

## ON IBN ḤAZM'S RHETORIC IN *AL-RADD 'ALĀ IBN AL-NAGHRĪLA*

Sobre la retórica de Ibn Ḥazm en *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Nagrīla*

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**Abstract:** In his polemic composition *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Nagrīla al-Yahūdī*, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī (994/1064) attempts to demonstrate the Jews' *tahrīf* (falsification) of the Torah by citing several examples. This article intends to shed some light on an important aspect of Ibn Ḥazm's rhetoric as reflected in *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Nagrīla*. I argue, however, that by juxtaposing some of Ibn Ḥazm's arguments with the relevant Jewish sources, we find that in some of these examples he himself deliberately misrepresents and misquotes explicit Torah texts, undermines their authority and overlooks parallel Qur'ānic accounts of which he must have been aware. Ibn Ḥazm's tendentiousness and double standard in this matter stem from his wish to prove that the Torah was falsified and, by so doing, to lend further support to the Qur'ānic argument regarding the *tahrīf*.

**Resumen:** En la composición polémica *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Nagrīla al-Yahūdī*, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī (994/1064) intentó demostrar la falsificación (*tahrīf*) judía de la Torá usando para ello varios ejemplos. Este artículo pretende arrojar algo de luz sobre un aspecto importante de la argumentación utilizada por Ibn Ḥazm tal y como se refleja en dicha obra. Con todo, sostengo que, si comparamos parte de los argumentos de ese autor con las fuentes judías más relevantes, encontraremos que Ibn Ḥazm tergiversó deliberadamente algunos de los ejemplos, citó erróneamente textos explícitos de la Torá, socavó su autoridad y pasó por alto los relatos coránicos paralelos, de los que, sin duda, era consciente. La tendenciosidad y el doble rasero de Ibn Ḥazm con respecto a este tema se derivan de su deseo de demostrar que la Torá había sido falsificada y, de ese modo, dar más apoyo al argumento coránico relativo al *tahrīf*.

**Key words:** Ibn Ḥazm. Ibn al-Nagrīla. *Tahrīf*. *Naskh*. *'Iṣma*.

**Palabras clave:** Ibn Ḥazm. Ibn al-Nagrīla. *Tahrīf*. *Nasj*. *'Iṣma*.

### INTRODUCTION

Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī (994/1064) is considered one of the most eminent Muslim scholars for his many compositions and the eclecticism of his areas of inquiry, which include Islamic law, history, theology,

literature, poetry, grammar, and polemics<sup>1</sup>. One of his compositions is *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghārīla al-Yahūdī* (hereinafter: *al-Radd*), a polemic against Jews and Judaism. Ibn Ḥazm claimed to have written this tract in response to a critical pamphlet by Ibn al-Naghārīla on contradictions in the Qur'ān. In this tract, he wards off Ibn al-Naghārīla's arguments and dwells at length and in trenchant polemical language on what he considers contradictions and chronological, geographical, and theological inaccuracies in the Bible.

*Al-Radd* has been discussed by scholars in the specific context of Ibn al-Naghārīla's identity. Although Ibn Ḥazm does not mention Ibn al-Naghārīla by name, David Powers notes that most scholars have concluded that it was Samuel b. al-Naghārīla (Samuel ha-Nagid, 993/1056)<sup>2</sup>, vizier of Granada<sup>3</sup>. Others disagree. Camilla Adang, for example, argues: "It is unlikely and out of character, though that Samuel should have risked losing all, including of his life, by willfully attacking Islam"<sup>4</sup>. Hanna Shemesh concurs<sup>5</sup>. Sarah Stroumsa suggests that Ibn Ḥazm's tract was against Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Ibn al-Rāwandī (827/911), who had written a polemical tract against Islam<sup>6</sup>. Paul Fenton claims it was Samuel ha-Nagid's son, Joseph<sup>7</sup>. Interestingly, Ibn Ḥazm admits that he did not see Ibn al-Naghārīla's pamphlet and became acquainted with its contents through an unnamed Muslim (*rajul min al-Muslimīn*)<sup>8</sup>. Given that no copy of this text has survived, little can be done to determine its author's identity.

Ibn Ḥazm is eager to prove that various contents in the Jewish sources were falsified, an argument that Islamic sources call *tahrīf*<sup>9</sup>. This article intends to shed some light on an important aspect of Ibn Ḥazm's rhetoric as reflected in *al-Radd*. It will examine some of his arguments on *tahrīf* as presented in this text and demonstrate that in at least five cases Ibn Ḥazm was probably familiar with Biblical texts and deliberately misquoted them to undermine their authority.

#### 1. "FACE TO FACE": MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Ibn Ḥazm argues that the falsification of the Torah finds expression in several ways. First, since God is shapeless, His anthropomorphic and anthropopathic re-

1. On his life and work, see Arnaldez. "Ibn Ḥazm"; Adang; Fierro and Schmidtke. *Ibn Hazm of Cordoba*.

2. On his life and work, see Targarona. "Ibn Naghrella".

3. Powers. "Reading/Misreading one another's scripture", p. 109.

4. Adang. *Muslim writers*, p. 68.

5. Shemesh. "Ibn Ḥazm's", p. 86.

6. Stroumsa. "From Muslim heresy to Jewish-Muslim polemics".

7. Fenton. "Jewish attitudes to Islam", p. 91.

8. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghārīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 47.

9. See further, Lazarus-Yafeh. "Tahrīf".

presentations in the Torah prove that the Torah was falsified. Ibn Ḥazm criticizes several Biblical verses on these grounds. One of them, he says, is “And Allāh talked to Moses mouth to mouth (*fam li-fam*), as a man speaketh unto his friend”<sup>10</sup>. It is difficult to know which verse he is referencing. It seems that his intention is to Exod. 33:11: “And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face (*panīm 'el panīm*), as a man speaketh unto his friend”. Also possible, however, is Num. 12:8, which specifically includes the words “mouth to mouth”: “With him will I speak mouth to mouth (*peh 'el peh*) [...]”.

Jewish sources term Moses “the master of the prophets” (*adōn ha-neḥī'īm*) because he attained a level of prophecy that no other prophet matched<sup>11</sup>. To express this intimacy with God, the Bible represents this level of prophecy as a “face to face” or “mouth to mouth” encounter with the deity. Islamic sources appear to invoke these metaphors as well. Some of these sources are based on Qur'ān [hereinafter: Q.] 4:164: “and messengers We have already told thee of before, and messengers We have not told thee of; and unto Moses Allāh spoke directly (*wakallama Allāh Mūsā taklīm<sup>an</sup>*)”<sup>12</sup>. Other Islamic sources are predicated on Q. 2:253: “And those messengers, some We have preferred above others; some there are to whom Allāh spoke (*minhum man kallama Allāh*), and some He raised in rank [...]”<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, Muslims call Moses *al-Kalīm* (the one to whom Allāh spoke).

In as much as Allāh spoke to all prophets, what is so special about Moses that would privilege him with the sobriquet *al-Kalīm*? Many prominent Qur'ān commentators interpret Q. 4:164 as meaning that Allāh spoke directly to Moses, as He had not to other prophets. According to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767), for example, the verses indicate that Allāh talked to Moses “mouth to mouth” (*mushāfaha*)<sup>14</sup>. Muqātil's commentary brings to mind Exod. 33:11 and Num. 12:8 and their affirmation that God spoke to Moses “face to face” or “mouth to mouth”, respectively. Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) and his student, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr al-Suyūfī (d. 1505) wrote that Allāh addressed His words to Moses “without any mediator” (*bi-lā wāsiṭa*)<sup>15</sup>. Allāh's revelation to Muḥammad, by contrast, was made through a mediator, i.e.,

10. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 58.

11. See e.g., Moses Maimonides (1138/1204), who refers to Moses as “the father of all prophets” (*abīhen shel kol ha-neḥī'īm*). Maimonides. *Commentary on the Mishnah*, pp. 212-214.

12. Translation taken from Arberry (ed.). *The Koran interpreted*.

13. There is a consensus among the the Qur'ān commentators that the words *minhum man kallama Allāh* refer to Moses.

14. Al-Balkhī. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, vol. 1, p. 281.

15. Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūfī. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p. 130.

Gabriel<sup>16</sup>. Ibn Ḥazm was no mere polemicist; he wrote on a variety of scholarly topics. These Qur'ānic descriptions could not have escaped his knowledge.

## 2. "THE LORD IS A MAN OF WAR"

Exod. 15:3 reads: "The Lord is a man of war" (*'īsh milḥamah*). This prompts Ibn Ḥazm to exclaim: "Is it possible for a prophet of Allāh [i.e., Moses] to liken the strength of the Almighty to that of a man with great abilities (*raḥul qādir*)? Is this not the biggest falsehood that you have ever seen?"<sup>17</sup>.

While presenting this example in support of his argument, Ibn Ḥazm ignores the fact that the argument cuts both ways. The Qur'ān offers ninety-nine descriptions of Allāh, almost all anthropomorphic, e.g., the Conqueror (al-Fattāḥ. Q. 34:26), the Dominant (al-Jabbār. Q. 59:23), and the Strong (al-Qawī. Q. 22:40). Such descriptions, identified in Islamic sources as among the ninety-nine names of Allāh, are reminiscent of Moses' description of the Lord as "a man of war" (Exod. 15:3). Again, Ibn Ḥazm was no mere polemicist; he wrote on a variety of scholarly topics. These Qur'ānic descriptions could not have escaped his knowledge. Furthermore, Ibn Ḥazm was a *Zāhirī*, which means that he follows the literal meaning of the text, making his use of Exod. 15:3 even more intriguing<sup>18</sup>.

## 3. JACOB'S STRUGGLE

Ibn Ḥazm derives further evidence of the alleged falsification of the Torah from the account of Jacob's struggle, as described in Genesis. According to the Torah, Ibn Ḥazm argues, Jacob wrestled with God and when God asked him to let Him go, Jacob told Him: "I will not let thee go, except you bless me"<sup>19</sup>. Ibn Ḥazm presents this as another example, of falsification because it is illogical that a man might prevail over God.

Ibn Ḥazm's account of Jacob's struggle brings to mind Gen. 32:25-26, but with one significant difference. While Ibn Ḥazm identifies God as the object of Jacob's struggle, the Torah itself uses the word "man" (*'īsh*):

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him (*va-ye'aveq 'īsh 'immō*) until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

16. E.g., al-Naysābūrī. *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, p. 17; al-Māwardī. *Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, vol. 1, p. 140.

17. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naḥrīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 70.

18. On the *Zāhirī* school, see Turki. "al-*Zāhirīyya*".

19. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naḥrīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 62.

Above, we saw that when Ibn Ḥazm discusses Exod. 15:3, “The Lord is a man (*'īsh*) of war”, he translates *'īsh* as *rajul* (man in Arabic)<sup>20</sup>. In the account of Jacob's struggle, he translates the word *'īsh* as God. Arguably, this may be not a mistranslation but a deliberate distortion.

Continuing, Ibn Ḥazm notes that Jacob became lame as a result of the struggle, for which reason the Children of Israel do not eat the sciatic tendon, exactly as the Biblical account reports (Gen. 32:33). He concludes that no one among the Jews is brave enough to say that the entity that struggled with Jacob was an angel<sup>21</sup>. The Bible itself clarifies the matter: “Yea, [Jacob] had power over the angel (*mal'akh*), and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us” (Hos. 12:5). In addition, several Midrashim specifically state that Jacob struggled with an angel (e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah*, 77 [b-c]-78 [a-d]). Thus Ibn Ḥazm's assertion is baseless. Furthermore, one might ask: Where Ibn Ḥazm got the idea that Jacob was struggling with an angel? The most likely answer is that it was through Jews or Jewish texts<sup>22</sup>. Yet he chose to ascribe to them a fallacious belief.

#### 4. *ALLĀH FEARED THE CURSE OF THE SONS OF JACOB*

As additional evidence that the Torah was falsified, Ibn Ḥazm cites the story of Joseph and his brothers. He claims that the Jewish sages (*'ulamā'*) describe Allāh as having concealed Himself from Jacob during thirteen years of Joseph's stay in Egypt. Jacob's sons, Ibn Ḥazm states, cursed anyone who would divulge this information to their father, including Allāh. Therefore Allāh, fearing their curse, did not inform Jacob that Joseph was alive<sup>23</sup>.

Even a cursory glance at the Biblical account indicates that Ibn Ḥazm's argument is a deliberate fabrication. The Biblical account says nothing of the sort. To the contrary: It is Jacob's sons who tell him that Joseph is alive. Gen. 45:25-26 reports: “And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not”.

Here Ibn Ḥazm supports the claim of deliberate fabrication by revealing, in his own words, that he was acquainted with the original Biblical text. Ibn Ḥazm protested against the Jewish sages (apparently those whom he met) and rejected their argument, which reflected the Biblical version, that it was Jacob's sons who

20. *Idem*, p. 70.

21. *Idem*, p. 62.

22. See further, Mazuz. “Ibn Ḥazm and Midrash.”

23. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 65.

told Jacob that Joseph was alive (*annahum qālū fī-ikhwat Yūsuf annahum kānū l-mukhbirīn li-Ya‘qūb bi-ḥayāt Yūsuf*)<sup>24</sup>.

##### 5. JACOB'S MARRIAGES

In Jewish thought, no man is perfect and sin befalls everyone, including the Patriarchs: “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc. 7:20). By contrast, most Muslim theologians attribute to the prophets—at least once they have begun their mission—a characteristic that they call “infallibility” (*‘iṣma*)<sup>25</sup>. Thus, Ibn Ḥazm and the other Muslim polemicists regard Biblical accounts that attribute sins to the Jewish Patriarchs, who are considered prophets in the Islamic tradition, as proof of the falsification of the Torah.

This, however, does not stop Ibn Ḥazm from claiming that the entire genealogy of the Children of Israel is problematic and stems from a history of unlawful relationships. The reason for this, says Ibn Ḥazm, is that Jacob married two sisters, Leah and Rachel, an act that the Torah specifically forbids<sup>26</sup>. He is probably referring to Lev. 18:18: “Neither shalt you take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time”. By so doing, he mistakenly, or perhaps deliberately, assumes that according to Jewish law such a marriage also makes the children the products of unlawful intercourse. Continuing, he says that Joseph and Benjamin were born to Rachel, whom Jacob was not allowed to marry (having married Leah previously); this, he claims, makes them the progeny of unlawful intercourse. In addition, Ibn Ḥazm states, Jacob did not marry Bilhah (Bilhā) and Zilpah (Zilfā’), the handmaids of Leah and Rachel, making their children, too, the offspring of unlawful intercourse. Consequently, all their descendants (i.e., the Jews) will bear this status (*inna jamī‘ Banī Isrā’īl wa-jamī‘ al-Yahūd awlād zinā*) for eternity<sup>27</sup>.

Ibn Ḥazm clearly was acquainted with the story of Leah and Rachel and the Jewish laws of marriage. In his polemic, however, he ignores two verses that specifically mention Jacob’s marriage to Bilhah and Zilpah: Gen. 30:4 (“And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her”) and Gen. 30:9 (“When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife”).

24. *Idem*, p. 65.

25. On *‘iṣma*, see Madelung and Tyan. “‘Iṣma”.

26. Ibn Ḥazm. *Al-Radd ‘alā Ibn al-Naghārīla al-Yahūdī*, p. 66.

27. *Idem*, p. 66.

## 6. DID IBN ḤAZM KNOW HEBREW?

One may ask: did Ibn Ḥazm know Hebrew or was familiar with Hebrew sources? Notably, he did not have to possess such knowledge in order to present the matters discussed above. Ibn Ḥazm's ability to read Hebrew (and Aramaic) is a matter of disagreement among scholars<sup>28</sup>. Those who answer in the affirmative may find support in the Jewish sage Abraham Ibn Dā'ūd (1110/1180)<sup>29</sup>, who, in his *al-'Aqīda al-Rafī'a*<sup>30</sup>, offers a detailed refutation of two of the *tahrīf* arguments. Ibn Dā'ūd may have been responding to Ibn Ḥazm's accusation of Ezra the Scribe for falsifying the Bible after the Babylonian exile<sup>31</sup>. He also debates two of the *a'lām al-nubuwwa*, arguing that "this claim was argued by someone unaccustomed to using the Hebrew language"<sup>32</sup>. If he indeed refers to Ibn Ḥazm, it supports the argument that Ibn Ḥazm was able to read Hebrew, at least to some extent. Yet all options are open; the correct one is unknowable<sup>33</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Five of Ibn Ḥazm's arguments regarding the falsification of the Torah have been investigated. They reveal a consistent tendency in Ibn Ḥazm's thinking: While demonstrating familiarity with Biblical accounts, Ibn Ḥazm always changes one detail from the original: God is presented in an anthropomorphic and anthropopathic way, sometimes physically strong, at other times weak, and on yet other occasions afraid<sup>34</sup>. In one location, Ibn Ḥazm modifies a text to slander the Jews: Jacob, also called Israel, struggles with God and forces Him to bless him. The Children of Israel (excluding Joseph and perhaps Benjamin) make God fear their curse. Finally, the polemicist pronounces all of them (including Joseph and Benjamin) sons of unlawful intercourse.

If this reasoning is taken to its logical end, Ibn Ḥazm's arguments against the Bible may be lodged against the Qur'ān as well. The question, then, is why he broached them at all. This double standard lends itself to one main explanation: he wished to present the Torah as falsified. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh explains this issue with precision:

28. Roth. "Forgery and abrogation of the Torah", p. 204, and *Jews, Visigoths and Muslims in medieval Spain*, p. 224; Lazarus-Yafeh. *Intertwined worlds: medieval Islam and Bible criticism*, p. 124 n. 42; Boušek. "'Half of the burden of a mule'", p. 279.

29. On his life and work, see Ferre. "Ibn Da'ud".

30. *Al-'Aqīda al-Rafī'a* has been lost. However, two of its translations into Hebrew have survived; they are titled *Ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*/*Ha-Emunah ha-Niša'āh*.

31. Ibn Dā'ūd. *Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, pp. 566-572.

32. *Idem*, p. 564.

33. See further, Mazuz. "Ibn Ḥazm and Midrash", pp. 149-152.

34. For a similar pattern in his work with Midrashic contents, see *Idem*, pp. 143-144, 148-149.

Muslim authors, as sincere believers, truly considered [the Qur'ān] to be the divine, perfect, and uncreated Word of God. They could easily explain away, therefore, any anthropomorphic expression, linguistic inaccuracies, or contradictions therein. Yet, the same faults in the Bible were taken as proof that it had been falsified or as a sign that it had been composed by a man<sup>35</sup>.

By juxtaposing some of Ibn Ḥazm's arguments with the relevant Jewish sources, I have shown that they are inaccurate and sometimes the opposite of specific Biblical texts. These findings suggest that, contrary to the opinion of some researchers<sup>36</sup>, Ibn Ḥazm was familiar with Biblical texts and his ostensible mistakes are in fact deliberate manipulations. I trace Ibn Ḥazm's tendentiousness in this matter to his wish to prove that the Torah was falsified and, by so doing, to lend further support to the Qur'ānic argument regarding the *tahrīf*. Ibn Ḥazm argues that the Jews engaged in *tahrīf*. The paradox, however, is that he himself engages in falsification of Jewish sources to make the point.

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35. Lazarus-Yafeh. *Intertwined worlds: medieval Islam and Bible criticism*, p. 17.

36. Cf., Perlmann. "The medieval polemics between Islam and Judaism", p. 111, and "Andalusian authors on the Jews of Granada", p. 272; Powers. "Reading/Misreading one another's scripture", p. 117.

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