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Figures of Ezra

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PEETERS

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III. Future Agents of 4Ezra in Light of First and Second Century Jewish Visionary Experiences

LUCA ARCARI

1. *Introduction*

This chapter considers 4Ezra, and in general the so-called apocalyptic texts, as narratives of concrete visionary experiences or accounts of ‘real’ contacts with the other world. In this sense, apocalyptic texts emerge as veritable mosaics composed of images or segments of traditional images.¹ This ‘re-assembly’ is the product of both a cognitive and a literary process through which visionaries ‘remember’ and/or ‘reconstruct’ their contacts with the other world; in doing so, they attempt to confer authority to what they have experienced under the umbrella of the authoritative ‘tradition’ of their particular socio-cultural contexts. On the basis of such methodological premises, it is evident that a *genre* distinction between Jewish and proto-Christian visionary accounts for the period in question (first-second century AD) cannot exist.

The area of interest I have chosen is that of the so-called ‘future agents’. I use this expression since I believe it perfectly describes the complexity of these figures more than that of Messiah or Messianic figures, inevitably ‘teleological’ in their Christianity-centered purposes. One aspect we have to consider when we talk about ‘future agents’ is that we are dealing with a relevant element of Jewish visionary texts: the veneration of beings that appeared during an experience in contact with the other world. The Jewish veneration scenes of the

¹ On the matter, see L. Arcari, *Visioni del figlio dell'uomo nel Libro delle Parabole e nell'Apocalisse* (Brescia, 2012). Also see the bibliography in P. Jansen, ‘Scriptural Interpretation in Early Jewish Apocalypses’, in J.J. Collins (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford, 2014) 69-84.

Hellenistic-Roman period provide a series of traditional images, veritable ‘tools of utterance’ for what is *per se* ineffable. The re-reading and the subsequent re-consideration of traditional elements of various origins is functional for the cultural realisation of what the seer claims to have seen during his experience. Hence, these can be defined as representations of veritable veneration scenes (with all the characteristics connected to them: elements that imply kingdom and/or power, tributes such as bows, obeisance, celebrations etc.) in the sense that the ways in which the seer ‘says’ and ‘communicates’ what he or other beings in his visions have experienced are traditionally dialectical. In this sense, ‘veneration’ is a term that does not only indicate the tradition through which various visionaries recount their experience of contact with supernatural beings, but it also refers to the dynamic of identification between concrete social agents directly entering (through rituals) the other world and encountering imaginary agents.²

The other aspect I will try to focus on in this analysis concerns the fact that the acts of a visionary remind the reader of different and complex emotional dynamics due to the practical and traditional features they present.³ Despite the traditional nature of the texts, they point out practical, performative and ritual elements at the same time. In this way, emotional dynamics connected to the process of contact with the other world are channeled in traditionally established corporal metaphors.⁴

² More generally, see J. Sørensen, ‘Acts that Work: A Cognitive Approach to Ritual Agency’, *MTSR* 19 (2007) 281-300. On the different ‘traditions’ by which a visionary account can be composed, as well as on the authoritative segments, in and for a specific cultural context, used and repositioned by the visionary storyteller, see the very instructive case of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, as it emerges in the seminal study by J.N. Bremmer, ‘The *Apocalypse of Peter*: Greek or Jewish?’, in J.N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz (eds), *The Apocalypse of Peter* (Leuven, 2003) 1-14, updated in his *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity: Collected Essays I* (Tübingen, 2017) 269-80.

³ The ‘emotional’ and/or ‘individual’ features related to the study of rituality have been the object of a wide scientific debate: for instance, see A. Michaels and C. Wulf (eds), *Emotions in Rituals* (London and New York, 2011); J.P. Hoffmann (ed.), *Understanding Religious Ritual* (London and New York, 2012) and M. Bull and J.P. Mitchell (eds), *Ritual, Performance, and the Senses* (London and New York, 2015). Regarding the ancient world, see C. Ando, *Roman Social Imaginaries* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2015).

⁴ About the importance of the body and of corporal/embodying metaphors in the description of processes of ritualisation, see C. Bell, *Ritual* (Oxford,

The future agents of 4Ezra have been studied in an important article by Michael Stone published in 1968.⁵ One of his points is that in this text the ‘messianic’ topic is not so relevant.⁶ The passages of the text in which it is present are merely a few. If considered in the light of ‘messianic’ Judaism, the overall vision of the passages analysed by Stone cannot lead to any other possible conclusions. However, if we stop considering the concept of ‘messianism’ as an organic set or in an ideological/theological perspective and start focusing on the dynamics of the reconstruction of visionary experiences, we are in a position to stress that the same passages analysed by Stone appear as very relevant regarding the whole visionary account.

I am here following the scheme of analysis proposed by Stone. The first analysed passage is 4Ezra 7.28-9, where we can see the rising, for four hundred years, of ‘my servant, the Messiah’. The second one is 11.37-12.36, where the seer sees ‘something like a lion’ threateningly speaking to the eagle and destroying it after it has reigned.⁷ The third passage is 13.3-13 (and the related explanation in 13.25-52), where ‘something like the figure of a man’ (13.3) appears and is identified with ‘he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages,

2009²). See also the classical volume by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980), where metaphorical associations emerge as connectors of the language with cognitive modalities; consequently, it is through metaphors that narrations are constructed. In my approach, visionary accounts seem to be veritable *storytellings* that shed light on what is at least ‘conceivable’ in a specific socio-cultural system.

⁵ See ‘The Concept of the Messiah in IV Ezra’, in *Religions in Antiquity* (Leiden, 1968) 295-312, reprinted in M.E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha* (Leiden, 1991) 317-32 (I quote from this reprint). The article has been reprinted again in id., *Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Armenian Studies I* (Leuven, 2006) 321-38.

⁶ See Stone, ‘The Concept of the Messiah’, 331f.

⁷ The text explicitly says: ‘And as for the lion whom you saw rousing up out of the forest and roaring and speaking to the eagle and reproving him for his unrighteousness, and as for all his words that you have heard, this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their contemptuous dealings’ (12.31-2). For the English translation, I follow M.E. Stone and M. Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch* (Minneapolis, 2013) 70.

through whom he will deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left' (13.26).⁸ The fourth is 14.9, where there are allusions to the 'servant'. Another passage that is usually assigned a 'messianic' meaning is 9.45-10.1, where there is reference to the dead son of the widow, later revealed to be the heavenly Jerusalem (10.44). It also has been argued that the reference to the death of the widow's son is probably an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem rather than to the death of a super-human being.⁹

From the analysis of the passages considered as 'messianic', Stone has argued that in 4Ezra an eschatological agent will appear at the end of the first era. As it emerges from 12.32 and 13.26, this being is pre-existing but his agency will have a limited duration. Although he will not play a fundamental role in its affirmation, he will act for the final advent of the *eschaton*¹⁰ and this is the reason why he will eventually die (7.29).¹¹ During his limited period of activity, he will favor Israel by demolishing the hostile powers. The text does not mention any explicit reference as to his activities of judgment or salvific actions in an eschatological scenario.

If we shift our attention from the theological to the level of experience, a specific aspect decisively seems to emerge from 4Ezra. The super-human beings perceived during the experience of contact with the other world are conceived on the basis of traditional/ancestral

⁸ Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 74.

⁹ See Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 61. About the vision, see K. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra* (Leiden, 2008) 163-78.

¹⁰ See Stone, 'The Concept of the Messiah', 317f.

¹¹ This element has been considered extremely important by J.H. Charlesworth, 'The Concept of Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha', in *ANRW* II.19.1 (1979) 188-218 at 203. Its absence in Arabic and Armenian versions further confirms the originality, as well as the Jewish character of such a passage (as for the Christian interpolation hypothesis see L. Gry, 'La mort du Messie en IV Esdras, VII, 29', in L.H. Vincent (ed.), *Mémorial Lagrange* [Paris, 1940] 133-39; *contra* see, above all, P. Bogaert, *Apocalypse de Baruch I* [Paris, 1969] 414). Stone also connects this element to the fact that the Messiah is kidnapped (see 'The Concept of the Messiah', 317, n. 3). It has also been argued that an allusion to the death of the Messiah is to be found in *2Baruch* 30.1. If in Charlesworth's opinion we can find allusions to the death of the Messiah also in *2Baruch* (see 'The Concept of Messiah in Pseudepigrapha', 200), in Bogaert's opinion the Syriac text is simply about 'coming back to glory' (see *Apocalypse de Baruch II*, 65).

figures or, more generally, previous authoritative ones.¹² This aspect is intrinsically connected to the fact that the re-interpretation of the experience is mainly made of conceptual schemata as well as culturally and emotionally strengthened mental frameworks. As Gerd Theissen has underlined,

experiences *depend on an interpretation*. Together with a receptive perception, they contain a productive element, that is a pre-structured cognitive interpretation (...). We spontaneously relate the incoming perceivable data to cognitive models and schemata codified in our brain, therefore interpretations are included in every perception: we put together perceivable data with the world as it is interpreted by ourselves. If this connection between perceivable data and familiar models fails, we are faced with fear and irritation in the first place but we are then driven to intensely identify familiar models to experience. Religious experiences are perceptions modeled on religious interpretative models.¹³

This allows us to underline the marked collective or social consequences elicited by the emotional reactions linked to the visionary experience.¹⁴ In this sense, a useful and important aspect of ritual studies in the light of the emotional approach is the one linked to *dysphoric* or *terror rituals*, often connected to altered states of consciousness.¹⁵ According to the experiential approach, contacts with the supernatural based upon a direct vision of the other world represent a solution to possible defections by members of social groups since they rely on

¹² Similar considerations can be found in the cognitive relevance hypothesis of christology examined in depth by I. Czachesz, 'The Transmission of Early Christian Thought: Toward a Cognitive Psychological Model', *SR* 36 (2007) 65-84.

¹³ G. Theissen, *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen* (Gütersloh, 2007) 117 (English translation is mine).

¹⁴ On the matter, see C. Shantz, 'Emotion, Cognition, and Social Change: A Consideration of Galatians 3:28', in I. Czachesz and R. Uro (eds), *Mind, Morality and Magic* (London and New York, 2014) 252-70. See especially the studies by A.R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York, 1994); *The Feeling of What Happen* (New York, 1999); *Looking for Spinoza* (New York, 2003); id. and K. Meyer, 'Behind the Looking Glass', *Nature* 454/10 (2008) 167f.

¹⁵ About *dysphoric* or *terror rituals*, see H. Whitehouse, 'Rites of Terror: Emotion, Metaphor, and Memory in Melanesian Initiation Cults', *J. Royal Anthropol. Inst.* 4 (1996) 703-15 and *Modes of Religiosity* (Walnut Creek, 2004) 166.

their own cognitive processes: the exposure to dysphoric stimuli influences the response to subsequent stimuli, consistently regulating wide-range problems such as access to the groups' resources. Thanks to their lasting effect on individual memories, these rituals imprint a sense of belonging to a limited group of individuals.¹⁶

2. *The Davidic provenance of future agents*

The first aspect on which I will concentrate my attention concerns the Davidic provenance of future agents. The representation of 11.37-12.36 clearly derives from Dan 7 (see 11.39; 12.10-12). The lion, which acts as a counterbalance of the eagle, competes and wins against his destructive enemy. From 11.38 to 11.46, the lion actually acts in a 'judiciary' way, while in 12.31-34 his Davidic nature emerges.

The so-called Davidic nature pertaining to the future agent in 4Ezra has been discussed since the beginning of last century. Box had already noticed the reference to the Davidic line in 12.32,¹⁷ although the correlation between this line and the element of pre-existence was not accepted by scholars. This has often led to consider the Davidic line as a weak element and the pre-existence of the superhuman as an element that was *de facto* incompatible with regality.¹⁸

¹⁶ Not accidentally, many initiation rituals found in ethnographic documentations are dysphoric and take place during development periods, whereas dysphoric rituals that exist in rural communities are mostly connected to small groups subject to high socio-psychological pressures, just as initiates in ancient mystery cults or military organisations: cf. J. Bulbulia *et al.*, 'The Cultural Evolution of Religion', in P.J. Richerson and M.H. Christiansen (eds), *Cultural Evolution* (Cambridge, 2013) 381-404 at 393.

¹⁷ See G.H. Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse* (London, 1912); 'IV Ezra', in R.H. Charles (ed.), *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913) 542-624 and *The Apocalypse of Ezra (II Esdras III-XIV)* (London, 1917).

¹⁸ About this (alleged) incompatibility, see J. Keulers, *Die eschatologische Lehre des vierten Esrabuches* (Freiburg/Br., 1922) and Stone, 'The Concept of the Messiah', 318-9. For instance, starting from this alleged incompatibility, a study by Torrey pointed out the difference between the Davidic element in 4Ezra 13 and the 'son of Efraim' mentioned in 11 and 12: Torrey thought that 4Ezra and 2Baruch referred to the figure of the 'Messiah', son of Efraim rather than to the Davidic descendant: see C.C. Torrey, 'The Messiah Son of Ephraim', *JBL* 66 (1947) 253-77; about the messianic ideas of 2Baruch, see

The attitude of the figure described in 4Ezra 7 is undoubtedly different from what is reported in 11-13: in the first mentioned, the eschatological agent does not play any part in the ending of the era, limiting himself to provide joy to survivors for 400 years; conversely, in other passages, he plays a fundamental role in the end of the era. Stone pointed out that the ‘messianism’ of 4Ezra is mainly of a military nature;¹⁹ for this reason, the Davidic characterisation of eschatological agents appears as not merely ‘cosmetic’ or simply ‘ornamental’. However, in our ancient text’s view, the element of pre-existence is not in contradiction with the Davidic line. For instance, in chapter 7 the future agent is only mentioned *en passant* yet this partly depends on the fact that in this specific session the discourse focuses on the judgment and the future world in which he has little relevance.²⁰ Regarding this last point, I do not agree with Kee who, in order to preserve the Davidic nature of the future figures in 4Ezra, argues that the text does not offer reliable elements for us to consider a pre-existence of the superhuman agent, it only allows us to consider its ‘predestination’ (along the same lines as Jeremiah’s consecration: see Jer 1.5).²¹ Statements such as ‘for my Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him’ (cf. 4Ezra 7.26 and 28; see also 7.33 [referred to the Most High] and 13.32 [referred to the servant of YHWH]) and ‘this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days’ (12.32) seem clear enough in this sense.

The militant, pre-existent Davidic nature of the eschatological agent that emerges from 4Ezra 7.28-9 and 11.37-12.36 has to be understood in the light of the subsequent situation of terror around 70 AD. The destruction of the Temple and its consequences, as well

Charlesworth, ‘The Concept of Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha’, 203, with further bibliography.

¹⁹ See Stone, ‘The Concept of the Messiah’, 322f.

²⁰ About the importance of chapter 7 in 4Ezra’s framework, see E. Bradenburger, *Die Verborgenheit Gottes im Weltgeschehen* (Zürich, 1981) 132-9. About the scarce relevance of the Messiah in the context of the judgement, see A.J. Ferch, ‘The Two Aeons and the Messiah in Pseudo-Philo, 4Esra and 2Baruch’, *AUSS* 15 (1977) 135-51 at 143 and 149; P. Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie der rabbinischen Judentums* (Leiden, 1978) 244-91 at 261-3.

²¹ See H.C. Kee, ‘The Man in Fourth Ezra: Growth of a Tradition’, *SBL.SP* 20 (1981) 199-208 at 207, n. 10.

as the fact that 4Ezra is representative of Israel are elements to be taken in due account. Starting from a socio-cognitive analysis, Esler has fittingly argued that the Jewish revolt of 63–68 AD and the immediately subsequent period constituted a veritable failure in the self-definition of some Jewish groups trying to affirm their own cultural and political hegemony. This must have had deep psychological and emotional implications. The impact of the Roman victory and the subsequent cognitive dissonance led a certain type of Judaism to re-consider the concept of election. Trying to offer a solution to these problems, 4Ezra proposed to all Jews a kind of reconciliation with all the factors of self-definition in the crisis after the Roman intervention.²² Among the strategies implemented by 4Ezra for this purpose, Esler emphasised the eschatology and, at the same time, the Law as tools of self-definition (strategies that in this case Esler defines as introversionist).²³

Although considerations about future agents found in 4Ezra do not show a real operative role in the *eschaton* (as the execution of the final judgment, for example, in the *Book of Parables of Enoch*), these figures mainly operate in the phase prior to the eschatological judgment. For this reason, the roles they play acquire all their relevance in the eschatological context illustrated in this paper. In Esler's opinion, the 'Messiah' of 4Ezra does not own a 'kingdom' but his military function clearly emerges from the allusions to the destruction of the beast (representing the Roman Empire).²⁴ If according to Esler, 4Ezra does not have the intention to trigger a political uprising to destroy Rome,

²² See P.F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds* (London and New York, 1994) 121.

²³ Esler, *The First Christians*. The 'cognitive dissonance' as well as the 'introversionist' models are mentioned by Esler with reference to the studies by Wilson and other studies about the Ringatu community and the Handsome Lake religion, cf. B.R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (London, 1975) 397–402. By 'introversionist' movement, Esler, *The First Christians*, 111 means a movement that was established as a reaction to 'cognitive dissonance attending a failed millennial dream' and 'as an autonomous development among an indigenous people whose culture had been dislocated through contact with a technologically superior civilisation'. I refer to Esler's interpretation also in my book *'Una donna avvolta nel sole...'* (*Apoc 12,1*) (Padua, 2008) 186–225. For a more detailed reading about the problems deriving from internal debates in scribal schools of the first century AD, see Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 227–31.

²⁴ See Esler, *The First Christians*, 122f.

my opinion is that, although not connected to the establishment of a political nomination, the vision of future agents is characterised by an important emotional value. Hence, the allusions to the destruction of Rome have to be understood as storytelling that has a collective meaning highly subversive in regards to the new situation.

Therefore, I believe that the importance of the Davidic line of the Messiah is rather evident in this context since it connects the text to such documents as *Psalms of Salomon* 17 in the attempt to support a group that identifies itself with Israel after the Roman invasion in 63 BC.²⁵ The typical Palestinian localisation of the Davidic salvific agent is an element that has to be explained in the light of the supportive/guiding function (especially for Israel) that 4Ezra invokes for itself.

Stone argued that the explicitly *messianic* terms in 4Ezra are ‘My Servant’ and ‘Messiah’.²⁶ These two words seem to be veritable *termini technici* whereas representations of the lion and the man symbolically allude to the activity of specific future agents.

A different emotional response to the vision of the lion emerges from John’s Revelation, a visionary writing usually dated to a similar period as 4Ezra. In Rev 5.5, the expression ‘lion of Judah’, which recalls Gen 49.9, is strictly associated with the Davidic line from which Jesus was born and the subsequent vision of the slain Lamb (Rev 5.6).²⁷ For this reason, Lupieri assumes an association between the symbol of the ‘lion of Judah’ and the ἀρνίον. The polemical statement further emerges when John talks about the symbol of the Lamb:

John here initiates his polemic with contemporary Jewish ideas and with the unfulfilled hope that the lion of Judah will triumph over the pagan eagle. In a typical instance of the theology of reversal John identifies the lion with the Lamb, and his victory with sacrificial death.²⁸

²⁵ See P. Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period* (London and New York, 2000) 273.

²⁶ See Stone, ‘The Concept of the Messiah’.

²⁷ About the reference to the symbol of the Lamb, see N. Hohnjec, *Das Lamm — τό αρνίον — in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Rome, 1980), with a large bibliography and *status quaestionis*. About Christological symbols in *Revelation*, in particular that of the Lamb, see the study by M.R. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb* (Tübingen, 2005).

²⁸ See E.F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, 2006) 140.

The persistence with which Revelation (3.21 and 22.16) stresses Jesus' 'Davidic' line, especially in the context of the judgment, seems to counterbalance tendencies that were becoming more or less established after the fall of the Temple.

3. *The Man of 4Ezra 13: attempts re-gathering and vindicating Israel*

The figure in 4Ezra 13.3 ff. — 'something like the figure of a man' — seems to be related to the more general function of the text.²⁹ In chapter 13 — especially in the angel's explanation (13.25 ff.) — there is more attention towards the superhuman agent, since a series of his characteristics are revealed in a very detailed way: breath, fire and storm seem to be coming out its mouth. It does not have a sword or another war tool and yet it annihilates the crowd's attack. The angel explains these elements as follows:

Behold, the days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who dwell on the earth. And they shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. And when these things come to pass and the signs occur which I showed you before, then my servant will be revealed, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea. And when all the nations hear his voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare that they have against one another; and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, desiring to come and conquer him. But he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion (13.29-35).

13.37 And he, my servant, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolised by the storm), [...].

13.49 And it will be when he destroys the multitude of the nations that are gathered together, he will defend the people who remain.

²⁹ Although he defends a substantial part of *4Ezra*, starting from a series of structural problems caused by the vision in chapter 13 Stone argues that it is a sort of fossil of a previous vision, despite its re-interpretation and re-reading by the final 'author' of *4Ezra*: cf. M.E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis, 1990) 211 and 398-400. This idea was expressed also by U.B. Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Gütersloh, 1972) 108f.

These elements are mostly modeled on the ones used to describe the function of accusation and annihilation pertaining to the superhuman agent of salvation. Moreover, the link with the term 'servant' in 13.37 stresses the fact that we are dealing with a representation that amplifies and implements characters that have already been seen in action before.

The most important element of the representation in chapter 13 is certainly the reference to the Danielic model, as it emerges from the reference to the sea from where the agent originates (see Dan 7.2) as well as to the one of the clouds that accompany him (clear reminiscence of Aramaic Dan and Theod: see Dan 7.13). Together with these elements, the author mentions another deriving from theophanies of YHWH as a divine warrior.³⁰ The reference to those who melt as wax while listening to the words of man (4Ezra 13.4) derives from texts like Ps 97.5, where YHWH is described in a militant fashion. Also in chapter 13, the eschatological agent has the main function to accuse Israel's enemies (for instance, see the reference to the image of the crowd deriving from Ezek 38-9 in 4Ezra 13.5) and to judge them. Yet, together with these functions, it also has that of punishing those who oppressed Israel (see 13.49); therefore, there is no reason to believe that the Davidic mention of the eschatological agent is not relevant. Instead, the presence of the term 'servant' seems to suggest a similar association, having considered that the term is often associated with 'messiah' in other texts (see 12.32; 7.28-9), being the name given to the Davidic heir in 12.32.

Many scholars have argued that in 4Ezra there is an allusion to the Son of Man as it is found in the *Book of Parables of Enoch*, although in the form of a sort of 'fossil'.³¹ Despite some undeniable similarities

³⁰ See Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn*, 118-22, who especially focuses on the influence deriving from Is 11.4. Hence he does not believe that there are real connections between the divine avenger and the man but only between the latter and the cosmic savior; differently, Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 212.

³¹ For instance, Charlesworth, 'The Concept of Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha', 202-03; T.B. Slater, 'One Like a Son of Man in First-Century CE Judaism', *NTS* 41 (1995) 183-98 at 195-6 and *Christ and Community* (Sheffield, 1999) 80-81 (Slater talks about common traditions in *1 Enoch* and in 4Ezra; the fact that the text of 4Ezra only used the term 'man' is not even mentioned). As for a *status quaestionis*, see Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 185-95.

in the representation, as well as some parallels in the two texts, mainly due to the common Danielic reference and the allusion to traditional models, in my opinion this thesis is hardly supportable for two reasons: linguistic (and/or textual) reasons; and content-related-literary reasons. The first derives from some considerations about both Latin and Syriac versions. The first versions only have the term 'man', hence the Latin translator dealt with a text which exclusively referred to a 'man' and not to the 'Son of Man'. We do not know the original language in which 4Ezra was written (even though it is clear that it is a Semitic language).³² However, this does not mean that the Latin text, probably translated from Greek if not from the original Semitic version, was based upon a text that did not mention the expression 'Son of Man' (which is instead found in the *Vulgata* in the corresponding form of *filius hominis*: see Dan 7.13).³³ As for the Syriac text, the question is more complex. This version is preserved in a single manuscript, the B. 21 Inf. in Milan's Ambrosiana. It contains the Bible and it is dated between the sixth and seventh century AD. The fact that the Syriac version can be exclusively found in a single manuscript is problematic, even though it can be better understood if read through the Arabic version.

³² See *status quaestionis* in Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 207-13.

³³ In this context, the *Sangermanensis* manuscript (eleventh century AD) is extremely important. This text does not show any variations with respect to the passage in question, despite the voluntary exclusion of the sheet containing 4Ezra 7.36-106 due to ideological reasons (probably deriving from Jerome's polemical statements in *Contra Vigilantium* 100.7): it was probably the passage harshly criticised by Jerome that led the unknown scribe to erase the section about the impossibility to intercede from the dead. Despite this fact, the passage in which the term 'man' occurs has not been 'amended' in concordance with the *Vulgata* formula *filius hominis* in the attempt to lead the Jewish text towards a Christian 'legibility'. This means that the word mentioned in the Latin text is that of 'man', the same that can be found in the 'archetype' of the *Sangermanensis* codex. On the matter, see R.L. Bensly, *The Missing Fragment of the Latin Translation of the Fourth Book of Ezra* (Cambridge, 1875). We are probably improperly talking about an archetype of the *Sangermanensis* codex by referring to the text it has been copied from and the manuscripts derived from ϕ . As for the *stemma codicum* of 4Ezra, see the classic work by L. Gry, *Les dires prophétiques d'Esdras I* (Paris, 1938) xiii, depending on D. De Bruyne, 'Un manuscrit complet du IVe livre d'Esdras', *RevBén* 24 (1907) 254-57 and 'Quelques nouveaux documents pour la critique textuelle de l'Apocalypse d'Esdras', *RevBén* 32 (1920) 43-47.

In manuscript B. 21, published by Ceriani in 1868,³⁴ and re-produced by him in 1883,³⁵ we can find the term *barnašâ* which literally renders the Aramaic ‘son of man’ whereas in Syriac literature it is used to indicate ‘the/a man’.³⁶ Starting from this version, some scholars argue that in the original Semitic one the expression ‘son of man’ was to be found. And yet, if we consider this thesis, it is difficult to explain the presence of the word ‘man’ in the Latin version, whereas if we start from a previous term, that is, man (*’adam?*) both the Latin and the Syriac version can be better explained.³⁷

Having underlined that it is philologically more convenient to accept that the original Semitic version used the term ‘man’, this term can be then explained also in the light of the emotional context emerging from 4Ezra. Stone has properly argued that the image of man counterbalances that of the ‘lion’ in 4Ezra 12. What is more, the re-reading of the Danielic text has been deemed to be the main reason why the term ‘man’ is used instead of the expression ‘son of man’.³⁸ Hence, we are probably dealing with a regal and Davidic re-reading of the Danielic text. In my opinion, it is this element that inevitably leads the reader to

³⁴ See *Monumenta Sacra et Profana opera Collegii Doctorum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae* V.1 (Milan, 1868) 41-111.

³⁵ See *Translatio Syra Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere VI, photolitografice edita curante et adnotante Sac. Obl. Antonio Maria Ceriani. Tomus II, pars IV* (Milan, 1883) 267r. ff.

³⁶ See the entries in J.R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1879-1901), with J.P. Margoliouth’s *Supplement* (Oxford, 1927); *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1903); C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle, 1928², repr. Hildesheim, 1966). To indicate ‘the man’, the Syriac also has the term *gabrâ*.

³⁷ M.P. Casey, *Son of Man* (London, 1979) 126-9 suggests a distinction. Based on the Latin and the Syriac translation, he believes that the terms used in the vision (13.3, 5, 12) refer to the Greek ἄνθρωπος and the Hebrew *ben-’adam*, whereas in the interpretation (13.25, 32, 51) the terminology merely mirrors the Greek ἀνὴρ and the Hebrew *’iš*, referring to Is 11.4. In Casey’s opinion, this influence suggests a confluence of Messianic ideas with those concerning the cosmic Saviour (see also Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn*, 118-22). Recently, Casey’s stance is also supported by Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 186-87, n. 68.

³⁸ In this sense, Chialà has a point when he talks about ‘echoing’ and ‘re-contextualisation’: see S. Chialà, *Libro delle Parabole di Enoc* (Brescia, 1997) 332f.

disregard any correlation with the individual figure of the Son of Man mentioned in the *Book of Parables of Enoch*.

The most important function of the Son of Man in this text is the one in the context of the judgment and the *eschaton* itself. This dimension seems to be implied in 4Ezra as well; but, according to a homogeneous reading of the text,³⁹ it emerges that the agent described in the sixth vision (chapter 13) does not have a judging function on an eschatological level; rather it only has a 'vindictive' function in the name of the people which oppressed Israel in a given historical time.⁴⁰ Therefore, this has to be considered in the light of the general reflection on the Davidic line as it is previously stated in the text, that is, as the product of the re-proposition of a non-ordinary experience of contact with the other world having the specific social function to re-unite a portion of Israel after the catastrophic events in AD 70.⁴¹

4. *Conclusions*

A persistent tradition of studies has often underestimated the fact that many texts from the ancient world stem from specific experiences of contact with the other world. Although it is clear that 'the ancient Mediterranean world was frequently visited by gods appearing in men's visions and dreams as well as leaving signs on steles and various writing materials, bodies and natural phenomena',⁴² the 'canonical' dimension — both in literary as well as in a religious sense — of many of these accounts has prevented scholars from approaching such texts as actual first-person accounts of experiences of contact with the 'other' world.

The approach which has received major consideration up to this day is certainly the literary one. As Coleen Shantz pointed out in a recent paper, the experience — in the religious sense of the term — of people who produced these texts was believed to be a kind of 'black box': authors' contexts and texts produced by them could be described,

³⁹ The problem of a possible pre-existence of chapter 13 is brilliantly discussed in Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 22-23, 211-12, 399-400; see also id., *Features of the Eschatology of IV Ezra* (Atlanta, 1989) 122-25.

⁴⁰ See Bogaert, *Apocalypse Syriaque de Baruch I*, 414 and Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie*, 261-63.

⁴¹ On this matter, see Chialà, *Libro delle Parabole di Enoc*, 333.

⁴² D. Tripaldi, *Apocalisse di Giovanni* (Rome, 2012) 12 (English translation is mine).

whereas a description of processes by which contexts were assumed and transformed by texts could not be given. The starting point of such a heuristic and classifying tendency was the necessity to preserve the canonical dimension of the so-called 'Old-Testament' prophecies as well as of the Neo-Testamentary Apocalypse of John. The 'canonical' dimension of these texts entailed the necessity to create a literary (often also ideological and social) platform on which the intrinsic superiority of the authoritative (in a religious sense) texts was to stand out. The first path taken by exegesis — especially by the Protestant one — was the creation of an 'apocalyptic' literary *genre* belonging to a Jewish context, antecedent and/or coeval to the last written work accepted in the Neo-Testamentary canon. It was assumed that such a *genre* was later ideologically and formally re-formulated in the light of a pre-supposed Christian *proprium*. The other path taken was that of prophecy. Clearly, the separation of the concept of apocalyptic literature from that of prophecy, according to which the former constituted a degeneration of the latter, was instrumental to the linkage of the last text of the Christian Bible to the Old-Testament prophecy.

New approaches to religious experience benefit from the renewal in studies about the ancient religious facts. They likewise take advantage of cognitivism-related studies of ordinary contacts with the 'other' world and selective memory, which allow a reconstruction of the participant's 'visionary' experience. Also, these approaches benefit from socio-anthropological studies about authority and dialectics between the group and a 'visionary' actor with respect to his/her authoritative discourse.

As regards the topic of future agents in the visionary experience narrated in 4Ezra, an experiential approach allows us to attentively consider a question on which the intra-textual method as applied to the analysis of 4Ezra inasmuch a 'finished textual product' has run aground. As we early mentioned, the attitude of the figure described in 4Ezra 7 is undoubtedly different from what is reported in 11-13: in the first mention, the 'eschatological' agent does not play any part in the ending of the era; conversely, in other passages, he plays a fundamental role in the end of the era. As we have seen, in chapter 7 the eschatological agent is only mentioned *en passant* but this partly depends on the fact that in this specific session the discourse focuses on the judgment and the future world in which he has little relevance. It emerges as a kind of re-structuration of the visionary experience in the name of a functional and strictly situational use.

In light of the experiential approach, the necessity emerges to re-define the textual nature of the visionary account in the light of (re-)narrations of experiences of contact with the other world. It becomes clear that considering the text as a mere 'pre-arranged' literary and rigid 'text' would inevitably backdate a much later situation to the period in which 4Ezra was presumably composed. I prefer to consider texts like 4Ezra as *living traditions* expressing a fluidity connected to visionary practices concerning transmissions of memories and thus, in this sense, a means of production of discourses and written narrations. Such an aspect emerges, not by chance, also in the different textual and linguistic transmissions thanks to which 4Ezra survived (the so-called different recensions and/or 'Christian' interpolations).