



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2016.06.04*

**Carlos A. Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Formation in Late Antiquity. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — Tension, Transmission, Transformation 4.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. ISBN: 9783110403497. Pp. xvi + 154. 99.95 € / \$140.00. Hardcover.**

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This book argues, first, that the Qur’anic portrayal of Noah is related to para-Biblical texts such as the Book of Enoch. Secondly, it examines the seven Qur’anic Noah narratives and makes tentative suggestions regarding the processes that led to the establishment of their present form. Thirdly, it suggests a link between Qur’anic portrayals of Noah and stages in the Prophet Muḥammad’s career that are evident in the Qur’an and in the *Sīrah* of Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām.

*The Quranic Noah* has seven chapters, a conclusion, and nine excursuses appended to the various chapters. The first chapter, surveys the current state of Qur’anic and early Islamic studies as an introduction. The second chapter discusses the portrayal of Noah as an apocalyptic figure in Jewish and Christian texts; it is followed by an excursus discussing the possible existence of a lost Apocalypse of Noah. Chapter three presents an overview of the Noah narratives in the Qur’an, and is followed by two excursuses that present the seven main Noah narratives and other, shorter Qur’anic references to Noah, respectively. Chapter four discusses the seven Noah narratives. It is followed by an excursus explaining how underlying texts were redacted to create the seven narratives. Chapter five discusses what the Noah narratives suggest about the mission of the Qur’anic Prophet. This chapter is followed by two excursuses, one proposing that the Noah narratives in Q11 and Q71 both arose as differing redactions of an earlier text, and the other discussing the textual criticism of 11:35, 49. Chapter six discusses para-Biblical texts that present elements possibly related to the Qur’anic portrayal of Noah. This is followed by an excursus discussing the possibility that Q 37:78-81 drew on a Syriac source. Chapter seven discusses the role that Noah traditions might have played in shaping the portrayal of the Prophet Muḥammad in the *Sīrah*. It is followed by two excursuses, one discussing what Ibn Ishāq’s original narrative must have looked like and the other discussing the nature of the relationship between prophets and messiahs in Jewish literature of the Second Temple period and in early Christian literature. An “Afterword” concludes the work.

*The Quranic Noah* could have presented the problem addressed and the methods adopted more directly. The problem, as I would put it, is that the Qur'anic presentation of the story of Noah differs substantially from its presentation in the Hebrew Bible, so substantially, in fact, that it raises questions about the connection between the two versions. While in Genesis, Noah is an exception, a single good man in a thoroughly evil world, in the Qur'an, Noah is a prophet commissioned by God to deliver His message. Noah preaches to his people, urging them to forsake their pagan gods and to worship the one true God instead, and he warns them of the dire consequences that will ensue if they reject the call. The contrast between the two versions is nowhere clearer than in the contrasting morals of the two stories, something that Segovia does not stress. At the end of the flood account in Genesis, God provides the rainbow as a sign of His promise never again to destroy the world in an all-encompassing flood, while in the Qur'an He does nearly the opposite, promising to wreak havoc on future nations in a similar manner if they reject their prophets' messages. God leaves the Ark on the top of Mount al-Jūdī, just as He leaves ruins of other ancient communities, as visible evidence to later peoples of the consequences of not listening to their prophets, who will come in a recurrent series. As Segovia notes, dialogue between Noah and his people figures prominently in the Qur'anic story, but not at all in Genesis.

In Western scholarship on the Qur'an, Aloys Sprenger and others noticed this issue long ago, and Josef Horowitz suggested that the Prophet Muḥammad projected his own experience onto the figure of Noah. More recently, studies of Prophetic typology in the Qur'an have explained that Biblical narratives are told in such a way as to "prefigure" aspects of Muḥammad's prophetic experience and the events and challenges of his mission.<sup>1</sup> Segovia does not present the problem in this way and does not provide the history of earlier attempts to resolve it in secondary scholarship. Rather, he frames it as a methodological issue having to do with the correct approach to Qur'anic interpretation in general that will be resolved by more attention to the Qur'an's connections with Jewish and Christian texts. The answer he arrives at is as follows: Noah in the Qur'an is an apocalyptic and messianic figure placed in an eschatological setting. The Qur'anic portrayal can be explained, at least in part, by its debt to apocalyptic interpretations of the Noah story that appear in the Book of Enoch and other para-Biblical texts, or at least to the tradition represented by those texts. The discrepant portrayal of Noah thus has earlier roots in late antique religious traditions and was not created *ad hoc* in the Qur'an. In addition, the Noah narratives refer typologically to the Prophet Muḥammad's career and reflect that he experienced opposition, then distress, then vindication.

Segovia's work participates in the neo-Biblical trend in recent Qur'anic scholarship that seeks to identify Biblical sources of the Quran and parallel texts with which the Qur'an may be said to exhibit inter-textuality. This type of scholarship goes back ultimately to Abraham Geiger's 1833 work and continued through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, culminating in the work of Heinrich Speyer. However, it was interrupted by WWII and fell out of favor in the latter half of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of "The Poets" and the Qurānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of A Literary Tradition* (ed. James L. Kugel; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 75-119, 205-31; Devin J. Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English: Notes on Translation, Form, and Prophetic Typology," in *Diversity in Language: Contrastive Studies in English and Arabic Theoretical and Applied Linguistics* (eds. Zeinab Ibrahim, Nagwa Kasabgy, and Sabiha Aydelott; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 31-48; Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 573-80; Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 64-71.

the twentieth century, when Qur'anic studies entered the doldrums and the few scholars active in the field devoted their attention to other topics, such as the life and psychology of the Prophet, Muslim-Christian dialogue, and Qur'anic commentaries. It was revived in 2000 with the publication of Christoph Luxenberg's *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran*, which provoked a renewed interest in identifying texts—predominantly Syriac, Christian texts—related to the Qur'an. Some of the participants in this trend of scholarship are, like Segovia, originally or primarily scholars of Biblical studies who have turned their attention to the Qur'an, but this also is not new—a number of the early scholars in the field also started in Biblical studies. Segovia is on the whole more wary of making bold claims than some other proponents of this trend.

The introduction to *The Quranic Noah* undertakes a sweeping overview of Qur'anic studies and early Islamic historiography rather than setting forth what I see as the intellectual tradition most directly related to this particular study. There is little need for the sake of this study to mention the works of Joseph Schacht on Islamic law and hadith or Maria Masse Dakake on Shiism, along with dozens of other works that are merely mentioned in passing, grouped together with other studies that are quite different in topic, method, approach, and conclusions and are only remotely related to the topic at hand. Segovia presents the field of Qur'anic and early Islamic studies as being divided between two camps, the traditionalists and the revisionists. Nöldeke and the traditionalists are seen to have accepted at face value the traditional Islamic account of the textual history of the Qur'an, the origins of Islam, and the early history of the Islamic community. The revisionists are willing to question the traditional account, and Segovia presents them as the great hope for Qur'anic studies, the scholars who will make decisive critical advances. Segovia is dismissive of the conservatives and of a group of scholars in the middle, whom he characterizes as showing sympathy for the critical, revisionist group but adopting an excessively conciliatory attitude that may end up simply masking an adherence to the traditional view.

While the texts of Enoch and the Dead Sea Scrolls provide some interesting portrayals of Noah, many of the examples Segovia cites have only a tenuous thematic connection with the Qur'anic material. It appears likely that the Qur'anic portrayal of Noah draws on Jewish texts and commentaries that fleshed out the Noah story and provide an extended dialogue between Noah and his people, perhaps starting from the notion that anyone building a huge boat on dry land would have been subjected to the ridicule of his people. The texts that Segovia notes may have a place in that tradition. However, there is an alternative explanation for at least some of the discrepancies between the Biblical and Qur'anic versions of the Noah accounts.

Though the introduction does not make this clear, Segovia applies to the Qur'anic Noah narratives John Wansbrough's theory of variant traditions, adopted from the proponents of *Formgeschichte*, which he illustrated in *Quranic Studies* with an analysis of the narratives of the prophet Shu'ayb. The Qur'an, in its present form, was assembled from relatively short, independent texts that circulated in the religious community, perhaps first orally, but at some pre-Qur'anic stage already in written form. Later, the Qur'an was edited and redacted from these *Grundschriften*. Like Wansbrough, Segovia refers to these texts—or at least some of them—as prophetic *logia*. The appropriate object of focus and unit of analysis is the individual passage, i.e., the specific pericope within a surah, such as the narrative of Noah and his people in *Sūrat al-Qamar* (Q 54), rather than *Sūrat al-Qamar* as an integral whole. Evidence of editorial activity and other textual indications allow the modern investigator to detect and retrieve, at least partially, earlier historical stages of

development of these pericopes. By examining those historical stages of those texts, the investigator may deduce features of the religious community in which they circulated. One major goal of the investigation is to arrive at an understanding of the formation of the religious community, which Rudolf Bultmann termed *Gemeindebildung* and which Segovia refers to as “religious identity formation.” On the one hand, it is heartening to see a potentially useful extension of Wansbrough’s work—rather than mere applause or gainsaying—based on a sound understanding of *Quranic Studies*, which has been misinterpreted and poorly understood overall. On the other hand, Segovia’s work shares the shortcomings and unsupported assumptions of Wansbrough’s study.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis focuses primarily on the microform, that is, the individual pericope or narrative of the Noah story, to the detriment of attention to the macroform, the integral surah in which the Noah narratives occur. This procedure is based on the assumption that the narratives circulated in the form of the individual pericopes and were later incorporated into *surahs* as a secondary process. It is possible to argue to the contrary that the *surahs* were composed, however one imagines the exact process, by drawing on a stock of known material, but that this material owes its current shape—even with regard to the individual narratives—mainly to the framework of the entire surah and the particular structure and rhetorical strategies embedded in those *surahs*.

If one takes the macroform and the general structure of the punishment stories into account, one may argue that the various narratives within particular surahs, including the Noah narratives, have been assimilated to each other, something noted long ago by Horovitz and explained in more detail since. In addition, the typological method followed in the Qur’an suggests that Biblical narratives are presented in such a way as to provide a compelling precedent or model for actions or situations during the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad (or at least as they are portrayed in the Qur’an). The logic of typology militates against merely describing them as back-projections, since they anticipate being used as models. Segovia could have paid more attention to the ways in which the Noah narratives have been shaped in order to fit into each surah and to fit the overall rhetorical strategy of each surah. Especially in this regard, even though Segovia cites many works of secondary scholarship, he could have benefited more from studies on the punishment stories, including the works of Sprenger, Horovitz, Alford Welch, David Marshall on the punishment stories, which he cites, but also from studies on prophetic typology such as those of Michael Zwettler, Devin Stewart, and Sidney Griffith. He could also have cited Gordon Newby’s discussion of Midrash and the story of Noah’s son.<sup>3</sup>

Segovia remarks several times in passing that Jesus is recognized in the Qur’an as the Messiah. This is possible, but not entirely established. Jesus is referred to in the Qur’an on a number of occasions as *al-masīh* (3:45; 4:157, 171, 172; 5:17, 72, 75; 9:30, 31), which clearly is the Arabic rendition of “the Messiah” or “Christ.” Before assuming that it has the same meaning as the Christian—or Jewish—term, one must take into account that the portrayal of Christ in the Qur’an as a whole adopts a strategy of outward and conciliatory agreement with many Christian views,

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<sup>2</sup> See Devin J. Stewart, “Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur’an,” in *Quranic Studies Today* (ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells; London: Routledge, 2016), 17-51.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Newby, “The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Quran and *Tafsir*,” in Stephen David Ricks, *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies, University of Denver* (2 vols.; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986), 2:19-32.

including Christian terminology: the virgin birth is accepted, Jesus' many miracles are considered authentic, the event of the Last Supper took place, Jesus is called "Christ," and the text refers both to *kalimah* "a Word" (3:39, 45; 4:171) and to *al-rūḥ al-quḍus* "the Holy Ghost/Spirit" (2:87, 253; 5:110) in connection with Jesus. However, it is also clear that the Qur'an may not be interpreting these Christian terms in their ordinary Christian sense, just as it reinterprets the significance of the Last Supper, which is portrayed as a miracle intended to reassure the disciples of the authenticity of Jesus' prophetic status (5:112-15). The Word and the Holy Ghost are related to Jesus' miraculous birth, but apparently do not refer to Jesus' eternity or to the Trinity. Therefore, *al-masīḥ* in the Qur'an may not be taken so easily to mean "the Messiah." Context indicates that *al-masīḥ* is part of Jesus' name, or an honorific title, but the exact sense is difficult to decipher.

The textual heart of the book is the analysis of the seven Noah narratives:

- I. 7:59-64.
- II. 10:71-74.
- III. 11:25-49.
- IV. 23:23-30.
- V. 26:105-122.
- VI. 54:9-17.
- VII. 71:1-28.

Segovia describes the general structure of each of these passages and makes several concrete critical suggestions about the texts. His analysis of the structure and rhetoric of the passages—set out in very useful tables—is clear and overall excellent. I question the label "eschatological coda" that he applies to the concluding statements that occur at the end of several Noah narratives: 10:73-74; 11:49; 23:30; 26:121-22; and 54:15-17. An example is 54:15-17, which reads "And verily We left it [= the Ark] as a sign, but is there any who takes heed? \* Then see how dreadful was My punishment after My warnings! We have made the Lesson [= the Qur'an] easy to apprehend, but is there any who takes heed?" Similar statements conclude other narratives in *Sūrat al-Qamar* about 'Ād, Thamūd, the folk of Lot (54:21-22; 30, 32; 40). The term "eschatological coda" supports Segovia's interpretation of Noah as an apocalyptic and perhaps messianic figure, but these statements do not refer to eschatological time directly. Instead, they present the moral of the story that applies to later communities, including the Prophet's community, a moral that is typical of the Qur'anic punishment story. The Noah narrative is one historical example among others of what happens when a particular nation of the past did not heed the message of their prophet: the unbelievers were annihilated. Later nations should therefore take the example to heart and avoid rejecting the message of their own prophet lest they be likewise destroyed. The references to doomsday that occur elsewhere in these surahs have to do with a particular structural feature inherent in the typological use of the punishment story. If the careers of earlier prophets serve as a model for that of the Prophet Muḥammad, all the steps of their interaction with their peoples can be made parallel to Muḥammad's interaction with his people except for their destruction, since he cannot tell them, "you have been destroyed," at the moment when he is addressing them and they are alive and well, standing in front of him. Therefore, this narrative step in the prophetic punishment story must be replaced, regarding Prophet Muḥammad's people, with the threat of a future punishment on the Day of Judgment. These are certainly references to the end of time, but they have to do with the future of Muḥammad's community, and there is a clever shift from an

accomplished annihilation in this world to a promised annihilation in the afterlife. The conclusions of the narratives of Noah, like those of the punishment of other peoples, reflect on the historical examples as such and are not themselves eschatological.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in his discussion of *Sūrat al-Ṣaffāt* (Q 37), Segovia endorses Luxenberg's reading of *al-ākhirīn* (37:78) as likely meaning "in the last days," though he retains other translations as possibilities (p. 100), when I would argue that it merely refers to subsequent historical nations.

Segovia argues that III (the current Noah narrative in *Sūrat Hūd*, 11:25-49) and VII (*Sūrat Nūh*, 71:1-28) derive from the same Urtext, which consisted of 11:25-34 + 71:5-28 + 11:36-41, 48. III was formed by suppressing Noah's complaint, found in 71:5-28, thus bringing together 11:25-34 with 11:36-41, 48, and by inserting 11:42-47, which presents a dialogue between Noah and God, between vv. 41 and 48 as a substitute for the more lengthy complaint. At a later stage, vv. 35 and 49 were added after the two sections, respectively. VII was formed when 71:5-28 was excised from the Urtext and provided with an introductory passage (71:1-4) to form the current *Sūrat Nūh* (71:1-28). Though I am not yet certain how to assess this proposal, I find it a fascinating and thought-provoking suggestion. This scenario may help explain the apparent gap between Noah's address to and dialogue with his people in 11:25-35 and God's address to and dialogue with Noah in 11:36-48. It also takes a step toward addressing the structural anomaly of *Sūrat Nūh* (Q 71), which, unlike all other *surahs* that present Biblical narratives, includes no introduction or conclusion outside the central narrative. Even *Sūrat Yusuf*, which is devoted to the single story of Joseph, includes a short introduction in 12:1-3 and a conclusion (12:102-111). The absence of this framework may suggest that the Noah narrative in Q 71 is something of an orphaned text that was not fully incorporated into the structure of a typical *surah*.

The book is relatively free of typographical, translation, and other errors. The few errata I noticed were the following: p. 1: *Grundschriftten* > *Grundschriften*; p. 9: pioneer > pioneering; p. 10: *ipssima verba* > *ipsissima verba*; p. 12: *ṣaddaqa* and ... *faṣala* > ... *faṣṣala* [actually the forms that occur in 10:37 are the cognates *taṣḍīq* and *tafṣīl*]; p. 16: *apropos* > *à propos*; p. 57: Noah's > Noah; p. 70: Q 11:25-34 + 71:5-28 + 11:36-41 > ... + 11:36-41, 48; p. 71: Q 75: 5-28 > Q 71: 5-28; p. 86: Bet that as it may > Be that as it may; p. 94, 95: *fi-l-aḥirīn* > *fi-l-āḥirīn* (5 times); pp. 95-96, 98: *fi-l-aḥirīn* (in Arabic script, with *hamzah* on the *alif*) > *fi-l-āḥirīn* (with *maddah* on the *alif*) (5 times); p. 119 n. 11: Qur'an's > Qur'an; p. 129: Qu'ān > Qur'an; p. 135: M. Sheddy > M. Sheedy.

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<sup>4</sup> Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English."