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JEWISH POLEMICS AGAINST ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE LIGHT OF JUDAEO-ARABIC TEXTS

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I

Jewish Polemics in the Arabic Middle Ages is a complex phenomenon. In order to understand its nature and function properly, one needs to address it, first of all, as *polemics*. Moritz Steinschneider's approach is a case in point. Steinschneider was well aware of the existence of a general body of Judaeo-Arabic literature meriting separate treatment.[1] Yet, in his *Polemische Literatur* he avoided any such separate classification, treating books written by Jews against Muslims and Christians, by Christians and Muslims against Jews and also by Christians and Muslims against each other, as one body of literature.[2] One obvious reason for this procedure was the scarcity of polemical books written in Arabic by Jews against Christianity or Islam.[3] This was probably one of Steinschneider's main incentives for adding to his book a vast appendix on all the Jewish literature against Islam, hoping thus to make up for what was lacking in Arabic.[4]

There is however another justification for Steinschneider's unified treatment. The polemical literature forms one corpus not only as a literary genre used by all the participants in the polemics, but also in terms of content. In the triangular marketplace where Muslims, Christians and Jews set up their doctrinal booths, the arguments brought up in the discussion—both oral and written—served as currency, quickly changing hands. The exact value of a given coin can only be learned if one follows its course from hand to hand; the arguments may often best be understood in the larger context of the inter-religious debate in Arabic, and not only in Arabic.

Even the literary ingenuity of authors who use the polemical genre can be best evaluated if we see it in the broader context of Jewish-Muslim-Christian debate. Judah Halevi, for example, portrays the King of the Khazars as interested in Judaism only after he has both the Muslim and the Christian

[1] See M. Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1902).

[2] Idem, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache* (Hildesheim, 1966²).

[3] See *ibid.*, p. 4.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

spokesmen rely on the Jews for the affirmation of their claims.[5] This literary setting enables Halevi to deal briefly with Christianity and Islam, before settling comfortably into his main concern, the vindication of Judaism. This literary device, however, gains a historical perspective and credence when we realize, through non-Jewish polemical writings, that it was indeed common practice for both Muslims and Christians to turn to Jews for their witnesses against each other.[6]

In what follows I shall deal only with literary aspects of the polemics in Arabic,[7] and only with the Jewish side of these polemics. I shall, however, try to show that, even within these limits, for a proper understanding of the Judaeo-Arabic polemical texts the wider inter-religious polemical literature is a necessary background.

II

The striking scarcity of books in Judaeo-Arabic dedicated entirely to polemics with Islam has drawn the attention of scholars, and has received various explanations. The reasons most commonly mentioned are the need for caution when writing in Arabic against Islam, and the absence of the common scriptural ground that is necessary if such polemics are to thrive.[8] Both these considerations were, no doubt, important factors in the shaping of polemical literature. Maimonides's *responsa* provide us with explicit

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[5] *Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fi'l-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. D. H. Baneth-H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem, 1977; henceforward: *Kuzari*), p. 9:13–14.

[6] See, for instance, M. F. Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'émir des agaréens," *Journal Asiatique*, II série, 5–6 (1915), pp. 233, 251, 260–261; K. Vollers, "Das Religionsgesprach von Jerusalem," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* XXIX (1908), p. 37; and see now G. B. Marcuzzo (ed. and trans.) *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820* (Rome, 1986). On the limits of the Christian reliance on Judaism see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Christian *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition and the 'New Jew', a Polemical Characterization of Muslims in the Christian Apologies in Syriac and Arabic of the First Abbasid Century," forthcoming.

[7] There is no denying that oral polemics between people of various religions and beliefs were a common practice, and the *realia* of these discussions is reflected in our sources. See, for instance, al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadwa al-muqtabas fi dhikr wulāt al-andalūs*, ed. al-Tanjī (Cairo, 1352), pp. 101–102. Yet, wherever these disputations are used as the formal setting for a written polemical treatise, it becomes rather difficult to trust their authenticity; see, for instance, Vollers, *Art. cit.*, p. 32; G. Vajda, "Un traité de polémique christiano-arabe contre les Juifs attribué à Abraham de Tibériade," *Bulletin de l'Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes* 15(1967–1968), pp. 144–150. A more reliable documentation can sometimes be found in the occasional allusions to such encounters which are to be found in theological or philosophical writings. These allusions, made *en passant*, are less likely to be intentional inventions. (For examples of such allusions see G. Vajda, "La finalité de la création de l'homme selon un théologien juif du IX^{e} siècle," *Oriens* XV (1962), p. 68; Sarah Stroumsa, *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ's Twenty Chapters ('Ishrūn Maqāla)* (Leiden, Brill, 1989), pp. 248–251; L. Cheikho, *Vingt traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens* (Beirut, 1920), p. 68; Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī, *al-imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Beirut), p. 218:12.)

testimonies that these considerations were indeed present in the minds of Jewish writers. Even when writing in Hebrew, Maimonides cautiously limits his criticism of Islam to vague allusions. The precise nature of the Muslims' "error and folly", he says, "cannot be put in writing, because of the vile apostates."[9] And Maimonides categorically forbids any attempt to explain the scriptures to Moslems, who do not accept the authenticity of the Bible.[10]

Nevertheless, these considerations could perhaps be held sufficient to explain a total lack of written polemics against Islam; but they lose some of their force when we remeber that we do have a fair documentation of outspoken polemics with Islam, incorporated in apologetical, exegetical and theological works.[11] What is lacking is not polemics as such, but rather works whose single or main purpose is to attack Islam. Furthermore, as we shall see, the number of books written by Jews in Arabic and directed against Christianity is not substantially larger than the number of such books directed against Islam. The explanation for the lack of separate polemical works is therefore probably one that applies to both Christianity and Islam. In all likelihood this explanation should be sought in the situation of Judaism as a religion despised by both Christianity and Islam.[12] In its confrontation with the two dominating religions, the polemical energy of the Jews was mostly used for the purpose of apology, that is to say, the strengthening of their own

[8]M. Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970[2]), pp. 129–130; M. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in S. D. Goitein, ed., *Religion in a Religious Age* (Los Angeles, 1974), p. 122.

[9]*"Mi-pnei posh'ei ve-rish'ei Ysra'el"*, see R. Moses b. Maimon, *Responsa*, ed. J. Blau, vol. II (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 726. On this designation of the apostates, see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol. II (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971), p. 300.

[10]*Ibid.*, Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 284–285.

[11]To the sources listed by Perlmann, *ibid.*, pp. 137–138, one can add Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, pp. 6–9, 162–163; and Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. A. S. Halkin (New York, 1952). Oxford Ms. heb.d.62 fol. 8 is catalogued as "a fragment of a sermon in Arabic on the Sabbath" [A. Neubauer and A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1906), vol. II, p. 317, n• 2850, 3a]. Its actual subject, however, is the abrogation of the law, and specific references to Islamic *fiqh* leave no doubt that this fragment was also part of an explicit controversy with Islam. Another Geniza fragment which should be considered in this context is Cambridge T-S. N.S. 314.22: refuting the claims of the upholders of "the abrogation of the law and (those who claim that) it was falsified" (*naskh al-shar' wa-tabdīluhu*), this fragment also mentions "their book and its tradition" (*kitābuhum wa-khabaruhu*), probably a reference to the Qur'ān.

[12]The feeling that, although they shared with the Christians the official status of *dhimma*, Jews were, in fact, much inferior to the Christians, was shared by both Christians and Muslims. See Qur'ān 5:82; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Radd 'alā al-naṣārā* in *Thalāth rasā'il*, ed. J. Finkel (Cairo, 1926), p. 17; Nau, *art. cit.*, p. 37; Vajda, "Polémique," p. 147. The Jews themselves had no illusions about their inferior social status, as the *Kuzari*'s full title makes clear (see above, note 5).

theological position. Only in a few cases did Jews writing in Arabic turn to a full scale attack on Islam, or, for that matter, on Christianity.

Of these rare Judaeo-Arabic books which were, nevertheless, written against Islam, none is known to have survived. The Qaraite al-Qirqisānī (first half of the tenth century) tells us that he wrote such a book.[13] From the summary of its main points given in Qirqisānī's *Kitāb al-anwār wā'l-marāqib*, we learn that it dealt extensively with such matters as the Muslim allegation that the Jews had falsified the scriptures (*tabdīl*; *taḥrīf*), Muḥammad's prophethood and the Muslim dogma of inimitability of the Qur'ān, and the abrogation of the law (*naskh*).

The abrogation of the law is also the topic (and the title) of a book written by Samuel b. Ḥofnī (d. 1013). From Moses Ibn Ezra's account we learn that this book also argued against the Muslim claim of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz*).[14] And Ibn Bala'am's remarks show that Ibn Ḥofnī's *Naskh al-Shar'* contained digressions to exegetical discussions.[15] Most of the book is lost. The few existing fragments suggest that this book dealt with multiple aspects of the problem of *naskh*. These aspects included, obviously, polemics: against Karaites, against Christians, and probably against Islam.[16] But it could hardly be seen as directed mainly against Islam.

The most interesting of the lost Judaeo-Arabic works criticising the Qur'ān is usually considered to have been the one attributed to Samuel Hanagīd (d. 1056), the surviving fragments of which are to be found in a short treatise by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), entitled *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrila*.[17] The defiant style of this Qur'ān criticism seems, however, inconsistent with Samuel's usual prudence and has caused scholars considerable unease.[18] This unease has been expressed in various ways; from marvel at Samuel's exceptional boldness[19] to cautious persistence in calling the book "the alleged

[13] *Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-marāqib, Code of Karaite Law*, ed. L. Nemoy (New York, 1939–1943), pp. 292:8, 301:5–6.

[14] *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa'l-mudhākara*, ed. A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 36:40–38:3, and see Steinschneider, *Polemische Literatur*, pp. 102–103.

[15] See Harkavy, *Zikhron ha-Rav ha-Ga'on Shmu'el ben Hofni u-Sefarav*, p. 14, n. 20; p. 41, n. 114.

[16] I am indebted to Mr. David Sklare for the reference to these fragments, which he is preparing for publication.

[17] *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrila al-yahūdi wa-rasā'il ukhrā li'ibn Ḥazm*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Cairo, 1960). For the correct reading of ha-Nagīd's Arabic name see S. Stern, "*Letoledōt R. Shmu'el Hanagid*," *Zion* 15 (1950), p. 135, n. 2.

[18] See David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings; Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002–1086* (Princeton, 1985), p. 201.

[19] E. Ashtor, *Korōt ha-yehūdim bi-sefarad ha-muslemīt* (Jerusalem, 1966), vol. II, pp. 74–75.

Qur'ān Criticism of Samuel ha-Nagīd."[20] Others sought to solve the problem by attributing the book to Joseph, Samuel's more reckless son.[21]

But in fact this book was not written by Ibn al-Naghrila, Senior or Junior, nor was it written by a Jew at all. The book quoted by Ibn Ḥazm is actually the lost *Kitāb al-dāmigh* of the notorious ninth-century heresiarch, Ibn al-Rāwandī. A detailed demonstration of this claim would carry us beyond the limits of this paper: suffice it to say that a refutation of the *Kitāb al-dāmigh*, written by Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 915), was still available in the eleventh century. Excerpts from it are quoted by both 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025)[22] and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200),[23] and these excerpts enable us to establish that what Ibn Ḥazm quotes is indeed the *Kitāb al-dāmigh*, and that it was Abū 'Alī's refuation of the *Kitāb al-dāmigh* which served as Ibn Ḥazm's immediate source.

It is appropriate to ask how this book came to be attributed to Samuel Hanagid: One could, of course, argue that, following the model of the *Kitāb al-dāmigh*, Ibn al-Naghrila wrote his own refutation of the Qur'ān. But in view of his above-mentioned prudence, this does not seem a very likely possibility. Moreover, the construction of Ibn Ḥazm's work suggests his awareness that the real author of the refutation of the Qur'ān is not Ibn al-Naghrila, against whom the epistle is directed. If this is indeed the case, we would have to conclude that Ibn al-Naghrila/Hanagid never wrote a refutation of the Qur'ān.[24]

For our own purposes the identification of the real author of this refutation of the Qur'ān is somewhat unfortunate, since it reduces by one-third our already short list of anti-Muslim books in Judaeo-Arabic. But the new identification also has its advantage, for it enables us to re-define the borders of Jewish polemics with Islam. These polemics focused on Muḥammad's prophethood and on the Qur'ān in a general way. Ibn al-Rāwandī's book, in contrast, included juxtapositions of particular Quranic verses in the attempt to show that they contradicted one another. It also included derisive observations about minor details of the Qur'ān. Such

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[20]Perlmann, "Medieval Polemics," p. 109, and see also *idem*, "Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada," *PAAJR* 18 (1948–1949), pp. 280 ff.

[21]Iḥsān 'Abbās in his introduction to *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrīla*, pp. 7 ff.; Paul B. Fenton, "Jewish Attitudes to Islam: Israel heeds Ishmael," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 29 (1983), p. 91; this solution was apparently adopted already by R. Dozy, see his *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne* (revised by E. Lévi-Provençal, Leiden, 1932), vol. III, p. 70.

[22]*Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-'adl*, vol. XVI (Cairo, 1960), pp. 389:10–394:8.

[23]*Al-Muntaẓam fī ta'rīkh al-mulūk wa'l-umam* (Hyderbad, 1357), pp. 99–105.

[24]For a detailed analysis of the evidence see S. Stroumsa, "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Kitāb al-Dāmigh*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), pp. 767–772.

criticism would have been written only by an insider; it was beyond the scope of Jewish polemics against Islam, not so much because Jews would not dare to write it, but rather, because it was not something that would naturally occur to them as a polemical possibility.

III

As to Jewish polemics against Christianity, although not much more was written, more has survived, and in particular our documentation of the polemics from its beginnings is much better. These beginnings are in the ninth century, with the work of Dā'ūd Ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ.[25] His arguments against Christianity are to be found mainly in three of his books.

The first is *al-Radd 'alā al-naṣārā min ṭarīq al-qiyās*, of which we are fortunate to have a few Geniza fragments.[26] This is what might be called polemics in low style. It is a collection of fifty questions and answers, aimed at exposing the absurdity of Christianity. Some of these questions refer to minor details of the Gospels and of the Christian dogma and practice, in a derisive attempt to show their inner contradictions. The exposition is in a defiant, scoffing tone, which resembles that of Ibn al-Rāwandī's criticism of the Qur'ān. Now this is the style we have just referred to as criticism of an insider, and which we regarded as beyond the scope of Jewish polemics against Islam: why then was it not beyond the scope of Jewish polemics against Christianity? The explanation is to be found largely, if not entirely, in the person of al-Muqammiṣ himself. He had been a Christian, and, therefore, after his return to Judaism, was the perfect person to write this sort of virulent attack against his former religion.[27]

His second book against Christianity, the *Kitāb al-Ḍarā'a*, adopts the same aggressive stance, but in a much more sober tone. It reviews the history of Christianity and tries to demonstrate that Christianity was an invention of Paul and of Constantine, that it deviated from the path indicated by Jesus, and that it is full of contradictions. From the quotations of the *Kitāb al-ḍarā'a* in Qirqisānī's *Anwār*[28] we can get a fair picture of what the book was like, and

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[25]On al-Muqammiṣ's life and work see Sarah Stroumsa (ed. and trans.), *Dā'ūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ, Twenty Chapters ('Ishrūn Maqāla)* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

[26]One fragment (T-S. 8. Ka4[1]) was published by H. Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Geniza at Cambridge," *JQR*, O.S. 15 (1903), pp. 167–181, 677–687. The Cambridge Geniza collection contains another portion of the same manuscript (T-S N.S. 91.26), which is now being prepared for publication by Dr. P. Fenton.

[27]On al-Muqammiṣ's Christian period see Qirqisānī, *Anwār*, p. 44:10–16.

[28]*Anwār*, p. 47:15–16. See L. Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisānī's Account of Jewish Sects and Christianity," *HUCA* 7 (1930), pp. 317–397. Al-Muqammiṣ's view of the early history of the church, as well as some of his polemical arguments, are ultimately derived from Jewish-Christian criticism of Christianity (see S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," *PIASH* II (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 47, n. 176). This, again, can certainly be called "inner criticism."

we also have enough evidence to be able to conclude that it had a major influence on the development of Jewish polemics against Christianity.

More than a century ago, Leon Schlossberg has published an anti-Christian treatise in Judaeo-Arabic, entitled "The Account of the Controversy with the Bishop."[29] This publication is the (rather poorly done) reproduction of a Paris manuscript, which Schlossberg believed to be a unique copy of this work. But the Geniza collections contain quite a few fragments which clearly belong to this book.[30] The book was apparently quite popular in the Middle Ages: parts of it were incorporated into Ibn Kammūnah's comparative study of the three monotheistic religions,[31] and as early as the eleventh century it was translated into Hebrew.[32]

Schlossberg, who followed indications given in the treatise itself, believed the *Qiṣṣa* to be the Arabic version of a sixth century Syriac treatise. His assessment was not accepted, and the book is generally believed to have been written in Arabic. Its date and precise origin, however, remain uncertain.

The author of the *Qiṣṣa* accuses the Christians of corrupting the laws of Judaism, laws which were taught by the prophets and by which Jesus had lived. Like al-Muqammiṣ, he endeavours to expose the disagreement and contradictions within Christianity, and in particular, what he regards as the polytheistic implications of the Christian doctrines. Although I would hesitate to actually identify this book with al-Muqammiṣ's *Kitāb al-Ḍarā'a*, we can at least be certain that the *Qiṣṣa* contains many arguments, and perhaps whole passages, which are ultimately derived from this book. Perhaps we can adopt here the terminology of art-historians, and regard the *Qiṣṣa* as the product of "the school of the *Kitāb al-Ḍarā'a*".

Of al-Muqammiṣ's third book, the *'Ishrūn maqāla*, the greater part has survived, and it enables us to see a third level of polemics, namely, the integration of the polemical influence into the theology of Judaism. Al-Muqammiṣ's theology is laced with attacks on Christianity, yet in his exposition of his own views, he draws extensively from his Christian education. Fortunately for us, his borrowing is often rather wooden, so that it is easy to detect the Christian identity of his source.[33]

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[29] *Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Usquf*, ed. L. Schlossberg (Vienne, 1880), to which Schlossberg added a French translation entitled *Controverse d'un Evêque* (Paris, 1988).

[30] On the various fragments, and on the way they relate to each other and to the text published by Schlossberg, see S. Stroumsa, "*Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Usquf*: A Case Study in Polemical Literature", in J. Blau and S. C. Reif, eds., *Geniza Research After Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 155–159.

[31] Sa'd b. Manṣūr Ibn Kammūna, *Tanḳīḥ al-abḥāth fi'l-milal al-thalāth, Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths*, ed. M. Perlmann (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 57ff.

[32] On the Hebrew version, see Daniel Lasker, "Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Usquf and Nestor Ha-Komer: The Earliest Arabic and Hebrew Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics", *Geniza Research After Ninety Years* (above, note 30), pp. 112-118.

[33] See *'Ishrūn Maqāla* (above, note 7), pp. 27–33.

IV

Later Jewish theologians were also influenced by the polemical encounter, but, more skillful than al-Muqammiṣ, they took care to adapt their borrowings to the needs of Jewish theology. I would like to give one example of how this "polemical influence" was incorporated in the Arabic writings of various Jewish writers, but, before doing so, a few preliminary observations are in order.

Each of the three religions which participated in the debate had its traditional weak areas, particularly open to attack, which served as targets for the attack of the two other participants. Thus, the anti-Jewish polemics of both Christians and Muslims concentrated on a variety of features, which they saw as supporting their accusation of *tabdīl* (falsification of the scriptures by the Jews)[34] and on the abrogation of the law (*Naskh*); in the anti-Christian polemics of both Jews and Muslims, the main issue was the Unity of God; and when Christians and Jews polemicised against Islam their topic was prophecy.

In their refutation of Islamic prophetology, Christians developed a set of "negative attributes" of the true religion;[35] the true religion is the one that spreads without the aid of military force, of ties of kin or nationality, of the promise of worldly gains or of the appeal to human fancy. As we have already said, theological arguments were passed from one religion to the other, and were adapted by each religion to suit its own purposes. It is usually impossible to determine where a particular argument started. But the cluster of "negative atttributes" of the true religion represents a rare example of a polemical theme the exact origin of which can be established: It was conceived of by Christians for the purpose of refuting Islam, and it was also used occasionally to discredit Judism. We may briefly follow the influence of this set of "negative attributes" in the works of four Jewish writers:

(a) When al-Muqammiṣ sets out to prove the validity of Judaism, he bases his claim on a Christian list of this kind. He quotes the "negative attributes" from an unidentified Christian source, stopping after each attribute to show that it applies to Judaism. Here as elsewhere his adaptation lacks flexibility.

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[34]Maimonides in his *responsa* presents the accusation of *tabdīl* as specifically Muslim, and emphasizes the common scriptural ground which Judaism has with Christianity (*Teshūbōt ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Blau, Jerusalem 1958, vol. I, pp. 284–285). It should be noted, however, that in the heat of the debate with Judaism, Christians did not disdain the use of this accusation, regardless of the implication it might have for their own religion. See, for example, Qirqisānī's self-satisfied description of how he refuted such a Christian attack, *Anwār*, p. 220:8–17; and M. Perlmann, "Ibn al-Maḥrūma, a Christian opponent of Ibn Kammūna," in *H. A. Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), vol. II, pp. 641–665.

[35]See Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference* (Villanova, Pa.), pp. 63–87; S. Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theological Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985), pp. 101–114.

Thus we find him implying, for instance, that the true religion is one not confined to a single nation or to the speakers of a single language. For al-Muqammiṣ, this is a description which fits Judaism, since "this Torah exists in Syriac and Persian and Greek and Arabic."[36] He was obviously insensitive to the fact that this particular argument is one that can be far better employed in favor of Christianity and *against* Judaism.

(b) Later generations were more wary or, rather, better trained. Maimonides, in the *Epistle to Yemen*, also refers to translations of the Bible, enumerating Syriac, Greek, Persian and Latin.[37] Unlike al-Muqammiṣ, however, Maimonides is careful to specify the exact, narrow implication of the existence of these translations: They do not constitute proof of the veracity of the Bible in general, but they do serve to disprove the Muslim accusation that the Jews eliminated the references to Muḥammad from the scriptures, since they were all propagated long before the rise of Islam. In other words, Maimonides uses an argument fashioned by Christians, but he re-tailors it to fit his own requirements.

(c) Another use of the originally Christian description of true religion can be discerned in Ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara*.[38] After a brief reference to the Muslim dogma of *i'jāz al-qur'ān*, Ibn Ezra tells us that the rhetorical excellence of the Arabs was the cause of their success in conquering so many civilizations. Now the seductive linguistic beauty of a scripture figured in the Christian list among the *wrong* reasons for the religion's success. The *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara* addressed itself to a public to whom, no doubt, this argument was familiar. Thus when Ibn Ezra mentions Arabic eloquence as a cause of the success of Islam, he also reveals to his reader his actual thought about the religious relevance of Arabic rhetorical excellence, including the inimitable beauty of the Qur'ān.[39]

(d) The last example comes from Judah Halevi. In the first part of the *Kuzari* the King of the Khazars asks the Rabbi to tell him about the spread of Judaism. He explains his request by saying that every religion begins necessarily with individuals who fight to establish their views, or a king who forces his views on the multitude.[40]

The King's question reveals Halevi's awareness of an originally Christian argument against Islam. The King's question is an invitation to the Rabbi to say—as the Christians would of their own religion—that the spread of Judaism was not achieved by military force, or by any other of the wrong

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[36] *'Ishrūn Maqāla*, (above, note 25), pp. 268–269.

[37] *Epistle to Yemen*, p. 38.

[38] *Muḥādara*, p. 38.

[39] Ibn Ezra gives his reader another carefully camouflaged indication in the same direction. He claims that the prophets foretold the eloquence of the Arabs, and he supports his claim by quoting those biblical verses usually interpreted by Jews as referring to Islam (Dan. 8:23, 7:20; Isa. 42:11), none of which is very flattering (see *Muḥāḍara*, p. 38).

[40] *Kuzari*, p. 21.

means. The Rabbi's reaction to this invitation, however, is outright rejection: Only religions invented by human beings spread gradually. The divinely sponsored religion does not "develop" in any way. Rather, it is created in an instant, as is the world, by the sheer will of God.[41]

The Rabbi's answer suggests not only that Halevi was familiar with the set of negative characteristics of the true religion, but also that he was aware of its Christian origin. He knew that this set of arguments could be—and indeed was—also used to discredit Judaism. For this reason, then, Halevi, through the Rabbi's answer, defines the whole question of how a religion propagates as totally irrelevant.

This method of adaptation to the changing polemical milieu is very common for all the participants in the religious debate. Jews, like others, were alert to the development of new arguments by their opponents. When such an argument was perceived as potentially or actually directed against Judaism, it was not always considered wise to pick up the challenge; sometimes it was deemed safest to slip away. The elegant way of doing this consisted in reshaping or slightly rewording the presentation of Judaism, so as to render the opponent's argument inapplicable and irrelevant.[42] It is largely in this way that the polemical encounter with Christianity and Islam contributed to the shaping and development of Jewish theology.[43]

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

[42] That is to say, that Jews *would* "consciously rectify their position in order to avoid being molested ag: in," as did also Muslims and Christians; compare J. Van Ess, "The Beginnings of Islamic Theology," in J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla, eds., *The Cultural Content of Medieval Learning* (Boston, 1975), p. 99.

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