

3.2.2.2.4.1.2 *The Jews*

We have access to a text purporting to be the transcript of a discussion between Nazzām and a Jew.¹ This is a rare document at that time, for while a number of Mu'tazilites before Nazzām had already written against the Jews: Aşamm, Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir, Abū l-Hudhayl,² their arguments left no traces in tradition. It is quite surprising that there is no relevant title listed among Nazzām's books. The text in question is not fully authenticated; Nazzām's authorship is stated as *za'amū* 'they say'. It may well be simply a model for a Muslim to follow. The subject is indeed the very one always discussed with Jews: the abrogation of the Mosaic Law.³ Even so there is no real reason why we should doubt the text. The train of thought touches on some of his other statements. Furthermore he was said to have known by heart not only the Quran but also the Old and New Testaments and the psalter together with their exegeses.⁴

A Muslim regarded the abolition of the Mosaic Law as divine abrogation (*naskh*). This actually decided the case for him, as he would know from the case of the Quran that abrogation is possible and that God effects it. Maybe Nazzām was the first to have focussed the debate onto this point. It must also be admitted that the Christians had paved the way for him by speaking of the 'new covenant'. Nazzām knew this, he quoted Jeremiah 31:31f., that verse of the OT that was repeated in Hebrews 8:8f. because of its reference to the new covenant.⁵ Still, he was not necessarily quoting a Christian source:⁶ he only adduced the verse at the end of his argumentation, as an instance from scripture that the Jew could hardly escape; before that, he had argued based on reason.

That was how his opponent had planned it. The Jew begins the conversation, is the challenger – at least in the eyes of our source. The approach he chose was not bad at all: God's law is wise. His wisdom is unchanging and he

1 Text 223.

2 Cf. the Catalogues of Work XIII no. 22, XVII no. 30, XXI no. 5.

3 Cf. the later and more detailed attack by Bāqillānī. Brunschvig discussed in in: *Homenaje a Millās Vallicrosa* I 225ff. (= *Etudes d'Islamologie* I 263ff.). This study also compares the parallels from Qirqisānī, *Anwār* and Sa'adyā, *K. al-amānāt*. We should also adduce the apocryphal discussion between Muḥammad and the Jews reported in Ṭabrisī's *K. al-ihtijāj* (Najaf 1966, p. 43ff.); the example cited here is the change of the *qibla*.

4 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Faḍl* 264, 11f.

5 Text 223, p. The quotation is slightly abridged, but it is not possible to determine whether Nazzām was quoting the Jewish or the Christian version. The first Arabic translation of the Prophets was by the Nestorian Pethin b. Ayyūb; he was younger than Nazzām (regarding him cf. CGAL II 120f.; Fränk in: *Cath. Bibl. Quarterly* 21/1959/136ff.).

6 This is Abel's view in: *Elaboration de l'Islam* 83, n. 4. He also writes incorrectly 'Jes. 21.31f.' instead of 'Jer. 31.21f.'