8. Echoes of Pseudepigrapha in the Qur'ān

Tommaso Tesei

Abstract
Tommaso Tesei addresses questions of quranic intertextuality which contribute to clarifying, among other things, the Qur'ān's undeniably scribal nature. The first part of this article focusses on Enochic elements (drawn from pseudepigraphical literature) in the quranic corpus. Specifically, it deals with the quranic characters of Idrīs and 'Uzayr and the fallen-angels – traditions the echoes of which can be heard in the Qur'ān. Did the people in the Qur'ān's environment know those books which we tend categorise under the label of 'Pseudepigrapha' directly? Or did they merely encounter themes and motifs which happened to trace back to pseudepigraphical literature?

Keywords: Late Antiquity, Early Islam, Qur'ān, Pseudepigrapha

The relationship between the Qur'ān and the writings belonging to the biblical tradition have attracted significant scholarly attention since the very beginnings of modern quranic studies. The question has recently obtained renewed investigation within the more general trend of research that aims to re-situate early Islam in its late antique context. Reading the Qur'ān against the background of biblical and extra-biblical texts often offers scholars a valuable means to cut through the allusiveness that characterises quranic narratives. At the same time, such comparative analysis helps us to determine the degree to which knowledge of biblical traditions was widespread in the Qur'ān's environment. In this article, I will investigate the specific case of the Qur'ān's references to literary traditions otherwise preserved in the corpus of texts known as pseudepigrapha.

The study of intertextualities between pseudepigraphical writings and quranic narratives has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention in the past few years, which has focused mostly on two subjects. Scholars have

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investigated the echoes from pseudepigrapha in the Qur'ān principally with the aim to identify literary and religious traditions current in the contexts from which the early Islamic communities emerged. In spite of these investigations, however, scholarship on the subject is still relatively scant, while the topic is extremely wide. An adequate analysis would require at least a monographic study. The goal of this article is much more humble, as it mostly aims to present an overview of the *status quaestionis*.

The first two sections of the article are thematically focused on the elements from the Enochic literature in the Qur'ān. Specifically, the first section deals with recent investigations on the quranic characters of Idrīs and 'Uzayr, while the second concerns elements of the fallen angels traditions in the Qur'ān. The final two sections of this study address whether, alongside themes and motifs going back to pseudepigraphical literature, people in the Qur'ān's environment also had knowledge of those books that we categorise under the label of pseudepigrapha.

Are Idrīs and 'Uzayr Characters from the Enochic Traditions?

A first topic of scholarly debate concerns possible references to the person of Enoch in the quranic corpus. As a matter of fact, the Qur'ān never mentions the name Enoch. Most quranic commentators, however, identify him with the mysterious Idrīs mentioned twice in the corpus, that is, in Q 19:56–57 and in Q 21:85–86. Western scholars have connected Idrīs to a variety of figures. The debate has mostly centred on the origins of the name Idrīs, which has been associated to the Greek names Esdras, Andreas, and Hermes (through a corruption of the Arab form *hīrmīs*), or connected to the expression *dōresh ha-Torah* ('interpreter of the Torah') in the Damascus Covenant Scroll, or even derived from the Hermetic treatise *Poimandrēs*.[1]

Reeves notices that the words in the Qur'ān, 'We raised him to a high position' (Q 19:57), echo the descriptions of Enoch's heavenly assumption in Enochic writings such as *1 Enoch* (87:3) and *Jubilees* (4:23). As for the name Idrīs, Reeves postulates a connection with the Arabic root *d-r-s* that carries the meaning of writing. The resulting title Idrīs – which Reeves

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1 See Crone, 'Idrīs, Atraḥasīs and al-Khiḍr'; Erder, 'Idrīs'.

envisages as wordplay on the verbal root *darasa*, 'to write' – would refer to the description of Enoch in Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha as a character with 'distinction in academic pursuits'.[2]

Crone accepts the identification of Idrīs with Enoch but elaborates a more complex explanation for the quranic name Idrīs. On the one hand, she maintains the connection between the names Idrīs and Andreas proposed by previous scholars. On the other hand, she relates the Greek Andreas to the ancient Akkadian title of Atraḫasīs, which in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* designates the immortal wise Ūta-napišti. The same title, she suggests, would possibly lie behind the Arabic Ḫiḍr – an association already postulated by earlier scholars. Noticeably, Andreas and Ḫiḍr are the names of two characters that acquire immortality in different versions of a legend about Alexander and the water of life. Crone relates her argument to the complex connections between various narrative traditions on Gilgamesh, Enoch, and Alexander. As is known, reminiscences of the ancient Gilgameshan poem, including interactions between the figures of Atraḫasīs / Ūta-napišti and Enoch, have been observed in different Enochic writings.[3] At the same time, echoes of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have been detected in various versions of the Alexander legend, among which figures a quranic narrative about Moses (Q 18:60–82) that later Muslim traditionists connected to stories about Ḫiḍr.[4] Without entering into the details of her very detailed literary and philological analysis, Crone suggests that the figure of Enoch came to be associated to these various characters and finally assumed the name of Idrīs in the framework of complex interactions between these different literary traditions.

Crone's study is insightful and deserves a more exhaustive review than the one that can be provided in the present context. I will limit myself to observe that her attempt to ultimately derive the three names Idrīs, Andreas, and Ḫiḍr from the name of Atraḫasīs is a bit of a stretch. Moreover, her reconstruction of the very complex history of the legend of the water of life, of its evolution, and of its interaction with ancient Babylonian lore, sometimes appears to be arbitrary.[5] In the end, it seems to me that the question about the origins of the name Idrīs is still open and in wait for a final answer. As for the identification of this character with Enoch, the most

2 Reeves, 'Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān', pp. 46–49.

3 See, for instance, Crone, 'Idrīs, Atraḫasīs and al-Khiḍr'.

4 On which see Tesei, 'Some Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity'.

5 See, for instance, her analysis about the exclusion of the character of Atraḫasīs / Ūta-napišti as a consequence of the insertion of the character of Glaukos / Andreas, with the latter adopting, however, the name of the former (Crone, 'Idrīs, Atraḫasīs and al-Khiḍr', p. 67).

compelling argument is still to be found in the way that his presentation in the Qur'ān (i.e., as someone who was raised 'to a high position') echoes – as already observed – some Enochic traditions.

Crone identifies another character of the Enochic literature with another mysterious quranic person. This is the wicked angel Azael, who might lie behind the enigmatic 'Uzayr mentioned in Q 9:30.[6] This quranic verse reports that 'the Jews said, "Uzayr is the son of God", and the Christians said, "the Messiah is the son of God".' The identity of 'Uzayr represents a longstanding interpretative problem. Quranic commentators almost unanimously identify 'Uzayr with Ezra.[7] This identification has been accepted by most Western scholars, who, however, were not able to provide a satisfying explanation for the enigmatic quranic statement that the Jews consider 'Uzayr as the son of God.[8] In fact, no similar description of Ezra occurs in either Jewish or Christian traditions. Crone resurrects an old suggestion by the French scholar Paul Casanova, who proposed 'Uzayr as a misreading of Azael.[9] According to Crone, the following charge against the Jews calling Azael the son of God reflects a more general quranic polemic against Jewish worship of angels. Crone connects this polemic to the ambience of Jewish magic and to the Jewish practice of invoking angels as intermediary powers. She refers to the Jewish production of amulets and magic spells in which the fallen angel Azael is invoked among other entities against demons.[10]

If Crone's analysis was proved to be correct, the consequences for our understanding of the Qur'ān's social and cultural context would be significant. First of all, it would bring new proofs for the circulation in the Qur'ān's environment of elements ultimately deriving from the Enochic myth of the fallen angels (on which, see below). Secondly, and more importantly, it would allow us to better understand the history of transmission of these literary traditions to the Qur'ān's community. The environment of Jewish magic that Crone identifies as the place in which this transmission occurred is indeed very intriguing. However, it should be noticed that, as far as I know, no palaeographical evidence supports the misreading postulated by Casanova to connect the name 'Uzayr to the name of Azael. Moreover, the similarity between the Arabic 'Uzayr (*ʿzyr*) and the Hebrew 'Ezrā (*ʿzr*) is difficult to

6 See Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān'.

7 See Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 203–204; Abu-Rabi, 'Ezra'.

8 On previous scholarly debates see Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 204–206.

9 Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 208–209; Casanova, 'Idrîs et Ouzaïr'.

10 Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 210–218.

ignore. As for the enigmatic quranic claim that 'Uzayr is the son of God, this can be taken as a polemical device meant to charge the Jews with the same doctrinal mistake on the divinity of Jesus than the Christians.

The Fallen Angels Traditions in the Qur'ān

As is known, an evocation of the Enochic myth of the fallen angels is found at vv. 101–102 of the second quranic surah. This verse contains the accusation against 'a party of those who were given the Scripture' (*farīq min allaḍīna ūtū al-kitāb*) to follow what the devils recited at the time of Solomon. Specifically, these devils are said to teach people witchcraft and what was revealed in Babylon to the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt, which is described as 'what can cause discord between man and wife'. Noticeably, however, the Qur'ān absolves twice the angels from any responsibility, first by stating that they 'never taught anyone without first warning him, We are sent only to tempt – do not disbelieve', and then by stressing that 'they harm no one with it except by God's leave'.

A number of motifs from the fallen angels stories are easily discernible, the most evident being the transgression of epistemological limits in which angels are somehow involved. Quranic commentators did not fail to complement the passage with elements drawn from previous Enochic traditions.[11] Q 2:102, however, contains a number of significant points of departure from the Enochic myth, the most obvious being the names of the two angels that do not find equivalent in any previous version of the story. Western scholars have pointed out the Iranian origins of the names Hārūt and Mārūt that are often considered as a reflex of the Avestian entities 'Haurvatāt' and 'Ameretāt'.[12] How the names of these figures of the Iranian lore came to be incorporated in the traditions of the fallen angels is a matter of debate. Some scholars have suggested that this happened via Manichaean literary productions, while others have indicated the ambience of Iraqi Jewish magic as a more likely location.[13]

Alongside the names of the two angels, other significant differences can be observed in the quranic verse. Most noticeably, Q 2:102 lacks a central

11 See Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 196–198; Reeves, 'Some Parascriptural Dimensions'.

12 For a detailed bibliography on this subject see Reeves, 'Some Parascriptural Dimensions', p. 818, n. 4

13 See Crone, 'The *Book of Watchers* in the Qur'ān', pp. 194–196.

feature of the story such as the illicit intercourse between angels and women that resulted in the bastard progeny of the Giants. Similarly significant is the lack of mention of the lineage between demons and fallen angels. The absence of these motifs goes hand in the hand with the evident intention to exonerate the two angels from any illicit action that is instead attributed to the demons. In doing so, the quranic account is consistent with the developments of the myth of the fallen angels from Antiquity to Late Antiquity, and with the many attempts over the centuries to mitigate (if not of entirely erase) the theologically problematic idea of the angels' responsibility in spreading evil on Earth.[14] This tendency is already witnessed in *Jubilees*, whose author/s make/s special efforts to delete traces of the motif of angels teaching humans evil arts.[15] The exculpation of the angels from their alleged sins was accompanied by the progressive attribution of these crimes to malign entities like Satan and the demons. Q 2:101–102 apparently follows the broad outlines of this process.[16]

Other elements in the story of Hārūt and Mārūt reveal the progressive evolution of the fallen angels' myth and witness its interactions with different literary traditions. For instance, the mention of Babel within the quranic story recalls the Pseudo-Eupolemos' fragments, in which the Giants are described as the builders of the tower of Babel.[17] In much the same way, the reference to Salomon in Q 2:102 probably points to previous contaminations between traditions on the Jewish king and the myth of the fallen angels. Moreover, a transposition of motifs from the fallen angels' story to the time of Solomon is possibly at play in Q 21:80 and 34:10–11, where God teaches Salomon's father, David, to fabricate coats of armour. This might be a re-elaboration of the Enochic motif of the fallen angels teaching humans to build weapons (*1 Enoch* 8:1). In concomitance with what has already been observed, in the Qur'ān this motif appears deprived of the problematic idea of angelic sin, and is projected to another moment of sacred history – following a dynamic that is also at play in the Iblīs narratives analysed below.

As the problematic concept of angelic sin was gradually discarded, many elements of the fallen angels story came to be absorbed by traditions on Satan's fall.[18] This process can be detected in several late antique sources,

14 Reed, *Fallen Angels*, p. 86.

15 Reed, *Fallen Angels*, pp. 90–95.

16 As I argue in the next section, this process is also at play in the quranic narratives about the fall of Iblīs.

17 Greek text available at <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/die-fragmente-der-griechischen-historiker-i-iii/anonymos-pseudo-eupolemos-724-a724>.

18 See Reed, *Fallen Angels*, especially pp. 51, 115–116, 168 (n. 16), 177–178, 187, 220–221.

including the quranic narratives on Iblīs.[19] An example of this literary tendency is the episode of the negotiation between God and Iblīs, in which the former provides the latter with permission to tempt mankind (Q 7:14–18; 15:36–40; 17:62–65; 38:79–85; cf. Q 34:20–21). This episode has a close parallel in *Jubilees*, where the evil angel Mastema asks and obtains from God that some of the demonic entities at his service be spared to perform the task of tempting the sons of men (10:1–14). One can detect many common traits between the figures of Iblīs and Mastema that, however, are common features of the figure of Satan in biblical and extra-biblical sources. What marks a unique parallel between the two episodes in *Jubilees* and the Qur'ān is the negotiation that the two evil entities undertake with God. In both cases, a wicked angel asks God something concerned with his ability to exercise a negative influence on humans. In both cases, God agrees, an agreement that appears as a real investiture of the devil as a tempter divinely appointed. These are narrative elements that, as far as I was able to find, do not occur in other traditions, about neither the fall of Satan nor the fallen angels.[20] The only real difference between the episodes in *Jubilees* and in the Qur'ān is the moment of sacred history when the scene of the negotiation occurs – at the time around the Flood in *Jubilees*, at the beginning of human history in the Qur'ān. This, however, concurs with the already mentioned process of retro-projection at primordial times of elements from the Enochic myth. The negotiation between Iblīs and God in the Qur'ān appears as one of the many elements from the fallen angels traditions that came to be absorbed by those about the fall of Satan.

Another interesting connection with the fallen angels traditions is the description of Iblīs as one of the demons (*ǧinn*). The connection between Iblīs and the *ǧinn* is explicitly affirmed in Q 18:50, and is implicitly assumed in several quranic passages. The quranic descriptions of Iblīs's nature thus appear to be demonic and angelic at once, for his assignment to the *ǧinn* is paralleled by the implication that he was one of the angels before his rebellion. On this point, the Qur'ān seems to participate in the progressive uncertainty in distinguishing between demons and fallen angels that appears in late antique receptions and evolutions of the fallen angels story.

19 The quranic narratives on Iblīs are closely connected to the traditions about the fall of Satan widespread among Syriac Christians. See Reynolds *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 39–64; Tesei, 'The Fall of Iblīs'; Zellentin, "Trialogical Anthropology'.

20 A scene similar to that in *Jubilees* occurs in the fallen angels tradition preserved in the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*. Here, after the Flood, the demons receive permission to tempt those who do not follow the law of God by an angel (Hom. 18–20). The tradition reported in the *Homilies*, however, lacks the motif of the negotiation between Satan and God.

The twofold angelic and demoniac kind of the quranic Iblīs reflects the confusion that during Late Antiquity surrounded the figures of demons and of the fallen angels.[21]

Worthy of attention is also the use of the term *ǧinn* ('demon') that in quranic narratives is associated to the fallen angels myth. The Arabic *ǧinn* can be compared to the Ge'ez *'agānent*, 'demons', that in *1 Enoch* (19:1) and in *Jubilees* (7:27; 10:1–2) designates the spirit emanating from the fallen angels' bastard offspring. Similarly interesting is a passage by Lactantius, who refers to the myth of the Watchers and states that demons 'took for themselves the name of *genii*, for thus they translate the world *daemonas* into Latin'.[22] This statement is enigmatic, and it is unclear why demons should take for themselves a Latin name to translate the Greek word *daemon*. One may speculate that behind the Latin *genii* of Lactantius's passage there is the Aramaic word *genyā* ('demon'). When put together with the above evidence from the Ge'ez translations of the Enochic texts, this might suggest that Semitic terms related to the Arabic *ǧinn* were used to designate the demons of the fallen angels story. In this case, the quranic use of the word *ǧinn* within the Iblīs narratives would follow a more elaborated literary tradition.

Another quranic narrative somehow connected to the Iblīs' stories, and thus relevant for the present analysis, concerns the demons' (*ǧinn* / *šayāṭīn*) attempts to reach heaven to eavesdrop the divine council's decisions. Parallel versions of this account are found in Q 15:16–18, Q 37:6–10 and Q 72:2–9 (cf. Q 21:32; 41:12; 67:5). The scenes described in these verses are similar to the one in a passage of the *Testament of Solomon*, in which the demon Ornias affirms: 'We demons go up to the firmament of heaven, fly around among the stars, and hear the decisions which issue from God concerning the lives of men' (20:12). Alongside similarities with this passage of the *Testament of Solomon*, more complex literary interactions appear to be at play behind the quranic passages. As Crone observes, the quranic story also includes narrative elements drawn from Iranian lore. Specifically, the motif of demons eventually repelled by heavenly defensive systems parallels Zoroastrian descriptions of good heavenly bodies set against the assaults of the evil forces of Ahriman. Crone suggests that the quranic story reflects the interaction between motifs from the Zoroastrian and the Jewish traditions that took place in Sasanian Iraq. According to her, it is from this same cultural milieu that the names Hārūt, Mārūt, 'Uzayr, and Idrīs entered

21 Tesei, 'The Fall of Iblīs', p. 73.

22 See VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch', pp. 84–85.

the corpus of traditions later included in the Qur'ān.[23] At the same time, Crone rejects the idea proposed by other scholars that the quranic story of demons repulsed from the heavenly spheres also bears Enochic influences.[24]

Crone contends that in the *Testament of Solomon* it is demons, and not fallen angels, who try to reach heaven. However, as noted above, the Qur'ān barely distinguishes demons from fallen angels and rather reflects the common late antique confusions between the two categories of evil beings. Moreover, Crone's claim that the *ǧinn* in Q 72 are extraneous to any Enochic myth does not take into account that a similar interaction of literary traditions about the fallen angels and about Solomon is certified in the Qur'ān, and namely in the story of Hārūt and Mārūt. Furthermore, there is a strong indication that the Qur'ān perceives the story of the *ǧinn's* failed ascension as related to that of Iblīs's fall, which is reminiscent of the myth of the Watchers. In fact, the episode of Iblīs's rebellion is very likely alluded to in Q 72:4, where the *ǧinn* complain, 'the fool among us spoke against God outrage'. This complaint is probably an allusion to the episode of Iblīs's primordial rebellion and successive expulsion from heaven. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the adjective *raǧīm* is used to designate both Iblīs at the moment of his banishment (Q 15:34; 38:77; 3:36; 16:98; 81:25) and the *ǧinn* / *šayāṭīn* who try to ascend to heaven (Q 15:17).[25] *Pace* Crone, these elements suggest that the stories in Q 15:16–18, Q 37:6–10, and Q 72:2–9 should be studied as part of the more general quranic phenomenon that witnesses previous interactions between different narrative traditions about Satan's fall, fallen angels, and Solomon.

The Scrolls of Abraham and Moses

As observed so far, some quranic passages are reminiscent of narrative traditions also present in pseudepigraphical literature. Did the people in the Qur'ān's environment also have knowledge of the texts in which those narratives were found? Did they know about the existence of texts attributed to Enoch, Solomon, or Adam? A case for a positive answer to this question can be made on the basis of the twofold quranic reference, in Q 53:36–37 and Q 87:18–19, to some kind of previous scripture (*ṣuḥuf*,

23 See Crone's commentary in Azaiez and others, *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, 305–312.

24 See Crone's commentary in Azaiez and others, *The Qur'ān Seminar Commentary*, pp. 387–390, *contra* Pregil, Tesei, and Zellentin's commentaries, pp. 392–398.

25 On the meaning of *raǧīm*, see Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 54–64.

'scrolls') given to Abraham and Moses (cf. Q 20:133, where reference is made to the *ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*, 'the previous scrolls'). It is unlikely that the specific case of the 'scrolls of Moses' can describe the Pentateuch, for this is commonly referred to in the Qur'ān as *tawrāt*. Moreover, the concomitant attribution of these scrolls to Abraham may suggest that allusion is meant to another corpus of texts. An intriguing case emerges, and concerns the possible quranic reference to pseudepigraphic works attributed to Abraham and Moses. In addition, this case might imply the Qur'ān's adoption of ideas also expressed in *Jubilees*, like Moses' reception at Mount Sinai of a 'more complete' revelation than the one transmitted in the written Torah, or like Abraham's role as copyist and transmitter of ancient writings composed by his ancestors.[26] What credibility should we accord to this case?

According to Gobillot, the quranic 'scrolls of Moses and Abraham' refer to precise pseudepigrapha attributed to the two patriarchs, namely, a chapter about the testament and death of Moses in the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, and the *Testament of Abraham*.[27] Gobillot argues that these works deal with the same themes that are evoked in the two quranic passages mentioning the scriptures revealed to Moses and Abraham. Specifically, in Q 87:18–19 reference to these scrolls is preceded by the words 'yet you [people] prefer the life of this world, even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting' (16–17). This statement echoes, according to Gobillot, the expression of similar reluctance to abandon this world in favour of the Hereafter as is expressed in the *Testament of Abraham* (1:7; 20:14) and in the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (19:12). In much the same way, the message of Q 53:33–41, according to which redistribution of reward and punishment will accord with individual responsibilities, parallels similar statements in the *Testament of Abraham* (12:12–15). Nevertheless, as Reeves rightly observes, one wonders if the parallels traced by Gobillot establish a clear connection between the quranic passages in question and the pseudepigraphical books attributed to Moses and Abraham.[28] The thematic parallels between these different texts actually appear very general, based on quite common features of Jewish and Christian literature. Furthermore, Reeves also calls for a more cautious reference to the *Testament of Abraham* as possible source for quranic materials, for

26 See Reeves, 'Stalking Jewish Apocrypha', pp. 4–5. I am grateful to the author for sharing with me an unpublished version of his work.

27 Gobillot, 'Apocryphes de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament', p. 58.

28 Reeves, 'Stalking Jewish Apocrypha', p. 5.

material evidence for the existence of this work in pre-Islamic times is very scant.[29]

A more plausible quranic reference to scriptures attributed to Abraham has been recently pointed out by Segovia, who traces interesting parallels between eschatological depictions in Q 56:1–51 and chapters 21–21 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.[30] Specifically, he points out the significant occurrence of the same image in both texts about two groups of people, on the right and on the left, that represents the post-mortem fate of righteous and sinners. While a similar imagery also occurs in the *Acts of John*,[31] the specific way it is used in Q 56:1–51 displays a closer similarity with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which – according to Segovia – provides the only authoritative and extensive parallel to the quranic story. If Segovia's analysis is correct, one may argue that, when referring to the scrolls of Abraham, the Qur'ān means to refer just to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a text that seems to have been known in the Qur'ān's environment. At the same time, however, one may wonder whether such a vague reference was not simply informed by a general awareness of scriptures attributed to the Jewish patriarch.

Q 23:93–103 and 4 Ezra

Another case worth analysing concerns narrative parallels between Q 23:93–102 and some passages in 4 Ezra that, as far as I know, have not received attention in previous scholarship. For the sake of the analysis, before proceeding it is useful to make a brief excursion about the Qur'ān's way of relating to previous sacred texts.

The Qur'ān almost never quotes from the biblical corpus. Few exceptions exist, in which the quranic text closely overlaps biblical or extra-biblical passages.[32] A well-known example is Q 7:40, which adopts the metaphor of the camel (not) passing through the eye of a needle from Mark 10:25. Most often, however, the Qur'ān evokes stories or motifs coming from the biblical tradition. A good example is represented by Q 7:50, where the

29 Reeves, 'Stalking Jewish Apocrypha', pp. 6.

30 Segovia 'Those on the Right'.

31 The reference to the *Acts of John* is made by Segovia who, however, does not provide a specific reference (Segovia 'Those on the Right', p. 207). Probably, the author means to refer to *Acts of John* 98 and 114, where an eschatological division between places (and people), on the right hand, and places, on the left hand, is made.

32 For a recent list of this overlaps see Sinai, *The Qur'ān*, p. 140.

denied request to receive some water that the people in Hell address to the people in Paradise reproduces the scene in Luke 16:24–25 where the rich man asks the poor to bring him some water. This latter case also offers us a good illustration of the creative way in which the Qur'ān deals with biblical materials. A scene from the parable of the rich and the poor in Luke 16:19–31 is extrapolated to elaborate a different afterlife scene, mostly based on elements that are extraneous to the Lucan passage.

The creative attitude of the quranic author also emerges from her/his incorporation in the same surah 7 of elements derived from the two above New Testament passages. Both Mark 10:25 and Luke 16:19–31 elaborate on the theme of richness as an impediment to receive *post mortem* reward. The quranic author can hardly have been unaware of this thematic connection when she/he selected the 'biblical sources' of her/his composition. At the same time, the fact that she/he adopted passages from two different Gospels is far from surprising. Late antique authors, for instance Syriac homilists, commonly blended in the same composition (sometimes in the same verse) references to different scriptural (or para-scriptural) corpora. The quranic author(s) frequently follow(s) this procedure.

Another illustrative case of the Qur'ān's creative use of biblical sources is found in surah 14, and specifically at verses 18 and 24–25. Both passages are reminiscent of Psalm 1. Q 14:18 closely overlaps Psalm 1:4, while Q 14:24–15 parallels Psalm 1:3. It is worth noticing the curious way in which the Qur'ān works with the materials drawn from Psalm 1, which are distributed in reverse order (reference to Psalm 1:4 precedes that to Psalm 1:3) in two different passages. Also noticeably, Q 14:24–25 forms part of a longer parable based on the image of bad and good trees (24–27), which is reminiscent of the parable of the good tree that bears good fruits and of the diseased tree that bears bad fruit in Matt 7:15–20. This points to a complex composition process operated by the quranic author, who has disassembled and reassembled different biblical sources.

With these observations in mind, we can now proceed to the comparative analysis of Q 23:93–103 with a few passages in 4 Ezra. For our purposes, the quranic passage can be divided into three sections: (1) 93–98; (2) 99–100; and (3) 101–103.

(1) The conversation between the believer and God in Q 23:93–98 almost identically replicates the dialogue between Ezra and the angel in 4 Ezra 7:75–77. The similarities between the narrative structure of the two dialogues and their contents are striking. In both cases, request is made that the punishments of sinners in the afterlife be shown. In both case, a supernatural entity agrees to reveal a vision of the eschatological

torments. Noticeably, the two texts also agree on how the narration proceeds. Contrary to what the reader might expect, the eschatological scene is not immediately revealed once the request of the believer is accepted. Before coming to this revelation, another verbal exchange between the supplicant and her/his divine interlocutor takes place. Also in this part of the dialogue, thematic affinities can be observed between the two texts: in the Qur'ān, the believer implores God not to be included among the evildoers; in 4 Ezra the angel tells Ezra not to count himself among the sinners. The small difference in this last segment, i.e. imploration in the Qur'ān v. exhortation in 4 Ezra, can be easily explained through the homiletic purpose of the quranic author, who aims to encourage his audience to dissociate from the unbelievers.

Q 23:93–98

93 Say, 'Lord, if You are going to show me the punishment You have promised them, **94** then Lord, do not include me among the evildoers!' **95** We certainly are able to show you the punishment We have promised them. **96** Repel evil with good – We are well aware of what they attribute to Us – **97** and say, 'Lord, I take refuge with You from the goadings of the evil ones; **98** I seek refuge with you, Lord, so that they may not come near me.'

4 Ezra 7:75–77

75 I answered and said, 'If I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, show this also to thy servant: whether after death, as soon as every one of us yields up his soul, we shall be kept in rest until those times come when thou wilt renew the creation, or whether we shall be tormented at once.' **76** He answered me and said, 'I will show you that also, but do not be associated with those who have shown scorn, nor number yourself among those who are tormented. 77 For you have a treasure of works laid up with the Most High; but it will not be shown to you until the last times.'

(2) Q 23:99–100 displays affinities with some elements of the following passage of 4 Ezra 7, that is, vv. 78–82. The opening sentence in Q 23:99, 'when death comes to one of them', echoes the similar statement in 4 Ezra 7:78: 'When the decisive decree has gone forth from the Most High that a man shall die.' The scene of the sinner who cannot be returned to the world to make amends in the Qur'ān parallels the similar situation in 4 Ezra, where evildoers are also unable to repent after death (82). Admittedly, the parallels are less conspicuous than in the previous case, as the

Qur'ān only partially compares to the passage in 4 Ezra. However, this situation can be attributed to the specific composition of Q 23:99–100 that apparently relates to some of the quranic composition procedures observed above (that is, to the practice of combining together different scriptural elements). In fact, Q 23:99–100 also displays connections with the parable of the rich and the poor in Luke 16:19–31. Specifically, the sinner asking God to be returned to make amends reminds of a similar situation in the Lucan parable, in which the rich begs Abraham to send the poor back to the world to prevent his family from acting wrongly.[33] It is noticeable that the two scriptural passages in Luke 16 and in 4 Ezra 7[34] present thematic and narrative relationships.[35] This situation may have facilitated their association in new composition. In this case, Q 23:99–100 could result from a more complex intertextual network and reveal the interaction of motifs drawn from 4 Ezra 7:78–82, Luke 16:19–31, and related extra-biblical materials.

Q 23:99–100

99 When death comes to one of them, he cries, 'My Lord, let me return **100** so as to make amends for the things I neglected.' Never! This will not go beyond his words: a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.

4 Ezra 7:78–82

78 Now concerning death, the teaching is: When the decisive decree has gone forth from the Most High that a man shall die [...] 82 because they cannot now repent and do good that they may live.

(3) Finally, Q 23:101–103 can be compared to two passages of 4 Ezra, that is, 4 Ezra 3:34 and 7:104–105. The scene in Q 23:101, characterised by the indifference that the dead souls demonstrate toward one another, matches a precise correspondence with the situation in 4 Ezra 7:104–105, where any kind of terrestrial tie is also forgotten at the moment of the Judgement. The quranic sentence *fa-lā ansāba baynahum*, 'the ties between them will be as nothing', is worth attention. The word *ansāb* designates blood relationships and can reflect the tie father-son indicated among others in 4 Ezra 7:104. The image of the eschatological scale at Q 23:102–103 also matches a precise

33 The quranic author also embellishes her/his composition through an eschatological imagery that, during Late Antiquity, was associated with the parable – as is testified in a homily by the sixth-century Syriac poet Narsai. See Tesei, 'The *barzakh* and the Intermediate State of the Dead', pp. 32–36.

34 It should be reminded that 4 Ezra appears as a canonical book in the Peshitta.

35 See Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story*, pp. 138–141.

correspondence with the scene described in 4 Ezra 3:34 that also uses the metaphor of the weight of iniquities measured on a balance.

Q 23:101–103

101 On that Day when the Trumpet is blown, the ties between them will be as nothing and they will not ask about each other: **102** those whose good deeds weigh heavy will be successful, **103** but those whose balance is light will have lost their souls for ever and will stay in Hell.

4 Ezra 7:104–105

The day of judgement is decisive and displays to all the seal of truth. Just as now a father does not send his son, or a son his father, or a master his servant, or a friend his dearest friend, to be ill or sleep or eat or be healed in his stead, **105** So no one shall ever pray for another the, neither shall anyone lay a burden on another; for then everyone shall bear his own righteousness and unrighteousness.

4 Ezra 3:34

Now, therefore, weigh in a balance our iniquities and those inhabitants of the world; and so it will be found which way the turn of the scale will incline.

It thus seems that Q 23:93–103 share both narrative and thematic features with several passages of 4 Ezra. If taken independently from one another, these parallels would appear as general similarities between the two texts. What makes the case particularly intriguing is the concentration in a single quranic passage of elements that can be traced back to a well-defined work. Most noticeably, common elements between 4 Ezra 7 and Q 23 occur in the same narrative order in the two texts. Admittedly, the Qur'ān does not reproduce the entire narrative sequence observable in 4 Ezra 7 from v. 75 onwards (that is, from the point in the text where the first parallel can be observed). Moreover, the Qur'ān seems to 'integrate' narrative materials also found in 4 Ezra 7 with elements that echo other scriptural passages (found in the same 4 Ezra and in Luke 16). However, this situation does not appear to differ from what can be observed elsewhere in the quranic corpus, and can be related to the Qur'ān's composition techniques that I tried to briefly outline above. While caution is still required, Q 23:93–103 might represent a rare case of a long quranic passage presenting textual correspondences with a pseudepigraphical work. If this was the case, it could be argued that

alongside being familiar with themes and motifs of the pseudepigraphical tradition, the quranic author/s might also have had knowledge of some of the actual texts.

Conclusions

From the general (and incomplete) overview that I attempted to provide in this article it appears that stories, motifs, and possibly even books from the corpus of pseudepigraphical literature were known in the social and cultural context(s) from which the Qur'ān emerged. Retracing a history of transmission of pseudepigrapha to the Qur'ān's environment appears a highly problematic task that brings into play more general questions still awaiting an answer. For instance, intertextualities between pseudepigraphical writings and the Qur'ān raise the question about the socio-religious identities of the communities in the environments from which the Arabic scripture emerged. The notorious elusiveness that surrounds the Islamic origins, as well as the unresolved scholarly debate about the processes of canonisation of the quranic corpus, unavoidably complicate the situation. At the present stage of the investigation, determining how traditions from the pseudepigraphical corpus reached the original Qur'ān's cradle is an unsolvable question. At the same time, revealing the literary connections between pseudepigrapha and Qur'ān retraces the legacy of pseudepigrapha in Late Antiquity and enriches the debate about the place of the Qur'ān in the late antique culture. Any future extensive study of pseudepigrapha in the Qur'ān cannot be disjoined from the parallel analysis of how these ancient texts were received by other religious communities during Late Antiquity.

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About the Author

Tommaso Tesei is an independent scholar of the Qur'ān; he is co-director of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar and works too on quranic rhetoric and intertextuality.