

leur demandant s'ils peuvent accepter de considérer les juifs comme croyants alors qu'une partie d'entre eux « fausse le discours de Dieu après l'avoir compris » (v. 75), voire « écrit l'Écriture de ses mains » (v. 79).

Il est vrai que l'un des plus grands commentateurs du Coran, al-Ṭabarī, a précisé que, dans ce passage, l'altération ne portait pas sur la Torah mais sur les paroles adressées par Dieu à Moïse⁶³. Forts de cela, certains ont rappelé que, s'adressant plus haut aux juifs, le Coran leur a dit : Dieu « marque la véracité des messages que vous détenez » (v. 41) et leur a seulement reproché : « Ne tenez pas secrète la vérité alors que vous savez » (v. 42). À quoi s'ajoute que c'est seulement dans cette première sourate médinoise qu'apparaît l'accusation de *tabriḥ* et que les sourates mecquoises non seulement l'ignorent, mais se réfèrent volontiers aux Écritures des « gens du Livre ». Aussi plusieurs penseurs importants de l'islam s'en sont-ils tenus à la formule minimale du *tabriḥ al-ma'ānī* (« altération du sens ») pour toute l'extension et la compréhension des Écritures antérieures au Coran.

Mais ce n'est pas ainsi qu'agit Ibn Ḥaldūn, lequel n'emploie cette expression que pour ce qui est, en fin de compte, dépourvu de toute portée spirituelle — et, pourrait-on ajouter actuellement, de valeur du strict point de vue historique, étant donnée la révolution opérée depuis notre auteur dans la vision de l'histoire universelle.

On lui a reproché de n'envisager la religion que comme un phénomène humain susceptible de l'analyse déterministe⁶⁴. En fait, il pourrait n'y avoir là qu'un parti pris méthodologique de s'en tenir à un niveau spécifique d'analyse, sans se prononcer sur le reste, ce qui serait absolument légitime. Mais ce qui est beaucoup plus grave, c'est que sa démarche est grevée par une double réception — antinomique — du Coran : d'une part, sa perspective de chroniqueur universel et ses relations humaines l'amènent à prendre des positions fracassantes sur les formules du Livre sacré ; mais, de l'autre, il se soumet sans état d'âme aux *effets* de sa rhétorique.

⁶³ *Ġāmi' al-bayān fī tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* (12 vol.), Beyrouth, Éd. Dār al-Ġil, s. d., t. I, pp. 290-301.

⁶⁴ Cf. J. CUOQ « La religion et les religions (judaïsme et christianisme) selon Ibn Khaldoun », *Islamochristiana*, 8, 1982, pp. 107-128.

A Jewish Reply to Ibn Ḥazm Solomon b. Adret's Polemic against Islam

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In the year 1863, J. Perles published a collection of short Hebrew tracts by the Barcelonan rabbi, Solomon ibn Adret (d. 1310)¹. One of them turned out to be a belated reply to the arguments that had been raised by the famous Muslim writer Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (d. 1064) against Judaism more than two hundred years earlier. It is this tract that forms the topic of the present article. After some general remarks about the author, his tract, and its significance, I shall present extensive sections from Ibn Adret's polemic².

INTRODUCTION: THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

a) *Ibn Adret.*

Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret³ (or some prefer the more Hebrew-sounding «Ibn Aderet») was born around the year 1233 in Barcelona, the city in which he was to spend most of his life acting as rabbi to the local Jewish community. He seems to have belonged to an influential family of merchants and money-lenders, and he, too, was in a position to extend loans to Christians and

¹ J. PERLES, *R. Salomo ben Abraham ben Adereth. Sein Leben und seine Schriften, nebst handschriftlichen Beilagen*, Breslau, Verlag der Schletter'schen Buchhandlung (H. Skutsch), 1863 (quoted as PERLES, *R. Salomo ben Abraham ben Adereth*).

² I propose to publish a full translation and commentary, with full references to the works of Ibn Ḥazm, elsewhere.

³ On the life and works of the author, see PERLES, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth*; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, Keter Press, 1971, s. v. «Adret, Solomon ben Abraham»; S. ASAF, «Adret, R. Shelomo ben Avraham», in *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, vol. I, cols. 572-576; YITZHAK BAER, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (2 vols.), Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967 (quoted as BAER, *History*); ÁNGEL SÁENZ-BADILLOS and JUDIT TARGARONA BORRÁS, *Diccionario de autores judíos (Sefarad. Siglos x-xv)*, Estudios de cultura hebrea (10), Córdoba, Ediciones El Almendro, 1988, p. 87 f. See also I. EPSTEIN, *The «Responsa» of R. Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona (1235-1310) as a source of the History of Spain*, London, 1925 (repr. 1968).

fellow-Jews alike. His many Christian customers seem to have included the king of Aragón.

Ibn Adret was one of the foremost Jewish scholars of his day, an important communal leader, whose *responsa* on halakhic issues were sought by Jews from Spain and abroad: requests for his advice reached him from Portugal, Germany, France, Bohemia, Sicily, Crete, as well as from Muslim-ruled areas such as North Africa and Palestine. A large number of these *responsa* have been published, but they still await systematic study⁴. The same goes for Ibn Adret's tract against Islam.

b) The tract and its purpose.

The tract carries the following title: *Ma'amar al Yishmael she-hibber 'al ha-datot ve-hu ksil she-dibber af 'al datenu ha-sblema, ve-hu la-rav ha-gadol rabbenu Shlomo bar Avraham ben Adret*, which roughly translates to: *Tract against Ishmael Who Wrote about the Religions, and Who is an Idiot who also Discussed our Perfect Faith, by the Great Rabbi, our Master Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret*⁵. It takes up twenty-four pages in Perles' edition⁶. The tract did not receive much attention, until in 1894 Martin Schreiner published a brief article⁷ in which he identified the unknown Ishmael as none other than the famous Muslim polymath Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), who had vehemently attacked Judaism in a series of polemical treatises⁸. Some years earlier, Schreiner had published an important, and still useful article about Muslim polemics against the Jews⁹, and had thoroughly familiarized himself with Ibn Hazm's main polemical work: *Kitāb al-fiṣal fi'l-mīlāl wa'l-abwā' wa'l-nihāl*¹⁰. He must therefore immediately have recognized the source of Ibn Adret's quotations and paraphrases¹¹. Other stu-

⁴ For an exception, see Moises ORFALI LEVI, «R. Selomoh ibn Aderet y la controversia judeo-cristiana», *Sefarad*, 39, 1979, pp. 111-120, and ID., «La cuestión de la venida del Mesías en un responsum de Rabbí Selomó ibn Adret al Cahal de Lérida», *Helmantica*, 43, 1992, pp. 203-220 (quoted as ORFALI LEVI, «R. Selomoh ibn Aderet», and «La cuestión de la venida»).

⁵ This last addition suggests that the title was given by a copyist, rather than by Ibn Adret himself.

⁶ PERLES, *Salomo ben Abraham ben Adereth*, pp. 1-24 of the Hebrew section.

⁷ Martin SCHREINER, «Die apologetische Schrift des Salomo b. Adret gegen einen Muhammedaner», *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 48, 1894, pp. 39-42 (quoted as SCHREINER, «Die apologetische Schrift»); included in Martin SCHREINER, *Gesammelte Schriften. Islamische und jüdisch-islamische Studien*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Moshe PERLMANN, Collectanea (11), Hildesheim - Zürich - New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 1983, pp. 271-274 (quoted as SCHREINER, *Gesammelte Schriften*).

⁸ His main arguments will be surveyed briefly below.

⁹ Martin SCHREINER, «Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern», *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 42, 1888, pp. 591-675 (quoted as SCHREINER, «Zur Geschichte der Polemik»), included in SCHREINER, *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 75-159.

¹⁰ Five parts in 3 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Ma'rifa li-l-Tibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1395-1975 and many reprints (quoted as IBN HAZM, *Fiṣal*). Translation by Miguel ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas* (5 vols.), Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 1927-1932 (quoted as ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*).

¹¹ The parallels between Ibn Hazm's work and the tract discussed here were also pointed out by Moshe ZUCKER; see his «Berurim be-toledot ha-vikuhim ha-datiyim she-ben ha-Ya-

dents of Muslim-Jewish and Jewish-Muslim polemics have recognized the significance of Ibn Adret's text, but seem to have shied away from it¹², perhaps because the Hebrew is far from easy, and the refutation raises a number of questions that are not so easily answered. Some of these questions will be addressed in the following.

It is beyond any doubt that Ibn Adret wrote his tract for Jewish readers, and that he had no intention of trying to persuade Muslims, who would not have had access to his work in any case, since the Hebrew language was known to very few of them only. But who were these Jews that he felt would benefit from it? What prompted this rabbi who, after all, was living in the Christian part of Spain, to write a tract refuting Islamic arguments against Judaism? And why now, more than two hundred years after the death of the author he refutes?

As for the question what prompted him, let us look at the explanation given by Yitzhak Baer, who in his classic *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, devotes a large section of his chapter on Mysticism and Social Reform to the «Communal and religious authority» of Ibn Adret¹³. Baer accepts Schreiner's identification of «Ishmael» as Ibn Hazm, and states:

Ibn Adret himself [like his famous teacher Nahmanides¹⁴] had occasion to dispute matters of faith with Christians and to counter, both orally and in writing, the arguments of Raymond Martini, the learned Dominican friar, and others like him. These Christian theologians and polemicists relied, it appears, to a large extent upon the anti-Jewish writings of the eleventh century Mohammedan scholar Ibn Hazm, who had in his day crossed literary swords with Samuel ha-Nagid. Ibn Adret therefore devoted a special work to a refutation of Ibn Hazm's strictures upon Judaism¹⁵.

In Baer's view, then, Jews reading Ibn Adret's tract might find arguments that could be used in discussions with Christians. However, it is not likely that the Christians were Ibn Adret's ultimate target. In fact, as we shall see, he states in his tract that the Christians, in spite of their enmity towards the Jews, agree with them with regard to the textual integrity of the Torah. The Christians, he adds, are much more knowledgeable than the Ishmaelite people about the Holy Scriptures.

Another possibility is that Ibn Adret was requested to write a tract in defence of Judaism and against Islam by coreligionists living under Islamic rule, most

hadut ve-ha-Islam», in *Festschrift Armand Kaminka zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Vienna, Verlag des Wiener Maimonides-Instituts, 1937, pp. 31-48 (quoted as M. ZUCKER, «Berurim be-toledot»).

¹² An exception is Norman ROTH in his article «Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: a Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain», in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 54, 1987, pp. 203-236.

¹³ BAER, *History*, vol. I, pp. 280-305.

¹⁴ My addition.

¹⁵ BAER, *History*, vol. I, p. 281.

likely in al-Andalus. I mentioned earlier that Ibn Adret received queries from Jews living under Muslim rule, and they may well have requested him to write such an epistle, in the same way that the Jewish community in Yemen had applied to Maimonides, who then wrote his famous *Iggeret Teman*¹⁶. Ibn Adret may simply have wished to strengthen the faith of the common believers and perhaps, if the tract was intended for Jews living under Muslim rule, to provide them with arguments they might use in discussions with their Muslim interlocutors —though this usually only seems to be a secondary goal in tracts of this type.

Ibn Adret himself does not provide a clear-cut explanation, but it seems that he was afraid that the biblical criticisms of the Muslim author he refutes might appeal to Jewish skeptics and rationalists. He may have felt that the Muslim's arguments had not yet been satisfactorily refuted, even though we find attempts to do so in the works of Abraham ibn Daud (d. 1180) and perhaps others such as Yehuda Ha-Levi (d. 1141) and Maimonides (d. 1204).

Whatever the immediate impetus, the work fits perfectly into Ibn Adret's programme of defending the Torah against the dangers posed by rationalism and other threats¹⁷.

c) *Ibn Adret's «Vorlage».*

Although it has been established beyond any doubt that the arguments that are being refuted by Ibn Adret stem from one or more polemical tracts by Ibn Hazm, the question of the Barcelonan rabbi's direct source remains to be answered. We have no indication that Ibn Adret knew any Arabic —in fact he himself seems to deny any such knowledge¹⁸— nor is there any compelling reason why he should have known that language; after all, his native Barcelona, where he spent most of his life, had been under Christian rule for a long time. We may safely assume, then, that he cannot have had access to a complete text of Ibn Hazm's tract¹⁹. But what, then, was Ibn Adret's «Vorlage»? In what form were Ibn Hazm's polemical works preserved and transmitted in the Jewish community in Spain? Unfortunately, we have no solid information, but it seems safe to conjecture that an excerpt or a set of quotations from the Mus-

¹⁶ Translation and commentary in *Epistles of Maimonides. Crisis and Leadership*, translations and notes by Abraham HALKIN, discussions by David HARTMAN, Philadelphia-Jerusalem, The Jewish Publication Society, 1993, pp. 91-207.

¹⁷ Cf. his role in the Maimonidean controversy, in which he took the side of the anti-rationalists. See Ch. TOUATI, «La controverse de 1303-1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques», *Revue des études juives*, 127, 1968, pp. 21-37.

¹⁸ See Esperanza ALFONSO CARRO, *Los judíos en el Islam medieval. La percepción de lo islámico en la construcción de la identidad* (PhD Thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid [1998]), p. 105, and SCHREINER, «Die apologetische Schrift», p. 42 (included in SCHREINER, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 274): «Aus dem Schreiben des Salomon b. Adret an Jakob Abbâsi, den Übersetzer des Mischnacommentars des Maimonides zur Section "Nâsîm" geht hervor, dass er des Arabischen unkundig war».

¹⁹ This was also recognized by SCHREINER, «Die apologetische Schrift», p. 42 (p. 274 of SCHREINER, *Gesammelte Schriften*) and Muhammad ABŪ LAYLAH, *In Pursuit of Virtue. The Moral Theology and Psychology of Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi (384-456 AH 994-1064 AD), with a translation of his book al-Akhlaq wa'l-Siyar*, London, Ta-Ha Publishers, 1990, p. 13.

lim author's work circulated among the Jews of al-Andalus, initially in Arabic, and later in a Hebrew translation.

While it is possible that Ibn Adret did not know the identity of the Muslim thinker whose arguments he refutes in his reply, it is more likely that he was well aware of it, but chose not to mention Ibn Hazm's name so as to broaden the relevance of his own reply: in this way, it is directed not against one particular Muslim, long dead, but against Muslims, and Islam, in general.

What is interesting is that Ibn Adret adopts a polemical style not unlike Ibn Hazm's own. He calls the Muslim scholar a vainglorious man who does not understand what he is talking about, a brainless idiot, and, most often, «*hameshbuga' ha-zeh*»: «this madman»²⁰. In comparison with Ibn Adret's polemical tract against the Ishmaelite, his tract against a likewise unidentified Christian (possibly Raimundus Martini, d. 1285) is completely dispassionate and devoid of the vilifications that characterize his tract against Ibn Hazm²¹. It would seem, then, that Ibn Adret adopts the style of the tract —or set of excerpts— he is refuting, which either means that his source preserved this particular feature of Ibn Hazm's writing or, if it did not, that Ibn Hazm's reputation for vilifying his opponents was still as much alive among the Jews as it was among the Muslims.

In order better to appreciate and follow Ibn Adret's arguments, I shall now give a brief survey of Ibn Hazm's main arguments against Judaism²².

d) *Ibn Hazm's main arguments.*

The most important polemical arguments are the following. According to Ibn Hazm, Jewish law has been abrogated by Islam and has ceased to be valid. It is therefore of no relevance to Muslims. Another reason why Muslims should steer clear of the Torah in Ibn Hazm's view is that it has been corrupted by the Jews in the course of history.

The Israelites turned to foreign gods soon after Moses had died. Moses was succeeded by a series of rulers, the judges, quite a few of whom were idolators. Under their rule, the Israelites began to hold the Torah in contempt, subjecting it to distortion. Of the twenty successors to King Solomon, no fewer than fifteen worshipped idols. All the while, there was only one single copy of the Torah in existence, and this was kept in the Temple, where

²⁰ Some Jewish polemicists reserve this and other derogatory nicknames for the Prophet Muhammad; see Moritz STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden, nebst Anhängen verwandten Inhalts*, Leipzig, 1887 (repr. Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1966), 302 f., p. 416 (quoted as STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*).

²¹ Cf. ORFALI LEVI, «R. Selomoh ibn Aderet», and especially «La cuestión de la venida».

²² For a full discussion of Ibn Hazm's polemics against Judaism, with an extensive bibliography, see Hava LAZARUS-YAFEH, *Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 1992 (quoted as LAZARUS-YAFEH, *Intertwined Worlds*), and my *Islam frente a Judaísmo. La polémica de Ibn Hazm de Córdoba*, Madrid-Córdoba, Aben Ezra Ediciones - Diputación Provincial de Córdoba (Área de Cultura), 1994, and *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible. From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Leiden - New York - Köln, E. J. Brill, series «Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science» (22), 1996.

the only ones to have access to it were the High Priests. They had ample opportunity to tamper with the Torah at will; the common people had no way of noticing the difference. The fact that the people had no access to the text meant that there could be no uninterrupted transmission, which is the ultimate guarantee of authenticity.

Moreover, one king of the house of David, namely Jehoahaz, deleted the name of God from the text, while his successor, Jehoiakim, surpassed him in impiety by burning the Torah. With the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, who razed the Temple to the ground, every remaining doubt concerning the fate of the Torah was removed.

The inhabitants of Judah were deported to Babylon where they developed a new religion, Judaism, which, with its newly invented prayers and rituals, was totally different from the original Mosaic faith. Ibn Ḥazm holds the rabbis responsible for the creation of Judaism as it was known in his day—an argument which seems to echo Karaite views.

When they were allowed to return to Jerusalem, the Jews not only rebuilt their Temple, but also rewrote their Torah, and it is plain to see that it does not represent the divine revelation. According to Ibn Ḥazm, Ezra, the biblical scribe, is the author of the Torah in its contemporary form, which has little to do with the book originally revealed to Moses²³.

e) Earlier responses to Ibn Ḥazm's polemic.

Ibn Ḥazm's polemic against Judaism takes up 109 printed pages in the most commonly used edition of *Kitāb al-Fiṣal*, and he repeats many of his arguments in other tracts, most importantly the *Radd 'alā bn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī*²⁴, which may or may not be an attack on Ismā'il ibn al-Naghrīla—also known as Shemuel ha-Nagid—the Jewish poet and vizier of Granada²⁵. This challenge to the very foundation of the Jewish faith could not, of course, remain unanswered,

²³ Nevertheless, the Muslim controversialist believes that even this distorted version of the Torah contains certain passages predicting the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad and the religion of Islam. These passages are among the few believed to have been preserved by God from distortion. This argument is not taken up by Ibn Adret, perhaps because he did not encounter it in his *Vorlage*.

²⁴ IBN ḤAZM, *al-Radd 'alā bn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī*, in IBN ḤAZM, *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī wa-Rasā'il Ukbri*, Ed. Ihsān 'ABBĀS, Cairo, Dār al-'Urūba, 1380/1960, pp. 45-81 (quoted as IBN ḤAZM, *al-Radd 'alā bn al-Naghrīla*), and IBN ḤAZM, *Rasā'il Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī*, vol. III, ed. Ihsān 'ABBĀS, Beirut, Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li'l-Dirāsāt wa'l-Nashr, 1981-1987, pp. 41-70.

²⁵ See on this issue LAZARUS-YAFEH, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 27, 67, 71, 123; Emilio GARCÍA GÓMEZ, «Polémica religiosa entre Ibn Ḥazm e Ibn al-Naghrīla», *Al-Andalus*, 4, 1936-1939, pp. 1-28; Roger ARNALDEZ, «Controverse d'Ibn Ḥazm contre Ibn Naghrīla le juif», in *Mélanges Le Tourneau*, nos 13-14 of the *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 1973, pp. 41-48; Moshe PERLMANN, «Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada», in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* (quoted as *PAAJR*), 18, 1948-1949, pp. 269-290 (repr. in Robert CHAZAN [ed.], *Medieval Jewish Life. Studies from the Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, New York, Ktav, 1976, pp. 147-168); ID., «The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism», in S. D. GOITEIN (ed.), *Religion in a Religious Age*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1974,

and it is surprising, therefore, that we have to wait till the 13th century for the first more or less systematic refutation to be produced: the tract by Ibn Adret²⁶.

For unless we assume that Ibn al-Naghrīla wrote a tract against the Koran in reaction to Ibn Ḥazm's polemic against the Jewish scriptures (and there seems to be a growing tendency among scholars to assume that he did not, in fact, write such a tract)²⁷ Ibn Ḥazm's refutations of Judaism do not seem to have elicited any written response among his Jewish contemporaries²⁸. At least, no such response has come down to us, nor do we find references to it in Jewish sources—or Muslim ones, for that matter. Of course later Jewish authors such as Yehuda Ha-Levi, Abraham ibn Daud, and Maimonides did polemicize against Islam, and may in fact have had the arguments of Ibn Ḥazm in mind. In the case of *Ha-Emuna ha-Rama* («The Exalted Faith») by Ibn Daud, this is actually quite clear²⁹. But Ibn Adret's is the earliest extant *monographical* reply by a Jew to Ibn Ḥazm's arguments. A possible explanation may be that Jews living under Islamic rule were cautious, in view of the fact that the punishment for blasphemy and offending the Prophet Muḥammad could be death. Ibn Adret, living in Christian Barcelona, had no such fears.

After these introductory remarks, let us look at Ibn Adret's arguments against the Muslim polemicist.

IBN ADRET'S RESPONSE.

In the introductory passage [1], the first part of which is in rhymed prose, Ibn Adret says³⁰ that he saw

pp. 103-138; ID., «Polemics, Muslim-Jewish», in Mircea ELIADE *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. XI, New York (Macmillan) - London (Collier-Macmillan), 1987, pp. 396-402; ID., «Polemics, Islamic-Jewish», in Joseph R. STRAYER (ed.), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. X, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988, pp. 7-9, and the publications referred to in note 27.

²⁶ Unless one accepts M. ZUCKER's theory that the tract was written by a Jewish contemporary of Ibn Ḥazm; see his «Berurim be-toledot».

²⁷ See David WASSERSTEIN, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings. Politics and Society in Islamic Spain (1002-1086)*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 199-205; Sarah STROUMSA, «From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rawandī's *Kitāb al-Dāmigh*», *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107, 1987, pp. 767-772; but cf. Maribel FIERRO, «Ibn Ḥazm et le *zandīq* juif», *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 63-64, 1992, pp. 81-89; and cf. Ross BRANN, «Textualizing Ambivalence in Islamic Spain. Arabic Representations of Ismā'il ibn Naghrīlah», in Ross BRANN (ed.), *Languages of Power in Islamic Spain*, Bethesda (Md.), CDL Press, 1997, pp. 107-135, at p. 130.

²⁸ Although he held numerous oral discussions with Jews; see my *Muslim Writers*, pp. 61, 67, 94-96, 102, 109, 219, 239.

²⁹ See T. A. M. FONTAINE, *In Defence of Judaism: Abraham ibn Daud. Sources and Structure of ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, translated from the Dutch by H. S. LAKE, Assen, Van Gorcum, series «Studia Semitica Neerlandica» (26), 1990, pp. 81-82, 94, 162-164, 166, 189, 192, 235, 260-261.

³⁰ The following pages cover most of Ibn Adret's arguments, although at times I have summarized them. I have usually chosen to paraphrase the author's rather dense and concise prose. A more accurate rendering of the text will be presented in the full translation that I am preparing for publication. References to pages in the Hebrew text (in Perles' edition) are given in square brackets.

a stupid man who considers himself smart, one idiotic Ishmael, whose eyes misled him and whose blindness deluded him into talking about our Holy Book, the Book of the Law of Moses, peace be with him.

This wretched scoundrel, he says, talks about things that he does not understand. As in other Jewish writings, the name Ishmael, or more often Ishmaelite, stands for Muslim³¹. It is interesting that Ibn Adret states that he saw this Ishmael. It is not clear what he means by this. If he is trying to suggest that he actually met the Muslim against whom he is polemicizing, he is, of course, misleading his readers, for almost two centuries had passed since Ibn Ḥazm had written his works. If Ibn Adret is merely saying that he saw the Ishmaelite's book, the question remains what book exactly he saw. As was said above, it is highly unlikely that Ibn Adret had access to a complete copy of Ibn Ḥazm's main work(s), and he probably had to rely on a set of excerpts in Hebrew.

At the beginning of his nonsense, says Ibn Adret, this man says that he found scandalous things that the Torah ascribes to Judah—namely that he fornicated with his daughter-in-law—and to Reuben, who allegedly did the same with the mother of his brothers Dan and Naftali. «Those are his words.»

Ibn Adret says that although it is not proper to reply to such an idiot, especially since to refute and to correct him is a simple matter for anyone, even for a baby, he will nevertheless reply to him, in order that people who follow in his footsteps will not consider themselves smart, but may be guided by the light of truth. It would seem that Ibn Adret was afraid that Jewish skeptics and rationalists might be persuaded by the Muslim's criticism. He explains that it is his aim to strengthen the view, already held by anyone endowed with reason, that the whole of the Mosaic Law is true, including all the reports of miracles and signs, and the proofs of the Jews' closeness to God that are described in it.

The Muslim, he found, had taken exception to various episodes in the Torah, such as that of the golden calf and that of the spies who had rejected what Moses (called here «the father of prophets») had told them, and who as a result met their punishment and perished in the desert³². All these episodes and others like them testify to the truth of the [2] Holy Book, to which nothing was added and from which nothing was struck; all that was and that happened, whether it reflects positively or negatively on the Israelites, was written down truthfully.

All the men of religion [says Ibn Adret] acknowledge that the whole Torah was received by our master Moses, peace be with him, from the mouth of the Almighty on Mount Sinai and was transmitted to the People of Israel. We have not heard anyone from the adherents of the other faiths dispute this or deny these events. The Christians and the Muslims are all agreed on this without anyone doubting it. If what is written in

³¹ See STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, pp. 256–261. In the following pages, I have usually translated «Ishmael(ite)» as «Muslim».

³² Cf. Num. 13 and 14.

the Book is not the truth from the mouth of our master Moses, peace be with him, but something that has been added afterwards, then how can we explain that King David, and all the kings that proceed from his dynasty, would tolerate what is written in the Book, in which it is explicitly said that they were born from fornication, and not erase it?

What Ibn Adret is saying here is that the fact that details about King David's dubious genealogy may be encountered in the Torah proves this Book's authenticity. If they had wanted to change the Torah, they would certainly have changed this, too. The fact that we find in the Torah that King David's mother, who was a Moabite, issued from the fornication that the mother of the family committed with her own father, Lot, shows that these words are from God, communicated by His prophet, for the alternative is inconceivable: people would surely have removed this episode. Rather than seeing in this problematic story proof of its falseness, then, Ibn Adret sees it as proof of the authenticity of the Torah.

Additional proof of the Scripture's genuineness is the agreement between the manifold copies that have always existed of the Book:

If anyone should claim that all this has been added to the Book, and that all that appears in this section of it dates back from the time after the destruction of the Temple, anyone endowed with reason, and anyone who has a brain in his skull should now ask himself if it would have been possible to gather all the copies that were in the hands of the Israelites in the East, in the West, in the North and in the South, and to distort all of them in the same manner, without a single copy escaping that differed from its peers in as much as a subject, one word, or several words.

It would have been an impossible task, for what enemy of the people and distorter of religion could have gathered all the books until not a single copy was left? Who could have distorted all of them—including the books of the prophets and the historical writings that contain many disputed matters—supposedly without any of the believers noticing? The suggestion that there might have been a king or a prince hostile to the Jews who gathered all the books together and inserted changes into them, and that the people were too frightened to delete what he had written and distorted, is just one of the claims of a confused madman whose idiocy has no boundaries. For, Ibn Adret repeats, it is impossible that not even one copy should have escaped. And even if all the kings would conspire to distort the Torah, they would be unable to do so, for after some time the Jews would correct the distortions, and remove what had been added. And one more thing. How come we do not know when and where the idiot lived who supposedly distorted all this?

Now the Christians, who precede the nation of the Muslims—who follow their error³³—and who disagree with us with regard to their belief, even these

³³ Presumably because the Muslims, unlike the Jews, accept Jesus as a prophet, and even as the Messiah.

Christians now, have responded to this. There is no doubt that the Christian people are much more knowledgeable than the Muslims about the Holy Scriptures, that is, the Book of the Law, all the prophets and the historical writings. Now they, who came earlier, and were so numerous, would no doubt have discovered any distortion in the Holy Books, if there was any. So how can this idiot come and allege that the Holy Scriptures have been distorted, the books of the truth that the ancients brought forth, and whose text and language the Jewish scholars spent all the days of their lives analyzing in all its details, [3] and with a dedication unmatched by the scholars of any of the other religions, as befits the True Law and the writings that were transmitted from the mouth of the Almighty concerning holy matters that were not committed to writing by mere coincidence. For thus stood the learned men who received the Law from the mouth of Moses, and thus they transmitted it to their disciples, and carefully explained all the precepts until they did not leave a single word in the whole Law unaccounted for. This is evident and clear to anyone who applies himself to the books of the ancient sages in the interpretations of the Law, that is, the Talmud, that has been elaborated by us generation after generation, going back till the period of the Second Temple, and received in the days of the First Temple, from the prophets, from Joshua and the elders, and from our master Moses, peace be with him, who heard and received them from the mouth of the Almighty on Mount Sinai.

Ibn Adret is emphasizing here that the Torah was handed down in an uninterrupted chain of transmitters, something that had been denied by Ibn Ḥazm in his writings. He proceeds:

So how can this brainless idiot suggest that distortions occur in such a holy Book that is perfect in all its grammatical structures, unmatched in its accuracy by any book of any nation or in any language? This is nothing but blindness and insanity that has taken possession of him.

This argument seems to echo discussions about the miraculous inimitability of the Koran and the Torah³⁴.

Ibn Adret continues:

Also, the madman said that he found in the Book things in which there is so much distortion that no religious scholar can deny it, and he prides himself on having found these things, saying that none of his predecessors had been alert to them. Furthermore he said that he put many of our learned men on the spot and that they became confused by these things.

What the «madman» had supposedly discovered and was using as an argument against his adversaries, is that in the Torah, «in the fourth chapter of the

³⁴ See on this topic LAZARUS-YAFEH, *Intertwined Worlds*, chapter 1, and Joseph SADAN, «Identity and Inimitability. Contexts of inter-religious polemics and solidarity in medieval Spain, in the light of two passages by Moše ibn 'Ezra and Ya'aqov ben El'azar», *Israel Oriental Studies*, 14, 1994, pp. 325-347. See also chapter v, part II in my *Muslim Writers on Judaism*.

second book», where Moses' acceptance of his mission to Pharaoh is mentioned, the sons of Jacob and their sons and their history are mentioned as follows: «Now these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their families»³⁵ and it mentions the sons of Levi, son of Jacob, and of them there were three: Gershon, Kohath and Merari³⁶. Afterwards the Torah mentions the sons of Gershon and of Merari³⁷, and then it states: «And the sons of Kohath were 130 [years]»³⁸ and it mentions that Kohath had four sons: Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel³⁹. After that, the Scripture says that the sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar⁴⁰, and his grandson called Pinhas, and that the sons of Korah [son of Izhar, son of Kohath] were Asir, Elkana and Abiasaf⁴¹.

Then it says in the first chapter of the fourth book that the Almighty ordered Moses, in the second month of the second year of their exodus from the land of Egypt, to make a census of the Israelites⁴², and it mentions the number of the sons of Kohath, every one of them from a month old and upward, and those that were registered were 8,600⁴³. Their leader was Elizaphan ben Uzziel ben Kohath ben Levi ben Jacob⁴⁴ and the number of the sons of Kohath that were registered, and that were aged thirty to fifty was 2,700 males⁴⁵.

Now the «madman» says:

This is one of the most nonsensical things that can be; that the sons of Kohath were only four, and that the sons of these four men were only seven in number — [Ibn Adret adds:] among them Moses and Aaron, peace be upon them, and Elizaphan, their leader.

In other words: How could so few men generate such a large offspring? [4] Would the intelligence of anyone endowed with reason accept this? «These are the words of the madman», says Ibn Adret, adding:

Now, I say that when he prided himself in that no man before him hit upon these things that he had found, he spoke the truth: no man before

³⁵ Ex. 6:16 ff. Ibn Adret has *le-mishpapotam* («according to their families») whereas the standard Hebrew text has *le-toledotam* («according to their genealogies»). This discrepancy, as well as other, similar ones occurring in the text, seems to suggest that Ibn Adret was quoting the passages from memory. I thank Professor Mordechai Z. Cohen of Yeshiva University for pointing this out to me.

³⁶ Ex. 6:16.

³⁷ Ex. 6:17, 19.

³⁸ Cf. Ex. 6:18. Here, again, there is a slight difference between Ibn Adret's quotation and the biblical text.

³⁹ Ex. 6:18; Num. 3:17.

⁴⁰ Ex. 6:23; Num. 3:2.

⁴¹ Ex. 6:24; IBN ḤAZM, *Fīṣal*, vol. I, p. 169; ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, p. 314.

⁴² Num. 1:1.

⁴³ Num. 3:27 f.

⁴⁴ Num. 3:30.

⁴⁵ Cf. Num. 4:34-36; IBN ḤAZM, *Fīṣal*, vol. I, p. 169; ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, p. 314 f.

him reached this degree of mental illness that he did. And when he said that many of our learned men became confused in their replies to his madness, he was either slandering our learned men, or he was lying because he never actually talked to any of them.

Ibn Adret is surprised that the «madman» is so troubled by the story about the increase of the descendants of Levi; if he would just take a look at the Torah, he would see that all the remaining tribes increased much more in number than that of Levi, and that although the first progenitors that are mentioned in the Scripture are few, their tribes increased greatly in number, exceeding that of the Levites. Thus Reuben, the son of Jacob, is mentioned by the Book as having fathered Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi⁴⁶, and it mentions that Pallu, who was one of the four, fathered only one, namely Eliab. Now Eliab had three sons, namely Nemuel, Dotan and Abiram. And although these progenitors were few, the Book mentions in the same census that took place in the second year of their exodus from the land of Egypt, and in which the sons of Kohath were counted, that the descendants of Reuben, aged twenty years and upwards, were 46,500 in number⁴⁷. Just think what their number would have been if they had counted from one month old and upward!

Now Judah, son of Jacob had three sons that created dynasties: Shelah, Perez and Zerah. Perez had two sons: Hezron and Hamul, and their number, from twenty years and upward, was 64,600⁴⁸. If one were to count the number of sons aged one month and up, it would probably rise to 200,000 or more. The Muslim sees in these improbably high numbers evidence of falsification of the text. But everybody knows, says Ibn Adret, that there has to be a reason for such additions, and in this case, what could the reason be? What would the Jews gain by inflating the numbers, what interest would this serve? None; in fact, the contrary is true. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were few in number and powerless, which made the miracle of their conquering the lands of thirty-one kings all the greater⁴⁹. Ibn Adret also invites his readers to look at what God said to Gideon:

The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying: «My own hand has delivered me»⁵⁰.

and it is written:

Then the Lord said to Gideon: «The troops are still too many [...]»⁵¹, etc. The number of those that lapped was three hundred

⁴⁶ Cf. Ex. 6:14 f.; IBN HAZM, *Fiṣal*, vol. I, p. 168; ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, p. 314.

⁴⁷ Cf. IBN HAZM, *Fiṣal*, vol. I, pp. 173 sqq.; ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, pp. 319 ff.

⁴⁸ Cf. IBN HAZM, *Fiṣal*, vol. I, pp. 146, 170; ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, pp. 282, 317.

⁴⁹ See Josh. 12:9-24.

⁵⁰ Judg. 7:2.

⁵¹ Judg. 7:4.

[...]»⁵² and God spoke to Gideon: «With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand [...]»⁵³.

The smaller the number of fighters, the greater the miracle, in other words, and with this the Muslim's argument loses its force. «Once more then», says Ibn Adret with a certain smugness, «I expose the distortions of this madman».

As for the elders and the generations that are mentioned in the Book: not all the descendants that they had are explicitly mentioned. Only part of them is recorded, even though they had many more sons in addition to these, but they are not mentioned here; rather, Scripture mentions only those that needed to be mentioned because they were the heads of their clans, according to their families, whereas the others are mentioned only by name. And in the case of Joseph, the Book only explicitly refers to his sons Manasseh and Ephraim, because these were to be at the head of all the offspring born from Joseph, their father⁵⁴.

This is to say that when the sons of Kohath are mentioned, the Torah names only those who were to be leaders of clans according to their families —except that in the end the Torah also mentions Nadab and Abihu, even though they were *not* heads of families, since they died in the lifetime of their father Aaron without leaving sons. This, however, is because of what happened to them when they offered illicit fire before the Lord⁵⁵, which the Torah proceeded to mention as a warning. The same applies to most of the narratives in the Torah.

Furthermore mentioned in this context are the fathers and the generations of their sons and their sons' sons. The sons of Aaron are mentioned, but the sons of Moses are not referred to here at all, even though it is explicitly written that he had Gershom and Eliezer years before that⁵⁶, and they built many more generations than all the others, as is written in the books of the Chronicles⁵⁷:

The sons of Moses were Gershom and Eliezer. The sons of Gershom: Shebuel the chief. The sons of Eliezer: Rehabiah the chief; Eliezer had no other sons, but the sons of Rehabiah were very numerous.

Here you see with your own eyes, says Ibn Adret, that the Book does not mention *the names of all* the sons born to Kohath, and it is possible that it does not mention the remaining children born in turn to them, but only those, for the reason I mentioned. This argument in itself is sufficient, but quite apart from that, it is possible that the sons of Moses who are not mentioned, had many children.

⁵² Judg. 7:6.

⁵³ Judg. 7:7.

⁵⁴ Ibn Adret quotes Gen. 48:6.

⁵⁵ Num. 3:4.

⁵⁶ Cf. I Chron. 23:15.

⁵⁷ I Chron. 23:15-17.

Moreover, when we look at the course of nature, we see that it is not necessarily true that [6] every generation of a family is equal in number; that is to say: if the father and his sons did not produce many sons, this does not necessarily mean that the grandchildren did not have many sons either, and that they only had the same number of sons as that of the generation of the father. It is quite possible that the grandchildren of Kohath had many sons. Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob, had only four sons, and Dan only one, namely Hushim, but Benjamin, who was the youngest of the brothers, already had ten sons before he went down to Egypt⁵⁸. It is furthermore possible that they had several wives and thus had many children, which is not at all inconceivable.

Ibzan the judge had thirty sons and thirty daughters⁵⁹, and in the light of what is written in the Scripture, the explanation is that he had many wives, for it is stated that this is how Gideon came to have seventy sons⁶⁰. It is even possible for one man to have a thousand sons. Would it be so strange if King Solomon had a thousand sons, or even several thousands of them, given the fact that according to the Scripture he had seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines⁶¹?

Even in our own time the kings and princes of the Muslims have many sons by many women; now, do you see them being astonished by that, or do they consider this impossible or inconceivable⁶²? Ultimately, only someone whose heart is inclined to lies and unbelief, will call this into question.

If God wants to multiply a nation or a family, there is nothing to prevent Him from doing so; this is something that only the unbelievers of all religions will deny. After all, Scripture testifies that thus it was promised to the patriarchs. To Abraham He said: «Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.» Then He said to him, «So shall your descendants be»⁶³. To Isaac He said, «I will make your offspring numerous as the stars of heaven»⁶⁴, and to Jacob He said, «do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there»⁶⁵. In addition, it is written: «Live! I made you grow like a plant in the field»⁶⁶.

This is one of God's ways to show to Pharaoh and all his nation that it is not within their power to oppress the nation that God has blessed, or to decimate it, even if he ordered the killing of their children and oppressed them through hard labour in order to prevent them from procreating, for as the

⁵⁸ Cf. Gen. 46:21.

⁵⁹ Judg. 12:8-9.

⁶⁰ Judg. 8:30.

⁶¹ I Kgs. 11:3.

⁶² Interestingly, in his *Fīṣal* (vol. I, p. 175 f.) IBN ḤAZM discusses Muslims with many children, but says that only few of them had more than thirty. Apparently, this passage was not contained in Ibn Adret's «Vorlage».

⁶³ Gen. 15:5.

⁶⁴ Gen. 26:4.

⁶⁵ Gen. 46:3.

⁶⁶ Ezek. 16:7.

Scripture testifies: «The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread»⁶⁷.

If we consider the offspring that they could have had in the period of their stay in Egypt, the count rises to a great number, even if we accept that they dwelled in Egypt for only 210 years and assume that they did not have twins. And there is no reason we should assume that they did not marry until they reached the age of twenty or even thirty, or that they married only one woman, or that they produced only three or four sons each.

When Joseph went down to Egypt he was seventeen years old and still herding the flock together with his brothers⁶⁸. After he had been sold, his brother Judah went down and took an Adullamite woman, had three sons by her and gave them in marriage one after the other, but after the death of his two oldest sons he did not give Tamar, his daughter-in-law, to his son Shelah in marriage⁶⁹. [7] She, now, seeing that Shelah had grown up and that Judah did not give her to him in marriage, did what she did, and as a result Judah had Perez and Zerah by her. Perez married and had two sons, Hezron and Hamul, and all this happened before Jacob's descent to Egypt, for all the sons and grandsons of Judah were counted among the ones who came to Egypt with Jacob. The number of years that passed between the sale of Joseph and Jacob's descent to Egypt was twenty-two at the most, for Joseph was thirty years old when he was brought before Pharaoh—and he had therefore been in Egypt for thirteen years, since he had been sold at the age of seventeen, as mentioned above—and seven years of wealth and two years of famine had passed by the time Jacob came to Egypt. Within this short period of time, Joseph's brother Judah not only had sons, but grandsons as well; this might seem unlikely, but is not to be rejected.

Ibn Adret now adduces more scriptural evidence to prove that the early generations were extremely fruitful, and that it needed only few progenitors to create a large progeny:

You will furthermore see [he says] that at the time of the flood only Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet escaped, and his sons had children after the flood. The sons of Ham were four: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. Cush had six, namely Sebah, Havilah, Sabtah, Sabtecah, Raamah and Nimrod. Nimrod was the third generation removed from Noah—Ham, Cush, Nimrod—and the Book speaks of only ten sons until the birth of Nimrod. Then it says that Nimrod became king, and the beginning of his rule was in four great cities: Babel, Erech, Accad and Calnah. Then he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah and Resen, and Resen is the great city between Nineveh and Calah⁷⁰. [The first generations of the Noahides did not

⁶⁷ Ex. 1:12.

⁶⁸ Gen. 37:2.

⁶⁹ Gen. 38.

⁷⁰ Gen. 10:6-8, 10-12.

engage in polygamy, for only the three sons escaped, with their respective wives.] Therefore, says that confused man, how could it be possible that within such a short period the sons of Ham increased to such an extent that Nimrod became king over them and was able to build all those magnificent cities, plus the city of which the Scripture testifies that it was «the great city», and which was surely built not in order to be populated by mosquitoes, but by the large numbers of people that were already born and that were multiplying in his days?

By the time of Abraham the world was filled with people, even though not much time had passed since the flood; already Noah had seen the world become filled through his three sons!

If the madman argues against all this and denies it all [saying that it is impossible that so few people could engender such a large offspring], we shall repeat and ask him once more if he knows of any reason that would have led us to inflate the numbers of the people that are mentioned in the Scripture, and what necessity drove us to it.

Ibn Adret then moves on to refute the arguments of all those who denounce the Jews, including the Muslim polemicist, and to clarify why it is that the Holy Book tells the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, and the matter of Reuben and his father's wife, the mother of his brothers:

This [he says] is actually a question that does not oblige us to give an answer; it is enough that we know that it all came from God to Moses. Nothing compels us to know why, just as we do not need to know why He forbade us to eat pork and other prohibited things [8] and why He forbade the common folk to wear garments made of mixed fibres, whereas the priests were ordered to wear priestly garb made out of linen and wool⁷¹; or why He forbade the ritual slaughter of fowl, ordering it to be killed by wrenching its neck instead? It is the same with all the precepts: it is enough for us to know with certainty that they have been given for a reason, and that there is no senseless thing in the words of the Holy One⁷².

Among these precepts, says Ibn Adret, there are some whose purpose is revealed to those with insight, but I have already mentioned to you above that the purpose of most of the narratives in the Torah is for known benefits. Among them there are narratives about certain acts we are required to abstain from or, conversely, that we are required to perform. Thus, the narrative of Lot and his daughters is told in order to prevent someone who knows that he has a low tolerance for alcohol from excessive drinking, for after all, it was Lot's drinking that caused him to fornicate with his daughters who, it should be added, arranged the whole scene out of a laudable desire to ensure the con-

⁷¹ Cf. Deut. 22:11; Ex. 28.

⁷² This view comes surprisingly close to Ibn Ḥazm's own Zāhiri beliefs.

tinued existence of the world. Even a narrative which at first sight would seem to be objectionable and of doubtful morality, then, serves an edifying purpose, while it does not contain an all-out ban on drinking.

Similarly, in the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, the purpose of the Torah is to regulate the *yibbum*, the levirate marriage to the wife of a brother who has died without leaving offspring.

[9] But what about another objectionable story, that of Reuben and one of his stepmothers? Ibn Adret suggests that it never actually happened; that the reason why Jacob transferred Reuben's birth right to Joseph was not because the former slept with one of his father's concubines, as is suggested in Gen. 35:22, but because he simply preferred Joseph. Reuben did not sin; he never touched her⁷³.

Ibn Adret now takes up what is the central argument in Ibn Ḥazm's polemical tracts, and must have been at the core of his «Vorlage» as well: the allegation that the Torah, unlike the Koran, was not known to the people as a whole and could therefore not be handed down in an uninterrupted transmission. Ibn Adret's aim is to demonstrate, on the basis of biblical texts, that there were multiple copies of the Torah available, and that the nation was aware of its contents, a fact that was denied by Ibn Ḥazm.

In addition, says Ibn Adret, the «madman» claims that the Torah was never in the hands of any Jew apart from the priest, that is, the rabbi, and that no one else had access to it. The situation remained like that for over a thousand years, and in this period, all manner of corruption took place: the religion was lost, the kings apostatized and worshipped idols, they killed the men of religion and the prophets, and from the first one down to the last abandoned themselves to idol-worship, and forsook the religion of the Torah until no prophets were left among them, except for one. But the likes of Isaiah, Elijah, etc. were no longer there.

Furthermore, says the Muslim, the Jews admit that King Jehoahaz ben Josiah ben Amon ben Manasseh, of the House of David, erased all the names of the Lord Almighty from the Torah, and that the king who succeeded him, his brother Jehoiakim ben Josiah, burned the Torah in its entirety⁷⁴, and that it was lost until after a long time one of the scribes, called Ezra, returned it to them. The Muslim claims that according to the Jews, Ezra, being a prophet, had preserved Moses' Torah, and that it was therefore not surprising that he should return it. However, the polemicist denies this, saying that there is no prophet that will come and recite the book of the ones that preceded him; thus

⁷³ Cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, Shab. 55b. Reuben resented the fact that his father, Jacob, had moved to the tent of Bilhah, his concubine, thus humiliating Reuben's mother, Leah. Reuben moved his father's couch back into Leah's tent, which was an insult to Bilhah and to Jacob; hence the condemnation of Reuben in Genesis.

⁷⁴ IBN ḤAZM, *Fiṣal*, vol. I, p. 193, 196 (ASÍN PALACIOS, *Abenbázam de Córdoba*, vol. II, pp. 345, 350); ID., *al-Radd 'alā bn al-Naghrīla*, § 60; ID., *Jambarat Ansāb al-'Arab*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad HĀRŪN, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1982, 5th ed., p. 506 f.

Moses did not recite and preserve the prophetic revelations given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Noah, and there is absolutely no doubt that they were prophets who were accorded a divine revelation and commandments that Moses did not get.

Ibn Adret counters:

The first of what he is saying—namely that the Torah existed in one copy only, and was not known to the people—is stupidity, for he erred with regard to what he saw in the Torah, viz: «When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, saying: “Take this book of the Law and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God: let it remain there as a witness against you”»⁷⁵.

The Muslim thought that this meant that only the Levites had the Torah, and not the whole community of Israel, but in that he is greatly mistaken, for the Torah was present among all of them, as it is written:

Then Moses wrote down this Law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel⁷⁶.

Now, these elders of Israel are the teachers of the Law, the ones who taught and instructed the people. It is true for all revealed laws that it is impossible [10] that all the priests of a given nation know all the books of their religion and belief; this is reserved only to the elders and the sages, and those who are endowed with knowledge and who peruse the books and teach and persuade the rest of the people through them. Also, it would have been impossible for Moses to give a book to every single one of them; but he did give one to the priests and the elders, knowledgeable in the Book, and to the leaders of the entire nation; and one copy he gave to the Levites, to be put beside the Ark of the Covenant, so that the precepts might be known, and so that afterwards, anyone could come and write a copy for himself as he pleased, to read in it and to teach his children, as is written: «Recite these words to your children and talk about them»⁷⁷.

Moreover, every king had to write a copy for himself, as is written:

[When he has taken the throne of his kingdom], he shall have a copy of this Law written for him [in the presence of the levitical priests.] It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Dt. 31:24-26.

⁷⁶ Dt. 31:9.

⁷⁷ Dt. 6:7.

⁷⁸ Dt. 17:18-19.

With regard to the Israelite community at large, it is written:

[Therefore write this song], and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths⁷⁹.

Now, if the Torah had *not* been present among them in written form, they could obviously not have taught it to them, or have reminded them of its contents, with all its manifold precepts. It is written in the Book of Joshua that after the death of Moses, the Lord ordered him as follows:

This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it⁸⁰ [...].

This, in Ibn Adret's view, constitutes additional proof of the fact that knowledge of the Torah among the people was widespread.

But there is more: this confused man should further realize that we have been ordered to write the whole Torah on stones, so that those stones would stand forever, and that anyone who comes might learn from them, even the other nations, for it is written in seventy tongues⁸¹. Joshua did as he was told, and it is written:

And there, he [Joshua] wrote on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses, which he had written in the presence of the Israelites⁸².

Note, says Ibn Adret, that it is said that Moses wrote it «in the presence of the Israelites», but even if, as that man says, Moses did indeed write it before the Levites only, then we can give two good reasons why he should have given the Book to the Levites. The first one is that if corruption were to occur in one of the books, be it a letter or a word, this particular copy of the Law, deposited with the Levites, would serve as a touchstone against which possible corruption, whether it occurred intentionally or unintentionally, could be corrected.

The second reason is that the Levites are the teachers of the Torah and of the laws that have been instituted to worship the Lord, as is written: «They [i.e., the Levites] teach Jacob your ordinances, [and Israel your law]»⁸³. And if

⁷⁹ Dt. 31:19.

⁸⁰ Josh. 1:8.

⁸¹ Ibn Adret quotes Dt. 27:2-3, 8: «You shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. You shall write on them all the words of this law»; «You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very clearly». According to the famous commentator Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, d. 1105), these last two words, «*ba'er betev*» in Hebrew, mean: «in the seventy languages of the world». This interpretation clearly suited Ibn Adret's purpose; it was claimed (by Jews and Christians alike, and against the Muslims) that a scripture transmitted in more than one language, and by more than one nation, was more likely to be genuine than a scripture adhered to by one nation only and transmitted in only one language. This was obviously an attempt to disqualify the Koran, which, unlike the Old Testament, was accepted by only one religious community, and which was not, at first, translated into other languages.

⁸² Josh. 8:32.

⁸³ Dt. 33:10.

the Israelites were to transgress the Law, there would be in the hands of Levites a book of the Law with which to persuade the people and to show them that they have sinned and are to be punished, for already the Lord Himself testified against them in His Holy Book, as is written:

[Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, so that I may recite these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth] to witness against them. For I know that after my death [you will surely act corruptly]⁸⁴.

And even if after a while some of the kings sinned, there was never a time in which the many sages and prophets that were among them did not possess countless copies of the Torah. Far be it from us to think that the whole of Israel would be held accountable for the sins of their kings, for the pious people did not cease to try and persuade them, and there were many followers of the truth worshipping the Lord.

[11] Even if one of the kings erased names from one copy of the Torah, this does not mean that he erased the entire Torah, and even if he tried to erase everything, he would not have succeeded, for this is not in the power of any man. First of all, the people would not have agreed to it; and even if they had agreed, it would have been impossible to carry out, what with the Lord having promised that «it will not be lost from the mouths of his descendants»⁸⁵.

Now, as to what the Muslim said that we Jews admit that Jehoiakim burned the Torah in its entirety, and that it disappeared from our hands until Ezra returned it to us, this is a lie, for we never admitted any such thing nor will we ever do so; it is rather the opposite that we hold. For the truth is that not even one letter of the Torah was forgotten, nor will it be forgotten, as our rabbis say in the tract Shabbat.

But, says Ibn Adret, I will not dwell upon this any further, so that the matter that I wanted to discuss here will not get mixed up.

What this man said, namely, that no one should accept the testimony of only one man, is true, for one cannot accept the whole of the Torah and the precepts on the authority of one single man, even if this one man was known as a prophet. If one accepts the eternal words and great principles of the Torah on the authority of one man who is considered a prophet, it may turn out that this man is not a prophet at all, even if he works wonders, for not everything that appears in the eyes of the masses to be a miracle really is one, and not even everything that looks like a miracle in the eyes of the sages is one. Many of the things that seem to transcend the natural course of things, and seem to us to be miracles, are actually merely natural phenomena, or human trickery, or imagination, or the work of a demon—to be distinguished from the true miracles that God has wrought. Because of this uncertainty, it is unacceptable to rely upon the miracle alone. Moreover, even a true prophet can

⁸⁴ Dt. 31:28-29.

⁸⁵ Dt. 31:21.

become confused and corrupted in his belief; there are many such cases, such as that of Hananiah ben 'Azor, who was a true prophet and became a false one, leading the people astray with his corrupted views, and saying that it was the Lord who ordered him to do so⁸⁶. Therefore, one should contemplate the words of the Torah.

What Ibn Adret is saying here is that a miracle in itself is not sufficient proof. It calls to mind Saadya Gaon's discussion of this topic. The Gaon wrote in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* that the primary reason for the Jews' belief in Moses or in any other prophet is the intrinsic ethical value of the message he carried. First it has to be ascertained that the prophet's message is sound, and only then will miracles be demanded in support of what he preaches. Should his message have no value, however, no miracles will be required, since no miracle can prove the truth of what is inherently untrue and unacceptable⁸⁷.

Ibn Adret continues: You should know that God gave a Law to the sons of Noah, which included only seven principles; thereafter, He renewed and added for us, the assembly of the people of Israel, a complete Law including 613 principles to which none may ever be added, and from which none may be removed, and therefore the Law of God is called *Temima* («perfect»), and therefore we have been ordered «do not add to it or take anything from it»⁸⁸.

Both these laws, that is, the Law of the Noahides and the Law of Moses, were not revealed by God to one man only, who then proceeded to transmit and explain it to his followers, but they were revealed by God to all those that were present, as is stated in the Book of Deuteronomy:

To you it was shown [so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other beside him]. From heaven He made you hear His voice to discipline you. On earth He showed you His great fire, while you heard His words coming out of the fire⁸⁹.

In this way, there could be no suspicion that the prophet had invented the revelations, and there would be no chance that he would distort what he, and all the others, had heard from God. As is written in the Book of Exodus,

The Lord said to Moses: «I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and trust you ever after»⁹⁰.

Needless to say, when the people heard what God said to Moses, it was not with the senses, but with their intellect. Likewise, when Moses saw what he saw when he stood on Mount Sinai, it was not with the eyes, but a matter of extra-sensory perception.

⁸⁶ See Jer. 28.

⁸⁷ See my *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, p. 174.

⁸⁸ Heb. Dt. 13:1 = Gk. 12:32.

⁸⁹ Dt. 4:35-36.

⁹⁰ Ex. 19:9.

A similar thing can be said about the Noahide law. When God ordered Noah to leave the ark, and gave him the precepts, He was addressing not only Noah, but all those that were with him.

A prophetic revelation, then, can only be genuine if it was sent down perceptibly in the presence of the community. This criterion is obviously aimed at disqualifying the Koran, for although the Prophet Muhammad would transmit the revelations that he received to his followers, the reception of the revelations itself was an entirely private and solitary event, not shared by anyone.

The author continues: What this confused man says about Moses not having preserved the scrolls of the prophethood of Abraham, Jacob, and Noah, i.e., not having promulgated their precepts is irrelevant; for the ones he mentions were not prophets who were sent with a written Law, since Moses himself was the first prophet sent with such a Law.

Moreover, what the Muslim said about Moses not having recorded and promulgated the precepts given to his predecessors, is incorrect, for [13] Moses recorded in the Torah what the Lord commanded to the first man, before the fall from Paradise and after it. After the flood, He allowed certain things to the Noahides that had been forbidden to Adam, for Adam's sins had now been atoned for. All these things are recorded in the Torah by Moses, just like the precepts that had been given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And just like Moses recorded the precepts that had been given to the earlier prophets, the precepts given by Moses himself were referred to by later prophets, witness the words of the one who marked the end of the cycle of prophets (i.e., Malachi): «Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, [the statutes and ordinances]»⁹¹.

Ibn Adret continues: Now I shall return and explain what one of the confused-minded people are bound to get mixed up about, namely that the Torah was forgotten from Israel, or that the books of the Torah were lost at some time, until not a single book could be found in the hands of a man, unless it were by coincidence or because he happened to have received it from one of our sages.

Ibn Adret once more quotes the verse

It will not be lost from the mouths of his descendants⁹²

and goes on to show that contrary to what the Muslim alleges, the Jews in exile were never without their prophets and leaders:

You will see with your own eyes that there were in Babel a number of sages and prophets apart from Ezra, like Daniel and his friends, Mordechai, Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who were true prophets whose prophetic mission is not denied by the scholars of any religion. Also there was among them a large congregation of great sages, who knew the whole Torah, so how can they say that the Book was for-

⁹¹ Mal. 3:22 (= 4:4).

⁹² Dt. 31:21.

gotten? And why do the Muslims credit its restitution to Ezra alone? Know that our holy Torah is called the Perfect Law of the Lord, and there is no defect in what is perfect. Moreover, we have been ordered not to add to it or take anything from it.

If even one of the details of the specifics of its precepts were to be forgotten from the Torah, it would be as if the whole Torah had fallen into oblivion, for it is one interlinked whole, and all its precepts, the general ones and the specific ones, have one single origin. In the days of Ezra, when the exiles left Babel, the sages and the elites of the nation stayed behind. [15] And of the Levites, who were teaching the Law, no one left Babel for Judah in the beginning, as is written:

As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the descendants of Levi;

so Ezra himself dedicated himself to teaching the Torah to the people of Judah⁹³. Admittedly there were other sages and prophets in Judah, such as Haggai and Zechariah⁹⁴, but no one had set his heart to instruct, teach, and educate the people like Ezra, and it is from his mouth that they learned it; he, who was for them instructor, teacher and educator, so that not a single detail of the Torah was lost on them, as is written:

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, [and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel]⁹⁵.

He was the reason why the Torah will not be forgotten from the world, and if it had not been for him, the Torah would have undergone changes, because of the small number of people who knew it, taught it and educated them in it.

Rather than accusing Ezra of producing a corrupted Torah, then, Ibn Adret credits him with preventing that the Torah would fall into oblivion. Nevertheless, this work had to be repeated by others. Thus, when Hillel came from Babylon, he had to remind the people of the land of Israel of a practice that had been neglected. Also, in the days of R. Hiyya, who, like Ezra and Hillel, is credited in the Talmud with having restored the Torah, there were some great and wonderful men like R. Ishmael bar Yosi, and R. Hoshai, and Levi, and Bar Kafra, R. Shimon, and R. Hanina, and others, a great congregation made up of a selection of the sages of Israel. I am astonished, therefore, says Ibn Adret, that they can say that the Torah fell into complete oblivion, and that R. Hiyya restored it. What happened, in fact, is that part of the nation was scattered in the rural towns, where there was no Temple and there were not even sages, and it is a well-known fact that in places that are left without a teacher, the law will eventually be forgotten by its people. Now, R. Hiyya and his sons made a great effort to return to those places and to restore knowledge of the Torah

⁹³ Ezra 8:15.

⁹⁴ Ibn Adret quotes Ezra 5:1-2.

⁹⁵ Ezra 7:10.

there, and indeed, in those places it would have fallen into oblivion but for the efforts of R. Hiyya and his sons, and that is what is referred to in the Talmudic tract *Baba Mezia*⁹⁶.

Ibn Adret once more takes up the attack against the Muslim polemicist. [16] What this person alleges is that the Torah of Moses was lost, and that not a single copy of it was found in the hands of any of the people, until Hilkiah the priest found a certain book in the Temple, and sent it to King Josiah, and that it was restored with all the precepts and warnings that it contained, as though they did not know them at all, as is written in the Books of the Chronicles⁹⁷. This suggests that the sole copy of the Law had been missing for a long time. However, Ibn Adret shows that there are indications that the pious king Josiah was well aware of the precepts and prohibitions of the Torah. Now, how could he have known, and how could he have worshipped the Lord in the correct way, unless he had a copy of the Law in his possession? There had been prophets in the days of his ancestors, as there were in his own day; they never desisted from trying to persuade the people and to inform them of the words of the Torah of Moses; how could they have continued to do so if no one possessed a copy of the Torah? After all, he, Josiah, was obliged to write down a copy of the Torah for himself, as is written:

He shall write a copy of this Law written for him [...]. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life⁹⁸.

Moreover, from the day on which the king decided to seek the true God, the true prophets and the servants of the Lord became strengthened in their position and began to instruct the people. However, this particular book that is mentioned in the Chronicles was not found until the eighth year of Josiah's reign. Are we to suppose that the Torah of Moses was not in the hands of the people and their leaders for a full ten years, even though Josiah cleaved strongly to the ways of the Lord, and all the servants of the Lord with him? This is something that the intellect refuses to accept. In reality, this particular copy had been in the Temple all along, in a hidden place that was only now discovered. Its discovery merely inspired Josiah to meditate on the wrongs that had been committed by his predecessors. The Torah, then, had not disappeared from the face of the earth, as was claimed by the Muslim polemicist, and its contents were being transmitted all the time.

Ibn Adret quotes two further examples to prove his point:

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water, etc. When the people heard the Law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ *Babylonian Talmud*, BM 85b.

⁹⁷ Ibn Adret refers to II Chron. 34:14-19, 3-5.

⁹⁸ Dt. 17:18-19.

⁹⁹ Neh. 13:1 f.

And also:

And they found it written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should live in booths during the festival of the seventh month, and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows: «Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive¹⁰⁰...»

Here you see that the text shows that the people did not know the precept of the Succah, nor the fact that they were to keep away from Ammonites and Moabites. The precepts had not vanished, the Book had not disappeared; people were just no longer aware of its contents and commandments. What Ibn Adret is arguing here is that it was the knowledge of the precepts that was lost, not the holy Book itself. But this is not to say that all of them were unaware of the precepts; it is merely impossible that all the members of the nation, without exception, follow the way of the Torah in that they observe all the commandments and refrain from all they were warned against, for there are always people who transgress the Law deliberately, and there are those who transgress involuntarily, out of ignorance.

Ibn Adret now refers to Ibn Hāzīm's accusation to the effect that the religion practised by the Jews is an invention by the rabbis, an argument which seems to echo Karaite views.

Furthermore the madman said: all the Jews admit that they do not live according to the Torah, and that the prayers that they are nowadays obliged to perform were not obligatory to them in the days of their kingdom, from the time of Moses' mission until the recognition of their kingdom; they no longer act in accordance with the laws of the Levites with regard to the sacrificial offerings and tithes that their religion prescribed to them at that time. Nowadays they act differently from all this. They admit that it was their rabbis and heads who wrote their precepts. And moreover he said that if the Jews say that the early precepts indeed applied as long as they were in the Holy Land, they admit in fact that the Law of Moses used to be incumbent upon them then, but that it is no longer binding nowadays. What helps to prove our point, says the Muslim, is the fact that those who lived when Moses was still alive, were never circumcised; only when they entered the Holy Land, when Joshua circumcised them with a sword, was this practice instituted. This, says the Muslim, is what we wanted them to admit, for it is tantamount to the collapse of their religion. All these are the words of the madman.

The Muslim's argument, then, is that some precepts are not necessary outside the Holy Land, which means, in fact, that they have been abrogated.

Ibn Adret wishes that the «madman» and all those who follow him and his madness, may be struck dumb; this madman who, without any self-control, but

¹⁰⁰ Neh. 8:14 f.

with much disdain talks about the Torah that the Lord has given through Moses, the famous, truthful prophet who is accredited by common agreement, just like he talks about the law of delusion that their deceiving prophet (i.e., Muḥammad) wrote for them.

If the «madman» were to take an in-depth look at the perfect Torah, he would see that those replies of his are mere stupidity which characterizes without any doubt the mentally ill. The poor man does not know that the true Torah has in any case three conditions: time, space, and means. It is not our holy, perfect Torah—which requires the acceptance of a supreme, divine wisdom directing all matters—alone that is built on those three principles, but all religious precepts, as well as courteous behaviour and the government of states; they cannot be without that, for it is an axioma. Thus, for example, the Torah commands us not to work on the Sabbath, and orders [19] stoning for the one who did so anyway; also it orders the one who eats leaven at Pesah to be excommunicated, and orders sitting in the Succah in the seventh month. Are we to conclude from this that all work is forbidden and evil in the eyes of the Lord, and likewise the eating of leaven and sitting in ordinary houses, and that what He prefers is rest and idleness, eating matzot, and sitting in booths at all times, in the same manner that He has selected forever the animals that may be slaughtered and has forbidden animals that have not been duly slaughtered, as well as creeping things, etc.? This is madness, for the Torah did not forbid all work except at certain known times, so that we may be reminded of what happened and be renewed at those times, as it is written: «so that [...] you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt»¹⁰¹, and it says: «so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths»¹⁰², and it says: «Six days you shall labour, etc.»¹⁰³. Therefore, He commanded you to keep the Sabbath, and this applies to a large part of the commandments of the Torah; it is the condition of time.

Now as for place, the Torah has ordered the offering of sacrifices, which is to be performed in certain locations. It is said by some that this act is appreciated by God in whatever spot it takes place. This, now, is a lie, says Ibn Adret, for He did not order us to worship Him in that way except in our Holy Land, and moreover in a specific place in that land, whereas the remaining places have been forbidden, as it is written:

Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place you happen to see. But only at the place that the Lord will choose [...] ¹⁰⁴.

So you see, He singles out a known place in one part of the land, and has forbidden all the remaining places. This condition, now, applies to many precepts like the sacrifices and the tithes, and many others; it is the condition of place.

¹⁰¹ Dt. 16:3.

¹⁰² Lev. 23:43.

¹⁰³ Dt. 5:13; Ex. 20:9; Ex. 34:21; and cf. Ex. 35:2.

¹⁰⁴ Dt. 12:13–14.

As for the means, God ordered that we make Him a dwelling place, and that the priest who officiates before Him wear certain clothes, and ritually slaughter before Him certain species of animals on the altar. Some say that He prefers certain buildings to just any building, and that the altar was built from certain materials that He selected. Also that we should put before Him pleasing articles like candelabras, etc., and that the one who worships Him should wear any clothing that is pleasing to the eye and of good quality. And that the worshipper should stand before Him and slaughter any fat and good animal whatsoever, be it a deer, an ass, or fat swans, and that we worship before Him through the ministrations of a respected man, a High Priest.

It has also been said that it is written that the worshippers are to be selected from the important people of the nation, like kings and princes, but that is a lie, for this is not what the Torah orders, only specific items of clothing. Also the building is a to be specific building, and the vessels that are being used there are to be specific vessels, no others, and only certain people may worship before Him, from a special family [i.e., the Levites], and they are not to worship before Him except through the ritual slaughter of specific animals, fowl and beasts, each one mentioned as such in the Torah. This is befitting a religion of truth that aims and alludes to divine, spiritual matters, and whose precepts and deeds are not a matter of simple coincidence, as is the case with invented religions, and as only an idiot with no brain in his skull can accept; and this is not liable to replacement or change.

If this madman should claim against us, with regard to circumcision, that it is a precept that depends on the condition of the body, not on time, place or means, and that it was not practised in the desert until Joshua performed it, this objection also arises from his scant knowledge of the relation of the Torah to the ones who received it. The Law simply did not want to endanger the body, and therefore did not prescribe initially, in the desert, what it was to prescribe later, that is, when the Israelites had settled in their own land. This is a case of *pikuah nefesh* («saving a life»), which puts aside almost all precepts, and for that reason [20] the Israelites were exempted from it in the desert, for they did not have a specific time to dwell and to travel, and it was dangerous to be circumcised when they were on the move, for they would be putting themselves in danger. This is what gave rise to the statements about their having been forbidden to circumcise, as is said in the tract Yebamot¹⁰⁵.

There is no change or replacement of a commandment in this, but it is a general rule which governs all the precepts. Is someone who kindles a fire on the Sabbath guilty of replacing a commandment if he does it because it is needed by a sick person who can thus be saved from danger, even if the Torah says: «You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath day»¹⁰⁶? Likewise all the religions are in agreement, to the extent of having it as an

¹⁰⁵ *Babylonian Talmud*, Yeb. 71b–72a.

¹⁰⁶ Ex. 35:3.

axioma, that there is almost nothing that stands in the way of saving the life of another. This is not replacing precepts or changing the Torah.

Also what he said about the prayers that are incumbent on us nowadays not having been incumbent on the people in the days of our kingdom, which he considers a replacement, this too is madness and blindness on his part.

According to Ibn Adret, there are different prayers for different circumstances, in other words: the contents of prayer vary with the circumstances in which the worshipper finds himself. A sick man needs to pray for recovery, while a healthy man will pray for continuation of his good health. A captive will pray for return to his land, whereas a free man will pray that he will never be exiled; a rich man will pray that he may remain rich and well-fed, whereas a poor man will pray for well-being and food. It is inconceivable that there should be one identical prayer for all these different people, since they all have different needs and wishes.

Ibn Adret comes back to the Muslim's accusation that the Jewish religion has been invented by the rabbis, and that the Torah lacks uninterrupted transmission. He goes on to explain the importance of the rabbis as interpreters, and hence protectors, of the Law:

The madman furthermore said: the Jews admit with regard to their religion that it was composed by their rabbis and leaders. Those are his words. What he is trying to say by this is that what is incumbent on us is not from our holy prophet, our master Moses, peace be with him, but are only things that our sages wrote down from their imagination [i.e., the Mishnah and the Talmud]. Now this is sheer madness, and his talk is like that of someone who never studied a book, neither a book belonging to any of the religions, nor a book by a writer endowed with any wisdom.

It is a known fact that if things that have been written down in a book come from a wise man, this book will of necessity be more profound; and the wiser the man, the profounder and more comprehensive his words and his intentions are. Also, the wise man, from the fullness of his wisdom can include many meanings in a minimum of words, and for this reason the books of the prophets are more profound than others and need many explanations, as is the case also with the books of the philosophers: the later philosophers have to put much effort into trying to understand and to explain what the earlier ones said. It is the same with a book that encompasses what is, what was, and what will be, [21] like our complete and perfect Torah which includes in its wisdom all that was, from the first creation to the limits of all wisdom, and has been written down and explained by one of the prophets in all its details and allusions, and has been expounded by the prophets; they in turn transmitted to the sages what the Torah contains in the way of allusions, for any book that contains many principles must contain many allusions and analogies. And thus Moses transmitted to Joshua and the elders of his generation according to what the Holy One, blessed be He, had said; and Joshua transmitted to certain prophets,

the prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Assembly, and they to their pupils, and therefore it is impossible that the meaning of the whole Torah which, in its generalities and its specifics, has been transmitted orally, should be forgotten by the entire nation.

The sages are described by Ibn Adret as the pillar that supports the community of believers. They come together to study and explain the Law with the help of the Almighty who illuminates their eyes, while His Shekhina stands among them. An important guideline is to go after the majority of people who agree with a certain opinion. In this context, Ibn Adret quotes a biblical verse:

Carry out exactly the decision that they announce to you from the place that the Lord will choose, diligently observing everything they instruct you. [...] Do not turn aside from the decision that they announce to you, either to the right or to the left. As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die¹⁰⁷.

Furthermore the Torah said: «You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing»¹⁰⁸, and it is well known that as more time passes, doubts with regard to the interpretation of the Torah increase, and there is a growing need for the great sages to clarify the principles, and therefore in the time of the early sages, like Hillel and Shammai, there was disagreement only with regard to six issues, but after a long time the people were divided on more issues, and they needed to go back to the principle that the Torah founded, which is: to go after the opinion of the majority, as is also said «one and many, the Halakha is according to the many», and in order that doubts would not increase further, they compiled books on this, revealing the interpretation of the Torah —what is accepted by all, and concerning which no one disagrees; and similarly what did give rise to disputes, and they showed the views that every one of them bases himself on, and they transmitted to us a tradition of wisdom, in order to show us who followed the views of so-and-so, and who subscribed to the opposite view, and how many were in each camp, for after all, the Halakha is according to the majority. They also showed us what [22] sages enjoin the most support, like when they say: «R. Meir and R. Yehuda; the Halakha is according to R. Yehuda»; or «R. Yosi and R. Shimon; the Halakha is according to R. Yosi».

Similarly, every single religious community needs to rely on its sages in their interpretation of the Law. This does not impair the perfect Torah, but only strengthens it. The sages are the guardians of the Torah. It is true, says Ibn Adret, that the sages have added certain precepts, and that they have set certain limits, but this does not mean that they have changed the Torah; moreover, it was all done out of love for the Law.

After thus having defended the rabbis, who had been denounced by the Muslim writer as the inventors of Judaism, Ibn Adret tackles the allegation that

¹⁰⁷ Dt. 17:10–12.

¹⁰⁸ Ex. 23:2.

the Torah has been abrogated: The madman furthermore says that the Jews have abolished work, and that they do not hold it possible that God order one thing first and then rescinds this. For, they say, if this were the case, then the truth would change into a lie, and a precept would become a transgression, and a transgression a precept. The Muslim added that the Jews were not known to have any argument other than this one, and that it was of the weakest ones possible, for the Almighty gives life to His creatures after He has caused them to die, and puts to death and afterwards revives, and deprives a strong nation of its power and humiliates it at the hands of a formerly humiliated nation; and strengthens and shows mercy to whom He will when He will with health, favours and disasters, and no one can take Him to task for what He does. Those are his words¹⁰⁹. This, now, says Ibn Adret, proves what I mentioned, namely, that on the basis of the little he has seen of the Jewish religion and the little he knows of our arguments, he thought that he had penetrated deeply into the true teachings of the law and the faith.

And that we supposedly say that nothing the Almighty does or wishes or orders can be reversed or substituted is not so, for He gives His orders for a certain period of time, and may replace them at some other time.[23] Sometimes He even changes a precept or law that He formerly said He would institute for a long time, and this is because He wished or ordered something on certain conditions. Now, when the condition no longer applies, the promise also becomes void, and this is what we say.

The truth is that the Almighty ordered the sons of Noah seven principal precepts only, and the transgression of each one of them was to be punished with the death penalty. In our view the community of believers, including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as the tribes and everyone born from them until Moses, and from Moses until the giving of the Torah on Sinai, were considered Noahides and were bound by that Noahide law, and obliged to kill any transgressor. And if So-and-So robbed his fellow-man or hit him, the court that existed at that time was obliged to execute him. So when Moses killed the Egyptian who had hit a fellow Hebrew, he was in fact carrying out the required verdict.

After some time God made the community of Israelites stand on Mount Sinai and gave them a perfect Torah, and made certain changes, e.g. that no one will be put to death for robbery or for hitting a fellow man, and the death-penalty applied by the court was replaced by a deadly punishment from heaven, or by excommunication, or in some cases put aside completely; but in any case there is a divine punishment for whoever does not act in accordance to what has been ordered.

A married woman used to be forever forbidden to another man; her husband who first married her could not ever divorce her and let her go; but after that, the Torah ruled that she could be let go with a *get* [divorce]. Also, every animal was forbidden for consumption, even if it had been duly slaughtered. This

¹⁰⁹ Cf. IBN HAZM, *Fisal*, vol. I, 100, discussed in my *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 216 f.

was changed by the Torah. And there are other things that were forbidden in the Noahide law, but with the coming of the Torah at Sinai, we received a new Halakha. Now, none of this can be considered abrogation, because when He gave that [Noahide] law, the Almighty did not say that it was to be forever and that it would not be changed. It is like the fact that on the non-festive days of the year, as well as on the intermediate days of the festivals of Succot and of Pesah, it is acceptable and proper to occupy oneself with day-to-day things, and this is pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, whereas idleness is condemned. But on the Sabbath, all productivity is forbidden, and idleness is desirable. It is like that also with the eating of the matza at Pesah, which is forbidden after Pesah, when it is once more proper to eat leavened foods. Finally, there is the matter of the Succah, the booth made of twigs and branches that one must dwell in during a certain month, after which one is expected to go back and live in one's house. There are many more cases like these where the Muslim sees abrogation, but which are in fact cases of precepts that have been instituted for specific times.

Ibn Adret closes his tract by quoting a number of biblical passages that confirm that Moses' Torah is the final Law that will be perpetually binding and cannot be abrogated¹¹⁰, and that one should not hear the words of prophets and those who divine by dreams with their promises of omens and portents. This is, of course, a dig at Muḥammad.

¹¹⁰ Ex. 27:21; Dt. 11:21; Dt. 13:1-2.