



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2016.08.06

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.

[Segovia's *Quranic Noah* was also reviewed by Devin Stewart. To see this review, go to the following link: <http://enochseminar.org/review/10026>]

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Segovia's work is arranged in seven chapters, with seven excurses appended along the way. The book seeks to investigate the way that Noah and Noachic narratives in Late Antiquity provide a model for understanding the literary and historical prophet of the Qur'an.

The lively first chapter sketches the state of Qur'anic studies, a field which the author understands to be split into two opposing camps. First, the traditionalist and neo-traditionalist school of scholarship, which either accepts or defers to the "master narrative" of Islamic origins (p. 2). The author criticizes this brand of scholarship for failing to apply critical methodologies developed in Biblical Studies, and celebrates the "audacious" and "innovative" paradigm shift initiated by the work of John Wansborough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and others.

After walking through a veritable "who's who" of Qur'anic studies more generally, the author notes the recent wave of fruitful work done on Islam as the heir to religious and cultural traditions transmitted and developed in the Late Antique Near East. With the aid of more flexible models of identity formation and cultural exchange in Late Antiquity, our author posits a more diverse body of intertexts can be brought to bear on the Qur'anic text, either as sources or as conversation partners. The integration of intertextual and critical methodologies into Qur'anic studies, he maintains, "would just help to welcome history into the picture for once, instead of clinging to a state closer to dreaming than waking, where both logic and chronology are sacrificed on the altar of a fabricated memory (p. 11)." Segovia perceives and sketches a fundamental fork in the road facing modern scholars of the Qur'an, and seeks to situate his work in the revisionist school of Qur'anic studies.

Thus oriented, the work sets its sights on the Qur’anic Noah. Segovia argues Noah is invoked and crafted as a literary and typological model for the “quranic prophet,” bolstering the prophet’s eschatological credentials and better aligning him with prophetic models current in the late-antique sectarian milieu that birthed Islam.

A few clarifications are in order regarding this central thesis. First, Segovia is unwilling to assume Muḥammad is the sole author of the Qur’an, or sole speaker behind all the prophetic logia embedded within the text—he avers that it is very likely that Muḥammad is the “quranic prophet,” but argues that automatically assuming such an equation would be a concession to the traditionalist way of reading the Qur’an, and thus uses the more neutral moniker “quranic prophet.” Second, one might note that Segovia characterizes the cultural inheritance of Islam as a “sectarian” milieu, a demarcation that enables him to preferentially pull from texts marked as “sectarian” in other eras—such as the Book of Enoch—over and against the Noah of Genesis. And, importantly, it is these sectarian texts, particularly 1 Enoch 106-107, that best supply the eschatologized elements of Noah’s literary portrait in Late Antiquity.

So, in chapter 2, Segovia briefly introduces the apocalyptic Noah, as attested in pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian literature. This chapter seeks to indicate an ongoing employment of Noachic motifs and prophetic figures modeled after Noah in Late Antiquity. The primary focus and hypotext is 1 Enoch 106-107 and two motifs anchored therein—the miraculous birth of Noah to Lamech and Noah as the righteous remnant who ushers in a new age. In addition to 1 En 106-107, the former motif is attested in the Genesis Apocryphon, while the latter appears in the Book of the Watchers, the Similitudes of Enoch, and the Book of Dreams. This reification of Noah, combined with a developing understanding that the end of time is similar to the Flood, leads Segovia to conclude that Noah was understood as an eschatological mediator.

After 1 Enoch and GenAp, however, explicit Noachic evidence stops. Segovia exegetes the birth of Melchizedek in 2 Enoch, the white-haired angel(s) of the Apocalypse of Abraham, Joseph and Aseneth, and Revelation, and the birth of Jesus in Matthew, Luke, the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, and the Protoevangelium of James as adaptations of the aforementioned two Noachic motifs. Moving into the Islamic era, he also adduces the birth of Jesus in the Qur’an as a “Noachic reflection” in Late Antiquity.

Chapter 2 is a critical piece of Segovia’s argument, insofar as it seeks to establish Noah’s apocalyptic and eschatological credentials in the “sectarian milieu” of Late Antiquity. A few issues would need to be addressed, however, for the chapter to achieve the desired effect. First, regarding the text known as 1 Enoch, Segovia assumes stability in textual transmission from Qumran to medieval Ethiopia, so that the manuscripts of the latter can be used to restore the shape and language of the former. Greater caution might be warranted, especially with regard to the invocation of the Similitudes of Enoch (which is never attested at Qumran), or the shape and language of 1 Enoch 106-107, as it would have existed before the 1st century CE. Some attention to the Aramaic text and possible valences in reconstruction would be clarifying. Moreover, even if the witnesses are gauged as lacking from a text-critical perspective, attention to the variants in the later Greek and Latin witnesses to 1 En 106-107 might contribute to a chapter with an interest

in Noachic motifs in Late Antiquity (e.g., the Latin for 1 En 106.2 uniquely adds, “His [i.e. Noah’s] body no human can fathom.”).¹

This attention to an ongoing textual transmission and development might help bridge another gap in the chapter—namely, that much of Segovia’s textual evidence for these two Noachic motifs in Late Antiquity comes from texts from which Noah is absent. By the time we reach the story of Jesus’ miraculous birth in the Qur’an, it would not be unreasonable to surmise that the motif is twice or three-times removed from an Noachic source, if there was one. Or, alternately, we could easily surmise that any echoes of a Noachic motif would be completely overshadowed by the proximity and importance of other Jesus birth narratives. Evidence to rebut this is collated in Segovia’s next chapter, and further discussions of Noachic engagement in Late Antiquity can be found in Chapter 6, but the evidence in Chapter 2 does little to strengthen the upcoming case. This motif plays a vital role in Segovia’s argument about the importance of Noah to Ibn Ishāq’s quasi-messianism in Chapter 7, so clarification and elaboration on this matter seems all the more important.

Finally, Segovia seems reticent, reasonably so, to suggest any kind of dependency between any of these Noachic reflections and his base-text, 1 En 106-107, preferring to speak of motifs which “parallel,” “echo,” or “evoke” the Enochic account. That said, the chapter is arranged so as to suggest the Noah of 1 Enoch as the spark behind all of the subsequent narratives surveyed, if only in its rejection or elision of other possible sources. So, Daniel 7 is rejected as the source for the white-haired angel in the Apocalypse of Abraham, and Greco-Roman accounts of miraculous births are passed over in the consideration of the Matthean and Lucan nativities. The assumption that pieces of a text now known as 1 Enoch should be jumped to the front of the line when considering possible and likely sources for the traditions or motifs in the canonical gospels, Revelation, or Joseph and Aseneth, over and against more commonly cited cultural and literary contexts, is not untenable, but surely needs to be defended.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Segovia introduces and charts out the seven major Qur’anic narratives about Noah (QNN, in later abbreviations). He argues that all were composed as individual and autonomous pericopes, and only later woven into the Qur’an, though he notes strong literary connections between them. Specifically, he highlights the “prophetic pattern” that serves as the skeleton for each narrative: commission, admonition, prediction of disaster, contestation, and justification, monologue/dialogue, apocalyptic judgment, and eschatological coda (laid out in Table 1 on p. 30). This pattern is lacking in the Biblical Noah narrative, but present in every major Qur’anic Noah narrative that he documents. He also argues that, within these Qur’anic narratives, Noah’s fame stems more from his confrontation with opponents than from his relationship to the Flood.

This element of conflict and punishment is present exclusively in the major Noachic narratives and not in other, briefer references throughout the Qur’an (laid out in Table 2 on pp. 31-34). This difference suggests to Segovia that the longer Qur’anic Noah narratives might be designed to pattern Noah along the lines of the historical quranic prophet, a prophetic figure countering opposition with pronouncements of judgment on the end-times. Excursus A, on pages 35-48,

¹ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91-108* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 623.

helpfully lays out a text and translation of the seven pericopes that Segovia exegetes. Excursus B, on pages 49-53, presents the references and allusions to Noah that are not embedded within one of these seven major pericopes.

Each of the passages is skillfully exegeted, though I do share Professor Stewart's misgivings about the applicability of the term "eschatological coda" (see Stewart's review here: <http://enochseminar.org/review/10026>). Q 10.73 (QNN II), 11.49 (QNN III), 23.30 (QNN IV), and 26.121-2 (QNN V) are all invitations for communities in the present to reflect on the moral of punishment in the past. An analogizing of these past events to the eschatological future is perhaps hinted at in 54.15-17 (QNN VI), but still seems implicit. And, as Segovia is well aware, his other key piece of evidence, Q 37.78, which he translates as "we have bestowed our blessing upon him in the last days," is more often translated as "we have bestowed our blessing upon him for those of later times." (This is discussed at length in Chapter 6, Excursus A). The impetus for reading these historical exempla as eschatologically oriented would need stronger and more conclusive evidence for the ubiquity of such Noachic readings in Late Antiquity. Perhaps some might be found in commentaries to and interpretations of Matthew 24.37-9, Luke 17.26, and 2 Peter 3.5-7, 10-12, three texts he rightly highlights in Excursus B on p. 86.

In Chapter 5, Segovia synthesizes his selected passages to reconstruct a unified sequence of events underpinning the Noachic story as it emerges from the Qur'an. The motifs explicated will be familiar to a close reader of chapters 3 and 4, but the contribution of this chapter is their unification and tentative application to the historical life of the quranic prophet. He detects a pattern in which the prophet "suffers opposition (maybe even persecution), he is mocked by his opponents, but in the end he is authenticated and moreover vindicated by God (69)." While he is unsure whether this points definitively to a historical reality or simply represents a Qur'anic attempt to convince its readers of such a reality, he concludes that the quranic prophet is authenticated through this Noachic sequence in the Qur'an.

One particularly fascinating piece of his analysis, present in chapters 3 and 4 but especially highlighted in Table 7 on p. 69, is the idea that the quranic prophet might be directly engaged in the Noachic narratives, rather than simply being authenticated by proxy and analogy. First, he notes that QNN II opens with a second-person imperative, ostensibly to the quranic prophet, to recite the story to his people, which he exegetes as "indirect authentication of the quranic prophet." Second, he notes the unusual first-person language of authentication in QNN V—"I am to you a trustworthy messenger, so fear God and obey me! (Q 26.107)"—and concludes that this marks direct authentication of the quranic prophet. Third, and finally, he reads the "seemingly embellished (p. 67)" QNN III to overlay the characters of Noah and the quranic prophet so fully that "it is even hard to properly distinguish between both figures! (p. 67)." One of the more tantalizing results of this last conclusion is the insertion of Q 11.35 ("If they say, 'He has forged it,' say: 'If I have forged it, then my sin falls upon me, but I am innocent of what you do.')" into the mouth of the quranic prophet—an interesting allegation, if this is a historical event in view. Segovia's reconstruction is possible, though the ambiguity of the text in QNN III, and QNN V forbids absolute conclusions.

In Chapter 6, Segovia considers possible sources for the unusual features ascribed to Noah in the various Qur'anic narratives. He is especially drawn to Ephraem's Commentary on Genesis and

Narsai's Homily on the Flood, which feature Noah being mocked by his contemporaries, as possible sources for QNN III. Next, the detail that Noah's contemporaries thought him nonsensical or possessed is traced to its appearance in QNN I, IV, and VI from the Struggle of Adam and Eve with Satan. Another possible connection is proposed between the detail in the Apocryphon of John that Noah's contemporaries "did not believe him," and the theme that Noah's opponents were unwilling to "listen to him."

(Though it is a small point, I was surprised that Josephus' portrait of Noah in his *Antiquities* went unaddressed. Josephus includes Noah's disgust with the actions of his contemporaries and plea for them to change their ways (1.74), as well as a postdiluvian dialogue with God in which Noah begs God to be merciful on humanity (1.96). The latter motif is marked off as an especially unusual one by Segovia with reference to QNN III: "short but apparently misplaced...for it is strangely placed after the flood! (p. 57)" Perhaps Josephus lacks appropriate cultural and geographic proximity to early Islam, but such a famous account, bearing two of the key innovations that Segovia marks in the Qur'anic narratives, might bear mentioning.)

Many of the proposed connections are premised on an especially close relationship between Islam and Syriac Christianity, leading neatly into Excursus A, which explores the possibility of a Syriac source for Q 37.78-81. In this chapter, he demonstrates his agreement with Christoph Luxenberg that *al-ākhirīn* should be read as "the last days," in keeping with the eschatological character Segovia reads in the portrait Qur'anic Noah elsewhere. For a summary of his philological conclusions, four possible translations are laid out on p. 100.

In Chapter 7, Segovia suggests that Ibn Ishāq relied upon the Qur'anic Noah to craft a portrait of Muḥammad with substantial eschatological credentials, perhaps even bordering upon the messianic, depending how one interprets the Noachic source material. As he says, "the aforementioned general pattern applied to Noah and the quranic prophet, commission+opposition+consolation...also underlies Muḥammad's presentation in the Sira narrative (107)." More generally, the chapter reiterates the larger conclusion of the book, that the Qur'anic Noah can be profitably brought into conversation with the literary and historical quranic prophet.

Excursus A considers what Ibn Ishāq's original Noah narrative, not included in Ibn Hishām's *Sira*, might have looked like, concluding it likely highlighted elements central to the QNN, and heightened the implicit connection between Muḥammad and Noah. Excursus B returns to Second Temple and Early Christian literature to assemble a set of five messianic types, with particular attention to how these types overlap with figures deemed "prophets." Finally, in the afterword, Segovia builds on his reading of Ibn Ishāq to think about ways in which certain subsections of early Islam might have thought about Muḥammad as a new Messiah, though this view clearly lost out in the end. He acknowledges that this train of thought is largely speculative, but notes that it is an intriguing possibility.

Though some assumptions in Segovia's work would be hotly contested by other Qur'anic scholars, he takes on a fascinating topic, and presents innovative and new conclusions for the field to ponder. As a stylistic aside, Segovia's writing is lively, and the liberal use of tables, figures, and visual

aids for the reader allows not only for ease in comprehension but also provide wonderful springboards for further research on the important figure of Noah in the Qur'an.