

“HALF OF THE BURDEN OF A MULE”:  
THE MISHNAH AND THE TALMUD IN  
MEDIEVAL MUSLIM LITERATURE

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SUMMARY

The aim of the present study is to outline the Muslim attitude to the Talmud and the Mishnah based on statements by several medieval Muslim writers. The information about the rabbinical literature can be found in authors such as Ibn Ḥazm, Samaw'al al-Maghribī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Maqrīṣī and al-Maqrīzī. As the Talmud and the Mishnah played only a marginal role in Muslim polemics against the Jews and Judaism, the information provided by the Muslim authors of these tracts is extremely trite and superficial. Muslims did not generally study this literature. Ibn Ḥazm was the first to introduce the Talmud to the polemical literature. He attributes its authorship to rabbis, who invented a new religion with new beliefs, liturgy, and prayers, which are no longer based on the Hebrew Bible, but on the Oral Law expressed in the Talmud, which they consider of greater value than God's revelation in the Torah. Ibn Ḥazm's notion of the Talmudic canon was rather vague, however, and he erroneously identifies as part of the Talmud the mystical book *Shi'ur Qoma*. More accurate information was furnished to Islam by Jewish apostates. One of them, Samaw'al al-Maghribī, turns against the whole Talmud, its tendencies, the way the rabbis enact laws, and he depicts contemporary rabbis as totally depraved. Samaw'al's polemic proved very influential and served as a reference text for later Muslim authors writing polemics against Judaism. Muslim polemicists in the Middle Ages generally put forward arguments to some degree similar to those levelled against the Talmud in Europe. They assert that the Talmud is full of blasphemies and was created by the Rabbanites as a tool to prevent the Jews from mingling with Gentiles, corrupts morals, teaches and even forces people to lie to, deceive and hate non-Jews. The same attitude still prevails among Muslim authors.

Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭaṭṭāwī (d. 2010), the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar University and Grand Imam of al-Azhar Mosque, the most respected religious authority in the Islamic world, wrote his 750-page doctoral thesis on the Jews in the Qu'rān and the Traditions (*Banū Isrā'īl fī 'l-Qur'ān wa 'l-Sunna*).<sup>1</sup> In the first chapter he broadly sketches the history of the biblical Jews and their scriptures, and in three pages adumbrates the Jewish post-biblical literature, including the Talmud and the Mishnah. The Talmud, sums up Ṭaṭṭāwī, “contains a great deal of lies and falsities which reason cannot grasp.”

It suffices to say that Ṭaṭṭāwī mentions as one of his main sources the Arabic translation of “the most famous book written about the Talmud” – August Rohling’s influential anti-Semitic tract *Der Talmudjude* (published in 1871),<sup>2</sup> which is based on J.A. Eisenmenger’s *Entdecktes Judenthum*. But this was not Ṭaṭṭāwī’s only source. It quickly becomes clear to the reader that the author’s arguments against and conclusions about the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and Judaism also depend heavily on much older Muslim polemical tradition, including authors such as Ibn Ḥazm and Samaw’al al-Maghribī.

This study, however, does not aim to focus on the broad topic of Muslim polemics against the Bible, which has been sufficiently treated in many publications, but rather to address the question of what medieval Muslim authors knew about the Talmud and the Mishnah. In the following pages a survey will be given of statements by medieval Muslim writers on the Talmud and the Mishnah, which will be taken from a variety of sources with different agendas. However, in order to do that, it is first necessary to outline their attitude towards the Hebrew Bible.

The depth of the Jewish influence on the prophet Muḥammad has been clear since 1833, when Abraham Geiger published his groundbreaking book *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*<sup>3</sup> During the fast of Ramaḍān it is permitted to eat and drink from sunset to dawn; the fast begins again at daybreak, “when a white thread can be distinguished from a black thread” (Sura 2:187). Geiger was the first to draw attention to the resemblance between this regulation and the dictum in the Talmud defining

<sup>1</sup> ṬAṬṬĀWĪ, Muḥammad Sayyid. *Banū Isrā'īl fī 'l-Qur'ān wa 'l-Sunna*. Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Idem., pp. 78–81. Rohling’s book translated from the French version Yūsuf Naṣra’llāh under the title *Al-Kanz al-marṣūd fī qawā'id al-talmūd*. Cairo: Ma'ārif, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> I shall not go into the question of whether the Jewish or Christian influence on Muḥammad was dominant. Both religious traditions are present in the Qu'rān, as well as purely Arabian features. An overview of the relevant literature is provided by GOITEIN, SH. D. Who were the main teachers of Muḥammad? [in Hebrew]. *Tarbiz* 1952, vol. 23, pp. 146–159.

daybreak as the time when blue can be distinguished from green. The Jerusalem Talmud more specifically refers to the fringes of a talit that contain a blue thread and are used when reciting the Shema'.<sup>4</sup>

From that time on many have followed in Geiger's footsteps and added to his findings. Heinrich Speyer in his *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* demonstrates that the Jewish subject matter in the Qu'rān stems largely from the broad range of biblical literature, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha as well as rabbinical literature, including the Mishnah, both Talmuds, Tosefta, Midrashim and others, rather than canonical scripture. Since Muḥammad relied in his instruction concerning the content of God's previous revelations upon the oral, often misunderstood information of the local Jews<sup>5</sup> and Nestorian and Monophysite Christians, he considered the stories of post-biblical literature to be part of the Hebrew Bible. It is unlikely that the Jews in Arabia of Muḥammad's time were able to discern between biblical and post-biblical tradition when asked by him for the instruction from *al-tawrāt*, the Torah. In the course of their oral transmission, the biblical accounts inevitably became mixed with foreign elements and were sometimes distorted beyond recognition. All that the Christians told Muḥammad he considered indiscriminately to be *injīl* (the Gospel) and all the Jews told him was part of *al-tawrāt*.<sup>6</sup> In consequence, although the Qu'rān implicitly draws a great deal of material from the Jewish post-biblical literature, it never says so explicitly. For example, after reciting the story of Cain and Abel, Muḥammad cites the Mishnah Sanhedrin IV,5 in this way: "On that account: We ordained (*katabnā*) for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people."<sup>7</sup> And a few lines later he begins with the same wording *katabnā 'alayhim fihā*, i.e. "we have written for the Children of Israel in the Torah": "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal" (Sura 5:49).

Unlike Christianity, Islam did not accept the Hebrew Bible as part of its scriptures and did not incorporate its tradition wholesale. The Qu'rān

<sup>4</sup> GEIGER, Abraham. *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* 2. rev. ed. Leipzig: M.W. Kaufmann, 1902, p. 87; citing Mishnah *Berachot*, I,2.

<sup>5</sup> For the history of the Jews in Arabia see NEWBY, Gordon Darnell. *A History of the Jews of Arabia*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of the reception of biblical material in the Qu'rān see ADANG, Camilla. *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*. Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill, 1996, pp. 1–8.

<sup>7</sup> SPEYER, Heinrich. *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961, pp. 87–88.

mentions the Torah many times and repeatedly accuses the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) – a term mostly related to Jews and Christians – of having deliberately distorted their scriptures. Muḥammad claimed to be sent a prophetic message in order to restore the original pristine monotheism of the biblical prophets, which he supposed to be identical with the tenets of Islam, while Jews and Christians had altered their scriptures. These allegations, among other things, were used in order to explain away the differences between related biblical and Qu’rānic narratives, to which the Jews of Medina had painfully drawn Muḥammad’s attention, and to reinforce the claim that the original text of the Bible in fact contained explicit prophecies of Muḥammad and his mission.<sup>8</sup> Muḥammad’s general charge that Jews changed, hid, twisted and tampered with the words of God as revealed in the Torah, generally termed *tahrīf* and *tabdīl*, was to remain the main accusation against the People of the Book in the polemical literature throughout the Middle Ages and to the present day.<sup>9</sup> Muslim scholars, aware of the contradiction between the two assertions, that the Jews on the one hand falsified their scripture, while their Torah contained predictions of Muḥammad and Islam, propound the conciliatory thesis, that Jews really omitted explicit references to the advent of the Prophet, while some more veiled allusions to his person or to Islam in general escaped their textual manipulations.<sup>10</sup>

Other Jewish writings such as the Mishnah and Talmud appeared in Islamic literature much later and the picture here is even dimmer than in the case of the Hebrew Bible. Ignaz Goldziher has shown that early Islam knew about the Jewish concept of unwritten revelation, the Oral Torah, next to the Written Torah, and used it as a damnable example which should be avoided in Islam with a view to withhold divine authority to the ever-growing ḥadīth literature or to prevent from writing it down.<sup>11</sup> The story about

<sup>8</sup> COHEN, Mark R. *Under Crescent and Cross. The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 147–151.

<sup>9</sup> Already some Fathers of the Church accused the Jews of falsifying the Bible. See ADLER, William. *The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemic*. In: *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute May 15–16, 1989*, Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990 [*Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement*], pp. 1–27. Besides Camilla Adang’s above-mentioned book, for information on Muslim polemics see STEINSCHNEIDER, Moritz. *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1877; LAZARUS-YAFEH, Hava. *Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*. Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> An incomplete list of Biblical allusions to Muḥammad can be found in ASHTOR (STRAUSS), Eliyahu. *Methods of Islamic Polemics* [in Hebrew]. In: *Memorial Volume for the Vienna Rabbinical Seminary*. Jerusalem: Ruben Mas, 1946, pp. 182–197.

<sup>11</sup> GOLDZIHHER, I. *Kämpfe um die Stellung des Ḥadīth im Islam*. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1907, vol. 61, pp. 860–872, especially 865–869.

‘Abdallāh b. al-‘Alā’ is typical. He asked al-Qāsim, a nephew of Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, to dictate ḥadīṡs to him. Al-Qāsim answered: In the time of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb the number of (written) *aḥādīṡ* increased, and therefore ‘Umar demanded from the people to bring them to him. As soon as they brought them he ordered them to be burned, and added: *maṭnāt ka-maṭnāt ahl al-kitāb* (“This is, or: Do you want) Mishnah like the Mishnah of the Jews?”<sup>12</sup> Goldziher mentions other passage elucidating the word *maṭnāt* as meaning “a book wilfully composed by Jewish rabbis, or *aḥbār*,<sup>13</sup> after Moses out of the framework of God’s book [...] in it they permitted or forbade whatever they wanted.” The Arabic term *maṭnāt*, which can be identified with the Hebrew and Aramaic *mishna* = *matnita*, has subsequently disappeared from the Muslim literature.

Another work where we would probably detect a note about the Talmud and Mishnah, were it not a lacuna in both editions in this particular place, is al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rīkh* (“History”). Here al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 905) after describing Jewish practices sums up that “the Jews depend for their laws and statutes upon the books of their learned men. These are the books known as [...] in Hebrew...”<sup>14</sup> Together with Camilla Adang<sup>15</sup> we can, hopefully justifiably, fill the lacuna and read either “Talmud” or “Mishnah”.

The next source where we are fortunate to find a reference to rabbinical literature is Ibn al-Nadīm’s bibliographical lexicon *Fihrist* written in 987. Here, based on the information drawn “from one of their [the Jew’s] notable men,” Ibn al-Nadīm gives some general, but fairly exact information about the Pentateuch, the Biblical Canon in general, and even about the Mishnah. He ascribes the authorship of *al-mishnā* (it will appear under this term in the subsequent literature) to Moses and concludes that “the Jews derive from the book their knowledge of jurisprudence, laws, and rules. It is a large book written in Aramaic and Hebrew language.”<sup>16</sup> It is significant that Ibn al-Nadīm inserts the reference to *al-mishnā* into his account of the books of the biblical canon as if it was an integral part of it. This ambiguity will persist in Muslim literature throughout the Middle Ages.

<sup>12</sup> IBN SA’D. *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā. Biographien*. eds. Mittwoch, Eugen – Sachau, Eduard, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1917, vol. 5, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> The Qu’rān uses for rabbis terms *rabbāniyyūna* and *aḥbār* (sg. *ḥabr*) from Hebrew *haver*. See HOROWITZ, J. Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1925, vol. 2, pp. 197–198.

<sup>14</sup> AL-YA’QŪBĪ. *Ta’rīkh al-Ya’qūbī*. Ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr. Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2002, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> ADANG. *Muslim Writers*. p. 74, n. 25.

<sup>16</sup> IBN AL-NADĪM. *Kitāb al-fihrist*. Ed. Flügel, G. – Roediger, I. Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1871, vol. 1, p. 23.

## IBN ḤAZM

Turning now to the works of the Muslim polemicists, the first time we come across references to rabbinical literature are the writings of Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (994–1064), a versatile and prolific savant, who is known to the broader public mostly through his delightful prose on profane love, *Tawq al-ḥamāma* (“The Ring of the Dove”). Ibn Ḥazm as a proponent of a Muslim *Zāhirī* (i.e. literalist) law school<sup>17</sup> was also a zealous polemicist. He expounds his convictions about Jewish and Christian scriptures in two works, which due to his knowledge of the Bible and especially of the Pentateuch surpass by far the polemics of his predecessors and contemporaries. The first is an extensive and controversial tract against Judaism (and Christianity) called *Izhār tabdīl al-yahūd wa’l-naṣārā li’l-tawrāt wa’l-inḡīl* (“Exposure of the Alterations made by the Jews and the Christians to the Torah and the Gospel”), which is the fullest Bible criticism ever written by a medieval Muslim author. This tract did not survive as a separate composition, but was later incorporated by the author in his comprehensive book on religions and sects, the *Kitāb al-fiṣal fi’l-milal wa’l-ahwā’ wa’l-niḥal* (“Book of Distinctions of Religions, Sects, and Heresies”).<sup>18</sup> This virulent polemic against Judaism reoccurs in more or less similar form in his second work called *Al-Radd ‘alā Ibn al-Naḡhrīla al-yahūdī, la’anahu ‘llāh* (“Refutation of Ibn al-Naḡhrīla the Jew, may God curse him”). In it Ibn Ḥazm wards off arguments of a Jew in the service of a Muslim king, who penned a pamphlet against the Qu’rān’s claim to divine origin.<sup>19</sup> As suggested by the title of this sharply polemical treatise, Ibn Ḥazm’s diatribe

<sup>17</sup> See the classical work by GOLDZIHNER, Ignaz. *The Zāhirīs. Their Doctrine and Their History. A Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> I use the Beirut edition: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya, 20073. Here the polemic with Judaism and Christianity has the changed heading *Faṣḥī munāqadāt zāhira...* (“Treatise on the obvious contradictions and evident lies contained in the book that the Jews call the Torah and in the four Gospels”). The critique of Judaism is in vol. 1, pp. 138–250, and of Christianity in vol. 1, pp. 251–344. For composition of the work see GOLDZIHNER, Ignaz. Ueber muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb. In: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1878, vol. 32, p. 363ff.; FRIEDLAENDER, Israel. Zur Komposition von Ibn Ḥazm’s Milal wa’l-Niḥal. In: Carl Bezold (ed.), *Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke gewidmet*, I. Giesen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1906, pp. 267–277. For a different opinion see STEINSCHNEIDER, Moritz. *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1877, p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> Edited by Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Cairo, 1380/1960. GARCÍA GÓMEZ, E. Polémica religiosa entre Ibn Ḥazm e Ibn al-Naḡrīla. *Al-Andalus*, 1936, vol. 4, pp. 1–28. The text was translated into Hebrew by SHEMESH, Hanna. Ibn Ḥazm’s ‘Al-Radd ‘alā Ibn Al-Naḡhrīla’. In: Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (ed.). *Muslim Authors on Jews and Judaism. The Jews among their Muslim Neighbours*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1996, pp. 83–118. I am currently preparing a Czech translation of the treatise.

belongs to Ismāʿīl b. al-Naghārīla, or Samuel ha-Nagid (993–1056), the great Hebrew poet, scholar, and statesman, who had a glorious career as a vizier at the court of the Berber king of Granada. But the identification of Ibn Ḥazm’s literary adversary with Samuel ha-Nagid remains a moot point among scholars.<sup>20</sup>

After a thorough discussion Ibn Ḥazm concludes that the Hebrew Bible of the Jews cannot be identical with the text revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. It underwent so many alterations and distortions in the course of history that it should no longer be regarded as a true expression of divine will. He points out many passages that according to him show the Hebrew Bible to be replete with chronological, historical and geographical inaccuracies, theological impossibilities, including anthropomorphisms (*tajsīm*), and stories that attribute preposterous behaviour to biblical personalities such as patriarchs and kings, who are usually considered by Muslim theologians to be prophets, and as such infallible.<sup>21</sup> Based on these arguments he tries to persuade his readers about the utter falsification of the “damned and false book called by Jews *al-ḥumāsh*”,<sup>22</sup> which he repeatedly labels as *al-kitāb al-mubaddal al-muḥarraf al-muftarī*, a “falsified, twisted and false book.”

Undoubtedly under the influence of some Hellenist polemics against Christianity and Judaism<sup>23</sup> or Christian polemics with Judaism<sup>24</sup> Ibn Ḥazm claims that the Hebrew Bible was falsified by Ezra the Scribe and the Priest (‘*azrā al-warrāq al-hārūnī*’),<sup>25</sup> whom he alternatively nicknames

<sup>20</sup> For these opinions see STROUMSA, S. From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rāwandī’s *Kitāb al-Dāmigh*. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1987, vol. 107, pp. 767–772; POWERS, D. S. Reading/Misreading One Another’s Scriptures: Ibn Ḥazm’s Refutation of Ibn Naghrella al-Yahūdī. In: William M. Brinner – Stephan D. Ricks (eds.). *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*. Atlanta (Georgia): Scholars Press, 1986, pp. 109–121; ARNALDEZ, R. Controverse d’Ibn Ḥazm contre Ibn Naghrella le Juif. *Revue de l’Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 1973, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 41–48; FIERRO, M. Ibn Ḥazm et le zindiq juif. *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 1992, vol. 63–64, pp. 81–89; BRANN, Ross. *Power in the portrayal: Representations of Jews and Muslims in eleventh and twelfth-century Islam*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 75–90.

<sup>21</sup> See *EL2* s.v. “Iṣma” (W. Madelung), and cf. ZUCKER, M. The Problem of Iṣma – Prophetic Immunity to Sin and Error in Islamic and Jewish Literatures [in Hebrew]. *Tarbiz*, 1965, vol. 35, pp. 149–173.

<sup>22</sup> From the Hebrew term *homesh* for particular books of the Pentateuch. See BACHER, Wilhelm. *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899, vol. 1, pp. 63–64.

<sup>23</sup> STERN, Menahem. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. Jerusalem: Israeli Academy of Science and Humanities, 1980, vol. 2, p. 480.

<sup>24</sup> *Des Heiligen Philosophen und Martyrers Justinus Dialog mit dem Juden Tryphon*. Trans. Philipp Haeuser, Muenchen – Kempten: Jos. Kösel, 1917, pp. 117–121.

<sup>25</sup> *Radd* § 60. The Samaritans had also charged the Jews and particularly Ezra with corrupting the Torah. See GASTER, Moshe. *The Samaritans. Their History, Doctrines and Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1925, p. 28.

“ignorant and liar,” “heretic and godless impostor,” or “ass mocking at religion, faith, and God.” Ezra altered the original version of the biblical text, which was preserved only in one exemplar in the Temple and was destroyed or lost and forgotten by the Israelites due to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and the resulting Babylonian exile. The text that he concocted from his memory 40 years after 70 years of exile, and which the Jews possess today, has nothing in common with the original revealed version, and as such the Muslim attitude toward it should be one of absolute rejection. Furthermore, Ibn Ḥazm argues that Ezra’s version of the Torah was not disseminated among the Israelites by rabbis until the time of Hasmoneans, approximately 400 years after the fall of the Israelite kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

The anthropomorphic Biblical expressions and theological impossibilities were Ibn Ḥazm’s central charges against the Bible and Judaism. If the Hebrew Bible is a wholly falsified book, the same, even worse, is true of the Talmud, which is full of blasphemies composed by rabbis.<sup>27</sup> Though Ibn Ḥazm does not mention the Mishnah, he does expound on the Talmud (*al-talmūd*). Similarly to Ibn al-Nadīm’s definition of *al-mishnā*, he also defines the Talmud as the “[Jew’s] trusted pillar in questions of their jurisprudence, rules, religion, and law, and it contains sayings of their rabbis as all unanimously agree.” Despite this definition, Ibn Ḥazm’s notion of the Talmudic canon was somewhat vague. He erroneously identifies as a part of the Talmud the *Shi’ur Qoma* (“The Measure of the [Divine] Body”),<sup>28</sup> the work of an early Jewish mystic, which deals with mystical measures of the Godhead. With exclamations of utmost horror and disgust he speaks about the anthropomorphic portrayal of God (*tajsīm*) in this mystical tract, a charge that called Jewish monotheism into question:

In a book of the Jews called *Shi’ur Qoma* [written as *tūmā*], which forms a part of the book Talmud [...] The book says that the length of the Creator’s forehead, measured from its upper part to its nose, is

<sup>26</sup> LAZARUS-YAFEH, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 50–74. See also AYOUB, M. ‘Uzayr in the Qur’an and Muslim Tradition. In: William M. Brinner – Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*. [Brown Judaic Studies; no. 10]. Atlanta (Georgia): Scholars Press, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 3–18.

<sup>27</sup> For Ibn Ḥazm’s polemics against biblical and rabbinical literature see PULCINI, Theodore. *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse. Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* [American Academy of Religion. The Religions; no. 2]. Atlanta (Georgia): Scholars Press, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> See SCHOLEM, Gershom G. *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960, pp. 36–42.



5,000 cubits. God forbid that we should ascribe form, size, limits, and boundaries to him!<sup>29</sup>

Another book identified by Ibn Ḥazm as part of the Talmud is the Mishnaic tractate *Sāder nāshīm* (*Seder nashim*), that, while dealing primarily with the purity laws pertaining to women, also depicts a ring on the Creator's finger and a crown on his head while being served by an angel called Sandalfon.

In another book of the Talmud, called *Sāder nāshīm*, which means commentary on rules relating to menstruation, it is stated that on the head of their Creator there is a crown in which there are 1 000 *qintars* of gold, and that on his finger there is a ring with a stone, from which the sun and the stars radiate, and that the angel who ministers this crown is called Sandalfon. God is highly exalted above such inanities!<sup>30</sup>

Although Ibn Ḥazm mostly recounts various anthropomorphic stories without stating their source, as we have seen he asserts that all of these sayings form part of the Talmud. One story which he especially condemns depicts God as weeping over himself for destroying his own Temple and as having remorse for exiling the Israelites. The story is taken from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Berakhot 7a*. This passage – which often recurs in the rabbinical literature and also appears in al-Mas'ūdī's (d. 957) account of a dispute between a Copt and a Jew in the court of an Egyptian ruler Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn (868–884)<sup>31</sup> – mentions Ibn Ḥazm in both his aforesaid works, of which the longer version in *al-Fiṣal* goes like this:

Even more repulsive than all this is what they have transmitted on the authority of many of their oldest rabbis – from whom they have received their religion and transmitted their Torah – about a man called Ishmael, who lived after the destruction of the Temple by Titus. They

<sup>29</sup> IBN ḤAZM. *Al-Fiṣal*, vol. 1, p. 246.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. The debate about the crown on the Creator's heads is not found in *seder nashim* but in bHag 13b. The same accusations were also raised by the bishop Agobard (d. 840), Peter Venerable (d. 1156) and Peter Alfonsi (d. 1110). See DAHAN Gilbert. *The Christian Polemic against the Jews in the Middle Ages*. Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, pp. 90–91; MERCHAVIA, Ch. *The Church versus Talmudic and Midraschic Literature (500–1248)*. [in Hebrew] Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1971, pp. 99–103.

<sup>31</sup> AL-MAS'ŪDĪ. *Murūj al-ḡaḥab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*. Ed. Barbier de Meynard – Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 1864, vol. 2, pp. 388–391. Martin Schreiner argues that al-Mas'ūdī's account served as Ibn Ḥazm's source. See SCHREINER, M. Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1888, vol. 42, p. 589, n. 5.

recount his relation that while walking about the ruins of the Temple he heard God whimpering like a dove and weeping, meanwhile saying: “Woe to him who destroys his house, ruins its cornerstone and pulls down his castle and abode of his Shekhina. Woe unto me that I have destroyed my house, woe unto me that I have dispersed my sons and daughters. My figure will be bent until I shall rebuild my house and return sons and daughters to it”.

This despicable dirty man, son of despicable parents, this Ishmael, said: “God grabbed my mantle and said to me: ‘Have you heard me Ishmael, my son?’ I said, ‘No, my Lord’. And he said to me: ‘Ishmael my son, bless me’; and this stinky dog said: ‘So I blessed him and left’”.<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Ḥazm is repelled by an anthropomorphic description of God deploring his own deeds and begging for the blessing of a man, which he perceives as the most outrageous blasphemy. He adds that he is not surprised by such stories, because all Jews, i.e. the Rabbanites among them, deride God with statements about Metatron, who “in the night of the festival of Kippur, which is the tenth day of the month of Tishrīn al-awwal, that is, October, raises himself up – the meaning of the word is ‘the little lord’; God is above their blasphemy! – and says, while he cries and pulls at his hair” and delivers the same lamentation as God in the ruins of the Temple. From this Ibn Ḥazm extrapolates that the Jews for ten days in a year worship another lord, different from God, which constitutes blatant idolatry.<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Ḥazm attributes the authorship of the Talmud to “heretical rabbis”. These rabbis, he says, are the true creators of Judaism, since they deformed Moses’s original religion beyond recognition, invented beliefs and instituted all kinds of practices that have no basis in scripture, including prayers and religious institutions like the synagogue. They simply invented a new religion (*sharī‘a jadīda*).<sup>34</sup> The Jews’ liturgy, rituals and commandments are not based on the Hebrew Bible, but on the Oral Law expressed in the Talmud. The rabbis think themselves higher than God and the prophets, and consider the Talmud, their own invention, of greater value than God’s

<sup>32</sup> IBN HAZM. *Al-Fiṣal*, vol. 1, p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> Metatron features prominently in Jewish esoteric doctrine. In the Babylonian Talmud he is mentioned in three places: *Hagigah* 15a, *Sanhedrin* 38b, and *Avodah Zarah* 3b. Al-Qarāfī says, that Jews fancy God as “an old man with white beard and hair sitting on the throne while angels stand in front of him and read him the books.” AL-QARĀFĪ. *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira*. Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiya, 1986, p. 147.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Ḥazm summarises the circumstances of destruction and subsequent falsification of the Torah in *Radd* § 60.

revelation in the Torah. All this though separates the Jews from Moses by more than 1,500 years, whereas the Rabbanites can trace their “chain of transmission” (*tawātur*) no further than to rabbis like “Hillel, Shammai, Shimeon, and Mar ‘Akiva. The only law which the Jews can trace back to prophetic times is that of the levirate marriage, which one of their rabbis received from one of the last prophets.”<sup>35</sup>

What or who were the sources in Islamic literature of Ibn Ḥazm’s unprecedented acquaintance with Jewish beliefs, literature and history? He writes in a number of places about discussions which he held with several Rabbanites like Ibn al-Naghṛīla (Samuel ha-Nagid), whom he appreciates as “the most knowledgeable and most accomplished disputant among the Jews,”<sup>36</sup> and sceptics and freethinkers Ismā‘īl ibn al-Qarrād and Ismā‘īl ibn Yūnus.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is difficult to assume that the Rabbanites themselves would divulge material to him for his pungent anti-rabbinical diatribes. Even though he claims that he consulted “their books, which I have read and consulted,”<sup>38</sup> it does not mean that he read original texts. Since Ibn Ḥazm did not know Hebrew, let alone Aramaic,<sup>39</sup> he had to have some kind of translation, but it is uncertain whether there were any translations of the rabbinical literature into Arabic. In the case of the Hebrew Bible he did not make use of the Se‘adya Gaon’s *Tafsīr* available in Spain and preferred instead a Christian translation of the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> Although Abraham ibn Da‘ud claims in *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* (“The Book of Tradition”, written in 1160/1 in Toledo) that Ibn Abitur “interpreted (*perush*) the whole of the Talmud in Arabic for the Muslim King al-Ḥakam,” meaning the famous library of al-Ḥakam II (961–976), scholars take this *perush* to mean a translation of the Mishnah or some part of it.<sup>41</sup> But this translation could not have

<sup>35</sup> IBN ḤAZM. *Fiṣal*, vol. 1, pp. 336–337.

<sup>36</sup> One discussion with him took place in 404/1013. IBN ḤAZM. *Fiṣal*, vol. 1, p. 178. His contemporary IBN ŠĀID AL-ANDALUSĪ pronounced the same judgment. *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-umam*. Ed. L. Cheikho, Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1912, p. 90: “More than any Spanish Jew before him, he was learned in the law of the Jews and understood how to prevail in disputes on its behalf and to rebut its opponents.”

<sup>37</sup> IBN ḤAZM. *Fiṣal*, vol. 3, p. 303. See also PERLMANN, M. Ibn Hazm on the Equivalence of Proofs. *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1950, vol. 40, pp. 281–282.

<sup>38</sup> *Radd* § 34.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Roth’s opposite statement in *Jews, Visigoths and Muslims in Medieval Spain*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994, p. 224, is unfounded; *idem.*, *Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: A Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain*. *Proceedings of American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1987, vol. 54, p. 204.

<sup>40</sup> LAZARUS-YAFEH. *Intertwined Worlds*. p. 123f.; see also GEHMAN, H. S. The Arabic Bible in Spain. *Speculum*, 1926, vol. 1, pp. 219–221; TRITTON, A. S. The Old Testament in Muslim Spain. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1958, vol. 21, pp. 392–399.

<sup>41</sup> ABRAHAM IBN DAUD. *Sefer ha-Qabbalah. The Book of Tradition*. Ed. and trans. Gerson D. Cohen,

been Ibn Ḥazm's only source, since several of his quotations originate from *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* and *Mekhilta*. He did not name these sources, but has pointed to them with the words "one their book says that..." and likens the quoted stories to "folk tales (*khurāfāt*) which old women tell while spinning."<sup>42</sup>

Moshe Perlmann's suggestion that Ibn Ḥazm had a set of excerpts from anti-Rabbanite writings made by Christians or Karaites at his disposal is highly plausible.<sup>43</sup> Although the Christian influence cannot be ruled out absolutely, Camilla Adang has convincingly argued<sup>44</sup> that most probably the Karaites of Talavera and Toledo<sup>45</sup> who were then persecuted by Ibn al-Naghṛīla provided Ibn Ḥazm with anti-Rabbanite passages in Ya' qūb al-Qirqisānī's *Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-marāqib* ("Book of Lights and Watchtowers")<sup>46</sup> or Salmon ben Yeruḥim's *Sefer Milḥamot 'Adonai*. These Karaites studied the Talmud and the *Shi'ur Qoma* with the express purpose of picking out objectionable 'aggadot and holding them up for ridicule and proving the theological backwardness of the Rabbanites.<sup>47</sup>

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Oxford, Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005, Hebrew part pp. 48–49, English part p. 66; BARON, Salo Wittmayer. *Social and Religious History of Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press – Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958, vol. 6, p. 264. David Wasserstein finds in Umayyad Spain an Arabic version of a mishnaic tractate Abot. WASSERSTEIN, D. J. An Arabic Version of *Abot* 1:3 from Umayyad Spain. *Arabica*, 1987, vol. 34, pp. 370–374.

<sup>42</sup> Celsus, a critic of Christianity, labels some stories from the book Genesis "fairy tales of old ladies." STEIN, Edmund. *Alttestamentliche Bibelkritik in der späthellenischen Literatur* [Collectanea Theologica, Societatis Theologorum Polonorum, 16]. Lwów, 1935, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> PERLMANN, Moshe. Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada. *Proceedings of American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1948–49, vol. 18, pp. 277–279; *idem.*, The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism. In: S. D. Goitein (ed.). *Religious in a Religious Age*. Cambridge (Massachusetts): Association for Jewish Studies, 1974, p. 113.

<sup>44</sup> ADANG, Camilla. Éléments karaïtes dans la polémique anti-judaïque d'Ibn Ḥazm. In: Horacio Santiago-Otero (ed.). *Diálogo filosófico-religioso entre cristianismo, judaísmo e islamismo durante la edad media en la Península Ibérica. Actes du Colloque international de San Lorenzo de El Escorial 23–26 juin 1991* [Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale, Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale, 3]. Turnhout: Brepols, 1994, pp. 419–441. Karaites' origin of Ibn Ḥazm's diatribes already established GOLDZIHNER, Ignaz who as a first published this Ibn Ḥazm's text together with German translation. See his *Proben muhammedanischer Polemik gegen den Talmud I. Jeschurun*, 1872, vol. 8, p. 102, n. 16; see also COHEN, Gerson D. *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*. p. xlv, n. 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem.*, p. xlvi. Ibn Ḥazm's note about the Karaites in these places in *al-Fiṣal* is the oldest testimony to their presence in Spain.

<sup>46</sup> NEMOY, L. Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1940, vol. 7, pp. 350–361; for a newer and more accurate version see CHIESA, B. – LOCKWOOD, W. *Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity. A translation of "Kitāb al-Anwār", Book I, with two introductory essays* [Judentum und Umwelt, Band 10]. Frankfurt a/M., etc.: Peter Lang, 1984, pp. 124–133.

<sup>47</sup> See ALTMANN, Alexander. Moses Narboni's "Epistle on *Shi'ur Qomā*". In: Alexander Altmann (ed.). *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* [Philips W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies,

## SAMAW'AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ

More detailed and accurate information about the Mishnah and the Talmud unsurprisingly furnished Islam Jewish converts with firsthand knowledge of Judaism and its scriptures. At the forefront was Samaw'al b. Yahyā al-Maghribī (d. 1175), a famous Jewish mathematician from Baghdad, who converted to Islam and started to write a refutation of his ancestors' faith entitled *Iḥām al-Yahūd* ("Silencing the Jews") on the day of his conversion, 8 November 1163, in Marāgha (northern Iran).<sup>48</sup> Four years later he composed an autobiography with details about his intellectual development and the motives for his conversion, which occurred after he saw the Prophet Muḥammad in his dreams.

Unlike Ibn Ḥazm, Samaw'al does not write polemics only against a handful of pronouncements which he finds absurd and blasphemous, but turns against the whole Talmud, the way the rabbis enact laws, and depicts contemporary rabbis as totally depraved by the "Geist" of the Talmud. Samaw'al's polemical tract proved highly influential and served as a reference text for later Muslim authors in their polemics against Judaism. Many of his arguments, particularly concerning the Mishnah and the Talmud, reappeared paraphrased or verbatim in polemical pamphlets as *Al-ajwibah al-fākhirah* ("The Perfect Replies"), written by the Egyptian Mālikī jurist Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ṣanhājī al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), and in some works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1350).<sup>49</sup> *Iḥām al-Yahūd's* impact is also testified by the intensity of Jewish apologetic response. Jewish religionist Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284) questioned the sincerity of Samaw'al's conversion to Islam and also rejected many of his objections in his examination of the three faiths, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, called *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāt li-l-milal al-ṭalāt* ("Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths"), written in Baghdad in 1280.<sup>50</sup> Like Ibn Ḥazm, Samaw'al identifies Ezra as

Brandeis University. Studies and Text, Vol. IV]. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 227–229.

<sup>48</sup> SAMAU'AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ. *Iḥām al-yahūd. Silencing The Jews*. Ed. and tr. Perlmann, Moshe, *Proceedings of American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1964, vol. 32. For the early recension of the tract, see MARAZKA, Ibrahim – POURJAVADY, Reza – SCHMIDTKE, Sabine (eds.). *Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175) Iḥām al-yahūd. The Early Recension* [Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Band LVII, 2]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006. I am currently preparing a Czech translation.

<sup>49</sup> PERLMANN, M. Ibn Qayyim and Samau'al Al-Maghribi. *Journal of Jewish Bibliography*, 1942, vol. 3, pp. 71–74, *idem.*, Ibn Qayyim and the Devil. In: *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* II. Roma: Istituto per l'oriente, 1956, pp. 330–337.

<sup>50</sup> PERLMANN, Moshe (ed.). *Sa'd b. Mansūr Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faith. A Thirteenth-Century Essay in Comparative Religion*. Berkeley–Los Angeles: University

the chief culprit in the forgery of the Torah, asserting that “[t]his Torah that they have is in truth a book by Ezra, and not a book of God.” He makes Ezra responsible, as an incompetent editor and forger, for what he identifies as a host of absurdities, inaccuracies, and anthropomorphisms in the present text of the Torah. Anticipating modern historical and source-critical scholarship of biblical transmission and compilation, Samaw’al supplied the missing motive for Ezra’s mischievous deed: priestly hatred for the Royal House of David.<sup>51</sup> According to Samaw’al, Ezra wanted to discredit Davidic royal dynasty with which priestly families competed for power with stories of fornication and whoredom. In so doing, he actually succeeded in foiling a re-establishment of the earlier Jewish Kingdom: “By my life, he achieved his purpose: for in the second commonwealth which they had in Jerusalem it was not the Davidids who were their kings but the Aaronids.”<sup>52</sup>

Samaw’al’s objections to the Bible’s lack of a reliable tradition of transmission are also manifestly historical. The history of the Jews is full of invasions, assaults and devastation of their country, and such conditions render the Torah a victim of history.

Samaw’al deals with the rabbinical literature in a chapter inscribed “Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves.” Here he depicts Jewish legists called *ḥakhamim*, who

[h]ad academies in Syria and Mesopotamia, during the rule of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, where thousands studied the sacred law until material was accumulated from which the legists decided to compile the two works, namely, the Mishnah (*al-mishnā*) and the Talmud (*al-talmūd*). The Mishnah, the smaller book, consists of about eight hundred sheets; the Talmud, the larger book, has the weight of about half of the burden of a mule. The legists who wrote it did not all live in one and the same age; they continued to compile

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of California Press, 1967; *idem.*, (transl.). *Ibn Kammūna’s Examination of the Three Faiths*. Ed. Moshe Perlmann, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971. Also preserved is part of a polemic against *Ifḥām al-Yahūd* from the 14th century Jewish author. See CHIESA, B. – SCHMIDTKE, S. The Jewish Reception of Samaw’al al-Maḡribī’s (d. 570/1175) *Ifḥām al-yahūd*: Some Evidence from the Abraham Firkovitch Collection I. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 2006, vol. 32, pp. 327–349. The response also contains the chronicle *Dibrei Yosef* (1672) of Yosef Sambari from Egypt. *Sefer divrei Yosef* by Yosef ben Yitzhak Sambari, ed. Shimon Shtober, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994, pp. 146–149.

<sup>51</sup> MILGROM, Jacob. Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1982, vol. 101–2, pp. 169–176. Cited in LAZARUS-YAFEH. *Intertwined Worlds*. p. 45, n. 71.

<sup>52</sup> SAMAU’AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ. *Ifḥām al-yahūd*. pp. 62–63, English part, p. 60.

it generation after generation. When the later legists, scrutinizing this compilation, noticed that the additions to it contained contradictions to the earlier sections of the work, they realized that, unless further additions were prohibited, obvious disorder and gross contradiction would result. They therefore ceased adding to the Talmud, barred any further additions, and forbade the legists to add or affix anything to it; in fact, they excommunicated anyone who added anything to it. And thus its size was set.<sup>53</sup>

Samaw'al's view of the rabbinical literature is utterly negative. Both the Mishnah and the Talmud are the embodiment of the perverted effort of the rabbis to prevent their tribe from mingling with people of other faiths, forbid partaking of food prepared by non-Jews or intermarriage with the goal of impeding otherwise unavoidable integration of the Jews into the majority, i.e. Muslim society. In so doing, the legists aim to retain their grip of power over the Jews and to keep them, by their inane misdrashim, from ever grasping the true, Islamic message of their own divinely revealed book.<sup>54</sup> They know that the only way to achieve this and to preserve their religion in exile, in which they live in subjugation and humiliation (*dull*), is to prohibit their coreligionists from intermingling with people from other faiths. The Mishnah and the Talmud serve as tools to achieve this goal by means of Talmudic legislation that consist of capriciously self-imposed legal burdens. Samaw'al practically uses the Christian argument that the Talmud makes life a burden. Combined with the argument of discordance between the Rabbanites and the Karaites within Judaism, he tries to show the imperfection and unreliability of their religion as a whole.

Although originally a Rabbanite, or perhaps because of this, Samaw'al sympathizes with the Karaites and is especially critical of the Rabbanites. In his view the Karaites repudiated all fabrications of the Jewish legists. "They [i.e. the Karaites] have legists of their own, too, who are authors of books, but do not go so far in calumniating God as to claim prophethood; nor do they ascribe their interpretations to prophetic inspiration or to God, but merely to their own effort (*ijtihād*)."<sup>55</sup> Samaw'al alludes here to the

<sup>53</sup> Idem., pp. 71–72, English part, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> The same accusation included a Jewish convert Nicholas Donin in a memorandum enumerating thirty-five points against the Talmud, which he submitted to a pope Gregory IX in 1236.

<sup>55</sup> Idem., p. 80, English part, p. 68. Cf. ADANG, Camilla. The Karaites as Portrayed in Medieval Islamic Sources. In Meira Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 192–194.

putative claim of legists (*hakhamim*) among the Rabbanites that they follow in determining legal decisions the inspiration of *bat qol*, the voice of God.<sup>56</sup> There is another reason why the Karaites are better off in Samaw'al's eyes. Since they are "free from the absurdities of the Rabbanite legists" which makes "them better prepared to embrace Islam" most of them already converted to Islam, a statement which Salo W. Baron regarded as an unfounded exaggeration.<sup>57</sup>

The legists among Rabbanites, "the most harsh in their animosity toward other people," had departed from biblical law by prohibiting intermarriage with gentiles and forbidding the consumption of meat slaughtered by non-Jews, while the Torah, argues Samaw'al, had merely forbidden union with idolaters and seen as unfit consumption of their sacrifices. But the rabbis extended that prohibition to monotheists and their food, in order to keep their people in permanent segregation. "This is the root of the community's perseverance in its religion's laws, its strict segregation from other nations, and its utter scornful and contemptuous view of the rest of mankind."<sup>58</sup>

To illustrate his claim Samaw'al expounds upon the Jewish dietary laws which the Qu'rān sees as God's punishment for Jewish disobedience.<sup>59</sup> The notions and the terms brought forth by Samaw'al will reappear in subsequent Muslim polemic tracts. He mentions "a book entitled *hilkhat sh'eḥita* meaning the science of (animal-) slaughter" which "increased the burden that distracts them from their position of humiliation and affliction," and calls in question a rabbinical interpretation of "*erefa*, meaning unclean."<sup>60</sup> The Rabbanites' animosity to the gentiles is demonstrated in their interpretation of Ex 22:30, where the words "you shall cast it to the dogs" mean that Jews should sell their non-kosher leftovers to non-Jews.<sup>61</sup> Although less

<sup>56</sup> The Talmudic sages, in fact, opposed to the use of *bat qol* in determining legal interpretations. See BT *Bava' Metsi' a'* 59b. This shows that Samaw'al did not keep away from misrepresenting Rabbinical texts and believes for polemical purpose.

<sup>57</sup> BARON, *Social and Religious History of Jews*. Vol. 3, p. 112. The Karaites, in reality, were even more daring critics of Islam than the Rabbanites. See HIRSCHFELD, H. Ein Karäer über den Muhammed gemachten Vorwurf jüdischer Torahfälschung. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 1912, vol. 26, pp. 111–113; BEN-SHAMMAI, Haggai. The Attitude of Some Early Karaites Towards Islam. In: I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* [Center for Jewish Studies, Harvard Judaic Monograph V]. Cambridge (MA), London: Harvard University Press, 1984, vol. 2., pp. 3–40.

<sup>58</sup> SAMAU'AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ. *Iḥām al-yahūd*, p. 82, English part, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> Qu'rān 6:146; 16:118; 4:160.

<sup>60</sup> SAMAU'AL AL-MAGHRIBĪ. *Iḥām al-yahūd*, pp. 75–77, English part pp. 66–67.

<sup>61</sup> The same accusation based on the same verse brings another Jewish convert, 'Abdulḥaq al-Islāmī. PERLMANN, M. 'Abd al-Hakḳ al-Islāmī, A Jewish Convert. *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1940–41, vol. 31, pp. 188–189.



frequently than in Christian lands, the Muslim also complained about Jews selling meat unfit for Jewish consumption to gentiles.<sup>62</sup>

IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYAH

Even though al-Qarāfi took over or straight-out copied many passages from Samaw'al's *Iḥām al-Yahūd* to demonstrate the falsification of the Torah and the changes which took place in the biblical faith and rituals compared to contemporary Judaism, he did not explicitly mention the Talmud or the Mishnah. But this is not the case for a well-known Ḥanbalite theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292–1350) from Damascus and his *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā fī-l-Radd 'alā-l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā* (“Guidance for the Confused concerning Answers to Jews and Christians”).<sup>63</sup> Like most Muslim polemicists Ibn Qayyim expands on the topic of the falsification of the Torah by “the people of the Book” and presents a great deal of biblical verses which he considers foretell Muḥammad’s prophethood. But he does not confine himself to this, strongly criticizing post-Biblical Judaism too and trying to show that there is a difference between the present Judaism and Moses’s Torah. He borrows almost all his evidence from Samaw'al al-Maghribī’s *Iḥām al-Yahūd* whose words he pieces together almost without change. Together with Arabic transcriptions of Hebrew sentences or words Ibn Qayyim also more or less verbatim copies Samaw'al’s definition and description of the Mishnah and the Talmud, including the differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites. But Ibn Qayyim could have also obtained the information about Judaism from Jewish converts whom he consulted about Hebrew,<sup>64</sup> and from disputations with the Jews.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See Abū Iṣḥāq al-Ilbīrī’s poem attacking the Jewish vizier of Granada, Yūsuf ibn al-Naghriḥla, where al-Ilbīrī objects to the custom that “Jews slaughter beasts in our markets and you eat their *terefa*.” LEWIS, Bernard. An Anti-Jewish Ode. The Qasida of Abu Ishaq Against Joseph ibn Naghrella. In: Saul Lieberman (ed.). *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume II*. Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974, p. 662. For the Arabic text, see MONROE, James T. *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 206–213, here line 34. The question of selling meat by Christians, Jews and Muslims in Christian Spain, see NIRENBERG, David. *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 169–172. The legal aspect of selling Jewish meat to Muslims is treated in IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA. *Aḥkām ahl al-ḍimma*. Ed. A Sa’d, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya, 2002, vol. 1, pp. 191–204.

<sup>63</sup> A short survey of this tract is provided by HOOVER, Jon. The Apologetic and Pastoral Intentions of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s Polemic against Jews and Christians. *The Muslim World*, 2010, vol. 100, pp. 472–489.

<sup>64</sup> He states that Hebrew is the closest language to Arabic.

<sup>65</sup> He refers to one he held in Egypt with “the most learnt and the most powerful Egyptian Jew” and to

Ibn Qayyim's only contribution is a more expanded definition of the Talmud, which consists of *al-gamārā* (i.e. the Gemara) commenting on *al-mishnā*.<sup>66</sup> He also reformulated slightly Samaw'al's elucidation of the aims lying behind the Talmudic legislation. The Rabbanite legists, greedy for power and wealth, attempted to segregate Jews in order to prevent them from dissolving into the majority society. The Jews scattered all around the world were easily persuaded that the more stringent laws enacted by legists, the more learnt and pious were the legists who enacted them.<sup>67</sup>

Ibn Qayyim introduces not only the term *al-gamārā* in the Muslim literature, but also returns the original word for the Mishnah, *al-maṭnānī*, and coins its plural form *al-maṭnānī*, while retelling the words of al-Zubayr b. Bāṭā from the Jewish tribe Qaynuqā' in Medina concerning foretokens of Muḥammad's mission in the Jewish scriptures: "I swear by the Torah that I have read his [i.e. the Prophet's] description in the book of Torah revealed to Moses and not in the *maṭnānī* (i.e. later books of the Mishnah) which we have composed."<sup>68</sup>

#### AL-MAQRĪZĪ

The last medieval Muslim author mentioned here who, as far as I am aware, refers to the Mishnah and the Talmud is the renowned Egyptian historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442). Al-Maqrīzī devoted several chapters to Judaism at the end of his voluminous historical and geographical description of Egypt called *Al-Mawā'iz wa'l-I'tibār fī Dīkr al-Khiṭaṭ wa'l-Āṭār*. First he enumerates and describes the synagogues in Cairo and Fustāṭ, then provides a historical description of the Jewish religion and survey of its calendar and festivals. Given the goal that the author set for himself he had to conduct his survey up to the present day, and so had to extend his description to the post-Biblical Jewish religion. Al-Maqrīzī's passage about the Mishnah and the Talmud is the longest in medieval Muslim literature that I have found and starts with the story of Titus's destruction of Jerusalem and

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one which occurred in Maghreb between two Jewish and Muslim sages. IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA. *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā fī-l-Radd 'alā-l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā*. ed. S. 'Imrān, Cairo: Dār al-hadīth, 2003, pp. 117–118. Ignaz Goldziher was the first to publish the parts dealing with the Talmud along with a German translation, but he did not know yet that Ibn Qayyim took over most of these parts from Samaw'al al-Maghribī. Proben muhammedanischer Polemik gegen den Talmud II. *Jeschurun*, 1873, vol. 9, pp. 18–47.

<sup>66</sup> IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA. *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*. p. 175.

<sup>67</sup> Idem., pp. 177–179.

<sup>68</sup> Idem., pp. 29–30.

the taking of all Jews in Israel into captivity. His account exposes what an educated Muslim in the Mamluk period in Egypt knew about Judaism.

Though al-Maqrīzī calls the last chapter devoted to Judaism “An Account of the Groups of the Jews Today,” most of the virtually verbatim quoted sources were in his time already several centuries old. He includes in his account Sadducees, Pharisees, and Hassidim from the time of the second Temple period. His heresiography is actually an eclectic collection of uncritically assembled and juxtaposed texts of often conflicting contents which he does not try to synthesize or expound.<sup>69</sup> From the author’s words (and not only concerning the Mishnah but also about Jewish sects) it is clear that besides Muslim sources he also consulted the Karaites. The author arrives at the conclusion that the present-day Rabbanites (*al-Rabbāniyyah*), which he also names “Banū Mishnū” – “Mishnū” meaning “Second,” because they attach more importance to the second than to the first Temple – do not live according to Moses’s Torah. Thus they deserve to call themselves the Jews only due to their origin, not religion. At the conclusion of the chapter Al-Maqrīzī writes that in all their decisions the Jews follow only the Talmud and from the time when Mūsā ben Maimūn of Cordoba became known among them they abide in everything by his opinion and act in accordance with his “Guide” and other books. The author here rightly points to the juridical practice of the Jewish law courts in Egypt, Syria, Eretz Yisrael, and North Africa which adhered in their rulings to Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah.<sup>70</sup> Al-Maqrīzī’s account of the Talmud and Mishnah is here translated in full.

The version of *al-mishnā* they had has disappeared because there have not remained among them any books of the Law except the Torah and the books of Prophets. After Titus destroyed the Temple the Israelites dispersed all over the world and became protected people (*ḍimma*) up to the present time. Later after the destruction of the Temple came two men called Shammai and Hillel to the town of Tiberias and wrote a book and named it *mishnā* according to Moses’s Mishnah. In the

<sup>69</sup> Sometimes he names his sources and sometimes he does not. Among those mentioned are al-Bīrūnī, al-Mas’ūdī, al-Maqdisī, and the Arabic Yosippon. Al-Maqrīzī’s method and sources are discussed in WASSERSTROM, Steven. Heresiography of the Jews in Mamluk Times. In: Waardenburg, Jacques (ed.). *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions. A Historical Survey*. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 168–174; ASHTOR (STRAUSS), Eliyahu. *History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1944, 1 vol., pp. 372–375.

<sup>70</sup> ASHTOR (STRAUSS), Eliyahu. *History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1951, 2 vol., pp. 251–252.

*al-mishnā* that they composed they included ordinances of the Law and many Jews agreed with what they had written. Both Shammai and Hillel lived at the same time at the end of the period of the Second Temple. Hillel had eighty students; the youngest was Yochanan ben Zakkai. He lived to see Ṭīṭush's destruction of the Second Temple. The sayings of Hillel and Shammai are mentioned in the Mishnah. It consists of six books containing the jurisprudence of the Torah and was organized by ha-Nasi, the descendant of the Prophet David, 150 years after Ṭīṭush's destruction of Jerusalem. Shammai and Hillel died without finishing the Mishnah. It was finished by a man known as Yehuda, a progeny of Hillel. The Jews practiced their religion in compliance with this Mishnah. The Mishnah actually contains a lot from the *al-mishnā* of the Prophet Moses as well as opinions of their elders. Approximately 150 years after the completion of the Mishnah came a group of Jews called Sanhedrin, meaning the elders, who expounded the Mishnah in accordance with their independent opinion and worked out a book called *al-talmūd*. In *al-talmūd* they inserted a great deal of what had been in this Mishnah and added ordinances based on their opinion. Right from the time when they composed *al-talmūd*, wrote it by themselves and inserted in it their subjective decisions, they attribute its content to God. That is why God rebukes them, the Qu'rān saying: Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: "This is from Allah," to traffic with it for miserable price!-Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they make thereby (2:79). This Talmud consists of two versions in his ordinances. The group of Rabbānīyūn practices their religion up to the present time in accordance with the Talmud, unlike the Karaites, who do not follow the Talmud in their practice.

When 'Ānān, Ra's al-Jālūt came to Iraq he disapproved of the Jews following the Talmud in their practice and claimed that what he has is true for he had written from manuscripts which he copied from Moses's handwritten copy of *mishnā*. The group of Rabbānīyūn and their followers rely on their Torah only in teachings confirmed by the Talmud and treat anything that contradicts the Talmud as unimportant. The Mighty has pronounced about them: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps" (43:22). It is clear to anyone who got acquainted with their Torah that their belief is vain and that they follow only their own assumptions and whims. For this reason from the time when Mūsā b. Maimūn

al-Qurtubī arose among them they rely on his opinion and act in compliance with the book *al-Dalāla* and his other books. They abide by his opinion up to the present time.

[...]

This is said of them because they revere the Temple, which was rebuilt after their return from the Second Exile [...] This group used to practice according to what is in the Mishnah, which was written in Tiberias after Ṭīṭush's destruction of Jerusalem, but they have come to rely upon what is in the Talmud for their ordinances of law, up to the present time. The Rabbānīyūna are far from acting according to the divine texts, following [instead] opinions of those learned men preceding them. Those who are well informed about the truth of their religion will clearly perceive that what God castigates them for in the Qu'rān is incontestably right, and that they do not deserve the name of Judaism, except by mere affiliation only. Not that they are in allegiance followers of Mosaic dispensation, especially since the appearance among them of Mūsā b. Maimūn al-Qurtubī more than 500 years after the Hijra, for then he caused them to revert to denying God's attributes. They have become in their principles of religion and their incidental duties the most remote of men from what the Prophets of God brought in the way of divinely revealed Laws.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the information furnished by Samaw'al al-Maghribī, the confusion concerning the meaning of the Mishnah has not been cleared as can be seen from al-Maqrīzī's account. In the chapter dealing with the beliefs of the Jews and the circumstances under which the falsification of their scripture took place, he considers the original *al-mishnā* to be an integral part of *al-tawrāt*, and therefore confusing the Mishnah of Yehuda ha-Nasi with *mishne ha-torah* in Deut 17:18. He relates the Qu'rān's accusation of the falsification not to the Torah, but to the Mishnah. During the Exile, when these authentic copies of *al-mishnā* produced by the kings were lost, they were replaced by different *al-mishnā* written by Hillel and Shammai in Tiberias. This Mishnah consists of six parts containing the jurisprudence of the Torah (*fiqh al-tawrāt*) and was put together by ha-Nasi (*al-nūsī*), the descendant of the Prophet David,<sup>72</sup> 150 years after Titus's destruction of Jerusalem. However, Hillel and Shammai have not finished the Mishnah; it was done by Hillel's descendent Yehu-

<sup>71</sup> AL-MAQRĪZĪ. *Al-Khiṭaṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998, vol. 4, pp. 380–382.

<sup>72</sup> Islam considers King David – along with other Biblical patriarchs – to be a prophet.

da. It is not clear if al-Maqrīzī is aware that *al-nūsī* and Yehuda is one and the same person, Yehuda ha-Nasi. Besides the material stemming from Moses's original Mishnah, this Mishnah includes many views expressed by later authorities. Al-Maqrīzī means elders of the Sanhedrin who began interpreting the Mishnah fifty years after its completion. This interpretation is called *al-talmūd*, in two different versions, which is for a Jewish believer as important as the Torah. Unlike the Karaites, however, the Rabbanites practice their religion in accordance with the rulings set down in the Talmud, which is hinted at in the Qu'rān in Sura 2:73/79.

When a few lines later al-Maqrīzī writes about the group called 'Ānānīyya, i.e. Karaites, the followers of 'Ānān, "Ra's al-Jālūt" who came from the East and brought with him manuscripts of the Mishnah written in the handwriting copied from the Prophet Moses, he probably had in mind the same *al-mishnā* as Ibn al-Nadīm ascribed to Moses.

#### CONCLUSIONS

As the Talmud and the Mishnah played only a marginal role in Muslim polemics against the Jews and Judaism, the information provided by the Muslim authors is extremely trite and superficial. Muslims did not generally study this literature. Whereas the Talmud stood at the centre of Christian polemics with Judaism beginning from the twelfth and especially in the thirteenth century, when anti-Jewish polemics became the business of a small group of professionals trained for missionary purposes in schools of oriental languages (Hebrew and Arabic) initiated by the Dominicans,<sup>73</sup> Muslim authors lacked both these institutions and skills. The only way for them to become acquainted with the rabbinical literature was either thanks to the good offices of the Karaites or apostates such as Samaw'al al-Maghribī. We can include to the latter group also Joseph ben Jehuda, Maimonides' most favourite pupil and the addressee of his "Guide of the Perplexed", who was forced to convert to Islam during the Almohad's persecution in Maghreb. Chiefly to him we should be most likely grateful for the information included into the entry about Maimonides in Ibn Qifṭī's (1172–1248) *Ta'riḫ al-ḥukamā'* (Lexicon of Sages). Here Ibn Qifṭī gives, undoubtedly guided by his friend Joseph ben Jehuda, a quit brief but at the same time the

<sup>73</sup> LIMOR, O. Polemical Varieties: Religious Disputations in 13th Century Spain. *Iberia Judaica*, 2010, vol. 2, pp. 55–56. See also COHEN, Jeremy. Towards a Functional Classification of Jewish anti-Christian Polemic in the High Middle Ages. In: Lewis B. – Niewöhner F. (eds.). *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1992, pp. 93–114.

most unbiased and accurate definition of the Talmud in the Muslim medieval literature. Maimonides, writes Ibn Qiftī, “was a knowledgeable in the Jewish law and its secrets and composed a commentary on the Talmud, *which is a commentary on the Torah and its explanation*.”<sup>74</sup>

Unlike Christian polemicists, digging in the rabbinical literature and looking for the proofs of Christianity’s veracity, Muslims did not browse through the Talmud searching for proofs of Islamic tenets. While Christians generally admitted the divine origin of the Hebrew Bible, and so could attack only the Talmud and the rabbinical literature at large, Muslim polemicists did not feel the need to turn to post-biblical literature, since the Hebrew Bible paradoxically furnished them (despite its falseness) with ample possibilities for an attack against Judaism and for uncovering fortellings of Muḥammad, i.e. one of the main points of the Muslim polemics.<sup>75</sup>

In spite of that, Muslim polemicists generally put forward arguments to some degree similar to those levelled against the Talmud in Europe. They assert that the Talmud is full of blasphemies and absurdities and was created by the Rabbanites as a tool to prevent the Jews from mingling with hated Gentiles. Furthermore, it corrupts morals, teaches and even forces people to lie (for example via laws of *ḥalitza*), deceive and hate non-Jews, which they curse in their prayers, etc. Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, the contemporary Muslim author with whom we commenced this study, came to the same conclusion.

However, there is an important difference, between Christian-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish medieval polemics against the Talmud. In Muslim countries the accusations against the Jews and Judaism remained confined to literary polemics and volumes of the Talmud or other rabbinical literature were never as a consequence of some public disputation between representatives of both religions condemned for blasphemy and then thrown into the bonfire like in Paris in 1242 (twenty-four carloads), or 1319 in Toulouse, 1553 in Roma and 1568 in Venice. The same is true with regard to the censorship of Hebrew books, which is never mentioned in the Muslim literature (again unlike the widespread practice in Christian Europe from the thirteenth century onwards)<sup>76</sup>, let alone exercised.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> IBN AL-QIFTĪ, *Ta’rīḥ al-ḥukamā’*, ed. Julius Lippert, Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903, p. 319. By Maimonides’ commentary on the Talmud he, of course, intended the *Mishne Torah*.

<sup>75</sup> LAZARUS-YAFEH. *Intertwined Worlds*. pp. 8–9.

<sup>76</sup> BARON. *Social and Religious History of Jews*. vol. 9, pp. 62–71.

<sup>77</sup> The only call for a censorship (even though the author refers mainly to biblical books) is actually to be found in a polemical pamphlet penned by a Jewish convert to Islam from fourteenth century Morocco. PERLMANN. ‘Abd al-Ḥaḳḳ al-Islāmī. p. 177.