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JUDAISM IN THE WORK OF IBN KAMMŪNA, A FORGOTTEN
JEWISH PHILOSOPHER

El judaísmo en la obra de Ibn Kammūna, un filósofo judío olvidado

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Abstract: Just as the work of Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides need little introduction, the corpus of Ibn Kammūna (c. 1215-1284), a Mizrahi Jewish philosopher and ophthalmologist born in Baghdad who wrote a compelling treatise about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is virtually unknown. His philosophical approach to Islam almost cost him his life. In this paper, the second chapter (dedicated to Judaism) of Ibn Kammūna's *Examination of the Three Faiths* and his *Treatise on the Differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* are analyzed. Furthermore, I briefly describe the Jewish community in Babylonia and Iraq—discussing antisemitism then and now—and I outline the main reasons why Ibn Kammūna is almost unknown, asserting that a Jewish thinker of Ibn Kammūna's magnitude deserves a place in the historiography of Jewish thought.

Resumen: Así como el pensamiento de Ibn Gabirol y Maimónides apenas necesita introducción alguna, la obra de Ibn Kammūna (c. 1215-1284), un filósofo y oftalmólogo judío mizrahí nacido en Bagdad que escribió un interesante tratado sobre el judaísmo, el cristianismo y el islam, es prácticamente desconocida. Su enfoque filosófico sobre el islam casi le costó la vida. En el presente artículo analizo el segundo capítulo (dedicado al judaísmo) del *Análisis de las tres religiones* de Ibn Kammūna y su *Tratado sobre las diferencias entre el judaísmo rabínico y los caraitas*. También describo brevemente la comunidad judía en Babilonia e Irak—analizando el antisemitismo de ayer y hoy—y expongo las razones principales por las que Ibn Kammūna es casi desconocido, afirmando que un pensador judío de la magnitud de Ibn Kammūna merece un lugar en la historiografía del pensamiento judío.

Keywords: Ibn Kammūna; Judaism; Philosophy of religion; Muslim intolerance; Jewish historiography

Palabras clave: Ibn Kammūna; judaísmo; Filosofía de la religión; Intolerancia musulmana; Historiografía judía

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INTRODUCTION

Ibn Kammūna was a Mizrahi Jewish philosopher and ophthalmologist¹ who lived in Baghdad in the 13th century, that is, eighteen centuries after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE by the Babylonians (and the beginning of the Diaspora) and nearly twelve centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE by the Romans. It is not known whether Ibn Kammūna's ancestors were expelled from their ancestral land (Eretz Israel) in 586 BCE or 70 CE; in any case, one thing is certain: Ibn Kammūna was Mizrahi. He “belonged to the Jewish community of Baghdad, and ... was probably active as a physician, possibly served as an administrator, and was mainly a teacher and writer on philosophy”².

Langermann describes Ibn Kammūna as “a thinker, who, however interesting his writings are, cannot be called a major figure”³. Largely unknown until recently, Ibn Kammūna “had to wait for over six hundred years to be resurrected from sorely undeserved oblivion and restored to anywhere near his rightful place in the history of Jewish thought”⁴. References to Ibn Kammūna's work can be found in some Islamic texts, but—broadly speaking—hitherto no special mention of him or his work has been found in the vast and rich body of Jewish literature and historiography. Despite this neglect, Ibn Kammūna's work in comparative religion is remarkable. In the *Examination of the Three Faiths* (written in Arabic), Ibn Kammūna analyzes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although the number of pages devoted to each religion is uneven, the dedication to Judaism alone deserves attention. It is astonishing that “the Arabic text was published in full [only] in 1967”⁵, that is, almost seven centuries after Ibn Kammūna wrote it.

¹ Ibn Kammūna worked as a doctor (ophthalmologist) in Aleppo (Syria): “His oeuvre includes a treatise on ophthalmology, no longer extant; quotations from it are however available in the writing of another ophthalmologist (...) From these we learn that Ibn Kammuna practiced medicine in Aleppo” (Langermann, 2007: 1). Aleppo is 850 km from Baghdad, a distance that could be travelled in 20–40 days by camel or in 60 days by donkey.

² Perlmann, 1971a: 1.

³ Langermann, 2007: 1.

⁴ Nemoy, 1972: 97.

⁵ Perlmann, 1971a: 2.

This paper focuses on Ibn Kammūna's view of Judaism: how he presents Judaism, whether he identifies as Jewish, and the place he assigns to Judaism alongside the other two Abrahamic religions. It is important to bear in mind that Judaism was the first Abrahamic religion and that both Christianity and Islam are largely based on it. However, this has not prevented Christianity and Islam from displaying religious intolerance and antisemitism toward the Jewish people over the course of millennia. Some of the 'fruits' of this enduring, obsessive, and irrational hatred have been discrimination, forced conversions, expulsion, pogroms, and the Shoah (the ultimate catastrophe and atrocity): the annihilation (by Germany and its collaborators) of six million European Jewish men, women, and children in the ghettos, the transports, the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres, and the six extermination camps (*Vernichtungslager*, VL, also called death camps, *Todeslager*)—Chełmno (gas vans: exhaust fumes), Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka II (the *Aktion Reinhardt* camps) (gas chambers, exhaust fumes), Auschwitz-Birkenau (gas chambers, Zyklon B), and Majdanek (gas chambers: carbon monoxide in canisters and Zyklon B)—and, to a lesser extent, annihilation in KZ (*Konzentrationslager*, concentration camps) and death marches.

Antisemitism did not disappear after the Shoah; on the contrary, it continued to rear its head stronger than ever—disguised as anti-Zionism—especially in the Middle East (as well as in many other parts of the world, including the West). The hatred of Muslim Arab countries against the tiny State of Israel (the ancestral land of the Jewish people) after the reestablishment of the Jewish state on May 14, 1948, was grotesque. It is important to stress that in 2026 antisemitism (the latest strain of Jew-hatred, anti-Zionism) is the only socially accepted form of hatred against a minority—one that is even expected and applauded. Israel is the ancestral land of the Jewish people, the only Jewish state in the world, and the only democracy in the Middle East. Moreover, it is worth noting that, of Israel's nearly 10 million citizens, 7.7 million are Jewish Israeli, 2.1 million are Arab Israeli, and a small number are neither Jewish nor Arab (in addition, 260,000 foreign nationals live in Israel). The 2.1 million Arab Israeli citizens are Muslim, Druze, and Christian: "The majority of Arab [Israeli] citizens are Muslim (83.2%), and the remainder are Druze (9.1%) and

Christian (7.7%)”⁶. On the other hand, the apparent harmony between Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Muslim Arab colonization from the 7th century onwards was never genuine.⁷ Muslim Arab conquest and intolerance towards all minorities must be kept in mind when researching Ibn Kammūna’s work, since he too suffered discrimination, threats, and aggression.

Jewish historiography has devoted very little, if any, attention to Ibn Kammūna’s thought. Although not much is known about Ibn Kammūna’s life, it is certain that he was well versed in both the Torah and the Talmud: “[t]he numerous Hebrew terms, notes and quotations from the Hebrew Bible indicate that Ibn Kammūna mastered Hebrew. His erudition in Jewish religious literature is also evident”⁸. The suggestion made by some scholars that Ibn Kammūna converted to Islam is rather unfounded. In the *Examination of the Three Faiths*—written around four years before his death—“his loyalty to Judaism is beyond doubt”⁹. Ibn Kammūna was Jewish and, in all likelihood, stayed faithful to Judaism throughout his life.¹⁰

In the first section of this paper, I unveil the reasons why Ibn Kammūna is virtually unknown. In the second section, I discuss Judaism in Ibn Kammūna’s *Examination of the Three Faiths*. In the third section, the *Treatise on the Differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* is analyzed. In the fourth section, Ibn Kammūna’s style and insights are briefly mentioned; his work *Insights Concerning Knowledge and Practice* offers us a glimpse into his conception of the soul. The fifth section briefly deals with the fate of the Jewish community in Babylonia and Iraq, while denouncing the intolerance of the Muslim community in Ibn Kammūna’s time (which nearly led to his lynching); I also briefly discuss today’s antisemitism in the wake of the October 7 massacres. In the Conclusion, I critique some of Ibn Kammūna’s statements, while emphasizing that a

⁶ Khalaily, Badran, and Rudnitzky, 2023.

⁷ “Plus l’État musulman était religieux et soudé, plus les membres des minorités étaient écartés de leur postes et plus les mesures restrictives s’aggravaient” [The more religious and united the Muslim state became, the more members of minority groups were removed from their positions and the more restrictive the measures became] (Ben Sasson, 2006: 60).

⁸ Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 8-9.

⁹ Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 18.

¹⁰ For a discussion on this topic, see Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 18-23.

Jewish thinker of Ibn Kammūna's stature deserves a place in the historiography of Jewish thought.

1. KAMMŪNA: A FORGOTTEN JEWISH AUTHOR

Even if Pourjavady and Schmidtke state that “[i]nterest in Ibn Kammūna in Europe dates back to the 17th century”¹¹, the truth is that it is striking how little known Ibn Kammūna is. It is quite surprising that there is not even a single mention of him in the 17,521 pages that make up the 22 volumes of *Encyclopedia Judaica* (much less an entry). *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906) only mentions him once (surprisingly, under the ‘Egypt’ entry—“Under the Mameluks”) and describes him as an apostate,¹² a description that is most probably erroneous, since Ibn Kammūna almost certainly never renounced his own faith.

In my opinion, Ibn Kammūna's invisibility in Jewish historiography is due to several factors. Firstly, to his dispassionate writing towards Judaism and the use of only Arabic in his writings—although some of his work was copied later in Arabic with the Hebrew alphabet.¹³ Secondly, the inclusion of his work in series or monographs devoted to Islam rather than Judaism—it is quite odd and misleading that one of the most comprehensive books on Ibn Kammūna, *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad. ‘Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) and His Writings*, was published in a series devoted to Islamic philosophy, theology, and science. Thirdly, a very serious problem affecting Ibn Kammūna's work is the fact that the few translations from Arabic into English that exist (by Perlmann and Nemoy) have been virtually appropriated (I assume without malicious intent) as the translators' own works, thereby diminishing Ibn Kammūna's visibility in academia. Both translations are listed under the translators' names rather

¹¹ Pourjavady – Schmidtke, 2006: 1.

¹² “[T]he apostate Sa’d ibn Mansur Ibn Kammuna (1280), who wrote a number of tracts on philosophy and an interesting controversial tract on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” (Singer, Adler, Deutsch, et al., eds., 1901-1906: 64).

¹³ “The fact that there are manuscripts of his writings in Hebrew characters preserved in European libraries, in the various collections of material from the Ben Ezra Genizah in Fustat [Egypt], and in the Abraham Firkovitch collection in St. Petersburg ... show that some of his philosophical writings, as well as his two comparative works, circulated among Jews and particularly Karaites” (Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 54).

than Ibn Kammūna's. Thus, the *Examination of the Three Faiths* was published in English as: Perlmann, Moshe, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths. A Thirteenth-Century Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion. Translated from the Arabic with an Introduction and Notes* (1971). And the *Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* became: Nemoy, Leon, "Ibn Kammūnah's Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites" (1972) and Nemoy, Leon, "Ibn Kammūnah's Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites (Continued)" (1973). Consequently, in these works we do not see or list Ibn Kammūna, but rather his translators. This perpetuates the invisibility of Ibn Kammūna's name. Only his work *Subtle Insights Concerning Knowledge and Practice*, translated just seven years ago by Langermann, bears the author's name, that is, Ibn Kammūna's: Ibn Kammūna al-Baghdadi, Sa'd ibn Mansur, *Subtle Insights Concerning Knowledge and Practice*. Translated with Introduction, Summary, and Commentary by Y. Tzvi Langermann (2019). In order not to endorse what I consider nearly identity theft, when I quote Perlmann and Nemoy I include Ibn Kammūna's name in brackets, since the works are Ibn Kammūna's, not the translators'. When the translators add comments, I only include the translators' names.

Be that as it may, these factors do not prevent us from recognizing that Ibn Kammūna's two treatises in which he discusses Judaism are interesting, even if they lack the richness of the corpus of Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides—written in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and Arabic.

2. JUDAISM IN THE *EXAMINATION OF THE THREE FAITHS*

Ibn Kammūna's "major theological work"¹⁴ is a comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In 1284, "the populace of Baghdad, always prone to turbulence, exploded in a riot, demanding the life of the 'unbeliever' who presumed to subject Islam and its Prophet to the cold scalpel of rational scrutiny"¹⁵. The chapter on Judaism is based on Yehuda Ha-Levi's work. Ha-Levi (d. 1141) was a Sephardic proto-Zionist poet who wrote mainly in Hebrew. Ibn Kammūna introduces seven objections against Judaism (borrowed by Samau'al ben Judah al-Maghribi, a 12th-century Jew who converted to Islam and wrote the loathing work *Silencing the Jews*, in

¹⁴ Nemoy, 1972: 98.

¹⁵ Nemoy, 1972: 99.

which he attacks both Judaism and the Jewish people), deconstructing each of them and opening a discussion while showing his love and support for his own religion.

According to Perlmann, Ibn Kammūna argues that “neither Christianity nor Islam with their dependence upon the Hebrew Scripture can afford to undermine it”¹⁶; hence, “their own respective positions against it are doomed to failure”¹⁷. Ibn Kammūna discusses Moses’ prophethood, and briefly describes the figures of the patriarchs—Abraham, אברהם, Isaac, יצחק, and Jacob, יעקב, while barely mentioning the matriarchs—Sarah, שרה, Rebecca (Rivka), רבקה, Leah, לאה, and Rachel, רחל; he does, however, mention Miriam, מרים.

According to the Torah, God appears to Moses (Moshe) at Mount Horeb and commands him to free the children of Israel and bring them out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus, *Shemot*, 3:8 and 13:5); the Promised Land is then inhabited by Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (ancient nations that no longer exist). Moses (who is then 80 years old) and Aaron (who is then 83 years old) (Exodus 7:7)—Ibn Kammūna does not give the exact age but writes that “Aaron was over 80”¹⁸—tell Pharaoh repeatedly to free the children of Israel, to no avail. God sends the ten plagues over Egypt, sparing the children of Israel in the land of Goshen.¹⁹ After the last plague, which was extremely tragic and rather cruel—the death of the firstborns, Pharaoh lets the children of Israel go: “the Israelites came, that same night, out of Pharaoh’s house of bondage,

¹⁶ Perlmann, 1971a: 5.

¹⁷ Perlmann, 1971a: 5.

¹⁸ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 41.

¹⁹ The Nile turns into blood (Exodus 7:17); Egypt is covered by frogs (Exodus 8), by lice (or other small insects: *kinim*, כינים) (Exodus 8:16-18), and by flies (Exodus 8:21-24); the finger of God (death) falls upon the cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, and flocks (Exodus 9:3), separating the livestock of Egypt from that of Israel (Exodus 9:4); dust and boils (skin infections) fall upon the Egyptians and beasts (Exodus 9:9); a devastating hailstorm with thunder, hail, and fire breaks out (Exodus 9:18, 23); locusts fill the Egyptian houses and eat all the plants in the land (Exodus 10:4-6, 12-15); darkness falls over the land of Egypt for three days (Exodus 9: 21-23); God kills the (Egyptian and livestock) firstborns at midnight (Exodus 11:4-7 and Exodus 12:29-30).

and guided by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire that marched before them, set forth for the region of the Red Sea led by Moses and Aaron”²⁰. After generations of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites embark on a forty-year journey to the Land of Israel. God does not lead them through the land of the Philistines but through the Yam (sea, ים) Suf, סוף.²¹ The Philistines are a people who no longer exist—not to be confused with the modern ‘Palestinians’, an invented ‘nation’ carefully crafted by the PLO in 1964-67. God, through Moses, gives the 10 commandments to the children of Israel (Exodus 20 and 31:18). Ibn Kammūna examines some of Moses’s miracles²² and briefly discusses the soul, stating that Jewish people “believe in the immortality of the soul after the destruction of the body, and the indestructibility of the soul, since this occurs in the books of the post-Mosaic prophets, and since such is the tradition of their rabbis and sages”²³. Ibn Kammūna gives a summary of the basic precepts of Judaism:

All that God, through his faithful messenger Moses, commanded [to the children of Israel] was to believe in the oneness of God (...) to love Him with all their hearts and souls and strength, to fear Him, ask His help, trust in Him, believe that He is omniscient and all-powerful, the Creator of everything (...) He commanded them to cultivate nobility of character, observe prayer and fast, give alms, practice justice and equity, respect contract and vow, honor parents and sages, obey and honor the rulers, and to wish unto others the good they wish unto themselves. He indicated to them the course to take in the conduct of home, public, and moral life. He forbade unto them vices and iniquities, murder, theft,

²⁰ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 41-42.

²¹ This is the sea that dries up and whose waters are divided in Exodus 14:21–22 (commonly referred to as the Red Sea—as Ibn Kammūna, or Perlmann (Jewish scholar and translator), refers to: “The sea split for them and they crossed it. Pharaoh and his host were drowned” (Perlmann, 1971b: 42). However, possibly there was a translation error, since *suf* actually means ‘reed’.

²² “Some of these miracles lasted as long as forty years. Only a few, such as turning the staff into a moving serpent, drawing out his hand all white, and the light on his face, were of short duration” (Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 44).

²³ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 46.

adultery, and coveting other people's property (...) The permanently obligatory precepts and prohibitions of the Torah [*mitzvot*] amount to 613.²⁴

The seven objection against the tenets of Judaism are not too interesting—the fact that they were originally formulated by Samau'al ben Judah al-Maghribi contributes to their lack of importance; what is interesting, however, are the answers Ibn Kammūna gives, which reveal strong support for Judaism. Ibn Kammūna is aware of the ancient history of the Jewish people: “the Hebrew language, which none but they speak, is the same as that spoken at the beginning of their history”²⁵. He states that nobody can deny “the reality of Moses and Aaron, of David and Solomon, and of their other famous kings”²⁶. The kingdoms of King Saul, King David, and King Solomon (Shlomo), which date back some 3,000 years, were vast and prosperous: “in the days of Saul, David and Solomon, the conquests were expanded until the kingdom stretched from present-day Eilat to the outskirts of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq)”²⁷. Ibn Kammūna asserts that anybody who learns the history of the Jewish people “will not doubt the period of the existence of the Temple from the time it was built by Solomon until it was destroyed, and the period of the existence of the Temple that was built after that, the kingdom of the Hasmonaeans, [and] the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus”²⁸. He praises the strength of the Jewish

²⁴ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b.

²⁵ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 47.

²⁶ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 47.

²⁷ Levy and Weinberger, 2014. Under the reign of King David, (11th–10th centuries BCE), Jerusalem, ירושלים (also referred as Zion), became the capital of Eretz Israel. King David defeating the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:25). King Solomon (Shlomo), שלמה, built the First Temple 480 years after Israel left Egypt (1 Kings 6:1), in the fourth year of his reign; it took him seven years to complete it (1 Kings 6:37–38). Solomon was wise, just, and righteous; his peaceful reign (10th century BCE) is considered a golden era. Like his father, King David, he reigned 40 years (in Jerusalem), and like his father he was buried in Jerusalem (Kings 11:42–43). Following the death of King Solomon, the United (Israelite) Kingdom was divided in two (following a period of wars and conflicts): to the north, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Kingdom of Ephraim, also referred to as Samaria) (c. 930–720 BCE) with its capital from Omri's reign in Samaria (*Shomron*), שומרון; to the south, the Kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital (c. 930–586 BCE).

²⁸ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 47.

nation in the Diaspora: “the massacres [against the Jewish people] perpetrated ... by Nebuchadnezzar and others [did not] break down ... the transmission of Jewish tradition”²⁹. Indeed, neither the countless massacres, nor the pogroms, nor the Shoah, nor the endless antisemitism—a pathological hatred, envy, and obsession, rightly described as a “psychotic prejudice”³⁰) have managed to break or annihilate the Jewish people, a resilient nation that has existed for more than four millennia.

Ibn Kammūna defends the Torah and the unity of Judaism; the different branches of Judaism “do not differ about even a single word in the Torah, or in the prophetic books in their possession, or about the miracles of Moses, or the wording of the Law”³¹. Judaism does not describe God with human characteristics: “The prohibition of anthropomorphism and anthropopathy is mentioned in a number of passages of the Torah”³². Ibn Kammūna explains some of the metaphors used in the Torah: the ‘finger of God’, for instance, “is a metaphor for His power, just as ‘the hand’ is used metaphorically for this same meaning in both Hebrew and Arabic. This is proved conclusively in the Torah story about the Egyptians; when they were stricken by the plagues, they said: This is the finger of God”³³.

In response to the objection that the Torah does not contain a clear statement about reward and punishment in the afterlife, Ibn Kammūna states, “In divine matters there can be no opposing or questioning, as they may contain wisdom of which we have no knowledge”³⁴. Being the link between God and the Jewish people, the prophets “are physicians of the soul by God’s guidance”³⁵. According to the Talmud, there are forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses in Judaism (Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther); on the contrary, Islam does not recognize any prophetess. Jesus was, of course, Jewish and lived—and died—as a Jew: “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”³⁶.

²⁹ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 48.

³⁰ Mamet, 2006: 4.

³¹ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 52.

³² Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 55.

³³ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 56.

³⁴ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 64.

³⁵ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 64.

³⁶ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 74.

Ibn Kammūna subtly condemns Muslim intolerance: “the Jews are prevented from declaring their creed, and their books are in a tongue the Muslims do not understand”³⁷. The many Jewish communities in the Diaspora wrote in many languages; “they spoke the languages of the countries in which they lived. In Iraq they spoke Arabic. But the author [Ibn Kammūna] refers to the language of canonic texts”³⁸.

3. THE *TREATISE ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RABBANITES AND THE KARAITES*

Ibn Kammūna wrote the *Treatise on the Differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* before the *Examination of the Three Faiths*. According to Judaism, the Oral Torah was given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai; Moses passed it on to Joshua; Joshua passed it on to the elders; the elders passed it on to the prophets; and the prophets passed it on to the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei Knesset Ha-Gedolah*). After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish nation “faced significant existential threat, and it was then that, due to the dispersion of the Jewish people, the Oral Torah came into existence in written form, first as scrolls, and eventually in book form”³⁹. The Talmud was written and compiled between the 3rd and 5th centuries; it is the primary source of *halakha*, הלכה, Jewish law. The Oral Torah comprises the Mishnah, which was compiled in 200–220 CE by Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi, and the Gemara—the commentaries on the Mishnah. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic, the Talmud, “a vast body of Jewish legal and ethical literature”⁴⁰, exists in two versions: the Talmud *Bavli* and the (incomplete) Talmud *Yerushalmi*.⁴¹ In the *Mishneh Torah* (originally written in Hebrew), Maimonides states that a Jewish person should divide their study time into three parts, all of equal importance: “one third should be devoted to the

³⁷ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 77.

³⁸ Perlmann, 1971b: 77n69.

³⁹ Colgan, n.d.

⁴⁰ Brawer, 2008: 252.

⁴¹ “The Talmud (or to be more precise, the Talmuds—we possess two, that of Babylonia and that of the Land of Israel) has been studied for roughly 1500 years, or, we might say, it has been studied for over 2000 years, since the Talmud is itself a record of the continuous study and scrutiny of earlier ‘Talmudic’ traditions and discussions” (Blidstein, 1971: 186).

Written Law; one third to the Oral Law; and one third to understanding and conceptualizing the ultimate derivation of a concept from its roots” (*Mishneh Torah*, Torah Study, 1:11)⁴².

Karaism is a non-rabbinic form of Judaism; Karaites reject the rabbinical literature and rely solely on the TaNaKh (and other minor writings). Karaism was born in Babylonia in the 8th century—Anan Ben David is considered its founder. Ibn Kammūna based his *Treatise on the Differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* on the *Kuzari*, the famous treatise by Judah Ha-Levi, a defense of Judaism, “which [Ibn Kammūna] extensively quoted, verbatim or in paraphrase”⁴³. Ibn Kammūna’s treatise is divided into three chapters. In chapter I, he mentions “the merits of the Sages who had transmitted [the Oral Law], explaining their erudition, and demonstrating the obligation to follow the requirements of their traditions”⁴⁴. In chapter II, he presents “the charges brought by the Karaites against the Sages, together with the answers refuting these”⁴⁵. In chapter III, he discusses the criticism made by the Rabbanites against the Karaites.

Even if Ibn Kammūna states that he does “not aim to declare one view true and the other false”⁴⁶, it is clear that he follows the Rabbanites. The fact that Ibn Kammūna devotes twice as much to defending the Rabbanites, suggests his loyalty to Rabbinic Judaism. Using a rational and philosophical tone, Ibn Kammūna calls for a reconciliation, calling on both sides to show respect and understanding.

⁴² “A person who is a craftsman may spend three hours each day involved in his work, and [devote] nine hours to Torah study: In those nine hours, he should spend three reading the Written Law; three, the Oral Law; and three, meditating with his intellect to derive one concept from another” (*Mishneh Torah*, Torah Study, 1:12); “Every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, whether his body is healthy and whole or afflicted by difficulties, whether he is young or an old man whose strength has diminished” (*Mishneh Torah*, Torah Study, 1:8); “The greater Sages of Israel included wood choppers, water drawers, and blind men. Despite these [difficulties], they were occupied with Torah study day and night and were included among those who transmitted the Torah’s teachings from [master] to [student in the chain stretching back to] Moses, our teacher” (*Mishneh Torah*, Torah Study, 1:9). It should be noted that in Orthodox Judaism only men can study the Torah (unlike in Masorti and Reform Judaism, where women are allowed and encouraged to study the Torah): “Women, slaves, and minors are free from the obligation of Torah study” (*Mishneh Torah*, Torah Study, 1:1).

⁴³ Nemoy, 1972: 100.

⁴⁴ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 104.

⁴⁵ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 115.

⁴⁶ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 115.

Ibn Kammūna praises the sages and states that their practical wisdom suggests they had God's assistance. He discusses how the oral tradition was passed on:

It is extremely improbable that the nation of the Children of Israel at the time of ... Moses ... did not ask questions about the details of the laws which they had been commanded to observe in their entirety, nor request explanations of what was not clearly explained: moreover that they did not transmit (to succeeding generations) the decisions rendered by [Moses] (...) The same applies to the decisions rendered by the seventy elders, and also by the judges, the priests, and the later prophets during (the time of) the First Temple and thereafter⁴⁷.

Even if the "Karaites have gone to such extremes in reviling the Sages, condemning them, and heaping ridicule upon their sayings (...) [they] cannot deny that some laws were enacted after Moses"⁴⁸. Indeed, some orders were given by King David, King Solomon (Shlomo), and Ezra.⁴⁹ According to Ibn Kammūna, "just as the Karaites do not consider these (additions) contrary to the text of the Torah, so should they also not regard the enactments of the Sages as contrary thereto, especially since ... they are ... connected with the divine command"⁵⁰.

Regarding the Karaites' criticism against the Rabbanites, Ibn Kammūna

⁴⁷ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 114).

⁴⁸ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 115, 118.

⁴⁹ Under Persian rule (538–333 BCE), tens of thousands of Jewish men and women returned to Judah from Babylonia in three waves from 538 BCE to 444 BCE (King Cyrus allowed the Jewish people to return to their land and practice Judaism). Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led the first, second, and third waves of exiles to Judah—rebuilding the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. It can be asserted that Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were, in fact, the first Zionists. The Second Temple was completed in 537 BCE: "When Babylon fell to Persia 50 years later, the Jews returned to the land of Israel and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple. Once again, Jerusalem served a centre of Jewish culture and religion; and this centrality continued for the next five and a half centuries" (Gabay, 1999: 323).

⁵⁰ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 119.

brings up thirteen topics,⁵¹ such as the lighting of candles on Shabbat and Kashrut. The *mitzvah* of lighting candles on Shabbat—given to women—is condemned by the Karaites; Ibn Kammūna responds to this criticism by declaring that the lighting of candles “does not constitute contradiction of the Torah, much less disobedience to it. For they prescribed the lighting ... for the sake of the (incoming) Sabbath”⁵². Ibn Kammūna examines each of these thirteen topics, presenting the arguments in favor of the Oral Law.

In chapter III, Ibn Kammūna declares that his “purpose is merely to remove the condemnation”⁵³. He then presents seven charges made by the Rabbanites against the Karaites: heresy; identifying the Karaites with the Sadducees and Boethusians; rejection of the Oral Law; “willfully modifying God’s religion”⁵⁴; making mandatory some things not written in the Torah; holding laws according to their opinions; and “interpreting a number of passages in the Torah ... in a way contrary to the rules of the (Hebrew) language”⁵⁵. Towards the end of the treatise, Ibn Kammūna states, “May God turn us back from error and blunder, and lead us in the right way in both word and deed”⁵⁶. Ibn Kammūna mentions Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), a Sephardic exegete, “also a poet, composer of *piyyutim*, grammarian, translator, philosopher, astronomer, and astrologer”⁵⁷ and Maimonides.

4. IBN KAMMŪNA’S STYLE AND INSIGHTS. A GLIMPSE INTO THE SOUL

One detail that surprises readers of Ibn Kammūna is his writing style, which is—occasionally—filled with Islamic mannerisms and idioms, such as “In the name of (God) the Merciful One”⁵⁸; “the prophets, upon whom be peace”⁵⁹ and continuously repeating ‘upon whom be peace’ after saying the

⁵¹ “I shall limit myself to these thirteen charges and the answers thereto, since this should suffice for the discerning (reader) (...) For in the particular charges that I have mentioned the Rabbanites are variously accused by the Karaites of adding to the (holy) text, diminishing from it, changing it, or disregarding that which clearly follows from it” (Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 232).

⁵² Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 128.

⁵³ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 232.

⁵⁴ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 237.

⁵⁵ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 245.

⁵⁶ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 246.

⁵⁷ Simon, 2007: 665.

⁵⁸ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 103.

⁵⁹ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 109.

name of a prophet.

It is quite striking that Ibn Kammūna refers to the Jewish people in the third person plural, thus giving the impression of distancing himself from Judaism: “the Hebrew language, which none but they speak”⁶⁰; “Jews rely in their legal practice, as well as the nature of their transmission of the law”⁶¹. However, the reason for this apparent detachment may be a desire to adopt a more scientific and impartial approach. Occasionally (though very rarely), Ibn Kammūna uses the first person plural: “our master Moses”⁶². However, these references may not be significant, since Moses is also a prophet in both Christianity and Islam.

Seemingly, “[o]ne of the issues Ibn Kammūna was most concerned with is the human soul, and it is on this issue that he formulated his most distinct views”⁶³. In *Insights Concerning Knowledge and Practice*, Ibn Kammūna states that the “soul is not a state ... within something, be it immaterial or not; otherwise that something would be self-standing, or it would trace back to that which is self-standing”⁶⁴. He even suggests that “[m]ore than one soul may be bound to a single body”⁶⁵, although he fails to explain this idea convincingly. According to him, “the soul does not die with the death of the body”⁶⁶; it is perfect and eternal. Ibn Kammūna “maintained the pre-eternity of the human soul”⁶⁷.

Mühlethaler asserts that Ibn Kammūna “does not limit himself to one definition of the soul, but presents a selection of definitions”⁶⁸; these definitions are: “The soul is the first perfection of a natural instrumental body (...) The soul is an incorporeal substance that moves the body (...) The soul is a faculty that subsists in a body”⁶⁹. The first two descriptions of the soul are presented anonymously, and the third one is written under a pseudonym.

⁶⁰ Perlmann, [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 45.

⁶¹ Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1972: 104.

⁶² Nemoy [Ibn Kammūna], 1973: 235.

⁶³ Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 23.

⁶⁴ Ibn Kammūna, 2019: 76.

⁶⁵ Ibn Kammūna, 2019: 74.

⁶⁶ Ibn Kammūna, 2019: 77.

⁶⁷ Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 24.

⁶⁸ Mühlethaler, 2010: 64.

⁶⁹ Mühlethaler, 2010: 65.

5. SOME POINTS REGARDING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN BABYLONIA AND IRAQ. ANTISEMITISM THEN AND NOW

Writing the history of the Jewish community in Babylonia—the community to which Ibn Kammūna belonged—and Iraq would take thousands of pages. However, I would like to highlight just a few points. Thousands of Jewish men and women were expelled from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, and hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children were massacred or expelled by the Romans nearly seven centuries later, following the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE, many of whom went into exile in Babylonia—where they blossomed and flourished, despite being unable to return to their ancestral homeland. It is uncertain whether Kammūna’s ancestors arrived in Babylonia following the destruction of the First Temple or the Second.

Even if the Mongols conquered Baghdad in 1258⁷⁰, the region remained largely Islamic under Mongol rule. If there is one thing that has characterized Islam since its creation in the 7th century to the present day, it is its eagerness to expand and colonize and its intolerance towards ‘infidels,’ especially Jews, as explicitly written in the Qu’ran in 2:88, 4:46, 4:160, 5:13, 5:51, 5:64, 6:146, and 62:6. Even when Jews, Christians, and Muslims coexisted (whether in Muslim-Arab-colonized Spain and Portugal, that is, Al-Ándalus, or in ancient Iraq), Jewish men, women, and children—as well as Christian men, women, and children—were subjugated to Muslims. Indeed, since its rapid spreading and conquest from the 7th century onwards, Muslim Arabs created a humiliating hierarchy: “at the top were [Muslim] believers, at the bottom of the hierarchy were unbelievers who should be fought [and killed], and [in the middle] emerged an intermediate category of non-Muslims”⁷¹; these were the *dhimmis*, i.e., Jews and Christians—‘the People of the Book’. Thus, although the *dhimmis* ‘enjoyed protection’, they were second-class citizens in their own countries and regions, forced to pay taxes in order to practice their own religion. In Islamic territories, sporadically “tolerance towards Jews prevailed and they

⁷⁰ Apropos of the conquest of Baghdad by the Mongols, Biran asserts: “The laments over the destruction of Baghdād under Mongol rule have been vastly exaggerated” (2022: 309). We should bear in mind that Muslim Arabs had conquered and colonized Persia in 637 CE.

⁷¹ Wagner, 2018.

made real intellectual advances, enjoyed economic prosperity and occasionally even some political influence. But more often, their existence from northern Africa to Iran was punctuated by misery, humiliation, and persecution”⁷². Langermann states that “fanaticism and intolerance were certainly present”⁷³ in Ibn Kammūna’s time. An anonymous contemporary chronicle describing a violent mob in Baghdad attacking Ibn Kammūna recounts:

[T]he Jew ‘Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna [wrote] a volume entitled [*Examination of the Three Faiths*] in which he displayed impudence in the discussion of the prophecies. God keep us from repeating what he said. The infuriated mob rioted, and massed to attack his house and kill him (...) [U]pon the prefect’s order, it was heralded in Baghdad that, early the following morning, outside the city wall, Ibn Kammūna would be burned.⁷⁴

In the end, Ibn Kammūna was not burned, but taken to Hilla, 110 km south of Baghdad, where his son was living and where he later died. According to Nemoy, Ibn Kammūna died as a “broken man [due to the] shock and strain of the whole incident”⁷⁵.

Perlmann states that Ibn Kammūna’s “critical remarks about Islam (...) ”

⁷² Wistrich, 1991: 195–196. “In the Moroccan city of Fez ... more than 6,000 Jews were massacred in 1033; in the Muslim part of Spain, between 1010 and 1013 hundreds of Jews were killed (mainly in [Córdoba]), and in Granada during the Muslim riots of 1066 the entire Jewish community of approximately four thousand people was massacre. This was a disaster ... yet it has rarely received much scholarly attention. In Kairouan (Tunisia) the Jews were persecuted and forced to leave in 1016, returning later only to be expelled again. In Tunis in 1145 they were forced to convert or to leave, and during the following decade there were fierce anti-Jewish persecutions throughout the country. A similar pattern of events occurred in Morocco after the massacre of Jews in Marrakesh in 1232. Indeed, in the Islamic world from Spain to the Arabian peninsula the looting and killing of Jews, along with punitive taxation, confinement to ghettos, the enforced wearing of distinguishing marks on clothes (an innovation in which Islam preceded medieval Christendom), and other humiliations, were rife” (Wistrich, 1991: 196).

⁷³ Langermann, 2019: 8.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 2006: 16.

⁷⁵ Nemoy, 1972: 100.

led zealous Muslims to make an issue of the fact that an infidel dared to write on their faith with what they considered impudent malice and wicked design”⁷⁶. However, this violence was not due to Ibn Kammūna’s ‘critical remarks about Islam’, but to Muslim intolerance. Not a single Jew or Christian threatened to kill Ibn Kammūna—only Muslims did. Ibn Kammūna applies the same rigor and critical thinking to all three religions in the *Examination*; yet only Muslims unleashed their aggression and violence against him.

A review of the history of Muslim Arab conquests and colonization worldwide would take us far away from Ibn Kammūna. By way of illustration, let us consider the case of Jerusalem (Zion)—the heart of Judaism and the eternal capital of the Jewish homeland. In 636 Jerusalem was invaded by Muslim Arabs. The Muslim Arab rule of Eretz Israel lasted almost four centuries (636–1099) and was particularly bloody.⁷⁷ The Dome of the Rock (691), “a silent witness to invasion”⁷⁸, was built on top of what was the Second Temple; indeed, the Dome of the Rock “was deliberately constructed on the very site of the Jewish Holy of Holies, the center of Jewish spiritual life for centuries”⁷⁹. Why? “Because that’s what conquerors do. They overwrite the sacred places of the indigenous people they subjugate and the Temple Mount was the beating heart of ancient Israelite and Jewish life long before Islam even existed”⁸⁰. Today, in 2026, nearly all Muslim Arab countries (as well as Turkey and Iran, two countries that are Muslim but not Arab) are deeply antisemitic.

The Jewish community of Baghdad, which had arrived to Babylonia many centuries before the Muslim Arab colonizers, suffered a devastating pogrom on June 1, 1941. The Farhud “lasted for about thirty hours (...) [T]housands of Baghdad Moslems attacked the Jews of the town, murdering men and women, children and aged people, raping women and

⁷⁶ Perlmann, 1971a: 3.

⁷⁷ “[T]he Arab Empire itself of the seventh century came into being through the invasion of lands by the jihadist armies from Arabia. Before the Arab Empire, there was a Byzantine, Christian empire, which had its origins in the Roman Empire. The Arabs were therefore the invaders, who imposed submission or conversion upon the native Christian and Jewish populations” (Trigano, 2019: 46).

⁷⁸ Sterk, 2025.

⁷⁹ Sterk, 2025.

⁸⁰ Sterk, 2025.

girls and plundering property”⁸¹. This pogrom was a turning point in the long history of the Jewish community in Iraq; it was “carried out in such a way that the Jews did leave Iraq and the Arab countries in 1948–52”⁸². Indeed, in the 1940s about 135,000 Jewish men, women, and children lived in Iraq—about 90,000 in Baghdad; “Jewish communities had existed in this region since the 6th century BCE, hundreds of years before Muslim communities established a presence in Iraq during the 7th century”⁸³. Antisemitism in Iraq had begun to emerge with full force seven years before the Farhud:

The first anti-Jewish act following the British Occupation of Iraq happened in September 1934 (...) In September and October 1936, a few Jews were killed and some primitive home-made bombs thrown at Jewish clubs. The beating-up and murder of Jews became a common occurrence in Baghdad during these months and from July 1937 onwards, life for Jews in the capital became increasingly difficult, day by day, until 1941, when the farhud broke out⁸⁴.

Indeed, the “end of the British Mandate, and the establishment of independent Iraq (1932), coincided with Hitler’s accession to power. Iraq became an active center of Nazi propaganda”⁸⁵. The Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini—a fierce antisemite and admirer of Hitler (whom he met in Berlin on November 28, 1941)—lived for a period of time in Baghdad, using all his energy and animosity to promote hatred against the Iraqi Jewish community.

Following the Shoah—the most devastating and cruel catastrophe—antisemitism remained in force in all Muslim Arab countries and in a vast portion of the world. On May 14, 1948, after 2,500 years of foreign occupation and theft, the Jewish people could reestablish their ancestral homeland; the State of Israel was reborn. Zionism is indeed the best

⁸¹ Cohen, 1966: 2.

⁸² Winogradsky Frenkel, 2023.

⁸³ Meir-Glitzenstein, n. d.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 1966: 5-6.

⁸⁵ Masliyah, 1989: 216.

example of de-colonization. It is essential to emphasize that on May 14, 1948, the Jewish people were not ‘given’ the land of Israel as a ‘gift’, but rather the children of Israel regained what had been stolen from them—their ancestral land. By 1951, most of the Iraqi Jewish men, women, and children (124,000 out of 135,000) had made aliyah.

Due to the recent rise of global antisemitism (disguised as anti-Zionism) and the alarming distortions about Eretz Israel following the horrific October 7 massacres⁸⁶, it is crucial to emphasize that Eretz Israel is the ancestral land of the Jewish people and that the Jewish people are the native people of the land.⁸⁷ Just as the ‘Nakba’ myth is continuously exploited in academia and the media⁸⁸, the exodus after 1948 of more than 850,000 Jewish men, women, and children who had lived for over 2,500 years in the

⁸⁶ The invasion of 3,000 ‘Palestinians’ (both ‘official’ terrorists and ordinary people) in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, had only one aim: to massacre as many Jews as possible. The perpetrators managed to murder entire families, butchering, burning, mutilating, and mass raping more than 1,200 Israeli men, women, and children (and men of other nationalities) in the *kibbutzim* and at the Nova Music Festival, and brutally kidnapped 251 Israeli men, women, and children (and foreign national men from Thailand, Tanzania, The Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Mexico-France), many of whom were later murdered in captivity by ‘Palestinian’ terrorists in the tunnels of Gaza with shots to the head at close range (Eden Yerushalmi, 24, Carmel Gat, 40, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, Ori Danino, 25, Alex Lobanov, 32, and Almog Sarusi, 27) or strangled (Kfir and Ari Bibas, 9 months and four years old at the time of their kidnapping, and their mother Shiri, 32).

⁸⁷ After the second (110 CE) and third (132–135 CE) Bar Kokhba rebellions against the Romans, Emperor Hadrian (an avid antisemite) tried to ‘erase’ the undeniable ancestry of the Jewish people in Eretz Israel by changing the name of (the ruins of) Jerusalem to ‘Colonia Aelia Capitolina’, and the name of Judea to ‘Syria-Palaestina’ (a name inspired by the Philistines, ancient enemies of the children of Israel who no longer exist). In a desperate and pathetic attempt to appropriate a non-existent ancestry, the Muslim Arabs of the region began to call themselves ‘Palestinians’ from 1964/67, constructing an invented ‘identity’ by usurping the identity of the ancient Philistines. For an analysis on the constructed ‘Palestinian’ identity by the PLO in 1964/67 and the ‘Nakba’ myth, see Meyer (2019) and Trigano (2019).

⁸⁸ The fleeing of 700,000 Arabs led by the belligerent Arab countries—which were determined to annihilate the State of Israel—in the War of Independence and the carefully constructed ‘victim’ identity of the Arabs after initiating and losing the war against the tiny State of Israel produced a false narrative of ‘forced’ exile and victimization. It is noteworthy that the narrative of ‘forced Arab exodus’ during the War of Independence never mentions the fact that the 150,000 Arabs who decided to remain in Israel in 1948 were granted Israeli citizenship and are the ancestors of the more than two million Arab Israelis living in the State of Israel today.

Muslim Arab countries in the Mashriq (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq—where Kammūna lived and died, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Yemen) and the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania), plus Turkey and Iran (1,000 years before Islam was even born) is hardly mentioned. This double standard is pure antisemitism:

Until the 1960s, approximately one million Jews lived in Iran and other Arab countries having arrived in the region more than 2,000 years before. Nowadays, it is estimated that only around 15,000 remain, as the majority of the Jewish population in Muslim lands were forced to flee their homes in the years following the establishment of the State of Israel. This mass expulsion and exodus is part of modern history, but inexplicably, it's neither taught at schools nor remembered within the context of the conflicts in the Middle East.⁸⁹

Antisemitism is a pathological hatred that keeps changing form. Anti-Zionism is the latest strain of this virus. *Judenhass*, antisemitism, and anti-Zionism are three words that represent the same thing: hatred against the Jewish people—just in different eras. The only difference between ‘*Judenhass*’ and ‘antisemitism’ is that ‘*Judenhass*’ ceased to be accepted and was replaced by the term ‘antisemitism’ at the end of the 19th century. Today, the term ‘antisemitism’ is no longer socially acceptable, so this hatred has given way to the word ‘anti-Zionism,’ which is widely accepted, legitimized, and applauded⁹⁰. And when the word ‘anti-Zionism’ will no longer be acceptable, a new word will surely emerge to represent the eternal hatred of Jews. Today, there are less than 20 Jewish men, women, and children left in Egypt, zero in Jordan, less than 30 in Lebanon, a handful in Syria, around 50 in Bahrain, zero in Kuwait, zero in Oman, four in Yemen, 3,000 in Morocco, zero in Algeria, 1,000 in Tunisia, zero in

⁸⁹ World Jewish Congress.

⁹⁰ For understanding antisemitism today, see the 3 Ds proposed by Natan Sharansky: Demonization, Double standards, and Delegitimization (of the State of Israel): “Double standards against the State of Israel often encompass all three of Sharansky’s test” (World Jewish Congress, 2022).

Libya, zero in Mauritania, 14,300 in Turkey, and 9,000 in Iran. Only four Jews live in Iraq:

Iraq's Jewish community is considered the most ancient of all Jewish diaspora communities, with some tracing its roots as far as the first exile in [586] BCE (...) After the liquidation of the Jewish Diaspora in the early 1950s, some 5,000 Jews remained in Iraq, and they too left it in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹¹

Had Ibn Kammūna lived in the 20th or 21st centuries, he would undoubtedly have made aliyah so that he could write whatever he wanted without censorship, without fear, and without danger in the land of his ancestors.

Ibn Kammūna was humiliated, persecuted, and expelled from Baghdad in the 13th century by a Muslim Arab mob. Had he written the *Examination* in a Muslim Arab country today, he would probably have suffered the same fate. I believe it is a moral duty to condemn the intolerance of Muslim countries then and now.

CONCLUSION

In his two major works, Ibn Kammūna aims—albeit subtly—to defend Judaism, the Torah, the Jewish nation and the Jewish people. Although his tone may be somewhat dispassionate, his attachment to Judaism is evident. Both the *Examination of the Three Faiths* and the *Treatise on the Differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites* are remarkable; they are worthy of being studied, deconstructed, critiqued, and discussed. In analyzing the differences between Rabbanites and Karaites, Ibn Kammūna does not seek to separate and pit the different branches of Judaism against

⁹¹ Gat, 2024: 201. After the mass exodus of the Jewish communities of the Muslim Arab countries, Turkey, and Iran), following discrimination and pogroms, these 850,000 Jewish men, women, and children did not wander around in filthy refugee camps for decades being financially supported by the UN, but made aliyah and became Israeli citizens, starting from scratch, building families and homes, finishing university and becoming teachers, doctors, lawyers, artists, or scientists, and thriving as human beings and communities, contributing to the richness and variety of cultures of the State of Israel, the only democracy in the entire Middle East.

one another, but rather to bring them closer through dialogue and understanding.

Ibn Kammūna is a thinker who has been overlooked in Jewish historiography. This oversight, neglect, and lack of recognition are primarily due to four factors: his detached and impassive tone when discussing Judaism, the use of Arabic only, the inclusion of his work in monographs devoted to Islam rather than Judaism, and—paradoxically—the obscuring of his name by translators and publishers. No matter how valuable translators may be, they must never usurp the author's work or overshadow the author by omitting the name whose work they translate—that is, by titling the works with their own names instead of the author's. Unfortunately, the translations by Perlmann and Nemoy seem to conceal Ibn Kammūna's authorship. Perlmann translated Ibn Kammūna's *Examination of the Three Faiths* and Nemoy translated Ibn Kammūna's *Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites*, but the publishers titled the works not after Ibn Kammūna's but after Perlmann and Nemoy. Since to date there is no other English translation of these works, scholars continue to cite them under the translators' names rather than Ibn Kammūna's. This is very unfortunate and has contributed significantly to the obscurity and oblivion of Ibn Kammūna's name.

Ibn Kammūna follows the Talmud when he 'blames' the Jewish people for the destruction of the First Temple: "By God's command, Moses made an ark for the commandments, and erected over it the Tent. This remained among the Israelites for about 900 years, until it disappeared as a result of their disobedience, when Nebuchadnezzar vanquished and exiled them"⁹². This statement is unfair. Eretz Israel underwent invasions, destruction, and colonization for more than 2,500 years by the Assyrians (732/720 BCE)⁹³,

⁹² Perlmann, [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 42.

⁹³ In 722/720 BCE (734/715 BCE), the Assyrians invaded the Kingdom of Israel and deported the ten northern tribes (the so-called Ten 'Lost' Tribes); however, many Israelites from these ten tribes managed to migrate to Judah. The "Assyrian conquest of Samaria in the last quarter of the eighth century [BCE] brought about the end of the Kingdom of Israel and the exile of tens of thousands of Israelites from the land of Israel" (Galil: 1995: 52). Most of the Israelite men (and all the Israelite women) of the ten tribes were enslaved by the Assyrians.

the Neo-Babylonians (597–538 BCE)⁹⁴, the Persians (538 BCE until the conquests of Alexander the Great, 336 BCE–323 BCE), the Greeks (Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, alternatively from 323 BCE until 142 BCE)—then came Hasmonean rule, which was Jewish, from 142 BCE to 63 BCE⁹⁵, the Romans (63 BCE–313 CE)⁹⁶, the Byzantine Empire (313–636), the Muslim Arabs (636–1099), the Christians (1099–1291)⁹⁷, the Mamluks (1291–1516), the Ottoman Empire (1516–1917), and the British Empire (British Mandate) (1917–1948). The Jewish people should never be blamed for their own suffering and annihilation, the destruction of their Two Temples, the Diaspora, and all the conquests, destructions, and colonizations to which Eretz Israel was subjected until the reestablishment of the Jewish state.

Notwithstanding the discrimination, pogroms, expulsions, the Farhud, and the Shoah, the Jewish people are alive and will always be. Ibn Kammūna, living in the Diaspora, knew that well:

⁹⁴ The Babylonians invaded the Kingdom of Judah in 597 BCE, burning Jerusalem and destroying, and plundering the First Temple in 586 BCE and deporting 10,000 Jewish people to Babylon (all except the poorest people of Judah); this is the beginning of the Diaspora.

⁹⁵ In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Eretz Israel; after his death in 323 BCE, the Hellenistic era began: for nearly two centuries, the land “was caught in the vortex of wars between ... the Ptolemaic [dynasty] in Egypt and the Seleucid [dynasty] in Syria” (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, 2002: 40). However, “Judea, considered by the Ptolemies as ‘the land of the Jews,’ was granted considerable autonomy” (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, 2002: 40). The Maccabean rebellion led by Yehuda Ha-Maccabi against the Seleucids who desecrated the Second Temple took place in the years 166–160 BCE. In 142 BCE, Simon, שמעון, the last of the Maccabean brothers, became the political and religious leader of the Jewish people, minted the first Jewish coins in Jerusalem and founded the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled around a century—until 63 BCE.

⁹⁶ The Roman rule of Eretz Israel (63 BCE–313 CE) lasted almost four centuries. Following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE), tens of thousands of Jewish men and women were brought to Rome as slaves and the tragedy and fall of Masada took place (73 CE). The arduous, prosperous, suffering, and long-lasting Diaspora—which had already begun under the Babylonians—was of unprecedented magnitude.

⁹⁷ “The First Crusade swept through and shattered the Jewish communities of western Europe (...) [In 1096] Pope Urban II ... called on ... to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims, massacr[ing] entire Jewish communities along the way (...) It was during this tragic period that the concept of *kiddush hashem* (sanctification of God’s name) was widely put into practice. This concept had been formulated during the Hadrianic persecutions in the second century” (Brawer, 2008: 123).

Their ruler and supporter in their dispersion and exile is the living God. For dispersion such as the one to which the Jews were exposed, especially in view of its long duration, is inconceivable in any other nation without a loss of identity. Many a nation that arose after them has perished without leaving a trace.⁹⁸

According to Ibn Kammūna, “Jews believed in resurrection, acknowledged immortality of the soul after the death of the body, and transmitted the tradition thereof from one generation to another. They pray over their dead [and] yield to repentance when they believe the end is near”⁹⁹. This is not entirely true. Although it is true that repentance (*teshuvah*, return) is important in Judaism¹⁰⁰ and the *Vidui*, וִידוּי, is a prayer of repentance, atonement, and reconciliation, the Shema, שְׁמָע, is a declaration of faith and unity rather than a prayer of repentance. During the Shoah, under the bullets of the *Einsatzgruppen* and inside the gas vans of Chełmno and the gas chambers of Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka II, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek, many Jewish victims prayed the Shema, not as a sign of repentance, but as an affirmation of Judaism—we know this because of the testimonies of some Birkenau *Sonderkommando* members, such as Filip Müller¹⁰¹ and Morris Venezia¹⁰², and those of some Treblinka escapees, such as Chil Rajchman.¹⁰³ Neither the most appalling cruelty and sadism nor the most unimaginable horror could rob the Jewish victims of their faith. In the massacres and the gassing operations, most of

⁹⁸ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 67-68.

⁹⁹ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 66.

¹⁰⁰ For an in-depth discussion on *teshuvah*, see Abramson (2022).

¹⁰¹ See Müller (2022) and Müller’s testimony in *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann.

¹⁰² Morris Venezia recalls, “I could hear the 3,000 people, voices, crying, and screaming. And you could hear ‘*Shema Israel, Adonai Eloheinu* [*Adonai echad*]’” (1996).

¹⁰³ “*Le mois d’avril [1943] commence par des convois venus de l’étranger, notamment de Bulgarie (...) [N]ous entendons des hurlements: «Au secours! Shema Israël!» Au bout de quelques minutes, les cris cessent dans les chambres à gaz et, une demi-heure plus tard, on extrait de nouveaux corps gazés*” [April [1943] began with transports arriving from abroad, notably from Bulgaria (...) [W]e heard screams: “Help! *Shema Israel!*” After a few minutes, the screams ceased in the gas chambers, and half an hour later, we removed again gassed bodies] (Rajchman, 2009: 105–106).

the Jewish victims only managed to recite the first verse of the Shema before succumbing to the most horrific death. To suggest that the victims of the Shoah had something to repent for (as Ibn Kammūna does when he discusses the immortality of the soul and resurrection in the *Examination*) is rather problematic. The Shema is a declaration of faith, belonging, and unity that symbolizes hope and resilience.

Perhaps one of the statements that beautifully illustrates Ibn Kammūna's faith is: "we cannot fathom all the hidden wisdom of God"¹⁰⁴. Although he wanted to come across as a rational, impartial, and objective thinker, Ibn Kammūna seems to give himself away with this statement.

Perlmann refers to the "sensitivity of the Muslims"¹⁰⁵ when referring to the riots that nearly ended Ibn Kammūna's life. I completely disagree. How come antisemitism, violence, aggression, and murder are still condoned? How come Muslims seem to get a free pass in lynching in Ibn Kammūna's time or mass raping, burning, kidnapping, and butchering in October 2023? Muslim Arab violence and antisemitism must be condemned, without fear and without excuses, whether during Ibn Kammūna's time or recent years. Pourjavady and Schmidtke state that "Kammūna was persecuted for having written [the *Examination*]"¹⁰⁶; this is an understatement. Ibn Kammūna was not 'just' persecuted, but nearly murdered by a Muslim mob. Antisemitism should not be tolerated in any form, not then not now.

Although Ibn Kammūna is no Ibn Gabirol or Maimonides, he deserves a place in Jewish thought. He was a Jewish thinker who analyzed Judaism with respect and care. Nearly eight centuries after his death, it is about time that his small body of work be fully recognized. This paper is a brief attempt to honor his legacy, to condemn the attacks he suffered at the hands of Muslims, and to remember his impressive work in the field of comparative religion.

¹⁰⁴ Perlmann [Ibn Kammūna], 1971b: 59.

¹⁰⁵ Perlmann, 1971a: 3.

¹⁰⁶ Pourjavady– Schmidtke, 2006: 16.

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