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The Forging of a Tradition: The Hebrew Bible, Ezra the Scribe, and the Corruption of Jewish Monotheism According to the Writings of al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, and Ibn Ḥazm

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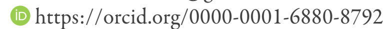
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Abstract: A widely distributed religious legend maintains that Ezra the scribe rewrote the Hebrew Bible sometime during the post-exilic period. The story is interpreted differently among its varying iterations. Some accounts view Ezra's recovery of the Scriptures as an act of divine wonder while other versions insist that Ezra's hand distorted the biblical text. Both outlooks are present in medieval Islamic writings. This article considers the polemical approach of three Muslim authors (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, and Ibn Ḥazm) and their portraits of Ezra, including his role that led to a purported compromise of Jewish monotheism. The article explores Ibn Ḥazm's claim that Ezra the scribe corrupted the biblical text. Several sources are examined (e.g., *4 Ezra*, Porphyry, Justin Martyr, a Samaritan liturgical imprecation, and diverse rabbinic traditions) as plausible support for the charge that Ezra corrupted the Scriptures. A tale from *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* that features Ezra's alleged scribal dots is posited as a reasonable source for the comment. Given Ibn Ḥazm's interpretive outlook and Ezra's prominent role in the story, the dots offer a new and sensible explanation.

Keywords: Al-Tabari, Al-Talabi, Avot d'Rabbi Natan, Ezra, Hebrew Bible, Ibn Hazm, puncta extraordinaria

Islamic writings from the medieval period preserve diverse challenges to the foundational text and monotheistic claims of post-exilic Judaism. The challenges pivot on an alleged redrafting of the Hebrew Bible that yielded a literary source rejected by one medieval author as a forgery. While not all Islamic writers of the period find fault with the process of scribal transmission, a number of records maintain that a compromise in Jewish monotheism beset the religion of Israel a short time after the Babylonian exile.[1] This paper provides

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1 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (See *Intertwined Worlds* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1992] 19) notes that "the accusation that Jews and Christians had falsified their Scriptures (*Taḥrīf*) is the most basic Muslim argument against both Old and New Testaments." *Taḥrīf* is a "central theme" in the Qur'an, "used mainly to explain away the contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an, and to establish that the coming of Muhammad and

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a brief overview of challenges confronting both the transmission process of the biblical text as well as the consistency of Jewish monotheism in view of the writings of select medieval Muslim authors. After a brief introduction of the authors, the study explores Ezra the scribe's legendary role in the transmission of the Hebrew Bible, which gave way to indictments of monotheistic compromise. Ibn Ḥazm's approach is differentiated from previous authors as he portrays Ezra as a fraudulent scribe who distorted the Scriptures. The study examines sources that conceivably informed his outlook, drawing content from rabbinic tradition overlooked by previous scholarship to support his view that Ezra corrupted the Hebrew Bible.

1. Prominent Medieval Islamic Writers and their Works

Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Ṭabarī, hereafter identified as al-Ṭabarī, was born in Persia in 838/839 C.E.[2] He was a prolific writer renowned for his mastery of Islamic tradition. Al-Ṭabarī was an eminent chronicler who compiled a comprehensive history of the world that spanned from the time of Adam to his own era.[3] His universal *History of Messengers and Kings* (*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*) is esteemed as the premiere source for the earliest centuries of Islamic history and transmission.[4] Al-Ṭabarī also composed an expansive *Commentary on the Qur'an* (*Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, i.e., his renowned *Tafsīr*), which fills 30 printed volumes.[5] The release of his *Commentary/Tafsīr* marks a launch into the classical period of *tafsīr*, a generative era that witnessed the vigorous production of

the rise of Islam had indeed been predicted in the uncorrupted 'true' Bible." For the notion that the corruption of the Hebrew Bible may derive from the Qur'an, cf. *ibidem*, 19–26. Gabriel S. Reynolds ("On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (taḥrīf) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *JAOS* 130/2 [2010] 190, 193–194) distinguishes *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* ("textual alteration") from other forms of scriptural falsification that may be implied by *taḥrīf*. He states that "there is no compelling reason to think the qur'anic idea of *taḥrīf* involves textual alteration." Martin-Samuel Behloul ("The Testimony of Reason and Historical Reality: Ibn Ḥazm's Refutation of Christianity," *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba. The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker* [eds. C. Adang – M. Fierro – S. Schmidtke] [Handbook of Oriental Studies 103. Section 1. The Near and Middle East; Leiden: Brill 2013] 457–458) acknowledges a distinction between *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* ("textual falsification") and "false interpretation of the text" or *taḥrīf al-maʿnā*, which implies a twist of meaning. He observes that after the death of Muhammad the majority of Islamic scholars held that Jews and Christians actively tampered with their Scriptures (i.e., *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*), while the consensus of Muslim scholars have generally viewed *taḥrīf* as a faulty interpretation (i.e., *taḥrīf al-maʿnā*).

2 As with the earlier Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (b. 810 C.E.), the appendage "al-Ṭabarī" is associated with the region of Tabaristan in northern Iraq. See Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary on the Qur'an* (trans. J. Cooper) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987) I, ix; P.G. Riddell, "Al-Tabari," *The Qur'an. An Encyclopedia* (ed. O. Leaman) (New York: Routledge 2006) 621–623; C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill 1996) 40.

3 See Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary on the Qur'an*, x. The *History* of al-Ṭabarī is comprised of forty volumes. See Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' (Lives of the Prophets)* (trans. W.M. Brinner) (Leiden: Brill 2002) xx.

4 Cf. D. Thomas, "Al-Ṭabarī," *Christian-Muslim Relations.* II. *(900–1050)* (eds. D. Thomas – A. Mallett) (Leiden: Brill 2010) 184–187, esp. 184.

5 Cf. C.E. Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," *EI*[2] X, 11–15.

additional writings native to the genre.[6] Claude Gilliot categorizes his work as a *summa* that integrates legal, grammatical, philological, and rhetorical components.[7] Al-Ṭabarī's *History* and *Tafsīr* are enriched by his extensive travels to key centers of Islamic learning (i.e., Rayy, Baghdad, Kufa, Basra, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt), where he interviewed reputable transmitters of hadith.[8] He died in Baghdad in 923.[9]

Abu Ishaq Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Thaʿlabī, hereafter referred to as al-Thaʿlabī, was born in Nishapur, Iran.[10] Much of his historical background, including the year of his birth, remains uncertain. Al-Thaʿlabī died in 1036. He is reputed for pioneering efforts to distinguish legends from their historiographical lens.[11] Following in the steps of al-Ṭabarī's *History*, al-Thaʿlabī delivered his exegetical conclusions in prose-narrative form.[12] Both writers furnish anecdotal support for the novel claim of *Q* 9.30 that the Jews make Ezra/ʿUzayr out to be the son of Allah.[13] Unlike al-Ṭabarī, who blended sketches of biblical prophets from *qiṣaṣ* literature with Persian history, al-Thaʿlabī introduced content from the Bible that was often not previously represented in *qiṣaṣ* writings.[14] The title of his primary work is *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (*The Brides of the Sessions about the Legends of the Prophets*).[15] Biblical figures esteemed as prophets by Islam are featured

6 The term *tafsīr* refers to an exegetical act (cf. Aram. פשר) as well as to an interpretation of the Qur'an. C. Gilliot, "Classical and Medieval Exegesis," *EQ* II, 99–100. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* favors grammar as a final arbiter in settling matters of exegetical dispute. *Ibidem*, 110–111; also A. Rippin, "Tafsīr," *EI* X.

7 See Gilliot, "Classical and Medieval Exegesis," *EQ* II, 111.

8 Gilliot, "Classical and Medieval Exegesis," *EQ* II, 111; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 40–41.

9 Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," *EI*² X, 11–15.

10 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, xxiv.

11 See T. Nagel, "Ḳiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ," *EI*² V, 180–181.

12 The first four volumes of al-Ṭabarī's *History* preserve earlier *qiṣaṣ* content, i.e., legends or stories involving biblical figures. Al-Thaʿlabī also developed a *tafsīr*, but the text is less well-known and will not be referred to further in this study. See P.G. Riddell, "Al Thaʿlabi, Abu Ishaq Ahmad," *The Qur'an. An Encyclopedia* (ed. O. Leaman) (New York: Routledge 2006) 653–655; Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, xx, xxiv.

13 The verse is featured in a Medinan *sūra*. The setting involved a formative Muslim community developing in the midst of a robust Jewish presence in Medina. Thus, the statement was a means by which the young Muslim community asserted its monotheistic boundaries, distinguishing itself from Judaism and Christianity. See I.M. Abu-Rabiʿ, "Ezra," *EQ* I, 155–156. Steven M. Wasserstrom (*Between Muslim and Jew. The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995] 183–184) observes that the identity of ʿUzair has been tied to Metatron, Enoch, and even Azazel. Cf. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "ʿUzayr," *EI*² X, 960. Elsewhere Lazarus-Yafeh notes that the identity of ʿUzayr is disputed. The heat of Ibn Ḥazm's invective specifically targets *ʿAzrā al Warrāq* (i.e., "Ezra the scribe") as the falsifier of the Torah. The orthographic distinction appears to be intangible as Ibn Ḥazm uses the name ʿUzayr (as written in *Q* 9.30) to describe the corruptor of the Bible in a letter in opposition to Ibn al-Naghrīla. Notwithstanding, in the twelfth century Samau'al al-Maghribī (See "Ifḥām al Yahūd. Silencing the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 32 [1964] 60) claimed that ʿUzayr corresponds to the name Eliezer rather than Ezra. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 51, esp. n. 4.

14 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, xxvi.

15 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, xxiv.

among its wide spectrum of content. As the title of his principal work suggests, the text is classified as *qiṣaṣ*, a textual form characterized by stories that expound on biblical legends.[16]

Ibn Ḥazm was born in Cordoba in 994 C.E. His background as a medieval Islamic polemicist from the Spanish west is unique among writers reviewed in this study. Ibn Ḥazm is esteemed as a prolific author whose compositions touch on a wide array of subjects including autobiographical works, religious tradition and polemics, law, logic, ethics, history, and even romantic poetry.[17] His involvement with the religious-political dynamics of Andalusia led to imprisonment on two occasions in addition to a term serving as the designated vizier to the presiding caliph in the year 1023.[18] Eventually he joined the quasi-literalist faction of the Ẓāhirites of Andalusia among whom he ascended to a leadership role in 1034.[19] The termination of Umayyad rule in Andalusia and surrounding regions effected social change, granting him an audience with the king of Seville.[20] Ibn Ḥazm challenged the integrity of the king who responded with a mandate to burn all of the agitator's books.[21] He retreated to his family quarters, apparently discouraged by his unwelcome reception. He continued to disseminate his ideas through writing and taught more students until he died in 1064.[22]

Although Ibn Ḥazm was geographically dislocated from al-Thaʿlabī, both men produced their works during the eleventh century.[23] Ibn Ḥazm displays a less reserved polemical

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16 Wasserstrom (*Between Muslim and Jew*, 174) notes that qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ collections "presented a view of history that was almost unanimously accepted into the historical worldview of Islamicate civilization. This was part of the real history of the world." Brinner offers a historical overview of the writers of the qiṣaṣ genre, beginning with Wahb b. Munabbih (*d. ca.* 728/732? C.E.) through Ibn Kathīr (1300–1373), who attempted to omit what he perceived to be *isrāʾīliyyāt* aspects of history in efforts to disabuse his text from perceived heresy. See Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, xviii-xxiii. As a narrative genre, qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ merges with *isrāʾīliyyāt* material among exegetical works of both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī. Content from *isrāʾīliyyāt* lore was likely imported via early Jewish converts to Islam or even pre-Islamic sources in Arabia. Eventually the subgenre began to lose favor and was strongly opposed as a foreign influence that infiltrated Islam and spread dissent against Muhammad (e.g., Ibn Taymiya [*d.* 1328] and Ibn Kathīr). *Ibidem*, xxvi-xxviii; Gilliot, "Classical and Medieval Exegesis," 105–107. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 9, esp. n. 49.

17 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 61, 63; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 26.

18 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 62.

19 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 95. The Ẓāhirītes represent an Islamic school of interpretation whose adherents "advocate the *literal* interpretation of the revealed sources" which include "the Koran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet." Adang notes that "they also recognize a restricted form of *ijma* (consensus), namely of the Prophet's Companions, as an additional source of Islamic law" (*ibidem*, 62). It is conceivable that Ibn Ḥazm's interpretive literalism developed in part through interaction with Andalusian Karaites. Also cf. M. Fierro, "Why Ibn Ḥazm became a Ẓāhirī: Charisma, Law, and the Court," *Hamsa. Journal of Judaic and Islamic Studies* 4 (2018) 17–18; K. Versteegh, "Ibn Maḍāʾ as a Ẓāhirī Grammarian," *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba. The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker* (eds. C. Adang – M. Fierro – S. Schmidtke) (Handbook of Oriental Studies 103. Section 1. The Near and Middle East; Leiden: Brill 2013) 207, 212–216.

20 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 63.

21 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 63–64.

22 Adang (*Muslim Writers*, 64) records that "according to his former student, Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, who had it from Ibn Ḥazm's son Abū Rāfiʿ al-Faḍl, he left some 400 works, totaling about 800,000 pages—a feat Ṣāʿid adds, that had hitherto only been achieved by al-Ṭabarī." Few of these works are extant.

23 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 17.

style than both al-Thaʿlabī and al-Ṭabarī.[24] His virulent criticism of the biblical text made a considerable impact on his successors, perhaps owing in part to his acquaintance with both Muslim and non-Muslim sources.[25] Two of his writings—*Al-usul wa' l-furu* and *Kitab al-fisal*—describe five putatively Jewish sects by name:[26] Ashʿaniyya—Rabbanites, ʿAnānites—Karaites, ʿIsāwiyya—followers of Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣbāhānī, Samaritans, and the Ṣadūqiyya (from Yemen).[27] His familiarity with Jewish and quasi-Jewish groups implies some awareness of the interpretive outlook held by cross-sections of the larger community, perhaps by way of personal engagement. Links to one or more of these religious subdivisions may help account for Ibn Ḥazm's interest in and knowledge of the contents of the Hebrew Bible. Joshua Berman demonstrates that Ibn Ḥazm took a critical approach to Genesis, noting that the apologist provided "a detailed exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures that was without precedent."[28] Until his era the majority of medieval Muslim polemical energy was directed toward Christianity,[29] making space for his allegations that both the Gospel accounts and the Hebrew Bible were corrupted.

2. Transmission of the Hebrew Scriptures

The writings of Ibn Ḥazm contend that the Hebrew Bible lacks divine authenticity on account of Ezra the scribe's handling of the text. Seeing that a number of impressions of Ezra were in circulation by the eleventh century, a polemicist potentially had access to multiple angles from which to address Ezra's reputed recovery of the Bible. Although other

24 Adang (*Muslim Writers*, 94) notes, his work is "almost invariably of a polemical nature, and an objective remark is rarely found."

25 H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," *EI*² X, 112.

26 His recognition of these discrete subgroups may betray a literary link to al-Maqdisī's tenth century work *Kitab al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikh* (*Book of Creation and History*). See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 48. Also cf. R.C. Steiner, "A Jewish Theory of Biblical Redaction from Byzantium: Its Rabbinic Roots, Its Diffusion and Its Encounter with the Muslim Doctrine of Falsification," *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 2 (2003) 160. Adang (*Muslim Writers*, 137) notes, "Like al-Masʿūdī, al-Maqdisī, and al-Bīrūnī, Ibn Ḥazm knows of the existence of three different versions of the Torah." His awareness of text critical matters may imply familiarity with any or all of these previous writers' works.

27 Adang (*Muslim Writers*, 95–98) observes that a Karaite source plausibly accounts for Ibn Ḥazm's suggestion that the movement existed in the first century B.C.E. This explanation may throw light on his mention that Karaites were present "in two cities in al-Andalus: Talavera and Toledo." Ibn Ḥazm discloses that his source for the ʿIsāwiyya was Yūsuf b. Hārūn (presumably a medieval reworking of Josephus' *Antiquites* [called *Yosippon*]). He describes an additional anonymous group adhering to notions that Elijah, Pinhas, Eliezer (i.e., Abraham's servant), and Melchizedek were still living. Murat Kaya ("The Figure of Ezra [Uzayr] and His Adoption as the Son of God by [the] Dustan Sect," *Turkish Academic Tesearch Review* 5/4 [2020] 475–476) notes that the ʿIsāwiyya maintain that Christ was a prophet sent to the Israelites, while Mohammad was sent to the Arab population and the children of Ishmael. Kaya also identifies the Ṣadūqiyya as Zadokites, "the small group of Jews" that Ibn Ḥazm purports "believed that Ezra was the son of God."

28 See Berman, "Biblical Criticism of Ibn Hazm," 377–390, esp. 381.

29 Cf. ʿAbd al-Jabbār's (d. 1025 C.E.) *Critique of Christian Origins*; though Reynolds ("Scriptural Falsification," 189–195) observes that the Qur'an consistently accuses the Jews of *taḥrīf*.

medieval Muslim authors prior to Ibn Ḥazm affirm Ezra's agency in reissuing the scriptural records, the notion that the biblical text was largely subject to Ezra's influence is not a theory unique to Islam. Jewish tradition maintains that during the Babylonian exile all the Scriptures were lost and the biblical text was eventually reproduced by Ezra the scribe. Irenaeus of Lyon, a late second century Christian bishop, shares the view that Ezra restored the biblical text in his lengthy work *Against Heresies*. He states that "during the captivity of the people under Nebuchadnezzar, the Scriptures had been corrupted, and when, after seventy years, the Jews had returned to their own land, then, in the times of Artaxerxes the king of the Persians […]" God "inspired Esdras the priest [i.e., Ezra], of the tribe of Levi, to recast all the words of the former prophets."[30] Apart from his claim of previous corruption, Irenaeus' view from second century France agrees with, and perhaps leans on, content from a first century apocalyptic text known as *4 Ezra*, probably composed amid the aftermath of the Roman siege in 70 C.E.[31]

The structure of *4 Ezra* is comprised of seven successive visions which culminate in a narrative account that briefly describes Ezra's revelation and written reproduction of material delivered to him during a forty-day period of consecration (*4 Ezra* 14:20–48).[32] The text suggests that Ezra's contemporaries were bereft of the law as a result of its having been incinerated (14.21). Ezra received the commission to rewrite the law of God with the assistance of five companions (vv. 22–25). Upon completion of the forty days of rigorous scribal work a total of ninety-four books were produced (v. 44). As the first twenty-four books were to be made indiscriminately available to all people, these works appear to correspond with those conventionally understood to comprise the Hebrew Bible (v. 45).[33] Thus, a number of these texts were available for circulation in the public domain while the final compositions were reserved for "the wise among" Ezra's people (vv. 26, 45–46).

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30 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.21.2.

31 Juan Carlos Ossandón Widow (*The Origins of the Canon of the Hebrew Bible. An Analysis of Josephus and 4 Ezra* [Leiden: Brill 2018] 3–7) suggests a date of *ca.* 100 C.E. linked to content from *4 Ezra* 14, apparently based on historical events pivoting around 70 C.E. and pressures to identify a fixed canon of the Hebrew Bible. Hindy Najman (*Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future. An Analysis of 4 Ezra* [New York: Cambridge University Press 2014] 7–8, 11, 15–18) points out that *4 Ezra* feigns a background as if composed shortly after the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C.E., but Najman sees the text as a post-Second Temple development from *ca.* 100 C.E. The writing of *4 Ezra* signifies a "reboot" or an unfreezing of time lost between the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Matthias Henze ("4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: The Status Quaestionis," *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch. Reconstruction after the Fall* [eds. M. Henze – G. Boccaccini – J.M. Zurawski] [SJSup 164; Leiden: Brill 2013] 4–5) recognizes that both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* were written in response to the destruction of the Second Temple, despite having been fictitiously placed in the aftermath of the destruction of the First Temple. He identifies both texts as late apocalypses that concluded a generative era launched by the first Enochic writings in the third century B.C.E. Michael E. Stone (*Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1984] 28, 412, 414) suggests that the dating of the book falls between 95–100 C.E. as may be deduced by symbols associated with "Flavian emperors." Although disputed, Stone suggests that the original language of the composition was most likely Hebrew.

32 Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 412–414.

33 Stone (*Jewish Writings*, 414, n. 169) notes that "this is the oldest source for the number twenty-four for the biblical books."

Concepts from *4 Ezra* appear to have shaped views toward the Hebrew Bible over a period of centuries.[34] Among medieval Islamic writers, both al-Ṭabarī's *History* and al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets* hold key features in common with *4 Ezra.* The broad distribution of Arabic translations of *4 Ezra* supports the idea that both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī were dependent upon its content as a source for their works.[35] The following shared components demonstrate the medieval writers' familiarity and harmony with *4 Ezra* 14:21–48.[36]

1. The notion that the Torah was either lost or destroyed by fire in response to unfaithfulness that led to captivity (*4 Ezra* 14:21, 31–33).[37]
2. A dialogical encounter accompanied by instructions given to Ezra that prompted the eventual recovery of the Bible on the following day (*4 Ezra* 14:23, 27, 38–39).[38]
3. Both medieval writers independently agree with *4 Ezra* on the following variant points: Al-Ṭabarī: The drinking of a cup of liquid delivered to Ezra which precipitated a sudden awakening of his memory to the contents of the Torah in their entirety (*4 Ezra* 14:39–41).
   Al-Thaʿlabī: The recording of the text by either *five* companions (*4 Ezra* 14:42–43) or Ezra's *five* fingers.[39]
4. Ezra's restoration of the biblical text to his people (*4 Ezra* 14:42–48; cf. 15:1–3).[40]

Observing that content from *4 Ezra* reappears in both al-Ṭabarī's *History* and al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets*, one also recognizes shared elements exclusive to the two medieval texts.[41] Both texts express a favorable outlook toward Ezra's recovery work, despite the fact that *Legends of the Prophets* was a product of the eleventh century, the same general

34 Steiner ("Biblical Redaction," 159–161) observes that "[i]t is difficult to overstate the impact of this story on religious polemics throughout the ages." He cites al-Qirqisānī, a tenth century Karaite, to demonstrate how contemporary Islamic polemicists made reference to *4 Ezra* in order to leverage their claim that Moses' Torah was no longer extant. As a Karaite, al-Qirqisānī takes issue with *4 Ezra* as a rabbinic tale that provided a platform for Muslim criticism of the Bible.

35 *4 Ezra* was widely distributed in the form of Arabic translations during the Middle Ages. See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 54–56; Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 159; M. Whittingham, "Ezra as the Corrupter of the Torah? Re-Assessing Ibn Ḥazm's Role in the Long History of an Idea," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013) 257.

36 For all references see al-Ṭabarī's *The History of Al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)* (trans. M. Perlmann) (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1987) IV, 64–65.

37 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 580, 582. Apart from the commentary on *Q* 9.30, al-Thaʿlabī includes a similar statement in "The Story of Daniel" which mentions that the temple and the books in it were burned. *Ibidem*, 568, 570.

38 *4 Ezra* suggests that communication was between Ezra and the Almighty (cf. 14:2, esp. v. 20) while the medieval authors describe Ezra's interaction with human agents. See Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 581–583.

39 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 582.

40 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 581–583. The renewal and returning of the Torah "through the tongue of Ezra" is also briefly mentioned within "The Story of Daniel." *Ibidem*, 570.

41 Lazarus-Yafeh (*Intertwined Worlds*, 56) notes similarity in structure in addition to other "basic elements: the loss of the Torah scroll through (the Jews') sins and troubled times, its miraculous return by Ezra, complete and precise conformity between the lost version (also miraculously returned) and the one supplied by Ezra, the joy of the children of Israel, and their admiration of Ezra exaggerated to the point of worship."

timeframe during which Ibn Ḥazm wrote *Al-fisal*.[42] Accordingly, al-Ṭabarī's *History* or even al-Thaʿlabī's ideas provided a tenable Islamic source for Ibn Ḥazm's view that Ezra rewrote the Scriptures. While Ibn Ḥazm takes issue with Ezra's recovery of the biblical text, the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī both place confidence in the veracity of Ezra's composition. Differing from Ibn Ḥazm, al-Thaʿlabī includes several anecdotal narratives that commend Ezra's historical profile.[43]

Al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets* contains a series of Islamic traditions relative to "one who had passed by a city which had fallen into utter ruin" (*Q* 2.259). The storyline suggests that the leading character died and remained dead for a century before being raised back to life.[44] Differing accounts identify the main character as either Jeremiah the prophet or Ezra the scribe.[45] One rendering suggests that Jeremiah was the man who died as the city of Jerusalem was brought under siege and its occupants were driven into exile.[46] An alternate telling recasts the role to feature Ezra as the central figure.[47] One legend reports that Ezra died and remained dead for a hundred years before rising as a proof of resurrection.[48] With a view to historiography, one can see that both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī dignify Ezra as a literary prophet, evidenced by his supernatural recovery of the Hebrew Bible. Meanwhile, al-Thaʿlabī further develops the tale involving the enigmatic identity of Ezra in the next chapter, which presents traditions corresponding to *Qur'an* 9.30.

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42 The lives of al-Thaʿlabī and Al-Juwaynī (1028–1085) briefly overlapped. Both had origins in Nishapur and held to the Shāfi'ite school of jurisprudence. However, in an approach that differs greatly from that of al-Thaʿlabī, al-Juwaynī's *Shifā'* argues that both the Torah and the Gospels were deliberately falsified, suggesting that financial incentives may have motivated Ezra to alter the Torah. To support his claim, Al-Juwaynī appeals to genealogical data recorded the Hebrew text at contrast with the Septuagint. See D. Thomas, "Al-Juwaynī," *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*. III. *(1050–1200)* (eds. D. Thomas – A. Mallett) (Leiden: Brill 2011) 121–123; Lazarus-Yafeh, "ʿUzayr," *EI*[2] X, 960. Seeing that Ibn Ḥazm made a similar claim about Ezra, taking a critical approach to Genesis at roughly the same time period, it is possible that polemical data transferred from Spain to Iraq and vice-versa at a rapid pace. Though not addressing any specific contrast with the Septuagint, Berman investigates Ibn Ḥazm's approach toward Genesis in "The Biblical Criticism of Ibn Hazm the Andalusian," 382–387. Ibn Ḥazm also found fault with the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, as well as the Samaritan Pentateuch. See Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," *EI*[2] X, 111–112; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitab al-fisal* (Rif 'at, III, 452–453, 461, 463).

43 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 573, 576–583. Among competing Islamic traditions, al-Thaʿlabī notes that Ezra was viewed by some as the subject of *Q* 2.259 who died and came back to life after one hundred years as a proof of the resurrection of the dead. Additionally, Ezra is esteemed as one whose prayers for the afflicted were answered with the result of a miraculous recovery. *Ibidem*, 576–80.

44 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 576–580, esp. 577.

45 Given the two potential protagonists—Ezra or Jeremiah—it is possible that al-Thaʿlabī was influenced by a Jewish tradition that attributed authorship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah. Ezra is credited with rewriting the text and placing it within the order of Psalms. See below.

46 The text derives imagery from Ezek 37:1–14. Instead of Ezekiel, Jeremiah is the prophet in focus. The bones are not the house of Israel, but those of a donkey. Instead of reviving the children of Israel and restoring the exiles to the land of Israel, the donkey (a non-kosher beast) is revived after a hundred years.

47 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 578–579.

48 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 578–580, esp. 579.

3. Monotheistic Compromise

The sole mention of Ezra's name in the Qur'an indicates that Ezra was shown uncommon reverence by the Jews. Sūra 9.30–31 contains a statement that prompted medieval Islamic writers to raise a heightened sense of caution against alleged corruption intrinsic to the monotheisms of both Judaism and Christianity. Meanwhile, related commentary served to bolster the claims of Islam as a uniquely monotheistic religion. A translation of *Q* 9.30–31 reads:[49]

> The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah"; and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah." That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?
> They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah, and [also] the Messiah, the son of Mary. And they were not commanded except to worship one God; there is no deity except Him. Exalted is He above whatever they associate with Him.

Referring back to the Ezra legend from al-Ṭabarī's *History*, one readily senses a favorable stance toward Ezra. The scribe is portrayed as both the one who grieves the loss of the Torah as well as the celebrated human vessel who restores the Bible to the children of Israel. However, the festive occasion with which the tale concludes is interrupted with a final startling report, "Then he [Ezra] died. In the course of time, the Israelites considered Ezra to be the son of God. God again sent them a prophet, as He did in the past, to direct and teach them, and to command them to follow the Torah."[50] Although al-Ṭabarī displays a generally favorable attitude toward Ezra and his efforts to reclaim the Torah for his people, he purports to find a glaring defect in the monotheistic claims of Judaism. According to al-Ṭabarī, Ezra's heroic act of restoring the Torah to Israel marked an occasion of national compromise as the people began to call Ezra the son of God.[51] The charge of *Q* 9.30—namely that "the Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of Allah'"—is here recast in the creative lore of al-Ṭabarī's text. The indictment is sharpened as the adjacent qur'anic verse includes the admonition to worship only one God.

Al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets* displays features that cohere with those of al-Ṭabarī's *History*. As suggested above, a portion of al-Thaʿlabī's text provides an anthology of Islamic folklore that links Ezra to *Q* 9.30.[52] The chapter in focus furnishes a cache of legends that reaffirm the claim that "the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God."[53] Placed at

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49 Qur'an trans. from http://quran.com.

50 See Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, IV, 65; also cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 54–55; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 229–231.

51 His earlier *Tafsīr* offered more conservative explanations, initially limiting the claim to an individual known as Pinhas, eventually suggesting that multiple Medinan Jews exalted Ezra's status while greeting Muhammad at his arrival in Medina in 622 C.E. Abu-Rabiʿ ("Ezra," 155–156) notes that the claim is linked to a Medinan sūra.

52 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 580–583.

53 The basis for the statement is difficult to determine. As noted by Haïm Z'ew Hirschberg, "These words are an enigma because no such opinion is to be found among the Jews" ("Ezra: In Islam," *EncJud*, VI, 653).

the head of the chapter of al-Thaʿlabī's work, the indicting remark about "the Jews" from the Qur'an functions as an initial inclusio that introduces each of the three colorful vignettes which sequentially follow.[54] Each consecutive narrative sketch relays a tale in which the tragedy of Israel's loss of the Torah is neutralized by Ezra's remarkable recovery of the sacred text. The pivotal statement from the Qur'an, "the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God," is vindicated by the closing sentence of each of the three episodes. The content and concluding statements of the three accounts vouch for the authenticity of *Q* 9.30. An overview of the larger literary scheme suggests that each story was selected and arranged with a discrete rhetorical goal in mind. The literary arrangement supports the initial claim that "the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God." A summary sentence functions as a final inclusio that marks the structural bookend of the chapter. The following summary of the arrangement may add clarity:

> The chapter is set in motion with an opening inclusio gleaned from *Q* 9.30, "God has said, '*And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God*'."[55] The statement functions as a polemical refrain.
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> The first tradition, ascribed to ʿAtiyah al-ʿAwfī from Ibn ʿAbbās, reaches a point of resolve with an exclamation placed in the mouth of the Israelites that conveys a sense of deep awe in response to Ezra's accurate reception of the Torah, namely: "Ezra would not have been given this were he not the son of God!"[56]
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> The second segment, ascribed to Al-Suddī and Ibn ʿAbbās from ʿAmmār, bears essentially the same sentiment as the first story. This second sketch concludes with a statement that appears to be linked to the scholars who compared Ezra's work with the text returned to them in the Ark: "God gave this to him only because he is His son."[57]
>
> The final narrative of the collection is attributed to al-Kalbī. The third account closes with a final indicting comment that shares rhetorical emphasis with the two previous anecdotes. The episode ends with a shocking response from the Israelites after comparing Ezra's reproduction of the Torah: "God would not have sent down the Torah into the heart of one of us after it had departed from our hearts, except if he were His son."
>
> To make a cliché of the point, the chapter concludes with the final inclusio refrain, "Whereupon the Jews said that Ezra is the son of God."[58]

Ibn Ḥazm clearly took issue with the monotheistic claims of Judaism, though he was perhaps less determined than his contemporary to make an apotheotic spectacle of Ezra the scribe. To be sure, Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitab al-fisal* publishes sentiment that concurs with claims of *Q* 9.30. He does limit charges that "the Jews say Ezra is the son of Allah" to the Ṣadūqiyya (i.e. Sadducees), a "politico-religious" sect that he considers distinct from other Jewish

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54 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 580.
55 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 580 (Italics from *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*).
56 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 580–581.
57 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 581–582.
58 Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 582–583.

subgroups due to their novel veneration of Ezra.[59] He notes that the Ṣadūqiyya lived in Yemen at one time, though by his own era the group had vanished.[60]

Another reference that may involve the deification of Ezra is linked to the figure of Metatron, a semi-divine angelic intermediary. In a conflated amalgam of rabbinic traditions Ibn Ḥazm alleges that the Jews worship Metatron as an auxiliary god with reference to Yom Kippur observance.[61] Steven M. Wasserstrom sees a tacit link between Metatron

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59 Nurshif ʿAbd Al-Rahim Mustafa Rifʾat, *Ibn Ḥazm on Jews and Judaism* (PhD Diss., University of Exeter; Exeter 1988) II/4, 306. Also cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 52, n. 7, also p. 68; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 98. Kaya suggests that Ibn Ḥazm had likely never been to Yemen, and evidence fails to confirm that the Ṣadūqiyya ever settled there. Kaya does not charge the Ṣadūqiyya with the scandal of revering Ezra as the son of God. Instead, he posits that a faction of the Samaritan community, known as the Dustan sect, more likely account for the Jews who held Ezra to be the son of God. Kaya's theory rests in part on the idea that, unlike other Samaritans, the Dustan community was favorably inclined toward Ezra. See Kaya, "The Figure of Ezra," 471–476, esp. 476.

60 Rifʾat, *Ibn Ḥazm on Jews and Judaism*, II/4, 306. Also cf. the content of *al-Radd ʿala Ibn al-Naghrila*, written in opposition to his opponent, Ibn al-Nagrilah (reproduced in Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 67–68). Rifʾat notes that a similar claim was introduced in the ninth century by al-Jāḥiẓ's *Risalat al-Radd ʿAla Nasara* which stated that a particular group "exaggerated" Ezra's "importance and called him the son of God, and this is well known about them. A remnant of this group survived in Yemen, Syria and inside the Roman countries." Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risalat al-Radd* (Rifʾat, II/4, 309). Al-Jāḥiẓ adds that Ezra was awarded this title "as a token of his obedience to God and of the respect in which the people hold him, because he is one of Israel's sons." *Ibidem*, 309. Al-Jāḥiẓ seems to suggest that two categories existed. In response to a miraculous restoration of the Scriptures one group overstated Ezra's importance as the exclusive son of God. The other group esteemed every Jew of Israel as a bearer of the title son of God. Al-Ṭabarī's *History* and al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets* represent the former example. Also cf. Rifʾat, *Ibn Ḥazm on Jews and Judaism*, II/4, 309–310.

61 Reworking a talmudic text cited a century earlier by al-Masʿūdī, he implicates a story from *b. Berakhot* 3a that depicts God mourning "as the dove moans" and saying, "Woe unto Me, that I destroyed My house, that I divided My sons and daughters from each other. My stature shall be bent until I build up My house and bring My sons and daughters back to it." See Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitab al-fisal* (Rifʾat, III, 476); also cf. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 99–101; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 31–32, esp. n. 38. Ibn Ḥazm criticizes the anthropomorphic notion of God expressing sorrow over chastening the people. (The initial context refers to the demise of the Second Temple.) Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitab al-fisal* differs from the Talmud in details and contextual placement. The text appears to be mingled with *b. Ber.* 7a, involving the figure of Ishmael b. Elisha. Ishmael recounts a fabled encounter with God by stating, וראיתי אכתריאל יה ה׳ צבאות שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא—"And I saw Akhteriel Yah, the Lord of hosts, who is the one sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." The talmudic tale derives phraseology and content from Isaiah's calling in 6:1. The story continues with the direct instruction, "Ishmael, my son, bless me." Ishmael responds by addressing God as a dependent being. Given the subservient expressions attributed to God it is little surprise that Ibn Ḥazm took issue with the anthropomorphous content. He also appears to draw content from *Shiʿur Qumah*, a mystical text featuring both R. Ishmael and Metatron. See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 99; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 31–33. Haggai Mazuz ("Ibn Ḥazm and Midrash," *JSS* 62/1 [2017] 143–144) compares the talmudic content with Ibn Ḥazm's rendition, observing how the rabbinic material is misrepresented in order to suggest that "the sources are fabricated." Ibn Ḥazm seems to intermix all three sources. Neither talmudic segment explicitly mentions Metatron. *Shiʾur Qumah* purports to relay corporeal measurements of the divine body as disclosed by Metatron. Ibn Ḥazm portrays the figure of Metatron simulating God's anthropomorphic expressions as depicted by the talmudic stories, alleging that the Jews worship Metatron during Yom Kippur. See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 100–101; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 31–32, esp. n. 38. Ibn Ḥazm (*Kitab al-fisal* [Rifʾat, III, 478]) states that "these Jews" petition "another god, in addition to Allah," which he regards as "sheer polytheism." While this description displays the polemicist's distaste for assigning anthropomorphous qualities to God, it also suggests that he had access to rabbinic tradition.

and Ezra the scribe in Ibn Ḥazm's claim that "the word 'Metatron' according to them [i.e., the Jews] means 'the little god'."[62] However, the esoteric link relies on tenuous scribal synonymity with Enoch as a "little lord" angel-creator.[63] While the idea that Ezra's identity as one of the collective "children of God" (*b'nei elohim*) may have caught the attention of Ibn Ḥazm (or even Muhammad),[64] Wasserstrom's overarching suggestion implies that the rabbinic community—not merely the Ṣadūqiyya of Yemen—were blameworthy for exalting Ezra's status to that of divine son.[65] The dependency on rabbinic literature to reach such a conclusion precludes the prospect of finding a link between Ezra and Metatron among any other Jewish sect.

4. Ibn Ḥazm's Polemical Posture

Ibn Ḥazm's attitude toward Ezra the scribe was considerably less charitable than the approach of either his contemporary al-Thaʿlabī or al-Ṭabarī, a century earlier.[66] Al-Thaʿlabī issued an artful defense, at harmony with the Qur'an, that commends the marvel of Ezra's restoration of the biblical text. Nothing is said to impugn or disrespect the character of Ezra the scribe. By commending his recovery of the Bible, both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī imply that Ezra functioned as a prophetic agent. To the contrary, expanding the charges against Christianity for tampering with the Gospels,[67] Ibn Ḥazm launched criticisms that discredited both the textual legacy and the ethical integrity of Ezra the scribe. Earlier legends about Ezra's heroic rewriting of the Bible are modified and restructured to account for an indictment of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* (i.e., "textual alteration"). Ezra is accused of having deliberately falsified the Scriptures.[68] Although during the tenth century both al-Ṭabarī and al-

62 See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 183–184.

63 Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 183; G.D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia. From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina 1988) 59–61.

64 Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, 60–61.

65 His does link Ibn Ḥazm's argument about worship of an angelic agent to a rabbinic subgroup, but falls short of identifying the object of exaltation as Ezra the scribe. See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 183–185.

66 Kaya ("The Figure of Ezra," 475) notes that both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī saw Ezra as a heroic figure. Lazarus-Yafeh notes that both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī were at harmony with the consensus of Jewish and Christian writers who also viewed Ezra as "a positive figure." See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 59. Also cf. *4 Ezra* 14; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.21.2; ms. Hamburg 32 re: Ps 137 (commentary from northern France); *b. Sanh.* 21b.

67 Cf. Behloul, "The Testimony of Reason," 465–467; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 26–28; J.P. Monferrer Sala, "Ibn Ḥazm—*Kitāb al-fiṣal*," *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*. III. *(1050–1200)* (eds. D. Thomas – A. Mallett) (Leiden: Brill 2011) 141–143.

68 Ibn Ḥazm labels the scribe as a "Zindic"—heretic. See Kaya, "The Figure of Ezra," 475; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 34. Lazarus-Yafeh writes: "following earlier pre-Islamic sources, he accused Ezra the scribe of having purposely corrupted the Biblical text" (*ibidem*, 45). Ibn Ḥazm's attitude toward Ezra's act of textual recovery differed from other Muslim authors. While acknowledging that the Torah was burned, and that Ezra reminted a replacement, he sees Ezra's version as a product of his memory that involved subjective emendations. Ibn Ḥazm claims that the Jews admit that Ezra emended the text. See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 245–246.

Maqdisī advanced claims that textual distortions existed, some of the sources undergirding Ibn Ḥazm's charges were likely of a pre-Islamic nature.[69] Given his ambition and familiarity with religious works outside the context of Islam, one may surmise that Ibn Ḥazm sought out non-Muslim sources to substantiate his point.

The earliest explicitly negative press directed toward Ezra's alleged revision appears to surface during the third century C.E. from the pen of Plotinus' student Porphyry. His *Adversus Christianos* contends that all of Moses' texts were reduced to ashes when the first temple was destroyed, "and all those which were written under his name afterwards were composed inaccurately one thousand one hundred and eighty years after Moses' death by Ezra and his followers."[70] It may be that Ibn Ḥazm was acquainted with this statement as he expressed personal interest in translating Porphyry's work.[71] His familiarity with Porphyry is further attested in a book called *al-Taqrīb*, which Ibn Ḥazm composed while in exile. As an introduction to logic, the text expounds on content derived from both Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isogoge*.[72]

Although Lazarus-Yafeh mentions Justin Martyr's second century *Dialogue with Trypho* regarding corruption of the biblical text, Ezra is shown no disrespect in Justin's work.[73] Justin does address the subject of omissions from the Scriptures as having taken place "only a short time [ago]" (*Dial.* 72.1), but only by the calculated efforts of Trypho's teachers.[74] According to Justin, the alleged tampering with the text took place after the production of the Septuagint translation. Although he mentions the legend about Ptolemy and the seventy elders who translated from Hebrew to Greek, Justin refers to verses from outside the Pentateuch that he claims have been altered or removed from the text. For whatever reason Justin chose to mention the Pentateuchal translation committee, he argues that someone meddled with the biblical text within the brief period of time subsequent to the initial

69 Al-Ṭabarī's exposition of *Q* 2.79 accuses the Jews of textual forgery. See Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, I, 413. Given his positive portrait of Ezra elsewhere, presumably he sees corruption introduced after Ezra's redrafting of the Hebrew Bible. It is plausible that Ibn Ḥazm gleaned both the story of Ezra's recovery of the Bible and the idea of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* from Al-Ṭabarī. Possibly al-Maqdisī's *Kitab al-bad'* also shaped Ibn Ḥazm's notions of textual alteration. Cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 45; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 233, 251. Despite the fact that al-Maqdisī claimed the distortions took place at Sinai, Ibn Ḥazm blames Ezra as the scribal instigator. Steiner ("Biblical Redaction," 160) points out that al-Maqdisī claims that Ezra recovered the Torah to the letter before handing the text over to his student who became the source of corruption.

70 Porphyry, *Christ.* 465e (Stern, 423, 427–428). Cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 63.

71 Rif 'at (*Ibn Ḥazm on Jews and Judaism*, II, 296) notes that in Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitab al-taqrib li bad al-mantiq* (p. 8) he reveals plans to translate material from both Aristotle and Porphyry on the subject of logic.

72 José Miguel Puerta Vílchez ("Inventory of Ibn Ḥazm's Works," *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba. The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker* [eds. C. Adang – M. Fierro – S. Schmidtke] [Handbook of Oriental Studies 103. Section 1. The Near and Middle East; Leiden: Brill 2013] 743–746, esp. 746) refers to the book as "no more than a summary explanation of what is contained in Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isogoge*, that can be used [...] in the strictly Muslim area of jurisprudence and theology." Cf. Behloul, "The Testimony of Reason," 465–466.

73 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 63; Justin, *Dial.* 72.1.

74 Trypho, Justin's interlocutor throughout the *Dialogue with Trypho* (71.1–72.1), was allegedly a pious Jew. Justin claims that the book of Ezra was among the books that were modified.

completion of the Greek translation. It is possible, though far from likely, that Justin's claims contributed to Ibn Ḥazm's overall criticism of the biblical text, viz. "the transmission is corrupt, interrupted, and unsound."[75] Given that the limited time interval between the late Greek and Roman periods affords merely a late and narrow margin of time for falsifying the text,[76] it requires one to embrace a glaring anachronism to pin the blame on Ezra. Further, pre-Nicene Christian texts seem to afford little to no basis for dishonoring Ezra as a purveyor of false tradition.[77]

The Samaritan tradition and general worldview may represent another source of influence tapped by Ibn Ḥazm by which he plausibly derived or supplemented his distaste for Ezra and his reproduction of the biblical text.[78] Already having dismissed the Tanakh as a counterfeit—in favor of their own Pentateuch—one may readily expect the Samaritan community to stand averse to Ezra and his legendary recovery of the Hebrew Scriptures. Contempt of this nature was perhaps galvanized by the talmudic claim that "even though the Torah was not given through him, its writing was changed through him."[79] If the script was changed in order "to build a greater barrier between the Samaritans and the Jews" (as may be implied)[80] it ought not be surprising to find that some from within the Samaritan community looked back on the person of Ezra with contempt. Despite the fact that Ibn Ḥazm acknowledges that he had never encountered the Samaritans, it remains possible that the contents of a Samaritan liturgical prayer contributed to the formulation (or reinforcement) of his polemical posture toward Ezra's alleged role in the process of scriptural transmission.[81] Within the context of a prayer linked to Yom Kippur, a brief imprecation targets Ezra and his textual legacy. The line of amalgamated Hebrew-Aramaic

75 Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitab al-fisal* (Rif 'at, III, 485).

76 Justin lived during the mid-second century C.E.

77 To the contrary, Irenaeus, Justin's contemporary in the west, holds to an idea similar to *4 Ezra*, namely, that Ezra "recast all the words of the former prophets" after returning from Babylon. Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.21.2) records that the "Scriptures had been corrupted" prior to this point.

78 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 60–63. Al-Masʿūdī's tenth century *Muruj al-dhahab* relays that the Samaritans claimed that "the Torah of Moses" had been "forged, altered and changed" and produced by Zerubbabel based on "what certain Israelites had remembered." See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 47, 232.

79 *B. Sanh.* 21b. The text suggests that the Assyrian script and לשון הקודש—"the holy tongue" were for Israel, while the Hebrew script and the Aramaic tongue were given להדיוטות—"for the commoners." Marcus Jastrow (*s.v.* "הדיוט," *Dictionary of Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [ed. M. Jastrow] [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1926]) suggests alternate definitions of "ignoble" or "ignorant." The Talmud proceeds to inquire about who the הדיוטות are. The response identifies them as כותאי, a reference to the Samaritans. Thus, the account makes a separation between Israel and the Samaritan community that is bolstered by linguistic distinctives. The term הדיוטות, directed toward the Samaritans, is not one of endearment. The Michael L. Rodkinson translation (*New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud. Sanhedrin* [ed. I.M. Wise] [Boston, MA: Talmud Society 1918] VIII, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/FullTalmud.pdf [access: 27.03.2023]) may capture the intent by interpreting the word simply as "idiots." See also Kaya, "The Figure of Ezra," 472.

80 Textual note culled from *b. Sanh.* 21b, The Soncino Edition, n. 49.

81 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 60, esp. n. 31.

text reads: ארור עזרה ודבריו דכתב בבישאתו—“Cursed be Ezra[82] and his words that he wrote in his shame.”[83] The imprecation directed toward a priest (i.e., Ezra) in the context of a Yom Kippur prayer is striking. One can easily imagine that Samaritan animosity toward Ezra may have drawn the attention of Ibn Ḥazm as he hunted for additional Jewish sources to support his polemical claims.[84]

5. Rabbinic Sources and Ezra's Scribal 'Dots'—Puncta Extraordinaria

It remains uncertain which rabbinic source(s) may support Ibn Ḥazm's claim that the Jews acknowledge that Ezra emended the Scriptures. Camilla Adang makes the reasonable suggestion that the polemicist's reference to alterations is associated with the *tiqqunei soferim* (i.e., corrections of the scribes), a phrase associated with (usually eighteen) suspected scribal revisions to the biblical text.[85] Adang posits that the influence of al-Qirqisānī, a tenth century Karaite author, may inform Ibn Ḥazm's awareness of the subject matter.[86] A Karaite akin to al-Qirqisānī may well account for Ibn Ḥazm's acquaintance with the notion of Ezra's emendations. Richard C. Steiner makes a fair point that scholars have not identified any explicit reference to the *tiqqunei soferim*, noting that Adang sees a tenable reference to the tradition in Ibn Ḥazm's statement about the Jews' admission that Ezra altered the text.[87]

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82 The name Ezra (עזרא) is here spelled with a final ה rather than an א, but the context requires a noun and the scribal action seems to remove any ambiguity about the referent.

83 Hebrew-Aramaic text from A.E. Cowley, *Samaritan Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon 1909) II, 514, line 2. It is difficult to reach decisive conclusions about the dating of the imprecation on a sheerly linguistic basis. The text combines a Hebrew nucleus with peripheral Aramaisms (e.g., the relative particle ד linked to the verb כתב). A chronology based on linguistic strata is corroborated by identification of a late fourteenth century writer, Abisha (אבישע). See A. Tal, "'Hebrew Language' and 'Holy Language' between Judea and Samaria," *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans. Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics* (ed. J. Zsengellér) (Berlin – Boston, MA: De Gruyter 2011) 197. Abraham Tal notes that Abisha was a priest and a prolific writer (*ibidem*, 194–197). Cowley (*Samaritan Liturgy*, II, xxvii-xxviii) informs that this particular Abisha (*d.* 1376) was the son of the high priest, Phineas (*d.* 1368) b. Yosef. Though the fourteenth century post-dates Ibn Ḥazm's era by hundreds of years, the written form of the Yom Kippur curse may reflect a considerably more antiquated liturgical tradition. The written liturgical form likely preserves an outlook of long-standing contempt for Ezra's scribal activity.

84 The possibility is heightened by his familiarity with the Samaritan community and their Scriptures. See H. Hirschfeld, "Mohammedan Criticism of the Bible," *JQR* 13/2 (1901) 228.

85 See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 246–247; Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 156–158, 161, cf. 166. For additional content related to scribal emendations, cf. E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament. An Introduction to the Bible Hebraica*, 2 ed. (trans. E.F. Rhodes) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) 17–18; Christian D. Ginsburg (*Introduction to the Massoretico-Edition to the Hebrew Bible* [London: Trinitarian Bible Society 1897] 347–363, esp. 347, n. 2) notes that the St. Petersburg Codex from 916 C.E. makes reference to eighteen scribal corrections (מן י״ח תיקון סופרים). Cf. M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon 1985) 66–74; E.R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1994) 54–55, 116–118; E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2 ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1992) 64–67.

86 See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 245–246.

87 See Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 124, 159–162, 166, esp. n. 143.

Granting that explicit references are not available to spell out which, if any, rabbinic texts or ideas may warrant Ibn Ḥazm's statement, Adang's theory about the *tiqqunei soferim* seems to be a sensible one. Though, a more intuitive explanation may thus far have been overlooked. Steiner maintains that "Byzantine Rabbanites" held to a theory about the editing process of Scripture that failed to take root in Spain on account of Muslim polemics involving Ezra the scribe.[88] Steiner demonstrates that the Byzantine theory spread in the regions of Germany, northern France, and eventually to Provence, where he suggests that the editing theory underwent changes.[89] The theory itself derives content from Palestinian sources, vividly featuring the scribal role of Ezra as characterized by a midrashic work known as *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (*c*. seventh to tenth century).[90] Steiner persuasively argues that Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) avoided discussing concepts of textual variation in view of the polemical climate that dominated Spain.[91] There is logical merit to his proposal. However, Steiner's claim that Muslim polemics about Ezra inhibited the spread of the Byzantine redaction theory fails to acknowledge that the theory may have inadvertently informed Muslim polemicists in Spain. Steiner's ideas about the theory have roots in rabbinic textual notions that date back to the tenth century,[92] barely prior to the entry of Ibn Ḥazm's contribution to the religious-polemical dynamics of the region.[93] Accordingly, Steiner's thesis overlooks the possibility that the editing theory involving Ezra first reached Ibn Ḥazm and then served as a catalyst to fuel medieval Muslim polemics, which in turn offset the spread of the Byzantine theory in Sefarad.[94]

As previously suggested, traces of rabbinic influence linked to the theory may be discernible among the stories of al-Tha'labī's *Legends of the Prophets*. The exegetical narratives that expound on *Q* 2.259 and 9.30 assign a prominent role to both Ezra the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. Variant episodes draw a parallel that casts each of the biblical figures in the role of "one who passed by a city which had fallen into utter ruin" (*Q* 2.259), the backdrop being the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. These tales segue into al-Tha'abī's rendition of Ezra's recovery of the biblical text and the ensuing smear campaign linked to *Q* 9.30 about the Jews deifying Ezra. Given that sketches of Ezra's recovery of the Scriptures are almost certainly

88 Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 124, 147–148, 153–155, esp. 158.

89 Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 124, 159–162.

90 See Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 124.

91 Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 153–157.

92 Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 124, n. 2.

93 While Steiner's contribution may accurately assess the spread of an editing theory among the medieval rabbinic community, the argument falls short of explaining how Muslim polemics managed to develop ideas about Ezra the scribe.

94 Steiner ("Biblical Redaction," 124) implies that Byzantine rabbinic tradents espousing the theory saw it as a liability in the territory of Spain in the wake of Islamic polemical ideas already in circulation. Perhaps *Q* 9.30 might be cited to support the idea, but the qur'anic influence was not limited to the area of Spain. Ibn Ḥazm's polemical voice was not heard until well into the eleventh century. Prior to that time, the diatribe against Ezra's recovery of the biblical text was not likely an issue in the region. A letter from Emperor Leo III (probably from the eighth century) to the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar II implies that the supernatural recovery of Ezra (without mention of his name) was called into question, but the matter was not isolated to Spain. *Ibidem*, 158–159.

grounded in *4 Ezra*, the content and juxtaposed arrangement of al-Tha'labī's legends may betray encounters with an early strand of the redaction theory advocated by Steiner. That is, a latent source beyond *4 Ezra* may inform and take shape in the structure of al-Thaʿlabī's exegetical folklore.

In an exposition on Psalm 137, an anonymous medieval Jewish commentator writing in northern France states: וכשעלה עזרא מבבל וכתב כל הספרים—"And Ezra went up from Babylonia and wrote all of the [biblical] books." The medieval exegete credits Ezra with having edited and arranged the Psalms in their current sequence (see Ps 137 [ms. Hamburg 32])."[95] The commentary suggests that Ezra personally added Ps 137 to the Psalter. The anonymous explicator claims that Jeremiah drafted the initial composition which was not placed within the order of Psalms until Ezra rewrote it, along with the other biblical books, after returning from exile.[96] Although the commentary post-dates al-Thaʿlabī's era, the commentator logs an understanding that may have circulated over a period of several centuries. While the Psalm itself laments the Babylonian captivity, the commentary showcases both Jeremiah's authorship and Ezra's agency in reproducing the text. Thus, key components of the commentary play out in sequence at the core of al-Thaʿlabī's qiṣaṣ. The setting relates to the siege of Jerusalem and the exile. Jeremiah, though not functioning as an author, plays a central role in one legendary account, while Ezra fills a corresponding role in the next chronicle. Both figures died and disappeared for a century before being revived after the captivity.[97] The subsequent interpretive tales, which enlarge on *Q* 9.30, make an exhibition of Ezra's miraculous recovery of the Bible before reporting that the Jews over-sensationalized Ezra's recovery work, divinizing him as the son of God.

It is possible that al-Thaʿlabī provides a link between notions that eventually circulated among rabbinic exegetes in northern France as well as among medieval Muslim polemical writers. Given the rapid exchange of ideas that potentially took place between Ibn Ḥazm in Spain and al-Juwaynī in Nishapur, it is conceivable that al-Thaʿlabī's legends were dispatched among Islamic spheres of influence that included the region of Andalusia. Accordingly, even al-Thaʿlabī's emphasis on Ezra's prominent role may have contributed to the phenomenal scarcity of the Byzantine theory among Andalusian Jews that Steiner observes.

95 For a reproduction of the content of ms. Hamburg 32, see I.M. Ta-Shma, "משהו על ביקורת המקרא באשקנז בימי־הביניים," המקרא בראי מפרשיו: ספר זכרון לשרה קמין (ed. S. Japhet) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1994) 457–458. Also cf. Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 131, 155.

96 The narrator infers that Jeremiah is the author of the Psalm as the prophet brings a charge against the Edomites before God: ירמיה הנביא היה תובע עלבונו לפני הק׳ מאדום ששמחי על מפלתן של ישראל־־ובזה תוכל להבין שירמי׳ אמ׳ על נהרות בבל—"Jeremiah the prophet was expressing his claim before the Holy One against Edom, which rejoiced over the downfall of Israel; and in this you can understand that Jeremiah spoke about the rivers of Babylon" (cf. Ps 137:7). The anonymous commentator draws a parallel between the indictment against Edom in Ps 137 and Jeremiah's composition in Lam 4:21: שהרי מעניין אילו דברים אמר באיכה שנא׳ שישי ושמחי בת אדום גם עליך תעבור כוס וגו׳—"After all, it is interesting that he said the words in Lamentations, as it says, 'Be glad and rejoice, daughter of Edom,' also upon you the cup will pass, etc."

97 The reference to Ezra's grandsons as elderly men in "the assembly" is suggestive of the men of the great assembly associated with Ezra and the editing theory. See Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 580; comp. with Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 149–151, 157.

More specifically, the influence of Ibn Ḥazm in Spain may have so charged the polemical atmosphere of the region that trademarks of the Byzantine redaction theory became targets of polemical lampoon in the religious culture of the territory.

Rabbinic traditions involving Ezra the scribe were plausibly pressed into the service of developing Islamic polemical views in Andalusia. On a mission to gather facts, Ibn Ḥazm may well have tapped al-Qirqisānī's work (or the ideas of other Karaites) with an aim to discover points of vulnerability in the compositional background of the Hebrew Bible. Haggai Mazuz posits that Karaite informants may account for his anti-rabbinic arguments.[98] The theory is convincing, though remains uncertain. Whether by Karaite influence or not, it is certainly conceivable that at some stage of inquiry Ibn Ḥazm became exposed to content from *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* regarding Ezra's activity as a scribe. The text itself preserves a rabbinic tradition inferring that Ezra placed dots above (or on one instance, below) a number of select consonantal clusters present in the Hebrew Bible, hinting that the marked content is disputed. Ezra's prominent role in the legend commends the theory that Ibn Ḥazm had some kernel of the story in mind when launching his polemical campaign against Ezra and the Hebrew Bible.

Details in the content of the Masoretic Text are on rare occasion offset by these scribal *dots* (i.e., "nequdot" or *puncta extraordinaria*), which allegedly signify uncertainty about the consonantal contents of fifteen brief textual units.[99] *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* elaborates on

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98 An oral source seems likely in light of traditions related to Ba'al Ṣafōn. See Mazuz, "Ibn Ḥazm and Midrash," 148–151.

99 The following verses are offset by scribal dots (i.e., נקודות—"nequdot"): Gen 16:5, 18:9, 19:33, 33:4, 37:12; Num 3:39, 9:10, 21:30, 29:15; Deut 29:28; 2 Sam 19:20; Isa 44:9; Ezek 41:20, 46:22; Ps 27:13. See Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 16; Ginsburg, *Massoretico-Edition*, 318–334. Ginsburg (cf. *ibidem*, 321) notes that the St. Petersburg Codex from 916 C.E. displays the scribal dots. Cf. also Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 48; Steiner, "Biblical Redaction," 137–141; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 55–57. Emanuel Tov observes that the internal unity of Masoretic manuscripts is attested by the presence of the dots. Their consistent display became an anchor for the argument of de Lagarde who claimed that all the manuscripts derived from a single source known as the *Urtext*; *ibidem*, 17–18, 56, 165–166, 183. Romain Butin (See "The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah or The Meaning and Purpose of the Extraordinary Points of the Pentateuch" [PhD Diss., Catholic University of America; Baltimore, MD 1906] 23–25) focuses on the particular ten dots found in the Torah, alleging that the dots were most likely part of the Pentateuchal text by the dawn of Christianity. Butin notes that comments about the dots in early rabbinic works (e.g., *m. Pesachim* 9.2) fail to identify an authorial source for the dots apart from sixth or seventh century references to Ezra. The lack of references in earlier works leads Butin to conclude that the identity of the author of the nequdot has long been forgotten. While neither the Samaritan Pentateuch nor the Septuagint retain all of the dots featured in the Masoretic Text, Butin notes the presence of scribal dots in both texts that correspond with their placement in the MT. Whether or not Butin's reasoning is correct about the author of the dots being lost to history, he gives compelling reason to see the nequdot as ongoing features of the biblical record from long before the stage of history occupied by Ibn Ḥazm. Butin highlights additional early evidence of the 'dot' phenomenon from the early versions of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint. While neither text corroborates all ten of the instances in the Torah of the MT where dots are recorded, both versions attest to more than one parallel example. According to Butin, the Samaritan Pentateuch preserves seven witnesses to the scribal dots (e.g., Gen 18:9; 19:33; 33:4; 37:12; Num 9:10; 29:15; Deut 29:28). Butin's record cites the following three examples of the dots in the Septuagint (e.g., Num 3:39; 29:15; Deut 29:28). See *ibidem*, 25.

the inconclusive nature of these unusual marked features of the biblical record.[100] A segment from ch. 37[A]/34.5[B] reads, "Why are all these letters dotted? This is what Ezra said: If Elijah comes and says: Why did you write this, I will say to him: I already dotted them; and if he says: You have written it well, I will remove the dots from the letters."[101] Perhaps the apparent lack of certainty on Ezra's part, as portrayed by the rabbinic sketch, provides occasion for Ibn Ḥazm to embrace its content as support for the notion that Ezra corrupted the biblical record. Granting that the rabbinic tale is sufficiently cryptic as to allow for a wide range of creative interpretation, the depiction of Ezra as lacking in certainty, as well as perhaps the competence, to transmit the content of the Scriptures accurately may not have escaped the attention of Ibn Ḥazm. Some schools of thought may find it simply unacceptable that any portion of sacred text might undergo corruption on account of scribal transmission. The tale from *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* and its explanation of the scribal dots as flagging ambiguous or uncertain content is prone to challenge such concepts of how a book from God ought to look and behave. As a Ẓāhirī theologian, Ibn Ḥazm's background implies that his exegetical outlook placed a high premium on certitude with leanings toward the literal end of the interpretive scale.[102] Given that a literalistic hermeneutic presupposes that a text will generally comply with literalist interpretive expectations, one may infer that Ibn Ḥazm found that neither Ezra's attitude as a scribe nor the text he allegedly recovered were compliant with Ẓāhirite standards.[103] Upon meeting with traditions linked to Ezra the scribe, it appears that Ibn Ḥazm gave attention to the perceived limitations of Ezra's scribal efforts and looked with increasing skepticism on his literary legacy. Ezra is seen not as a hero, but as a fraud. His alleged recovery of the Hebrew Bible is dismissed as a sham. Though the matter remains uncertain, it is possible that rabbinic tradition and scribal

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100 Similar expanded content is found in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 3.13. For rabbinic sources that mention the diacritical dots without reference to Ezra cf. *Tractate Soferim* 6.3; *Sifre Numbers* 69.2.

101 *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (Saldarini, 224); cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 59.

102 Ibn Ḥazm's leanings as a Ẓāhirī interpreter seem to be at tension with the sort of text critical questions introduced by the tale from *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*. The portrayal of Ezra's lack of certainty concerning his alleged scribal handiwork may be problematic for a Ẓāhirī. Devin J. Stewart ("Muhammad b. Dawud al-Ẓāhirī's Manual of Jurisprudence," *Studies in Islamic Law and Society. Studies in Islamic Legal Theory* [ed. B.G. Weiss] [Leiden: Brill 2002] XV, 111) suggests that "one would expect Dā'ūd [i.e., the founder of the Ẓāhirite movement] to uphold the need for certainty in the law and to reject the proposition that speculation (*naẓar)* can lead to the truth."

103 Maribel Fierro ("Why Ibn Ḥazm became a Ẓāhirī," 17) notes that the Ẓāhirite exegetical outlook maintains "a conviction that the texts of the Revelation should be understood in their literal, external, or apparent meaning, without recourse to deductive methods such as reasoning by analogy, which can only introduce an element of human arbitrariness into the divine plan." As noted previously, Adang (*Muslim Writers*, 62) suggests that the Ẓāhirite position is characterized by a literal interpretation of the text. Kees Versteegh ("Ibn Maḍā' as a Ẓāhirī Grammarian," 207) posits that Ẓāhirite interpretive positions extend beyond literalism to rather emphasize the "obvious (apparent, manifest) meaning" expressed in either the Qur'an or hadith as "the only valid basis for legal or theological judgments." Over a century ago, Hartwig Hirschfeld ("Mohammedan Criticism of the Bible," 224–225) observed that Ibn Ḥazm was the first to subject the Bible to the Ẓāhirīte interpretive technique, though he recognizes a developmental affinity between the Karaite and Ẓāhirite movements.

diacritics involving the mysterious dots gave traction to support Ibn Ḥazm's claim that Ezra the scribe corrupted the biblical text.[104]

Conclusion

The writers reviewed in this study are not at one accord in their appraisal of Ezra's personal integrity nor his reproduction of the biblical text. The accounts of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī both commend the reputation of Ezra and his transmission of scripture as a miraculous feat, while Ibn Ḥazm rejects the work as the fraudulent byproduct of a compromised scribal agent. Pre-Islamic sources provide some, though probably not all, of the ideological grounds from which to leverage his criticism.

The final vision recorded in *4 Ezra* describes the legendary recovery of scripture through the agency of Ezra the scribe. Porphyry maintains that all of Moses' writings were destroyed during the Babylonian siege, but "Ezra and his followers" erroneously redrafted the text. The claim that Ezra rewrote the Scriptures is supported by later rabbinic reflections in *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* and later yet in a medieval commentary from northern France which affirms that Ezra returned from captivity and rewrote "all the books." Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī appear to agree, characterizing the act of recovering the text with a sense of divine marvel. Much of the content of their Ezra legends almost certainly derives from familiarity with *4 Ezra*, though mention of Jeremiah in al-Thaʿlabī's *Legends of the Prophets* may betray links to an incipient rabbinic tradition. The tradition was anonymously committed to writing in northern France by way of a medieval exposition of Psalm 137. Ibn Ḥazm's views on the subject seem to be informed by a selective synthesis of rabbinic legend combined with dissenting criticisms. Porphyry's comment that Ezra's text is a faulty imitation of scripture represents one such critical voice.

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104 The high value that Ibn Ḥazm places on certainty is discernible in his brief exposition related to a clause from *Q* 53.28: "[…] conjecture is no substitute for the truth." Under the heading "Certainty is Not Replaced by Doubt" he states, "Doubt and conjecture are one and the same, because they both oppose the concept of certainty, except that conjecture is closer to one of two possibilities but it still is not certainty. That which is not certainty is still a form of doubt, and doubt is not decisive." Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Nubadh (A Concise Introduction to the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence)* (trans. of Q 53.28 and manuscript by Abu Nadm al-Zahiri) (2013) 48, https://dokumen.pub/al-nubadh-a-concise-introduction-to-the-principles-of-islamic-jurisprudence.html [access: 27.03.2023]. Later in the text Ibn Ḥazm again comments on the same clause from *Q* 53.28. He admonishes the reader by stating, "And what the Messenger of God said: Avoid conjecture as it is the most dishonest of speech. […] He has prohibited us to speak without knowledge and resort to conjecture" (*ibidem*, 71). Noting his use of sharp dictums that make no allowance for ethical conjecture it follows that Ibn Ḥazm may have found content from the tradition about Ezra's 'dots' highly objectionable. The idea of emending the written form of a scriptural text on the basis of conjecture would stand at odds with such an outlook. Ibn Ḥazm candidly upholds an ideal of absolute certainty, further declaring that "with total certainty, and lack of doubt, the notion that any matter from the religion lacks a scriptural text or judgement from Almighty God and His Messenger (peace be upon him) has been disproven" (*ibidem*, 65–66).

Another dismissive utterance is found in a Samaritan prayer formulary designated for Yom Kippur. Samaritan rival attitudes are ventilated in the context of a liturgical imprecation directed toward Ezra and his writings. Though the written record of the imprecation dates from centuries after Ibn Ḥazm's era, the ongoing rhythm of the annual liturgical cycle involving Yom Kippur may reasonably imply that its content preserves long-standing tradition, perhaps spanning several centuries. Accordingly, the words of contempt for Ezra and his text plausibly circulated in conventional ritual and sentiment long before being committed to ink. If so, it is possible that the execration had been in observance long enough to have had a galvanizing effect on the focus of Ibn Ḥazm's heresiography, contributing in some sense to his bold censure of Ezra the scribe. While it is unclear how Ibn Ḥazm may have learned of the Samaritan hex, the printed form of the imprecation may represent a token of rival antipathy that continued in ongoing circulation from days of old.

Ibn Ḥazm may have stumbled on additional grounds for criticizing Ezra and the Hebrew Scriptures in learning of Ezra's enigmatic 'dots' as described in the brief tale from *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*.[105] Ezra's mythical exchange with Elijah depicts the scribe as unsettled about the final draft of his alleged literary achievement. The fabled sketch of Ezra as lacking assurance in his potentially flawed composition transforms the dots, which are attributed to the diffident scribe, into an apologetic liability, principally when handled by a religious opponent of Judaism. Given Ibn Ḥazm's outlook as a Ẓāhirite, coupled with his high regard for certainty, if he indeed met with the tale of Ezra's dots, he likely saw the *puncta extraordinaria* as a weak point in the transmission history of the Bible (pun not intended). To the mind of the heresiologist, the theoretically unreliable content of such a composition—as presented by rabbinic tradents via *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*—functioned to establish a borderline from which to look askance at both Ezra and the Hebrew Bible. That is, on the basis of Ezra's legendary recovery of the text—coupled with the rabbinic interpretation of the *nequdot*—Ibn Ḥazm might conveniently write off Ezra as a forger and excuse his redrafted text of the Hebrew Bible as a fabrication, i.e., an exemplar of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*.

The secondary concern of this article is the question of the compromise of Jewish monotheism. Despite the fact that present socio-religious dynamics fail to substantiate the claim of *Q* 9.30 that the Jews regard Ezra to be the son of God, the idea gained currency among the works of medieval Islamic writers. All three of the medieval authors considered in this study provide anecdotal support for the claim of *Q* 9.30 concerning the Jews' elevation of Ezra the scribe to divine status, revering him as the son of God. Ibn Ḥazm relegates these claims to the Ṣadūqiyya of Yemen who lived prior to his own day, imputing additional blame to Ezra for a flawed transmission of the Hebrew Bible.[106] Ibn Ḥazm's polemical tone

105 The presence of the dots themselves draws attention to the process of scribal transmission (or restoration) and its impact on the visual complexion of scripture.

106 Furthermore, he charges Jewish monotheism with widespread compromise by way of anthropomorphizing as well as for venerating Metatron as a second power. That is, his indictments draw conceptual borderlines that differentiate his more restrictive monotheism from models of deity characterized by divine passibility or that accommodate for more than one heavenly power.

wears no disguise, yet his condemnation of the Jews for deifying Ezra as the son of God is tempered in some measure by limiting his criticism to the Ṣadūqiyya.[107] Neither al-Ṭabarī nor al-Thaʿlabī lay any fault to Ezra. Amid their stories about the recovery of the Bible neither al-Ṭabarī nor al-Thaʿlabī make efforts to qualify which particular Jews may actually deify Ezra.[108] Instead, blame rests with the corporate Jewish response to his spectacular recovery of the Scriptures.

Finally, the portrayal of Ezra as a vehicle that effected the compromise of Jewish monotheism as well as the corruption of the Hebrew Bible may appear to spring from (a) common source(s). Yet, Ezra legends from late antiquity afforded an abundance of material for medieval heresiographers to work with. It may be that in campaigning to indict Ezra the scribe as a forger of the Hebrew Bible, Ibn Ḥazm managed to forge a tradition of his own.

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107 Ibn Ḥazm identifies the Jews of Yemen, more specifically the Ṣadūqiyya as the perpetrators, though he does charge at least some other Jews with polytheistic practices that elevate the status of Metatron to that of a "little god." Wasserstrom points out that the phrase "little god" may be suggestive of an esoteric blending of identities between Ezra and Metatron. In addition, most likely drawing from the work of al-Masʿūdī' a century earlier, Ibn Ḥazm conflates stories from the Talmud (cf. *b. Ber.* 3a and 7a) that attribute anthropomorphic expressions to the Holy One. Accordingly, the charge of anthropomorphizing represents its own discrete indictment against Jewish monotheism. Yet, the figure of Metatron is imported (probably from *Shi'ur Qumah*) into the fusion of talmudic tales within which the angelic intermediary echoes humanlike expressions previously linked to the Holy One. Ibn Ḥazm takes occasion to relay grief over the decline of Judaism, as he portrays it, into a sort of polytheistic disarray.

108 Al-Ṭabarī's earlier *Tafsīr* does specify Pinhas and then a larger segment of Medinan Jews.

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