

TITLES AND ABSTRACTS

Religious polemics and natural philosophy in Islamic literate cultures from Christian Spain

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RELIGIOUS POLEMICS ARE NATURAL SITES for knowledge exchange between literate cultures. Those by Muslims in Christian Spain (ca. eleventh to seventeenth century) are revealing of the dynamics of these exchanges, particularly when their uses of natural philosophy are put under the focus. This is because, on the one hand, Muslim minority communities related transversally to the changing epistemes of knowledge along a temporal-geographical axis that was affected by their longstanding contacts with Christians and Jews; while, on the other, their knowledge of natural philosophy was heavily indebted to the Islamic literate cultures of the peninsula and the Maghreb. The juggling of natural philosophy with religious discourse, thus, gave common ground for inter-religious dispute, but was, nevertheless, a contested move in the Islamic tradition.

This paper will address natural philosophy in a treatise of Muslim polemics against Christianity and Judaism copied in Arabic in the Christian territories in 1405 (*Kitāb al-Mujādala maʿa al-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā*, or briefly called The “Book of Disputation”). Focus will be placed on the change in Islamic literate cultures: change here being understood in relation to the locus of the articulation of knowledge (from majority Muslim to Christian lands) and in relation to its place in an epistemic system (the alignment of natural philosophy with revealed sources). The investigation of various aspects of Islamic literacy in the “Book of Disputation” will help argue the position that the understanding of the natural philosophy of Muslims under Christian rule was limited by a basic functional knowledge of an upper-middle social class that was well connected with the Christian and Jewish intelligentsia, and accordingly, led to instances of knowledge exchange and the co-production of epistemic frameworks.