

“Those on the Right” and “Those on the Left”: Rereading Qur’ān 56, 1-56 (and the Founding Myth of Islam) in Light of Apocalypse of Abraham 21–2

Carlos A. Segovia, Saint Louis University - Madrid Campus

segoviaca@slu.edu

Abstract

The Quranic text may be construed as a palimpsest with regard to those scriptural and para-scriptural writings of Jewish and Christian provenance previously known to, and used in, the “sectarian milieu” from within which the Islamic religion gradually emerged. In this paper I examine the parallels that can be drawn between chs. 21–2 of ApAb, in which Abraham is given a vision of how the earth was created and of the fate of each human group according to their faith and deeds, and vv. 1-56 of *sūrat al-wāqī‘a* (Q 56), which provide an apocalyptic vision of the earth and its inhabitants in the end of time that reframes the spatial, numerical, and axiological distinctions displayed in ApAb 21–2. Then I go on to show that ApAb 21–2 may have played (together with Rom 4 and/or Gal 3) a prominent role in the founding myth of Islam, which, I shall argue, is to be regarded – just like its (post-Pauline) Christian counterpart – as a supersessionist myth.

1.

In what follows I shall try to offer an intertextual approach to a passage in the Qur’ān which I will read in light of a strikingly similar passage contained in the Apocalypse of Abraham (hereafter ApAb), a Jewish pseudepigraphon written around the turn of the 2nd century CE that “describes” Abraham’s conversion from idolatry and his ascent to heaven.¹

The early Islamic reuse of Abrahamic legends – which tends to typologically present Abraham as Muḥammad’s spiritual forbear – has been studied in recent years by Heribert Busse, Reuven Firestone, Gerald Hawting, François de Blois, Roberto Tottoli, Brian Hauglid, Shari Lowin, Friedmann Eissler, and

¹ On ApAb, its date, context, contents, versions, and manuscript witnesses, see Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (SBLTCS V.3; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature), 1-3; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 2nd ed.), 285-8.

Gabriel Said Reynolds.² Yet regarding Quranic intertextuality these authors have mainly explored its Biblical, Rabbinic, and Christian precedents.³

Albeit somewhat disappointing, this is just normal. When examining the Jewish and Christian connections – I would prefer to say the Judaeo-Christian setting – of early Islam, scholars of Islamic origins have seldom paid enough attention to the OT Pseudepigrapha.⁴ Thus an analysis of the OT pseudepigraphic subtexts of the Qur’ān is still wanting.

This does not only apply to the Qur’ān as a whole, but to its Abrahamic and cripto-Abrahamic legends and motifs as well, although Geneviève Gobillot has rightly emphasised the role presumably played by ApAb and by the Testament of Abraham – another 1st-century-CE Jewish pseudepigraphon – both in the composition of several key-passages of the Qur’ān (e.g. 17:1, 5, 7; 20:133; 53:33-41;

² Heribert Busse, *Die theologische Beziehungen des Islams zu Judentum und Christentum: Grundlagen des Dialogs im Koran und die gegenwärtige Situation* (G 72; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988); Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); idem, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, ed. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten & Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, 477-50 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010); François de Blois, “Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἑθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam,” *Bulletin of SOAS* 65 (2002): 1-30; Roberto Tottoli, *The Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002); Brian M. Hauglid, “On the Early Life of Abraham: Biblical and Qur’ānic Intertextuality and the Anticipation of Muḥammad,” in *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves, 87-105 (SBLSS 24; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature); Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (IHCST 65; Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2006); Friedmann Eissler, “Abraham im Islam,” in *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Christfried Böttrich, Beate Ego & Friedmann Eissler, 116-88 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht., 2009); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (RSQ; London & New York: Routledge, 2010).

³ See however Lowin’s succinct reference to ApAb (*Making*, 91ff). On the fictional character of the Biblical (and therefore of the para-Biblical, whether Rabbinic, Christian, Islamic or other) narratives about Abraham, see John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible’s Writers* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 75-90.

⁴ On which see Robert A. Kraft, *Exploring the Scripturesque: Jewish Texts and Their Christian Contexts* (JSJSup 137; Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2009).

87:16-19)⁵ and in the development of some equally significant Muhammadan legends (including Muḥammad's celestial journey); moreover, she has insightfully labelled ApAb, together with Lactancius's *Divine Institutes* and the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, as a "seuil herméneutique du Coran," i.e. as one of the textual corpora that should be taken into account when analysing the "conceptual framework" inherent in the Quranic text.⁶

In turn, I should like to draw your attention, first, to the parallels that can be drawn between chs. 21-2 of ApAb, in which Abraham is given a vision of how the earth was created and of the fate of each human group according to their faith and deeds, and vv. 1-56 of *sūrat al-wāqī'a* (Q 56), which provide an apocalyptic vision of the earth and its inhabitants in the end of time based upon the very same spatial, numerical, and axiological distinctions displayed in ApAb 21-2. I shall undertake that analysis in sections 3 and 4. Then in section 5 I will try to show that ApAb may have played (perhaps together with Romans 4 and/or Galatians 3?) a significant role in the founding myth of Islam, which, I shall argue, is to be regarded – just like its (post-Pauline) Christian counterpart – as a supersessionist myth.

2.

To begin with, however, I would wish to make the point that current intertextual analysis does not aim at merely unraveling a series of literary influences between two or more texts. As David Clipping argues, "Intertextuality is a method of reading one text against another that illuminates shared textual and ideological resonances; the assertion that all texts and ideas exist within a fabric of relations. The term 'intertextuality' refers to both a method of reading that juxtaposes texts in order to discover points of similarity and differences as well as the belief that all texts are part and parcel of

⁵ Geneviève Gobillot, "Apocryphes de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament," in *Dictionnaire du Coran*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, 58-61 (Paris: Robert Lafont, 2007). See however my remarks on Gobillot's cross-references, which at times fail to be exact, in Carlos A. Segovia, "Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qur'an: A Contribution to the Study of the Judaeo-Christian Apocalyptic Setting of the Early Islamic Faith," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia & Basil Lourié, 231-67 (OJC 3; Piscataway, NJ, Gorgias Press, 2012), here 237-8, n. 41.

⁶ Geneviève Gobillot, "Des textes pseudo clémentines à la mystique juive des premières siècles et du Sinaï à Ma'rib. Quelques coïncidences entre contexte culturel et localisation géographique dans le Coran," in *The Coming of the Comforter*, ed. Segovia & Lourié, 3-89, here 4-6. See also Pierre Lory, "Abraham," in *Dictionnaire du Coran*, ed. Amir-Moezzi, 9-14, here 13.

a fabric of historical, social, ideological, and textual relations. As a whole, intertextuality suggests an important break with prior conceptions of the text as an autonomous entity separate from ideology and history. An intertextual reading, therefore, crosses disciplinary boundaries and challenges the perceived sanctity of genre by demonstrating that all texts and ideas draw upon similar ideological sources”⁷.

This is not the same as saying that some texts may have influenced the composition of other texts. Rather, it means that different texts can be studied together as being different, though interconnected, strata of an ongoing intellectual tradition, or regions of a single, though complex, ideological milieu. Boundaries may not always be easy to draw between such regions, nor do we always know what exactly belongs to each and what does not. The study of Islamic origins is particularly challenging in this regard, but it must doubtless move along intertextual lines to move forward beyond the “grand narratives” to which it has usually been subjected.⁸

The Quranic text itself hints in this direction when it complicates any plain equation between the “divine revelation” (*tanzīl*), the “book” (*kitāb*) said to contain it, the ‘signs’ (*āyāt*) of such ‘book,’ and its Arabic “recitation” (*qur’ān*). In 10:37 the “book” and its ‘recitation’ are clearly to be distinguished. So too in 41:3, where the latter is said to contain and to make clear the “signs” of the former (which might, only might, be taken to be equated in 41:2-3 with the “revelation” itself). Yet 43:3-4 equates the “recitation” neither with the ‘book’ nor with its “signs,” but with the “matrix” or the “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*), where the “recitation” itself is said to be contained – but which is equated with the “book” in 56:78 (cf. too 85:22)! Whilst in 3:7, after explicitly equating the ‘book’ with the “revela-

⁷ David Clippinger, “Intertextuality,” in *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, ed. V. E. Taylor & C. E. Winquist, 190-1 (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), here 190.

⁸ On which see now Herbert Berg, “The Needle in the Haystack: Islamic Origins and the Nature of the Early Sources,” in *The Coming of the Comforter*, ed. Segovia & Lourié, 271-302. Recent and suggestive intertextual analysis of the Qur’ān and other early Islamic texts can be found in Manfred Kropp, ed., *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur’ān: The Question of a Historio-Critical Text of the Qur’ān* (BTS 100; Beirut & Würzburg: Orient-Institut Beirut & Ergon Verlag, 2007); Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* (RSQ; London & New York: Routledge, 2008); idem, *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān: The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context 2* (RSQ; London & New York: Routledge, 2011); Guillaume Dye & Fabien Nobilio, eds., *Figures bibliques en islam* (Brussels-Fernelmont: EME, 2011); Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext*; Segovia and Lourié, eds., *The Coming of the Comforter*; Carlos A. Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Formation in Late Antiquity* (JCIT 4; Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2015).

tion” itself, we read that only some parts of the “book” (namely, its purely unambiguous verses) are identical to its “matrix”! What can we make of this? That is, how are we to understand these slippery categories? Is the “recitation” an outcome of the “book,” or must we place it above it together with its “matrix”? Besides, is the recitation equal to such “matrix” or is it different from it insofar as it is merely said to be contained in it? Furthermore, how can the “recitation” be said to be contained in it whilst being, at the same time, a mere outcome of the “book” (literally, an exposition of its “signs”)? And what about the “book” itself? How can it be that only some parts of it are identical to the “matrix of the book” whereas its “recitation” is said to be fully contained in such “matrix”? Where do the discarded parts of the “book” belong? And how, then, can the “book” itself be equated with its “matrix”? To put it in more forceful terms: why is it that we get the impression – as suggested by Michel Foucault in a different context – that when we try to organise such notions, say, by their shape (i.e. by their very own definition), the very function and the logical extension of each one varies, and that we face a similar problem when we try to organise them otherwise?⁹

To be sure, one could also question the exact meaning and the rich connotations of the verbs *ṣadaqa* (to confirm) and *faṣala* (to separate?) in 10:37, as well as those of the verbs *jama‘a* (to collect) and *qara‘a* (to recite) in 75:17-8. And thereby ask what relationship is there to be found between them. Likewise, one can – and perhaps should – inquire the exact meaning of the allusions to previous revelations, warnings, legends (maybe also writings?)¹⁰ contained in 10:37; 25:4-6; 53:56). In short, we may very well demand whether the Qur’ān – or at least its *Grundschriften!* – originally functioned as a sort of “palimpsest,” as I have suggested elsewhere,¹¹ and whether the concept of “liminality” may be apt to define its once very concrete pre-canonical editorial (and redactional) status.

There is no need to say that apocalyptic texts played an important part amongst the hypothetical written sources of the Qur’ān, which may be partly described as an “apocalypse.” As I have argued, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts “provided the editors of the Qur’ān a series of narrative pat-

⁹ See Foucault’s well known Preface to *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966).

¹⁰ On ApAb and the “divinely revealed” books acknowledged by early Muslims, see Camila C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (IPTS 22; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 1996), 18-9.

¹¹ Carlos A. Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qur’ān,” 235.

terns, themes, . . . motifs, . . . [and] notions as well as some literary advices common to Second Temple prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom literature which had been already reworked by Christian authors either in their own writings or through their adaptation, translation, and reuse, of several Jewish texts. . . . The early Islamic faith self-defined against this common religious and scriptural background by adopting some of its theological premises and narrative strategies, some of which were incorporated in a *découpage*-like manner into the Quranic text, which functions therefore as a palimpsest with regard to those scriptural and para-scriptural writings of Jewish and Christian provenance previously known to, and used in, the ‘sectarian milieu’ from within which the Islamic religion gradually emerged. We neither know who decided to include them in the Qur’ān nor when this happened. . . . But it seems well within the evidence to conclude that the ‘sectarian milieu’ out of which Islam arose was either an apocalyptic-oriented one or else closely familiarised with both apocalyptic writings and apocalyptic ideas, which pervade . . . the whole Quranic corpus. Had early Muslims not been familiar with them – i.e. had they not belonged to that ‘sectarian milieu’ in one way or another – they would have failed to understand . . . the message of the Qur’ān.”¹²

In my view, ApAb must be counted amongst the apocalyptic subtexts of the Quranic text – or, again, of its *Grundschriften* – and as one of its fundamental written sources for that matter. I shall now compare the contents of ApAb 21–2 to vv. 1–56 of *sūrat al-wāqī‘a* and explain why those very chapters might have been essential to the editors of the Qur’ān by examining their stereotyped figures of good and evil, faithful and wicked people, and the way in which both texts put forth a different kind of founding myth.

3.

ApAb – which is only extant in Church Slavonic after a Greek text very likely made from a now lost Hebrew (or, less probably, Palestinian Aramaic) original – divides into to two main, perhaps once in-

¹² Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qur’ān,” 259. See also my study “Noah as Eschatological Mediator Transposed: From 2 Enoch 71–2 to the Christological Echoes of 1 Enoch 106:3 in the Qur’ān,” *Henoch* 33.1 (2011): 129–44.

dependent, sections: (1) chs. 1–8, which deal with Abraham’s conversion to monotheism, and (2) chs. 9–31, which focus primarily on Abraham’s ascent to heaven and on the visions of the cosmos and of the future of mankind that he is granted there. Both parts differ in their genre as well: whereas chs. 1–8 are written in “aggadic” style, chs. 9–31 are markedly “apocalyptic.”

Once in heaven (ch. 15) Abraham is taught by the angel Yahoel a song praising God (chs. 16–7). He then sees the divine throne (ch. 18) and the celestial powers displayed on the firmaments (chs. 19–20). Next God promises Abraham that his descendants will be God’s chosen people and that they will be free from the influence of Azazel (20.5), the Prince of Darkness who aims at ruling the present world. Abraham then asks God about the presence of evil on earth and is granted a series of visions (chs. 20–6), of which I will only examine here the first one, i.e. the vision of the creation of the earth by God and of the predestined fate that its inhabitants might await according to their faith and deeds (chs. 21–2).

Alexander Kulik’s translation of chs. 21–2, which basically draws on the text contained in *Codex Sylvester* (2nd half of the 14th century), reads as follows:

21:1 And he said to me, “Look now beneath your feet at the expanse and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it.” 21:2 And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein. 21:3 And [I saw] there the earth and its fruits, and its moving ones, and its spiritual ones, and its host of men and their spiritual impieties, and their justifications, and the pursuits of their works, and the abyss and its torment, and its lower depths, and the perdition which is in it. 21:4 And I saw there the sea and its islands, and its animals and its fishes, and Leviathan and his spouse, and his lair, and his dens, and the world which lies upon him, and his motions and the destruction of the world because of him. 21:5 I saw there the rivers and their overflows, and their circles. 21:6 And I saw there the tree of Eden and its fruits, and the spring, the river flowing from it, and its trees and their flowering, and I saw those who act righteously. And I saw in it their food and rest. 21:7 And I saw there a great crowd of men, and women, and children, and half of them on the right side of the portrayal, and half of them on the left side of the portrayal. 22:1 And I said, “Eternal Mighty One! What is this picture of creation?” 22:2 And he said to me, “This is my will for existence in design, and it was pleasing to me. And then, afterward, I gave them a command by my word and they came into being. And whatever I had determined to be had already been previously depicted and stood before me in

this, as you have seen, before they were created. 22:3 And I said, “O Lord! Mighty and Eternal! Who are the people in the picture on this side and on that?” 22:4 And he said to me, “These who are on the left side are a multitude of tribes who were before and who are destined to be after you: some for judgment and justice, and others for revenge and perdition at the end of the age. 22:5 Those on the right side of the picture are the people set apart for me of the people [that are] with Azazel. These are the ones I have destined to be born of you and to be called my people.”

Vv. 22:3-5 depict mankind, therefore, in two groups: “those on the left side” and “those on the right side.” “Who are the people in the picture on this side and on that?,” asks Abraham. “The ones on the left side,” replies God, “are a multitude of tribes who were before and who are destined to be after you: some for judgment and justice, and other for revenge and perdition at the end of the age.” God then goes on to say: “Those on the right side of the picture are the people set apart for me of the people [that are] with Azazel. These are the ones I have destined to be born of you and to be called my people,” he adds.

We may divide Abraham’s and God’s exchange into three major segments:

- (1) Abraham’s question about both human groups and their location in the picture (22:3).
- (2) God’s reply about ‘those on the left side’ of the picture (22:4).
- (3) God’s reply about ‘those on the right side of the picture’ (22:5).

Some brief remarks might prove useful at this juncture:

- a. Prior to Abraham’s question in 22:3, there is already an indication that mankind is to be regarded as spatially divided into two groups (21:7, where, in contrast to 22:4-5, those on the right side are mentioned first).
- b. God begins by explaining to Abraham who are “those on the left side” of the picture (22:4). It is only later that he explains to him who are “those on the right side of the picture” (22:5).
- c. “Those on the left side” are “those who were before and who are destined to be after” Abraham (22:4a), i.e. people that cannot be counted amongst Abraham’s descendants (cf. 22:5). Some of them are declared to be righteous (22:4b1), whereas others are declared to be wicked (22:4b2).

d. God's first answer is, accordingly, repeatedly twofold, for "on the left side" of the picture stand (a) those who were before Abraham and (b) their descendants, i.e. all past, present, and future people lacking Abrahamic kinship (22:4a). Afterwards we are told that such people divide into (c) righteous and (d) wicked men and women (22:4b).

e. By way of contrast, God's second answer, i.e. God's reply regarding "those on the right side of the picture," is threefold, as it consists of a multifaceted explanation of who they are: they are (a) people set apart for God (22:5a1), (b) destined to be born of Abraham (22:5b) and (c) to be called, therefore, God's people (22:5c). The fact that they are free from Azazel (22:5a2) adds nothing to the fact that they have been set apart for God.

f. Alternatively we can also regard God's second answer as twofold – like his first answer: "those on the right side" are (a) the people set apart for God, i.e. God's chosen people (22:5a,c) , as well as (b) Abraham's descendants (22:5b).

Hence we may further divide the text as follows:

(1) Abraham's question about both human groups and their location in the picture as set forth in 21.7, where "those on the right side" had been mentioned first (22:3).

(2) God's first reply concerning "those on the left side" of the picture (22:4):

(2.1) they are those lacking Abrahamic kinship (22:4a);

(2.2) some of them are righteous people to whom justice shall be granted (22:4b1),

(2.3) whereas the wicked ones amongst them shall be destroyed in the end of time (22:4b2);

(1) God's second reply concerning "those on the right side of the picture" (22:5):

(3.1) they have been set apart for God (22:5a);

(3.2) they are Abraham's descendants (22:5b)

(3.3) and God's chosen people (22:5c).

In other words, we have:

(A) The picture itself, with some people on its right side and some people on its left side.

- (B) A question about the meaning of such picture.
- (C) An explanation concerning the group placed on the left side of the picture, which includes most people on earth (they are the people lacking Abrahamic kinship; the righteous amongst them shall be justified [C1], whilst the wicked ones amongst them shall be punished [C2]).
- (D) An explanation concerning those placed on the right side of the picture, who are set apart from everyone else (they are Abraham’s descendants and God’s chosen people).

Following the spatial order inherent in God’s reply (22.4-5) I shall henceforth label the groups placed on the left side and on the right side of the picture as “ApAb II G1” and “ApAb II G2,” respectively; the righteous amongst “ApAb II G1,” “ApAb II G1a”; and their wicked counterparts, “ApAb II G1b.” Thus we have:

“ApAb II G1”	those on the left side
‘ApAb II G1a”	the righteous on the left side
“ApAb II G1b”	the wicked on the left side
“ApAb II G2”	those on the right side, i.e. God’s chosen people, who are qualified as Abraham’s descendants

According to 21:7, however, such groups should rather be labelled as follows:

“ApAb I G1”	those on the right side	=	“ApAb II G2”
“Ab I G2”	those on the left side	=	“ApAb II G1”

Note that both the righteous and the wicked standing on the left side (= “ApAb II G1a” and “ApAb II G1b,” respectively) go unmentioned in 21:7.

Let us now draw our attention to vv. 1-56 of *sūrat al-wāqī‘a*.

4.

As is well known, *sūrat al-wāqī'a* opens with the announcement of the end of time and with the vision of the cosmic events that will follow (56:1-6). Such vision resembles the one contained in ApAb 21:4g, which presents similar – though not identical – cosmic traits.

We then read in the Qur'ān that in that day mankind will be divided into “three groups” (56:7):

(a) some will be placed “on the right” (56:8);

(b) some will be placed “on the left” (56:9);

(c) in addition we are told that there shall be a third group different both from the group “on the right” and the group “on the left”: “the foremost” (*al-šābiqun*) in faith and monotheism, who will stand “near to God” (56:10-1).

Following the spatial order here displayed I shall label the group placed on the right side of the picture as “Q G1”; the group on the left side, “Q G2”; and the “foremost,” “Q G3.” Thus we have:

“Q G1”	those on the right side
“Q G2”	those on the left side
“Q G3”	the foremost who will stand near to God

Some brief remarks might also prove useful at this point:

a. The Quranic narrative follows the spatial order provided in ApAb 21:7 (right to left) instead of the one provided in ApAb 22:4-5 (left to right).

b. It is easy to see, on the other hand, that “Q G1” parallels “ApAb II G1a”; “Q G2,” “ApAb II G1b”; and “Q G3,” “pAb II G2.” That is to say, those placed “on the left side” in ApAb (including both “ApAb II G1a” and “ApAb II G1b,” i.e. the “righteous” and the “wicked”) are divided in the Qur'ān into two separate groups: “Q G1” and “Q G2,” which now stand “on the right” side and “on the left” side, respectively.

c. In spite of this spatial shift, the twofold order present in “ApAb II G1” (“ApAb II G1a” + “ApAb II G1b”) is well preserved.

d. At the same time, “ApAb II G2” (i.e. God’s chosen people) is set apart as “Q G3.” Their designation is quite similar in both texts: they are said to be “those set apart for God” (ApAb 22:5a), “God’s chosen people” (ApAb 22:5c), and those brought “near to God” (Q 56:11). And interestingly enough they close the list of the different kinds of people that each text mentions.

e. As in ApAb 21:7 and later in ApAb 22:5, there is a big line that makes such people (the “foremost,” i.e. God’s chosen ones) stand apart from everyone else.

f. Yet whilst in ApAb God’s chosen ones are said to be Abraham descendants, the Qur’ān does not further qualify them in any other way: they are simply said to be God’s chosen ones, though we later read that many amongst the “older people” and only few amongst the “later people” will join such group (56:13-4; cf. ApAb 22:4a, where a somewhat different chronological distinction is also made). I shall examine this rather rough contrast in the next section.

Meanwhile, it will suffice to note that, in spite of their differences, a similar scheme can be found in both texts:

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Their spatial location according to each text</i>	
	<i>ApAb</i>	<i>Q</i>
the righteous	on the left	on the right
the wicked	on the left	on the left
God’s chosen ones	on the right, apart from everyone else	apart from everyone else

The Quranic text goes on to describe with detail the fate of each group: (a) the fate of the “foremost” (56:12-26) and the fate of the righteous standing “on the right” side (56:27-40), who shall all enter Paradise, is mentioned in the first place; (b) then we are told of the fate of the wicked standing “on the left” side (56:41-56), who shall be thrown to the Gehenna. This clearly parallels, and expands, ApAb 22:4b.

Finally, it should also be noticed that – if we leave aside ApAb 21:7 – both texts begin by questioning about the identity of the groups standing on the right side and on the left side of the picture: in ApAb 22:3 it is Abraham who asks the question about their identity; in the Quranic text, the question is outlined four times, twice apropos those standing “on the right” (56:8, 27) and twice apropos those standing “on the left” (56:9, 41), without anyone asking such question, however, for the Qur’ān puts it forth as an impersonal question addressed to its readers, just as the whole vision is.

Thus we have:

- (1)The announcement of the event that will take place in the end of time and its cosmic implications (56:1-4).
- (2)The division of mankind into three groups plus the corresponding question about the identity of each group:
 - (2.1) “those on the right” – who are those on the right? (56:8)
 - (2.2) “those on the left” – who are those on the left? (56:9)
 - (2.3) “the foremost” (56:10)
- (1)The answer concerning the third group and their fate (56:11-26):
 - (3.1) they will be brought near to God in the next life (56:11);
 - (3.2) although many amongst the “older people” will be in such group, only few amongst the “later people” will join it (56:13-4);
 - (3.3) the “foremost” will enter Paradise and enjoy its pleasures (56:12, 15-26).
- (1)The answer concerning the first group and their fate, whose identity is inquired about again in 56:27: they will also enter Paradise and enjoy its pleasures (56:27-40)

(2)The answer concerning the second group and their fate, whose identity is inquired about again in 56:41: they will be thrown to the Gehenna (56:41-56).

In other words, we have:

- (A) A picture with some people standing on its right side, some people on its left side, and a third group of people standing apart from everyone else.
- (B) The questions about the identity of the two first groups.
- (C) An explanation concerning those standing apart from everyone else (they are God's chosen ones and shall enter Paradise).
- (D) An explanation concerning those placed on the right side of the picture (they shall also enter Paradise).
- (E) An explanation concerning those placed on the left side of the picture (they shall be thrown to the Gehenna).

I dare say that the following equivalences can be traced:

Q (A) = ApAb (A)

Q (B) = ApAb (B)

Q (C) = ApAb (D)

Q (D) = ApAb (C1)

Q (E) = ApAb (C2)

Accordingly, the following lines of textual dependence may also be suggested:

Q (A) – ApAb (A)

Q (B) – ApAb (B)

Q (C) ApAb (C)

×

Q (D+E) ApAb (D)

It goes without saying that the central image in both texts – i.e. the opposition between the right and the left side – is relatively frequent in early Jewish and Christian imagery. Yet to my knowledge it is only applied to the fate of the righteous and the wicked in ApAb, the apocryphal Acts of John (which dates to the 2nd half of the 2nd century CE), and the Qur’ān. The author of the Acts of John used it, however, in a narrower and metaphoric way to merely announce that those on the right side would stand fast and those on the left side would be removed in the end of time (114). Unless I am mistaken, therefore, the only authoritative and extensive parallel to the Quranic story is to be found in ApAb.

5.

The author of ApAb wrote in the decades following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. Like the authors of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, s/he aimed at reflecting upon the causes of so profound a crisis and recalled Israel’s pre-Mosaic founding myth (i.e. Abraham’s election) to give new hope to Israel and to help her overcome the present evil age. Abraham had searched for God and had become God’s “friend” (9:6; cf. Is 41:8). Yahoel had helped him to escape from Azazel (who had tried to dissuade him from offering sacrifices to God) and had later assisted him in his heavenly journey. Once in heaven, Abraham sees the divine throne, the firmaments and the earth, and inquires God about the presence of evil on earth. He is taught about the history of God’s people and about what has gone wrong with them: they have gone astray because they have fallen to idolatric practices (ApAb recalls Manasseh’s sins [2 Kgs 21:2-7; 2 Chr 33:2-7]; cf. 2 Kgs 21:10-5, whose author points to Manasseh’s defilement of the Temple cult as the cause of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE). That is why their Temple has finally been destroyed by the idolatrous Gentiles, who, all this notwithstanding, will be delivered to eternal pun-

ishment by God's Messiah in due time. Then too Israel will be gathered from the nations and will be restored. So there is new hope for Israel, provided she does not err again in cultic matters.¹³

In short, Abraham's faithfulness is used by the author or ApAb as re-founding myth to comfort Israel (i.e. Abrahams descendants) in times of sorrow.

Needless to say, the editors of the Quranic text – or, to repeat it again, of its *Grundschriften* – had other purposes in mind. Yet they too made Abraham – quite plausibly relying on Rom 4:9-12, as Wansbrough audaciously suggests¹⁴ – the father of the only true religion which in their view deserved such name: Islam. Cf. Q 3:65, 67; 4:125 (where, as in ApAb 9:6, Abraham is also called God's "friend"); 6:161; 16:120-3. Thus construed, Abraham became Muḥammad's spiritual forebear – and in fact his sole complete prophetic model. God's chosen ones were transformed from Abraham's carnal descendants via Isaac (i.e. from Israel) into a new, purely spiritual group (2:124) – "the foremost" in faith and monotheism, according to 56:10.¹⁵ And a new founding myth was inscribed in the pages of history – a supersessionist myth which was nonetheless polemically read backwards as a restoration myth.¹⁶

¹³ As Daniel Harlow argues, "the work epitomizes evil in the world as idolatry – evil in its various forms amounts to false worship" (Daniel C. Harlow, "Idolatry and Alterity: Israel and the Nations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of J. J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C. Harlow, Matthew J. Goff, Karina M. Hogan & Joel S. Kaminsky, 302-30 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), here 328. See also John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 227; Andrei A. Orlov, "'The Likeness of Heaven': Kavod of Azazel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," in *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism*, ed. Dana Arbel & Andrei A. Orlov, 232-53 (EREAMA 2; Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2010).

¹⁴ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* [1977], Foreword, translation & expanded notes by A. Rippin (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 54.

¹⁵ Of course, the post-Pauline Christian claim regarding the Church was similar. Yet the Church intended to replace Israel, whereas early Muslims thought of themselves as being elder than the Israelites (and the Christians) in matters of faith, due to their presumed Abrahamic (i.e. pre-Mosaic) spiritual descent. If, however, one brackets this latter conviction as a mere self-legitimising claim – and there is no reliable historical record to suggest the opposite! – one may take the founding myth of Islam to be a supersessionist myth as well.

¹⁶ On the supersessionist nature of the founding myth of Islam, to which I shall return below, see Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 192-3; John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* [1978], Foreword, translation & expanded notes by G. Hawting (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), 109ff.; Guillaume Dye, "La théologie de la substitution du point de vue de l'islam," in *Judaïsme, christianisme, islam: le judaïsme entre "théologie de la substitution" et "théologie de la falsification"*, ed. Thomas Gergely, 83-103 (Brussels: Didier Devillez & EME, 2010); Gobillot "Des textes pseudo clémentines à la mystique juive des premières siècles et du Sinai à Ma'rib," 8ff.; Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39ff.

Which, then, was the role played by ApAb in such move?

In my view, ApAb provided the editors of the Quranic text the very core of the myth itself. It also provided them its precise apocalyptic form. And, once readapted, it offered them a place to inscribe their ideological construction.

It provided them, quite possibly together with Rom 4 and/or Gal 3, the core of the myth itself; for there is no other text – either Jewish or Christian – that presents Abraham as the sole forefather of the faithful. To be sure, ApAb would hardly have had such a great impact upon them had they not be formerly inclined to read it in that way. But it seems safe to deduce that the traditional Christian interpretation of Rom 4 and Gal 3 was already there to instruct them. There is, of course, no way to prove this. Yet such hypothesis need not be a priori discarded in my opinion, as there is no better one that helps us make sense of why the editors of the Quranic text used the Abraham story as they did.¹⁷ Be that as it may, it is clear that ApAb functioned as a subtext for them and as a source for – perhaps even as the main source of – their own founding myth.

As said above, ApAb also provided the myth its precise apocalyptic form, which is in fact lacking both in Rom 4 and Gal 3. Besides, it should be noted (a) that the Qur’ān self-defines itself as ‘a warner of the warners of old’ (53:56), i.e. an admonition – and this could perhaps be the clue to what I have earlier discussed in section 2 regarding the “book,” its “recitation” and its “matrix”! – which is, on the other hand, (b) supposed to recite afresh (92:1-3), and/or to rewrite (for 80:11-6 could obviously be read in that way), the revelation contained in what the Quranic text itself labels somewhat enigmatically as “the first pages” (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*, 20:133): those of Abraham and Moses (53:36-7; 87:18-9). “[I]

¹⁷ Furthermore, Abraham’s designation as “guide” (*imām*) in Q 2:124 might reflect an adaptation of his role as “father” of the faithful regardless of their ethnicity in Rom 4. Cf. the relationship suggested in Q 28:5 between “leaders” (*a’imma*) and “heirs” (*wāriṭūn*). Besides, the rather unclear distinction between Q G1 and Q G3 could perhaps be reminiscent of that found in Rom 4:11-2, where the difference between groups 1 (“all who have faith”) and 3 (“those who walk in . . . faith”) is likewise unclear in my view; see James Swetnam, “The Curious Crux at Romans 4:12,” *Biblica* 61 (1980): 110-15; Maria Neumann, *Abraham, Vater von Juden und Nichtjuden: Eine exegetische Studie zu Rom 4* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1997), 234ff.; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. E. J. Epp (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 319-21. Finally, if Guillaume Dye is correct about the Christian liturgical background of Q 19:1-63 – and I take it he is (see his study “Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confiqués: aux sources de quelques pericopes coraniques [Q 10:1-63],” in *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, ed. Isabelle Dépret & Guillaume Dye, [Brussels-Fernelmont: EME, 2012], here 100) – then it is clear that the editors of the Qur’ān – or its *Grundschriften* – knew of Gal 3 and were moreover familiar with its traditional Christian reading; I would like to thank him for kindly drawing my attention to this issue. On Paul’s Abrahamic argument in Rom 4 and the early Islamic concept of *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā’*), see also de Blois, “*Naṣrānī* and *ḥanīf*,” 16-27.

est impossible d'identifier avec certitude la nature de ces écrits," remarks Pierre Lory.¹⁸ I do not agree. ApAb must not simply be taken – together with the Testament of Abraham – as the source for the legends about Muḥammad's heavenly ascent, as Lory himself suggests. Nor can its narratives only be said to have influenced – together with the parallel narratives contained in the Testament of Abraham and the book of Jubilees – the Quranic narratives about Abraham's opposition to his father Terah. ApAb plays a much more fundamental role in the Quranic text. The Qur'ān is surely more than an apocalypse, but if it may also be defined as an apocalypse – and I think it should due to the revelatory and eschatological concerns that lie at its very centre – I see it as an apocalypse entirely based upon ApAb; for all that we can find in the Qur'ān (its non-negotiable monotheistic claims and polemics, which are in fact traced back to Abraham; its many allusions to a revelation received from above whose first witness was Abraham; the announcement of God's judgment as inevitable and the distinction between Abraham's followers and everyone else in both the present and the future life, etc.) is already present in AbAb. In other words, I do not see the Qur'ān as an apocalypse full of Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic traits, but as an Abrahamic apocalypse full of other apocalyptic traits of, say, Enochic, Pauline, and/or Johannine provenance, *inter alia*.

At first sight, on the other hand, it would appear that Rom 4 and/or Gal 3 contributed to shape in some way the supersessionist framework of the new myth. Such, at least, was the mainstream Christian interpretation of Rom 4 and Gal 3, though clearly not its original meaning.¹⁹ For it is one thing to say that the Israelites are not the only heirs to God's promises – as Paul himself argues – and another thing to assert that they have been replaced by a new religious community. Now, the Quranic reuse of ApAb 22:5 shows that such supersessionist framework, wherever it came from, resulted in a textual

¹⁸ Pierre Lory, "Abraham," 13.

¹⁹ On the contemporary rereading of Paul as a Second-Temple Jewish author worried about the ingathering of the nations, see e.g. Carlos A. Segovia & Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *Paul the Jew: Rethinking the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015 [forthcoming]). On Paul's opposition to the exclusivistic Roman imperial ideology later adopted by the Church, see e.g. Davina Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission* (PCC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010). New evaluations of the complex partings of the ways between Christianity and Judaism can now be found in Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (DRLAR; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

adaptation (and corruption) of the contents of the Jewish apocalypse: the Jews are no longer God's chosen ones (as it was claimed in ApAb 22:5), they have been replaced by the 'foremost' in faith and monotheism (Q 56:10). This is the only verse in the Qur'ān where such replacement explicitly takes place. Some may object that there is no true supersessionism in the Qur'ān, that the Qur'ān accepts all prior revelations whilst simultaneously denouncing their intrinsic limitations and their eventual corruption by their own followers. The Quranic reuse of ApAb proves that this is not so: the new Umma is expressly said to substitute Israel. But then, it could be legitimately argued that the "sectarian milieu" out of which Islam emerged was a Christian milieu. Exploring its contour-lines, intellectual background, geographical location, and timeframe, belongs to an altogether different study that I cannot undertake here²⁰.

²⁰ See further Carlos A. Segovia, "A Messianic Controversy behind the Making of Muḥammad as the Last Prophet?" Paper presented to the 4th Nangeroni Meeting of the Enoch Seminar / 1st Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar: "Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?" (Milan; June 15-19, 2015). https://www.academia.edu/3372907/A_Messianic_Controversy_Behind_the_Making_of_Muhammad_as_the_Last_Prophet_2015_Conference_Paper_-_Upcoming_Book_Chapter.