

Muslim Views of Jews and Judaism in the Medieval Period: A Comparative Study of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Muslim views of Jews and Judaism in the Medieval period by engaging in a comparative study of two important encyclopedic works of comparative religion, composed in that period. These are *Kitāb al-Faṣl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* [Book of Distinctions between Religions, Heresies, and Sects] of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* [Book of Religions and Sects] of al-Shahrastānī (d. 1163). This paper argues that in line with the general methodology of the Islamic genre of comparative religions, these two authors take Islam's truth-claim as the starting point. Moreover, they also seek to prove Islam's truth by pointing out the errors in Judaism (and other religions). This is more pronounced in the case of Ibn Ḥazm whose language is often combative and polemical, but is, nevertheless, also present in al-Shahrastānī's work. Furthermore, this paper argues that of the two, Ibn Ḥazm's discussion of Jews and Judaism is more informed and systematic, and indicates his vast personal knowledge of Judaism through reading and personal interaction with Jews in Medieval Iberia. On the other hand, while al-Shahrastānī's discussion of Judaism provides interesting details about certain Jewish sects; on the whole, it is not systematic and does not suggest that its author had a good enough knowledge of Judaism. Finally, this paper argues that these two authors, and by extension, other Muslim scholars of the Medieval period regarded Jews as people of the book, and as holding on to a religion which previously had divine sanction but which had since been abrogated by the final revelation of God, given to Prophet Muḥammad.² Moreover, Muslim scholars considered Jews to have been unable to preserve their holy books and that they had introduced many corruptions into their religion. Muslim scholars also felt confident that they were the recipients of the final message of God to humanity, as given to Prophet Muḥammad.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in the early seventh century,³ Muslims have claimed Islam to be the continuation and culmination of the same divine message of divine oneness (*tawḥīd*) and belief in the after-life given to all the prophets from Adam onwards. In this regard, the Islamic message was at odds with the Jewish and Christian understanding of the same tradition. It was, therefore, natural for Muslims, from the very beginning, to engage with Judaism and Christianity at the intellectual level to explicate what they believed, based on the Qur'an and Prophet Muḥammad's traditions,

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¹ This is the customary Arabic vocalization. This is how Encyclopedia of Islam refers to him. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Brill Online*, s.v. "al-Shahrastānī," by G. Monnot, accessed 17 November, 2012, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.libproxy.wustl.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-shahrastani-SIM_6769?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=Shahrast%C4%81n%C4%AB. In Persian, it is Shahrīstānī. This is how Steven Wasserstrom has referred to him in his dissertation. See Steven Wasserstrom, "Species of Misbelief: A History of Muslim Heresiography of the Jews" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 178-193. Throughout this paper, I have retained the typical Arabic vocalization.

² Whenever Prophet Muḥammad's name is mentioned, it is considered proper etiquette for Muslims to invoke God's blessings upon him, which is usually in the form of *ṣalla Allāh 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam* (Allah bless him and his family, and give them peace).

³ All dates are CE.

had gone wrong with Judaism and Christianity. This theological impulse was further given impetus by the socio-political situation of the Muslim World during Medieval times. In many parts of this vast region stretching from present-day Pakistan and Central Asia in the east to Iberia in the west, all three Abrahamic faiths lived together. Muslims wielded the ultimate political authority (with some exceptions) but these were essentially multi-religious and multi-ethnic polities. This was especially true of Iberia, which Muslims referred to as al-Andalus. Here, Muslims had been present since the early eighth century. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Muslims and Christians were the two largest religious communities. In addition, Jews, though small in numbers, were also present. These three communities interacted often, socially, politically and economically.

In the Medieval period, Muslim engagement with other religions, both in al-Andalus and other parts of the Muslim world, took on many forms. One of these was Muslim scholarly works on other religions. In the following pages, I propose to describe and analyze Muslim views of Jews and Judaism through the works of two prominent Muslim scholars of the Medieval period. One is Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064) from al-Andalus and the other is al-Shahrastānī (1086-1153) from Iran/Central Asia. Born in Cordoba, Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥazm is considered one of the scholarly giants produced by Muslim Spain. He was an important figure in the Zāhirī (literalist) school, which was one of the then existing Sunni schools of jurisprudence.⁴ Ibn Ḥazm is known for his many works dealing with Islamic theology, Islamic jurisprudence, and Arabic literature. Amongst his various works on Islamic theology, his magnum opus is *Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal* [Book of Distinctions between Religions, Heresies, and Sects] (henceforth *Kitāb al-Faṣl*),⁵ which as the title suggests, is an encyclopedic text dealing with the various religions and sects of his time.⁶ In fact, among the many works of this kind from the Medieval period, two stand out. One is the above-mentioned work of Ibn Ḥazm. It was followed less than a century later by al-Shahrastānī’s similarly titled *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* [Book of Religions and Sects] (henceforth *Kitāb al-Milal*). Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī was a theologian from Iran/Central Asia who composed many works on theology and philosophy. He is mostly remembered for his above-mentioned work.

These two scholars appeared at a juncture in Islamic history when the *Islamic* genre of comparative religions (*muqāranat al-adyān* or *taqābul al-adyān* in Arabic) had matured. This particular Islamic genre is different from the modern discipline of Comparative Religion which does not concern itself with verifying the truth-claims of each religion. The Islamic approach to the study of other religions generally takes validity of Islam’s truth-claim as its starting point. It is because of this that Islamic scholars of Comparative Religion, both pre-modern and modern, quite often engage in a critique of other religions while describing them. In the case of Judaism, an

⁴ The Zāhirī school died out a few centuries after Ibn Ḥazm and remained so until the modern period when it began to make a comeback.

⁵ There is some debate regarding the first part of the title as to whether it is *al-fiṣal* or *al-faṣl*. Ghulam Haider Aasi has discussed the issue at length. See Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm’s Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal*, (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, 1999), 60-63. He provides convincing arguments for the title to be *al-faṣl*.

⁶ Camilla Adang has discussed in detail how the book *Kitāb al-Faṣl* came to be. According to her, Ibn Ḥazm composed different treatises on various topics including Islamic creed, Muslim sects, philosophical groups and the people of the book. Later, he combined them all into one book and called it *Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal*. Many of these earlier treatises have not reached us. Therefore, *Kitāb al-Faṣl* remains the best source for his comments on Judaism. See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 64-69.

important part of this critique is to prove that the *Sharī‘ah*⁷ of Moses has been abrogated (*mansūkh*)⁸ by the *Sharī‘ah* of Prophet Muḥammad.⁹

Of all the works written by pre-modern Muslim scholars on comparative religions, *Kitāb al-Faṣl* and *Kitāb al-Milal* appear to be the most comprehensive ones. Moreover, these two are the only ones that have remained popular, among specialists and non-specialists alike, until today. Although both of the two authors penned a number of works in which they discuss Judaism, sometimes in detail, sometimes not; nevertheless, the above-mentioned two works can be considered representative of their thought because of their comprehensiveness. Moreover, the limited scope of this paper also requires that I limit myself to these two texts.

Questions

In this paper, I seek to answer the following questions:

1. What were Muslim scholarly views of Judaism and Jews during the Medieval period as understood from the above-mentioned works, *Kitāb al-Faṣl* and *Kitāb al-Milal*?
2. How do these two works compare with each other? What are the similarities and differences in their presentation styles, content, and expressed opinions?
3. What caused these authors to engage in comparative religious studies? Was it merely academic pursuits or was there some other factor?
4. Were these works an unbiased attempt on the part of their authors to understand and present various sects’ and religions’ doctrines, or were these largely polemical works?
5. Did these authors interact with Jews of their time to gain first-hand knowledge of Judaism and Jews, or did they rely on second-hand sources?

To explore these questions, I begin with a brief overview of their respective biographies.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Ibn Ḥazm was born in Cordoba in the late Umayyad period. His family was close to the caliphal palace and he was himself a passionate supporter of the Umayyad Caliphate.¹⁰ In the last decades of the caliphate, his family suffered the same vicissitudes as the caliphate until it was abolished in 1031. It was replaced by petty kingdoms (*tawā’if*, sing. *ṭā’ifah*) that competed with one another for land and glory. These states were organized along tribal and ethnic lines. Islam had been replaced by tribalism and ethno-centrism as the binding force. Moreover, each of these states sought to reconstruct the splendor that was Cordoba. Pious Muslims had tolerated the worldly indulgence of the Cordoban caliphate because Islam had the highest position (at least, theoretically) in it. Now, with Islam relegated to a secondary position, pious Muslims perceived these states’ elites’

⁷ *Sharī‘ah* refers to the totality of divine commands given to a prophet. In general, it is translated as law.

⁸ *Mansūkh* is the passive participle of the Arabic verb *nasakha*. The infinitive *naskh* is used as a technical term to mean abrogation of a divine command(s) and its replacement with a new divine command(s).

⁹ Whenever a prophet’s name is mentioned, it is considered proper etiquette for Muslims to invoke God’s blessings upon him and Prophet Muḥammad which is usually in the form of *ṣalla Allāh ‘alayhi wa ‘ala nabīyyinā* (Allah bless him and our Prophet).

¹⁰ Caliphate comes from the word caliph, which is the Anglicized version of *khalīfah*, which itself is the shortened form of *khalīfat al-rasūl*, meaning successor of the messenger (Prophet Muḥammad). It was used as a title by Muslim rulers to highlight their legitimacy. Al-Andalus had been ruled by an Umayyad dynasty since the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I (d. 788) who founded it in 755 in al-Andalus. One of the later Umayyad rulers, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (d. 961) claimed himself to be the caliph, in opposition to the Abbasid caliphate which was based in Baghdad. For a detailed discussion of Ibn Ḥazm’s life and career, and his role in politics, see Aasi, 43-58; and Adang, 59-69.

indulgence in luxury as even more repugnant. It was also in this period of political fragmentation, which Ibn Ḥazm calls a *fitnah* (trial/tribulation), that a Jew became the *wazīr*¹¹ of the Berber Muslim King of Granada.¹² Initially, Ibn Ḥazm sought to re-establish the unity of the peninsula through the re-establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate. However, after multiple failures he retired to a life devoted to intellectual pursuits.¹³ Nevertheless, his socio-political environment seems to have deeply affected him. This has led at least one modern observer to claim that Ibn Ḥazm composed all of his works as part of his grand scheme “to analyze the malaise of the society and to re-orient it towards the interdependence between *Sharī‘ah* and *khilāfah* (caliphate).”¹⁴

While Ibn Ḥazm’s life is well-documented, not much detail is available about al-Shahrastānī’s life and career. This much is clear though, that he was born in Shahrīstān, located between Nishapur and Khawarazm, which was part of the Khawarazmian empire.¹⁵ The exact religious composition of the Khawarazmian empire is not entirely clear. It is likely that it was a multi-religious empire with all three Abrahamic religions present. Al-Shahrastānī lived in this region for most of his life. He studied with Shāfi‘ī and Ash‘arī scholars in Nishapur and excelled in *kalām* (dialectic theology), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and philosophy. Most of his works deal with *kalām*.¹⁶

There is some debate among scholars regarding whether al-Shahrastānī was an Ash‘arī or an Ismā‘īlī. Among his contemporaries, al-Khawārazmī and Ibn al-Sam‘ānī accused him of being inclined towards Ismā‘īlism.¹⁷ This was later repeated by other biographers. Amongst these, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī defended him on the basis of his books which he found to be in agreement with orthodox Sunnism.¹⁸ Among modern Western scholars, Monnot has found his works to give credence to the claim that he was an Ismā‘īlī.¹⁹ Among modern Shī‘ī scholars, al-Na‘īnī also contends that he was Ismā‘īlī.²⁰ However, modern Sunni scholars have generally followed al-Subkī in considering him a Sunni.

¹¹ Literally, it means minister but in this context, it would be more appropriate to translate it as prime minister.

¹² This was Ismā‘īl ibn al-Naghrīla (d. 1056?), referred to as Samuel Ha Nagid in Jewish sources.

¹³ Ibn Ḥazm was arrested and released three times due to his political activities. Later on, he chose to dedicate himself to intellectual works. See his biography referred to above in Aasi, 43-58.

¹⁴ Aasi, 50. Aasi sees this grand scheme in the particular sequence in which Ibn Ḥazm composed his works from logic to philosophy to history of religions to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and then ethics.

¹⁵ The Khawarazmian empire was a Persianate empire that controlled the areas that include present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It was established in late eleventh century and was swept away in the early thirteenth century by Mongol invaders.

¹⁶ See Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirikī, *al-A‘lām: Qāmūs Tarājīm li Ashhar al-Rijāl wa al-Nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa al-Musta‘ribīn wa al-Mustashriqīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 2002), 6: 215.

¹⁷ See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), 3: 377. Also see Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā*, (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d.), 6: 130.

¹⁸ Al-Dhahabī has mentioned in his biographical note on al-Shahrastānī that he was accused of being inclined towards people of the castles and calling towards them and defending them. This seems to be an obvious reference to the group of Niẓārī Ismā‘īlī mercenaries who had gathered around Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 1124) in Alamūt castle in northern Iran. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, (Damascus: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 1982), 20: 287. Also, see al-Subkī’s commentary on this in al-Subkī, 6: 130. For a detailed recent discussion of the subject, see Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī fī Kitābihi al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), 119-196.

¹⁹ EI², s.v. “al-Shahrastānī.” This article also provides a good overview of the debate in English including modern scholars’ take on it.

²⁰ Ibid.

METHODOLOGIES OF STUDYING RELIGIONS

Ibn Ḥazm's Methodology

To understand Ibn Ḥazm's description and analysis of Judaism, one must understand his overall methodology in *Kitāb al-Faṣl*. On first sight, Ibn Ḥazm comes across as a historian of religions in this work. However, a closer look reveals that he is more than that. He is also a theologian who seeks to establish the truth, a truth which he is convinced of, and which he thinks can be established using simple criterion, viz. the basic sources of knowledge that all rational people would agree to. These are the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting, as well as a sixth sense, which he calls intuitive knowledge of the first principles of reason (*awā'il al-'aql*). The latter refers to basic intuitive knowledge that even a child has, i.e. that the whole is greater than the part, two contradictory things cannot occur together such as a person sitting and standing at the same time, one thing cannot be in two places at the same time, two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time, every act needs an actor, no one by himself has knowledge of the unseen, etc. Ibn Ḥazm declares these basic principles, viz. the five regular senses and the sixth sense sufficient for sound reasoning.²¹

After stating these principles, he proceeds to establish various truths that will eventually lead to proving the truth of Islam such as that realities of things are established, that these realities can be known with certainty, that the world is originated etc.²² In the process, he also demolishes the "errors" of other religions as he sees them. Thus, he gradually moves from those religious/philosophical groups that are farthest from Islam to the ones that are closest to Islam. The total categories are six. Jews and Judaism fall in the last category of groups closest to Islam, along with those Christians who deny Trinity, those Sabians who accept prophet hood, and those Magians who consider Zoroaster to be a prophet, while denying other prophets.²³ Ibn Ḥazm wraps up his discussion of the first five groups in the first half of the first volume. The second half of this volume is dedicated to Judaism. The first half of the second volume is devoted to the discussion of Christianity. The rest of the three and half volumes deal with Muslim sects. Throughout this book, Ibn Ḥazm displays his erudition and vast knowledge of other religions and sects, their primary beliefs, practices, internal debates and evolution. While he tries to be accurate in describing other religions, he does not limit himself to mere reporting of the facts. He also engages in debates with them, in a tone that is quite often combative and polemical. In spite of his stated goal alluded to above, viz. he would judge each belief using the basic principles he delineated at the beginning of his book, he also employs his own understanding of Islamic theology to critique these beliefs.

Al-Shahrastānī's Methodology

Al-Shahrastānī's book *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* has received praise from many quarters, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Wasserstrom has praised him abundantly for being rigorous and less polemical, calling him "the greatest pre-modern historian of religion in any language."²⁴ He has

²¹ Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-Faṣl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1982), 1: 41-42.

²² I was alerted to this particular aspect of *Kitāb al-Faṣl* by Arnaldez's entry on Ibn Ḥazm in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Brill Online*, s.v. "Ibn Ḥazm," by R. Arnaldez, accessed 08 December, 2012. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-hazm-COM_0325.

²³ Ibn Ḥazm, 1: 35-36.

²⁴ Wasserstrom, 178 & 193.

also quoted a number of modern scholars who have found his book to be extremely useful and unbiased.²⁵ Among his detractors, Kazi and Flynn have mentioned A. J. Arberry who declared *Kitāb al-Milal* to be a loose collection of quotations from older writers without the slightest acknowledgement.²⁶ Notwithstanding this remark, al-Shahrastānī's admirers outnumber his detractors. The best feature of *Kitāb al-Milal* is its conciseness and excellent order. Generally, al-Shahrastānī's presentation is clear but sometimes it tends to be ambiguous, especially the section on Judaism. Unlike Ibn Ḥazm, al-Shahrastānī is not combative. He does engage in some debate with his subjects but on the whole his attitude is that of mere presentation of facts as he knows them. It is this attitude of his that could explain why so many modern scholars seem to be happy with him. Another aspect which stands out is that before delving into discussion of a particular religious group, al-Shahrastānī defines all the important terms that he will be using.

In comparison to *Kitāb al-Faṣl*, *Kitāb al-Milal* is a shorter work. Unlike Ibn Ḥazm, al-Shahrastānī has organized his book in terms of a religion's or sect's increasing distance from Islam. After the introduction and a few preliminary sections, al-Shahrastānī devotes about two-fifths of the book to a discussion of Muslim sects. This is followed by a chapter on the "people of the book." It includes two sections, one on those who actually have a (revealed) book, viz. Jews and Christians; the other on those who have something akin to a (revealed) book, viz. Magians and Manicheans. The last two-fifths of the book is devoted to people of opinions and creeds (*ahl al-ahwā' wa al-niḥal*). By this, he is referring to all those who do not have any revelation, pseudo or otherwise, to support their ideas and beliefs. Within this section, he has devoted the largest space to philosophers, Greek and Muslim.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF JUDAISM

Ibn Ḥazm on Judaism

As mentioned above, in his typology of religions, Ibn Ḥazm has placed Judaism in the sixth category, which is the closest to Islam. This section is quite large. Ibn Ḥazm begins by mentioning five Jewish sects along with a brief description of their beliefs, origin, location, etc. These groups are the Sāmīriyyah (Samaritans), the Ṣadūqiyyah (Saducees), the 'Anāniyyah (Karaites), the Rabbāniyyah (Rabbanites), and the 'Īsawiyyah (Isawites). He describes the Sāmīriyyah as possessing a Torah different from other Jews. Moreover, unlike other Jews they do not regard Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) as the holy city; rather, they consider Nablus to be the holy city. Furthermore, they deny all prophets after Moses and Joshua. The Ṣadūqiyyah are named after a person called Ṣadūq. According to Ibn Ḥazm, among all the Jews, they claim that al-'Azīz²⁷ is the son of Allah. With regards to the 'Anāniyyah, he mentions that they are the followers of 'Ānān al-Dāwūdī, and that the Jews call them the Qarrāyūn (Karaites). He also describes them as those who believe in the Torah and the books of all the prophets after Moses, but deny the works of Rabbis, i.e. the Oral Torah. He identifies the Rabbanites as being in the majority and thus representative of

²⁵ Ibid., 184.

²⁶ A. K. Kazi & J. G. Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslims Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal by Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 4.

²⁷ This could be a typo. Perhaps, he is referring to al-'Uzayr. In written Arabic, there is a difference of only one dot between the two.

the Jews. Later on, throughout his presentation and critique of Judaism, he mainly deals with this group.

While each of these four groups receives a paragraph, Ibn Ḥazm devotes a full page to the 'Īsawīyah. He describes them as the companions of Abū 'Īsā al-Aṣbahānī, a Jew from Isfahan in Iran. The distinctive feature about this group is that they accept the prophet hood of Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad, except that they say that Prophet Muḥammad was sent only to the Arabs.

Naskh (Abrogation of Divine Command):

After describing the five Jewish sects, Ibn Ḥazm classifies all Jews into those who do not consider *naskh* to be possible and those who do consider it possible but deny that it ever occurred. He argues with each group successively, arguing that not only is abrogation possible, it occurs in a number of places in the Torah as well. For example, the Torah mentions that Jacob simultaneously married Leah and Rachel, the two daughters of Laban, but later marriage to two sisters was prohibited under the Mosaic law.²⁸ In fact, Ibn Ḥazm's attack against the Jewish stance on abrogation is based on his use of two distinct Islamic theological terms *naskh* and *badā'* (God changing His mind because of new information that was previously unknown to Him). He has defined the first in his section on Judaism but not the second.²⁹ For him, *naskh* is not a problem but *badā'* is because the latter entails that God changed His mind after learning something new or after finding some fault in His previous command, while the former merely means that God changed His command without implying any imperfection in His omniscience or omnipotence. Ibn Ḥazm considers Jews at fault for not differentiating between the two.³⁰

Prophet hood:

Proving the possibility and actual occurrence of *naskh* is one of the ways for Ibn Ḥazm to prove the possibility of Prophet Muḥammad's prophet hood. He also engages in an attempt to prove that there are rational reasons for Jews to accept the prophet hood of Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad. He maintains that the main criterion for accepting a person's claim to prophet hood is his performing miracles. This he says is the reason why the Jews believed in the prophets sent to them. By the same token, they should be accepting Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad as prophets. Moreover, in the case of 'Īsawīyah, who accept these two as prophets, denying the teachings of these two is self-contradictory. Ibn Ḥazm refutes Jews who claimed that Moses had told them to not accept any prophet who comes to them with a *Sharī'ah* different than his even if he performs miracles. According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Torah actually says "whoever comes to you claiming prophet hood, while he is actually a liar, then do not confirm him (*man atākum yadda ṭ nubuwwah wa huwa kādhib fa lā tuṣaddiqūhu*)."³¹

Although Ibn Ḥazm strongly disputes the authenticity of the then extant Torah, as will be seen in the next section, it seems he could not resist the temptation to still quote passages that prophesied the coming of Prophet Muḥammad. Thus, in addition to the remark above, he also mentions that it is stated in Torah that "Allah came from Sinai, then appeared from Sā'īr, and then manifested from the mountains of Fārān (*jā'a Allāh min Sīnā*)."³² He analyzes this by saying that

²⁸ Ibid., 1: 180-181.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Aasi, 82-86.

³¹ Ibn Ḥazm, 1:190.

Sinai is the place where Moses received the revelation, Sā'ir is the place where Jesus received the revelation, and Fārān is the place where Prophet Muḥammad received the revelation.³²

Biblical Criticism:³³

Within his section on Judaism, Ibn Ḥazm has devoted the largest space to a historical and textual criticism of Torah and other Biblical books.³⁴ The title is instructive. It reads “*faṣl fī munāqadāt zāhirah wa takādhib wāḍiḥah fī al-kitāb alladhī tusammīhi al-Yahūd al-Tawrāh wa fī sā'ir kutubihim wa fī al-Anājīl al-arba'ah yatabayyanu bi dhālik taḥrīfuhum wa tabdīluhum wa annahā gḥayr alladhī anzala Allāh 'azza wa jalla*” (section concerning manifest contradictions and obvious lies in the book named by the Jews as the Torah and in the rest of their books and in the four Gospels wherefrom their corruption and alteration is manifest, and that they are not what Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, revealed).³⁵ It is in this section that Ibn Ḥazm uses the harshest language which perhaps justified the proverbial saying “the sword of Ḥajjāj³⁶ and the tongue of Ibn Ḥazm are twin sisters.”³⁷

His main critique of the Torah is that the Torah of his time was not the same as the one revealed to Moses. The term he uses for this is *taḥrif*, which means corruption or distortion. He goes about proving this in three ways.

1. The first is his attempt to prove that the then extant Torah had so many inner contradictions and errors that it could not be the word of God. It must have been tampered with by humans. He provides a long list of internal contradictions, factual mistakes, historical and geographical inaccuracies, computational mistakes, unfulfilled prophecies, and immoral conduct ascribed to the prophets and angels. Here he applies his rational criterion for judging religions and beliefs which he had mentioned in the beginning of the book. However, he does not limit himself to that. He also uses Islamic principles to evaluate the contents of these books such as when he finds certain things attributed to the prophets and angels objectionable because they violate the Islamic concept of a prophet or angel. Examples of some of these issues are given below:

- i. The Torah claims that Adam is a god when it mentions that God says that Adam has become one of Us when he ate from the tree of life.³⁸ This violates the Jewish and Islamic concept of oneness of God (*tawḥīd*).
- ii. Torah's claim that Lot slept with his daughters.³⁹ Incest is unbecoming of a prophet.

³² Ibid., 1: 194.

³³ For a detailed critique of Ibn Ḥazm's Biblical criticism and its position within the Islamic genre of Biblical criticism, see Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Hazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, (Atlanta: American Academy of Religion, 1998). Also see Aasi, 92-114; and Adang, 237-248.

³⁴ In the edition of *Kitāb al-Faṣl* that I have before me, the section on Judaism is from the beginning of p. 177 till the end of p. 329. Of this, the section on the contradictions of Torah and other Biblical books begins on p. 201 and last until p. 285. This is followed by a section on how Torah was corrupted, which begins on p. 287 and lasts until p. 329. For a detailed table of contents of the section on the contradictions of Torah, see the translation of this table as given in Pulcini, 58-59.

³⁵ The translation is from Aasi, 89. Strangely, the word “not” at the end is missing in Aasi's translation. Apparently, it is a typo. I have added it because of the Arabic original requiring it.

³⁶ Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 714) was the governor of Iraq and the eastern provinces during the Umayyad Caliphate (r. 661-750) in the early period of Islam. He is known in Islamic history as being especially brutal. He massacred many, including prominent religious personalities of his time.

³⁷ Aasi, 91.

³⁸ Ibn Ḥazm, 1: 207.

³⁹ Ibid., 1: 223.

- iii. Confusion in the Torah regarding the ages of the sons of Noah.⁴⁰ This is a case of internal contradiction.
- iv. The Torah claims that the Children of Israel will rule the land between the Nile and Euphrates. He claims this prophecy has not been fulfilled so far.⁴¹

2. Ibn Ḥazm's second approach is to trace the history of Torah from Moses until his time. Here he finds a number of problems regarding the continuity and reliability of the chain of transmission of Torah from Moses to his time. It is interesting to see how Ibn Ḥazm uses the tools that Muslims had developed for *Ḥadīth*-criticism to examine the authenticity of Torah. According to Ibn Ḥazm, the first problem is that there were at least seven times when Israelites committed mass apostasy.⁴² These periods were of different durations, the shortest being three years and the longest being forty years. It is impossible for the Torah to have been preserved during this time because there was no one left to transmit it.⁴³ Secondly, even though many Israelite kings were God-fearing, there were many others who were not and they persecuted the religious amongst them thereby hindering Torah's transmission.⁴⁴ Moreover, during Moses' time and later on as well, Torah was entrusted to only a small group of people, the priests. The average person did not have direct access to it. It is highly unlikely that such a small number of transmitters could have preserved Torah during periods of persecution and apostasy. In fact, during the periods of mass apostasy, the longest of which lasted for forty years, it is certain that Torah would have been lost.

Finally, Ibn Ḥazm mentions that the fate of Torah was unequivocally sealed when Nebuchadnezzar raided Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, enslaved the Israelites and took them to Babylon. The only copy of Torah (whichever version it may be) was in that Temple. With its destruction, it would have been destroyed. Moreover, according to Ibn Ḥazm, Jews themselves agree that Ezra the Scribe (‘Adhrā al-Warrāq al-Hārūnī) dictated to them the Torah from his memory. This dictation had many mistakes so he fixed them later on. This dictation by Ezra was forty years after the Jews' return to Jerusalem from captivity, which itself lasted for seventy years.⁴⁵ According to Ibn Ḥazm, Torah began to spread only after this dictation by Ezra, and even then it did not acquire a large number of transmitters, making the reliability of Ezra's version doubtful as well.

3. Ibn Ḥazm mentions that the Samaritans have a Torah different from that which all the other Jews have. He says he has not seen it because the Samaritans do not leave Palestine and Jordan but that it has reached him through definitive (*qaṭ‘ī*) evidence that it is also corrupted and altered like the Torah of the rest of the Jews.⁴⁶

It seems Ibn Ḥazm also had access to Rabbinical homiletic literature called *midrash aggadah*. He found it extremely problematic because it had numerous anthropomorphisms. As a *Zāhirī* theologian, who rejected esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, he found this as

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1: 212.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1: 203.

⁴² Ibid., 1: 288 & 290.

⁴³ Ibid., 1: 298.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, 1: 202.

further proof that the Rabbis who are credited with transmitting Torah were not credible transmitters.

Al-Shahrastānī on Judaism

As mentioned earlier, al-Shahrastānī's has devoted much less space to Judaism as compared to Muslim sects and philosophers. Moreover, compared to *Kitāb al-Faṣl*, this section is quite small as well. It almost makes one think that perhaps he included it only to fulfill the encyclopedic nature of his book. However, though brief, the section contains a lot of information.

As mentioned earlier, the section on Judaism is part of the chapter on the "people of the book." Like elsewhere, al-Shahrastānī begins by defining *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the book) and then Judaism.⁴⁷ Here, al-Shahrastānī follows a comparative method. First, he compares people of the book with the Arabs, and then Jews with the Christians. He goes on to say that *qiblah* (direction to turn to for worship) of the people of the book was Jerusalem while that of the Children of Ismā'īl (Arabs) was Makkah.⁴⁸ Later, he compares Jews to the Christians saying the Jewish nation is greater (in merit) than the Christian nation because the law was given to Moses, because all of the Children of Israel submitted to it and were obligated to follow the rulings of Torah.⁴⁹

In his section on Judaism, al-Shahrastānī follows a different order than that of Ibn Ḥazm's. He begins by defining the meaning of Judaism. Hence, he says: "*hāda al-rajul* means he returned and repented. This name stuck with them because of the saying of Moses, peace be upon him: Indeed we return to You, i.e. we return and beseech [You] (*hāda al-rajul ay raja 'a wa tāba wa innamā lazimahum hādihā al-ism li qawl Mūsā 'alayhi al-salām innā hudnā ilayka ay raja 'nā wa taḍarra 'nā*)."⁵⁰ Later, he describes their main beliefs including their opinions regarding *naskh*, free will, and anthropomorphism. This is followed by a detailed discussion of Jews' belief regarding the impermissibility of *naskh*, his detailed argument against it and in support of the prophet hood of Prophet Muḥammad. He ends with his presentation of the main Jewish sects from whom he claims all other Jewish sects are derived. I will discuss these one by one.

Naskh (Abrogation of Divine Command) and Prophet Muḥammad's Prophet hood:

With regards to *naskh*, al-Shahrastānī's presentation of arguments for the Jews is similar to Ibn Ḥazm's in that the Jews consider *naskh* impermissible because they equate it with *badā'*. While al-Shahrastānī also takes issue with this, unlike Ibn Ḥazm, he is relatively brief and on the whole, quite civil. His main argument rests on proving to his readers that Jews acknowledge that Torah contains mention of Abraham and his son Ismā'īl, that Abraham prayed for Ismā'īl and his progeny, and that God accepted it by saying that "I have blessed Ismā'īl and his progeny, I have placed all good in them, I will dominate them over all nations, and I will soon send in them a messenger from among them who will recite My verses upon them (*innī bāraktu 'ala Ismā'īl wa awlādihi wa ja'altu fīhim al-khayr kullahu wa sa-uzhīrūhum 'ala al-umam kullihā wa sa-ab'athu fīhim rasūlan yatlu 'alayhim ayātī*)."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Amīr 'Alī Mahnā & 'Alī Ḥasan Fā'ūr, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1993), 1: 247 & 250.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1: 248

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1: 250.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1: 253.

According to al-Shahrastānī, the Jews acknowledge this, except that they say that God accepted his prayer for kingdom (government) and not for prophet hood. Al-Shahrastānī responds to this by saying that the divine gift of kingship which the Jews accept for Ismā‘il and his progeny, it could either be by a kingship (government) upholding truth and justice or not upholding them? If it was not upholding truth and justice, then this would not be a favor that God would remind Abraham of; and if Jews accept truth and justice in terms of kingship (government), then it is necessary that the king should be truthful with respect to God, as well in what he claims and says about Him.

Al-Shahrastānī also quotes the verse of the Torah which Ibn Ḥazm had quoted to prove that the Torah had prophesied the coming of Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad. His analysis is the same as that of Ibn Ḥazm’s.⁵²

Jewish Sects:

Al-Shahrastānī’s presentation of Jewish sects is quite different from Ibn Ḥazm’s. It is more detailed with one strange oddity; Rabbanites, the largest group of Jews, are conspicuous by their almost absence. They are mentioned only in passing while discussing Jewish beliefs. In the main discussion of Jewish sects, al-Shahrastānī mentions four sects and claims that all other Jewish groups are derived from these four.⁵³ These four are the ‘Anāniyyah (Karaites), the ‘Isawiyah (Isawites), the Maqāribah and the Yūdh‘āniyyah,⁵⁴ and the Sāmiriyyah (Samaritans). He also mentions another group called the Mūshkāniyyah. In the edition that I have generally followed, it is listed as a separate sect.⁵⁵ However, in another edition, it is listed as a sub-sect of the Maqāribah and the Yūdh‘āniyyah.⁵⁶ The author’s count of four would be valid only if the Mūshkāniyyah were to be not counted as a separate sect.

In his discussion of the ‘Anāniyyah, al-Shahrastānī does not mention that they are also called Karaites as Ibn Ḥazm had done. Interestingly, he does use this term in passing while discussing Jewish beliefs when he compares Rabbanites to the Mu‘tazilah and Karaites to the Mujbarah.⁵⁷ Regarding the ‘Anāniyyah, he mentions that they are the followers of ‘Anān ibn Dāwūd. He does not mention their rejection of the Oral Torah as Ibn Ḥazm had done. He only mentions that they differ from the rest of the Jews in the Sabbath and the festivals, that they forbid eating birds, deer, fish and locusts, and that they slaughter the animal on the nape. He spends more time describing what they think of Jesus. According to him, they hold Jesus to be a sincere friend of Allah, and not a prophet of God. They claim that he confirmed the Torah and called people towards it. The Jews of his time transgressed twice; once when they denied him, and second when

⁵² See p. 9 above.

⁵³ Al-Shahrastānī, 1: 261.

⁵⁴ These are two names for the same group.

⁵⁵ Al-Shahrastānī, 1: 258.

⁵⁶ See Abū al-Faḥ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Muḥammad al-Wakīl, (Cairo: Mu‘assasat al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakah, 1968), 2: 22. This contains the sentence *minhum al-Mūshkāniyyah* (from among them are the Mūshkāniyyah). Apparently, the editors of the 1993 edition understood *minhum* to refer to Jews in general, and dropped it while editing; whereas it may have referred to the Maqāribah and the Yūdh‘āniyyah in particular.

⁵⁷ Al-Shahrastānī, ed. Mahnā & Fā‘ūr, 1: 252. The Mu‘tazilah were an Islamic sect mostly known for their emphasis on reason to the extent of over-ruling revelation when they felt it contradicted reason. Mujbarah is another name for the Qadariyyah, which was an Islamic sect that believed that humans do not have a free will.

they had him killed. Some of them also think that the Gospels were not divine revelation because they were gathered by four of his companions after his death.⁵⁸

Al-Shahrastānī's discussion of the 'Īsawīyah is longer than that of Ibn Ḥazm's and according to Wasserstrom, it is "the fullest extant report on this sect."⁵⁹ Like Ibn Ḥazm, he identifies their founder as Abū 'Īsā al-Asfahānī. Interestingly, he does not mention their belief about Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad being prophets. He does give a detailed account of their founder and his claims regarding him being a messenger whom God had spoken to. Oddly, at the end of this section, he mentions that the Torah of the people was compiled by thirty rabbis for some king of Rome so that every ignorant person would not tamper with its rulings. It is not clear whether he is referring to the Torah accepted by most Jews or he is suggesting that the 'Īsawīyah had a different Torah.⁶⁰

While discussing the Maqāribah and the Yūdh'āniyyah, al-Shahrastānī devotes considerable space to discussing how some of them claim that God took away the prophets through an angel which He had chosen, and gave him precedence over all creation and made him a successor over them. They say: all that is in the Torah and all the books regarding attributes of Allah Most High, is [in fact] a report about that angel. Otherwise, it would not be permissible to describe Allah Most High with an attribute.⁶¹ Apparently, this is a reference to the angel Metatron which some Jews believed in. Al-Shahrastānī's description of these beliefs seems sympathetic. By way of comparison, he mentions how certain passages of the Qur'an which apparently refer to God, and therefore would be problematic, are interpreted by Muslims as actually referring to the archangel Gabriel.⁶² While discussing the Mūshkāniyyah, a sub-sect of the Maqāribah, he identifies them as believing that Prophet Muḥammad was a prophet sent to all humanity except the Jews.

Al-Shahrastānī's discussion of the Samaritans is also longer than that of Ibn Ḥazm's. He mentions how their Torah is different from that of other Jews, and how they consider Nablus to be the holy city instead of Jerusalem. He also mentions two sub-groups of Samaritans: Dūstāniyyah, also called the Alfāniyyah, and the Kūstāniyyah. The main difference between them is in terms of their belief regarding the afterlife. The latter accept it while the former deny it saying reward and punishment happen in the world.⁶³

SOURCES

Jewish Informants

Ibn Hazm:

Ibn Ḥazm lived in al-Andalus all his life. As mentioned above, it was a multi-religious society. Ibn Ḥazm had ample opportunity to interact with Jewish scholars and discuss with them Jewish beliefs and practices. In fact, he had been interacting with Jews from an early age.⁶⁴ Most of these would

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1: 256.

⁵⁹ Wasserstrom, 187.

⁶⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, ed. Mahnā & Fā'ūr, 1: 258.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1: 259-260.

⁶² Ibid., 1: 260.

⁶³ Ibid., 1: 261.

⁶⁴ Adang, 94.

have been Rabbanites who were the majority among the Jews.⁶⁵ He had held disputations with Ismā'īl ibn al-Naghrīlah (Samuel Ha Nagid), a Rabbanite Jew, before the latter became the *wazīr* of Granada.

In his discussion of the 'Anāniyyah, Ibn Ḥazm mentions that some of them live in Toledo and Talavera in central Iberia. It is possible that he may have met some of them. According to Adang, his strong anti-Rabbinical stance as well as reproduction of Karaite anti-Rabbinical accusations suggest that his main source(s) was Karaite. However, there could be another reason for that. Ibn Ḥazm belonged to the *Zāhirī* (literalist) school of thought within Islam, which rejected blind following of scholars (*taqlīd*) and preferred direct access to the Qur'an and Sunnah, the twin sources of Islamic doctrine and law. The Karaites were similar to the *Zāhirīs* in that they rejected the mediation of Rabbis and preferred direct access to the Bible. It is plausible that Ibn Ḥazm felt sympathy for them, and therefore, was harsh on the Rabbanites more than he was on the Karaites.

His discussion of the 'Isawīyah also suggests that he may have met them. As for the other two groups that he mentions, viz. the *Ṣadūqiyyah* and the *Sāmīriyyah*, he admits to having never met them.⁶⁶

Al-Shahrastānī:

Al-Shahrastānī's incomplete description of Karaites and almost non-description of Rabbanites suggests that he did not have any informants from these two sects. According to Wasserstrom, if al-Shahrastānī's description of the Jewish sects is taken as a whole, it would seem that he only had an 'Isawite informant, whose presentation and understanding of other Jewish sects colored al-Shahrastānī's understanding.⁶⁷ The details that he mentions regarding this sect support this hypothesis. However, the fact that he does not even mention their belief regarding Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad as prophets, which is the distinctive feature of this sect, supports the claim that he did not have any 'Isawite informant. In my opinion, al-Shahrastānī's description of Jewish sects is not systematic, and he ends his discussion abruptly. He does mention arguing with some Jew but it is not enough to draw any firm conclusion about his Jewish informant(s).⁶⁸

Jewish Textual Sources

Both Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī have engaged in Biblical criticism, Ibn Ḥazm to a much greater extent than al-Shahrastānī. This raises a number of questions. Did they know Hebrew or not? Did they have access to the Hebrew Bible, or did they rely on Arabic translations? Ibn Ḥazm's use of Hebrew words and phrases in different works suggests that he had some knowledge of Hebrew. However, according to Adang, this was limited knowledge, not enough to allow him to read the Bible in its original version.⁶⁹ Moreover, according to Adang, the description that Ibn Ḥazm has provided of the Torah indicates that he had an abridged version of the Torah before him.⁷⁰ As to what is the source of this abridged Torah? Whether it was prepared by a Muslim or a Jew? It is not entirely clear.

⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥazm, 1: 178.

⁶⁶ Adang, 97.

⁶⁷ Wasserstrom, 187-193.

⁶⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, ed. Mahnā & Fā'ūr, 1: 253.

⁶⁹ Adang, 135-136.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 136-137.

It also seems he had access to some Karaite anti-Rabbinical literature which he may have used to attack Rabbinical Judaism.⁷¹ Moreover, Adang has found numerous instances where she thinks Ibn Ḥazm may have relied on a Karaite source.⁷²

Muslim Sources

Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī appeared at a time in Muslim history when most of Islamic sciences/disciplines had already matured. This also included the field of comparative religions. Within that, a number of Muslim scholars had contributed extensively to the study of Jews and Judaism. These included Ibn Rabban (d. 865), Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 905) and others. In the case of a polymath like Ibn Ḥazm, it is logical to assume that he was familiar with the work of these authors. Adang has mentioned instances where she thinks he may have used their works.⁷³ Al-Shahrastānī came after Ibn Ḥazm. One would assume that he would have access to all of this literature as well. While he did rely upon previous Muslim scholars for the rest of his *Kitāb al-Milal*;⁷⁴ his not so coherent presentation of Judaism suggests that he had not studied much of this previous literature with respect to Judaism.

In terms of sources, the last question that remains is, did these scholars rely on Christian sources for their description and analysis of Judaism? It is not entirely clear. Wasserstrom thinks that Christian sources had influenced early Islamic literature about Judaism.⁷⁵ If that is indeed the case, then it is possible that Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī may have used this material without fully knowing that it was of Christian origin.

MOTIVATIONS

The last issue to consider is, what motivated these authors to study Judaism? A simple answer could be that they were attempting to write encyclopedic texts on the world's religions and sects. Therefore, it was logical for them to include a section on Judaism. While this may be true, we have already seen that Muslim scholars writing in the Islamic genre of comparative religions assumed the validity of Islam's truth-claim. It was not just an academic exercise. Moreover, Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāb al-Faṣl* is characterized by a strong polemical tone. This is particularly true of his discussion of Judaism. According to Adang, Ibn Ḥazm's main goal for composing *Kitāb al-Faṣl* was polemical. It was to prove the truth of Islam with respect to all religions, and in the case of Judaism, to prove that the Torah had been abrogated and that Prophet Muḥammad was a prophet who abrogated previous religions. While the polemical tone is subdued in the case of al-Shahrastānī, it is present nevertheless. He also seeks to prove the truth of Islam, to prove that the Torah had been abrogated and that Prophet Muḥammad was a prophet whose *Sharī'ah* abrogated previous religions.

More importantly, in the case of Ibn Ḥazm, as mentioned earlier, Aasi contends that his academic endeavors were, in fact, meant to achieve a single goal, viz. to systematize all extant knowledge according to an Islamic pattern. This, he hoped, would pave the way for Muslims to see the connection between *Sharī'ah* and caliphate, which would eventually help re-establish the

⁷¹ Ibid., 102.

⁷² Ibid., 246.

⁷³ See, for example, Adang, 105 & 251.

⁷⁴ Al-Suḥaybānī, 231-249.

⁷⁵ Wasserstrom, 299.

caliphate in al-Andalus. It is possible that that was his motivation. However, to verify such a claim one would have to engage in a thorough study of all of Ibn Ḥazm's works, and that is beyond the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding description and analysis of *Kitāb al-Faṣl* and *Kitāb al-Milal*, we have seen what their authors, and by extension, Muslim scholars of the Medieval period, thought of Jews and Judaism. In brief, Muslim scholars regarded Jews as people of the book, and as holding on to a religion which previously had divine sanction but which had since been abrogated by the final revelation of God given to Prophet Muḥammad. Muslim scholars considered Jews to have been unable to preserve their holy books and that they had introduced many corruptions into their religion. Muslim scholars felt confident that they were the recipients of the final message of God to humanity, as given to Prophet Muḥammad.

Among the many books written in the Islamic genre of comparative religions, *Kitāb al-Faṣl* and *Kitāb al-Milal* stand out for their comprehensiveness and erudition. Both authors had set out to compose encyclopedias of religions and sects. Both succeeded at that. Both also sought to prove Islam's truth as they saw it. They engaged with their subjects to point out the errors in other religions and to establish the veracity of Islam's claim as the only true religion. Both made use of previous Islamic literature on the subject. While the former is more detailed than the latter, the latter is more concise and better organized. Over the centuries, both books have received scholars' attention. Of the two, *Kitāb al-Milal* has gained more popularity, both among Islamic scholars and modern academics, due to its generally non-polemical tone. Among classical Islamic scholars, the above-mentioned al-Subkī compared the two and considered *Kitāb al-Milal* to be much better than *Kitāb al-Faṣl* in terms of organization and accuracy.⁷⁶ While al-Shahrastānī may have been accurate in his description of other religions and Muslim sects, this is not really the case with his section on Judaism.

With regards to Judaism, Ibn Ḥazm had a better grasp and understanding of Jewish beliefs and practices, as well as of their literature. He had held disputations with their religious scholars over the course of his long intellectual career. He also apparently had some knowledge of Hebrew. On the other hand, al-Shahrastānī comes across as someone with limited knowledge of Jewish religion and culture including language. Apparently he did not get a chance to interact with many Jews. However, because of his providing more detail about certain Jewish sects, his book is still considered a valuable resource for Jewish history, among other things.

⁷⁶ See al-Subkī, 6: 128-129.

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