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A SHĪCĪ-JEWISH “DEBATE” (*MUNĀZARA*) IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Surviving records of Jewish-Muslim polemical literature originate almost entirely from the Sunni milieu. It is therefore difficult to establish whether polemical exchanges existed in the Shīcī world and how Shīcī arguments against Judaism may have differed from their Sunni counterparts. One record, albeit a “second-hand” one, recounted by some modern editors but based on earlier records, relates a *munāzara* (“debate”) between the famous Shīcī divine, Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī b. Murtaḍā Ṭabāṭabācī Burūjirdī (“Baḥr al-‘Ulūm”) and a few Jews in Dhu’l-Kifl (Iraq).¹ The encounter is said to have occurred in 1796 and the account sheds some light not only on the nature and extent of Shīcī-Jewish polemical exchanges but also on Shīcī-Jewish relations toward the end of the eighteenth century. This *munāzara* may have been little more than a literary and educational exercise in promoting Baḥr al-‘Ulūm’s erudition and the account we have of it shows clearly a predilection to rehash traditional Sunni arguments against Judaism. The voices of the Jewish interlocutors are muted and they present questions and answers that are difficult to believe. Nevertheless, there may be a kernel of historicity behind this rather unique account which makes it worthy of our attention.

THE HISTORY OF POLEMICS between Jews and Muslims still has a number of unexplored corners even if the basic framework and arguments used by both sides were largely formulated as early as two centuries after the advent of Islam, and have been repeated, with little variation, ever since.² However, because practically all the surviving

¹ This text was brought to my attention by Professor Michel M. Mazzaoui, who also helped me with the first reading of it. I also wish to express my gratitude to the following friends and colleagues, listed in alphabetical order, who have made helpful comments on earlier drafts of this study: Camilla Adang, Gilad Gevaryahu, Etan Kohlberg, Daniel J. Lasker, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Magda al-Nuwaihi, Robert D. McChesney, and Sarah Stroumsa. An abridged version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Middle Eastern Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 1991.

² In addition to the specific studies cited in the notes to the translation below, I might mention here a number of seminal works that are important for the study of Muslim-Jewish polemics in general: Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden* (Leipzig, 1877; repr., Hildesheim, 1966); I. Goldziher, “Ueber muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb,” *ZDMG* 32 (1878): 341–87 (repr. Ignaz Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. de Somogyi [Hildesheim, 1967–73], 1: 136–65); idem, “Proben muhammedanischer Polemik gegen den Talmud I,” *Jeshurun* 8 (1872): 76–104 (repr. Ignaz Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2: 1–48); M. Schreiner, “Zur Geschichte

der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern,” *ZDMG* 42 (1888): 591–675; Miguel Asin Palacios, *Abenhamaz de Cordoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1927–32); E. Ashtor, “The Methods of Islamic Polemics,” in *Memorial Volume for the Vienna Rabbinical Seminary* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 1946); L. Strauss, “The Ways of Moslem Polemics,” in *Memorial Volume of the Rabbinical Seminary of Vienna* (Jerusalem, 1946); Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1957), vol. 5, ch. 24; Moshe Perlmann, *Ibn Kammuna’s Examination of the Three Faiths* (Berkeley, 1971); idem, “The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism,” in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); Bruno Chiesa and Wilfrid Lockwood, *Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity* (Frankfurt am-Main, 1984); E. M. Perlmann, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987), s.v. “Muslim-Jewish Polemics.”

More recent full length studies include: Steven M. Wasserstrom, “Species of Misbelief: A History of Muslim Heresiography of the Jews” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1985); Sarah Stroumsa, “From Muslim Heresy to Jewish Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rawandī’s *Kitāb al-Dāmīgh*,” *JAOS* 107 (1987): 767–77; Mark R. Cohen and Sasson Somekh, “In the Court of Ya‘qūb ibn Killis: A Fragment from the Cairo Genizah,” *JQR* 80 (1990): 283–314; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992); Camilla Adang, “Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabbān to Ibn Ḥazm” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Nijmegen, 1993); idem, *Islam a Frente Judaismo: La polémica de Ibn Ḥazm de*

information comes from the Sunnī milieu, one potential area yet to be investigated lies in the field of explicit polemical exchanges between Shī'īs and Jews.

A full account of the history of the Jews in Shī'ī lands, particularly of the ancient Iranian Jewish community, is yet to be written. Although some of the later chapters of this history, particularly in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, are now better known,³ significant lacunae remain regarding most aspects of Jewish welfare since the establishment of the Safavid Shī'ī state in 1501 and from the mid-eighteenth century until the present.⁴ There are many reasons that account for the difficulty of filling in these gaps,⁵ and yet only a full-scale investigation would enable us to compare adequately the treatment of religious minorities in Shī'ī as opposed to Sunnī territories.⁶

Documents that deal directly with various aspects of Jewish-Shī'ī relations are scarce; thus we are justified in exploring whatever evidence might help shed light on the subject. One such text, an account of a debate that is

said to have taken place in Iraq toward the end of the eighteenth century (1796) between a famous Shī'ī *mujtahid*, commonly known by the honorific (*laqab*) Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm ("Ocean of the Sciences"), and the representatives of a small Jewish community, is the subject of this study. Referring to this particular debate in his article on "Muslim-Jewish Polemics" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* under the rubric "Decline of the Genre" [of polemics] and notes, Moshe Perlmann, without elaborating on the content, remarks that the Arabic account of the disputation shows it to have been "characterized by uncommon mildness and magnanimity."⁷ In order to arrive at a proper historical assessment, however, we need to consider the circumstances of the debate, the personalities involved, and the nature of the arguments employed by both sides. The accuracy of Perlmann's comment can only be determined through close scrutiny of the actual text of the debate, which, unfortunately, has not yet come to light.

EVIDENCE FOR THE DEBATE

The only account of this disputation that I have been able to find is recorded in the editors' introduction to *Rijāl al-Sayyid Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm al-ma^ʿrūf bi'l-Fawa'id al-rijāliyya* ("The Biographies of Great Men, Known as 'Notes on Famous Men,' of Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm"), written by the *sayyid* Muḥammad Mahdī ibn Murtaḍā Ṭabāṭabā'ī Burūjirdī (1155–1212 A.H./A.D. 1742–97).⁸ The account given there and thus the text on which this study is based describes at some length (pp. 50–66) a *munāzara*, a "debate," that occurred between Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm and a group of Jews. According to the editors, the Sayyid took pleasure in learned religious debates and had engaged in them previously several times with fellow Muslims during his seven-year stay in Mashhad (1772–79), and also in Mecca, during his three year *hajj* visit (1779–81). It was in Mashhad, in Khurasan, that he bested the philosopher Mirzā Muḥammad Mahdī al-Isfahānī al-Khurāsānī, who then bestowed upon Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī the *laqab* "Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm" by which he came to be popularly known.⁹ The contents of these intra-Muslim debates are

Cordoba (Madrid, 1994); *Religionsgesprache im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewohner (Wiesbaden, 1992); Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, 1993), esp. ch. 6; Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew* (Princeton, 1995).

³ See Vera B. Moreen, *Iranian Jewry's Hour of Peril and Heroism: A Study of Bābāi ibn Lutf's Chronicle (1617–1662)* (New York, 1987); idem, *Iranian Jewry during the Afghan Invasion: The Kitāb-i Sar Guzash-t-i Kāshān of Bābāi b. Farhād* (Stuttgart, 1990); Walter J. Fischel, "Qehillat ha-anusim be-Paras," *Zion* 1 (1935): 49–74.

⁴ The only history of Iranian Jewry to date is a diffuse, uncritical work by Ḥabīb Lavi, *Ta'rikh-i Yahūdān-i Irān*, 3 vols. (Tehran, 1956–60).

⁵ The information available is scant and much of it needs to be gleaned from Iranian royal chronicles, some of which have not yet been published in critical editions and most of which deal with very little outside the direct concerns of the court. Unless new manuscripts come to light, Judaeo-Persian texts, with the exception of the chronicles cited in n. 3, are mostly of literary nature, although some historical evidence can be gleaned from this material as well.

⁶ B. Lewis assesses very negatively the treatment of Jews in Shī'ī Iran in his *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1984), 40, 52, 82. I have tried to evaluate this assessment in light of Shī'ī theological views in my "Salmān-i Fārisi and the Jews: An Anti-Shī'ī Ḥadīth from the Sixteenth Century?" in *Irano-Judaica* II, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem, 1989), 144–57; and my "Risāla-yi Ṣawā'iq al-yahūd" ["The Treatise Lightning Bolts against the Jews"] by Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1699)," *Die Welt des Islams* 32 (1992): 177–95.

⁷ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 11: 401.

⁸ Ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm and Ḥusayn Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm (Najaf, 1965). For a perceptive biography of Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm, based on several sources, see R. D. McChesney, "The Life and Intellectual Development of an Eighteenth Century Shī'ī Scholar, Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī "Baḥr al-^ʿUlūm," *Folia Orientalia* 22 (1981–84): 163–84.

⁹ *Rijāl al-sayyid*, 34–35, 43, 49–50. Mirzā Muḥammad's dates are 1153–1217/1740–1802.

not discussed in this introduction beyond the general mention that they dealt with the differences between the *madhāhib*, i.e., the various schools of Muslim law. However, perhaps because of the rarity of debates between Shi'is and Jews, the same introduction presents a full account of the Sayyid's encounter with a group of Jews. Moreover, after the narrative of the debate itself, the editors inform us that the exchange was famous enough to be noted by at least two other fairly recent Shi'ī authorities, namely Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in *al-Mawāhib al-saniyya* ("The Sublime Gifts"),¹⁰ and Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, in *Rawḍat al-janna fī aḥwāl al-^ḥulamā' wa'l-sādāt* ("The Gardens of Paradise Regarding the Status of Learned Men and Sayyids").¹¹ The former claims explicitly that many Jews converted as a result of this encounter. Both authors appear merely to be repeating a claim made by an earlier source, the *Munṭahā al-maqāl* ("The Conclusion of the Speech") by Shaykh Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Karbalā'ī (d. 1216 A.H. [1800–1801]), who was a student of Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm. Shaykh Abū 'Alī's citation appears to be the earliest reference to the debate. He may have witnessed the event himself or had access to a contemporaneous account

¹⁰ "... Maḥmūd Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his book *al-Mawāhib al-saniyya*, while mentioning the Sayyid Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm, said: 'As for his refutation of those who differ and are unbelievers in other regions and countries, it is too well known to be hidden. Due to his blessings, many who are too well known to mention have entered the religion of Islam. And today, among the people he set free, there are children whom we see among the pious of the time.' He [Maḥmūd Ṭabāṭabā'ī] also said: 'A large gathering of Jews confronted him in Dhu'l-Kifl, where two of their best people, ^ḥUzayr and Dā'ūd, took it upon themselves to speak. The Sayyid [Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm] asserted to them that which he transmitted to them of the books of the Torah, and he proved to them the occurrence of [textual] corruption in it until they ceased to talk. He wore himself out advising them until they finally acknowledged their weakness and sought a respite. . . . I heard from some of the learned men that one of the two later came to visit the Sayyid. . . ." (*Rijāl al-sayyid*, 65).

¹¹ "Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir stated in his book *Rawḍat al-jannāt*, while mentioning the Sayyid [Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm]: 'The details of his disputation with a group of Jewish rabbis resulting, thanks to the blessedness of his soul, in the guidance of those ill-starred persons and in their submission to the truth and in acknowledging the prophecy of our praiseworthy prophet, is a clear business to which no obscurity or suppression is attached, and its confirmation does not lack proofs and witnesses until the clear, evident Resurrection. . . ." (*Rijāl*, 65–66). This statement is based on Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-^ḥulamā' wa'l-sādāt* (Qum, 1976), 7: 213.

of it.¹² Several later sources, basing themselves on this report, repeat the claim.¹³ The editors also maintain that the text of the debate itself has been carefully preserved although they do not specify the manner of its recording, the name(s) of the transmitter(s), or its present location. They appear to imply that their account is based on a full text of the debate.¹⁴ In fact three sources refer explicitly to the existence of an original account. In the sentence following the quotation recorded in the *Rijāl*, al-Khwānsārī mentions that "the elucidation of this event is found in an orderly book among the collected works of the man mentioned above."¹⁵ Mirzā Muḥammad 'Alī ("Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī"), in addition to referring to the conversion of some Jews in Dhu'l-Kifl (he is the only one among these sources to mention the location),¹⁶ and basing himself on al-Khwānsārī's claim, numbers the account of the debate (amplified by details provided by some unnamed students of Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm who had witnessed it), as the eighth written work that can be attributed to the Sayyid.¹⁷ Mirzā Muḥammad Tunuqābūnī also refers to a *risāla*, or treatise, about "refuting (*radd*) the Jews."¹⁸ Until this account actually surfaces, however (and, if it exists, it is probably still in manuscript), the editors' record of this encounter is the only one available to us.

The Shi'ī, or rather Muslim, bias of the account, which highlights Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm's acumen and erudition, is readily apparent and what, if anything, in the account may be distorted or suppressed is, in the absence of other (especially Jewish) records of the event, a moot question. Despite the account's apparent grounding in fact, a number of its features cast doubt on whether the *munāẓara* actually took place in the manner related. Certain of its hortatory features suggest the possibility that the kernel of the actual event may have been subordinate to its aims, namely the extolling of Baḥr al-^ḥUlūm's educational and proselytizing efforts. Furthermore, the vague identity of the Jewish protagonists suggests the possibility that the account, even in the form available to us, was

¹² This work was not available to me, but the pertinent phrase is quoted in 'Alī Davānī's *Ustādh-i kull: Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad akmal ma^ḥrūf bihi Vahid Bihbihānī* (Qum, n.d.), 212–36: "Of all those communities, many Jews, upon seeing his proofs and wonders, converted to Shi'ism. . . ."

¹³ E.g., Muḥammad 'Alī Tabrizī, *Rayḥānāt al-^ḥadab fī tarājim al-ma^ḥrūfīn bi'l kunya aw bi'l-laqaḥ* (Qum?, 1916), 1: 148–49.

¹⁴ *Rijāl al-sayyid*, 66.

¹⁵ *Rawḍat al-jannāt*, 7: 213.

¹⁶ Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, *Makārim al-āthār dar aḥwāl-i rijāl-i dawra-yi Qājār* (Qum, 1962), 1: 417.

¹⁷ *Makārim al-Āthār*, 1:421.

¹⁸ Mirzā Muḥammad al-Tunukābūnī, *Qiṣaṣ al-^ḥulamā'* (Tehran, n.d.), 232.

not intended to represent a real incident but simply signaled to some readership that, had such a debate taken place, these would have been the arguments presented. But it would appear likely that the instruction derived from the *munāẓara* was directed primarily at Shiʿis.

THE DEBATERS AND THEIR TIMES

The present account of the *munāẓara* provides practically no information about the identity of the Jewish participants in the debate, whose surnames are not given and who are referred to by the rather generic Jewish names of “Dāʾūd” and “ʿEzrā” (ʿUzayr). If they were real individuals, we may only guess that they were learned leaders of the local Jewish community.¹⁹

By contrast the Shiʿi theologian, known to his contemporaries and to future generations of learned Shiʿis simply as “Baḥr al-ʿUlūm,” was a major and prolific *mujtahid* of the *uṣūlī* branch of Shiʿism.²⁰ His biography has been well preserved.²¹ In brief, he was born in Karbala in 1155/1742 where he studied under two famous theologians, Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186—1772) and Vaḥīd Bihbihānī (1118—1207/1706—92). He moved to Najaf in 1169/1755 and succeeded Bihbihānī as a leading *mujtahid* upon the latter’s death. Many miraculous stories are told about Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, including the popular claim of communication with the Hidden (Twelfth) Imam.²² Baḥr

al-ʿUlūm, in turn, was the teacher of several famous students, such as Kāshifūʾl Ghiṭā (d. 1812)²³ and Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsāʾī (d. 1826),²⁴ to name only two, and he was the sire of a family that produced several famous *ʿulamāʾ* up to the present.

By the time of Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, the *uṣūlī* branch of Shiʿism had come to prevail over the *akhbārī* in Iran and the Shiʿi regions of Iraq.²⁵ During most of his lifetime, Iran was under the rule of the Zand dynasty (1750–94); a change of dynasties occurred with the accession of the first Qajar Shah, Āghā Muḥammad (1794–97). Despite his family ties to Iran and to his ancestral town of Burūjird,²⁶ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm was actually an Ottoman subject. The two “thresholds” (*ʿataba*), the shrines of Najaf and Karbala, were only briefly under Iranian protection during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I (1571–1629) when he conquered Baghdad in 1624. They remained under his control until 1638, when Shah Ṣafī I (1629–42) lost them again to the Ottomans.²⁷ Nevertheless, Iranian threats to these parts of the Ottoman realm continued to make the Porte nervous.²⁸ Despite Sunnī dominion, the primarily Shiʿi population of Najaf, Karbala, and their surroundings, retained strong ties with Iran. It is therefore not surprising to find a certain fluidity across these borders that neither the Ottomans nor the Iranians controlled too strictly. Thus students kept going back and forth to study with reputable *ʿulamāʾ* and these, in turn, paid visits to their families on either side of the border.

During Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s lifetime approximately twelve Mamluk and Turkish pashas ruled Iraq (1750–1831). The welfare of Ottoman Jewry, already on the decline in the sixteenth century, continued to deteriorate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁹ If the text before us is based on an actual event, and if this record of it is at least partially reliable, the apparent low level of erudition of the Jewish participants lends further support to the perception of the intellectual decline of Ottoman Jewry in

¹⁹ See below, n. 63. As we have seen above, al-Khwānsārī (*Rawḍat al-jannāt*, 7: 213) does refer to them as *aḥbār*, “learned (non-Muslim) religious authorities,” a claim not repeated by other sources. This claim can be assumed to be correct since the Sayyid is unlikely to have entered into such a discussion with ordinary, unlearned Jews.

²⁰ For succinct accounts of the *uṣūlī-akhbārī* controversy in the eighteenth century, see Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785–1906* (Berkeley, 1969), 33–35; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿism* (New Haven, 1985), 117–18, 184–207, 222–25. For recent penetrating specific studies, see Juan Cole, “Shiʿi Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Conflict Reconsidered,” *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985): 3–34; Andrew J. Newman, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Safawid Iran, part I: ʿAbdallah al-Samahijī’s *Munyat al-mumari-sīn*,” *BSOAS* 55 (1992): 22–51; idem, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Safawid Iran, part 2: The Conflict Reassessed,” *BSOAS* 55 (1992): 250–61.

²¹ See the sources cited in McChesney, “The Life,” 178 n. 1, as well as n. 8, above, and n. 22, below.

²² All the biographical sources listed above allude to or mention specifically some of the miracles associated with Baḥr al-ʿUlūm. See especially Davānī, *Vaḥīd Bihbihānī*, 224–32; and al-Tunukābūnī, *Qīṣaṣ* (Tehran, n.d.), 171ff.

²³ See a short biographical notice in Momen, *An Introduction*, 315.

²⁴ On the teachings of this shaykh, founder of the Shaykhī school of thought, see Momen, *An Introduction*, 225–31.

²⁵ See the sources cited in n. 20, above.

²⁶ *Rijāl al-sayyid*, 11ff.

²⁷ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq* (Princeton, 1994), 13–25.

²⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge, 1977), 1: 238–39; 243, 245–46, 254.

²⁹ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 128; M. E. Epstein, *Ottoman Jewish Communities* (Freiburg, 1980); Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York, 1991), ch. 3; and *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Princeton, 1994), pts. 1–3.

the eighteenth century. However, it is both unfair and ultimately impossible to gage the learning of these men from a debate in which, despite the veneer of friendliness, intimidation may have dominated, and from a second hand account issued by only one—the Shīʿī—side of the debate.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DEBATE

The encounter between Baḥr al-ʿUlūm and the Jews is supposed to have taken place in Dhu'l-Kifl (pronounced "Chefil" by the Persians, "Kifl" by the Arabs), a small town located about twenty miles south of Hilla, between Najaf and Karbala. This town derives its name from the Muslim name of the biblical prophet Ezekiel, whose tomb is supposed to be located there. Muslims usually identify the qurʿanic "Dhu'l-Kifl" (Q 21:85; 38:48) with Ezekiel, and they, along with the Jews, venerate the prophet purportedly buried in the tomb.³⁰ Dhu'l-Kifl was and continues to be a natural stopping place for Shīʿī pilgrims traveling between Najaf and Karbala.³¹ Control of the tomb and its surroundings seems unclear between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, although Jewish possession seems to have returned to some extent and the Jews continued to have access to the area. However, in 1765 the Danish traveler Carsten Niebuhr found the Muslims in charge of the shrine. It would appear that the Jews may not have regained full control of it until 1860, when the Muslims made an earnest but nonetheless unsuccessful attempt to wrest control once and for all.³²

The existence and history of the shrine, attested to by numerous Jewish, Muslim, and European sources, is of

interest here only insofar as it could have, potentially, provided information on the economic status of the local Jews, and how large the local Jewish community may have been at the time of the debate. Unfortunately, our text does not shed light on either question. It is silent about who was in charge of the shrine although implying the existence of a large Jewish community—only some thirty years after Niebuhr passed through the area. Even if its claim of "three thousand Jewish souls"³³ residing in Dhu'l-Kifl may be inflated for a small town (village?), perhaps in order to give the impression that the Sayyid engaged in debate with an important community, in the absence of accurate demographic information, we can assume, at most, that Dhu'l-Kifl was home to a fairly large number of Jews, perhaps even close to the number cited by the text, if all Jewish inhabitants, not only heads of families, were counted. If the shrine was wholly or even partially in Jewish hands, we may also assume that the livelihood of many of the Jews of Dhu'l-Kifl was either directly connected with its maintenance or with seeing to the needs of Jewish pilgrims.³⁴

The account suggests that the debate took place at the initiative of the Jews, a dubious claim, since no disputation between Jews and non-Jews ever took place, as far as we know, at the initiative of the former.³⁵ Moreover, if the debate actually did take place, its ultimate aim appears to have been proselitizing.³⁶ Given Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's penchant for religious debates, it is more likely that some Jews were urged, if not actually coerced, into participating in a dialogue with the Sayyid during his stopover in Dhu'l-Kifl. Interestingly, as it was often the case in many Christian tracts *contra judaeos*,³⁷ the thrust of several of Baḥr

³⁰ See I. Goldziher, *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden [1913–36], 1987), s.v. "Dhu'l Kifl"; *EI*² (Leiden, 1971), 3: 535, s.v. "Hizkīl"; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 6: 1096–97, s.v. "Ezekiel's Tomb"; *Massa Bavel*, ed. M. Benayahu (Jerusalem, 1955), 60. A detailed account of the various changes of authority between Jews and Muslims over the tomb is Zvi Yehudah's "Mabaqam shel yehude bavel ʿal shelitah ha-qever Yehezkel ha-navi' be-Kifl be-'elef ha-sheni le-sefirah," *Mehqarim be-toldot yehude Iraq u-be-tarbutam* 6, ed. Y. Avishor (Jerusalem, 1991), 31–75. I am indebted to Dr. Reeva Simon for this last reference. See also Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 157, and the sources cited in n. 48.

³¹ Yehudah, "Mabaqam shel yehude bavel," 25–28; Nakash, *The Shi'is*, 18–25.

³² Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels in Arabia* (abridged), in *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*, ed. J. Pinkerton (London, 1811); Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, 1979), 389–92.

³³ See below, p. 578.

³⁴ Unfortunately, John Gordon Lorimer's important *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1908–15), while attesting to widespread Jewish presence in Iraq in general (see, e.g., 2: 769, 770, and 792) does not shed light on their specific economic activities.

³⁵ In addition to the sources cited in n. 2, see the following for the typology of Christian-Jewish debates in the Middle Ages: Frank Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue* (New York, 1975); Amos Funkestein, "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator* 2 (1971): 373–82; Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977); David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979).

³⁶ See below, pp. 586–87.

³⁷ See the sources cited in n. 35 and Robert Chazan's observation in his review of Gilbert Dahan's *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au moyen âge* (Paris, 1990), *AJS Review* 17 (1992): 307.

al-ʿUlūm’s arguments, if they were made in the form before us, may in fact have been directed as much, if not more, at his coreligionists rather than at a Jewish audience.³⁸ His motive for doing so—beside a display of his erudition—may well have been primarily educational, that is, to teach his Muslim audience the arguments they could use against Jews. For the last years of Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s life, when this incident is supposed to have occurred, it appears typical of highly respected Imāmī *marjaʿ al-taqlid* (“source of emulation”), to engage publicly in such “teaching, the giving and receiving of *ijāzāt*, leading worship, settling questions of law and ritual, arbitrating disputes.”³⁹

THE ARGUMENTS OF THE DEBATE

It is clear that this *munāẓara* is no “interfaith dialogue” as the concept is understood today. Although each side seems to know some aspects about the other’s faith, Baḥr al-ʿUlūm and his Jewish interlocutors are only marginally interested in each other’s answers. The narrative of the account presents mostly the Sayyid’s views. At times it seems as if the Jewish debaters are his “straw men.” Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s long arguments and the short, sometimes apparently truncated answers of the Jewish participants, as well as the questions he directs toward his Jewish opponents, are obviously intended to display the erudition of the Sayyid, but we ought to question to what extent they do so at the expense, perhaps, of suppressing fuller, more learned answers, by his Jewish opponents.

Even a cursory glance at Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s arguments reveals that they are not original but that he was familiar with some of the older, traditional Muslim polemics against Judaism. Closer scrutiny uncovers his indebtedness to the arguments of the Jewish apostate Samāūʿāl al-Maghribī (d. ca. 1175), either directly, for we know that manuscripts of *Iḥām al-Yahūd* were widespread in the Muslim world,⁴⁰ or indirectly, perhaps through the intermediacy of someone such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350).⁴¹ Both of these authors, and especially the first, were, in turn, indebted to the arguments of the Andalusian scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), whose book on religious sects is one of the most significant texts on religion

penned by a Muslim scholar.⁴² Despite his claims to be knowledgeable about the Torah, a claim made by all Muslim polemicists,⁴³ it is more likely that Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s knowledge derived either from the polemical literature which he had perused or, much less likely, from individual Jewish informants he knew personally. In fact, however, the scenario of the *munāẓara* may be simply a literary setting for Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s display of what he knows of Jewish tradition. Since he, like earlier Muslim polemicists, was convinced that the Jews have tampered (*tahrif*) with the text of the Torah, and he accepted only the qurʿanic version of biblical events,⁴⁴ it would have served no purpose, and it may have been even dangerous, for his Jewish interlocutors (assuming they were real) to correct his erroneous (from the Jewish point of view) biblical references on the spot even if they had been able to do so—which also appears unlikely in this account. Or, if the Jews would have done so, it is unlikely that the Shīʿī recorders of the event would have preserved these corrections, since they would have detracted from Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s fame and erudition.

Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s arguments revolve essentially around four basic themes of Muslim-Jewish polemics: 1. the absence of true monotheism among biblical Jews (pp. 578–79); 2. anthropomorphism in the Torah (p. 583); 3. the charge that the Jews tampered with or corrupted the text of their Scripture (*tahrif*), including the related charges of abrogations (*naskh*) and innovations (*bidaʿ*) (pp. 583–86); 4. and the supremacy of Muḥammad’s prophecy over that of Moses (p. 588). Baḥr al-ʿUlūm shows no sign of being acquainted with some of the traditional rabbinic answers to the problems he perceives in the Torah. In fact,

⁴² Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal waʾl-milal waʾl-ahwāʾ waʾl-niḥal wa hamishihi al-Milal waʾl-niḥal liʾl-Shahrestānī*, four volumes in two (Cairo, 1928).

In addition to the works cited in n. 2, see Camilla Adang’s penetrating studies of Ibn Ḥazm’s polemics: “Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material in the Work of Ibn Ḥazm,” *Al-Masaq* 5 (1992): 17–28; “Ibn Ḥazm de Cordoba sobre los judíos en la sociedad islamica,” *Foro Hispanico* 7 (1994): 15–24; “Éléments karaïtes dans le polémique antijudaïque d’Ibn Ḥazm,” in *Dialogo filosófico-religioso entre cristianismo, judaísmo e islamismo en la península ibérica* (Brepols, 1994); “Different Interpretations of *tahrif*: al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Ḥazm” (unpublished). I thank the author for making these articles available to me. See now also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 138.

⁴³ See below, p. 582.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note a couple of instances when Baḥr al-ʿUlūm implied that the qurʿanic versions of the events he refers to are actually biblical; see below, p. 581.

³⁸ See below, pp. 586

³⁹ McChesney, “The Life,” 168.

⁴⁰ Samāūʿāl al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-yahūd* (“Silencing the Jews”), ed. M. Perlmann, *PAAJR* 32 (1964).

⁴¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra fiʾl radd ʿalaʾl yahūd waʾl naṣāra* (Beirut, n.d.). See Moshe Perlmann, “Ibn Qayyim and Samāūʿāl al-Maghribī,” *Journal of Jewish Booklore* 3 (1942): 71–74.

like Samāu²āl al-Maghribi and Ibn Ḥazm before him, he finds the entire rabbinic tradition (Oral Law) reprehensible. Some of his arguments were anticipated already by the Karaites and it is likely that Karaite objections are behind many of the polemical statements of Ibn Ḥazm and Samāu²āl al-Maghribi.⁴⁵ Whatever Baḥr al-^cUlūm perceives as having been added to the Law of Moses (whose life and law he, like all Muslims, treats implicitly as a paradigm comparable to the life and *sunna* of Muḥammad), for example, the three daily prayers and pilgrimage[s] (*hajj*) to Jerusalem belong, in his view, under the heading of *bid^ca* ("reprehensible innovation"), although he does not use this technical term.⁴⁶ When he elaborates on aspects of *naskh* (p. 586), presumably in answer to a question posed by the Jews, Baḥr al-^cUlūm's explanations sound as if they were addressed only to the Muslims in his audience, who may well have held a range of definitions for that particular concept.⁴⁷ Similarly, when he embarks on persuading the Jews to abandon the "mindless" imitation of their forefathers (p. 586), he may be defining, for the benefit of his Muslim followers, rather than of the Jews, the proper meaning of *taqlid* ("imitation" or "blind acceptance of concepts") regarding the fundamentals of the faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*), which ought to consist of "each individual's independent investigation,"⁴⁸ rather than of unquestioning following of others. This distinction was especially important for the concept of *marja^c al-taqlid* as developed by the *uṣūlī mujtahids*.⁴⁹

The participation of the Jews, as described in this account, raises many other questions. The cumulative effect of their responses undermines the reliability of the account itself, and, as a result, it resembles more a polemical tract than a live debate, even if the account was inspired originally by a historical occurrence. Some of the doubts raised by the Jewish response are: Is it believable, as stated earlier, that the Jews could not only have initiated the discussion but also put forth some six arguments, as the account claims? If the Jews were prominent and suppos-

edly learned members of the Jewish community, how do we explain their complete silence when faced with important accusations, such as the textual corruption of the Torah (pp. 582–83), or their confusion about the lack of prescribed prayer in Moses' time (pp. 583–84)? If their Jewish learning was so weak that they could not respond appropriately to these charges, is it more believable that they were familiar with the Qur²ān to the point of being able to quote from it (pp. 585–86), show sufficient familiarity with it to maintain that it also fails to describe and prescribe Muslim prayer rituals (p. 584), and ask for a clarification of thorny theological issues, such as the difference between *naskh* and *insā²* (p. 586)? In what appears to be a truncated Jewish answer regarding the nature of the commandments (p. 585), there is a clue suggesting both that the debaters may have been more learned than the account allows, and that there may have been some tampering with it. Their "offensive" arguments, as in the case of adducing Deut. 18:15 (pp. 586–87),⁵⁰ and in referring to later revelations superseding earlier ones (p. 588), appear in fact to be expressing arguments generally used by Muslim polemicists.⁵¹ If we allow for a kernel of historical authenticity behind the account, Jacob Lassner's general elucidation of the problem may serve, in part, to explain the weak Jewish participation in this debate:

Although a good deal has been written about polemics and a number of treatises have been preserved, the large picture of the Jewish response remains blurred. The extant documents, few and far between, are marked by a narrow geographical distribution. . . . One thing appears likely, however. In dealing with Muslims, Jews would have been inclined to be circumspect. One could argue that, as a rule, Jewish responses to Muslim criticism, however shrill, were not a defense of the faith for the benefit of the hegemonic community, but more likely were intended for internal consumption. In any event, the frequent use of quotations in Hebrew and the writing of Arabic in Hebrew script must have deflected the impact of ideological counterthrust when and if non-Jews were inclined to take interest. Given these linguistic constraints, few, other than Jewish converts, had the capacity to comprehend fully and thus explain thoroughly how Jews reacted to Muslim views. There is no indication that learned Muslim scholars acquired the skills to absorb Jewish texts in the original, nor is there evidence that the Jews were inclined to hang all their linen in public.⁵²

⁴⁵ Camilla Adang, "Eléments karaïtes," 434–40.

⁴⁶ This concept is, of course, an important battle ground in *shari^ca*, but not in Jewish *ḥalakhah*. Rabbinic tradition is comfortable in attributing most of the Oral Law (past, present, and future) to "the Law of Moses from Sinai" (BT, Berakot, 5a). See David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (Boulder, Colo., 1997), 57–75.

⁴⁷ John Wansbrough, *Qur²ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977), 197.

⁴⁸ Momen, *An Introduction*, 175–76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 204; Aḥmad Kāzemi Moussavi, "The Establishment of Marja^cīyyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver Shi^ci Community," *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985): 35–51.

⁵⁰ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 104 n. 92.

⁵¹ See below, n. 144.

⁵² Jacob Lassner, "The Covenant of the Prophets: Muslim Texts, Jewish Subtexts," *AJS Review* 15 (1990): 235–36.

In the account before us the debate ends, not surprisingly, with Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s verbal victory and his dissatisfaction at not having been challenged more seriously. Interestingly, if some Jews, or even the debaters themselves actually converted after the event, as some of the sources claim,⁵³ one would have expected the account to state this explicitly, which it does not. Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s proselytizing goals (pp. 586–87) may have encountered serious opposition, for the account ends simply with an invitation to the Jews to return in a year. Unfortunately, neither here nor in the sources that claim that Baḥr al-ʿUlūm converted some Jews, are we told when exactly those conversions occurred and what actually happened after one year—that is, whether this time period was merely a face-saving device for both sides, or whether it was in the nature of a threatening deadline.

An interesting feature of this *munāẓara* is the complete absence in it of any polemical arguments that could be construed as specifically Shīʿī rather than Sunnī in character. Puzzling at first, upon contemplation, this absence is not really that surprising. If Baḥr al-ʿUlūm was unable to make his Jewish interlocutors accept the veracity of Muḥammad’s mission and message, how could he move beyond this basic issue and ask them to accept the authority and testimonies of the twelve imams? In other words, converting the Jews to the Shīʿī branch of Islam, step two, required a first step, acceptance of the fundamentals of Islam, which the Jews clearly did not take in this debate. If, on the other hand, the account is more

literary than factual, it clearly demonstrates Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s reliance on earlier Sunnī polemical tracts in an area, arguing against *ahl al-kitāb*, where Shīʿīs and Sunnis had few if any differences. It is reasonable to assume that the thrust of Shīʿī polemical energies were devoted not to arguing against Jews but to engage the various Sunnī schools, as reference to Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s own debates in Mecca intimate.⁵⁴

If, as I am inclined to believe, there is at least a kernel of historicity behind this account, it does shed some light on the nature of Shīʿī-Jewish coexistence in Iraq toward the end of the eighteenth century. The tone of the debate, though not as mild or as magnanimous as Perlmann’s assertion would have us believe, does not allow for broad generalizations beyond the obvious, namely, that the relationship between Jews and Shīʿīs at this time and in this particular place were fairly cordial, and that behind this cordiality there nevertheless lay a thinly concealed Shīʿī effort to convert the Jews. Judging by this account the Jews, on the whole, appear to have resisted the proselytizing effort even if they probably lost some individual members in the fray. Thus, regarding the broader issue of whether there were more numerous persecutions of Jews in Shīʿī than in Sunnī lands,⁵⁵ this *munāẓara* lends support to the impression substantiated by Judeo-Persian chronicles,⁵⁶ namely that the Jews (and all religious minorities) in Shīʿī realms felt increasing pressures commensurate with the consolidation and growth in power of the Shīʿī hierarchy.⁵⁷

A TRANSLATION OF THE EXISTING ACCOUNT OF THE DEBATE

“His debate with the Jews”

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful: Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, who sent Muḥammad, master of messengers, as a seal for all His prophets, with the clearest proof and strongest evidence. And He supported him with ʿAlī, the son of his uncle, the prince of the faithful, and established the imamate through his progeny until the Day of Judgment. May God’s blessing be upon Muḥammad and his good and pure family.

It happened in the days of the most distinguished among the rightly guided and erudite [men], the very understanding one among the learned, the epitome of the supported and the guided, the most learned of the *ʿulamāʾ* from among the masters of the rational and the transmitted [sciences], and the most excellent among the people [acquainted with] the [theoretical] foundations and

[practical] branches [of jurisprudence], the protector of Islam, shelter of Muslims, supporter of the faith, zenith of the faithful, sun of the religious community and of religion, destroyer of the inventions of erring innovators, savant of divine [matters], eternal temple, peerless one of the time[s], unique one of the age, precious one of the revolving [age] in knowledge and practice, and in the solving of difficulties and the clearing of all enigmas, he whose virtues cannot ever be enumerated and whose merits cannot be counted through the succession of epochs and months, the steadfast support, the reliable base, the esteemed, the noble, the Sayyid Mahdī, son of the Sayyid

⁵⁴ See above, n. 9.

⁵⁵ See above, n. 6.

⁵⁶ See above, n. 3.

⁵⁷ Said A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shīʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, 1984), pts. 2 and 3.

⁵³ See above, nn. 10–12.

Murtaḍā b. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī:

His ancestry is as if the high-noon shone upon it,
As if he were a shaft from daybreak's crevice.

May God, the exalted, please the world with his existence, and may He, by the perpetuity of his good fortune, raise the banners of good fortune. May he continue, like his name [Mahdī], to be a guide, and may God make him endure until he meets his namesake [i.e., the Mahdī] from among the imāms.

And this [occurred] when he traveled from the wondrous *mashhad*⁵⁸ (i.e., Najaf), to visit his ancestor Ḥusayn [in Karbala], in the holy month of Dhu'l-hijja, in the 1211th year after the prophetic emigration [1796 C.E.], may thousands of greetings and salutations be upon him [Muḥammad] who guards it. There was with him on that day a large group of accomplished disciples. Their path traversed the site of Dhu'l-Kifl, in which in those days there lived a group of Jews numbering about three thousand souls.⁵⁹ The news of his arrival reached them [the Jews]; they had already heard about the brilliance of his high rank and nobility. Among them there were those who claimed to know and thought that they had evidence and proof for what they believed. A group of their learned men caught up with the noble one. They followed him in order to have a debate (*munāẓara*), until they reached the Rabaṭ [quarter] that he [Baḥr al-ʿUlūm] commanded should be built for pilgrims and visitors.⁶⁰ They alighted there in his majestic presence and sat down in front of him politely, to his right and on his left.

They were like bats in the sun who have no other abode than in utter darkness.⁶¹ Then he welcomed them as was his habit and pleasant disposition. He addressed them softly lest one of them [not] take note or become fright-

ened.⁶² Among them there were two men who claimed to have knowledge, one was Dāʿūd and the other ʿEzrā.⁶³

Dāʿūd began to speak, saying: "We and the community of Islam, from among all other religious communities, are monotheists and are free of polytheism. The rest of the groups and peoples, such as the Zoroastrians and the Christians, associate partners with their lord and worship idols and graven images. No others remain to profess God's unity (*tawḥīd*), except the two groups [Jews and Muslims]."⁶⁴

Then the Sayyid said: "How is this? The Jews adopted the [Golden] Calf and worshiped it, 'and they did not cease to cling to it until Moses returned to them' from the appointed meeting with his Lord.⁶⁵ This affair of theirs is too famous to need recalling and too well known

⁶² The statement implies that the Jews' presence at the debate was not, perhaps, as voluntary as was stated a few lines earlier.

⁶³ The full name, rank, and standing of these Jewish opponents is not specified beyond their being called ʿulamāʾ *al-yahūd*, "learned men of the Jews" (*Rijāl al-sayyid*, 43 and 50). Their vague identities—they bear "archetypal" (from the Muslim point of view) Jewish names—may indicate either the contemptuous attitude of the Shīʿī recorders of the event, or it may be additional evidence for considering the encounter as largely fictitious.

⁶⁴ The accuracy of the recording of the discussion's opening is suspect. There was probably a polite exchange of niceties, as we are told that the Sayyid welcomed the Jews kindly. But that the Jews would venture to initiate the conversation unprompted, by referring to the importance of the concept of *tawḥīd* ("declaring or acknowledging God's Oneness") in both Judaism and Islam, appears unlikely.

⁶⁵ The editors have placed the qurʿanic verse in quotation marks but they have not quoted the verse exactly, having changed it from the first person plural to the third person plural: "They said: We shall by no means cease to be its votaries till Moses return unto us" (Q 20:91). (This and all subsequent quotations from the Qurʿān are from M. M. Pickthall's translation, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* [New York, n.d.].) The Qurʿān refers several times to the Golden Calf incident: Suras 2:51, 2:92, 4:153, 7:147, and most qurʿanic commentators discuss it at length. Two of the most famous accounts occur in al-Ṭabari's (d. 923) *Taʾriḫ al-rusul wa'l mulūk* [*Annales*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1879–81)], 1: 489ff., now in the translation of William M. Brinner, *The Children of Israel* (Albany, 1991), 3: 72–73; and Masʿūdī's (d. 956) *Murūj al-dhahab*, tr. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille, reviewed and corrected by Charles Pellat, *Les Prairies d'or* (Beirut, 1966), 2: 388ff. The incident is often mentioned, however briefly, in Muslim polemical literature against the Jews. See, for example, Samāʾī al-Maghribī, *Ifḥām al-yahūd*, 86 (English tr., 71).

⁵⁸ *Mashhad al-gharwah*, "the wondrous place of martyrdom," is one of the epithets ascribed to Najaf, the site of a tomb believed to be the burial place of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

⁵⁹ See my comments above, p. 574.

⁶⁰ This refers to a specific part of the town which derives its name from the fact that it contained hospices and inns. Its being built at Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's initiative confirms his important social standing in Najaf, especially during his second sojourn there (1196–1212/1782–1797), when he became *marjaʿ al-taqlīd*, after the death of Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbihānī (d. ca. 1792) (McChesney, "The Life," 168–69).

⁶¹ This "editorial comment" reflects the Shīʿī view of the encounter in which the "unenlightened" Jews were about to receive light, i.e., correct information regarding their own religion [!] and Islam.

to be denied. Then they also worshiped idols in the time of Jeroboam b. Nabaṭ, who was one of the servants of Solomon b. David.⁶⁶ His story is as follows: Solomon detected in him the desire to rule and perceived in him marks of leadership and sovereignty. Ahijah of Shiloh had informed Jeroboam of [Soloman’s suspicion] and he [Ahijah] tore the new garment he [Jeroboam] wore, ripping it into twelve pieces giving him ten, saying: ‘You will reign over this many [i.e. ten] tribes of the children of Israel, and there will remain for Solomon and his son Rehoboam and his sons only two tribes, namely Judah and Benjamin.’⁶⁷ Then Solomon planned to kill Jeroboam, but Yeroboam b. Nabaṭ fled from Solomon to Shishak, the ruler of Egypt, and remained with him until Solomon died. He then returned to al-Sham. It was his [Jeroboam’s] view and the view of all the children of Israel that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, should be made king, and they made him king. Then they [the children of Israel] came to him imploring his mercy on account of the burdens and difficulties that were imposed upon them in the days of Solomon. But Rehoboam said to them: ‘Verily, my little finger is stronger than my father’s little finger.’⁶⁸ If, indeed, my father had imposed on you difficult tasks and made you bear troublesome burdens, I will place and impose upon you that which is [even] more burdensome and more difficult.’ Then they [the children of Israel] separated themselves from him and appointed Jeroboam b. Nabaṭ and made him king over themselves; ten tribes of Israel were in agreement about him. And Rehoboam b. Solomon became ruler of the two [remaining] tribes in Jerusalem.⁶⁹ But, because the children of Israel used to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem every

year, Jeroboam feared for his reign if he should permit them to [continue to] go to pilgrimage on account of Rehoboam and his followers, who might turn them [the children of Israel] away from him [Jeroboam], or cause them to become favorably inclined toward him [Rehoboam]. Therefore he made for them two golden calves and placed them in Dan and Bethel, saying: ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who made you go up from the land of Egypt.’⁷⁰ And he commanded the people to worship them and to go on pilgrimage to them. They obeyed and thus became idolaters once again, after the worship of the [first Golden] Calf.⁷¹ So how can any of you Jews say that the Jews did not use to associate others with God, the exalted, and had no other god beside God, the exalted, and that they were monotheists, turning away from anything other than God?’

They [the Jews] acknowledged what he had said about their worship of idols in accord with what he had mentioned and wondered at his having noticed what no one else knew of their own affairs.⁷² Then he said to them:

⁷⁰ 1 Kings 12:28.

⁷¹ Muslim familiarity with this act of Jeroboam may go back to the account of the Karaite scholar Abū Yūsuf al-Qirqisāni (fl. tenth century). He discusses the incident in the section on the “History of Jewish Sects” of his code of law, *Kitāb al-anwār waʿl marāqib*, ed. Leon Nemoj (New York, 1939–43), 2: 6–10; Nemoj translates the incident in his “Al-Qirqisāni’s Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity,” *HUCA* 7 (1930): 317–97. Nemoj provides a more polished translation of the same passages in his *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts from the Early Literature* (New Haven, [1952] 1980): 45–49. See now also the translation of Wilfrid Lockwood, in *Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisāni on Jewish Sects and Christianity* (Frankfurt an-Main, 1984), 95–100. Al-Qirqisāni’s close reading of the biblical narrative convinced him to regard Jeroboam’s act not as idolatry, for “. . . Jeroboam did not deny the Glorious Creator nor abrogate Him, nor did he worship idols, as some people imagine . . .” (Nemoj, “Al-Qirqisāni’s Account,” 323), but simply as a political move intended to “wean” his people from going to Jerusalem, where they could have been enticed to return their allegiance to the House of David. In fact, according to some Jewish legends, Jeroboam was the prophet Ahijah’s closest disciple and attained great spiritual heights before he succumbed to the corruption of power (see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia (1913) 1968], 4: 180 and 6: 305 nn. 6 and 7 and the sources cited there). However, for clearly polemical reasons, already Samāʿūʿāl al-Maghribi cites the charge of Jeroboam’s idolatry, stripped of other motivations (*Iḥḥām al-yahūd*, 37–38, 55, 88; English tr., 48–49, 57, 72).

⁷² If the account before us can be believed, it may not be surprising that the Sayyid’s Jewish interlocutors do not mention al-Qirqisāni’s explanation, with which they may not have been

⁶⁶ The account that follows is based on 1 Kings, 11–12. It is not a story with which Muslim historians and polemicists were particularly familiar, and it may have reached Baḥr al-ʿUlūm through a Jewish informant. Al-Ṭabarī refers very briefly to Rehoboam’s reign (*Taʾriḥ*, 2: 619), as does Ibn Ḥazm (*al-Fiṣal*, 1: 143–44); neither refers to the conflict recorded in the biblical account.

⁶⁷ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm shows here some awareness of the traditional Jewish interpretation of 1 Kings 11:32 and 11:36: “But one tribe [not two!] shall remain his—for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem. . . .” (This and all biblical quotations are from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* [Philadelphia, 1985]). In his popular biblical commentary Rabbi David Qimḥi (Radaq; d. ca. 1235), states the traditional rabbinic view concerning this verse: “[The tribes of] Judah and Benjamin were considered one tribe because they were joined in [their] inheritance and in Jerusalem” (*Mikraʾot Gedolot: Melakim* [New York, n.d.], 1280). See also Josh. 15:20ff. and 18:11ff.

⁶⁸ An abbreviated paraphrase of 1 Kings 12:10. See also 1 Kings 12:14.

⁶⁹ 1 Kings 12:21.

“How was it permitted to Solomon to plan to kill Jeroboam before [he committed] his crime?⁷³ This is not permitted in the law (*shari‘a*) of Moses, nor in the law of the other prophets. Solomon adhered to the law of Moses, and if he was permitted to do that which Moses was not permitted, [then] abrogation [of the law] is permitted; but you deny [the possibility of] abrogation.”⁷⁴ They [the Jews] were silent. Dā‘ūd, their leader, said: “O, our master, we accept your words wholeheartedly.” Then he [the Sayyid] asked: “Tell me, are there among you, O community of Jews, differences [of opinion], and are there contradictions and disagreements in your books?” They answered: “No.” But he said to them: “How can this be? You are divided into three sects from which seventy-one sects have split off.⁷⁵ [One of these] is the Samaritans, a

familiar. Nevertheless, it is surprising that they do not point out the political motivation of Jeroboam’s action, which is clearly brought out even in the Sayyid’s account.

⁷³ The Sayyid is probably alluding to Solomon’s prophetic powers for, after the prophet Ahijah announced to Jeroboam that he will wrest most of the kingdom from the heirs of Solomon (1 Kings 11:30ff.), the biblical account does not reveal how this information reached Solomon. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6: 301, n. 93 and the sources cited there, and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta‘riḫ (Annales)* 2: 572; Brinner, tr., *Children of Israel*, 152.

⁷⁴ The issue of *naskh* (“abrogation”), to which Baḥr al-‘Ulūm refers several times directly or indirectly, is, of course, one of the thorny knots of Muslim theology, which Muslims took great pains to attribute to other traditions besides their own. The concept is based primarily on Sura 2: 106. For perceptive comments on some of the differences between the Jewish and Muslim views of this concept, see John Wansbrough, *Qur‘ānic Studies*, 192–202; idem., *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978), 109–12, 150–54. For a succinct account of the role of *naskh* in Muslim-Jewish polemics, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 35–41, 69, and the sources cited there.

⁷⁵ Al-Qirqisānī lists at least fifteen sects, spread out in time, among the Jews (Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 49–53). Ibn Ḥazm mentions the Rabbanites, Karaites (‘*Ananiyya*), ‘*Isawiyya*, Samaritans, and the Sadducees (‘*Saduqiyya*) (*Kitāb al-fiṣal*, 1: 93ff., and *Al-uṣūl wa’l-furū‘* ed. Muḥammad ‘Aṭif al-‘Irāqī [Cairo, 1978], 1: 196). I am grateful for these references to Dr. Camilla Adang, who also drew my attention to the clearer mention of the Karaites in Ibn Ḥazm’s *Al-uṣūl* than in his *Kitāb al-fiṣal*. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) contrasts the views of Rabbanites and Karaites in the context of discussing anthropomorphism among Muslim sects, see *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa’l-Nihal*, tr. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London, 1984), 78, 88–92. For a comprehensive discussion of Muslim views on

large sect of the Jews that differs from them in many things. The Torah that they have differs from that which the rest of the Jews have.” They answered: “We do not know why these differences occurred. But we do know that the Book of the Samaritans differs from ours and that they also differ from us in many other matters.”⁷⁶ Next he said to them: “How do you deny disagreement [among you] and claim agreement on one [and the same] thing?” He also asked them: “Has anything been added to or taken away from the Torah which God, the exalted, revealed to Moses?”⁷⁷ They answered: “It is as it has been until now; nothing was added, nothing was taken away?”⁷⁸ He replied: “How can this be? For in the Torah which you have there are things that are clearly abominable, ugly and repulsive,⁷⁹ such as what happened in the story of the [Golden] Calf to the prophet Aaron, which attributes to him the making of a god for the children of Israel. This is the translation of the phrase in the Torah in the chapter ‘The Revelation of the Tablets and the Making of the Calf,’ which is chapter twenty of the second

Jewish sects, see Wasserstrom, “Species of Misbelief,” and now, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 64ff.

The concept of seventy-one or seventy-two nations and languages to which the notion of over seventy sects can be traced is of ancient origin and is found in many early Jewish and non-Jewish sources (e.g., Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1: 173; 5: 194–95 n. 72; 6: 375 n. 104). Therefore it is not surprising to find it surfacing in early ḥadīths (see A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* [Leiden, 1936–71], 135, under *firqatun/firaq*).

⁷⁶ Neither the Sayyid nor the Jews appear to be well informed about the Samaritans; thus they spend little time on the subject.

⁷⁷ Without using the technical terms in which this Muslim accusation is usually leveled against the Jews, Baḥr al-‘Ulūm is nevertheless referring either to some form of *tabdīl* (deliberate falsification of scripture), or *tahrīf* (forgery). Various early Muslim scholars understood different processes by these terms; see Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar, “Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant le *tahrīf* (falsification) des écritures,” *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 61–104; Wansbrough, *Qurānic Studies*, 189–90, 196; idem., *The Sectarian Milieu*, 109; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, index under these two terms; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 174–75. There may well be a Karaite undertone to this argument; see Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 249.

⁷⁸ The Jewish answer, and maybe Baḥr al-‘Ulūm’s question as well, echo Deut. 13:1.

⁷⁹ Ibn Ḥazm (*Kitāb al-fiṣal*, 1: 105ff.), and Samā‘ū‘ al-Maghribī (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 59ff.; English tr., 58ff.), were particularly offended by stories imputing shocking or immoral action to biblical prophets. See M. Perlmann, “Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada,” *PAAJR* 18 (1949): 274ff.

book:⁸⁰ “When the people saw that Moses was late in descending from the mountain, they turned to Aaron and said: “Rise and make us gods who will march before us, for this man Moses, who brought us out from the land of Egypt, we don’t know what happened to him.”⁸¹ And Aaron said to them: “Take off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me.”⁸² The people did so. They removed the golden earrings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron, and he took these from them and molded them into a form, and shaped it into a molten calf, and they adopted it as a god and worshiped it. Then, when Moses came from his meeting with his God and saw what Aaron and his people had done, he disapproved of it and rebuked Aaron, while the latter apologized to him saying: “Do not blame me for this; I would not have done it except for fear of division among the children of Israel.”⁸³

⁸⁰ There is, of course, no such title associated with Exod. 20, which is, in any case, not the correct reference for the story that the Sayyid mentions, namely, Aaron’s fashioning of the Golden calf (Exod. 32). Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s biblical references are off in the entire debate, which raises the important question of who or what his Jewish sources were. Despite the availability of some partial and not very well disseminated copies of Arabic translations of the Pentateuch, scholarly opinion generally favors the idea that the main channel of biblical information available to Muslim scholars was oral, in the form of consultation with local Jewish informants. (See Lazarus-Yafeh, “Muslim Authors and the Problematics of Arabic Translation of the Bible,” ch. 5 of *Interwined Worlds*; and David S. Powers, “Reading/Misreading One Another’s Scriptures: Ibn Ḥazm’s Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahudi,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks [Atlanta, 1986], 120 n. 17). The fact that the Jews do not correct the Sayyid may be attributed as much to their sense of intimidation, and the high probability that they never saw this Arabic account of the debate, as to the likelihood that they themselves would have been familiar only with references to the *parasha* (weekly divisions) of the Torah rather than with chapter numbers and certainly not with titles, which do not exist in the Torah.

⁸¹ Exod. 32:1.

⁸² Exod. 32:2.

⁸³ Aaron’s reply is not found in the biblical account, nor did I find any intimation of it among Jewish commentators and *mi-drashim*. But the Qurʾān refers to this incident on two occasions, Suras 7:142ff., and 20:77ff. Baḥr al-ʿUlūm relates here Aaron’s reply as recorded in Sura 20:94. In Islamic tradition Aaron’s responsibility is diluted by the involvement of a man called al-Samirī. Aaron had asked for the jewels to be thrown into a pit because they were Egyptian spoils forbidden to the Jews, but

“This is irrefutable proof that the Torah you have is corrupt,⁸⁴ and that it contains additions to the Torah that was revealed to Moses, for this kind of behavior could not originate even from a foolish ignoramus; how then could it originate from the like of the prophet Aaron? And how could he have made such an apology to Moses? The division of the children of Israel, in his [Aaron’s] estimation, would have been a smaller offense than Aaron’s fashioning a god for them to worship? How could he fear the dissension among the children of Israel and not worry that they commit polytheism and idolatry? Moses had said to him: ‘O Aaron, take my place among the people. Do right, and follow not the way of mischief-makers.’”⁸⁵

Then Dāʿūd and the Jews who were with him, said: “And what objection is there to this? Gabriel has also assisted [them] in this, and the story concerning him is as famous in the Torah as the story of Aaron.”⁸⁶ But he answered: “Gabriel did not assist in this matter, and there is nothing in the Torah of that which is here. It was al-Samirī who found a trace of animation in the footprints of Gabriel’s horse and seduced the people by this means.⁸⁷ Gabriel bears no responsibility in this matter, nor does God, the sublime, the exalted, since He created the circumstance that led to the sedition, just as He created circumstances of adultery, murder, and other sins. They do not happen except in [specific] circumstances and [are carried out by] specific instruments. But this does not come under the rubric of assistance to idolatry and transgression [of God’s commands]; God is exalted greatly above [all] this.”⁸⁸

al-Samirī caused these materials to turn into “a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a lowing sound” (Suras 20:88; 7:148). When the angel Gabriel came to take Moses on horseback up to Mt. Sinai, al-Samirī caught a handful of dust from its hoofprint turning the jewels into a calf (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrikh (Annales)*, 1: 492ff.; Brinner, tr., *The Children of Israel*, 72–76; al-Masʿūdī, *Prairies d’or*, 2: 388ff.

⁸⁴ Here Baḥr al-ʿUlūm uses the technical term *muḥarrafa[tun]*, “corrupted (word),” and seems to base his argument on the purely Muslim assumption that prophets do not commit reprehensible actions. See above, n. 77.

⁸⁵ The Sayyid does not make it clear whether he is about to quote the Torah or the Qurʾān. Here he cites from Sura 7:142.

⁸⁶ The Jews appear to show some awareness of the Qurʾānic version of the biblical events. See above, n. 44.

⁸⁷ See above, n. 44.

⁸⁸ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s views here on God’s omnipotence and the limitations of human freedom go as far back as al-Ashʿarī (d. 935) (W. Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* [London, 1948], 141–47).

"And in the fourth chapter of the fifth book mentioning the [Golden] Calf and the reprimand of the children of Israel regarding its worship, it is stated: 'God was very angry with Aaron and almost destroyed him, but I begged [God's] pardon on his behalf. He forgave him this as well.'⁸⁹ This clearly shows the repulsiveness of this act and its odiousness, for if God was angry with Aaron on its account, how can you say that there was no objection to it?

"Almost as bad as this story in repulsiveness and odiousness is what is recounted in the Torah about the story of Lot and his two daughters.⁹⁰ In chapter twenty-three of the first book of the Torah⁹¹ [there is the following verse]: 'Verily, when Lot went up from Şwghr⁹² and dwelled in the mountain with his two daughters (his people having been destroyed), the older of the two said to the younger one: "Our father is an old man and there are no men [left] on earth to cohabit with us, as is the way of mankind. Rise, let us give our father wine to drink and have sexual intercourse with him, and let us strive to beget progeny from him." So they gave him wine to drink that night and the older one came and had intercourse with her father and he did not perceive her sleeping [with him] nor her rising. Then, on the next day, the older one said to the younger one: "I had intercourse last night with father. Rise, let us give him wine to drink tonight and have intercourse with him yourself." So they gave him wine to drink that night as well. The younger one arose and had intercourse with him and he did not perceive her sleeping or waking. Thus Lot's two daughters became pregnant by their father. The older one bore a son and she called him Moab. He is the progenitor of the "children of Moab" to this day. And the younger one bore a son and she called him Amon. And he is the progenitor of the "children of Amon" to this day.'

"This is the text of the Torah which the Jews⁹³ have; I

⁸⁹ The correct reference is probably to Deut. 9:20, and Baḥr al-^cUlūm's "translation" is off.

⁹⁰ Lot (Lūṭ), Abraham's nephew, is regarded as a prophet in Islamic tradition, cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta²riḫ* (*Annales* 1: 325ff.; Brinner, tr., *Prophets and Patriarchs* [Albany, 1987], 111ff.), hence the account of his engendering offspring with his daughters was considered extremely repulsive by Muslim polemicists. See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 32–33, and the sources cited there.

⁹¹ The reference is erroneous again. The incident with Lot and his daughters occurs in Gen. 19:30–38.

⁹² Zoar: Gen. 19:30.

⁹³ Dr. Camilla Adang drew my attention to the change here and in the next paragraph from the direct address in the second person plural used thus far to the third person plural. It may be an editorial "slip," or it may well lend support to the idea that the *munāzara* format is not the record of an actual event but is merely a literary foil.

have translated it [these passages] word-for-word.⁹⁴ But this is an evident lie and an ugly slander. Reason rejects that such shameful and slanderous incidents could occur to the messengers and prophets of God, and that their daughters and sons could be afflicted with the consequences of such odious behavior throughout time and for all generations [to come].⁹⁵

"As for Moab and Amon, they are two great nations between al-Balqā' and Mt. al-Sharā.⁹⁶ The grandmother of Solomon and David was from among the children of Moab,⁹⁷ so according to the Jews this entire progeny is ignoble, since it was not engendered through lawful matrimony. The daughters' being prohibited to the father is agreed upon by all laws and religions. Sisters too were prohibited by previous religions. That is why Abraham, when the Egyptians asked him about Sarah, said: 'She is my sister,'⁹⁸ so that they would not think that she was his wife and would [not] kill him. And there is no doubt that, in being prohibited, a daughter has precedence over a sister.⁹⁹ It is usually not probable for one advanced in age to impregnate on two successive nights, especially while excessively drunk, which is what they claim. However, it was said that Lot, after the affair with Sodom, was nearing one hundred years [of age].¹⁰⁰

"How could Lot's daughters think that the world was devoid of men, despite knowing that those who perished were exclusively the people of Lot? They knew that Abraham and his people were in the village of Jirūn¹⁰¹ and between him and them there was only [a distance] of one parasang, that the calamity did not befall them, and that the entire world, except the people of Lot, were safe from it.

"Therefore this is a lie mixed with excessive stupidity. It would have been enough for them to know that their father would realize this repulsive act when he awoke, and so would Abraham, the uncle of their father, on account of the great position and close relationship [to Lot]. This should have sufficed to prevent them from perpe-

⁹⁴ As the loose accuracy of the Sayyid's references shows, this claim cannot be taken literally. For similar claims made by earlier Muslim polemicists, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 121.

⁹⁵ See above, n. 84.

⁹⁶ I have been unable to identify these locations.

⁹⁷ Ruth 4:18–22; al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-yahūd*, 64; English tr., 59.

⁹⁸ Gen. 12:13; *Iḥām al-yahūd*, *ibid*.

⁹⁹ Lev. 18:7–30.

¹⁰⁰ Baḥr al-^cUlūm's wording here is almost identical with al-Maghribī's (see *Iḥām al-yahūd*, *ibid.*).

¹⁰¹ Gerar (Gen. 20:1).

trating this abominable deed, supposing that it did take place. It, and the like of it which occurs in your Torah, O community of Jews, is proof of the occurrence in it of corruption and addition.¹⁰²

“And if we wished to elaborate on the contradictions and the differences that occur in this Torah, and on what it unsuitably associates with the Creator, the great and mighty, such as corporeality, form, remorse, sorrow, weakness, [and] weariness, words would be drawn out indeed and this place would not be wide enough [to contain them all].¹⁰³

“But tell me, O community of Jews, can ritual prayer (*ṣalat*) be missing in any religious law (*sharīʿa*)?” They answered: “No; ritual prayer is prescribed in all of them and no religious law is devoid of it.” He said: “Inform me about this ritual prayer of yours. What is its origin? And whence is it taken? This Torah, which is made up of five books, we have examined and know what is in it book by book, but we have not found ritual prayer in any of them by name or mention.”¹⁰⁴ Then one of them replied: “The fact that it [ritual prayer] is commanded is known through implication rather than through explicit words.¹⁰⁵ The Torah contains [commands] regarding the invocation (*dhikr*)

[of God’s name] and supplication (*duʿā*).”¹⁰⁶ But he, may God support him, said to them: “We are not talking about invocation or about supplication, but rather about your specific and prescribed ritual prayer (*ṣalat*) [recited] three times daily, morning, afternoon, and evening which are called *tefilla shaḥarit*, *tefilla minḥah*, and *tefilla arab*.¹⁰⁷ As for invocation and supplication, there is a general command to do them, but no specific command that ascribes specific times, and no direction [of prayer] is preferable to another, whereas you must face the Temple¹⁰⁸ during this ritual prayer, which is not a condition for invocation and supplication.

“With regard to the prerequisite of facing the Temple, there is another difficulty, one from which I do not see you freeing yourselves, and it is this: the Temple was demarcated by David and was built by his son Solomon. Now there were more than five hundred years between Solomon and Moses.¹⁰⁹ So what was the status of Moses’ prayer, and after him, of the prayers of the prophets, until the time of Solomon and his building of the Temple? Similar to this is what you must admit in the matter of pilgrimage (*ḥajj*).

¹⁰² . . . *al-taḥrif waʿl ziyāda (Rijāl al-sayyid, 57).*

¹⁰³ Although they are not elaborated upon in this *munāzara*, accusations of wild anthropomorphism rank at the top of anti-Jewish (and anti-Christian) Muslim polemical arguments: see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 29–31, 136–37. It is interesting to note that Ibn Ḥazm appears to have heard of *Shiur Qomah*, the Jewish anthropomorphic text associated with the Merkavah mystical tradition, which gives the “measurements” of God (ibid., 31, 136). He seems to have borrowed this and many of his other ideas critical of (Rabbanite) Judaism from Karaite sources, especially from al-Qirḳisānī’s *Kitāb al-anwār*, 1: 3.2; 1: 4.1). For a detailed analysis of Ibn Ḥazm’s indebtedness to Karaite sources, see Camilla Adang, “Eléments karaïtes.”

¹⁰⁴ Like the Karaites, Baḥr al-ʿUlūm appears to be implying that Jewish prayers in their entirety should come from the biblical text as, for example, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, comes from the Qurʾān. See Daniel Frank, “The *Shoshanim* of Tenth-Century Jerusalem: Karaite Exegesis, Prayer, and Communal Identity,” in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden, 1995), 199–245. See n. 106.

¹⁰⁵ The answer of the Jews is unclear. I take it to mean that the Torah records many passionate prayers of biblical heroes, thus providing examples for the ritual prayers of later generations. Surprisingly (or, perhaps, anticipating Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s objections to post-biblical “innovations”), they do not even intimate that the three daily prayers were rabbinically instituted as substitutes for the three daily sacrifices performed when the Temple was in existence.

¹⁰⁶ Strictly speaking, the Muslim distinction of *dhikr* (“invocation” [of the Divine Name]) and *duʿā* (“personal, private prayer”) does not characterize Jewish liturgy, which tends to mix aspects of both forms, in addition to fixed prayers, such as the *Amidah*, recited three times daily. Al-Maghribī claims that the persecution of the Jews under the Persians (he does not specify the period) led to the Jews’ invention of “invocations into which they admixed passages from their prayers,” which they called *ḥizana*. These were set to special tunes recited by the person leading the services known as the *ḥazzan (Iḥām al-yahūd, 56–57; English tr., 57).*

¹⁰⁷ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s argument echoes a well-known Karaite view, namely that “formal prayer should consist exclusively of biblical quotations, mainly the Psalms of David,” which led the Karaites to reject many rabbinic prayers and hymns, even the *Amidah*, as unwarranted additions to the liturgy (Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 272–73; Frank, “The *Shoshanim*”). The Sayyid’s attempt to reproduce the actual Hebrew sounds is interesting although not entirely correct. The first and third forms should read *tefillat shaḥarit* and *tefillat arvit* (or *tefillat erev?*).

¹⁰⁸ *Bayt al-maqdis* can refer to both Jerusalem and the Temple, but in this and the following paragraph it seems to be more appropriate to translate it literally, as referring to the Temple.

¹⁰⁹ Without dwelling on the complexities of biblical chronology, Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s calculation accords pretty well with traditional Jewish reckoning, which places the Exodus some four hundred and eighty years before the construction of King Solomon’s Temple (A. Malamat, “Origins and Formative Period,” in *A History of the Jewish Period*, ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson [Cambridge, Mass., 1976], 43).

The pilgrimage for you is to the Temple, which was not in existence in the time of Moses, nor that of the prophets, until the time of Solomon.¹¹⁰ Is this a thing you invented for yourselves, or do you possess any proof or evidence for it? 'Bring your proof (of what ye state) if you are truthful.'¹¹¹

They answered: "We know this from the words of the prophets [who came] after Moses, and [from] their books, as well as from the commentaries of our sages (*ʿulamāʿ*) on the Torah." But he said to them: "As for the prophets after Moses, they all [lived] according to his law, following him in his judgments, ruling according to the Torah, not adding or taking anything away from it.

"Furthermore, you, O community of Jews, do not permit the abrogation of laws, so how are you permitted new inventions¹¹² which did not exist in the time of Moses? How is it possible for your sages to comment on the Torah by [adding] things that are extraneous to the law of Moses, and how can you attribute to the prophets their promulgation of these laws which are extraneous to the Torah?"¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm seems determined to force his Jewish interlocutors to admit to either the existence in Jewish tradition of *naskh* ("abrogation"), or *bidʿa* ("[reprehensible] innovation"), or both, with regard to prayer (see al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-yahūd*, 20–21; English tr., 40–41).

¹¹¹ Q 2:11.

¹¹² Instead of *bidʿa*, the Sayyid uses the word *iḥdāth* ("invention"), which has the same negative connotation here.

¹¹³ Karaite thinkers, such as al-Qirḡisānī, already raised these objections, which, in turn, were repeated by Ibn Ḥazm (C. Adang, "Eléments karaïtes," 430–34). Ibn Kammuna (d. ca. 1285) gives the traditional Jewish (rabbinic) answers to these arguments: "Concerning the Jews following the stipulations of their chief authorities and judges, despite the Torah prohibition against adding or subtracting from the Law, know then that the Torah enjoined submission to the prophets who follow the Law of Moses [Deut. 18:18]. The Jewish sages say that the prophets may issue no command that would permanently annul any Torah stipulation, or they would not be followers of that law; but they may prescribe annulment when a situation requires it, on condition that the annulment not be continuous, as in the case of the prophet Elijah, who offered sacrifice in an unauthorized place—an annulment that could not be permanent" (*Ibn Kammuna's Examination of the Three Faiths*, ed. M. Perlmann [Berkeley, 1967], 46–47; English tr. [1971], 72). Clearly, Baḥr al-ʿUlūm objects to Jewish religious concepts derived from the Oral Law (Aram., *mi-de-rabbanan*) overlooking similar lines of development in the *shariʿa* based on *ḥadīth*. His argument implies either that if the Torah omits important and necessary laws it is far from perfect, or, that if the Jews have added to its laws, they have tampered with divine revelation.

They were perplexed by these words, silenced, and amazed by the profusion of his learning and this information regarding their own affairs and his understanding of their beliefs and writings. Then one of them got up the courage to ask: "[Suppose] we were to admit that there was no ritual prayer in the time of Moses; what are the implications which are then incumbent upon us?"

He, may God the exalted sustain him, answered them: "You have just admitted that ritual prayer is prescribed in all religious laws, so how can the law of Moses which, according to you, is the greatest and most complete, lack it?"¹¹⁴ Moreover, what called upon you to suffer the burden of performing this ritual prayer which did not exist in your prophet's time and was not specified in your Book?"¹¹⁵

They were silenced and had no answer; they felt embarrassed by the exposure in one [and the same] meeting of such inconsistency in their own words. Then one [of the Jews] said to the Sayyid: "The Qurʾān does not elaborate [the details] of the ritual prayers you perform, O community of Muslims, so how do you know them, despite the fact that the Qurʾān lacks them?"¹¹⁶

He responded: "Ritual prayer is mentioned in several places in the Qurʾān. We know from the Qurʾān its number, its direction, and many of its rules. The remaining rules and conditions we know from prophetic explicatory utterances as related in reliable traditions.¹¹⁷ So we are not equal in this matter, we and you, if you [would but] understand."

¹¹⁴ See n. 113.

¹¹⁵ Al-Maghribī discusses at length, in the context of laws governing Jewish dietary restrictions, how the Jews, especially the Rabbanites, have tended to "increase the burden upon themselves" (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 71–79; English tr., 64–67). Specifically, in a passage regarding prayer, which shows marked Karaite sympathies, he ridicules two passages in the *Amidah* on the grounds that they could not possibly have been recited by Moses. He accuses the Jews of having "fabricated them after the destruction of the Jewish state" along with fasts commemorating the burning of the Temple and the hanging of Haman (*ibid.*, 21; English tr., 40). See Ibn Kammuna's replies to these contentions, *Ibn Kammuna's Examination*, 46–47; English tr., 71.

¹¹⁶ The Jews, again displaying some familiarity with Islam, argue that the Qurʾān is equally "deficient" when it comes to the complete detailing of all the prayers incumbent on Muslims.

¹¹⁷ *Khabar mutawātir*, tradition passed down through numerous, congruent, uninterrupted and sound chains of transmission (*isnād*): see G. H. A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature* (Leiden, 1969), 26, 31. Implicit in Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's reply is the lack of *tawātur* in the Bible, as opposed to the Qurʾān: see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 41–43.

Next he said: "The Torah contains many laws which you do not observe now, such as the laws concerning purity and impurity until sunset, and others, [laws] regarding touching those afflicted with venereal disease, menstruation, leprosy, a variety of [unclean] animals, and the contagion of the menses from women to men making the men who touch them as ritually unclean as the menstruating women.¹¹⁸ These laws are contained in chapters nine, ten, and eleven of the third book and in other places in the Torah [as well];¹¹⁹ you should return to them if [now] you do not perform them!"

They answered: "Yes, this is all true, we agree and accept your words."

Afterward he said to them: "Why do you not perform these, although they are mentioned in the text of the Torah which you claim is the one revealed to Moses, without corruption or alteration, and whose law you claim is universal for all people, exhaustive for all time, in which nothing has been abrogated? After the prophet Moses, only Jesus and Muḥammad brought abrogation to his [Moses'] law. But you do not accept their prophethood or the abrogation of the law of Moses in any way."

They replied: "This all pertains to the rule on commandments, and a [positive] commandment can be changed in the course of time, as opposed to prohibitions [which cannot]. The [positive] commandment is [intended] to bring reward while the prohibition is [intended] to repel punishment, and thus they differ."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Cf. Lev. 15:24. See al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-yahūd*, 17; English tr., 39, and Ibn Kammuna, *Ibn Kammuna's Examination*, 45; English tr., 71–72. The charge of Jewish women imparting menstruation to men was also known in Medieval Christendom (Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* [New York, 1977]), 8.

¹¹⁹ This reference is also inaccurate. While Lev. 11 deals with unclean animals, Lev. 9 and 10 deal with sacrificial laws. The laws regarding menstruation are mentioned in the context of impurities in Lev. 15:19–24.

¹²⁰ It seems that here and in the argument about commandments that follows the Jewish interlocutors and Baḥr al-ʿUlūm have different concepts in mind, for the polysemous Arabic term *amr* is by no means a simple synonym of the Hebrew concept of commandment (*mišwah*). The Jews do not seem to give the Sayyid a direct answer perhaps because this would involve a lengthy explanation about why the laws of *ṭahāra* ("purity") and *ṭumʿa* ("impurity") are no longer implementable. Instead, they hint at the complexity of the subject by stating that a positive commandment differs from a negative one in that it can be changed (see Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Commandments," ch. 13 of *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Cambridge, Mass., 1987], 345ff.). Baḥr al-ʿUlūm still appears to have various

He replied: "There is no difference between a [positive] commandment and a prohibition in regard to the obligation to obey and to adhere; abrogation is impossible without an abrogating [commandment] and without a cause. And if a commandment is positive, it is like a prohibition with regard to repelling punishment together with bringing reward. What you claim, that all these laws pertain to the rule of commandments, is not so. The wording of the Torah in these places occurs both in the language of command and in other ways, such as prohibition, forbidding, [demanding] purification, and [regarding] pollution.¹²¹ "Produce the Torah and read it (unto us) if you be truthful."¹²²

They then changed from this topic of conversation to another. Their chief said: "How come you do not judge according to the Torah, O community of Muslims, for the Qurʾān says: 'Whoso judgeth not by that which Allāh hath revealed: such are disbelievers.'"¹²³

He responded: "Since the prophecy of our prophet is established for us, and he abrogated previous laws, it is incumbent upon us to follow the laws that abrogate rather than those that are abrogated. This is just as you must follow the law of Moses, and must carry out what is in the Torah, without [obeying] the religions, laws, and scriptures that preceded it. A group of the laws of the Torah have remained which have not been abrogated, such as the laws [regarding] injuries, retaliation, and others.¹²⁴ But we rule in accord with these because they exist in the Qurʾān, not because they are found in the Torah."¹²⁵

conditions and types of *naskh* on his mind (Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, 197).

¹²¹ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm realizes that the Jews are not addressing his question directly and chides them for distinguishing between positive and negative commandments as far as their duty to obey both types equally is concerned. He emphasizes that the laws of purification in Leviticus are expressed clearly as both positive and negative commandments and thus cannot be denied.

¹²² Sura 3:93.

¹²³ Sura 5:44. Since the Jewish interlocutors do not appear to be particularly learned in Jewish subjects, is it believable that they can quote the Qurʾān? On the lack of Hebrew translations of the Qurʾān (they tend to be late and rare) and general Jewish ignorance of the Qurʾān, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 144–60.

¹²⁴ For example, the Muslim punishment for adultery—stoning—which is based on Deut. 22:22–24 (Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, 194–96, and Michael Cook, "Anan and Islam: The Origins of Karaite Scripturalism," *JSAI* [1987]: 176).

¹²⁵ Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, who believed that "the Muslim attitude toward the scriptures [of others] should be one of absolute rejection. The Muslim accepts only the Koran, and only from the Koran he knows of previous revelations, among them one

Then he [the Jew] asked: "What is the meaning of His verse: 'Such of Our revelations as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring [in place] one better or the like thereof'?"¹²⁶ What is the difference between abrogating (*naskh*) and causing to forget (*insāʿ*)? What is the benefit in abrogating something and then instituting something like it?"

He replied: "The difference between abrogating and causing something to be forgotten is that abrogation removes the legal provision (*ḥukm*) even if the text which ordains it remains, while causing something to be forgotten is removing it [the rule] by removing the text which denotes it and wiping it off the mind completely. What is meant by 'something like it' is the rule which is similar to the first, according to its beneficial effect, so that its benefit in its own time is equivalent to the benefit of the first rule in its own time, not that the utility of both is the same during the same time, in which case abrogation, of necessity, would be of no use."

They laughed and were amazed by the excellence of his reply and the beauty of the argument in his speech. He said: "O community of Jews, had we perceived in you a desire and solicitousness in searching for truth, we would have brought you clear proofs and overpowering evidence.¹²⁷ But I counsel you with the most perfect of proofs to act with fairness, abandon blind imitation (*taqlid*)¹²⁸ and the following of your fathers and forefathers,

called Torah and one called Gospel . . ." (Perlmann, "Eleventh Century," 275).

¹²⁶ Sura 2:106. See above, n. 123. This argument is really addressed to a Muslim audience since it deals with the controversial issue of the various aspects of *naskh* as understood by Muslim legists (Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, 197).

¹²⁷ In what follows, the Sayyid clearly reveals his desire to convert the Jews.

¹²⁸ It is interesting to note that although *taqlid* became even more important after the triumph of the Uṣūlīs (see above, n. 20: Momen, *An Introduction*, 204), Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, although he was himself an *uṣūlī mujtahid*—and probably addressing himself as much (if not more) to his Muslim as to his Jewish audience—decries the tendency to blind imitation attributed here to the Jews. Already Ibn Ḥazm reprimanded those who were following their ancestors blindly (*taqlid al-aslāf*) even when their leaders knew better (*Kitāb al-ḥiṣāl* 1: 99f., quoted in Perlmann, "Eleventh Century," 280). In another part of this opus, while discussing "the views of atheists, deists, and agnostics," Ibn Ḥazm distinguishes a group of rationalists as follows: "Another group said: a man's adherence to the religion of his father and grandfather or lord or neighbor is neither an excuse for him nor an argument for that religion. But every man should accept those doctrines which all the religions as

and to abandon bigotry, fanaticism, and stubbornness. For verily the world is perishable and finite, 'every soul will taste of death,'¹²⁹ and God's servants must meet God, the exalted, in eternity, on the great day after which there will be nothing but lasting felicity or grievous torment. The wise[man] is he who prepares himself for that day, is concerned about it, and embarks in this world on correcting [his] beliefs, carries out the works with which he is enjoined and contemplates critically the various faiths and diverse denominations. But Truth cannot be on two contradictory sides. No one can bring as an excuse the fact that he imitates [the ways of his] father and grandfather, or accepts a denomination or faith without proof or evidence. For the same rule applies to all people as regards fathers and forefathers. If this were an acceptable way to salvation, everyone would be saved and all people would be safe! But this would do away with religion and make faith and unbelief equal. Infidels and idolaters follow in the tracks of their fathers, but they are not excused for it. [Their] following of their tradition does not save them from destruction and ruin.¹³⁰ So, save your souls from the torture of the fire and the wrath of the Almighty 'on the day when hidden thoughts shall be searched out,'¹³¹ veils will be rent, intercession will be of no avail, nor close friends, helpers, or protectors. Therefore it is incumbent on you to rid yourselves of prejudices that prevent you from turning to the Truth, and from the

well as all thinking men in general have agreed to consider right and commendable" (M. Perlmann, "Ibn Ḥazm on the Equivalence of Proofs" *JQR* 40 (1949–50): 279, 284).

¹²⁹ Sura 3:185.

¹³⁰ Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's reasoning is close to al-Maghribī's: ". . . we realize that reason does not oblige us to accept ancestral tradition without examining it as to its soundness, merely because it has been handed down from ancestors, but obliges us to accept tradition only if it be a verity per se, and if there is proof of its soundness. Mere reference to fathers and ancestry, however, is no proof. For if it were, it would serve all the infidel rivals as well. . . . Should it be claimed that emulation of the ancestors be correct only in the case of the Jews, this would not be accepted unless the Jews proved that their ancestors were wiser than those of other peoples. The Jews may make such a claim with respect to their fathers and ancestors, but all reports about their ancestors give the Jews the lie in this matter. Once we abandon partisanship in their favor, their ancestors are put on the same footing as those of other peoples" (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 103–4; English tr., 79–80, also quoted in M. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein [Cambridge, Mass., 1974], 115–16).

¹³¹ Sura 86:9.

causes diverting [you] from integrity, to remove the inclination towards the faith of [your] fathers and forefathers, and to turn to the Lord of mankind, striving to seek that which saves from torture on the Day of Return. This requires the beneficial spiritual exercise of the soul and its salutary struggle as God, the exalted, has said: ‘[As for] those who strive in Us, we surely guide them to our paths.’¹³² All revealed scriptures speak in this way, and it is mentioned by all the prophets who have been sent. All sound minds corroborate it and all penetrating, straightforward views lead to it. Turn to God in your beliefs and mend them; correct your deeds and save your souls; do not cause them to perish! No one is left with anything but his soul when his spirit separates itself and he descends into the grave. I do not want [to accomplish] anything with my speech except to advise you as much as I can, even though you do not like advisers.”

They said: “Your words are precious to us and we accept them. We seek Truth and we desire that which is right and truthful.”

He asked them: “What incited you to choose and prefer the Jewish over the Muslim faith?”

They replied: “The followers of [the monotheistic] faiths, namely Jews, Christians, and Muslims, agree about the prophecy of Moses, [about] the firm ground of his law, and the revelation of the Torah to him. They disagree regarding the prophecy of Jesus, the prophecy of Muḥammad, God’s blessings be upon him, about the Gospels, and about the Qurʾān. We chose that about which everyone is in agreement and refrained from that about which they disagree.”¹³³

He, may God the exalted sustain him, said to them: “Muslims believe in the prophecy of Moses and in the truthfulness of his mission because of the message of their righteous and reliable prophet [Muḥammad] and the fact that he [Moses] is mentioned in their book, the Qurʾān. Were it not for this they [Muslims] would not acknowl-

edge the prophecy of Moses and Jesus, or the Torah and the Gospels.¹³⁴ But you do not similarly accept the testimony of Christians and Muslims in anything. So, how can you admit their testimony, for they testify against you regarding idolatry and deviation from the truth? Thus there remains for you nothing except your own testimony in regard to yourselves, and it is of no benefit to you.”¹³⁵

They were perplexed by his clear words and by this eloquent and powerful assertion. They looked at one another and desisted for a long time.

Then ʿUzayr, a young man among them, said: “Dear sir, shall I give a short, useful speech by way of advice and out of affection? Listen and contemplate it and be fair; it shall be a proof against you.”

He replied: “All right; what is this speech?”

He [ʿUzayr] said: “In our scripture, that is to say in the Torah, the advent of a prophet after Moses [is mentioned], but he would be from among our brothers, not from the children of Ishmael.”¹³⁶

But he countered: “The Torah mentions this good news in chapter twelve of the fifth book, and its translation is: ‘Verily, the Exalted said to Moses: “I will set up for you,”—that is, for the children of Israel—“a prophet from among the sons of their brothers [who is] like you, so let them believe in him and listen to him.”’¹³⁷ And the brothers of the children of Israel are the children of Ishmael. Israel is Jacob, son of Isaac, the brother of Ishmael.¹³⁸ Therefore, the

¹³⁴ See above, n. 125.

¹³⁵ Al-Maghribi adduced this entire line of argument: “Should they [the Jews] say: ‘All the nations bear witness to our prophet, therefore the transmission [tawātur] is stronger in his favor; how can you say then that it is weaker?’ We [Muslims] should say: ‘Is the consensus of the nations’ testimony true in your opinion?’ Should they say yes, we say: ‘But the nations whose evidence you have just accepted are unanimous in declaring you unbelievers living in error; this is now binding upon you inasmuch as their evidence is accepted by you.’ Should they [the Jews] say, ‘we do not accept anybody’s evidence,’ they will be left only with the chain of transmission of their own community, which is the smallest community numerically, and their transmission and religion would, consequently, be the least sound” (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 26–27; English tr., 43). See also n. 130 above.

¹³⁶ Deut. 18:15 is often confused in polemical literature, or discussed in conjunction with Deut. 18:18–19 (Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 104–6).

¹³⁷ Both the reference and its Arabic translation are somewhat off.

¹³⁸ This is an old argument employed already by the Christian apostate ʿAlī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (ninth century) in his *Kitāb al-dīn waʾl-dawla*, tr. A. Mingana (London, 1923), 85ff.

¹³² Sura 26:69.

¹³³ The Jews speak here as if they had made a conscious, rational choice of faith rather than merely following the faith of their ancestors. This polemical topos was addressed already much earlier by both Jews and Muslims. Cf. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī’s (d. 1013) reply (in *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. R. McCarthy [Beirut, 1957], 160–90) to various Jewish claims, among them the assertion that Christians and Muslims accept the prophethood of Moses (cited in Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 151, no. 8), and the Spanish Hebrew poet Yehudah ha-Levi’s (d. 1141) argument regarding the general recognition of the Jewish scripture as a basis for the Khazar king’s investigation of, and eventual conversion to, Judaism (*The Kuzari*, tr. H. Hirschfeld, [New York, 1964], 44ff).

prophet who is promised is from the offspring of Ishmael. This is proof in our favor, not against us.”

Uzayr was greatly embarrassed, turned colors, bit his fingertips, and did not say anything after this. Then he [the Sayyid] returned to giving them advice. He said to them: “You know of my knowledge of your books and ways, and of my knowledge regarding the way of your forefathers and [their] successors. I wish to put an end to your excuses by removing your errors. If there is someone among you who is more learned than you are, go back to him, find out what he knows. Bring him to me; you have an entire year to do so.¹³⁹ But return to God and do not persist in your transgression.”

They said: “We believe in the prophecy of Moses through his brilliant miracles and manifest signs.” But he asked them: “Were you alive in Moses’ time and did you see these miracles and signs with your own eyes?”¹⁴⁰ They replied: “We heard about them.” Then he replied: “Have you not also heard about the miracles of Muḥammad, may God’s blessing be upon him, about his proofs, signs, and his evident miracles?”¹⁴¹ How come you believe the former and disbelieve the latter, despite the fact that Moses’ time is distant from you and Muḥammad’s is closer? It is well known that hearing differs in intensity and weakens, according to whether the time is close or distant. Whenever the time span is longer, belief is more difficult, and whenever it is shorter, belief is easier. As for us, the community of Muslims, we accepted both oral

traditions [of Judaism and Islam] and combined these two proofs; we believe in the prophecy of both prophets. We do not differentiate between any of [God’s] prophets and His scriptures, and we do not say, as you do: ‘We believe some of them and disbelieve others.’¹⁴² Praise be to God who guided us to this; we would not have been rightly guided had God not guided us. The prophets of our Lord brought the Truth.”

Then he [also] said to them: “If Abraham were to ask you: ‘Why did you abandon my religion and my faith? Why did you wind up in the religion and faith of Moses?’ What would you answer him?”¹⁴³ They replied: “We would say to Abraham: ‘You are the predecessor and Moses is the successor; the law (*ḥukm*) does not belong to the predecessor after [the manifestation of] a successor.’”¹⁴⁴

But he answered them: “What if Muḥammad said to you: ‘Why do you not follow my faith, since I am the successor and Moses is the predecessor?’ You have said: ‘The law does not belong to the predecessor after [the manifestation of] the successor,’ and I brought you manifest signs, brilliant miracles, and the eternal Qur’ān which endures through time. What would your answer be to this?”

Following this they desisted, became perplexed, and brought forward no [other arguments]. “Thus was the disbeliever abashed.”¹⁴⁵

He turned to their elder, saying: “I will ask you something. Tell me the truth, and do not say anything other than the truth. Have you tried to seek faith and acquire

Ibn Ḥazm also refers to it (Perlmann, “The Medieval Polemics,” 114), and al-Maghribī, commenting on Deut. 2:4, where the children of Esau are referred to as “brethren,” argues: “Now if the children of Esau were brethren to the children of Israel because Esau and Israel [Jacob] were the sons of Isaac, the children of Ishmael are likewise brethren of all the progeny of Abraham” (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 29–30; English tr., 45).

¹³⁹ The Sayyid appears more than a little displeased by the low level of argumentation presented by his Jewish opponents. There may be an implicit threat, rather than a gracious dismissal, in the year long “deadline” allotted to the Jews.

¹⁴⁰ See al-Bāqillānī’s similar argument in his *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, cited in Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 151, no. 5, and especially al-Maghribī: “By what do you recognize the prophethood of Moses? If they [the Jews] say: ‘By the miracles he performed,’ we [Muslims] say to them: ‘Have any of you seen those miracles?’ This is indeed no way to verify the prophetic mission; for it would follow that the miracles should be perpetuated beyond the lifetime of the prophet in order that every generation might behold the miracles and believe them . . .” (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 25; English tr., 42–43).

¹⁴¹ Cf. al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd* (Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 151–52, nos. 1 and 22).

¹⁴² Sura 4:150.

¹⁴³ This argument returns to the issue of abrogation. Ibn Ḥazm has clearly stated: *inna shari‘ata Ya‘qūb . . . ghayru shari‘at Mūsā* (M. Schreiner, “Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern,” *ZDMG* 42 [1888]: 654). Along the same lines, al-Maghribī maintains: “If it is possible that the law of the Torah should proscribe that which has been considered lawful by Abraham and others before him, then it is possible that still another law should declare lawful that which has been forbidden in the Torah” (*Iḥām al-yahūd*, 9; English tr., 35).

¹⁴⁴ This answer is most likely on the part of the Jews as it contains more than a touch of the concept of Muslim supersession of earlier revelations (Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies*, 192ff.), although it may, perhaps, allude to the halakic concept of *ḥalaka ke-batrai* (“the law is according to the last [most recent, authorities]”), which, of course, does not imply abrogation of a previous legal interpretation, but rather refers to the cumulative growth and development of a law that builds upon and amplifies the ideas of predecessors (*Ensiqlopedia Talmudit* [Jerusalem, 1959], 9: 341–45, s.v., “*ḥalaka ke-batrai*”).

¹⁴⁵ Sura 2:258.

knowledge and certainty since you reached maturity [i.e., the age when religious laws became obligatory for you] until now?" He replied: "In fairness, until now I have not been in this valley and [these arguments] never occurred to my conscience or to my heart. I chose the faith of Moses because he was our prophet and no proof was shown to us that would abrogate this prophecy. We have not examined the religion of Muḥammad closely nor

have we investigated it truly.¹⁴⁶ We shall contemplate this and shall bring to you news regarding what occurs to us in this matter."

With this the session folded, the discussion ceased, praise be to the God of the people of excellence and distinction. May blessings and peace be upon Muḥammad, lord of mankind, and upon the family of his pious, precious imāms.

¹⁴⁶ See above, p. 587.