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A Jewish Refutation of Samaw'al al-Maghribī's *Iḥām al-Yahūd*

An Annotated Translation

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Abstract

This article offers a contribution to the study of polemics between Muslims and Jews in the Middle Ages. It presents an annotated translation of the extant fragments of a reply by an unknown Jew to the polemical tract *Iḥām al-Yahūd* in which the mathematician Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175), who converted to Islam in 558/1163, virulently attacks his former religion. Samaw'al's tract had a significant impact both on later Muslim polemicists and on Jewish thinkers, who defended their religion against his strictures. The unique manuscript of the anonymous refutation, written in Judaeo-Arabic, is part of the Firkovitch collection kept at the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. It is included in a codex that also contains an incomplete version, in the same hand, of Samaw'al al-Maghribī's tract. While the codex can be tentatively dated to the fourteenth century and was presumably written in Egypt, we cannot know with any degree of certainty when and where the refutation itself was composed, nor whether the unknown author had access to a complete copy of Samaw'al's work. Although at times the author quotes *Iḥām al-Yahūd* verbatim, paraphrases and indirect references to Samaw'al's arguments are more common. In order to contextualize the unknown author's counterarguments, we provide a running commentary, including quotations of the passages from *Iḥām al-Yahūd* that are being refuted.

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Keywords

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1 Introduction

Since the publication of Moritz Steinschneider's *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache* (1877),¹ virtually every survey of polemical exchanges between Jews and Muslims has included a shorter or longer discussion of Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175).² This man, whose full name was Abū Naṣr Samaw'al b. Yaḥyā, was born into a Jewish family; by his own account, his father Yehuda b. Abūn was a rabbi.³ His *nisba* al-Maghribī refers to his father's North African origin rather than his own.⁴ He was born in or around 524/1130, presumably in Baghdad, where his father had moved from his native Fez. Samaw'al was already renowned for his writings in the fields of mathematics and medicine⁵ before his conversion to Islam, on Thursday,

1 Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, pp. 26 n. 8, 112, 321, 324, 326, 327, 329, 353, 397; *idem*, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, pp. 186–193, no. 149.

2 See, e.g. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics"; Boušek, "Entangled Arguments"; Adang and Schmidtke, *Muslim Perceptions*, Chapter 3; Mazuz, "Jewish-Muslim Polemics"; Marciano and Mazuz, "Writings of Jewish Converts to Islam."

3 Samaw'al describes the family background of both his parents in some detail at the beginning of his conversion account, referred to below. His main purpose in providing these details is clearly to show that he was steeped in Jewish religious learning and tradition from the very beginning, and thus possessed insights that native Muslim polemicists lacked. Mazuz, "How Knowledgeable was Samaw'al" emphasizes the polemicist's great familiarity with Jewish sources, Rabbanite as well as Karaite. We thank the author for making his article available to us before publication.

4 Samaw'al's father was also a minor poet, and some of his Hebrew verse has been preserved. See Schirmann, "Poets contemporary with Mose ibn Ezra," pp. 297–313; Bernstein, "Unknown piyyutim."

5 This earned him an entry in Ibn al-Qifṭī's (d. 646/1248) *Ta'riḫ al-ḥukamā'*, p. 209. The author of this biographical dictionary of physicians, philosophers and astronomers assumed that Samaw'al's father Yehuda was from al-Andalus and left with his son for the Mashriq. Of Samaw'al's mathematical writings, his *K. al-Bāḥir fī l-jabr* is best known. Among recent scholarship on the work, see Nadmi, "A Significant Step toward the Development of Algebra." For a discussion of his astronomical treatise *Kashf 'īwar al-munajjimīn*, see Van Brummelen, Mimura and Kerai, "Al-Samaw'al's Curious Approach," with additional references. Only one of his writings in the fields of medicine and sexology has survived, namely *K. Nuzhat al-aṣḥāb fī mu'āsharat al-aḥbāb fī 'ilm al-bāh*. In general on the author, see Firestone, "Samaw'al al-Maghribī," and Schmidtke, "Samaw'al al-Maghribī, al-," with further references.

9 Dhū l-Hijja 558 AH (8 November 1163 CE) in the Iranian city of Marāgha. He describes the motives for this change of religion in a lengthy conversion account that has been analyzed in several studies.⁶ Four years after taking this step Samaw'al wrote a refutation against his former religion entitled *Iḥām al-Yahūd* ("Silencing the Jews"). He later expanded the work and a revised recension was completed in 562/1167. Both recensions became very popular among Muslims, to judge by the many manuscripts of the work that have come down to us, as well as by the numerous quotations from it included in the writings of Muslim scholars of later generations.⁷

Iḥām al-Yahūd was also known among Jewish readers. The philosopher 'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. in or after 1284) refuted numerous objections raised by Samaw'al in his examination of the three faiths, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam entitled *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth*.⁸ It has been argued that Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) was familiar with Samaw'al's tract and replied to his polemical arguments in *Iggeret Teman* ("Epistle to Yemen").⁹ Critical remarks on Samaw'al's *Iḥām* are also included by Yosef Şambarī (d. 1700s) in his chronicle *Sefer Divre Yosef*.¹⁰ Moreover, the Firkovitch collection (National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg) holds fragments of a codex that contained a copy in Hebrew characters of Samaw'al al-Maghribī's *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, together with pages from a refutation of that work by an anonymous author.¹¹ That this

6 See Stroumsa, "On Jewish Intellectuals," pp. 191–196; García-Arenal, "Dreams and reason," pp. 94–98; 105–109; Husain, "Conversion to history"; Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, pp. 180–200. See also Schwarb, "A Polemical Treatise."

7 The first full-length study of *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, published in 1898, is Schreiner, "Samau'al b. Jaḥjā al-Maḡribī," which contains a summary of the work with an edition of selected portions. In 1964 Moshe Perlmann published an *editio princeps* and translation of the work that reflects the later recension of the *Iḥām* (Samau'al al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-Yahūd: Silencing the Jews*). This publication provided the impetus for many later studies. For the early recension of the *Iḥām*, see the edition by Marazka, Pourjavady and Schmidtke published in 2006. The introduction of this edition discusses the history and circulation of the text in great detail. Besides the two critical editions, the work was repeatedly printed in the Islamic world over the course of the twentieth century in non-critical publications, another indication of the continuing interest in the work's polemical contents. On quotations from and references to *Iḥām al-Yahūd* among Muslim authors of the pre-modern period, see Schmidtke, "Samaw'al al-Maghribī, al-"

8 An edition of this work was published in 1967 by Perlmann (*Sa'd b. Manşūr Ibn Kammūna's Examination*); an English translation by the latter (*Ibn Kammūna's Examination*) was published in 1971. On the author and his work, see Schmidtke, "Ibn Kammūna."

9 Mazuz, "The Identity of the Apostate."

10 See Schmidtke, "Samaw'al al-Maghribī, al-". For Şambarī, see also Martin Jacobs, "An Ex-Sabbatean's Remorse?"

11 Ms. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia (NLR), YA I 3020, 24 fols with 17 lines to a page, written in semi-cursive oriental Hebrew script (abbreviated in the following translation

author was a Rabbanite Jew is clear from the introduction, in which he invokes the authority of Rabbanite scholars such as Samuel ben Ḥofnī (d. 1013) and Ḥai b. Sherīrā Gaon (d. 1038) and identifies with “the community of the Children of Israel, the Rabbanites and the religious scholars” (*li-annanā ma’shar Banī Isrā’īl al-Rabbāniyyūn wa-l-aḥbār*). It is further corroborated by two margin notes containing lengthy quotations from a work by Sa’adya Gaon (d. 942), introduced as *le-Rabbenu Sa’adya*,¹² and from Daniel ben Moses al-Qūmisī (fl. end of the 9th, early 10th century), who is explicitly identified as a Karaite.¹³ Other than this, the fragments contain no indication as to when, by whom and for whom the refutation was composed, though codicological comparison with other materials suggests that the fragments are to be dated to the fourteenth century and were presumably written in Egypt.¹⁴ Since Samaw’al’s *Iḥām* and the refutation, written in the same hand, were bound together in the same codex, the reader of this codex had convenient access to the *Iḥām* when reading the refutation. Unfortunately, we do not know if the anonymous author had a complete copy of Samaw’al’s work at his disposal or only a set of extracts, nor do we know what was the extent of his refutation.

In the following, an annotated translation of the extant fragments of the refutation is offered. The principal purpose of the explanatory notes accompanying the individual passages is to show their connection to Samaw’al’s *Iḥām al-Yahūd*. In fact, without the extensive references to Samaw’al’s tract it would be difficult to understand the anonymous author’s composition. For greater clarity, the explanatory notes have been set apart from the main text. Direct quotations from *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, in the anonymous refutation as well as in the notes, have been italicized. At times the translation is inevitably tentative, due to the fragmentary state of the text. Moreover, the anonymous author refrains

as “B”). Ms. NLR, YA II 470 is an additional leaf originating from the same codex, containing most of the introduction to the refutation (abbreviated in the following translation as “G”). An edition of the fragments from Samaw’al’s *Iḥām* (in Judaeo-Arabic) on the basis of Ms. NLR, YA I 3020 was published in Chiesa and Schmidtke, “The Jewish Reception.” An edition, in Arabic characters, of the extant fragments of the anonymous refutation, which were in complete disorder, was prepared by Adang, Chiesa, and Schmidtke and is included as Text 7 in Adang, Chiesa, Hamdan, Madelung, Schmidtke, and Thiele (eds.) *Jewish-Muslim Intellectual History Entangled*, pp. 373–404 (with codicological details on pp. 47–51 in the Introduction). The present translation is based on this edition, which is readily available as the volume was published in Open Access. Folio numbers are indicated within the translation.

12 Ms. NLR YA II 470, fol. iv.

13 Ms. NLR YA I 3020, fol. 8v.

14 See p. 49 in the Introduction of Adang, Chiesa, Hamdan, Madelung, Schmidtke, and Thiele (eds.), *Jewish-Muslim Intellectual History Entangled*.

as a rule from quoting in full the passages he refutes and often only provides brief allusions, so that it is not always easy to follow his argumentation. He may have assumed that his readers were familiar with Samaw'al's work so that he did not feel the need to supply full quotations. Although the author by and large followed the sequence of Samaw'al's arguments when writing his refutation, there are numerous occasions where he diverges from this pattern. The passages we quote from Samaw'al's *Iḥām* generally follow the edition and translation by Moshe Perlmann, with small changes, whereby the first page number in the reference indicates the Arabic text and the second, separated from the first by a slash, the translation. For quotations from the Bible Perlmann used the King James Version, and with a few exceptions, so have we.

2 Annotated Translation

2.1 *Fragment I*

Fragment I begins in the middle of the author's introduction. It is uncertain how much text is missing prior to this fragment but it seems that much of the introduction has been preserved.

[...] | [G 1r] According to what [the author of *Iḥām al-Yahūd*] himself pretends, the refutation against the Jews extends to certain beliefs that he ascribes to them – though they do not constitute their actual belief –, reports that he invented, and fanciful conjectures regarding the way in which the texts of the Torah are to be understood. He waxed expansive, uttering grave defamations, and attributed shortcomings to the ancestors of the Children of Israel, who have been preferred above all beings.¹⁵

It would therefore have been highly appropriate to shun him and to avoid replying to him, because the opinions that he construed and [subsequently] refuted are not [our] beliefs. But when a group of Muslims became interested in reading this book of his, imagining his statements to be correct and having a positive opinion of his claims, it became incumbent upon us and a duty to take

15 “Who have been preferred above all beings” echoes the Qur’anic statement (Sūra 2, verses 47 and 122) “Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and that I have preferred you above all beings” (trans. Arberry). This verse was often quoted by Jewish authors polemicizing against Islam, sometimes interpreting it to suggest that God preferred the Children of Israel over the Muslims. See also Sūra 2, verse 40. Cf. Ahroni, “From ‘Bustan al-‘uqūl,” p. 327; Paudice, “On Three Extant Sources,” p. 222.

issue with this book, not in order to establish the proof for [our] doctrine and religion, but to dissociate ourselves from the beliefs that he attributed to us; to explain by ourselves that we do not follow the teachings that he claims we do, to expose his slander with respect to the Torah, and to clarify things whose meaning he did not understand and certain passages that contradict his statements in this tract [of his].

Samaw'al al-Maghribī opens his *Ifhām al-Yahūd* with a section entitled "Forcing them to admit abrogation" (*ilzāmuhum al-naskh*) [pp. 6–12/33–36] arguing that instances of abrogation occur even within the Torah. This is a well-known argument of Muslim polemicists against Judaism: once the Jews are forced to admit that the Mosaic law abrogated earlier legislations, such as the ones that had been revealed to Noah and Abraham, they must likewise accept that the Mosaic revelation can be abrogated in turn, and has in fact been superseded by the divine dispensation God conveyed to the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁶ The anonymous author counters as follows:

[At] the beginning of his discourse he claims that he has forced us to accept [the possibility of] abrogation | [G 1v] despite our views and the requirements of our doctrine, and he says that this is because our minds do not hold the abrogation of legal provisions to be possible. This is a false claim and the saying of someone who does not know our belief and has not consulted the books of our predecessors, the rational scholars of theology and legal hermeneutics (*al-mutakallimīn fī l-uṣūl*), like the head of the rabbinic academy Ben Ḥofni al-Hārūnī, Ibn al-Khashīsh, the head of the academy Hā'ī al-Dāwūdī and other *mutakallimūn*,¹⁷ for we, the community of the Children of Israel, the Rabbanites and the religious scholars (*aḥbār*), do not deny the rational possibility of the

16 See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 35–41; Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, pp. 192–222; Adang and Schmidtke, *Muslim Perceptions*, Chapters 8 and 13.

17 On Samuel ben Ḥofnī (d. 1013), gaon of the Sura yeshiva, see Shweka, "Samuel ben Ḥofnī Gaon." The gaon discusses the opinions of the various Jewish groups on the issue of abrogation in his *Kitāb Naskh al-shar'* with which our anonymous author may well have been familiar. On this work, see Sklare, *Samuel ben Ḥofnī Gaon*, pp. 28–29, no. 51 and *idem*, "Responses to Islamic Polemics," pp. 146–150. Hai b. Sherīrā Gaon belonged to a rivaling gaonic dynasty. He succeeded his father Sherīrā Gaon (d. 1006) as head of the Pumbeditha Academy and retained this position until his death in 1038. See on him Brody, "Hay (Hayya) Gaon." The identity of Ibn al-Khashīsh (or al-Khushaysh) remains uncertain. It is possible that the reference is to the eleventh-century Rabbanite scholar Ḥananel ben Ḥushiel of Qayrawan, on whom see Wechsler, "Ḥananel ben Ḥushiel."

abrogation of legal provisions, if these [original provisions and the abrogating ones] apply to two different times.

I shall mention to you some of the proofs for its [rational] possibility. Don't you see that it is not impossible that there should be a benefit in a command or a prohibition at a certain moment of time for the person who was given the command or the prohibition, although they imply a difference in the legal rulings depending on the category into which the act falls: is it beneficial or harmful, good or evil? And don't you see that it can be beneficial for a person to sit down in a specific place at a specific moment in time when there is no harm for him in it, and detrimental for him to sit down in this same place at another moment in time when it causes harm to him and sitting down does not produce any benefit like ...¹⁸

2.2 *Fragment 11*

The following fragment begins in the middle of the refutation of an argument adduced by Samaw'al in the section entitled "Compelling them to accept [Jesus'] prophethood and the prophethood of Muḥammad, peace upon them both" (*ilzāmuhum nubuwwatahu wa-nubuwwat al-Muṣṭafā 'alayhimā al-salām*) (*Ifhām*, pp. 24–27/42:13–44:3). Samaw'al starts out by arguing that if the Jews acknowledge the prophethood of Moses on the basis of uninterrupted reports about the miracles he performed, they must also acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus and Muḥammad who are likewise reported to have worked miracles. Moreover, Samaw'al continues, "[i]f anything, the transmission of evidence for the prophethood of Moses is weaker than that for the mission of Jesus and Muḥammad, since the evidence of the Muslims and Christians for the mission of Moses is based merely on the fact that their respective scriptures bear witness thereto; and their belief in his prophethood is derived from their belief in their own respective scriptures" (*Ifhām*, pp. 25:14–26:2/43:11–16). Samaw'al then touches upon the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān: "As to the miracle of

18 Although the text breaks off here, it is evident that our anonymous author maintains the characteristic Rabbanite position that from the rational point of view abrogation cannot be ruled out. On this issue, see, e.g. Boušek, "The Abrogation of Mosaic Law." While many Karaites deny the rational possibility of abrogation altogether, the Rabbanites, who constitute the majority of the Jews, hold abrogation to be rationally admissible while declaring it impossible on scriptural grounds. The above-mentioned Sa'adya Gaon argues against the possibility of abrogation on scriptural grounds; see his *Sefer ha-Nivḥar*, pp. קלא-קלה; *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, pp. 157–163. On Sa'adya, see Ben-Shammai, "Sa'adya Gaon." See on him and the other geonim referred to: Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia*.

the Qurʾān, its permanence, which is not essential as a reason for belief, is an additional advantage. Further, anyone endowed with a taste for eloquence will believe in the miraculous character of the Qurʾān, and do so as the eye-witness of a miracle and not merely as one who relies on hearsay. However, this is a stage not everyone can attain” (*Ifhām*, pp. 26:3–7/43:17–22). After addressing the issue of uninterrupted transmission, our unknown author first quotes verbatim Samawʾal’s line of argumentation, and then adds his riposte. The last part of the following section refers indirectly to the final part of the dialectical exchange adduced by Samawʾal, which reads: “*Should [the Jews] say, ‘we do not accept anybody’s evidence,’ they will be left only with the chain of transmission of their own community, which is the smallest community numerically, and their transmission and religion would, consequently, be the least sound*”. (*Ifhām*, pp. 26:13–27:4/43:29–33). The anonymous author’s reply reads as follows:

| [B 7r] ... according to a saying that is not sound and the transmission of others than ourselves, because what distinguishes it by its uninterrupted transmission is taken from individual men as well as from women. The second meaning that eluded him is that someone who testifies to the soundness of a certain book and to the fact that this book confirms the soundness of a certain report, thereby necessarily also testifies to the soundness of the report, and therefore he cannot say: I only testify to the soundness of the book but not of this report.

Now, when [the Muslim polemicist] realized the weakness of this statement, he said: “*Should [the Jews] say: All the nations bear witness to our prophet, therefore the uninterrupted transmission is stronger in his favor; how can you say then that it is weaker?*” Then he said: “*We should say [to them]: Is the consensus of the nations’ testimony true in your opinion? Should [the Jews] say ‘yes,’ we say: But the nations whose evidence you have just accepted are unanimous in declaring you unbelievers living in error; this is now binding upon you inasmuch as their evidence is accepted by you*” (*Ifhām*, pp. 26:8–19/43:23–29). This is a serious mistake on his part. For the objective [of giving evidence] is attained by a witness’ testifying in his report to what he has seen or heard, and he is not asked about his opinion as to what should be the legal ruling on the issue to which he testified, for this is a function of the soundness or unsoundness of his understanding, or of his injustice | [B 7v] or justice, not of his transmission. Thus one should pay close attention to the *words* of what he transmits, not to his *opinion*, like the judge does: he listens to what the witnesses say and accepts it, and he reaches his verdict without investigating their [personal] belief concerning the necessity of the law on that question [as to whether the law on this issue is binding or not], for this [opinion] does not influence [the judge]. Moreover, we

are obliged to accept what has been transmitted from our forefathers because it was conveyed to the multitude, even if we are the least of the two nations in number, whether they testify to its soundness or not.

The next chapter of Samaw'al's *Iḥām* to which the anonymous author replies is entitled "Section on what they tell of Jesus" (*faṣḥ fīmā yaḥkūnahu 'an 'Īsā 'alayhi al-salām*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 27–28/44–46). The passage in the work by the Muslim polemicist, which is based on Matt. 12:1–13 (and Luke 6:1–10), reads as follows: "They assert that [Jesus] was a scholar, not a prophet; that he used to heal the sick with medicines but made them believe that the improvement had set in through his prayer; that he cured a group of sick persons of their diseases on a Sabbath. When the Jews disapproved thereof, he said to them: Tell me, if a sheep of the fold fell into the well on a Saturday, would you not go down to it, thus permitting the breaking of the Sabbath rest to save the sheep? They said, 'certainly.' He said: Then why do you violate the Sabbath to save cattle, but will not do so to save a human being who is more important than cattle? Thus he silenced them, but they believed not" (*Iḥām*, pp. 27:9–15/44:5–14). In the same chapter in his book Samaw'al adds another story about Jesus that he ascribes to the Jews, and which is loosely based on the New Testament (cf. Matt. 12:1–4; Luke 6:1–5; Mark 2:23–24): "They also tell about him that he was on a mountain with some of his disciples, and they had no food, so he permitted them to gather herbs on the Sabbath. But the Jews criticized him for cutting herbs on the Sabbath. He said to them: If one of you were alone with people not of his own faith and if they, without any intention of breaking the Sabbath, ordered him to cut a plant on the Sabbath and to throw it to their draft animals, would you not permit him to cut the plant? They said 'certainly.' Then he said: I ordered these men to cut the plant that they might eat it and nourish themselves; not that they might infringe upon the Sabbath" (*Iḥām*, pp. 28/44:15–27). In his concluding comment in the "Section on what they tell of Jesus" Samaw'al argues that the incidents related before prove that Jesus abrogated the Mosaic law: "All this [was said by Jesus] in a gentle attempt to persuade their minds, which were not receptive to abrogation. Even if what they tell of this matter were true, it would perhaps refer to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus" (*Iḥām*, pp. 28:9–12/44:24–27). The anonymous author clearly objects to the fact that Samaw'al appears to quote the New Testament as proof of abrogation, when for the Jews this scripture is of no consequence whatsoever, and reacts to the Muslim polemicist's arguments as follows:

Then he claimed that we relate about the one whom the Christians hold to be the Messiah that he was healing the sick on a Sabbath, and that the Jews disapproved of this, and that he challenged them arguing that it is allowed to save a sheep if it fell into a well, which distorts the Sabbath. This is a report on which he contradicts himself, for our position is well known and recognized, namely, that we consider healing the sick to be obligatory, let alone that we should condemn it; rather, we do not prohibit it in a situation of [acute] danger and suffering.¹⁹ However, our doctrine does not allow breaking the Sabbath to save a non-rational animal. Moreover, we never related this about [Jesus].²⁰

As for his saying that we relate about [Jesus] that he was on a mountain with his group [of disciples], and they had no food, so that he permitted them to gather herbs on the Sabbath, and that the Jews criticized him, and that he challenged them | [B 8r] [pointing out] that it is permissible according to their doctrine to cut plants for animals that are in danger of starvation, this is also a fabricated story.

By my life, among the things that he related about [Jesus] that had come to his attention is that he gleaned corns of wheat on the Sabbath, [and this] not in a place where provisions were lacking or death was imminent, claiming moreover that [Jesus] was one of those upheld this revealed law and ordered its observance.²¹ Moreover, our permission to cut plants for the animals of those who are not of our religion is not absolute, as he imagines, but is rather

19 For a discussion of the positions in Jewish law on healing on the sabbath in the light of the New Testament, see Collins, *Jesus, the Sabbath, and the Jewish Debate*.

20 It should be emphasized that unlike Samaw'al, the anonymous author never mentions Jesus by name. If we have at times inserted his name, it is for clarification only.

21 This last comment, which has no parallel in the available editions of Samaw'al's *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, is based on Matthew 12:1–4 (with reference to 1 Samuel 21:4–7): “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?” The biblical passage was adduced by Ibn Kammūna in his *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth* as an argument against the Christians, as it proves, in his view, that Jesus did not claim to abrogate the Mosaic law; (cf. *Tanqīḥ*, pp. 48/74): “When the Jews blamed Jesus because one of his disciples gleaned and ate the corns of wheat on the Sabbath, he did not reply that the Sabbath had been abrogated but explained that the precept did not prevent one who had to eat from doing so, just as David, when needing food, was not prevented from eating from the Lord’s table, even though this was not permitted. Jesus adhered to the precepts of the Torah to the end, as did his disciples after his death. Only much later, when they had to mingle with the gentiles, did Paul stop them from complying with the precepts.”

limited to a situation in which there is a threat of death, and when it is feasible, as we have mentioned.

As for the abrogation of the Torah, [Jesus] never claimed this, neither at the beginning of his ministry nor towards its end, and his followers did not transmit this about him, despite the disagreements between their denominations. Rather, all of them maintain the eternal validity [of the Torah] and hold it to be binding, and they also claim to be acting in agreement with [its precepts]. For had [Jesus] maintained [the abrogation of the Torah], he would have contradicted his own claim to be the Messiah whom the former prophets have alluded to and who they announced would judge according to the law of Moses (peace be upon him), and about whom they have mentioned the conditions to which we have directed our attention | [B 8v] in this treatise. This renders void this man's saying that [Jesus] preached the abrogation of the Torah, and would gently persuade the Jews and their minds, which were [supposedly] not receptive to [the idea of] abrogation.

In the following, the unknown author deals with the section of Samaw'al's *Iḥām* entitled "An account of the verses and allusions referring in the Torah to the prophethood of our master Muḥammad the Chosen, may God pray over him and grant him peace" (*dhikr al-āyāt wa-l-ʿalāmāt allatī fī l-tawrāh al-dālla ʿalā nubuwwat sayyidinā Muḥammad al-muṣṭafā ʿallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 29–32/45–46). Samaw'al opens this section by quoting, in Hebrew, Deut. 18:18 ("I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee"), one of the most popular biblical verses adduced by Muslim scholars as predictions of Muḥammad's prophetic mission.²² He adds Deut. 2:4 to prove that "from among their brethren" in Deut. 18:18 can in fact also refer to non-Israelites, concluding that "if the children of Esau were brethren to the children of Israel, because Esau and Israel were the sons of Isaac, then the children of Ishmael are likewise brethren to all the progeny of Abraham" (*Iḥām*, pp. 30:2–4/45:19–21). Samaw'al moreover rejects the possible reply of the Jews that the prediction in Deut. 18:18 may refer to Samuel, maintaining that no new dispensation was revealed to that prophet. In countering Samaw'al's argumentation (see *Iḥām*, pp. 29/45), the anonymous author refers to

22 Deut. 18:18. On this and other Biblical verses interpreted as prefigurations of Muḥammad and Islam, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, Chapter Four; Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, Chapter Five, Part I; Adang and Schmidtke, *Muslim Perceptions*, Chapters 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15 and *passim*.

Deut. 18:9–15, which contextualizes and defangs the alleged proof-text.²³ His reference to knowledge of the unseen may echo Deut. 29:29: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” The author’s statement, towards the end of the section, that the biblical prophets traveled in search of knowledge and with the purpose of guiding the people, not in order to institute a law, emphasizes that no new legislation was brought by any Israelite prophet after Moses, let alone by Jesus or Muḥammad. Towards the end of the passage, the lower margin of Ms. YA I 3020, fol. 24 is heavily damaged and the remainder of our author’s rebuttal cannot be fully reconstructed.

He further adduced as evidence the saying of God (exalted is He) in the Torah concerning the Children of Israel: “I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee,²⁴ etcera”, arguing that there must inevitably rise a prophet from among the Children of *Ishmael* who will command the Children of *Israel* to follow a revealed law other than this one [i.e., the Torah].

His mistake with regard to this proof-text is obvious, for if you ponder this saying, you will see that there is not a whiff of evidence in it; rather, it points to the opposite of what he intended. For from its very beginning this chapter (*sūra*, i.e., Deut. 18) forbids one to follow the ways of the people of the land of Canaan who seek knowledge of the unseen by way of soothsaying, astrology, magical practices, fortune-telling, auguries, incantations to summon *jinn*s, invocation of spirits and necromancy, and it conveys [to us] that God hates whomever practices these things and that it falls into the categories of idol worship.

[Moses] said: “And because of this abomination | [B 24r] God threatened to uproot them by your hands, because the nations that you have been commanded to uproot seek knowledge of the unseen in this way, but God your

23 “When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”

24 The author provides these words in Hebrew: גביא אקים להם מקרב אחיהם כמוך.

Lord did not allow you to act thus, but he will bring you a prophet from among your brethren like unto me whom your Lord God will establish for you to honor you, for God has promised you this on the day of [your] standing by Mount Sinai.”²⁵ And this is [another] saying of [Moses] (peace be upon him): “From every prophet who will rise from among the Children of Israel, you will gain hidden knowledge.” Now the intention of [Moses’] saying “from among your brethren” is that they will not need the sayings of any other nation nor another revealed law in order to learn about hidden matters and to solve difficulties. This meaning renders the interpretation of [the phrase] “from among your brethren” as an indication of the Children of Ishmael impossible, and also his lengthy argument that the Children of Esau are called “brethren”,²⁶ which term is thus not specific to Ishmael, as he argued. The prophetic books are replete with [references to] prophets heading for other places in order to gain hidden knowledge, to rule the nation and to regulate the actions [of the people], but not to bring legislation, as he claimed. And his saying about this ... on the part of God ... | [B 24v], He will not announce by way of soothsaying. And the [biblical] text is not as he claimed: “in him they shall believe” but “unto him they shall hearken”,²⁷ which constitutes an abominable alteration [of the biblical text].

The final section of Fragment II relates to Samaw’al’s chapter entitled “The allusion to [Muḥammad’s] name in the Torah” (*al-ishāra ilā ismihi fī l-tawrāt*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 31–34/46–47). This chapter opens with another alleged biblical prediction of Muḥammad’s prophethood that was popular among Muslim authors, namely Gen. 17:20 (“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly”). Samaw’al explains that the numerical value of the Hebrew expression for “exceedingly”, *bi-me’od me’od*, equals that of the name Muḥammad. The anonymous author explains that this argument is without merit:

As for his argumentation that [Muḥammad’s] name occurs in the Torah, namely in the context of God’s promise to Abraham (peace be upon him) that He will make Ishmael thrive and multiply him exceedingly, which in Hebrew is *bi-me’od me’od*, and his calculation of the numerical value of these two words which adds up to ninety-two, corresponding to the numerical value of the name of the one who will rise from among the Children of Ishmael, this,

25 A loose translation of Deut. 18:12–15.

26 Deut. 2:5.

27 Deut. 18:15.

now, is a method that has neither been followed by any of the prophets with regard to his name nor by any of the sages, and it has not been heard among any of the religious communities. If someone who follows this method persists in explaining [God's] speech by adding up its letters and calculating their numerical value, well, there is much in God's speech [that can be interpreted as] indicating the names of specific persons from among the Children of Adam or of specific animals, the names of devices, countries, drugs and other things that may fall into this vast category, and this will lead to outrageous claims and grave defamations with regard to the other revealed laws [...]

2.3 *Fragment III*

In the third fragment the anonymous author criticizes Samaw'al's chapter entitled "On the passage alluding to the prophethood of Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad" (*dhikr al-mawḍi' alladhī ushīra fīhi ilā nubuwwat al-Kalīm wa-l-Masīh wa-l-Muṣṭafā 'alayhim al-salām*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 34–36/47–48). Samaw'al focuses here on Deut. 33:2, yet another biblical passage taken as a prediction of Muḥammad's mission, which, translated from the Aramaic version quoted by Samaw'al, reads: "God will reveal himself from Sinai, His light will rise from Seir and will shine forth from the mountains of Paran, and with Him myriads of the holy." Like many earlier Muslim authors Samaw'al identifies the biblical Seir as the mountain range of Sharāt where the Children of Esau lived who believed in Jesus, Sinai with Mount Ṭūr where Moses was given the Torah, and Paran with the mountain of Mecca, where the last dispensation was revealed that abrogated all former revelations. Samaw'al supports this last claim by adducing Gen. 21:21 ("And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt of Paran, and with Him myriads of the holy),” in which the subject is Ishmael, who is seen as the ancestor of Muḥammad and the Arabs.

[...] | [B 23r] insofar as these two were adjoining mountains, and the valley in which the Children of Israel were pausing during the time of the address was [located] between these two above-mentioned mountains. As for the mountain of Mecca, it divides the desert space for a length that takes more than thirty days to traverse.²⁸

Moreover, the *qā'im* of the Christians²⁹ did not hail from Mount Seir nor from among its people, for both his parents belonged to the Children of Israel.

²⁸ Probably the Ḥijāz mountain range.

²⁹ The anonymous author naturally avoids calling Jesus the Messiah.

His place of birth was Bethlehem, and he was brought up in the Holy Land, which was his dwelling place until the end of his life. As for his followers, the Children of Esau, they were not the first ones to follow him. Because for many years after his death [Jesus'] call did not extend beyond the teachings of one of his companions³⁰ that some people among the Romans were deceived into accepting, and they [subsequently] forced some people from among their nation to enter into his doctrine. [Only] then did the message spread among many nations, among them the Children of Esau. Therefore, no proof whatsoever remains for him from among these scriptural passages that he mentioned.

In the section in his *Iḥām* entitled “Another way of establishing the fact of abrogation” (*ithbāt al-naskh ‘alā wajh ākhar*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 21–22/41) Samaw’al adduces a further example of supersession or even alteration of the divine will (*badā’*), namely that God conveyed the privilege to assist Moses during the service in the Tabernacle to the children of Levi instead of the first-born among the Children of Israel. Samaw’al writes: “We say to [the Jews]: Is it not in your text that God chose from among the children of Israel the first-born that they may be consecrated for holy service? (Ex. 13:2) They will say, ‘yes.’ We then say to them: Is it not also in your text that Moses, when he descended from the mountain with the tablets in his hands and found the people worshipping the calf, stood at the rim of the camp and called: Whoso is on the Lord’s side, let him come unto me? (Ex. 32:36) The sons of Levi, not the first-born, joined him although his appeal, literally addressed to all, had been intended only for the first-born inasmuch as it was they who were the chosen of God at the time, not the children of Levi. So when the first-born deserted him, and the children of Levi assisted him, God said to Moses: And I have taken the Levites instead of all the first-born among the Children of Israel (Num. 8:18). Did not God, following the revelation of this verse, dismiss the first-born from the privileged status and take the Levites in their stead? They cannot deny this, and this will compel them to admit either alteration (*badā’*) of divine determination or abrogation.”³¹ In his reply our author follows the argumentation that can already be found among earlier Jewish thinkers.³²

30 Apparently a reference to Paul.

31 See the definition of *badā’* in Amir-Moezzi, “Badā’”: “literally, ‘emergence, appearance,’ refers in theology to the advent of a divine decree that changes a previous divine decree in response to new circumstances. Hence, the term is sometimes translated as ‘versatility or mutability of God.’”

32 See, e.g. Sa’adya Gaon, *Sefer ha-Nivḥar*, p. 827, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 170.

As for his attempt to force us to admit [the occurrence of] abrogation by [pointing out] that God (exalted is He) had deprived the first-born of their privileged status and taken the Levites in their stead, because [the former] had refrained from assisting Moses | [B 23v] against the worshipers of the calf, we shall explain that this does not imply abrogation, although we have already explained our position with regard to abrogation. However, the truth must be told, and this is that since God (praised and exalted is He) does not rule on the basis of His knowledge and then change His will, and since it was the custom of the world in those times to honor the first-born and to put them first in the handling of sacrifices and to single them out for leadership – as occurred in the case of Jacob (peace be upon him) and his desire to obtain the privilege of primogeniture which made him purchase it for a price from his brother Esau (cf. Gen. 25:29–34) – and the agreement that the first-born were honored remained in effect until they began to manifest indifference and became lax in the support of the religion that was expected from the likes of them, the justice of the Exalted required Him to take this privilege away from them and to dismiss them, and to distinguish [instead] those who undertook to support the religion and made an effort on its behalf, these being the children of Levi. It does not follow from this that the law has been abrogated, nor that anything new occurred (*badā*) to Him (exalted is He) which He had not known before, and this is evident.³³

In the next passage the anonymous author reacts to Samaw'al's "Refutation of [the Jews'] claim that God loves them" (*fī ibṭāl mā yad'ūnahu min maḥabbat Allāh iyyāhum*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 37–39/48–49), in which the Muslim polemicist argues that God does not love the infidel among the Israelites but that He rather loves the believer from outside the community and even selects prophets and saints from among the gentiles, so that the Jews' claim that God's love is exclusively reserved for their community is shown to be false. Samaw'al first refers to Job, who was recognized by the Jews as a prophet although he was considered a gentile; secondly, he mentions the battle between Jeroboam son of Nebat and Solomon which resulted in the slaying of many unbelieving Israelites (cf. II Chron. 13:17); lastly, Samaw'al refers to several biblical passages that affirm that the stranger and the native are equal before God (cf. Lev. 19:33–34, Lev. 24:22, Num. 15:15–16, and Ex. 12:49). Samaw'al concludes the section by stating that "[o]nce we force them to admit that God does not love the errant among

33 The same instance was also discussed – and dismissed – by Sa'adya as a scriptural argument in favor of abrogation; cf. his *Sefer ha-Nivḥar*, p. ㉘㉙, *Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 170.

them, but does love the believers outside their community and selects prophets and saints who are not of their descendants, they negate their claim that God's love is reserved specifically for their community, of all mankind." The anonymous author emphasizes the manifold ways in which God has honored the Israelites, while acknowledging that certain righteous men from other nations, too, enjoy His favor.

As for his denial that God loves our community and honored it above other | [B gr] nations, his argument against us with regard to the Prophet Job, saying that he belonged to another nation, his objection on the basis of the passage from the Torah [which says] that there is no difference between the stranger and the native, and his condemnation of those who disbelieved among the Children of Israel: these are the sayings of someone who has not grasped the true mode of our belief on this point. For God singled out the Children of Israel by sending down the revealed law to them; by making them hear His speech;³⁴ by showing them His clear miracles;³⁵ by letting His light shine among them forever upon the House to which they directed their prayers,³⁶ and by sending down a heavenly fire to consume their sacrifices eternally,³⁷ while He did not do anything of the kind for any other nation. From this it transpires that the Exalted honored this progeny of Jacob above other peoples. Even if among these remaining nations there were pious people who were devoted [to God] and enjoyed His favor, He nevertheless did not treat them in the same way. Moreover, the Exalted informed us that any stranger [who enters] our religion willingly shall not be wronged,³⁸ and the law applying to him is the same as the law that applies to us, and there is no difference between any of the remaining legal rulings and decisions that apply to us and him, while these had not been incumbent on him previously. This notwithstanding, | [B gv] there is no disagreement among us that those among the other [nations] who make an effort [such as Job] are more worthy than those among us who fall short, especially and certainly those [among the latter] who sin and exceed the proper bounds by worshiping idols. Even if they are from this [our] lineage, they are going astray and will be punished, deserving [punishment] in hell; there is no one in our community who believes otherwise. Thus it has become clear that our statement that God (exalted is He) loves this community in

34 Cf. Ex. 19 and 20.

35 Cf. 1 Chron. 16:12.

36 Cf. Eccles. 5:6–7.

37 Cf. 2 Chron. 7:1–2.

38 Lev. 19:33–34.

the sense of singling it out, giving it preference and honoring it agrees with everything we say during our prayers³⁹ and with our belief that our [revealed] law is incumbent upon us for all eternity,⁴⁰ and we put this into words by using the expression “eternal love” (*maḥabbat al-dahr*) that [the polemicist] mentioned,⁴¹ which is the expression used by the prophet Isaiah (peace be upon him), and not something that we invented.⁴²

At the beginning of his “Section devoted to some aspects of their unbelief and falsification” (*faṣl fī dhikr ṭuraf min kufrīhim wa-tabdīlihīm*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 39–48/49–53) Samaw’al claims that “in this community of the Jews there are varieties of error and corruption that [sound] minds will recoil from, and that defy both human reason and divine law”. His first example is closely related to the topic of his previous “Refutation of their claim that God loves them”. Samaw’al states that “despite the disappearance of their state, despite their dispersion, and their recognition of the divine wrath extended over them, they still say each day in their prayers that they are God’s children and beloved ones”. This is followed by quotations from a number of Jewish prayers in which God is called “our Father” (אבִּינִי). The anonymous author already referred to some of this in the previous passage. In the following section he explains in some more detail the meaning of the Jews’ being the children of God. His distinction between the “children of God, i.e., the people who were taught by their Lord to worship Him” and “the intellectuals, like the masters of the rational laws who go astray” may either be a critical comment aimed at philosophers or, though less likely, at Karaite scholars, who were believed by some Rabbanites to be more open to Islamic thought and therefore more inclined to convert. In any case, it cannot refer to Rabbanite *mutakallimūn*, since these are mentioned by the anonymous author with approval at the beginning of his refutation.

As for his badmouthing us because we say: ‘we are the children of God’, either he intended to trip us up and wrong us, or he did not understand its meaning – just like he did not understand the meaning of other things either – namely, that when we hear someone saying in Arabic that he is the son of God, we reproach him for that and accuse him of unbelief, because in Arabic this

39 Cf. *Iḥām*, pp. 40:1–14/49:27–50:2.

40 Cf., e.g., Ex. 31:16.

41 Cf. *Iḥām*, pp. 40:4/49:28.

42 Cf. Isa. 54:8, which in Hebrew has אהבת עולם rather than אהבת עולם.

designation | [B 10r] applies only to a child whose father begot him by the well-known way of procreation. In the Hebrew language, however, this designation has three meanings, *first*, that of procreation, as we have mentioned; *second*, it is said of every branch deriving from a root, such as the branches of trees and the branches of rivers, which are also called 'children'; *third*, it is used in the context of learning, namely each student gaining knowledge from a teacher is called his 'son' while the teacher is called 'father'. It is in this last sense that [our] nation is referred to as 'children of God', i.e., the people who were taught by their Lord to worship Him, and these are not the intellectuals, like the masters of the rational laws, who have gone astray. This is also the meaning of our expression in the remaining words of our prayers that he mentioned, and it is not that we disacknowledge Him, as he claims. It is a widely accepted meaning among philologists, and the prophets used this expression on numerous occasions in their books. Thus anyone who knows the Hebrew language, | [B 10v] its similes and metaphors knows this, and whoever does not know this, assumes that the conventions of different languages are the same so that he suspects unbelief on the part of a people who do not disbelieve and utters the like of these slanderous assertions.

In the course of the above-mentioned section Samaw'al criticizes the Jews' expectation of the Messiah who, according to Isa. 11, will rise from the house of David, while in fact, he says, the promise has already been fulfilled with the advent of Jesus Christ: "*They expect a leader who will come of the house of David the prophet. When he moves his lips in prayer, all the other nations will die and only the Jews will remain. This expected one is, they contend, the Messiah they have been promised. But the prophets – peace be upon them – coined for them parables pointing to the glory of the religion of Jesus, to the submission of the mighty to the people of his community, and to his declaration of the supreme abrogation*". (*Ifhām*, pp. 41:4–9/50:14–21). According to Samaw'al, the Jews were simply incapable of understanding the spiritual meaning of passages such as Isaiah 11:6–7. In his retort, our author criticizes Samaw'al's translation of Isa. 11:4 as "*When he moves his lips in prayer, all the other nations will die and only the Jews will remain*" (*Ifhām*, pp. 41:4–5/50:15–16).

As for his condemning us for the fact that we are expecting a leader (*qā'im*) who will come to us from the offspring of the Prophet David and who is the true Messiah, this is an issue that every believer is familiar with, and it is the bone of contention between ourselves and the Christians who claim to adhere to his law. Moreover, they claim that this Expected One from the offspring of David

has already appeared and risen, whereas we maintain that he has not yet risen, for there will be signs pointing to him that cannot apply to anyone else. This issue is neither hidden nor disgraceful to the point that this man had to expose and explain it.

As for his saying that we maintain that “*when [the expected Messiah] moves his lips in prayer, all the nations will die and only the Jews will remain*”, this is a blatant inaccuracy, because the prophets have said that this Messiah will only rise to make the world plain,⁴³ and that he will cause all the nations to follow a single doctrine and to believe | [B 22r] in him, and this can only occur after his appearance.

Samaw'al next quotes some lines that were traced by Perlmann to the *Amida* prayer for the Jewish New Year regarding God's dominion over the world as well as two verses from the Book of Psalms (115:2; 44:24), suggesting that “[*the Jews*] *mean thereby that it will not be evident that dominion belongs to God unless the sovereignty passes to the Jews, His nation and choice; and so long as the government is in the hands of the non-Jews, God is hardly known among the nations, His reign is defective, His power doubtful*”. (*Iḥām*, pp. 43:5–8/51:9–13). In his reply the anonymous author focuses on the first passage from the prayer adduced by Samaw'al, “*Our God and God of our fathers, reign Thou over all the inhabitants of the world, so that whatsoever is animated may say God, the God of Israel, reigns and His dominion ruleth over all*”. (*Iḥām*, pp. 42:12–43:2/51:2–7).⁴⁴ Towards the end of Ms. YA I 3020, fol. 22r, some parts of the text are lost as the leaf is damaged, which renders the translation of the unknown author's argument somewhat speculative.

As for our saying during our prayer: “O God, reign Thou over all the people of the earth,” and whatever follows to this effect, it comes after the Exalted's announcement and His promise that at that time no one will remain who does not acknowledge that the Exalted is king, the only true ruler, and that it will be affirmed among all those who possess the faculty of speech that no one is to be worshipped but He. There is no doubt that the majority of the people of the earth during this our time do not believe in the rule of God, for the upholders of the doctrine of the trinity – and these are the Christians according to

43 Cf. Isaiah 40:4.

44 According to Mazuz, “How Knowledgeable was Samaw'al,” pp. 117–118, the wording of the prayer as quoted by the Muslim polemicist – and explained by the anonymous author – resembles the one found in the *Siddur* of Sa'adya Gaon.

their different denominations, who outnumber the two nations of the Jews and the Muslims – further the fire-worshipping Indians who inhabit a large part of the world, the tribes of the Khitā, the Qipčaq, the Alans and the Berbers, the Sabians, the sun worshippers and the Zoroastrians, and among them those who worship the stars and the philosophers deny the Exalted [...] *zawiyāt*,⁴⁵ furthermore the Na[...]a and the [...] Assassins and the [...]miyya, so the mention of God (exalted is He) is neither [...] nor observed, except by some. It is for this reason that we say [in our prayer]: “O God, reign Thou over all the inhabitants | [B 22v] of the world,” that is, explain for them that which will lead them to acknowledge the [divine] lordship and oneness, and no one denies this except this troublemaker who deceives himself.

In the same context, Samaw'al refers to Ps. 115:2 (“Wherefore should the nations say: Where is now their God?”) which, together with a modified translation of Ps. 44:23 (“Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Arouse Thyself from Thy slumber”) he interprets as additional examples of heresy and audacity on the part of the Jews towards God, suggesting that *“they became bold against God in these vile prayers, as if they were urging God to encourage them and protect Himself. For when they pray to their Lord in this way, they, as it were, inform Him that He has apparently chosen to be obscure and they urge Him to bestir Himself and become renowned. Thus one may see a Jew shuddering as he recites these words in the prayer, yet doubting not that his word will greatly impress God, and that he will influence his Lord, move Him, shake Him, challenge Him. In truth, the ignorance and weak-mindedness of such people should be pitied”*. (*Iḥḩām*, pp. 44:3–10/51:28–36). The unknown author provides the following explanation of the verses that are quoted by Samaw'al with malicious intent:

As for his disapproval of our saying [in the Psalms]: “Wherefore should the nations say, Where is now their God?”, this is a saying by the Prophet David (peace be upon him). When he sought victory in the name of God against the unbelieving tyrants, he supplicated his Lord for assistance for His sake while considering himself unworthy of it.⁴⁶ But because it had been firmly established in the souls of the unbelievers that we worship the lord and mover of the stars, while they did not believe in Him, [David] said: “When they triumph over us, they say, reproaching us: Where is now their God?” Their denial of and

45 The meaning of the term *zawiyāt* is not clear to us.

46 Cf. Ps. 79:9–10; 115:1–2.

unbelief in God were strong, but this is not something that can be held against the one who reported it [i.e. David].

Samaw'al concludes the section devoted to alleged cases of unbelief and falsification among the Jews by adducing scriptural passages that contain anthropomorphic descriptions of God as well as Jewish interpretations of them, such as God having written the two tablets with His finger (Ex. 31:18) or God regretting having created man (Gen. 6:6) which, Samaw'al explains, is usually interpreted as if He had retracted His view or that it grieved Him. These are clearly falsifications of the Torah on the part of the Jews, he concludes, as it is impossible that God did not know what would become of man when He created him in the first place. Moreover, if indeed God regretted later on that He had created man, this would imply a change in the divine decision or even abrogation, both of which are denied by the Jews. Samaw'al regards these texts as evident distortions of the Torah by the Jews, since "[w]e do not think that these heresies were in the Torah revealed to Moses, may God's prayers be upon him". (*Ifhām*, pp. 48:5–6/53:23–24). Towards the end of Ms. YA I 3020, fol. 22v, some parts of our anonymous text are again lost as the leaf is damaged.⁴⁷ We may assume that the author argues here for a metaphorical reading of the verses containing anthropomorphic descriptions. He comes back to this issue in Fragment v.

The same goes for the remainder of the claims that he finds objectionable inasmuch as their plain expression suggests [God's] corporeality: all of them are verses that have been written in the words of the [...] [...] prophets, as he claimed, and they are not spoken by [...] nor out of unbelief or heresy, as he alleged. There is no one among the people of the revealed law who did not ... [...]

2.4 *Fragment IV*

In this fragment the anonymous author provides further examples of what he regards as Samaw'al's limited understanding of the Jewish religion and the Hebrew language. His main criticism concerns the Muslim polemicist's attempt to show that the Jews believe that God has

⁴⁷ On the accusation that the Jews have tampered with their scriptures, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 19–35; *ead.*, "Taḥrīf," Adang, *Muslim Writers*, Chapter Seven and the surveys mentioned in n. 2 above.

regretted some of His actions. On this issue, Samaw'al states that "*the translator*⁴⁸ *went so far in his zealous partisanship as to falsify the words, in violation of the usage of the language, and rendered* ה' ויגחם *as* ה' ותב במימרה *meaning: And God retracted in His view. Not only is this interpretation not in accord with usage, but it is also heretical; indeed, it contradicts their rejection of sudden change in divine decision, or abrogation*". (*Ifhām*, pp. 45:12–46:1–6/52:23–30). One example adduced by Samaw'al is God's regret of having made Saul king following the latter's disobedience of His order to destroy the Amalekites. In the course of his discussion, Samaw'al quotes numerous verses from 1 Sam. 15 (*Ifhām*, pp. 47:5–11/53:7–13). The author of the refutation criticizes the polemicist as follows:

[...] | [B 5r] and obeying the commandments, because we refrain from offering sacrifices on the Sabbath and from burning them on the fire, whereas we do not refrain from circumcising a boy if the eighth day since his birth happens to fall on a Sabbath, not to mention the prescribed fast, worship through praying and standing and the like. It is not strange that someone who has such limited knowledge of the [Jewish] religion does not understand the metaphors of the Hebrew language, its uses and its rules.

It behooves him to avoid expressions which he takes to imply an admission of the possibility of regret on the part of God (exalted is He), and which he considers abominable, because they do not mean what he imagines they do. For the Hebrew language calls the regret of someone who commits an act and then regrets having committed it when what was unknown to him before becomes apparent to him: *n^ekhama*, the root of which is *nūn*, *khā* and *mīm*. However, the same word is also used to express a change in the divine will depending on a change in what is deserved. Since God's promise of benefits and of bestowing favors on His creation | [B 5v] is conditional upon obedience [on the part of men], they deserve that [God] change [His will] with regard to them if they disobey, as was the case with the generation of the Flood which, without exception, committed evil, so that the [divine] will changed from approval to wrath, and from grace to vengeance. This is why God the Exalted said: "For it repenteth me that I have made them,"⁴⁹ meaning [God's] will with regard to them has changed. This is the interpretation of the translator and this is its true meaning.

48 Perlmann renders *al-mutarjim* as "the compiler of the Targum," probably because Samaw'al appears to be quoting Targum Onkelos here, as on other occasions; see above. See also Mazuz, "How Knowledgeable was Samaw'al," pp. 118–119.

49 Gen. 6:7. The author gives these words in Hebrew: נחמתני כי עשיתים.

Similarly, when Saul was righteous before His Lord and the most noble among his nation, [God] considered him suitable to be king, but when He commanded him to uproot the nation of the Amalekites, and [Saul] took pity on one of them and let him live, thus descending into disobedience, he deserved to have the kingship removed from his house. Thus God revealed these words to Samuel: “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king”,⁵⁰ that is, [God’s] will with regard to [Saul] has changed because of the change in his behavior. Don’t you see that [Samuel] said to Saul, at the conclusion of this episode, when the latter asked [him] to intercede [on his behalf]: “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent”.⁵¹ The meaning of this [passage] is that the Creator, the God of Israel, neither changes His mind nor | [B 11r] regrets, for He is not like a human who regrets, and he is using precisely this root (*n-kh-m*) for “regret”.

Another example of a biblical text according to which God apparently regretted what He had done before is Gen. 6:6 (“And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him in his heart”), which Samaw’al says can only be explained as a case of falsification of the original revelation by the Jews. It is mentioned prior to the episode of Saul’s sparing one of the Amalekites, mentioned above. The order of the two examples may have been different in the copy of *Ifhām* that was available to the anonymous author. The final example brought by Samaw’al in this section is Gen. 8:21, according to which God, being gratified by Noah’s burnt offering to Him upon leaving the ark, reacted as follows: “And the Lord smelled the sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (*Ifhām*, pp. 47:12–48:4/53:14–22). Samaw’al concludes that all these cases confirm that the Torah has been tampered with by the Jews: “We do not think that these heresies were in the Torah revealed to Moses – may God’s prayers be upon him; nor do we say that the Jews intended to change and corrupt the [whole] Torah. But the truth should be followed above all. And now we shall mention the true reason for the falsification of the Torah” (*Ifhām*, pp. 48:5–8/53:23–27). The anonymous author refutes the arguments of the Muslim polemicist, whom he calls “delusional”.

50 See 1 Sam. 15:11, quoted in Hebrew: נחמתני כי המלכתי את שאול.

51 See 1 Sam. 15:29, quoted in Hebrew: וגם נצח ישראל לא ישקר ולא ינחם כי לא אדם הוא להנחם.

As for his fanciful assumption that the meaning of “it grieved him at his heart”⁵² is that it weighed on Him, this is an unsound statement, for the word-by-word translation of this expression is as follows: “And the will of God changed for He had made man on earth, and it grieved him at his heart,” and the personal pronoun “his” in “his heart” refers back to man, not to God (Mighty and Exalted is He), and “causing pain to his heart” is meant as a reference to [God’s] threat utterly to destroy humankind.

His interpretation of [the scriptural passage] “God smelled the sweet savor” is likewise unsound, because it only says that God was pleased with Noah because of the scent of the sacrifice.

What he considered to be repugnant about God’s saying to Noah: “I will not curse the ground any more for man’s sake”, only means that the Exalted One accepted Noah’s plea not to punish humankind collectively for their sins, nor the animals and the plants, as He had done in the time of Noah; rather, He now treated them with mildness and grace. Thus no one has the right to claim that this implies anything that can be considered repugnant | [B iv] nor does what this delusional person imagines constitute unbelief, as he claimed.

The following passage relates to what Samaw’al contends in the section of his work entitled “Why the Torah was falsified” (*dhikr al-sabab fī tabdīl al-tawrāt*) (*Ifhām*, pp. 48–57/53–57). As an example of the supposed extreme fanaticism of the Jews Samaw’al refers to Ex. 23:19 (“The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not *tebashel* a kid in his mother’s milk”), and argues that contrary to the Jews’ opinion, *tebashel* means “maturing”, and that the verse thus means that one should not protract the period during which the young of the flock remain with their mothers. The Jews, however, interpret it to mean “cooking” and thus conclude that it is prohibited to eat any meat together with milk. (*Ifhām*, pp. 51:14–54:5/55:15–56:16). The anonymous author explains Samaw’al’s erroneous interpretation of Ex. 23:19 from his lack of knowledge of Hebrew, a point he makes more than once in his refutation.

As for [the Muslim polemicist’s] criticism of our interpretation [of the verse] whose meaning is “do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”,⁵³ and his claim that *bishul* in the [Hebrew] language does not mean cooking [but rather maturing],

52 Gen. 6:6, quoted in Hebrew: ויתעצב אל לבו.

53 Ex. 23:19, quoted in Hebrew: ראשית בכורי אדמתך תביא בית ה' אלהיך לא תבשל גדי בהלב אמו.

this is the result of his scant familiarity with this language and his lack of interest in it, for in fact the opposite is true, since the word *bishul* means to simmer something well on the fire, which is cooking, and it is used metaphorically for the ripening of fruits. Proof of this is Moses' saying to the people on the sixth day: "the Sabbath is a rest for God tomorrow. What you need to bake, bake, and what you need to cook, cook".⁵⁴ And He also said with regard to the Pessah sacrifice: "Do not eat it raw, nor cooked in water, but roasted,"⁵⁵ in addition to His saying, with regard to the sacrifices: "But the earthen vessel wherein it is cooked [shall be broken]".⁵⁶

2.5 *Fragment v*

This fragment begins in the middle of a refutation of Samaw'al's allegation that the Jews have falsified the originally revealed Torah by inserting, among other things, anthropomorphic statements about God, which is included in the *Iḥām*'s lengthy "Section devoted to some aspects of their unbelief and falsification" (*faṣl fī dhikr ṭuraf min kufrīhim wa-tabdīlīhim*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 39–48/49–53). Samaw'al ends his discussion by stating that "[i]t would take too long to enumerate the anthropomorphic heresies maintained by [the Jews]." He adds that "[t]rue, their scholars, benefiting from the Muslim monotheism, have refined much of their ancestors' belief and have put such an interpretation upon their texts as will shield them from the Muslims' disapproval, even though it is not in accord with the words they interpret and translate. When asked about these shocking matters, they hide behind denial and falsehood in fear of the terrible infamy that may overtake them" (*Iḥām*, pp. 45:5–11/52:10–17). It is this last aspect that is countered in the following passage:

[...] | [B 3r] the proof of [God's] oneness in the world. Although he is well aware that the principle of our belief and the creed of our religion is to deny any corporeality and anthropomorphism with regard to God, this man claims that we have just taken this from the Muslims and that [when asked about these objectionable matters] we hide behind denial and falsehood, and he has the audacity to compare this [allegation] with the texts of the Torah and the texts of the [books of the] Prophets that plainly deny anthropomorphism, without

54 Ex. 16:23, quoted in Hebrew: שבתון שבת קדש ליהוה מחר את אשר תאפו אפו ואת אשר תבשלו בשלו.

55 Ex. 12:9, quoted in Hebrew: אל תאכלו ממנו נא ובשל מבשל במים כי אם צלי אש.

56 Lev. 6:28, quoted in Hebrew: וכלי-חרש אשר תבשלו בו [ישבר].

any need for the arguments of the religious scholars and traditionists (*kalām al-uṣūliyyīn wa-l-muḥaddithīn*) within the religions of Islam and Judaism, for whoever among the two religions possesses the truth does not need the proofs or arguments [of these men].

In what follows, the anonymous author addresses an issue that had been raised by Samaw'al in the "Section on what they think about the religion of Islam" (*faṣl fīmā ya'taqidūnahu fī dīn al-Islām*) (*Ifḥām*, pp. 57–67/58–62), where the Muslim polemicist makes the following claim: "*The Jews assert that Muḥammad had dreams indicating that he was to be the head of a state; that he traveled to Syria on business of Khadīja, met rabbis and told them his dreams, and that they recognized that he was to be the head of a state. Then they attached to him as companion 'Abd Allāh b. Salām, who instructed him for some time in scholarship and jurisprudence of the Torah. They go so far in their claim as to ascribe the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'ān to its compilation by 'Abd Allāh b. Salām, and maintain that it was he who stipulated in the [Islamic] marriage law that a wife, after her third divorce from her husband, shall not be permitted to rewed him until she has been married and divorced from another man,*⁵⁷ *the purpose being, in their contention, to make mamzerim of the children of the Muslims. This word is plural; its singular is mamzer. This is the term for an illegitimate child. For, in their law, if the husband takes back his wife after she has been married to another man, her children are considered illegitimate. Since abrogation is inconceivable to them, they conclude that this stipulation in the marriage law is an interpolation of 'Abd Allāh b. Salām, by which he sought to turn Muslim children into what they consider mamzerim*" (*Ifḥām*, pp. 57:12–59:2/58:2–20). The following reply of the anonymous author can only be partly reconstructed since the bottom part of Ms. YA I 3020, fol. 3 is heavily damaged.

As for what he mentions about the issue of the thrice-divorced wife becoming [once again] licit [to her husband] after she has been married to [and divorced from] another man, this is an invention on his part and a fabrication that is falsely attributed to us and that we have never heard of. The proof of its falsity is our doctrine concerning someone who remarries his wife after she had been

57 Samaw'al refers here to *taḥlīl*, "the practice whereby a man marries a woman who has been triply divorced from one husband for the sole purpose of subsequently divorcing her so that she can remarry the first husband;" see Spector, *Women in Classical Islamic Law*, p. 95.

married to and divorced from another man ... his children are not of a flawed lineage and are not classified as *mamzerim* ... | [B 3v] and the falsity of this claim is evident. Thus it becomes clear that all other claims of this man are of the same kind.

In the same section of his *Iḥām* Samaw'al continues his discussion of *mamzerim* by casting doubt on the legitimacy of David and of the expected Messiah, both of whom are descendants of Ruth. Ruth was of the progeny of Moab, the son of one of the two daughters of Lot who had conceived from their father after they had got him drunk. Since according to biblical law, it is forbidden to marry one's sister, Samaw'al argues, it must be even more prohibited to have sexual intercourse with one's daughter. Samaw'al concludes that "[a]s Ruth was of the progeny of Moab, and the ancestress of David and of their expected Messiah, the Jews have turned both [David and the Messiah] into the progeny of a lineage whose legitimacy they malign" (*Iḥām*, pp. 59:3–61:2/58:22–59:22).⁵⁸ The anonymous author's main line of argumentation, here as well as in other sections, is that anything that occurs prior to a revelation cannot be judged as if it occurred after the revelation was received.

As for his erroneous belief that there is a stain on the lineage of the Prophet David insofar as his paternal grandmother belonged to the nation of Moab, about whom the Torah states that they descended from a daughter who gave birth to a child by her father, and his astonishment at this – he and anyone who has as little knowledge as he does may well be astonished at this, particularly since [nowadays] we do consider anyone like this to be a *mamzer*. It is therefore necessary that I explain to the readers of this treatise of mine what clarifies the object of his delusion, and that there never was anything to discredit the lineage of David. For the women who according to the law conveyed by Moses are forbidden to be bedded are of two categories. In the first category are the transgressors whom God threatened with excommunication. The second category is of those women that are forbidden [to be bedded] without the transgressor being threatened with excommunication ... For if one begets a child from them ... *mamzer* | [B 4r] he belongs to this kind of children born of adultery. As for the second category [of transgressors], who are *not* threatened with excommunication: even though the parents were sinners, there is no

58 For a discussion of David's status according to Jewish law, see Mazuz, "How Knowledgeable was Samaw'al," pp. 119–121.

difference between their children and the rest of the nation in any respect and no blemish whatsoever attaches to them. You will find this distinction between the two categories only *after* the revelation of the law of Moses (peace be upon him). As for the women who were forbidden according to the laws of Noah and Abraham, such as one's mother, sister, daughter and another man's wife, the law with regard to their offspring is identical to that of the [above-mentioned] second category – whose punishment is not excommunication, because this threat was only first made in the law of Moses (peace be upon him). Thus, the descendants of Moab are not to be labeled *mamzerim*, as this critic assumed, for God had not [yet] threatened the adulterers with excommunication, nor had He ordered that their children be prevented from marrying. And no one may say that once the revealed law ruled that the children that were thus conceived by these two parents should be prevented [from marrying], it made no difference whether his parents committed adultery before or after the revelation [of this law] if [the child] was born after its revelation, because we reject | [B 4v] this analogy with regard to him since the child of the First Man married his sister,⁵⁹ whereas according to our law today a child by one's sister is a *mamzer*.⁶⁰ If we were to judge that his origin would be flawed from before the revelation, it would necessarily follow that humankind [in its entirety] was made up of *mamzerim*. Moreover, Jacob was married to two sisters⁶¹ and about [such unions] the Mosaic law would rule that their children are *mamzerim*. From this explanation it becomes evident, then, that anything that occurred *prior* to a revelation is judged differently from what has occurred *after* this revelation. The reason for this is obvious, because the revealed law rules that the offspring of someone who defies this threat [once made] is discredited and to be excommunicated, but it does not similarly judge the person who defied this threat *before* it [had been issued]. [This is] like the doctrine of Islam that judges someone who drinks wine *after* it had been forbidden to be among the people [condemned to] hell because of his transgression, whereas it is not right to judge the wine drinker to be among the people of hell *before* [drinking] had been declared forbidden. One of the proofs indicating the correctness of this [our argument] is that when Moses and the Children of Israel passed these two tribes, I mean Ammon and Moab, and [these tribes] failed to provide them with supplies | [B 13r] and water as had been done by other nations, God (exalted is He) said: "The males of Ammon and Moab shall not enter into the

59 Cf. Book of Jubilees 4.

60 Cf. Lev. 18:18.

61 Cf. Gen. 29.

congregation of the Lord”⁶² that is, even if they enter the religion, they shall not intermarry with you. Thereupon He complemented this [saying] by mentioning their crime, stating: “Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt”.⁶³ However, He declared their women lawful.⁶⁴ Now, had these two tribes been *mamzerim* [as is argued by this man], the reason for keeping them removed [from the community] would not have been their failure to supply [provisions to the Israelites], and males as well as females would have been included in the absolute prohibition to get close to any of the *mamzerim*.

The anonymous author next addresses Samaw’al’s remarks on the account of Lot’s intercourse with his two daughters, who had got him drunk (Gen. 19:30–38), which is dealt with at great length by the Muslim polemicist as part of his argumentation that David is to be considered a *mamzer* according to Jewish law (*Iḥām*, pp. 59–62/58–60). In the same context, Samaw’al remarks on Lot’s advanced age at the time he slept with his daughters. His comments seem to reflect his understanding of sexology, on which he wrote a tract (see n. 3 above). He states in his *Iḥām*: “Further, it is utterly absurd that an old man close to a hundred years of age should imbibe wine and become drunk to the extent of not recognizing his own daughters, that one of his two daughters should lie down with him, receive his sperm and get up, and he remain unaware of it all, as it says in their scripture: He did not know when she lay down or when she rose (Gen. 19:33). Such is the talk of a man who does not know how conception occurs. For it is impossible that a woman should conceive by a man so advanced in years and insensate through excessive drinking. What makes it utterly impossible is that they assert that his younger daughter did the same with him the following night and also conceived. It is impossible in the case of a very old man that a woman should conceive by him one night, and the very next night another woman, too, should conceive by him. But the endless animosity between the Ammonites and the Moabites, on the one hand, and the Israelites, on the other hand, induced the compiler of this section to concoct this absurdity so that it might be a most vilifying report about the Ammonites and the Moabites” (*Iḥām*, pp. 61:3–62:6/59:23–60:6). In his

62 Deut. 23:3.

63 Deut. 23:4.

64 Cf. Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 77a.

retort the anonymous author exonerates Lot and argues that even men insensate and advanced in years are able to beget children.

As for the foolishness that led the daughters of Lot in their ignorance, their isolation and their assumption that all [human] beings had perished to make sure that their father lost his consciousness by getting him drunk and to have sexual intercourse with him, about which this man wrote at length and in detail, slandering the narrator by arguing that it cannot possibly be said to be true: there is nothing objectionable in affirming it. As for drinking wine, it was known among other people, for not a single nation nor a single prophet ever banned the drinking of wine in those times, | [B 13v] so that his saying that [the Jews] made this prophet out to be a wine drinker is mere distortion and defamation. There is no doubt that drinking wine causes inebriation, and if to this is added the lethargy of sleep, the person sleeping will not be conscious of what happens to him, especially not of being approached by women for sexual intercourse, to which men are supposed to take the initiative. Thus he assumes that what ensued was sexual intercourse according to regular custom, particularly given the woman's concern for what should concern him, namely the proper functioning of the organs through which sexual intercourse and physical movement can be performed properly, so that he, had he been aware of this, would not have had any doubt that it constituted sexual intercourse. Moreover, it is possible to associate this with heavy sleepers, even without [the effect of] drunkenness and slumber, so what [the Muslim polemicist] thought unlikely isn't at all unlikely, and there is no fault in a man to whom such a thing happens when he is unaware of it.

As for his saying that [Lot] was a very old man approaching a hundred years, the only indication he has of this is the saying of his daughters: | [B 14r] "Our father is an old man," but he could be sixty or nine hundred and fifty years of age and be called by them "an old man". Therefore, everything he has rejected as being improbable, namely that a woman could conceive from an old man and that the same act could be repeated during the following night, is null and void, even if it had occurred [twice] on the very same night. Moreover, what he deemed unlikely because of [Lot's] presumed advanced age is not unlikely [at all]. For there were in those times old men of similar or even greater strength and vigor [than his].

In Samaw'al's tract the account of Lot and his daughters is followed by the story of Tamar (Gen. 38:1–27), the daughter-in-law of Judah, who was first married to the latter's son Er. When he died childless, Judah married

her to his second son, Onan, who did not fulfil his duty to get Tamar pregnant and who died as well. Judah was by law supposed to marry her to his third son, Shelah, but instead he sent her back to her family. Tamar subsequently sought to obtain her rights by disguising herself as a prostitute. Unaware of her identity, Judah had intercourse with her and eventually had to accept her rightful claim and to marry her (*Iḥām*, pp. 63:10–64:11/60:27–61:25). Samaw'al maintains that this is another example of how the Jews corrupted the prophetic lineage. He concludes this section by stating that “[i]n this story they also ascribe fornication and unbelief to the prophetic line, even as they ascribed them to the prophet Lot”. The anonymous author refutes this accusation in the following passage. He uses the ambiguity of the Arabic term *nikāḥ* which, depending on the context, can mean either marriage or intercourse, to its full advantage.

Likewise what he regarded as objectionable about the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law; there is nothing objectionable about it except to one who is not familiar with the conduct of affairs of the Children of Abraham prior to the Mosaic law, namely that the wife of someone who died childless remained dependent on his extended family like she had been dependent on her husband, and that someone of his household, either the brother or the father or some other male relative [of the deceased] had to marry her, and she could not be released from them except through divorce. Therefore, when the two sons of Judah had died, Tamar was expecting [to be married to] the third son. When she saw that [Judah] disapproved of her for him and that Judah's own wife had died | [B 14v] so that he sought a new wife, she resorted to a ruse to get married to him by presenting herself to him disguised and unrecognizable, because she knew that he was not disposed to marry her. So when he turned to her and wanted to have relations with her like a couple, he left her as a security his signet, his mantle, and his staff as a gift that rendered her licit to him, as was their custom with regard to consensual relations between a man and a woman, and their relations were concluded without any witness or someone to draw up a contract. Afterwards she hid from him in shame, knowing that he would detest her should he realize who she was. When her pregnancy became visible, people believed that it was by someone outside of her [deceased] husband's household, which would have amounted to fornication. According to the laws of Adam and Noah, now, the fornicating wife was to be burned, and so she was sentenced to the stake. Therefore, she was compelled to uncover the matter by producing the pledges that proved that [Judah] had approached her. Thus she was released from the punishment because she was innocent of fornication and had had to resort to a ruse in order to be exonerated.

Samaw'al concludes his discussion of the story of Tamar by suggesting that it implies another case of abrogation found in the Torah: "Furthermore, this story has a fine point that would make abrogation necessary. Namely, when Judah was informed that his daughter-in-law had conceived in harlotry, he ruled that she be burned. Then she sent him his signet and staff, saying: I am with child by the man to whom these belong. He then said: She is more in the right than I. He excused himself on the grounds that he had not recognized her, and that he did not visit her again. This indicates that the law of that time stipulated the burning of harlots, which the Torah abrogated by prescribing stoning" (cf. Deut. 22:21) (*Ifhām*, pp. 64:12–65:1/61:15–23). The final remark in the following paragraph is a response to Samaw'al's comment on the episode of Lot and his daughters and that of Tamar and Judah, that "[a]ll this is found in the text of their Scripture. They make this the genealogy of David, Solomon, and the Messiah they expect. Yet they maintain that the Muslims deserve this by-name (*mamzerim*) more than their Messiah. The absurdity of this assertion is most clear and evident" (*Ifhām*, pp. 65:4–7/61:26–30). The anonymous author retorts:

As for his belief that this [story] indicates abrogation insofar as the Torah does not condemn the fornicatress to the stake | [B 15r] [while this was evidently the prescribed punishment at the time of Judah and Tamar], this is not correct, because of God the Exalted's saying in the eighth part of the third book [of the Torah]: "Any daughter of a priest (*imām*) that defiles herself by fornication has defiled her father and she shall be burnt with fire."⁶⁵ It has been related that Tamar was the daughter of a priest from among those who worshiped God alone and whose name was Melchizedek.⁶⁶ He would have had her burned [if Tamar had indeed been guilty of fornication]. Thus there is nothing in this story for [this man] to be shocked about, neither fornication and unbelief nor abrogation, as he claimed, and there is also no defect with respect to David and Solomon and the Messiah, as he maligned.⁶⁷

In what follows, the unknown author counters yet another allegation of Samaw'al's, namely that the originally revealed Torah had been lost and that what the Jews possess was put together by Ezra (*Ifhām*, pp. 62:10–63:9/60:11–26). Samaw'al had already dealt with this topic, in

65 Lev. 21:9.

66 Gen. 14:18.

67 The prescribed punishment for prostitution was not abrogated, but Tamar was in the right and could not be accused of fornication, let alone prostitution.

greater detail, in the section entitled “Why the Torah was falsified” (*dhikr al-sabab fī tabdīl al-tawrāt*) (*Ifhām*, pp. 48–57/53–57). Subsequently, our author refutes an additional argument for the falsification of the Torah, namely that Moses did not share the Torah with the Children of Israel in its entirety, but only a single chapter, namely Deut. 32 (*Ifhām*, pp. 50:12–51:2/54:27–55:1). Samaw’al states: “As to the rest of the Torah, he gave it to the sons of Aaron, depositing it among them and keeping it away from all others. These Aaronid priests, who knew the Torah and had memorized most of it, were slain by Nebuchadnezzar in a massacre at the conquest of Jerusalem. Memorizing the Torah was neither obligatory nor traditional, but each Aaronid used to memorize a section of it” (*Ifhām*, pp. 50:12–51:2/54:30–55:1). Samaw’al then elaborates on the alleged role of Ezra in reassembling the Torah after it had been dispersed. (*Ifhām*, pp. 51:2–13/55:1–14). The anonymous author categorically denies Samaw’al’s allegations:

As for his claim that the Torah that we possess [nowadays] is not the one that had been revealed to Moses (peace be upon him), and his [attempt to] persuade those who listen to his discourse that someone had written it down and pieced it together to suit his purpose: if only we could appeal to someone who would establish our right as against him! Sometimes he takes our book to be the truth and God’s very speech and uses it as proof for whatever purpose comes to his mind, whereas at other times he assumes it to be something written down and devised by some person, simply saying so without [adducing] any proof, and this is one of the clearest and most despicable distortions.

The demonstration of the falsity of his claims on this issue comprises five goals. The *first* goal | [B 15v] is to contradict what he has said, namely that the Torah was not known [in its entirety] among the Children of Israel except to the Aaronid priests (*a’imma*), and moreover that each of them memorized one section only. [This man] sought to prove this by stating that Moses gave [the Children of Israel] a book like a copy of the [complete] Torah, [and] he alleged that [Moses] did not give them any of the other books like he had given to [the Aaronids], and that [Moses’] intention was to keep [the Torah] away from the Children of Israel. And [this man] invented for this [story] whatever he saw fit. Thereupon he claimed that Nebuchadnezzar slew the Aaronid priests in a massacre so that no one was left who had memorized [the Torah]. We shall refute everything he asserted with verified proofs. As for his claim that Moses kept the Torah away from the Children of Israel and did not distribute it except among the tribe of the Aaronids, this is impossible because

God commanded him to teach the rest of the nation the remaining parts of the Torah, and this is what God (exalted is He) said: “Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.”⁶⁸ He further said: “And Moses took the book of the covenant, and read it in the audience of the people”⁶⁹ and he put all these things before them.⁷⁰

2.6 *Fragment VI*

It is not clear to which section in Samaw'al's *Ifhām* the following paragraph refers:

[...] | [B 6r] it is known to be defamation, and if he did agree on ... he is a confused hypocrite, as this is not something that points to the veracity of the doctrine and to the foundation of belief. For if the matter were like this, this would cause confusion to enter into the remaining religions in the easiest manner, because there are numerous people engaging in conspiracy and distortion and others who long for worldly matters.

The subsequent passage contains a detailed refutation of Samaw'al's “Section demonstrating some of their ignominy” (*faṣl mu'rib 'an ba'ḍ faḍā'ihihim*), which deals with the so-called levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10): if a man passes away childless, his surviving brother is expected to step in to take his place by marrying the deceased's wife, even if either one of them is unwilling to enter into such a marriage (*Ifhām*, pp. 68–71/62–64). In particular, the anonymous author addresses Samaw'al's statement “[i]f the woman is averse to marrying the brother of her deceased husband, they force him to waive his right to her. Yet they oblige her to appear before the judge in session with their rabbis, and they teach her to say My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel; he will not marry me. Thus they force her to lie against him; for he did wish to marry her, and she it was who withdrew, whilst he was willing. By teaching her these words, they instruct her to lie. They summon him and instruct him to rise and say: I like not to take her. Even though she may be his wish and desire, they order him to lie.”

68 Ex. 21:2.

69 Ex. 24:7.

70 Cf. Ex. 34:32.

As for what is written about God's commandment that the brother has to marry the wife of his [brother] who died childless, even if he does not want to do so, and that he cannot free himself [from this obligation] except by declaring in the presence of the community: "I do not wish to marry her," whereupon she will take his shoe off his foot and spit on the ground before him, it is not, as he mentioned, that she spits in his face and holds up his shoe against him.⁷¹ This is not so incompatible with other revealed laws that are not grasped by the intellect that it can be denounced as disgraceful. If, however, *she* is the one who is averse [to marrying the brother of her deceased husband], it is established that she cannot free herself [from this obligation] except by these sayings and actions that have been stipulated. The ruling of the legists requires that she stand up and declare: "He refuses to raise up unto his brother a name among the clan of Israel; he does not want to marry | [B 6v] me," and that he also stand up and declare: "I do not wish to marry her," even if [in fact] he does want to. This man thus imagines that [the legists] command the [two of them] to lie and to commit an outrage against [the deceased]. Such things are said by every uneducated person and anyone who does not understand the intention of the legists on this matter as it is difficult for him [to comprehend], just as it is difficult for this man. With the help of God, I shall explain the reply to this, even if it is difficult to grasp, as follows: Since our law does not force a woman to marry a man if she dislikes him, nor forces a man to marry a woman he dislikes, it is necessary by law that when the woman [declares that she] does not want to marry him, he [also declare that he] does not want to marry her. Thus the declaration "I do not want this" by this man who does want her and does desire to marry her does not convey his choice according to his own inclination, but is rather an expression of his choice insofar as the law forbids him to pursue her even if he does not force her. Similarly, by her statement: "He refuses to raise up unto his brother a name" she [only] means: "He refuses this in view of the fact that I do not find him suitable." ...

2.7 *Fragment VII*

This fragment discusses sections of Samaw'al's "Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves" (*Dhikr al-sabab fi tashdīdihim al-iṣr 'alā anfusihim*) (*Iḥām*, pp. 71–85/64–70). The first portion of the fragment relates to Samaw'al's description of the obligations

⁷¹ The author interprets בַּפְּנֵי וּרְקֵהָ as "she spits before him" as opposed to "she spits in his face".

regarding ritual slaughter (*Iḥām*, pp. 75:10–76:12/66:12–31). It is followed by a comment regarding Samaw'al's statement about the kind of meat that is forbidden to the Jews, in order to demonstrate how they increased the burden upon themselves. Samaw'al writes: "*They said that the significance of the Torah verse: Ye shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs (Ex. 22:31) is that if you slaughter an animal and it does not satisfy these conditions – do not eat of it, but sell it to the gentiles. Thus they interpret 'cast it to the dogs' to mean 'to a person not of your persuasion; feed it to him, sell it to him.'* But, in truth, it is they who are like dogs, deserving this appellation and analogy on account of their mental turpitude, and their evil thoughts and beliefs concerning other nations" (*Iḥām*, pp. 78:9–79:13/67:28–35). The anonymous author refutes Samaw'al's statement as follows:

[...] | [B 12r] it is incumbent upon us to examine the respiratory organs of the sacrificed animal and the location of its blemishes. No one disagrees with this except someone who does not know the definition of dedication to God or whose objective is lying, obstinacy and slander with regard to things that [even] the scholars of Islam and its distinguished men do not allow themselves to attribute to the righteous rabbis and religious scholars from among the Children of Israel, the children of the prophets who are venerated by them and honored by God.

As for his offensive statement that our elders interpreted the scriptural command "you shall cast it to the dogs" [which refers to carrion] to mean: "Sell it to those who do not belong to your nation", this is an abominable calumny that is not condoned by anyone apart from him. For did not the scripture state explicitly: "Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself:⁷² thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien."⁷³ Thus it follows from this passage that what is forbidden for you [Jews] is not forbidden for someone other than yourselves, and that he is allowed to eat it. About the prey which has been touched by the venom of a lion or a wolf and which is not suitable for man to eat, He said: "neither shall ye eat any of it; ye shall cast it to the dogs",⁷⁴ and He indicated that it be fed to the sheep dogs that live in the desert, and this is evident to anyone of sound mind.

72 Quoted in Hebrew: לא תאכלו כל נבלה.

73 Deut. 14:21.

74 Ex. 22:30/31.

In the course of his “Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves” (*Iḥām*, pp. 71–85/64–70), Samaw’al describes the Karaites and the Rabbanites.⁷⁵ About the latter he states the following (*Iḥām*, pp. 81:1–9/68:30–69:2): “*The other group is called the Rabbanites. They are more numerous. They are followers of the ‘sages’ – the legists who calumniate God and who assert that on every problem God has wont to address them through the voice they call bath qol. Among the Jews, this group is the harshest in its animosity towards other nations. These God-calumniating legists made the Jews believe that food and drink become lawful for man through the application of this ‘science’ which they ascribe to Moses and to God; that the other nations do not know it, and that only the Jews have been so honored by God through this and similar absurdities, with which the legists have corrupted the minds of the Jews.*” This statement is refuted by our anonymous author as follows:

[...] | [B 12v] The same goes for his statement that the learned Jewish scholars asserted that God would address them on every single issue, which is an objectionable assertion on his part, for this report has come down on a single issue only, namely that they heard a voice that decided between the views of two different parties from among the eminent and pious men of the Children of Israel.⁷⁶ This is a saying that does not disqualify the customary miracles of saints.

The following passage refers to an earlier statement by Samaw’al in his “Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves”, where he argues on the basis of Deut. 2:6 (“Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money,

75 On Samaw’al’s comments on the Karaites, see Adang, “The Karaites as Portrayed,” pp. 192–194. On his polemic against Rabbanite legal scholars, see Boušek, “Half of the Burden of a Mule,” pp. 299–303. On p. 301, Boušek writes: “Although originally a Rabbanite, or perhaps because of this, Samaw’al sympathizes with the Karaites and is especially critical of the Rabbanites.”

76 The anonymous author apparently refers to the Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 13b, which in the Soncino translation reads: “R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel, the former asserting, ‘The halachah is in agreement with our views’ and the latter contending, ‘The halachah is in agreement with our views’. Then a bath kol issued announcing, ‘[The utterances of] both are the words of the living God, but the halachah is in agreement with the rulings of Beth Hillel.’” See also Mazuz, “How Knowledgeable was Samaw’al,” p. 124.

that ye may drink”) that “*it is clear from the text of the Torah that the Jews are permitted to take food from other peoples, and eat it. They know that the children of Esau were idol-worshippers and infidels. Now the Muslims, for example, are not lower in rank than the children of Esau. Therefore, the Jews should accept the food of the Muslims; nay, they should prefer it, since the Muslims, because of their monotheism and their faith, are not idol-worshippers. True, Moses forbade the Jews to marry idol-worshippers or to eat the meat of the animals slaughtered in the name of idols; but we do not know of a single Muslim who invoked the name of an idol or image at the slaughtering of an animal. What is the matter with these Jews, then, that they do not eat of animals slaughtered by Muslims?*” (*Ifhām*, pp. 74:8–75:1/65:28–66:2).

As for what he imagined that God’s saying to the Children of Israel: “Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink” means that God permitted us to take food from [other peoples], this is not correct, for by this [permitted] food are [only] meant grains that have not been processed, not slaughtered animals or cooked food, as was the custom of the people of the desert when they crossed from one side of the country to the other suffering burning thirst and were given the right to drink the water from the wells.

The final passage, which is only partly preserved, also relates to Samaw’al’s final argument in his “Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves” (*Ifhām*, pp. 82:12–85:5/69:20–70:22). Here Samaw’al writes: “*The second cause for the oppressiveness of their burden is that the Jews are dispersed both to the East and to the West. In any town harbouring a community of Jews there may appear from a distant land a man of their faith who displays religious strictness, extreme piety, and meticulous observance. If he happens to be trained theologically, he will start to rebuke them for certain practices, giving an impression of superiority. He will accuse them of defective observance. He will ascribe the substance of his rebuke to his masters and to his townsmen, and his references for the most part will be false. In this way, he hopes to achieve leadership or some other goal, especially if he intends to remain with or be influential among them. So you may see him, upon his arrival, refraining from partaking of their food and of the meat of their slaughter; examining the knife of their slaughterer, whom he will reprove for something or other, saying: I shall not eat except of my own slaughter. You may see them vexed by him, while he continues to*

blame them for what is lawful and permissible, suggesting that these things be prohibited on the strength of his fabricated references until their doubts are dispelled. ...". Unfortunately, we cannot reconstruct the anonymous author's reply on the basis of these few surviving lines:

As for the rest of what he mentioned in this section, accusing the people of religion and law of innovations, if one of them came to a foreign town, no intelligent person would consider him ...

3 In Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we offered a translation of the extant fragments of what appears to be the only detailed refutation by a Jewish author of *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, the well-known polemical tract by Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175) against his former religion. The identity of the author is unknown, and although an approximate date may be given for the manuscript, it offers no clues as to when and where the actual refutation was composed. We do not know whether the author had access to a complete copy of Samaw'al's work or based his refutation on a set of excerpts. Samaw'al's name is not mentioned at any point, nor is the title of his tract. The unknown author does not refer to Samaw'al's Jewish background, although he was no doubt aware of it, as it was common knowledge. While Samaw'al prided himself on the extent of his Jewish learning, which he used against his erstwhile coreligionists, his detractor aims to expose what he describes as the polemicist's lack of familiarity with Hebrew and with Jewish law and custom. Without resorting to vituperative language, the anonymous author accuses Samaw'al of attributing to the Jews beliefs that they do not hold, but rather than to ignore him, he chooses to refute the Muslim scholar's strictures with scriptural, rational and linguistic arguments, some of which are more sophisticated than others. Samaw'al's offensive work contains the standard allegations of Islamic polemics against Judaism: the Torah has been abrogated; it did not enjoy an uninterrupted transmission; the Jews have tampered with their Torah; in spite of this it contains clear references to Muḥammad and the coming of Islam. It is not surprising, therefore, that our anonymous tract should include a detailed refutation of these contentions, as well as of other accusations leveled by Samaw'al against the Jews, such as their supposed adhering to anthropomorphic and anthropopathic descriptions of the deity, defaming the lineage of David and his descendant, their expected Messiah, and observing irrational and objectionable laws and customs. The extant fragments contain some tantalizing indications of more

elaborate discussions by the anonymous author. Although our translation is at times inevitably tentative due to the precarious state of the manuscript, we believe it can make a valuable contribution to the history of interreligious polemics.

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