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THE THREE RINGS

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EPISTEMOLOGY AS POLEMICS:
IBN KAMMŪNA'S EXAMINATION OF THE APOLOGETICS
OF THE THREE FAITHS

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The second Abbasid caliph Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr, while searching for a convenient location for his new capital in the year 762 CE, found a fertile and well-situated spot on the Tigris where he built his 'City of Peace', later to be called after the village that had been there originally: Baghdad. Since the time of its foundation Baghdad was a city in which believers of the three monotheistic faiths lived together. Jews had inhabited Iraq for more than a millennium, and when Baghdad became the capital of the caliphate the exilarch made it his residence.¹ From the tenth century onwards the famous Talmud schools of Sura and Pumbeditha were practically run from Baghdad, and in the twelfth century no less than ten Jewish academies were operating in the city, as well as twenty eight synagogues.² Christianity was widespread in Iraq since the fourth century, and in the area in which Baghdad was built several monasteries already existed before the arrival of the Abbasids. They were gradually absorbed into the city when it expanded. The largest group was formed by the Nestorians, who instituted a patriarchate in Baghdad soon after its foundation, but there was a Jacobite presence in the city as well.³ The *lingua franca* was Arabic. Jews and Christians used it to communicate not only with Muslims, but also within their own community. At various stages the books of the Bible were translated into Arabic. Furthermore many texts in which Jews and Christians expressed and preserved their cultural and religious identity were written in this language.⁴

¹ Georges Vajda, 'Le milieu juif à Baghdad', *Arabica*, 9 (1962), 389-93.

² Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam. The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 78-79.

³ M. Allard, 'Les Chrétiens à Baghdad', *Arabica*, 9 (1962), 375-88; Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 75-77.

⁴ Short but useful introductions to Jewish and Christian writings in Arabic can be found in *Religion, learning and science in the Abbasid period*, ed. by M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham and R.B. Serjeant, (Cambridge, 1990); see chapter 26: Samir Khalil Samir, 'Christian

Baghdad remained the centre of the caliphate for five centuries, even though the Abbasid caliphs were only nominally in power from the mid-tenth century onwards. In the mid-thirteenth century much of the glory of Baghdad came to an end when the Mongols invaded and plundered the city and murdered al-Musta'şim, the thirty-seventh Abbasid caliph.

Ibn Kammūna: Life and Works

Sa'd ibn Manşūr ibn Kammūna, a member of the Jewish community of Baghdad and an acclaimed scientist and philosopher, grew up in this turbulent epoch and presumably witnessed the devastating Mongol conquest himself. It has been argued that the free spirit with which he wrote was partly due to Islam losing its status as state religion in the period after the advent of the Mongols. On the other hand, however, it deserves to be stressed that his scholarship testifies to the continuity of Baghdad's intellectual milieu. The conventional picture of a looted city, with libraries in flames, has to be adjusted in light of the wealth of Arabic sources that Ibn Kammūna uses in his works.

Ibn Kammūna was a well-respected member of society, as can be inferred from his honorific title 'Izz al-Dawla, 'Glory of the State'. Amongst the many different fields of his learning were chemistry, philosophy, theology, literature, and mathematics. His competency in these fields has been deduced from the titles of his works alone, as there are virtually no sources about his life. There is no definite catalogue of his works, but their number is said to be around thirty. They include handbooks on chemistry and on logic, a mirror for princes, a treatise on the immortality of the soul and several philosophical commentaries.⁵ One of his most important works in the field of philosophy is his commentary on Ibn Sīnā's well-known work *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*. Two of his philosophical works deal with Illuminationism, the school of philosophy

Arabic literature in the 'Abbasid period' (pp. 446-60), and chapter 27: Paul B. Fenton, 'Judeo-Arabic literature' (pp. 461-76). For Arabic translations of the Bible, see: Hava Lazamus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 111-29.

⁵ A list can be found with Ziai and Alwishah, but it is largely based on secondary literature and they indicate furthermore the possibility that single works circulate under various titles. See: Ibn Kammūna, *Al-Tanqīh fī Sharḥ al-Talwīḥāt. Refinement and Commentary on Suhrawardī's Intimations, A Thirteenth Century Text on Natural Philosophy and Psychology*, Critical Edition, with Introduction and Analysis by Hossein Ziai and Ahmed Alwishah (Costa Mesa, 2003), pp. 3-5.

founded in the twelfth century by the Iranian philosopher al-Suhrawardī. His groundbreaking work *The Wisdom of Illumination (Ḥikmat al-ishrāq)* contains an all-encompassing system of thought, in part an elaboration and in part a critique of Aristotelian and Avicennan philosophy.⁶ It views physical reality as an aspect of the Divine, with which it is connected through light. This is why Suhrawardī's thought was food for mystics, although it has been argued that his holistic philosophical system per se should be regarded as analytical rather than mystical. The first of Ibn Kammūna's works on Illuminationism, *al-Tanqīhāt fī sharḥ al-talwīḥāt*, is an extensive commentary on Suhrawardī's *Talwīḥāt*, and has recently appeared in an edition for the first time.⁷ The second work in question is his own Illuminationist exposé, dealing with logic, physics and metaphysics. It is known under two different titles, *al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma* and *al-Kāshif*.

Quite different is the subject matter of two comparable works in his oeuvre: the untitled treatise on the disagreements between the Karaites and Rabbanites,⁸ together with the work which is the subject of this paper: *The Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths (Tanqīh al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth*, henceforth: *the Examination*). In both of these works he juxtaposes well-established religious traditions and scrutinizes the way in which the adherents of the different faiths seek to demonstrate the exclusive truth of their own tradition. In the case of the *Examination*, he deals with the apologetic foundations of the three Abrahamic religions. In Western scholarship this has long been Ibn Kammūna's best known work.⁹ However, manuscripts of his commentary on Suhrawardī's *Talwīḥāt* outnumber those of all his other works, which leads us to believe that this work was historically his most widely read. It has been noted that in Jewish intellectual circles, both of his time and later, his thought has

⁶ For a short introduction to the school of thought, see: Hossein Ziai, 'The Illuminationist Tradition', in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols (London etc, 1996), I, pp. 465-96. The importance of Ibn Kammūna's contribution to Illuminationism is discussed on pp. 484-92.

⁷ See above, n. 5.

⁸ Leon Nemoy, 'Ibn Kammūnah's treatise on the differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites', *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 36 (1968), 107-65; edition: pp. 119-65; English summary: pp. 109-18.

⁹ Leo Hirschfeld already edited the chapter on Judaism in his *Sa'd b. Manşūr ibn Kammūna und seine polemische Schrift tanqīh al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth* (Berlin, 1893). Perlmann published a complete edition and a translation separately: Ibn Kammūna, *Sa'd b. Manşūr b. Kammūna's Examination of the inquiries into the three faiths. A Thirteenth-Century Essay in Comparative Religion*, ed. by Moshe Perlmann (Berkeley, 1967), and Ibn Kammūna, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths. A thirteenth-century essay in the comparative study of religion*, transl., intr., ann. by Moshe Perlmann (Berkeley, 1971).

The Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths

The Examination has often been hailed as a unique treatise for its time, both because of its commitment to deal with the apologetics of the three monotheistic faiths systematically and for the ostensibly unprejudiced way in which it was done. However, even a cursory reading reveals that it bears close resemblance to the type of treatises on prophethood that were written by Muslim theologians.¹⁵ From the earliest time when they began to formulate reasoned defenses of their faith, Muslim theologians applied themselves to the general question of how true prophethood could be defined, in order to form a groundwork from which they could demonstrate that Muḥammad had truly been sent by God as the final and most important Prophet.¹⁶ Establishing the so-called 'Proofs of Prophethood' was motivated by three different needs. First of all the genre sought to establish the validity of the Prophet's *Sunnā* as a source of Islamic Law. Secondly, it sought to demonstrate the existence of prophethood per se in face of the 'freethinkers' who attacked the whole concept of prophethood and claimed that it is at variance with reason and Divine justice.¹⁷ Last but not least, the enterprise was driven by the confrontation with Jews and Christians, who made a great effort to explain why they did not believe in Muḥammad's prophethood.

The majority of these treatises follow the method of Islamic scholastic theology, or *Kalām*. They are constructed in a dialectical format, in

¹⁵ Ibn Kammūna opens his treatise with a vow to fairness. That the treatise is nevertheless more critical of Islam than of the other faiths was already detected by Baneth; Dawid Hartwig Baneth, 'Ibn Kammuna', *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 69 (1925), 259-311. For a recent discussion that lays bare some more anti-Islamic aspects of the treatise, see: Simone Rosenkrantz, 'Judentum, Christentum und Islam in der Sicht des Ibn Kammūna', *Judaica*, 52 (1996), 4-22. On account of the polemical aspects of the work I strongly disagree with Niewöhner who considers it a truly objective and modern work. His interpretation is based on an imaginary dichotomy between polemic and reason. It is precisely the use of reason, in this treatise and all its antecedents, which drives the interreligious polemics in Arabic; Friedrich Niewöhner, 'Die Wahrheit ist eine Tochter der Zeit. Ibn Kammūna's historisch-kritischer Religionsvergleich aus dem Jahre 1280', in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter, proceedings of the 25th Wolfenbütteler Symposium (June 1989)*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 357-69.

¹⁶ The Mu'tazilites have been the greatest producers of treatises on this topic. The oldest surviving treatise of the kind is by al-Jāhiz (d. 865), but probably Abū 'l-Hudhayl preceded him (cf. Richard C. Martin, 'Inimitability', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 5 vols (Leiden, 2001 — ...) II, pp. 526-35, p. 532). For a discussion of the contents of a number of well-known treatises in this genre, see: Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 162-91.

¹⁷ See further below, n. 20.

had no tangible impact, as no quotations of his work have been found in Jewish sources. Of the *Examination* we do know that it circulated amongst Jews, however, as two of the five extant manuscripts are written in Judeo-Arabic.¹⁰

Before looking more closely at the *Examination*, I will discuss briefly what we know about Ibn Kammūna's life. Such a discussion cannot be anything but brief, because there are only two passages devoted to him in contemporary historical sources. One of these two passages deals with events surrounding the *Examination*. We are told that when its contents became known to the public, a riot broke out in the city between zealous Muslims and the judicial authorities.¹¹ The former wanted to have Ibn Kammūna condemned to death for insulting the Prophet, and they accused the latter of siding with the author. The hunger for revenge was stilled when Ibn Kammūna was made to disappear. He was taken in a coffin to the city of Hilla, where he died soon afterwards, in 1284.¹² The only other contemporary reference to him is made by Ibn al-Fuwaṭī.¹³ This chronicler confessed to having tried to contact Ibn Kammūna in what turned out to be the last year of his life, but all he received in reply to his written request was a brief poem containing an exhortation to keep wisdom away from the ignorant. The poem reads:

Ever guard your wisdom from the fool
And give nothing to the worthless as a rule
For he will reduce it to disdain, hatred and iniquity
The paucity of his mind will topple him foolishly
Guard it from him with all your might
And seek not profit from deficient ones outright!¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. xi-xii.

¹¹ Another type of response to Ibn Kammūna's treatise came in the form of refutations, of which at least three were written by Muslims, as well as one by a Christian in the form of critical annotations to the text. See: Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 8. About this Christian text, see my 'Jewish-Christian debate in a Muslim context: Ibn al-Mahrūma's Notes to Ibn Kammūna's *Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths*', in Vanstiphout et al (eds), *All those nations ... Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East. Studies presented to Han Drijvers at the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday by colleagues and students* (Groningen, 1999), pp. 131-39.

¹² The events are described in the annals entitled *al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi'a wa-l-tajārīb al-nāfi'a fi'l-mī'a al-sābi'a*. This work has commonly been attributed to Ibn al-Fuwaṭī and has been published under that name in Baghdad in 1932. However, many years later its editor, Muṣṭafā Jawād, stated that the attribution is unfounded. See: Habib Bacha, 'Tanqīḥ al-Abḥāt li-l-Mīlāl al-Talāt d'Ibn Kammūna', *Parole de l'Orient*, 11 (1971), 151-62 (p. 151, n. 1).

¹³ Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhiṣ majma' al-ādāb fi mu'jam al-aḥqāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā Jawād, 4 vols (Damascus, 1962-1967), IV, pp. 159-61.

¹⁴ The Arabic poem is printed in Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 113.

which a given revealed truth is vindicated by the refutation of its antitheses. The proponents of these antitheses are often left unidentified, because the *mutakallimūn*, the scholastic theologians, preferred to make real criticism look hypothetical. Jewish and Christian theologians writing in Arabic applied the same method and wrote about the same issues.¹⁸ Jewish theologians, like their Muslim counterparts, attempted to create a seemingly theoretical framework for the concepts of prophethood, revelation, and authoritative tradition, which ultimately served as a defense of the perpetual validity of the Mosaic Law. Christians instead were faced with the challenge of defending their conception of the Divine Being, as well as the factuality and the purpose of the Incarnation, but they also responded to Islam with a kind of 'Proofs of Prophethood' literature which defines reasons not to believe in a prophet.¹⁹ When Ibn Kammūna mingled in this triangle of interreligious debate he had the fruits of almost half a millennium of apologetic endeavor at his disposal.

Ibn Kammūna begins his treatise with a chapter in which he defines the phenomenon of prophecy, excerpting the views of major thinkers such as al-Ghazālī, Maimonides, Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. This introduction serves the purpose of limiting the discussion and demarcating the 'battleground'. The author attempts to demonstrate that prophecy, and the miracles which accompany it, are in principle possible. This means that those who deny prophethood, the 'freethinkers', who were a permanent thorn in the side of the apologists of all three of the monotheist faiths, do not need to be dealt with any further.²⁰ One notices the ironic fact that it is the consensus between the three faiths on this issue that helps the author to demarcate the arena in which he wants to play the three faiths off against each other. Ibn Kammūna's blunt assertion that

¹⁸ For an introduction to the history and methods of *Kalām* as well as its popularity amongst Jewish theologians, see: Haggai Ben-Shammai, 'Kalām in medieval Jewish philosophy', in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London and New York, 1997) 115-48. Wolfson's monumental study of *Kalām* is simultaneously a study of the theological interaction between Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Harry Austrin Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Harvard, 1976).

¹⁹ For example when a religion is spread by the sword or when there are obvious material grounds on which people convert to it. See Accad's contribution to this volume and Sarah Stroumsa, 'The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theological Theme in Arabic Theological Literature', *Harvard Theological Review*, 78 (1985) 101-14.

²⁰ Ibn Kammūna reviews and superficially refutes the principle objections to prophethood without mentioning whose ideas these are, but it is nevertheless clear that he responds to the polemic of Ibn al-Rāwandī and Muḥammad ibn Zakariyya al-Rāzī, who criticized prophetic proof based on miracles in particular; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam. Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, 1999).

true prophets always preach monotheism also betrays the fact that he is only interested in discussing the three major religions of his time. To demonstrate convincingly that true prophets are always sent by the One God would have been a lengthy task, but, again, it is the agreement between Judaism, Christianity and Islam which allows him to make this claim, and to do away with Zoroastrianism.²¹ The Zoroastrian tradition, which had a continuous presence in Iraq, only receives Ibn Kammūna's attention when it can support his argumentation, for instance when he wants to draw attention to the possibility of a multitude of people agreeing on error.²²

The author proceeds with an examination of the individual religions in separate chapters, organizing them according to the chronological order of appearance of the religions in history. Of each religion the basic tenets are given, after which Ibn Kammūna discusses how the various apologetic traditions defend them as being exclusively true. The critique of the defenses are often taken from earlier polemical sources, and in several instances Ibn Kammūna takes on the role of defending a faith that is not his own against polemical arguments from others. At times it is unclear whether an argument comes from Ibn Kammūna personally or whether he is drawing on an existing set of arguments. This is one of the reasons why there is disagreement amongst modern readers about how polemical Ibn Kammūna's intentions actually are. It is nevertheless clear that he brings the issue of the soundness of apologetic methodology to a head by scrupulously dissecting common strands of argumentation. Along the way one discerns the various tools which he uses for this purpose. For instance, he uses Islamic tradition against Islam²³ and Christ against Christianity,²⁴ and urges the apologists to apply to their own faith the standards which they use when judging others.²⁵ He furthermore has an

²¹ In comprehensive *Kalām* treatises the proof of the existence and oneness of God precedes the chapter on prophethood, so this particular point does not need to be proven anymore. See for example: *Dāwūd Ibn Marwān al-Muqammis's Twenty Chapters* ('Ishrūn Maqāla), ed., transl., ann. by Sarah Stroumsa (Leiden, 1989).

²² Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 91-92; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 135-36.

²³ For example when he points out that the most respected scholars of *ḥadīth* have transmitted interpretations of Qur'anic verses which endorse a physical conception of the divine being. Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 100; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 146.

²⁴ For example when saying that Christ did not call himself divine. Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 59; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 89.

²⁵ For example if Muslims harmonize the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an they should allow others to do the same; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 99-100; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 145-46.

unmistakable penchant for pointing out internal discord between believers who present themselves as united in face of other faiths.

One of the key features of the *Examination* is the author's focus on the decisive moments in history when God is believed to have guaranteed the veracity of the various religious missions, typically by means of miracles. This is not an approach specific to Ibn Kammūna, as miracles played an important role in the literature of the 'Proofs of Prophethood' from the beginning. Apologists considered miraculous events essential for the substantiation of the truth claims of their religions but were simultaneously confronted with the limitations of their persuasive value in any reasoned defense of a faith. In one way or another, prophetic miracles had to be clearly distinguishable from the miracles of saints and magicians. Another question was how the actual occurrence of a miracle could be of value to those who did not witness it. The latter challenge caused the apologetic cause to be closely tied up with the issue of verification of historical information. For this purpose *mutakallimūn* used guidelines that were produced by the scholars of Islamic Law, who tried to establish rules on the basis of orally transmitted reports about the Prophet.²⁶ Consensus of the community (*ijmā'*) about an aspect of the faith was one of the roads to certainty. Single reports, on the other hand, were accepted on the condition that they be transmitted by a number of eyewitnesses, through different channels, and that the possibility of conspiracy (*tawāṭu'*) be ruled out. According to most Muslim *mutakallimūn*, reports which had met these conditions constituted 'necessary knowledge' and were the equivalent of sense perception: hearing such a report about an event is like truly witnessing that event. In other words, the apologetic burden moves from the tradition in question to the audience, which is obstinate when not accepting it.²⁷ For example the reports about the miracles of Muḥammad were

²⁶ The ideas of a number of leading Islamic *mutakallimūn* about the verification of historical reports are surveyed in Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought in the classical period* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 137-58. The subsection on pp. 151-58 deals specifically with the question of miracles in relation to historical truth.

²⁷ A.J. Wensinck-[W.F. Heinrichs], 'Mutawāṭir', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, ed. by H.A.R. Gibb and others (Leiden, 1960-2002), VII, pp. 781-82. See also: B. Abrahamov, 'Necessary knowledge in Islamic theology', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20 (1993), 20-32. An excerpt of an eleventh century discussion of the views of several Mu'tazilites on the question of 'necessary knowledge' can be found in A.S. Tritton, 'Some Mu'tazilite Ideas about Religion, in particular about Knowledge based on General Report', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 14 (1952), 612-22. Saadya Gaon equally asserts that authentic tradition is 'as trustworthy as things perceived with our own eyes'; Saadia Gaon *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, transl. by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), p. 157.

regarded as 'known by necessity' by the Muslims *mutakallimūn*. To them it meant that people who heard these reports but nevertheless did not give them credence were willfully rejecting God's signs that indicated the truth of Islam.²⁸ It is therefore not surprising that these criteria for the verification of reports reverberated in the apologetics of Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians, when they responded to Muslim polemics.²⁹

The *Examination* is also filled with reflections on the question to what extent one's adherence to a faith can be said to be based on a true knowledge of historical events. In order to understand Ibn Kammūna's approach to the subject, it is useful to focus on the epistemological thread that runs through the *Examination* and to try to detect what assumptions about the verification of historical knowledge govern his thinking. The passages which have been chosen as examples here are meant to be good illustrations of Ibn Kammūna's epistemological concern. It is ironic that Ibn Kammūna, whose treatise revolves around this issue, does not introduce his readers to his assumptions about historical knowledge, as many other apologists do.³⁰ He refrains from putting all his cards on the table, and leaves it up to his readers to find out what they are.

Fragment I — On Christianity³¹

As for [the opponents] claim that the transmission of the miracles of Christ and their circumstances is unreliable and untrustworthy, because it was only transmitted by individuals, they may reply that those individuals performed more miracles than Christ and that the people who transmitted this about them were many, which means that the transmission is reliable. Their miracles were proof of the truth of the miracles of Christ, and moreover, they were really his miracles in essence and only accidentally their own, so it is more proper to attribute them to him rather than to them. This confirms that

²⁸ Cf. the section 'Fragment from 'Abd al-Jabbār's Refutation of Judaism' in Heemskerck's contribution to this volume.

²⁹ An interesting example is an anti-Jewish text, written by a Christian on intimate terms with the 'Abbasid rulers, in which it is argued that the consensus (*ijmā'*) of Christians and Muslim on the Messiah (*al-Masīh*) having come constitutes proof against the Jews; Bo Holmberg, 'A refutation of the Jews by Israel of Kashkar (d. 962)', *Parole de l'Orient*, 16 (1990-1), 139-47 (p. 141).

³⁰ For the epistemological introductions to theological treatises in Arabic, see: Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant. The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1970), pp. 208-19.

³¹ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 65-66; I have wanted to stay as close as possible to Ibn Kammūna's reasoning and have therefore made my own translations. Perle's translation is generally satisfactory, although he does not highlight Ibn Kammūna's use of *Kalāmīc* epistemological terms.

everything they have transmitted about him, as regards his miracles and other things, is sound, and from this it becomes clear that the truth of their religion will not be abrogated.

The truth is that we do not agree that what the companions of Christ have reported about his miracles constitutes reliable transmission inducing certainty, in the way the reliable transmission of the [companions'] existence and the existence of Christ and his crucifixion does. It is more like things that, once widely reported, become well known and hence appear to have been reliably transmitted, even if this is not really the case.

As for the idea that reason does not rule out that his miracles occurred by means of tricks or collusion, they claim to be certain that such trickery and collusion did not happen and could not possibly occur, and that there is no difference between these ones and the miracles of Moses, such as the separation of the sea, with respect to the impossibility of trickery. No one doubted the fact that the people whom Christ raised from the dead and cured had been really dead or ill, so they can infer the truth of these things from the fact that if there had been doubt about it, it would have become well known amongst his enemies at the time, Jews and others. If it had become well known at that time, it would have been transmitted. And since it has not been transmitted (instead some attributed it to sorcery, or to his being aided by the Devil or his knowing the Highest Name) it can be known that they were certain of the absence of tricks and collusion. This is convincing, but not leading to absolute certainty, although it may lead to strong belief after their reliable transmission has been accepted. But if it is supported by inspecting the totality of the circumstances of Christ and his companions, their asceticism and piety and endurance of great hardship in establishing their mission and in organizing their religion so thoroughly, then it can be known, from the sum of these pieces of evidence, that their cause depends on divine support and aid from the Lord.

Commentary

This fragment on Christian apologetics is taken from the end of the chapter concerned. In the preceding pages Ibn Kammūna rehearsed the major themes of anti-Christian polemic, well-known from both Jewish and Muslim sources, such as the discrepancies between the four gospels, the dissension about the creed, the lack of proof for Christ's divinity and the late invention of the cult of the cross. He then proceeds to give both existing and potential Christian counterarguments, followed by another round of refutations.

These oscillations, typical of *Kalām*, continue in the passage translated above. On the one hand Ibn Kammūna hypothetically rescues the transmission of the miracles of Christ by drawing attention to the Apostles' unmistakable corroboration of them, but then goes on to say that they

only appear to have been transmitted faithfully, an assertion which he does not underpin with further argumentation. Moving on to another standard criterion for the verification of reports, the exclusion of the possibility of conspiracy, he presents a Christian argument in which the Jewish polemic against the miracles of Christ is turned into an argument in favor of their being 'conspiracy-free'. Rather than underscoring the fact that others denied the divine agency, Christians can argue that the ascription of the miracles to something other than God (e.g. witchcraft) is a proof of their occurrence. With this he alludes to Jewish tales such as the *Toledot Jeshu* in which Christ's miracles are explained as the result of him having learnt God's Highest Name. Without any further discussion Ibn Kammūna grants that this argument is convincing and may lead to 'strong belief' but not 'certainty'.³² These are two epistemological categories, *ẓann ghātib* and *yaqīn* respectively, between which there is the difference that only the second is verifiable. He then rounds off the section with a rather general statement indicating that the life of Christ and the hardships and persistence of the early Church show signs of divine support. In other words, despite refuting the central aspects of the Christian faith, Ibn Kammūna leaves some space for a positive evaluation of Christianity, with which he creates a functional ambiguity that serves him in his evaluation of Islam. It reinforces his self-image as a fair and objective investigator and allows him to proceed to discuss Islam with the suggestion that no final judgment has yet been made about the true faith.

Fragment II — On Islam³³

Supposing that we agree to the reliable transmission of the Qur'anic 'challenge verses', we still do not accept that they really prove the challenge. Their purpose is, rather, the same as the custom of orators and poets who make many boastful claims during their orations and in their poems. If the purpose had been to prove his prophethood, then this would have become widely known in sources other than the Qur'an, just like his claim to prophethood itself has. However, no traditionist has reported that he demonstrated

³² Perlmann mistranslated 'convincing' (*iqnāʾ*) as 'an argument of the convinced', which is much more negative. All Ibn Kammūna means is that it does not lead to absolute certainty. According to Horten, a *dalīl iqnāʾī* is a 'Wahrscheinlichkeitsbeweis', as opposed to a *dalīl burhānī*, a 'demonstrativer Beweis'; Max Horten, *Die spekulative und positive Theologie des Islam nach Razi (1209) und ihre Kritik durch Tusi (1273) nach Originalquellen übersetzt und erläutert. Mit einem Anhang: Verzeichnis philosophischer Termini im Arabischen* (Leipzig, 1912), p. 233.

³³ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 76-78.

the veracity of his prophethood to his opponents by means of the Qur'an, nor has it been reported in regard to someone who believes in him that the belief of this person was on the basis of the Qur'an. Hence it is known that he himself did not rely on the Qur'an to establish his prophethood.

The reply: it is possible that the matter was made so widely known within the Qur'an itself that it rendered the urge to report it elsewhere superfluous, because there is little use in multiplying channels.

I say: this is weak, and its weakness will not escape anyone acquainted with the history, books and traditions about the Prophet and the way in which he summoned people to the faith as they turned to him, even though they had never heard a word of the Qur'an, let alone the challenge verses. The same counts for the way the believers amongst his companions summoned to the faith those who did not believe, both during his time and later. When he wrote to the Persian and Byzantine emperors and other rulers he did not include argumentation on the basis of the challenge verses in the Qur'an. His companions summoned to Islam those who had never heard of Muḥammad at all, let alone of the Qur'an, in general or in detail. It has not been reported about any of them that they mentioned the challenge of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an to them, nor did they affirm it to them by saying that the Arabs had been unable to present something like it, despite having ample motives for doing so and not being obstructed from trying it at all, as a way of proving the truth of Islam to those nations before fighting them and killing them. This was particularly important because most of these nations were non-Arabic speakers and could not become aware of the miracle of the Qur'an by just listening to it, just as we are not aware of it except by the assertion of it being the proof, even though we do know Arabic.

When the Muslims emigrated from Mecca to Ethiopia, fearing the people of Mecca, the Ethiopian king asked them about their religion, and it has not been reported that they said anything more than:

'O King, we were people of ignorance who worshipped idols, ate carrion, committed indecent acts, cut open wombs and wronged neighbors, while the powerful among us destroyed the weak ones. We acted like this until God (may He be exalted) sent us a messenger from our midst, whose origin, trustworthiness, faithfulness and virtue we knew. He called us to turn to God in order that we profess Him as one and worship Him and rid ourselves from the belief in the stones and idols of our forefathers, which excluded Him. He commanded us to do such and such....' and so on.

No argument about a miracle was advanced, neither the Qur'an nor any other. Yet, the usual course of things would require that it was being talked about, and that the reasons for transmitting and disseminating the details of the challenge would not differ with any of the groups or individuals, as was the case with things like the prophethood itself and the monotheist doctrine, even if the Qur'an already included them. Any sensible person will conclude that if it had happened it would have become widely known. In fact, two Mu'tazilite scholars Hishām al-Fuwafī and 'Abbād al-Ṣaymārī denied the challenge of the inimitability of the Qur'an. This is to be found in *Kitāb al-shāmil fī usūl al-dīn* by al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ḥaramayn, even though he was scornful of the two.

Indeed there is no doubt that a great amount of people converted to Islam on account of hearing the Qur'an and being affected by the stories of the Prophets, the admonitions, and the parables in it, as well as its way of inciting desire and fear, and the promise and warning it contains, and above all, its eloquence and peculiarity of style. As some people said: 'it has sweetness and grace about it, it is sublime speech unsurpassed', but without mentioning a challenge, in the way prophets challenge people with their miracles.

Commentary

This textual fragment about Islam begs for a more detailed discussion. It represents one of the critical questions in response to the first proof of Muḥammad's prophethood being advanced in this chapter of the *Examination*, the inimitability of the Qur'an. The section on the inimitability of the Qur'an is the longest of all, and covers about twenty pages, which is more than the entire chapter on Christianity.³⁴ The other five proofs of prophethood which follow are Muḥammad's disclosure of future events, his other miracles, his being predicted in the Bible, his personal perfection which caused many to suddenly find the truth, and lastly, the miraculous totality of these things.

In order to understand Ibn Kammūna's pointed discussion of the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an we need to discuss briefly how the *mutakallimūn* used it in their apologetics. Whereas the miracle of the Qur'an seems at first sight more tangible, and hence more convincing, than those miracles which involved an act in the past, the Qur'anic miracle turned out to be equally vulnerable in debate. As I mentioned before, one of the problems that emerged when miracles were used as proofs of prophethood is that they had to be distinguishable from miracles worked by others. This is why *mutakallimūn* postulated that a prophetic miracle is always to be accompanied with an explicit challenge of the performer to his audience to do the same.³⁵ In the case of the miraculous Qur'an, Muḥammad challenged the Arabs to present something similar, which could prove that he was not a prophet after all. Such challenges are voiced in several verses of the Qur'an. Had an imposter voiced such a claim he

³⁴ The Arabic text covers seventeen pages, the English twenty three, almost as much as the whole of the rest of the chapter on Islam; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 69-86; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 102-25.

³⁵ For the distinctions made by Muslim theologians between miracles of prophets and saints, see: Richard Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Theologien und Erscheinungsformen des Islamischen Heiligenwunders* (Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 41-58.

would have been punished by God immediately, and been contradicted by his people. But Muslim tradition testifies that no one even undertook an attempt to match the Qur'an.

This conceptual construction of the course of events killed three birds with one stone: the challenge distinguished the miracle of the Qur'an as a genuine prophetic miracle, the absence of attempts to match it circumvented the difficulty of subjective debates about the esthetics of the Qur'an, and furthermore avoided the problem of a potential match of the Qur'an at a future point in time, as the miraculous happened right there and then.

However, when the Muslims theologians had developed the idea that the inimitability had been proven by a phenomenon in the past (i.e. the lack of response of Muhammad's audience), the problem of reliable transmission reared its ugly head again. Ibn Kammūna is well aware of this and by means of critical questions he presses for a clear-cut testimony that may confirm the historicity of the utterance of the challenge. The passage translated above is the fourth query into this matter. Before discussing it, I will summarize which points Ibn Kammūna made in the preceding pages.

The fact that the Qur'an contains the actual challenge to Muhammad's environment is regarded by Muslims as the proof that the challenge occurred. Ibn Kammūna, first of all, points out that this is not sufficient and cites existing arguments against the particular proof. He advances the idea that since these verses are so important their transmission has to be confirmed in a more specific manner than just by saying that the whole of the Qur'an itself has been transmitted. He illustrates this point with anecdotes from Muslim sources that point at uncertainty with the early memorizers as to what belongs to the Qur'an and what does not. This implies that there was no clear consensus about the exact text in the period following the death of the Prophet. Only such a clear consensus could have prevented the insertion of non-authentic verses into the text, but according to Ibn Kammūna Muslim tradition shows that this clear point of reference did not exist. The argument is illustrated with a number of sensitive issues concerning the codification of the Qur'an, such as discussion about its two final chapters, divergences between the recensions, and contradictions in meaning amongst certain verses.

At this point, Ibn Kammūna puts forth the Muslim arguments in favor of the integrity of the Qur'an, but again adds fuel to the fire, adducing further citations from canonical *hadith* as a way to suggest that the collection of the Qur'an began only after the death of the Prophet, and that Muslims argued amongst each other about verses that dealt with the

succession to the Prophet, an allusion to the strife between Sunnites and Shiites. Next he mentions the episode of the so-called Satanic verses. He does not go into much detail about it but simply states that apparently people considered it possible that Satan would secretly add false verses to the Qur'anic revelation. The implication is that it cannot be maintained that all verses are necessarily from God, and that people did not immediately recognize the Qur'anic speech as something radically different.

This debate is followed by the passage that I have translated above: the fourth query into the miracle of the Qur'an. Again the crucial issue is transmission. Now it is conceded that the 'challenge verses' are indeed properly Qur'anic. But does this really reflect a historical situation in which the Prophet was challenging his audience? The argument put forth is that the challenge verses may well be purely rhetorical, especially considering the fact that the claim is not known from other sources than Qur'an itself. The hypothetical Muslim argument is that the Qur'an made the matter so well known that there was no need to report it elsewhere. This provokes another rebuttal by Ibn Kammūna personally, which is interesting from two points of view. First of all, we notice that he uses the agreed-upon conditions of the reliability of reports against Islam. Just as in the 'third query' he had argued that there was no consensus (*ijmā'*) about the transmission of the Qur'an, now he argues that there is no reliable transmission (*tawātur*) for the reports about the challenge. His point is that other sources do not give any glimpse of the Prophet boasting about his Scripture or defying his audience with it. This means that it is report coming through a single channel, the Qur'an, which therefore cannot be trusted. Furthermore, extra-Qur'anic sources hint at the fact that both the Prophet and his followers believed in the Divine origin of Islam for reasons other than the lack of response to the challenge.

A second aspect worth noticing is that the passage reveals Ibn Kammūna's thorough acquaintance with Islamic sources. The stories of the emigrants to Ethiopia and of the Prophet's letters to the Persian and Byzantine emperors are well known from the most famous eighth-century biography of the Prophet, the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq³⁶, but more astonishing is his reference to two eccentric ninth-century Mu'tazilite scholars, Hishām al-Fuwaif and 'Abbād al-Ṣaymārī, who denied that Muhammad had ever challenged his people.³⁷

³⁶ *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishaq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, transl. and ann. by A. Guillaume (London, 1955), pp. 150-53, 652-59.

³⁷ They did not accept the idea of the inimitability of the Qur'an as an apologetic miracle and were known for their extreme attachment to the notion of divine goodness; Josef

So much for Ibn Kammūna's personal contribution to the 'fourth query'. How does the discussion of the inimitability of the Qur'an continue? The main issue remains historicity. With every single query a further historical aspect is conceded. For example, the next query proceeds from the premise that there was a historical challenge, but that not everybody heard it. This again is followed by the suggestion that people heard the challenge but did not take it up, because they were distracted by warfare, or were not interested, or were fearful of the Prophet. These are all arguments known from earlier debate. Only with the 'thirteenth query' does Ibn Kammūna let his own voice be heard again.³⁸ His strategy resembles the one in the 'fourth query'. He adduces the Mu'tazilite debate concerning 'deflection'. This is the idea, proposed by al-Nazzām, that the inimitability of the Qur'an lies not in the speech itself but in God's incipitating Muḥammad's opponents when they intended to imitate it. Ibn Kammūna is exaggerating when he says that 'most of the Mu'tazila' adhere to this doctrine, because in fact the Basran Mu'tazila rejected it.³⁹ Be that as it may, he underscores once more the striking disagreement as to what constituted the miracle of the Qur'an. The sheer existence of this disagreement implies that the difference between Qur'anic speech and other types of speech is not self-evident, and that the miracle is therefore not known through 'necessary knowledge'.⁴⁰

All in all, it becomes clear that Ibn Kammūna has grave doubts about the greatest miracle of Islam. It is interesting to compare this fact with his more lenient attitude to Christ's miracles. He says, on the one hand, that they cannot be freed completely from the suspicion of collusion or illusion, but they are at least transmitted through multiple channels, the Christian and the Jewish, even if the Jews attributed them to witchcraft. For Muḥammad's miracle, by contrast, there are no external sources,

van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, 6 vols (Berlin, 1991-97), IV, pp. 1-44.

³⁸ In other words, among the fifteen queries there are three where Ibn Kammūna adds his personal views under a recognizable heading, those being the third, the fourth and the thirteenth. With the fourteenth he adds that his preceding points apply there too.

³⁹ Marūn, 'Inimitability', pp. 532-33. The author notes that some scholars of the Baghdad Mu'tazila and some Imāmī Shiites adhered to the idea in later centuries.

⁴⁰ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 83. In the translation (Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 122) the words 'necessary knowledge' have been omitted. The Karaites Yūsuf al-Baṣīr had a similar apologetic approach. He asserted that Moses's miracles and the validity of his Law are known by 'necessary knowledge', and that no new revelation has yet compelled the Jews by means of 'necessary knowledge' to abandon their Law; see the passage quoted in Martin Schreiner, 'Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft*, 42 (1888), 591-675 (pp. 650-51).

according to Ibn Kammūna. Christ's miracles are at least based on consensus (*ijmā'*), whereas the former are neither based on consensus nor reliable transmission (*tawātur*).

Reading through the whole of the *Examination*, one notices that Moses turns out to be the champion of thaumaturgy. His miracles involved great long-lasting natural phenomena, and can therefore not be attributed to illusion or collusion.⁴¹ Ibn Kammūna furthermore — using the criterion of *ijmā'* to the full — is well aware that they form part of the belief of all three religions. Is this issue the decisive factor then in Ibn Kammūna's evaluation of the religions? In fact, when we read the introductory chapter about prophethood, we realize that Ibn Kammūna does not think a religion stands or falls with its miracle record. Careful consideration of all pieces of evidence is needed.⁴² One of the reasons why miracles alone will not do is because so many pagan 'prophets' perform miracles too.⁴³ Another reason is the fact that people do not adhere to a religion purely on the basis of its miracles.⁴⁴ In other words, there are other, interrelated aspects which play a role, and Ibn Kammūna even points out that some people come to believe in a prophet through intuition (*ḥads*).⁴⁵ Moreover, some people may have sufficient expertise to judge a prophet, just as one can recognize a good doctor after having studied medicine.⁴⁶

The two parallel passages in which Ibn Kammūna sets forth the latter argument are, in a way, an apology for the whole enterprise of writing the *Examination*: expertise about prophecy can be decisive in one's belief in one prophet or another. This is undoubtedly a taunt to Muslims who say that the Jewish faith is only based on a blind following of forefathers, *taqlid*. Muslim apologists asserted that Jews have to face up to the fact that Islam is founded in the same way as Judaism and that if Jews accept the revelation to Moses they should equally accept the

⁴¹ They were numerous, lasted a long time and affected a large area. Furthermore the Jews witnessed the only case in history of Divine speech to humankind; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 24-25, p. 44; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 42-44, pp. 69-70. Both passages are inspired on Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* on which Ibn Kammūna relied for his description of Judaism.

⁴² Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 20; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 37-38.

⁴³ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 14; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 29.

⁴⁴ Part of Ibn Kammūna's argumentation remains implicit. The fact that people in reality often believe in prophets for other reasons does not mean that they are right, but the assumption is that within the community of believers in a true prophet there must be some who have come to believe in this prophet for other reasons than miracles.

⁴⁵ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 14; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 29.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 14, p. 20; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 29, p. 37.

revelation to Muḥammad. In the *Examination* one discerns the author's irritation with one of the Muslims who had claimed this, a convert from Judaism called Samaw' al al-Maghribī.⁴⁷ Ibn Kammūna's response is the other extreme of *taqlīd*; a very close inspection of the foundations of the religions.

At crucial moments in his exposé Ibn Kammūna returns to this question of the inspection of 'the sum of particulars'. The chapter on Islam finishes with a proof of prophethood based on the totality of Muḥammad's character, life, and achievements.⁴⁸ After already having refuted all the proofs in support of the idea that the miracles of the Prophet amounted to 'necessary knowledge', he proceeds to cast serious doubts on Muḥammad's life and character. He claims, for example, that it is very well possible that the Prophet received his religious ideas from people in Syria⁴⁹ when traveling there, and that he was anything but ascetic, having had nine wives while allowing the believers only four, and giving himself a disproportionate share of the booty of raids.

One notices the sharp contrast with the end of the passage cited above about Christianity. There Ibn Kammūna went as far as saying that the totality of Christ's life and the endurance and asceticism of his followers showed signs of divine support for their cause, and he left the matter at that. In the case of Islam, however, he presents the following Muslim reply: 'if you object to a proof based on totality because of its being a totality, we will claim 'necessity' (*al-ḍarūra*, i.e. its yielding necessary knowledge), unworried by your denial'.⁵⁰ Ibn Kammūna rejects that, saying that such a conviction is simply based on intuition (*wajh ḥadsī*) and cannot be verified. At this point Ibn Kammūna's position is more than clear. Islam cannot claim to have a foundation equal to that of Judaism and Christianity, let alone a superior one. A detailed investigation reveals an unreliable transmission and much internal dissension. An overall

⁴⁷ Samaw' al al-Maghribī, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 'Ifḥām al-Yahūd. Silencing the Jews', ed. and transl. by Moshe Perlmann, in 32 (1964).

⁴⁸ As Ibn Kammūna himself indicates, he is following the major works of the great theologian, philosopher and exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), whose 'proofs of Prophethood' vary considerably throughout his oeuvre. For al-Rāzī's gradual shift toward more philosophical proofs, see: B. Abrahamov, 'Religion versus Philosophy. The case of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs for Prophethood', *Oriente Moderno* n.s., 19 (2000), 415-25.

⁴⁹ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 105; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 153. He alludes to the traditions about the monk Bahīrā at several other instances, and in covert terms refers to the allegation of some Jews and Christians that this tutor-monk was eventually killed by the Prophet; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 70; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 105.

⁵⁰ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 107.

impression, on the other hand, cannot be verified. Other more casual jibes made by Ibn Kammūna include the point that Muḥammad did not add anything to knowledge of God,⁵¹ and that the Islamic Law is so severe that the authorities are compelled to apply it only partially, if they want to keep law and order.⁵²

That the book is animated by the rivalry between Judaism and Islam already becomes clear in the chapter on Judaism. Not only are all the quoted objections to Judaism stemming from Samaw' al al-Maghribī's attack on Judaism, but towards the end of the chapter Ibn Kammūna confronts the Muslims more and more openly, and writes: 'The Islamic Religion cannot exist unless it teaches the abrogation of the religion of Moses. That is why the Muslims had to impugn the transmission of the Jews'.⁵³ The chapter on Islam, for its part, demonstrates that Muslims do not have the goods to do that.

Ultimately, the book represents a prolonged attempt to show that there is no decisive factor in favor of Islam. This is also confirmed by its closing passage, where Ibn Kammūna once again opens up an old issue: the claim of each one of the three faiths that they will 'last until the Day of the Resurrection'. If Jews and Christians claim that their faith cannot be abrogated and yet this very thing happened, then how can Islam claim that it will not be abrogated, without contemplating the possibility that it will be at some time in the future? Muslim apologists have always argued that this is not an appropriate question, since the Prophet is explicitly stated to be the final Prophet in the Qur'an, whereas the Jews and Christians have no solid proof of the perpetual validity of their faiths. Jewish apologists presented verses from the Hebrew Bible in order to demonstrate the perpetual validity of the Mosaic Law, but they were faced with the challenge of Muslims that their Scripture has been falsified. Ibn Kammūna advances two alternative arguments in defense of the non-abrogatability of the Jewish religion. First: he finds an ingenious argument in favor of the perpetuity of the Mosaic Law, which is not dependent on Scriptural proof, drawing instead on the shared assumptions of Jewish and Muslim *mutakallimīn* about the nature of Divine command. The precise implications of Divine commandments were analyzed in many works of *Uṣūl al-fiqh* ('principles of jurisprudence') by means of comparisons

⁵¹ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 99; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 145.

⁵² Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 102; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 148.

⁵³ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 49; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 76.

with commandments expressed in human language.⁵⁴ Amongst the fundamental questions raised is how frequently a command should be obeyed and until when. Some *mutakallimūn* proposed that if no time-frame or frequency (a so-called 'absolute command') is given, it should be fulfilled only once, as it would be absurd to assume that if a master says to his slave 'go inside the house', that he should do it continually and forever.⁵⁵ This is what Ibn Kammūna refers to when he says:

Had Moses or Jesus announced that their Law was discontinuous, this would have been transmitted in the way fundamentals of their Law are transmitted and nobody would be able to deny it. And if either had commanded them in their Law in an absolute way, without specifying its temporality or perpetuity, their Law would not require acts except once, because an absolute command (*amr mutlaq*) does not require more than that. But it is well known that their Law is not like that.⁵⁶

The point which Ibn Kammūna is trying to make is that the continued observance of the Divine commandments in these two faiths constitute a present-day witness to the fact that their founders did command continued observance; otherwise believers would naturally have performed commandments only once. He finds what we might call alternative *tawātūr* proof, based on continuous worship rather than on the written word. Although Ibn Kammūna continues to refer to Judaism and Christianity together, his point in the end only strengthens the validity of the Jewish faith, because in reality Christians have also ignored the perpetual commandment of the Mosaic Law.⁵⁷ In other words, what appears to be an attempt to cast doubt on the validity of the Muslim claim that Islam

⁵⁴ I thank David Vishanoff (Emory University) for drawing my attention to the *Uṣūl al-fiqh* aspects of this final passage of the *Examination*.

⁵⁵ An example used in Abū Ḥusayn al-Basrī, *Kitāb al-mu'tamad fi uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. by Muḥammad Ḥamid Allāh, Muḥammad Bakr and Ḥasan Hanafi, 2 vols (Damascus, 1964-65), I, pp. 108-14. A Jewish treatise closely related to this Mu'tazilite text, Samuel Ben Hofni Gaon's *Treatise on the Commandments*, has an entry on such unconditioned commands, but unfortunately the text is lacking. We may surmise that the idea expressed was the same. David E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and his Cultural World. Texts and Studies* (Leiden, 1996), p. 25* (text), pp. 203-04 (transl.). Saadya Gaon had already devoted attention to such unconditioned commands and said that some Jews believe that they are valid until a further indication at a time which God has predetermined, but then added that others may therefore say that they are not a separate category. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 159.

⁵⁶ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 107.

⁵⁷ Ibn Kammūna regarded Jesus as a practicing Jew, so the abandonment of the Mosaic Law by Christians at a later date is obviously not regarded by him as being based on revelation. His view that it was Paul who began to alter Christ's religion conveniently coincides with the idea of Muslims.

will last until the day of the resurrection is at close inspection an argument in favor of Judaism.

The second point is an allusion to an argument presented earlier on. Muslims can only assert the abrogation of the earlier faiths by impugning their transmission, which they do of course, but in order for them to prove that their faith abrogates they first need to prove that their religion is true, because otherwise the disapproval of the transmission of the earlier faiths cannot be authoritative. A proof of Muḥammad's prophethood based on him having brought the world from total error and darkness to the true knowledge of God is a vicious circle, Ibn Kammūna claims, because one cannot designate other faiths as error when one has not yet proven one's own truth.⁵⁸

Concluding Discussion

A thorough reading of the *Examination* reveals Ibn Kammūna's skeptical and hostile attitude to Islamic apologetics. The issue of validity of transmitted reports, which was central in Muslim polemics against Judaism, is thrown back at the feet of Muslim *mutakallimūn*. Ibn Kammūna clearly indicates why he does not accept the Islamic 'Proofs of Prophethood'. Is that to say that the *Examination* is a refutation of Islam, or a defense of Judaism? There is no doubt that Ibn Kammūna, if faced with that question, would be the first one to acknowledge the limitations of the *Examination*. The refutation proceeds from the assumption that the 'three rings' could all be authentic. This is what gives the *Examination* the appearance of a 'fair' comparison. But Ibn Kammūna himself is aware of the arbitrariness of the assumption that one or more of these 'rings' could be authentic. All he shows is that if one accepts the criteria of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* Judaism turns out as the best candidate for authenticity, because it has the strongest basis of *ijmā'* and because most arguments precisely coming from the other two religions cannot stand if they do not apply them to themselves as well. That Jews can nevertheless not draw support from the other faiths does not escape Ibn Kammūna, precisely for the same reason, i.e. because he is well aware of the difference in validity between arguments presented by total outsiders and believers

⁵⁸ A point which he made in the fifth query; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), p. 102; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), p. 148. Or perhaps Ibn Kammūna alludes to the whole of his argument, i.e. that the superiority of transmission in Islam cannot be proven.

in one of the 'three rings'.⁵⁹ All that is argued is that *if* one accepts the standards of the *mutakallimūn*, Islam cannot prove its own truth and quite practically it means that Jews can fend off Islamic pressure to convert. In that sense the treatise is a defense of Judaism vis-à-vis Islam ('why I am not a Muslim', and not 'why I am a Jew'). This is not to say that Muslims are wrong in adhering to their faith, as Ibn Kammūna is well aware that *Kalām* is only one way to approach reality, and he does not attack the non-verifiable, intuitive, grounds on which people adhere to a faith.

To find out who Ibn Kammūna is once he steps outside the arena of *Kalām* is difficult to say. Looking at his other writings, one would say that he is more likely a detached philosopher, offended by the accusation that adherence to Judaism is irrational, than an observant Jew who wants to protect the Mosaic Law from Muslim critique. On the other hand, nothing speaks against the possibility that these were two parallel drives, stemming from different facets of his identity. Baneth's suggestion that Ibn Kammūna was pressured to convert is certainly gripping. One can also imagine that he was not defending his personal adherence to the Law of Moses but was rather driven by the urge to defend his community and his heritage against the self-satisfied polemics of Sunnite Islam.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (ed.), pp. 47-48; Ibn Kammūna, *Examination* (transl.), pp. 73-74.

⁶⁰ Baneth, 'Ibn Kammūna', p. 307. Baneth also suggested that Ibn Kammūna, in a Khuzari-like manner, tried to influence the Mongol rulers, who, at the time, had not yet converted to Islam.

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