

Ibn Kammūna's and Ibn al-ʿIbrī's Responses to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs of Muḥammad's Prophethood

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Abstract

Two non-Muslim intellectuals who were active in Iraq in the seventh/thirteenth century, the Syrian-Orthodox Christian Abū l-Faraj ibn al-ʿIbrī, better known as Barhebraeus (d. 685/1286) and the Jewish philosopher Saʿd ibn Manṣūr ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284), were almost exact contemporaries. They enjoyed the heyday of their careers in the period following the Mongol conquest when the Mongols had not yet converted to Islam. This article explores some of the similarities in scholarly interests and activities of the two thinkers and takes into account the possibility that they knew each other's work. Both scholars wrote apologetic works partly devoted to disproving the Muslim claim that Islam superseded all earlier religions. In their responses to the Islamic proofs of Muhammad's prophethood, they focused on the work of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in particular, and there are clear similarities in the argumentation of the two thinkers against al-Rāzī's arguments, which are pointed out in this article, leading to the question of a possible dependency of the one work on the other.

Keywords

Ibn Kammūna – Barhebraeus (Ibn al-ʿIbrī) – Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī – Proofs of Prophethood – Islamic apologetics – Christian apologetics vis-à-vis Islam – Jewish apologetics vis-à-vis Islam

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Thanks to a number of studies that have appeared in the last decade a huge leap forward has been made in our knowledge of the lives and works of the seventh/thirteenth-century thinkers Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna. Abū l-Faraj ibn al-ʿIbrī, better known as Barhebraeus, ranks among the greatest scholars the Syrian-Orthodox community has ever known. He had three parallel careers: as a physician, as a scholar and as a high-ranking functionary in the Syrian-Orthodox church. His numerous books cover a wide array of topics, including philosophy, astronomy, physics, Christian theology and spirituality, grammar and history. After becoming bishop at a very young age, he became maphrian, the patriarchal representative for the Eastern territories of the church, in 663/1264, a position he held until his death in 685/1286.

Saʿd ibn Manṣūr ibn Kammūna, in turn, was a Jewish scholar from Baghdad who, just as Ibn al-ʿIbrī, was an outstanding man of intellect who combined several careers. Although much less is known about his life, from his honorific title ʿIzz al-Dawla (“Glory of the State”) we can infer that he was a high-ranking official in the Ilkhanid administration. As a scholar he produced works in numerous disciplines, the most important of which was philosophy. It was a field in which he was self-taught but in which he had considerable success, as can be inferred from the fact that his later works were commissioned by members of the ruling elite. His interests included logic, astronomy, physics, theology and poetry. His earliest dated works date back to the late 650s/1250s, after which a wide variety of treatises and commentaries followed until his death in 683/1284.

Both Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna were remarkably versatile thinkers whose works have aroused scholarly interest for centuries. Recently two meticulous ‘bio-bibliographies’ have been published which bring together all the findings of previous research and include extensive information about unpublished texts and manuscripts of their works, as well as their reception. In 2005 Hidemi Takahashi published *Barhebraeus: A Bio-bibliography*,¹ and in the following year Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke published an equally detailed and ground-breaking work about Ibn Kammūna entitled *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad: ʿIzz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) and His Writings*.² Increased attention to their respective legacies during the recent decades has led to a number of other valuable studies and text editions, and more studies are to appear in the near future.³ This progress in research helps to

1 Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005, henceforth abbreviated as: Takahashi.

2 Leiden: Brill, 2006; henceforth abbreviated as: Pourjavady-Schmidtke.

3 The editing of Ibn al-ʿIbrī’s massive scientific encyclopaedia *Cream of Wisdom* is an on-going

build a comprehensive picture of the world view and originality of Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna.

Until now, no comparative studies of the thought of Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna exist. It has rarely even been noted that they are almost exact contemporaries (they died in 685/1286 and 683/1284 respectively⁴) and that they had similar intellectual interests. One may surmise that one of the reasons why their works have not been compared, as yet, is the fact that Ibn al-ʿIbrī, being a Syrian-Orthodox who wrote most of his work in Syriac, is often seen as belonging to the Syriac-speaking world.⁵ It needs to be stressed, however, that although most of Ibn al-ʿIbrī's work was written in Syriac, he knew also Arabic and wrote in Arabic. Moreover, his choice of topics and sources, as well as his collaborations during his lifetime, show that he was a fully-fledged participant in the Arabic-speaking scholarly milieu.⁶

Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna enjoyed the active decades of their scholarly careers in the intellectually vibrant period of the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century.⁷ The Ilkhanid rulers, who as yet had not converted to

project that now goes back more than a century; see Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works", pp. 114f. The next part to appear is physics, by Jens Ole Schmitt (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). Ibn al-ʿIbrī's *Ethicon* appears in instalments, edited by Herman Teule (the first section: *Gregory Barhebraeus. Ethicon. (Mēmra I)*). Among the recent research on Ibn Kammūna, there is a study of his treatises on the soul: Muehlethaler, *Ibn Kammūna on the Eternity of the Human Soul*. In 2008, Ḥamid Nāji Iṣfahānī completed a new edition of his philosophical encyclopaedia *al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma*. A new edition of Ibn Kammūna's *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth* by Sabine Schmidtke is forthcoming, as is his commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, edited by Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke (see Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 61). A French translation of the *Tanqīḥ* appeared in 2012 as *Examen de la critique des trois religions monothéistes*, trans. Simon Bellahsen. Langermann, "Ibn Kammuna", consists of a useful overview of some of the major aspects of his thinking and it includes further recent bibliography.

4 Ibn al-ʿIbrī was born in 623/1226. Ibn Kammūna's date of birth is unknown. His scholarly career began in the 650s/1250s.

5 See for example: Langermann, "Ibn Kammūna and the 'New Wisdom'", p. 283; Langermann is, to the best of my knowledge, the only scholar who draws attention to Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna being contemporaries with similar interests. He does not make a detailed comparison between the works of the two men, as he categorizes Ibn al-ʿIbrī as a scholar writing in another language.

6 The Arabic version of his name is preferred in this article, so as to emphasize the Arabic side of his identity which is manifest in his role as a scholar in the Arabic-speaking scientific world. The Syriac form is Bar ʿEbroyo.

7 A useful historical overview of the period is Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*. For Ibn al-ʿIbrī's interaction with the Mongols, see idem, "Barhebraeus" and Takahashi, "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita".

Islam, sponsored scientific pursuits in which many fields of learning were promoted, such as medicine, astronomy, and logic. Ibn al-ʿIbrī and Ibn Kammūna are an illustration of the fact that in this scholarly world Muslims and non-Muslims shared a philosophical discourse that was not specific to Islam.⁸

With many of their contemporaries, Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī shared an interest in Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Kammūna wrote a commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt* (completed 671/1273),⁹ while Ibn al-ʿIbrī translated this work into Syriac (before 677/1278),¹⁰ a remarkable undertaking that is often highlighted as a prime example of Ibn al-ʿIbrī's contribution to the 'Syriac Renaissance', the period of the fifth/eleventh to the seventh/thirteenth centuries, during which Syriac Christians revived their learning and identity by creatively integrating Muslim, Christian and classical learning.¹¹ Moreover, his opus magnum *Cream of Wisdom* (*Ktaba d-hewat hekmta*) was modelled on Ibn Sīnā's *Shifāʾ*. His indebtedness to the more distinctly Islamic works of al-Ghazzālī is perhaps even more striking. Al-Ghazzālī's *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* served as a model for Ibn al-ʿIbrī's *Ethicon*.¹² Ibn Kammūna used it too for his ethical tracts *Kalimāt wajīza* and *Ithbāt al-mabdaʾ*.¹³ The commentary of the latter on the *Tahwīḥāt* of the then still relatively unknown Suhrawardī is another example of Ibn Kammūna's wide-ranging acquaintance with Muslim thought.¹⁴ Ibn al-ʿIbrī seems to have found inspiration with Suhrawardī for some of his poetry.¹⁵ A contemporary scholar, in whose thought Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī were both interested, was the philosopher and astronomer Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. between 660/1263 and 663/1265), a student of the polymath Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Yūnus (d. 639/1242).¹⁶ Ibn al-ʿIbrī translated al-Abharī's *Zubdat al-*

8 For an excellent description of the scholarly networks at the time and a detailed presentation of individual educational trajectories of the 7th/13th century scholars, see Endress, "Reading Avicenna in the *Madrassa*".

9 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 59–63; see below for Ibn Kammūna's excerpts from Nakhju-wānī's commentary on the work. There is also a work entitled *Ḥall ishkalāt al-Ishārāt* of which Ibn Kammūna's authorship cannot be confirmed beyond doubt; *ibid.*, pp. 128–129.

10 Takahashi, p. 70; Teule, "The Transmission of Islamic Culture".

11 Teule, "Barhebraeus and his Time"; *idem*, "La renaissance syriaque", *idem* (et al.), *The Syriac Renaissance*.

12 Teule, "Barhebraeus' *Ethicon*, Al-Ghazali and b. Sina".

13 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 26.

14 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 63–67.

15 Fathi-Chelhod, "The mystic story of childhood from Suhrawardī to Bar ʿEbrōyō".

16 Eichner, "Abharī, Athīr al-Dīn"; Endress, "Reading Avicenna in the *Madrassa*", p. 396 and *passim*.

asrār into Syriac.¹⁷ Ibn Kammūna used al-Abharī's *Muntahā l-afkār fī ibānat al-asrār* for his commentary on Suhrawardī's *Talwīḥāt*.¹⁸ They also both had an interest in their older contemporary Najm al-Dīn al-Nakhjuwānī. Ibn Kammūna excerpted his commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt* and made a summary of one of his works on logic.¹⁹ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, for his part, devoted an entry to him in the survey of important scholars in his chronicle *Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh al-duwal*.²⁰ Furthermore, Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī, as well as al-Abharī and al-Nakhjuwānī, were in contact with the famous polymath Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

The fact that Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī had these shared interests and that they were part of the same scholarly network calls for a systematic comparison of their works. Comparative studies could help us to better contextualize their works and to determine whether there were direct connections between them.²¹ An obvious starting point would be their philosophical encyclopaedias, Ibn al-ʿIbrī's *Cream of Wisdom* and Ibn Kammūna's *al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma*. That type of project goes far beyond the scope of this article. In the following I will restrict myself to one topic that reveals a particular closeness in thinking

17 The Syriac translation appears to be lost: Takahashi, p. 71, while the original has recently been discovered: Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus", p. 113, n. 10.

18 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 28.

19 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 27, pp. 85 f.

20 For Ibn al-ʿIbrī's entry on him, see his *Taʾrīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, pp. 272 f.; see also Micheau, "Biographies de savants dans le *Mukhtaṣar* de Bar Hebraeus", p. 269, who notes that Ibn al-ʿIbrī added this entry to a list he otherwise largely copied from Ibn al-Qifṭī.

21 Whether, besides being part of the same scholarly circles, they actually knew each other personally is hard to determine. Ibn Kammūna was from Baghdad and probably lived there until his escape to Ḥilla in 1280. The hypothesis that he lived in Aleppo (Langermann, "Ibn Kammūna at Aleppo," pp. 14–19) ought to be dismissed, since it is based on a text wrongly attributed to him (cf. Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 137 f.). Ibn al-ʿIbrī was from ʿEbrā near Melitene and became bishop of Aleppo at a young age, where he resided during the 1250s. As maphrian, his principal area of residence became the area of Mosul ('Nineve'), but he travelled extensively and spent significant amounts of time in Maragha, where he stayed at least four times and where he passed away in 1284. He also travelled to Baghdad several times, certainly in the summer of 1264/65 as well as Easter and the summer of 1276/77 (Takahashi, pp. 23–27). Ibn Kammūna's interest in astronomy (cf. Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 11, p. 84) and his contact with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī make it quite likely he went to Maragha, but unfortunately the sources do not give us enough insight (cf. Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 14).

between Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī. It concerns the question of the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood, as they had been presented and investigated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs of Prophethood

The philosopher-theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) is another major Muslim thinker who features frequently in the works of Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī. In this regard they are certainly not unique, since there was a trend of writing commentaries and super-commentaries on his œuvre which had been already set by al-Rāzī's students. His thought was the starting point for many intellectual endeavors for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.²² Ibn al-ʿIbrī used al-Rāzī's expertise in many fields for his own writings, even quoting extensive sections of it without further comments.²³ Ibn Kammūna studied a range of books by al-Rāzī on logic and *kalām*.²⁴

Although al-Rāzī was clearly an authoritative figure to them, Ibn al-ʿIbrī's and Ibn Kammūna's confessional identities made them look critically at al-Rāzī's discussions of Islamic apologetics. Al-Rāzī wrote a range of *kalām* works, which featured the standard topic of *nubuwwa*, prophethood. Much of the 'Proofs of Prophethood' literature of previous centuries had focused on the inimitability of the Qurʾān and Muḥammad's other miracles. When al-Rāzī began his career, as a classical Ashʿarite *mutakallim*, he subscribed to these conventional proofs. However, as his thinking progressed, he transitioned to a philosophical critique of *kalām*, and later, to a synthesis of *kalām* and *falsafa*.²⁵

22 See the articles by Takahashi, Awad, Schwarb and Swanson in the current issue of this journal.

23 Takahashi traced large sections from Ibn al-ʿIbrī's *Tegrat tegrata* as well as the *Candelabrum*'s Second Base to al-Rāzī's *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqīyya*; see his "Barhebraeus und seine Islamische Quellen" and "The Greco-Syriac and Arabic Sources". Al-Rāzī's *Mulakh-khaṣṣ fi l-mantiq wa-l-ḥikma* is a source of the *Cream of Wisdom*'s Book of Physics (Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works," p. 117, referring to the forthcoming work of Schmitt (see n. 3 above)). The *Muḥaṣṣal* was used extensively for the *Candelabrum*.

24 For Ibn Kammūna's acquaintance with al-Rāzī's *kalām* works, see further below; for his references to al-Rāzī's logic, see Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 27.

25 Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," p. 179. A strict chronology of his thought cannot be made in the absence of unequivocal dates of his works; cf. Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*,

Along the way, his views on what constituted the ultimate proof that Muḥammad's mission was God-given shifted considerably. Under the influence of Ibn Sīnā, he turned his focus to the notion of prophecy consisting in the prophet's perfect intellect that can grasp divine truths and that has a capacity to perfect others.²⁶

When Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī addressed the topic of Muḥammad's prophethood, they used al-Rāzī's reflections on this theme as their starting point. In the following I will discuss how they each responded to al-Rāzī's views on the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood, after which I will try to assess how closely related their responses are.

Ibn Kammūna on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs of Prophethood

Ibn Kammūna studied al-Rāzī's *kalām* during several stages of his career. Sometime before 667/1268 he wrote critical comments on al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-Maʿālim*.²⁷ Ibn Kammūna's acquaintance with a number of other important works of the genre by al-Rāzī, notably the *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn*, *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-mutaʾakhhirīn*, and *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, becomes clear when he compares some of the arguments in the *Maʿālim* to arguments presented in those other works.²⁸ In 670/1272 Ibn Kammūna made a selection of excerpts from Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's commentary on al-Rāzī's *Muḥaṣṣal* entitled *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, which the latter had produced in the preceding year.²⁹

Several works of al-Rāzī also feature in Ibn Kammūna's comparison of the apologetics of the three faiths, the *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth* (*Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths*, henceforth: *Tanqīḥ*), which he finished in 679/1280.³⁰ The first part of this work contains a theoretical exposé

pp. 7–11 with Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life," p. 344. Differences in tone and method may also be due to the variations in targeted audience; Street, "Life and Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī".

26 For the development of al-Rāzī's ideas about prophecy and Muḥammad's prophethood, see Abrahamov, "Religion versus Philosophy"; Griffel, "al-Ġazālī's Concept of Prophecy", pp. 106–113. See also Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-Allāma al-Ḥillī*, pp. 151–165.

27 Having found the critical questions to this work by Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī al-Qazwīnī (d. 675/1277), Ibn Kammūna copied them and added his own comments to al-Rāzī's and to al-Kātibī's work; Schmidtke/Pourjavady, *Critical remarks*, pp. xi f.

28 Schmidtke/Pourjavady, *Critical remarks*, pp. xii f.

29 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 79–83.

30 I refer to the edition of Perlmann, *Sa'd b. Manṣūr b. Kammūna's Examination* and his

explaining the characteristics of prophecy, which is an interesting amalgam of ideas on the topic by Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazzālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Maimonides. It is followed by three chapters in which Ibn Kammūna summarizes and critiques the basic doctrines and apologetics of Judaism, Christianity and Islam respectively. In the chapter on Islam, Ibn Kammūna presents six proofs for the veracity of Muḥammad's message: (1) the inimitability of the Qur'ān, (2) Muḥammad's disclosures of mysteries, (3) his miracles as recorded in *ḥadīth*, (4) his fulfillment of biblical prophecies, (5) his success in perfecting people's souls, and (6) the total of miraculous events, his character and his achievements. Ibn Kammūna refers to these proofs as general proofs which Muslims present, without referring specifically to al-Rāzī.³¹ Soon it becomes clear, however, that he predominantly uses al-Rāzī's *Ma'ālīm*, *Muḥaṣṣal*, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl* and *Arba'īn*. He often copies or paraphrases al-Rāzī's summary of a well-known *kalām* argument, together with al-Rāzī's critical evaluation of it. Since Ibn Kammūna does not clearly indicate where a section from al-Rāzī's works begins or ends, it looks at times as though the refutations of certain proofs stem from Ibn Kammūna, while in reality they are part of al-Rāzī's critical analysis of the demonstrative value of these proofs. This happens, for example, in the second proof concerning Muḥammad's miraculous ability to foretell the future and to reveal biblical stories and historical events unknown in his environment. Ibn Kammūna lists a series of counterarguments, arguing that soothsayers can also predict the future, that many of the Qur'ānic verses containing prophecies are vague, and that Muḥammad may have heard things about the past from Jews and Christians. All of these critical points are taken from al-Rāzī's *Muḥaṣṣal*. Ibn Kammūna, however, only explicitly refers to al-Rāzī when he mentions the latter's counter-counterargument to the intent that Muḥammad's disclosures about the unseen world are to be regarded as subsidiary arguments, while the prophethood of Muḥammad is first and foremost founded on the revelation of the Qur'ān to Muḥammad. In the final section about this proof, Ibn Kammūna advances his own points of critique, arguing that many of the biblical stories in the Qur'ān are incorrect, and that Jews and Christians in Muḥammad's environment probably did not point out the errors out of ignorance or fear.³² In other words, the proof, the

translation, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination* (together cited henceforth as Perlmann, ed./trans.). I have not seen the reissued edition by Lwīs Saliba (published by Byblos, Lebanon 2009; 2nd ed. 2010).

31 Perlmann, ed. p. 69, trans. p. 102.

32 Perlmann, ed. p. 90, trans. p. 132.

counterarguments as well as the counter-counterarguments belong to al-Rāzī, while the final evaluation of the proof is given by Ibn Kammūna.

A similar structure is found in the fourth proof which is the prior announcement of Muḥammad by earlier prophets. Ibn Kammūna lists al-Rāzī's objections to this proof, which he had raised in the *Muḥaṣṣal*: (1) the biblical verses allegedly containing references to Muḥammad are vague and (2) the allegation of the textual corruption of the Bible is untenable. After this Ibn Kammūna adds his own contribution to the discussion, by arguing that Jews and Christians would have objected when Muḥammad expressed the claim that certain biblical verses are prophecies about his mission. Therefore, he argues, they either did not hear Muḥammad say he was predicted in the Bible, or they pretended to agree with him for strategic reasons. In addition, he advances the hypothesis that verses containing the claim that Muḥammad was predicted in the Bible were added to the Qurʾān after Muḥammad's death. Unless the sound transmission of individual verses of the Qurʾān is confirmed these possibilities cannot be excluded, according to Ibn Kammūna. This is one of many instances in which Ibn Kammūna emphasizes that without sound historical data, proofs of this type cannot be decisive.³³ He reiterates that these potential objections caused al-Rāzī to regard the Qurʾān as the only decisive proof for Muḥammad's prophethood in the *Muḥaṣṣal*.

It is at the next proof that one can observe that Ibn Kammūna was well-aware of the shift in thinking on the topic of *nubuwwa* that al-Rāzī underwent. The discussion now proceeds to the claim that Muḥammad's perfection (*kamāl*) caused others to become perfect (*takmīl*). Muḥammad came to the true knowledge of God and converted others to it, thereby not only perfecting himself but also others. This means that he achieved the highest order of religious figures: the prophets. Al-Rāzī describes how Muḥammad's achievements during his mission were particularly impressive, because in the world around him people were completely astray: pagans were unethical polytheists, Jews held anthropomorphic views and distorted their scriptures, Christians erred with their belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation and also distorted their scriptures. Muḥammad turned all these people from darkness to light and was more successful than any previous prophet. Ibn Kammūna alerts his readers to fact that this was the argument that al-Rāzī gave most weight in his *Maʿālīm*, alluding thereby to the significant shift from the arguments in the *Muḥaṣṣal*.

33 For an analysis of his argumentative techniques undercutting the apologetics of all three religions, but especially Islam, see Roggema, "Epistemology as polemics."

In his rebuttal of this argument, Ibn Kammūna makes a point of listing a number of sharp criticisms. First of all—writing as a scholar in response to a scholar—he remarks that it is the learned, not the prophets, who are most able to perfect others.³⁴ Next, echoing a century-old polemical point against Islam, Ibn Kammūna goes on to argue that Muḥammad did not add anything to the knowledge about God beyond what the earlier religions had promulgated. His ensuing list of critical points seems, at first sight, quite random: (a) Jews cannot be accused of conceptualizing God in an anthropomorphic way; in Islam there is more discussion about God in human terms; (b) Christians, notwithstanding their belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation, maintain the unity of divine substance; (c) Zoroastrians do not teach that there are two Gods. Their peculiar sexual ethics and marital laws are not rationally unacceptable simply because most religions disapprove of them; (d) idolatrous cults still exist; their followers do not believe the idols are God the Creator—their idols merely bring them closer to God, just as the Black Stone does for Muslims.

These points are not as loosely connected as they may seem at first sight. They are part of Ibn Kammūna's attempt to disprove the claim that Muḥammad perfected the world in an extraordinary way. That claim can only be upheld if it is proven that the non-Islamic religions are not true submission to God. Ibn Kammūna's list of points is meant to make clear that Muslims have no obvious argument to prove that their religion is true submission to God, while the religions of others are not:

*If it is said that what non-Muslims do in their prayer, fasting, and other specific rites is no worship, for worship is that which is done in accordance with God's commands and is not abrogated by another religion, and that which the non-Muslims do does not come under this category, then we say that you cannot prove that it does not come under this category unless the prophethood of Muḥammad is proven first, and if you prove it by means of this [fact], you are in the throes of circular reasoning (*al-bayān al-dawrī*).³⁵*

34 Perlmann, ed. p. 99, trans. p. 145. It is quite striking that he places scholars on a higher rank than prophets, but he does not belabor this point, presumably because there is no need to compare the achievements of scholars and prophets in the current context, since the discussion is not a general one about prophethood, but one about the prophethood of Muḥammad in specific.

35 Perlmann, ed. p. 102, trans. p. 148 (with slight modifications).

In short, a proof based on the claim of bringing people from light to darkness cannot be valid unless it is proven that the darkness is such. Ibn Kammūna had already focused on this flaw in one of his critical comments to the *Maʿālim*.³⁶ There, too, he maintained that the progress from “untruth to truth, from lies to faithfulness, and from darkness to light” needs to be demonstrated before this argument can be accepted. He remarked there, as well, that al-Rāzī gave preference to this proof in the *Maʿālim*. Ibn Kammūna labels it as inferior to the classical *kalām* arguments.³⁷

The final proof which Ibn Kammūna discusses is a reiteration of the points made previously, given for their cumulative effect: so many wondrous things culminated in Muḥammad that one cannot have doubts about the origin of his mission: his miracles including his victories, his physical marks, his noble character and perseverance, his fulfillment of biblical predictions and his prophetic statements. The historical circumstances of his life prove that he did not have a religious teacher, yet his knowledge about the divine realm and about history was profound. This proof reflects yet another of al-Rāzī's works of *kalām*, the *Arbaʿīn*. Ibn Kammūna, in response, draws attention once again to the fact that many of the ‘facts’ of Muḥammad's life are based on unverifiable traditions. Alluding to the monk Baḥīrā,³⁸ he does not see grounds to dismiss the possibility that Muḥammad had a secret teacher and heavily criticizes the idea that Muḥammad was a model of moral and ascetic behavior.³⁹ People who believe in Muḥammad's prophethood on the basis of an overall picture do so on *intuitive* grounds, while the constituent elements of this proof can be refuted individually, as Ibn Kammūna had already done.

In the end, Ibn Kammūna does not claim to have given a refutation of Islam. He shows that its claims to truth cannot be verified. The chapter on Islam shows the depth of his knowledge of al-Rāzī's thought. Although it is not labeled as such, one could call the chapter a discussion of al-Rāzī's apologetics.

36 Schmidtke/Pourjavady, *Critical remarks*, pp. 97 f.

37 Schmidtke/Pourjavady, *Critical remarks*, p. 98.

38 For traditions about this alleged secret Christian teacher of Muḥammad, see Roggema, *Legend of Sergius Bahirā*, esp. pp. 190 f.

39 The strikingly negative statements about Muḥammad in this section are the clearest indication that Ibn Kammūna was neither a convert to Islam, nor a completely detached relativist making a fair comparison of the faiths, as has been claimed by some modern scholars.

Ibn al-ʿIbrī on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs of Prophethood

Al-Rāzī is also Ibn al-ʿIbrī's point of reference when he addresses Islam's critique of Christianity in his theological *summa*, the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* (*Mnarat Qudshe*, henceforth: *Candelabrum*).⁴⁰ Ibn al-ʿIbrī's reply to Islamic apologetics features in the course of his survey of objections to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. In this chapter he lists several 'heresies' that reject the doctrine of the Incarnation, the seventh of which is Islam. He lists eight arguments of Muslims against the Incarnation, the first seven of which revolve around the idea that this doctrine is rationally untenable. Ibn al-ʿIbrī's replies to these objections are brief and standard. The eighth objection from the Muslim side is based on the idea of the divine origin of Islam's critique of Christian doctrine: the Qurʾān explicitly rejects the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Qurʾān is truly of divine origin, because Muḥammad was the prophet of God. The proofs for his prophethood listed are the inimitability of the Qurʾān, the other miracles of Muḥammad, his character and conduct, and the prior announcement of his mission.

In this section one can hear echoes of the *Muḥaṣṣal* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. It is only within Ibn al-ʿIbrī's refutation of this eighth objection that we find an explicit reference to him. Ibn al-ʿIbrī's rejoinder is a brief but pointed refutation of Islamic apologetics. His argumentation is less refined and detailed than Ibn Kammūna's, yet it contains some polemical elements worth highlighting. He is apparently aware of discussions among *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* about the inimitability of the Qurʾān, and asks why some Shīʿī scholars consider this Muḥammad's only miracle, while others adduce other miracles and his life and conduct. Ibn al-ʿIbrī quotes al-Rāzī's list of proofs from the *Muḥaṣṣal* to illustrate his claim that Islamic theologians are not certain as to what the decisive proof of Muḥammad's prophethood is. He then advances a number of counter-arguments. Muḥammad's alleged virtuous conduct is not different from that of noble kings. The Qurʾān would be much more impressive if it had been pronounced by a non-Arab. In this respect, the Apostles' xenoglossy (described in the New Testament, Acts 2:1–13) is much more miraculous. It would also have been more impressive if the Qurʾān had been pronounced by someone who had never had contact with foreign scholars. With this brief comment Ibn al-ʿIbrī reveals that, just like Ibn Kammūna, he has the suspicion that Muḥammad

40 The fourth part of it, which will be discussed here, is to be found in Khoury, "Le Candelabre du Sanctuaire". For the other parts and relevant literature, see Takahashi, pp. 175–191.

met with religious teachers before his mission, and presumably he has also the monk Baḥīrā in mind.⁴¹ As for the prophecies in the Qurʾān about the future victories of the Muslim armies, Ibn al-ʿIbrī notes that:

All who want to incite their armies to fight make such promises; then, when they are accomplished, they are confirmed as true, and if not, they say that their time is not there yet.⁴²

The reason why this particular point is worth noting is because in the given structure of Ibn al-ʿIbrī's retort, this appears to be one of his arguments against the point made in the *Muḥaṣṣal*. Interestingly, however, the argument is already given al-Rāzī himself, in very similar wording.⁴³ What is also interesting is that Ibn Kammūna picked up the very same argument from al-Rāzī and likewise integrated it into his discourse without indicating the source.⁴⁴

In the final passage of his rejoinder, Ibn al-ʿIbrī treats the claim that Muḥammad's coming had been announced by the previous prophets. According to the Qurʾān, both the Torah and the Gospel make mention of his future mission and Jesus had specifically indicated that a prophet would come after him whose name was to be Aḥmad. Alluding to Qurʾān 7:157 and 61:6, this is how the biblical endorsement of Muḥammad's mission was presented in the seventh and final objection to Christianity in the *Candelabrum*.⁴⁵

Against your saying that his name is mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, we say: 'You heard this from the Qurʾān, while the Qurʾān is being confirmed by the veracity of his prophethood. So if his prophethood, in turn, is confirmed by the Qurʾān, then a vicious circle (*ḥudra*) occurs. Moreover, if his name were mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, it would not have been hidden to us.'⁴⁶

Ibn al-ʿIbrī continues the argument by dispelling the accusation of *taḥrīf*, textual corruption of the Bible. The fact that there are many different redactions of the Bible and that no version contains Muḥammad's name should be seen as an argument against the charge of *taḥrīf*, he argues. The accusation would only

41 See above, n. 38.

42 Khoury, "Le Candélabre du Sanctuaire", pp. 118 f.

43 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 152.

44 Perlmann, ed. p. 89, trans. p. 130.

45 Khoury, "Le Candélabre du Sanctuaire", pp. 112 f.

46 Khoury, "Le Candélabre du Sanctuaire", pp. 118–121.

be justified if some versions of the Bible included his name while others did not. This is in agreement with al-Rāzī's view on this issue, since he stated that the corruption of the Bible is to be excluded.⁴⁷ Although Ibn al-'Ibrī does not specifically refer to the fact that al-Rāzī maintains this, it is of course essential to Ibn al-'Ibrī's argument, for without the consent that the Bible does not contain prophecies about Muḥammad, his claim that this proof is based on circular reasoning would be invalid.

After finishing this part of the *Candelabrum*, Ibn al-'Ibrī wrote a shorter work that covers roughly the same themes but which is significantly shorter, entitled *The Book of Rays* (*Ktaba d-Zalge*).⁴⁸ Ibn al-'Ibrī repeated the accusation of circular reasoning. He also added an argument to the discussion of *taḥrīf*. He turned the accusation around and claimed that it is the Qur'ān which has been corrupted. He mentions the seven "readings" (*qirā'āt*) which "do not agree with each other", adducing the disagreements between the redactions of Zayd b. Thābit and 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd. He also mentions two *sūras* that have been abbreviated: "The chapter of the Cow consisted of 1285 verses at first, while now it has only 285 and the chapter of Divorce used to have 285 and now only 12".⁴⁹ These allegations go back to internal Islamic dissension about the transmission of the Qur'ān, to which Ibn Kammūna also alludes.⁵⁰ The accusation that parts of the Qur'ān had disappeared due to drastic redactions is a polemical point that was made by Christians as early as the second/eighth century. Ibn al-'Ibrī and Ibn Kammūna add the particular claim that they know how many verses have disappeared. According to Ibn Kammūna, Chapter 33 (*sūrat al-aḥzāb*) of the Qur'ān used to be as long as Chapter 2 (*sūrat al-baqara*).⁵¹ It is not known what their source for this is.

The *Tanqīh* and the *Candelabrum*: Connected?

With the rapprochement of *kalām* and *falsafa* that was stimulated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the discussion about what constituted Muḥammad's prophetic function precisely and how it could be proven to be true was revived. The philosophical theories about the possibility of prophecy and the necessity of prophecy had to be integrated with the demonstration of the prophethood

47 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 154.

48 Takahashi, "Bemerkungen".

49 Nau, "Deux textes de Bar Hébraeus", pp. 320 f.

50 Perlmann, ed. pp. 73–76, trans. pp. 109–113.

51 Perlmann, ed. p. 76, trans. p. 113.

of Muḥammad. The introduction of Avicennan concepts into the discussion led al-Rāzī, as he calls it, to move from arguments of 'that' (i.e. to prove that Muḥammad is a prophet) to arguments of 'why' (i.e. why did God send him?). He called this a preferable approach in his *Maʿālim*.⁵² His experimental thinking on the topic was not directed at non-Muslims, but, as we have seen, the latter contributed to the discussion by evaluating the various arguments. Comparing the critique of Ibn Kammūna with the critique of Ibn al-ʿIbrī, we see several similar arguments. One reason for this is the fact that they selected some of the stock arguments of Jews and Christians against Islam, which were already widely used in the third/ninth century, e.g. the accusation that Muḥammad received his scripture from a secret Christian teacher. Some other similarities are to be explained by the fact that they both decided to integrate those arguments in al-Rāzī's *Muḥaṣṣal* which could be used against the proofs of prophethood. Yet, they also added a new element to the discussion: the accusation of circular reasoning. Ibn Kammūna used it to dismiss the argument that the truth of Muḥammad's mission lies in the fact that he brought light to a world of darkness. Ibn al-ʿIbrī used it to critique the claim of the biblical foretelling of Muḥammad which, to Ibn al-ʿIbrī's view, stems from the Qurʾān only.

By pointing out this circular reasoning, Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī questioned the validity of a common rhetorical strategy in Muslim anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemic, i.e. that the alleged errors of Judaism and Christianity are somehow indicative of Islam's truth. An obvious question to ask is whether this points to a connection between the *Tanqīh* and the *Candelabrum*. It seems too much of a coincidence that, after five centuries in which that 'flawed' argumentation of Muslim apologists went unnoticed, two non-Muslims working in the same period and responding to the same work of al-Rāzī pinpointed the same shortcoming of Muslim apologetics. The most immediate hypothesis would be that Ibn al-ʿIbrī found inspiration in Ibn Kammūna's *Tanqīh*, which is much more elaborate than the *Candelabrum* with regard to the refutation of the proofs of prophethood.⁵³ This can be excluded, however, on the basis of chronology, since the relevant section of the *Candelabrum* was completed about a decade before the *Tanqīh*. It should be remembered, though, that Ibn Kammūna had already been working on al-Rāzī's *kalām* works in the years

52 Schmidtke/Pourjavady, *Critical remarks*, p. 96.

53 Ibn al-ʿIbrī may also have been acquainted with earlier Christian responses to al-Rāzī's thought, for example through the writings of al-Ṣafī Ibn al-ʿAssāl (see Awad's contribution to the current issue of this journal).

before, as can be read in his comments to the *Ma'ālim*.⁵⁴ Another historical detail worth bearing in mind is the fact that both Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī had contact with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who also wrote comments on the work of al-Rāzī at the time. The dates of their works, assuming they are accurate, hint at a possible interdependency:

	Ibn Kammūna	Ibn al-ʿIbrī	Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī
Before 667/1268	Comments to al-Rāzī's <i>Ma'ālim</i> ⁵⁵		
669/1271		<i>Candelabrum</i> Base 4 ⁵⁶	<i>Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal</i> ⁵⁷
670/1272	<i>Fawā'id min Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal</i> ⁵⁸	<i>Book of Rays</i> ⁵⁹	
679/1280	<i>Tanqīḥ</i>		

Within a period of two years, Ibn Kammūna, Ibn al-ʿIbrī and al-Ṭūsī each finished the works under discussion which deal with the writings of al-Rāzī. Ibn al-ʿIbrī finished the particular section of the *Candelabrum* in 669/1271, the same year al-Ṭūsī completed his commentary on the *Muḥaṣṣal*. In the following year, Ibn Kammūna edited his notes on al-Ṭūsī's *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, which points at the rapid circulation of al-Ṭūsī's work. Ibn al-ʿIbrī may already have written his *Book of Rays* in the next year, in which he added some more critical points about the Qurʾān.

The exact relationship between these works cannot easily be determined. There are no close textual agreements, in any event, except where both authors quote the *Muḥaṣṣal*. It is possible that the ideas voiced in these texts were

54 See above, p. 199.

55 For the dating see Pourjavady-Schmidtke, p. 77.

56 The date of the *Candelabrum* is often given as ca. 1267, but not all parts were finished at the same time. Base 4 refers to "approximately 1274 years" after Christ, and because Ibn al-ʿIbrī took 309 A.Gr. as his date of birth, he probably refers to 1271/1272 CE. See Takahashi, p. 91, n. 338. A slightly earlier date is given by Takahashi in the biographical part of this *Bio-bibliography*, p. 23, where 1581 A.Gr. is given as 1269/70 AD.

57 Daiber/Rageb, "Ṭūsī", El2, for this date.

58 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 79–83; the work survives (among others) in an autograph of June 1272.

59 This commonly accepted date is not entirely certain, but in any case it is before 1278; Takahashi, pp. 91–93, Takahashi, "Bemerkungen," pp. 419–422.

arguments that were in vogue and that the source of them cannot be traced. Ibn Kammūna refers to "debates" (*mufāwadāt*) in his time which led him to compose the *Tanqīh*.⁶⁰ Unfortunately we do not know with whom he debated, but we may speculate that Ibn al-'Ibrī was one of his interlocutors.⁶¹

Responses to Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-'Ibrī

It would be interesting to see whether Muslim scholars ever responded in detail to Ibn Kammūna's and Ibn al-'Ibrī's accusation of circular reasoning in the proofs for Muḥammad's prophethood. Both the *Tanqīh* and the relevant section of the *Candelabrum* were read and transmitted by Muslims. The *Tanqīh* exists in several Islamic manuscripts. It also elicited a response in defense of Muḥammad's prophethood that rehearses a number of traditional proofs, without addressing this particular issue.⁶² In the eighth/fourteenth century a fierce Christian response was composed by the Syrian-Orthodox author Ibn al-Maḥrūma.⁶³ The relevant section of the *Candelabrum* survives in an Islamic Arabic manuscript in the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul, Ms Ayasofya 2282, which contains an Arabic translation of the Syriac original. Despite the title written on the cover, *Risālat al-ḥujaj 'alā l-Naṣārā min qabl 'ilm al-kalām*, it lacks arguments refuting the Christian polemics.⁶⁴ Further research may uncover

60 Perlmann, ed. p. 1.

61 Ibn Kammūna mentions that he acquired some Christian texts from Christians, which he used to compare the creeds of the different communities. He refers to the version of the creed that the Syrian-Orthodox have ("the version I obtained from the Jacobites"; Perlmann, ed. p. 52, trans. p. 80), and it would not have been surprising if he had turned to Ibn al-'Ibrī for this, because Ibn al-'Ibrī in his role as maphrian was the person charged with maintaining relations with members of other communities, which means he was the most obvious person to contact.

62 Pourjavady-Schmidtke, pp. 228–244.

63 Ibn al-Maḥrūma, *Ḥawāshī Ibn al-Maḥrūma*; Roggema, "Jewish-Christian debate in a Muslim context".

64 The Arabic text differs from the integral translation of the *Candelabrum* made by Sergius b. Yuhannā b. al-Zurbābī in the late 17th century (for the manuscripts of this translation, see Takahashi, pp. 188f.). There is also a translation by the 14th century Syrian-Orthodox theologian Daniel of Mardin of the third and fourth part of the *Candelabrum*, in his *Book of Splendor*. On the basis of Sepmeijer's description of this unedited work (Sepmeijer, "The Book of Brilliance") it can be determined that Ms. Ayasofya 2282 is not this same

detailed responses from the Muslim side. In any case, the mere existence of these two texts in Muslim circles is yet another illustration of the close contact between learned members of the various confessional communities and of the interreligious dynamics that were aided by the unique linguistic situation, i.e. the shared knowledge of Arabic. Rather than speaking of the Jewish and Christian reception of Muslim theology—which suggests a one-way traffic of ideas—perhaps one ought to speak of Jewish and Christian *participation* in Muslim theology.

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