

Seth A. Bledsoe

Ahiqar the “Patriarch”: Tobit’s Interpretation of the Wisdom of Ahiqar through a Torahizing Lens

1 Introduction: Limitations & Strategies

In a volume on “Wisdom and Torah,” an essay on Ahiqar may seem out of place. While the famous sage’s connection with a sapiential tradition hardly raises eyebrows, few would consider Ahiqar as sufficiently “Jewish” to elicit any consideration of a connection to Torah. The Book of Tobit disagrees. Ahiqar features prominently in the Book of Tobit, but, even more, Tobit makes it abundantly clear that Ahiqar is Jewish. Tobit names Ahiqar ἐξάδελφός μου και ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας μου “my nephew and among my close relatives.”¹ Yet for some interpreters, this supposed “Aramean” sage could hardly be Jewish and, as one prominent commentary says of Tobit, such a designation simply “goes too far.”²

1 The text cited here is based on Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus (= GII); GI lacks και ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας μου; cf. 1:21 where in both ms. traditions Tobit calls Ahiqar τὸν Αναηλ υἱὸν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ μου “the son of my brother Anael (cf. 4Q196 2 5 בר ענאל אחי). The manuscript tradition for Tobit is quite complicated, with two (or three) major text traditions in Greek recognized (GI and GII), some fragmentary manuscripts from Qumran in both Aramaic (4Q196–199) and Hebrew (4Q200), as well as the oft important Latin, Syriac, and other translational recensions. For this essay I use the GII or “long” version as the base text, although with a close eye to both the Qumran evidence and GI (the so-called “short” version). In particular, it should be noted that the preponderance of GII text-types (including Sinaiticus) lacks an important section for this study, namely Tobit’s first instructional speech to Tobias 4:7–19. However, Francis Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions in the Book of Tobit*, DCLS 12 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 49–53, has recently made a compelling case for including this section, even when using the GII as the base text – and, notably, this has been standard practice anyway for many modern translations, including NRSV. Citations of the English translation of Tobit follow that of the NRSV, though I make occasional emendations to translation when highlighting a particular aspect; for the Greek text I generally rely on Rahlfs’s edition of the LXX unless otherwise citing an alternate reading; for the Aramaic and Hebrew I look to the editions by Joseph Fitzmyer, DJD 19, 1–76 and Michaela Hallermayer, *Text und Überlieferung des Buches Tobit*, DCLS 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008). For a recent, clear outline and description of the various texts and text-types of Tobit, see Naomi S. S. Jacobs, *Delicious Prose: Reading the Tale of Tobit with Food and Drink*, JSJSup 188 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 16–21.

2 Joseph Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, CEJL (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 32, whose comment should be read in context: “There is good reason to consider Ahiqar a historical person and a Gentile, but to imply

Seth A. Bledsoe, Radboud University, Netherlands

Of course, the uncomfortableness with seeing Ahiqar as Jewish lies squarely with *our* (= the modern scholar's) perspective. Nothing in the Book of Tobit suggests that this is a bold or contentious claim. Why, then, is it problematic that Ahiqar is Jewish and, secondly, what might be the result of taking Ahiqar's Jewishness at face value? For the first question, the issue has to do with the way scholars categorize ancient literature and the way such categories affect our efforts at redescription. For one set of texts, it is their later trajectory that has been and continues to be decisive for their categorization. Those texts which eventually become biblical" or "canonical" rest comfortably in discussions about Jewish (or Israelite) literary production, with little to no need for qualification. For much of the rest of ancient literature, Ahiqar included, texts are assigned by scholars to a particular culture and category of literature based on a hypothesized *original* provenance and date. Even if there is some debate about the origins, the implications for arriving at the "proper" designation are clear: once this formative context is identified it becomes determinative for how scholars interpret both the textual evidence itself as well as its interpretive "afterlife." A given text, once adequately put through the historical-critical interpretive machine, is thus assigned a "fundamental identity" and any subsequent vestige or recension is merely secondary.³

that he was son of a Jewish ἀδελφός *goes too far*" (emphasis added). One might ask Fitzmyer: too far for whom? It certainly does not seem to be the case for Tobit or his audience. In fact, Fitzmyer's passing suggestion that Ahiqar was "a historical person" seems more unwarranted than his apparent Jewishness, at least when it comes to what such a statement means in relation to a commentary on Tobit. Of course, the problem here has to do with framing and perspective. The author of Tobit and his audience might very well have considered Ahiqar to be a "real" historical person (or not) and Jewish (or not), just like any number of Second Temple period audiences may (or may not) have considered the famous figures of their stories as historical. Fitzmyer has unfortunately not sufficiently demarcated his methodological point of view from that of Tobit's. The book of Tobit is *not* a reliable historical source for making any claim about Ahiqar's "real" existence; however, Tobit very much *can* be read as a reliable historical source for what a given Jewish audience of the late Second Temple period might have *thought* or *imagined* to be true about the persona "Ahiqar." In this case, Tobit clues us into a context within which Ahiqar very clearly could be and seemingly "is" Jewish.

3 Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 96. Part of the problem, according to Mroczek (pp. 5–11), has to do with the very metaphors scholars continue to use – or, in some respects, the lack of recognition that such are even metaphors – when undertaking (re)descriptive analysis. The predominance of "bookish categories," including "author" and "book," presumes a "bibliographic temper," which for the modern reader conjures up notions of "original," "completeness," and "singularity." Hence the metaphor employed here of "afterlife," which gestures toward a text's "real" life in its original context. This is the presumption that lies behind statements like that of Fitzmyer's (see note above), for when he says "too far" he means that Tobit, in naming Ahiqar "Jewish," has diverged "too far" from what (scholars think) "Ahiqar" *really* was. In Fitzmyer's view Ahiqar was "secular folklore" (*Tobit*, 36–37).

For Ahiqar, there has been some debate on establishing its supposed identity, but a relative consensus has landed on a 6th or possibly 7th c. BCE Aramean context.⁴ Regardless of the precise provenance, since the discovery of the 5th c. BCE Elephantine fragments of Ahiqar, there has been a near unanimity among scholars that Ahiqar is most certainly *not* Jewish.⁵ He is Aramean, a foreigner and a pagan.

This conclusion stands at odds with the world of Tobit’s narrative, wherein Ahiqar has συγγένεια “kinship ties” or, more rigidly, is “of the same genealogy” with Tobit. Indeed, in attempting to answer the second question above, this essay looks to Tobit’s literary imagination and, to some extent, its presumed ancient context, particularly as it relates to how the narrative configures “familial,” i.e., Jewish, identity. In this paper, therefore, I attempt to offer a re-reading of Ahiqar in Tobit that takes quite seriously its claim that Ahiqar is Jewish. In doing so, it becomes clear that for Tobit’s supposed Second Temple audience Ahiqar functions not only as a paragon of wisdom but at the same time as an exemplary Jewish ancestor or “patriarch.”

To be clear, I am not using “patriarch” in the strictest sense here, i.e., as ‘progenitor’ of a people group, rather the term is applied here to signify that, for the presumed readership of Tobit, Ahiqar stands in the same category of well-known and exemplary ancestors as do the other figures named in the book, including the patriarch Abraham. That such a category or way of thinking about the past had significance for Tobit’s audience is evident not only in his several direct and indirect allusions to such figures, but may also be supposed by considering the near contemporary text of Ben Sira. Like Tobit, the author of this 2nd c. BCE wisdom text turns to “famous men and our ancestors” (44:1; ἄνδρας ἐνδόξους καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν) as embodiments of wisdom and exemplars of the ethical values espoused throughout his work, whom the presumed audience – literarily configured in both texts as the “son” or “pupil” of the sage – ought to imitate. Ben Sira draws a seamless line from the “real” patriarchs (according to the scholarly use of the term) of Genesis⁶

4 The situation is a bit more complicated since most scholars, when referring to the composition of Ahiqar, treat the narrative and sayings separately. The 7th/6th c. date refers to the production of the story and possibly also the integration of the wisdom instructions. Nevertheless, even most scholars who assign such a date still acknowledge that the story and sayings of Ahiqar underwent significant development in subsequent eras. For a detailed summary of these issues, see Seth A. Bledsoe, *The Wisdom of the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar: Unravelling a Discourse of Uncertainty and Distress*, JSJSup199 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 37–52.

5 Ironically, the Aramaic fragments of Ahiqar were found alongside documents that largely belonged or were directly related to members of a Jewish/Yehudean community resident at Elephantine.

6 Of particular interest is that Ben Sira begins with Enoch, followed by Noah and then the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then moves on to Moses, skipping Joseph. In Tobit 4:12

all the way through the monarchic and exilic period up to Ben Sira's "present day" with the high priest Simon.⁷ Prophets, kings, judges, and others, the sage names all of them as "our ancestors (= patriarchs)." Importantly, Ben Sira's presentation of these figures, like Tobit's, are not always simple, straightforward allusions based on the biblical texts. They instead reflect *interpretive* summaries that suggest a robust discursive tradition around these "ancestors" that extend beyond the bounds of the texts that later are dubbed "canonical."

For Tobit, the "ancestors" and the establishing of kinship ties with both past and present characters is a crucial factor for the plot and ethic of the narrative, as many interpreters of the work have demonstrated. Ahiqar's role in this respect, however, has not been sufficiently appreciated, and his "Jewishness" is largely treated as exceptional for Tobit to the point that it is either dismissed outright or simply ignored as insignificant for understanding Tobit's literary and cultural milieu. In contrast, this essay illustrates how Ahiqar functions in much the same way as the other "patriarchs" in the narrative. To have such a prominent role one must imagine a context where Ahiqar was considered "Jewish." This essay, therefore, considers what significance this might have, not only for our internal reading of Tobit, but also the ripple effect for seeing Tobit as part of a larger Aramaic literary milieu.

In short, this essay argues that Tobit has appropriated and reinterpreted the "wisdom" of Ahiqar through a Torahizing lens by casting the sage as one whose actions are emblematic of Torah-faithfulness, and in so doing likens the wise sage to the Patriarchs. To accomplish this task, after a brief discussion of the theoretical framing, I begin with some background on Ahiqar, focusing especially on its textual history and attestation in antiquity such that one might speak of an "Ahiqar discourse," in which Tobit's "Ahiqar" takes part. The next section highlights the key themes and ethical features in the Book of Tobit, specifically as they evoke the concepts of "wisdom" and "Torah." With Tobit's literary and conceptual context in mind, I then turn to an analysis of Ahiqar in Tobit, focusing not only on the specific passages in which the sage features, but also considering the thematic and rhetorical features evident in the narrative that might reflect upon the "Ahiqar discourse." A final section summarizes Ahiqar's role as "patriarch" in Tobit and offers

Enoch is not mentioned, but Tobit does begin, oddly, with Noah (see comments below), names the three patriarchs but, like Ben Sira, does not mention Joseph. Note, though, Ben Sira does eventually mention Joseph, alongside others from Genesis (Shem, Seth, Enosh, Adam, Enoch) in the small section (49:14–16) that interrupts the otherwise generally chronological survey.

7 For a brief discussion on the dating and context of Ben Sira with respect to Simon (II), see Seth A. Bledsoe, "Ben Sira," *Cambridge Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Katharine Dell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 261–82, esp. 262–63.

some further reflection on how this reading can contribute to a broader discussion among scholars of Second Temple period Judaism about how we conceptualize and frame discussions of Jewish identity and literary production.

2 “Wisdom” and “Torah”: A Brief Note on Concepts

In using inverted commas for “Torah” and “wisdom” this essay means to signal that that which is under discussion is not strictly in reference to an object or text.⁸ With respect to “Torah,” in addition to the generally agreed upon instability and plurality of Torah-as-written text at this stage – with respect to transmission, scribal/communal idiosyncrasies, or ongoing redactional activity – and even beyond the secondary understandings in ancient discourses that anchor their respective imaginaries to such a “text” through descriptors like “exegetical” or “rewritten,” this essay follows a few scholars who have sought to reframe “Torah” in such a way that it does *not* constitute a fixed entity but rather, in David Lambert’s words, “a series of particular constructions deeply embedded in specific communal contexts, particular reading moments, that happened to attain a degree of staying power, objective reality, without ever escaping from their contingent, historical subjective quality.”⁹ In other words, in Tobit, as well as throughout the Second Temple period, “Torah” signifies “something more inclusive than the written text of the Torah, and roughly equivalent to ‘normative Jewish tradition’ *as a given author understood it.*”¹⁰ “Torah” is indicative of a type of discourse, one that may (or may not) have a “text” as a symbolic referent, but functionally speaking was a metaphor for asserting Jewish identity and practice, often in a context where such assertions were continuously being contested, reconfigured, and reimagined to suit the needs of a specific audience. What we are analyzing, then, is not Tobit and Pentateuch,¹¹ but instead Tobit’s engagement with a much broader, dynamic discourse of “Torah” as

8 See David Lambert, “*Tôrâ* as Mode of Conveyance: The Problem with ‘Teaching’ and ‘Law,’” in *Torah: Functions Meanings, and Diverse Manifestations in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. William M. Schniedewind, Jason M. Zurawski, and Gabriele Boccaccini, EJL 56 (Atlanta: SBL, 2021), 61–80, esp. 64–66.

9 Lambert, “*Tôrâ* as Mode,” 65–66.

10 John J. Collins, “The Judaism of the Book of Tobit,” in *The Book of Tobit: Text, Tradition, Theology*, ed. Géza Xeravits and József Zsengellér, JSJSup 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 23–40, at 34 (emphasis added).

11 I use the term Pentateuch here, and elsewhere, when referring to the written text that makes up the first five books of the Bible and thus to distinguish it from “Torah.”

a contested and contestable aspect of conceptualizing, reinscribing, and renegotiating what it means to be “Jewish” for a given community.

A related approach determines the way in which this essay employs the term “wisdom,” although here it is even more explicitly used as a second-level description. Dozens of recent studies over the past decade or so have rehashed a long-standing argument about whether such a term is appropriate for categorizing and describing a variable set of ancient literature.¹² For me, despite the uproar, I still find heuristic value in continuing to use “wisdom” as an operative category, at least so long as one acknowledges how and why such a category is being used. At times, for instance, it is convenient to use the related term “wisdom literature” as a means to refer to a (variable) set of texts identified by scholars to have a demonstrable affinity with one another in terms of form, content, and function. This may be understood as a reference to a “genre,” and even one carefully conceptualized according to a model of family resemblance – although in practice the book of Proverbs tends to stand as the central barometer against which other potential candidates are adjudged.¹³ For the most part, though, I employ the term “wisdom” in this essay as a way of pointing to a type of discourse typified by paraenetic and/or noetic impulses. When describing a particular text, passage, literary aspect, theme, or structure as “wisdom,” this is in reference to a rhetorical and ethical posturing, one that seeks to inculcate a set of values, typically by drawing on a body of knowledge, whether received or learned, about the cosmos and its workings. How such a posturing is identified could be on formal, thematic, or functional grounds, or some combination thereof. In any case, “wisdom” signifies a communicative act.¹⁴ How “wisdom” functions as an interpretive category for the book of Tobit specifically will be outlined in the discussion below.

¹² See, e.g., Mark R. Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Perspectives in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, AIL (Atlanta: SBL), 2015 and Will Kynes, *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature”: The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹³ See the brief discussion and bibliography in Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. eidem (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 1–10, esp. 2–5.

¹⁴ Of course, a third use of the term is in reference to a specific lexeme in Hebrew (חכמה), Aramaic (חכמא), or Greek (σοφία). It will be clear when and if such a usage is being made.

3 Ahiqar: Text, Legacy, and Discourse

Ahiqar is a legendary figure, known throughout the ancient Mediterranean world as early as the latter half of the first millennium BCE and widely attested in subsequent centuries among a variety of sources and contexts. Ahiqar is associated with the Neo-Assyrian court, specifically the kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, for whom he is depicted as a prominent advisor. In most cases, Ahiqar’s fame rests on two aspects: (1) he was considered to be *inordinately wise*, usually credited with making several proverbial statements; (2) he *suffered unjustly*, through betrayal by his successor and kinsman and sentenced to death by the king, but is ultimately vindicated and restored to his position, usually through the assistance of another court official. Both of these aspects seem to feature in Tobit’s portrayal of Ahiqar, though to varying degrees.

3.1 Ahiqar in Text and Tradition

Like much of ancient literature the most prolific material evidence for Ahiqar comes from medieval manuscript traditions. Dozens of medieval and early modern manuscripts in several languages – Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Old Slavonic, Ethiopic, inter alia – have been preserved, although only a few of these have been published.¹⁵ A passing glance suggests that, for the most part, the broad strokes of the story’s structure and character are the same, and most also include a set of proverbial instructions. Yet, careful comparison of even the few published editions makes it clear that there are many differences in detail among the various witnesses.

There are also a number of ancient witnesses. The most significant are the several papyrus fragments from Elephantine, dated generally to the late 5th c. BCE. The Elephantine papyri attest to at least two “versions” of Ahiqar, though one of which is an erased (in antiquity) text and incomplete.¹⁶ The main version is also

¹⁵ For some of the editions, though over a century-old translations, see F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Story of Ahiqar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

¹⁶ See James D. Moore, “Ahiqariana”: New Readings of Berlin P. 13446 and Developments in Ahiqar Research,” in *Elephantine in Context: Studies on the History, Religion and Literature of the Judeans in Persian Period Egypt*, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Bernd U. Schipper (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 237–64, esp. 253–57, who suggests a possible third “version.” I only cautiously use the word “version” here given that the erased text and the errant (?) incipit are clearly incomplete. That is, in their ancient context, the scribe appears to have stopped and thus one cannot accurately speak of a “version” but rather an abbreviated extract.

quite fragmentary, but nevertheless a total of five columns of narrative and nine columns of instructions are preserved, while it is estimated that at least a further seven or more entire columns of text are entirely missing.¹⁷ Translation and interpretation of the manuscript are challenging as a result of the poor condition of the fragments. Still, one can get some sense of the contours of the text, including the themes and concerns both in the narrative and sayings.

According to the Elephantine text, Ahiqar is a wise and skillful scribe in the court of Sennacherib. After the death of the king and the succession by his son Esarhaddon, Ahiqar begins to contemplate his own old age and, importantly, his lack of an heir. He then decides to adopt the “son of his sister” Nadan and train him as his successor. The Aramaic story is muddled here but Ahiqar apparently leaves court, having retired to his country estate. Immediately after his departure Nadan betrays his uncle, accusing him of some treason against the crown. Esarhaddon promptly sentences Ahiqar to death. When the executioner, named Nabusumiskun, arrives at Ahiqar’s estate, the wise old sage fears for his life and pleads with Nabusumiskun to save him. The basis for Ahiqar’s argument is to remind Nabusumiskun that Ahiqar had once saved him from a similar unjust death-sentence. Ahiqar tells the would-be executioner that he once “supported [Nabusumiskun], like a person does for his kinsman (אִחָא) . . . and now, just as I have done for you, so also do for me!”¹⁸ Nabusumiskun is convinced. He persuades his fellow-executioners to save Ahiqar; they execute a סַרְיָס (“eunuch-slave”) instead to show the king, and Nabusumiskun hides Ahiqar in his house. At this point, the Aramaic narrative breaks off. The remaining extant columns are comprised of instructional sayings, employing several forms (exhortation, prohibition, and fables are prominent) and covering a wide variety of topics (e.g., discretion in speech, discipline of children, financial advice).¹⁹

In addition to the Elephantine Aramaic texts, at least two other ancient witnesses are extant, both in translation. There are several Demotic fragments of Ahiqar, dated to either the early Roman or late Ptolemaic-era Egypt. Additionally, the Greek Aesop romance contains what is typically considered to be direct adaptation of the Ahiqar story, though it is Aesop who endures the tribulations and recites proverbial wisdom, and the setting has been changed to Babylon.

Beyond the ancient and medieval witnesses, there are several secondary attestations to Ahiqar among ancient sources. A 2nd c. BCE cuneiform tablet from Uruk

¹⁷ For brief discussion of the condition of the manuscript and its history of publication see Seth A. Bledsoe, “Ahiqar and Other Legendary Sages,” in Adams and Goff, *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, 289–309, esp. 290–91.

¹⁸ TAD C1.1.48–52 (translation is my own).

¹⁹ See Bledsoe, “Ahiqar and Other,” 296–303 for a survey of the prominent themes and topics of the Aramaic Ahiqar text.

includes Ahiqar in its list of famous legendary sages, identifying him as one of the *ummānu* “court scholars” of Esarhaddon. Strabo, in a section of his *Geographica* discussing Moses and his successors, likens them to other famous “prophets . . . that promulgated to us ordinances and amendments from the gods” and includes in this list one “Achaecarus” (LCL 241:288–89). Clement (*Strom.* 1.15.69) tells of Democritus who appropriated a “stele of Ahiqar,” which he classifies as an example of “Babylonian ethical discourses.” In his “Life of Theophrastus,” Diogenes Laertius lists the philosopher’s rather prolific set of writings and mentions a book title Ἀκίχαρος (*Lives*, 5.2.50).

Additionally, several scholars have suggested that, like with Tobit, Ahiqar was a source that later texts either borrowed from or were modeled on. Michael Fox, for example, citing numerous close parallels and distinctive features between the two sets of proverbial instructions, has suggested that the compilers of Proverbs “knew the book of Ahiqar.”²⁰ As noted, Aesop’s romance, if not a direct borrowing, was certainly inspired by Ahiqar’s story, and some have said the same about the Demotic Instruction of Ankhsheshonqe. Other supposed intertextual connections have been proposed over the years, although admittedly establishing direct lines of dependence are usually tenuous.²¹ This is not the case, of course, for Tobit, where Ahiqar is both directly named and several details in Tobit’s narrative make it clear that he was quite familiar with Ahiqar.

What becomes clear, then, when considering Ahiqar we are not simply dealing with a “text,” nor in the case of Tobit are we dealing with a simple notion of “intertextuality” but rather there is a large body of evidence indicating that each instance of “Ahiqar” is but one “part of a growing tradition that had a very wide circulation and has informed the cultural ethos of a large number of communities over a very long period of time.”²²

3.2 An “Ahiqar” Discourse and the Book of Tobit

To what do we or Tobit refer when we say “Ahiqar”? For scholars, the starting point has generally been the Elephantine manuscript. To be sure, the Aramaic fragments are extremely important because they provide some ancient textual basis for the specific details of Ahiqar’s story and didactic concerns. As a result, most assessments of Tobit’s “Ahiqar” are evaluated against the Elephantine text. This is not

²⁰ Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 767.

²¹ See Bledsoe, “Ahiqar and Other,” 303–7, for a fuller outline and bibliography of studies concerning Ahiqar’s reception in antiquity.

²² Bledsoe, *Wisdom of Ahiqar*, 60.

problematic per se, but the way such studies are framed can be misleading. As with the biblical texts, though not nearly to the same extent, the Aramaic *Ahiqar* has been subject to numerous linguistic, historical, and compositional evaluations. At the same time, it has long been noted that the ancient Aramaic version differs in some significant ways from the medieval recensions. Thus, some have proposed complex lines of transmission and even hypothesized a “standard” version of *Ahiqar* from which, incredibly, the Elephantine version is seen as an errant form.²³ A comparison between Tobit’s “*Ahiqar*” and the Aramaic witness, therefore, is hardly a simplistic one.

The point here is not to realign or even trace out specifically the lines of transmission. Quite the contrary, this essay takes as a starting point that such a way of conceptualizing ancient literary production is problematic to begin with. As indicated in the introduction, the scholarly framework for describing and assigning meaning to *Ahiqar* is built around, to use Mroczek’s phrase, “bookish categories,” which, among other things, come with normative assumptions about a text’s “fundamental identity.”²⁴ In the case of *Ahiqar*, the language used by scholars, even when speaking about “*Ahiqar*” in the 2nd c. context of Tobit, furthers essentialist notions about a text and the literary persona portrayed therein. Even the phrase “a text” reinforces such a paradigm that presumes there is an “authentic” version of *Ahiqar*, or, in text-critical terms, a “best” or “original” version on which scholars ought to rely when making any historical claims. Instead, we might better refer to “*Ahiqar*” not as “text” or “book” but with a different metaphor, such as “project,” to better enunciate the “ongoing-ness” of literary production.²⁵ This approach to mapping ancient literary production accords well with the theoretical arguments about discourse outlined in Lambert’s article about “Torah.” Hence, in much the same way that works like Ben Sira or others make reference to “Torah,” even if one might rightly presume a specific textual referent, Tobit’s citation of “*Ahiqar*,” is not a simple allusion to some (version of a) “text” but rather is “for all intents and purposes, relating to a different object than we [are]. . . a quasi-object whose very conceptualization and contours are defined by radically different subjectivities.”²⁶

With both Mroczek’s idiom of “project” or Lambert’s “constructed quasi-object” in mind, I suggest using the phrase “*Ahiqar* discourse” as an operative category for qualifying and describing how and for what purpose “*Ahiqar*” figures in Tobit. By “*Ahiqar* discourse” I mean the constellation of textual, oral, and concep-

23 See, e.g., the figure in James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 7.

24 Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 5, 40.

25 Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 16, 89, 110 (in reference to Ben Sira).

26 Lambert, *Tôrâ as Mode*, 66.

tual instances of “Ahiqar” among a diverse set of receiving communities, such that each occasion or reference is both constituted by and constitutive of an “ongoing production” of meaning. “Ahiqar,” then, refers not to an individual, whether text or person, but a personality, a character whose literary articulation evokes a partly-stable, partly-fluid set of attitudes, ideas, and actions. When one thinks of Ahiqar as “character”²⁷ or, more broadly, as part of a large “discourse,” there arises a host of new “opportunities for redescription.”²⁸

4 Tobit: Wisdom, Torah, and the Ethic of Tobit

This section begins with a brief discussion of certain literary and thematic qualities of Tobit’s narrative that have led scholars to connect the work with both “Torah” and “wisdom” traditions. Then, I turn to the major themes in Tobit, drawing particular attention to the twin narratological themes of endogamy and proper burial in addition to the overarching ethical directive of acting charitably. Tobit’s instructive promotion of these actions is equally described in terms of the broader ethic of family loyalty or obligation that permeates the narrative. In other words, acts of charity, which, according to Tobit, include marrying and/or properly burying a kinsperson, are a performance of familial loyalty. Such actions, espoused by Tobit himself and the narratological logic of the story, serve to create a functional equivalency between the ethical and ethnic (i.e., Jewish group identity) concerns. In short, one may say that acting wisely is the same as being Torah-observant, according to how both those categories are defined by Tobit.

4.1 Tobit’s Exemplification of “Torah” and “Wisdom”

As many interpreters have observed, the Book of Tobit is thoroughly seeped in “Torah.” There are several direct and indirect bits of evidence that lead commentators to conclude that Tobit was “well acquainted with Hebrew Scriptures.”²⁹ There is direct reference to “the law of Moses,”³⁰ and some have pointed to distinctly Deuteronomistic aspects, such as the exclusivist Jerusalem-centric cult and belying a

²⁷ Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 16, 89.

²⁸ Lambert, “*Tôrâ* as Mode,” 66.

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 35.

³⁰ There is variation depending on which text tradition one follows. GII: 1:8, 7:13, 14; GI: 6:13, 7:13, though νόμος, with προστάγματα “commandments,” also appears in 14:9 (GI).

strong awareness of a Judean experience of exile and (hoped for) restoration (Tob 1:4; 13:15–17), even despite the Northern (Naphtalite) and Neo-Assyrian setting. Yet what links Tobit most closely to “Torah” are the very contours of the narrative itself and the themes promoted therein. This is particularly so for the ancestral narratives in Genesis. One scholar has recently quipped: “the story radiates the atmosphere of patriarchal traditions.”³¹ As Irene Nowell has argued, the characters in Tobit, particularly the father-figures Tobit and Raguel, are “modeled on the patriarchs, especially Abraham.”³² The same could be said of the female characters, Anna and Sarah, and the matriarchs. The character correspondences are evident in the situational and thematic circumstances of the narratives. Like the ancestral stories of Genesis, the book of Tobit may be read as a family drama, centered around an aging parent and his wife and child, where there is need for travel to secure a marriage within the family, further complications arise from trying to secure said marriage, and all the while there is a lingering presence of an angel as well as an external threat by way of foreign rulers. All these features echo the various pericopes in the patriarchal cycle of Genesis 12–50, such that one may regard the Pentateuchal traditions as “the primary templates or analogues for Tobit.”³³

With respect to “Wisdom,” Tobit likewise appears to draw on texts identified with this scholarly category, especially Proverbs, Ben Sira, and Job. Tobit’s dependence can be described in terms of both direct allusion as well as literary modeling. On a formal level, three lengthy speeches – two by Tobit (4:3–21; 14:2–11a) and one by Raphael (12:2–16) – have a distinctly exhortatory character, where an authority figure relates a set of maxims and advice to a subordinate. In Tobit’s case it is to his son Tobias, while the angel Raphael offers exhortations to both Tobit and Tobias. Within the speeches themselves, there are a variety of stylistic and formal utterances that are at least reminiscent of the proverbial instruction literature typified by the book of Proverbs and Ben Sira, if not some direct parallels – such as Tob 4:10 and Prov 10:2 (“righteousness delivers from death”).³⁴ The themes addressed in these sayings, but also throughout Tobit, bear a strong resemblance with “wisdom” discourses. Daniel Machiela, for example, in an essay on the wisdom motifs in Aramaic texts from Qumran, points to similarities between Tobit and other wisdom passages, drawing special attention to the familiar motif of the two “ways” (ὁδός/

31 Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 29.

32 Irene Nowell, “The Book of Tobit: An Ancestral Story,” in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp, CBQMS 38 (Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 3–13, at 4. Figures from Genesis 1–11 are also referenced, including Noah (4:12) and Adam and Eve (8:6). Nowell offers a lengthy analysis on Tobit’s use of Genesis.

33 Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 29.

34 For further examples, see Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 33. See also Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 36.

דָּרָד) evident in Tobit (e.g., 1:3, 4:5).³⁵ Further, the overall narrative that concerns the trials of Tobit as a “righteous sufferer” has been likened to the book of Job.³⁶

How, then, do both “Torah” and “wisdom” interact or intersect in Tobit? Whether one thinks in terms of “text” and intertextuality or in terms of “discourse,” there is good reason to argue that in Tobit we have a confluence of Wisdom and Torah. Moreover, this confluence is coincident. That is, the same episodes and aspects which invoke the one at the same time invoke the other: the most “Torah-esque” aspects of Tobit – e.g., allusions to Torah figures, the “law of Moses,” and specific normative practices that “originate” in the Deuteronomic text – overlap with the most “wisdom-esque” features – e.g., the instructional setting, the form of “instructional exhortation,” and the engagement with the “wisdom tradition” especially Proverbs and Job. As a result, wisdom and Torah are intertwined and difficult to disentangle.

A specific example of this overlap comes in the very first lines. In Tobit’s opening narratorial monologue (1:3–22), the protagonist sets the scene by recounting his many “acts of charity” (1:3;), most of which involved his offering of various foodstuffs in the context of proper sacrifices during festivals at the Temple (1:6–7a), with tithes directed toward priests, Levites, or generally in Jerusalem (1:7b). He continues noting a “third tithe” he would give for widows, orphans, and “converts” (προσηλύτοις; 1:8). Tobit adds that in so doing he would share a meal with these marginalized groups (cf. 2:2). He specifies that they “would eat it according to the ordinance decreed concerning it *in the law of Moses* and *according to the instructions of Deborah*,” his paternal grandmother.³⁷ Deborah’s role here hardly gets commented upon by interpreters beyond a discussion of her exact relation to Tobit.³⁸ However, here it seems there is a complementary parallel between the “law of Moses” and the “instructing” of one’s grandmother. A mundane reading might simply see this as indicating that in order to follow proper eating procedures one

35 Daniel Machiela, “Wisdom Motifs’ in the Compositional Strategy of the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1Q20) and Other Aramaic Texts from Qumran,” in *HA’ISH MOSHE: Studies in Scriptural Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Moshe J. Bernstein*, ed. Binyamin Goldstein, Michael Segal, and George J. Brooke, STDJ 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 223–47, at 235.

36 See, e.g., Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 32. For a thorough bibliography on Tobit and Job’s intertextuality, although in the context of an argument lessening the strict interdependence, see JiSeong James Kwon, “Meaning and Context in Job and Tobit,” *JSOT* 43 (2019): 627–43.

37 GII: ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωσῆ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐντολάς ἃς ἐνετείλατο Δεββωρα; GI lacks reference to “the law of Moses,” only mentioning instruction from his grandmother Deborah, with similar phrasing καθὼς ἐνετείλατο Δεββωρα.

38 Some interpreters understand Deborah to be Tobit’s great-grandmother since she is named (in GII) as the mother of one Tobiel, while Tobit’s father was previously called Hananiel (1:1); see, Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 111.

must, pragmatically speaking, be shown how to do so. Yet, one could also surmise that the “instructions” of the parental figure have a prominent place in Tobit given the several “instructions” (Tob 5:1; 14:3, 8) Tobit gives Tobias. Karin Schöpflin, for example, has suggested that “Deborah is mentioned as a female prefiguration and counterpart of Tobit as a wisdom teacher.”³⁹ Further, as at least some scholars have noted, even in passing, the “detail of a woman instructing a young man in Jewish practice . . . may evoke other female instructors such as Lady Wisdom (Prov 1:20–33) or even one’s own mother (Prov 31:8).”⁴⁰ Indeed, one may understand this doubled notice as an indication of the collusion of “Torah,” as a symbolic source for Jewish ethical practice, with “wisdom” as the social-familial domain within which the ethical practice is conditioned and transmitted. Thus, it is tempting to frame the situation in such a way to describe this verse as the confluence, i.e., the bringing together, of two traditions: Torah and Wisdom. The former is the “content” – divine and revealed – while the latter is the means of conveyance, instruction, and performance thereof.

4.2 Family and Charity as Tobit’s Foundational Ethic

Narratologically speaking, proper burial and endogamy are the twin moral impetuses which propel the overlapping plot sequences. The external narrative of Tobit’s turmoil is enacted by his decision to properly bury his kinspeople, even against the threats of the foreign king. The internal drama of Tobias and Sarah is more complex, but nevertheless their mutual plot tensions center around marriage within the kinship group. Tobias’s departure from his home is ostensibly to retrieve money, but the concern for retrieving the money from Gabael quite literally exits center stage as he hands off this duty to Raphael, who promptly and without trouble accomplishes the task. This is in stark contrast to the extended focus and tension related to the drama of marriage to Sarah. Like his father, Tobias is directly confronted with the threat of death if he chooses to remain committed to his familial duty of endogamy. Of note, this mirrored plot point may subtly link the demon Asmodeus with the Assyrian king Esarhaddon. In any case, the three main characters’ commitments to proper burial rites and endogamy, respectively, are what create and, ultimately, resolve the tension.

³⁹ Karin Schöpflin, “Women’s Roles in the Narrative and Theology of the Book of Tobit,” in *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and its Environments*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 28 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 173–85, at 174; cf. Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 63.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, *Delicious Prose*, 42; cf. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 112 who passingly refers to Prov 31:1.

Proper burial and endogamy are correlated beyond the plot structure through their association to the broader ethical and ideological posturing of the work, namely “acting charitably” as a fulfilment of a familial obligation. The two ethical ideals cannot be easily separated, much like the overlapping plot’s of Tobit’s and Sarah’s dilemmas. Demonstrating loyal behavior to family, whether through proper burial or endogamous union, is qualified as an act of “charity” (ἐλεημοσύνη). Thus, they are the twin foundational ethics upon which the narrative rests.

4.3 Familial Loyalty

Family is paramount in the book of Tobit. There is a clear concern for not only establishing who belongs (and thus who does *not* belong) but also for promoting mutual support within the kinship group. Nearly every character, aside from the foreign kings and the demon, is expressly identified as related to Tobit. Several passages emphasize the “tribe” (φυλή),⁴¹ “nation” (ἐθνὴ),⁴² “people (group)” (γένος),⁴³ and, most especially, “relative(s)” (ἀδελφός) of Tobit.⁴⁴ The family of Tobit is broadly conceived, being identified with “all Israel” (1:6). The family-centeredness of Tobit is reinforced by several specific themes that point to engagement with “Torah” or a “Torah” discourse inasmuch as it is refracted through the lens of a Hellenistic, diaspora Jewish experience and its attendant (literary) means of expressing Jewish identity.

A key example of a Torah-inspired literary feature that has been reimagined for a Second Temple audience is the issue of proper burial. Attention to proper burial can rightly be seen as Tobit’s self-proclaimed connection to the patriarchal narratives and, at the same time, functions to highlight the ethic of familial loyalty. Thus, Tobit’s commitment to proper burial makes him *like the patriarchs*. It echoes, for example, the final chapters of Genesis, where Jacob, in a testamentary fashion, makes repeated mention of the importance of burial in the land of Canaan: he exhorts Joseph to bury him “with my ancestors” (Gen 47:29–31);⁴⁵ he makes explicit

⁴¹ Tob 1:1, 4, 5; 4:12; 5:9, 11, 12, 14.

⁴² Tob 1:3, 10; 3:4; 4:19; 13:3, 5, 8, 13; 14:6.

⁴³ Tob 1:10, 17; 2:3; 5:12; 6:12, 16.

⁴⁴ Tob 1:3, 10, 14, 16, 21; 2:2; 3:15; 4:12, 13; 5:6, 11, 12, 13, 14; 6:7, 11, 14, 16; 7:3, 4, 9, 12; 9:2; 10:13; 11:2, 18 (GII: Ἰουδαῖοι); 14:4, 7.

⁴⁵ Note also that Jacob frames this exhortation for proper burial as an expression of his son behaving “loyally and truthfully” (חסד וימרה) with him; this is partially echoed in Tobit where the protagonist claims to “walk in the ways of truth and righteousness” (Tob 1:3), a claim that is later exemplified by, among other things, attending to the proper burial of his kinspeople (1:16–20).

that Joseph's mother, Rachel, was buried in Canaan (48:7); he again exhorts Joseph to bury him "with my ancestors," this time specifying not only the place in Canaan ("the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite") but also that the other patriarchs and matriarchs are buried there (49:29–32); finally, Jacob speaks indirectly and posthumously through the mouth of Joseph who repeats his father's wishes to be buried in Canaan as he requests permission from Pharaoh to bury his father (50:4–14).

Endogamy is the most prominent issue related to family in Tobit and, beyond being just a simple plot device, directly links Tobit's narrative with that of the patriarchs as well as an exemplar of the ethic of familial loyalty. Both Jacob and Tobias leave the home and go to a distant relative to find a wife after receiving commands from their fathers to marry within the family. Notably, they each also have a doubled-reason for the journey: Tobias for the money, Jacob to flee his brother Esau (Gen 27:43–45). Tobit grounds his appeal for endogamy in an interesting manner. He begins with the "traditional" argument that marriage outside of the fold is tantamount to fornication (4:12a) – this may be seen as a subtle gesture to the expansive trope of Israelites from the Torah (and beyond) whose sexual exploits outside the confines of Israelite identity was problematic in that it led to, or was concurrent with, idolatry (e.g., Num 25). But here in Tobit the issue of idolatry via fornication quickly takes a back seat. Tobias is told to "remember . . . our ancestors of old" (μνήσθητι . . . οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος; 4:12c), who also married within the family. After linking their endogamous unions to the promise of land and prosperity, Tobit continues by justifying and extolling endogamy as an act that fulfills the expectation of reciprocity among kindred. Marrying one's kinsperson may be understood as good Torah observance (cf. Gen 28:1), but it is also explicitly described as a performative act of kinship obligations. To marry one's "kindred" (ἀδελφούς) is to show them "love" (ἀγαπάω); to refuse would be "to behave arrogantly" (ὑπερηφανεύω; 4:13a) both with respect to oneself but also in a more combative manner "against one's kindred" (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν).⁴⁶ Oddly, Tobit adds that refusing to marry one's kin is tantamount to idleness (ἀχρηιότης; 4:13c), yet the blending of issues is driven home by the subsequent familial metaphor – "idleness is the *mother* of famine" – a pun which is not lost on the reader. In short, the pseudo-testament of Tobit in ch. 4 makes it abundantly clear that what's at stake for Tobias vis-à-vis the endogamous directive is more than simple obedience to a "dying" father.⁴⁷ The protagonist's

⁴⁶ Much of the language here (4:13) is echoed later in ch. 6 when Raphael tells Tobias to "remember" (μυμνήσκομαι; 6:16) his father's command to marry within the family, which is followed by Tobit "loving" (GI φιλέω/ GII ἀγαπάω) his "kinswoman" Sarah.

⁴⁷ I refer to the parenetic section in Tobit 4 as the "false" testament given that Tobit recovers and, later, offers a second "real" death-bed instruction in ch. 14.

efforts to get his son to marry “one of their own” are, in a sense, subsumed under a broader rubric of both ethical and familial expectation.

In cautioning against the *πορνεία* and hubris of intermarriage, Tobit legitimizes his appeal for endogamy by telling Tobias to “remember, my son, that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our ancestors of old, all took wives from among their kindred” (4:12). In so doing, according to Tobit, they all prospered, having many children. In other words, Tobit tells his son that if he acts like the famed patriarchs, then he too will prosper. What stands out, though, is the precise list of patriarchs. Tobit lumps Noah in with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but leaves out Joseph. Why include Noah? Not only is Noah “pre”-Jewish, in a sense, given that he is basically the progenitor of all humans (cf. Gen 9:9), but also nowhere in Genesis does it explicitly state who Noah’s wife was. She is not named, nor is it made clear that she is “from the family” – because, again, in some respects *there was no family yet*. Of course, scholars have recognized this issue for years, and most point to Jubilees 4:33 as evidence of a tradition that clearly identifies Noah’s wife as “the son of his father’s brother.” Even if an explicit reference to Jubilees is not being made, importantly, the inclusion of Noah is indicative of a “Torah” discourse that extends beyond the confines of any explicit textual reference. Further, in its effort to promote a type of Jewish social identity that restricts marriage to within the kinship group, Tobit unsurprisingly leaves out reference to Joseph, who famously married the foreigner Aseneth. A reader is inclined to see this as an intentional oversight, signaling an apprehension for a “foreigner” being brought into the family.

In short, Tobit’s treatment of endogamy accomplishes several things simultaneously: (1) it reveals a certain “Torah” discourse within the narrative; (2) it rhetorically links, and thus legitimizes, Tobit and his family with the patriarchs; and (3) it reinforces the ethical aims of the book related to familial loyalty and charitable behavior.

4.4 Charity

The attention to familial concerns, and expectations extends well beyond the oft-noted theme of endogamy.⁴⁸ All of the actions taken by Tobit, including the initial commitment to proper burial and those further promoted by him to Tobias, are subsumed under the broader umbrella of the text’s primary ethic: to act charitably. This is illustrated throughout the narrative in its frequent attention to “acting

⁴⁸ See Devorah Dimant, “The Family of Tobit,” in *From Enoch to Tobit: Collected Studies in Ancient Jewish Literature*, FAT 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 223–28, esp. 223.

charitably” (n. ἐλεημοσύνη; v. ἐλεέω; a. ἔλεος).⁴⁹ Yet, the ethical directive to act charitably, while seemingly a universal “wisdom” ideal, takes on a specific, familial dimension in Tobit.

Performing acts of charity are an expression of kinship obligation. Some interpreters have already noted this. Kottsieper, for example, has argued that for the author of Tobit “truth” and “righteousness” should not be understood as “common ethical values, but as the base (sic) on which solidarity between Jews is grounded.”⁵⁰ Tobit’s initial righteousness is established by his self-claim of having done many “acts of charity for my kindred and my people/tribe” (1:3, 16), a claim made explicitly in reference to giving alms and the key issue of proper burial (1:17). Later, when Tobit is called out for questioning Anna’s integrity, his wife asks: “Where are your acts of charity?” (2:14). The expectation behind this rhetorical questions is what matters: she expects his “charitable” demeanor and, as we were explicitly informed earlier (1:9) Anna is “a member of (Tobit’s) own family.” Thus, narratively, there is an expectation on Anna’s part that Tobit should be “charitable” to her, i.e., to his family member.⁵¹

The concepts of “charity” or “charitableness” are also attributes of God. In Tobit’s prayer to God, he praises the deity, exclaiming: “all your ways are mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη) and truth” (3:2; cf. Sarah’s similar phrasing in her prayer in 3:11). This may be understood as a general reference to God’s “mercy,” but the lexeme is the same as the “acts of charity” attributed to Tobit and others throughout. Just as God is the truly charitable one, so too should God’s people be so. Of course, this reference is not strictly about familial obligation. However, the context of the prayer is such that the “mercy” or, rather, “acts of charity and truth” appear to be in reference to

⁴⁹ Note that the term here is often rendered “almsgiving,” including in the NRSV. I find this to be too restrictive of a translation as it does not adequately correspond to the way such a term is used today. The term, for instance, also occurs where “almsgiving” does not really fit well (e.g., 3:2), as even many modern translations recognize. A more general but still semantically meaningful rendering is preferred: “act(s) of charity or beneficence”; thus even when relying on the NRSV I will typically substitute “(acts of) charity” for “almsgiving.”

⁵⁰ Ingo Kottsieper, “Look, son, what Nadab did to Ahikaros . . .”: The Aramaic Ahiqar Tradition and its Relationship to the Book of Tobit,” in *The Dynamics of Language and Exegesis at Qumran*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz, FAT II/35 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 145–67, at 145. Kottsieper’s reference to אמת “truth” and צדקה “righteousness” are based on the fragmentary Aramaic and Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran; whereas the Greek versions typically feature the term “(an act of) charity” (ἐλεημοσύνη).

⁵¹ There is also a bit of humor in the scene through irony, in that Tobit is accusing Anna of stealing when, in fact, the young goat in question is itself an “act of charity,” with Anna explicitly referring to it as a “gift” (δῶρον; 2:14). Later Tobit himself refers to “acts of charity” as a “good gift” (δῶρον . . . ἀγαθόν) in his ethical advice to Tobias (4:11)

the Lord's dealings specifically with the Jewish people, and further that Tobit links the Lord's potential judgment to a broader *communal* sense of responsibility: "Do not punish me for my sins and for my unwitting offenses and those that my ancestors committed against you." The prayer proceeds to blur the lines between Tobit's sense of self and the "they" of his ancestors: "they sinned" (3b); the Lord "gave us" to plunder and "dispersed us" (4); the Lord is punishing "my sins" (5a) but "we have not kept the commandments" (5b). In short, even when the Lord is called upon to be "charitable," it appears to be specifically in reference to the expected "familial" relationship between God and the Jewish people.

In Tobit's first testamentary speech to Tobias (4:7–11, 14–17), we find what is perhaps the most prominent reflection on "acts of charity" in Tobit.⁵² After a quick command for Tobias to properly bury him and Anna, Tobit transitions into a series of exhortations that formally resemble wisdom instructions. In this litany, Tobit highlights the command to "act charitably," especially to the poor (4:6). At first glance, the passage stands out relative to the previous ones given that there does not seem to be an explicit tie to acting charitably with one's family. Tobit tells his son, "do not turn your face away from *anyone* who is poor." Yet it should be noted that the pericope is fronted with a qualifier: "To all those who practice righteousness, act charitably . . ." (4:6–7a). This qualification is again picked up at the second mention about "charitable acts" (4:14–17), where the specification of to whom one may demonstrate charity is made more explicit: "place your bread on the grave of the righteous, but give none to sinners." To be sure, the tone suggests a more egalitarian approach to charity – and the division between "righteous" and "sinner" need not be read as code for "Jew" and "Gentile" – yet it may not be insignificant that the two subsections on acting charitably (4:6–11 and 4:14–17), with the repetition of "righteousness/righteous" forming a bracket as it were for the entire speech, are sandwiching an internal passage centered chiefly on endogamy and familial relations. Structurally, then, "charitable acts" and marrying "within the family" are linked.

Specific references to "acting charitably" do not figure in the internal narrative of Tobias's journey and Sarah's demonic marriage woes, but as noted above this part of the story can be understood as the expositional playing out of the ethical directives that precede and follow this section. The ethical language of Tobit's speech before Tobias's departure is immediately picked up again after the conclusion to the internal plot. Importantly, the exhortation to act charitably is repeated

⁵² It should be noted that much of this passage is not fully extant in the Sinaiticus (GII) version of Tobit, but there is strong indication that it is ancient; see discussion in Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 14–16, 24–25.

first by the angel Raphael in his revelation speech to Tobit and Tobias (12:8–9). The divine messenger emphasizes that acting charitably and with righteousness are more desirable qualities than either piety (e.g., prayer and fasting) or security (e.g., having wealth). Notably, Raphael here, as earlier (6:16), echoes Tobit’s wise instructions to Tobias, with some alterations. In any case, the primary ethical directive is that one should “act charitably.” Indeed the angel goes so far as to make explicit that the acting charitably has the ability to save one from death, particularly as it has the function of “purging away every sin” (12:9).

The mention of sin and forgiveness in the context of both prayer and fasting points both backward to Tobit’s earlier prayer in 3:1–4 and forward to the one in ch. 13. Both prayers feature the protagonist’s appeals to the “mercy” or “charitable behavior” of God, and both prayers preface a subsequent ethical instruction that elaborates on how “charitable behavior” might alleviate the judgment of sin.

Raphael’s speech also forms an interpretive link between the two lengthy testaments of Tobit in chs. 4 and 14. The protagonist’s wisdom instructions share several similarities. Notable for this study is the reference to “darkness” in 4:10: “For acting charitably delivers from death and prevents you from entering into darkness.” The saving power of acting charitably is echoed in Raphael’s speech (12:9) but even more explicitly in Tobit’s final testament. Reference to darkness, particularly as a metaphor for death, only occurs on one other occasion in Tobit: in the epitome of Ahiqar’s story in 14. Unlike the hypothetical charitable “son/student” in 4:10 (and 12:8–9), Nadan “went into darkness” because he very clearly did *not* act charitably toward his elder *family*; while Ahiqar, though suffering a “false” death like Tobit, “entered into the light” and was saved from death because he “acted charitably” (14:10). Ahiqar’s charitable behavior, which proved to be his salvation, was done on behalf of family (cf. 1:22, 2:10; see discussion below).

In short, for Tobit, acting charitably is the key ethical directive. But even more so, this exhortation to act charitably is generally conditioned as an act that reflects one’s obligatory loyalty toward and support of fellow Jewish people.

4.5 Summary: Tobit’s “Wisdom” and “Torah”-Faithfulness

The combination of several literary styles, character references, and themes in Tobit indicates engagement with “Torah” and “wisdom.” The overall contours of the narrative, the plot points, the characters involved and their relationships, and the pietistic interludes are all reminiscent of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. Some of the same narrative aspects could also be ascribed to the wisdom tradition, but nevertheless the three instructional speeches (two by Tobit and one by Raphael) and the specific proverbial forms and topics therein evoke the tradition

of Proverbs and Ben Sira. Similarly, Tobit’s avowed righteousness and subsequent unjust suffering echo the plight of Job on several levels. To separate “Torah” and “wisdom” as distinct threads interwoven in Tobit may be a helpful heuristic tool for redescription of the text, as the above discussions have illustrated. However, what may also be clear from the analyses above is that such a division is not altogether simple. The discourses of “Torah” and “wisdom” are coincident and, thus, for Tobit’s implied audience – and perhaps also for a scholarly one – there is hardly any space in between. Put simply, in Tobit’s terms, being “Torah”-like is equivalent to being “wisdom”-like.

This point is abundantly clear in the several “wisdom” speeches (chs. 4, 12, 14) that may likewise be labeled patriarchal testaments. Macatangay, for example, argues that the speech of Raphael (12:6–20; cf. 6:11–18) is particularly important on a narratological and didactic level. For one, in its recall of Tobit’s exhortation in ch. 4 and in its anticipation of the final deathbed instruction in ch. 14, the angelic speech gives an unquestionable authority to the protagonist’s words, adding further: “More importantly, since Tobit’s wisdom teachings supply the pragmatic content by enumerating the practical conduct that constitutes observance of a major Deuteronomic injunction, it grounds acquired wisdom and the construction of personal ethics on revealed law.”⁵³

We should not see it as exceptional, therefore, that precisely in the two “wisdom instructions” (chs. 4 and 14) of Tobit are the only two explicit references to the patriarchs of the “Torah.”

In sum, Tobit’s narrative may rightly be said to incorporate both “Torah” and “wisdom” inasmuch as those terms are typically used by scholars. In such a reading, the normative values espoused by the narrative, both in its overall logic and through direct speech, are the abiding concern for familial loyalty and the ethical directive of acting charitably. Yet, it becomes increasingly clear that the two themes cannot simply be ascribed to the discourses of “Torah” and “wisdom,” respectively.

5 Ahiqar and “Ahiqar Discourse” in the Book of Tobit

At this point a few things have been established that are important for supporting the re-reading of Ahiqar in Tobit that I offer in this section. First, Tobit’s primary norm is that family matters and acting charitably, especially toward family, is the

⁵³ Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 208.

abiding ethic. In nearly every scene and for basically every character, there is a familial aspect explicitly remarked upon. The result is that Tobit belies a profound anxiety about who belongs and what expectations come with such belonging. Tobit's paraenetic impulse is the promotion of charitable behavior, particularly on behalf of one's Jewish relatives, with an assumption of both theological and social reciprocity: acting charitably is expected and will be, ultimately, rewarded. Further, Tobit makes a number of rhetorical maneuvers to support this agenda, the most prominent of which is through the location of its titular hero directly in the line of tradition that stretches back to ancestral heroes, who are, according to Tobit, the best exemplars of Jewish values. For the presumed Hellenistic audience, the story, in effect, makes an argument that "Tobit" is one of those ancestors, whose charity and familial-loyalty are performed in the context of threat of foreign empire.

With this outline in mind, we may question what function Ahiqar plays in this context. When evaluating "Ahiqar" in the Book of Tobit, there are a few aspects to consider. First are the four explicit mentions of Ahiqar: 1:21–22; 2:10; 11:18; 14:10–11a. In three of these episodes Ahiqar is an actual character present within the narrative, while the fourth and final reference imagines Ahiqar at a distance. Secondly, as several scholars have noted over the years, the broader structure and even specific formal aspects of Tobit can be understood as echoing, if not directly influenced by, the Book of Ahiqar. Lastly, the reference to Ahiqar is generally seen as more than a casual connection. The story of Ahiqar, which is epitomized and interpreted in Tobit 14:10, appears to have a direct bearing on the thematic concerns of Tobit. In other words, Ahiqar's story affects, in some way, the message and purpose of the Book of Tobit.

5.1 "Ahiqar" in Tobit

5.1.1 Tobit 1:21–22

Ahiqar appears for the first time in the opening chapter of Tobit, during the first-person narrator's lengthy "autobiographical retrospective."⁵⁴ Here Ahiqar is introduced as a high official in the court of Sennacherib and his successor Esarhad-don. Ahiqar is further identified as a direct and close relative to Tobit, specifically "the son of [Tobit's] brother Han(na)ael."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Schöpflin, "Women's Roles," 174.

⁵⁵ "Brother" (ἀδελφός) here, probably rendering the Aramaic 𐤍 is regularly used, both in Tobit and more broadly, as the generic term for "kinsman." In 1:22 the familial connection is again noted, but this time using the term ἐξάδελφος which translators typically render as "nephew," but could

Ahiqar’s prominent service spanning the two Neo-Assyrian kings matches the situation in the 5th c. BCE Aramaic version.⁵⁶ The attention to the transfer of power between kings is also significant for the immediate literary context. Tobit makes it clear that his service (“acts of charity” 1:16), specifically the burial of his kindred, spans the reigns of the various Neo-Assyrian kings, from Shalmaneser to Esarhaddon, the latter’s reign being the narrative “present” during which the remainder of the plot takes place.⁵⁷ Thus, in a nearly exact parallel to Ahiqar’s tale, the initial setting of Tobit, including important backstory for the plot, takes place during a previous ruler and the transition to the “present” of the story is signaled, in part, by the transition from one king to the next and the attendant (renewed) threat that comes with it.

Significantly, Ahiqar is not just part of the narrative’s contextual trappings. There is already a complete drama in Tobit’s introduction, and Ahiqar plays an integral part in its resolution. Tobit’s opening prologue tells a brief story that both sets the stage and foreshadows the plot of the main narrative. Tobit has been in hiding for drawing the ire of King Sennacherib. This came about because of Tobit’s “many acts of charity” (1:16), primarily his secretive burials of kinspeople who were executed by the king. Enter Ahiqar, who is doubly introduced as having a prominent position under Sennacherib and then later, with some alteration, a similarly powerful position under Esarhaddon.⁵⁸ Thus, the kinsman of Tobit is well poised to

be understood as a cousin/relative; cf. Tob 11:18 where the term is used in the plural to refer to both Ahiqar and Nadan together in relation to Tobit (GII).

56 The same is the case for many of the much later medieval versions, although it is common for these witnesses to have the order of the kings reversed.

57 Shalmaneser (1:16) probably refers to Shalmaneser V, who is here erroneously called the father of Sennacherib (1:15), though not a completely egregious historical inaccuracy since Shalmaneser (r. 727–721) did indeed precede Sennacherib’s reign (r. 705–682); Sargon II (r. 721–705) is the missing link and who was actually the father of Sennacherib.

58 The “double” introduction of Ahiqar in Tob 1:21b (“he was appointed . . . over the accounts of [Sennacherib’s] kingdom and he had authority over the entire administration) and then again in 1:22b (“Now Ahiqar was chief cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration and accounts under Sennacherib of Assyria; so Esarhaddon reappointed him”) has previously been cited by scholars as indication of a redactional layering; see, e.g., Kottsieper, “Look Nadab,” 150. However, this is not necessary; as indicated above, the double-introduction fits with the narrative’s attention to the double-appointment of Ahiqar from one king to the next. Some have also highlighted the potential chiasmic structure of this Ahiqar pericope: (a) Ahiqar’s relation to Tobit “son of my brother”; (b) Ahiqar’s position at Sennacherib’s court over “administration/accounts”; (c) “Ahiqar interceded for me [Tobit] and I returned to Nineveh”; (b*) Ahiqar’s position at Sennacherib’s and Esarhaddon’s court over “administration/accounts”; (a*) Ahiqar’s relation to Tobit as “nephew.” See Devorah Dimant, “Tobit and Ahiqar,” in *Wisdom Poured out Like Water: Studies on Jewish and*

“intercede” on his behalf (1:22). Narratologically, Ahiqar’s introduction at this point is to resolve the tension of the narrative past so that the “present” story can begin at a state of equilibrium (Tob 2:1).

5.1.2 Tobit 2:10

Ahiqar returns to assist his kinsman Tobit who again finds himself in dire circumstances that came as a result of his repeated “acts of charity,” i.e., the burial of a murdered kinsman. In this scenario, however, Tobit’s suffering comes not as a result of an execution order but through a potentially comedic scene of bird droppings having fallen into the eyes of the protagonist. Ahiqar gets a brief, but important, mention. While “all” of Tobit’s kindred were sympathetic, only Ahiqar explicitly “supported” (ἔτρεφεν) Tobit. Notably this verb only occurs on one other occasion in Tobit: in 14:10 where Tobit tells Tobias how Ahiqar had “supported” Nadan.⁵⁹ This suggests not only a familial relation, but also a potentially hierarchical one. Ahiqar, as “supporter,” occupies the role of caregiver and thus authority over Tobit/Nadan. Regardless, this is yet another occasion where Ahiqar alleviates, at least partly, the difficult circumstances within which Tobit finds himself. Tobit also includes a small notation: “Ahiqar took care of me two years before he went to Elymais.”⁶⁰

5.1.3 Tobit 11:18

After mention of “rejoicing among all the Jews who were in Nineveh,” the narrator adds a comment that “Ahiqar and his nephew Nadan were also present to share Tobit’s joy.” This notice comes almost as an afterthought to the description of the public celebrations of Tobit’s rehabilitation and the wedding feast of Tobias and Sarah. Here, not only is Ahiqar mentioned but, for the first time, we hear of

Christian Antiquity in Honor of Gabriele Boccaccini, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., DCLS 38 (De Gruyter: Berlin, 2018), 276–91, at 286–87; Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 12 n. 21.

⁵⁹ GI τῷ θρέψαντι αὐτόν; GII τῷ ἐκθρέψαντι αὐτόν.

⁶⁰ It is not entirely clear why Ahiqar is going to Elymais (= Elam). Perhaps there is some connection in an alternate version of Ahiqar’s tale and thus the audience would understand the reference, but this is uncertain. Some have suggested that this signals when Ahiqar “retired” from court or even went into hiding, since his point of departure from Tobit would be away from the Assyrian capital (in this story’s imagination) of Nineveh. However, the presence of Nadan at the wedding feast in 11:18 suggests this is not the case.

Nadan,⁶¹ his “nephew.”⁶² That Nadan is present at a time of joy and celebration would suggest that this takes place after Ahiqar has adopted Nadan but before the latter has betrayed him, thus in the middle of Ahiqar’s story.⁶³ Perhaps this was during the period of Nadan’s training. Given the reference to Nadan’s “destruction” in 14:10 (see below), it seems, at the very least, unlikely that Tobias’s wedding took place some time after the ordeal of Nadan’s betrayal. Indeed, the mention of Nadan in the context of Tobias’s celebration and restoration seems a bit off-putting given what the reader is presumed to know about the disobedient nephew, although perhaps this is done to heighten the fact that the two are complete opposites in terms of their fulfillment of familial loyalty and charitable behavior and to foreshadow, by way of dramatic contrast, the opposing fates of the two “sons” of the righteous heroes. Either way, the reference to Ahiqar at this point, while also seemingly unnecessary, could actually have some structural purpose in signifying the resolution to Tobit’s suffering and thus forming an *inclusio* around the drama that began at the same time as the previous mention of Ahiqar in 2:10.⁶⁴

5.1.4 Tobit 14:10

The final mention of Ahiqar by name is the most extensive and, from the perspective of Ahiqar studies, the most significant. Yet its position within the book of Tobit itself also hints at Ahiqar’s overall importance for the meaning of Tobit itself. The final chapter of Tobit, largely comprises the death-bed speech or testament of the titular character to his son Tobias. Many of the elements in this speech echo details throughout the story, but the most prominent are the connections to the earlier pseudo-testament of ch. 4. After “predicting” the destruction and exile of both the

61 I refer to this figure as “Nadan” throughout for sake of consistency and in reference to the Aramaic version. In the Greek mss. he is variously named Ναδαβ, Νασβας, Ναβαδ, and Ἄμαν.

62 The Greek term here is ἐξάδελφος, thus Nadan’s relationship to Ahiqar is described in similar terms as Ahiqar’s to Tobias’s in 2:22. GIL, interestingly, differs from most other manuscripts and simply refers to both Ahiqar and Nadan as ἐξάδελφοι of Tobias, thus either implying Ahiqar and Nadan were both nephews of Tobias (without noting anything about their relationship to each other) or we may alternatively see the Greek term as a generic one for “relative.”

63 Generally every extant version, from ancient to medieval, begins with Ahiqar childless (or, at least, without a son) and only subsequently in the narrative does Ahiqar actually decide to adopt/train Nadan, who later betrays him.

64 See further comments below on the structural arguments and timing mechanisms related to Ahiqar and the overall plot.

Northern and Southern kingdoms as well as the restoration of Jerusalem, Tobit offers pointed commands to his son. The exhortations are brief, but they touch on the major themes of the narrative, including charitable acts (v. 8–9) and proper burial of family, in this case of Tobit and Anna themselves (v. 10a; cf. 4:3). Tobit concludes with a final illustration of charity and its opposite, “wickedness and deceit” (ἀδικία, δόλος; v. 10b).⁶⁵ Tobias is told to “Look!” at what Nadan did to his uncle Ahiqar. The details of what Nadan actually did are never stated, thus it is assumed that Tobias (i.e., representing the implied audience’s perspective) knows the story already. Tobit uses Ahiqar as the exemplar of how “acts of charity” can be redemptive, for it enabled him to emerge “into the light” (εἰς τὸ φῶς). Meanwhile, Nadan represents the consequences of not being charitable and of not following the commandments. As a result, he was the one who ultimately went “into darkness” (εἰς τὸ σκότος).⁶⁶ The juxtaposition of “charity” bringing salvation and deceit leading one into darkness directly recalls the earlier testament of chapter 4: “For charity delivers from death and keeps you from going into the darkness” (4:10). Further, the description not only offers the contrast of light/dark and charity/wickedness, but the explicit use of the image of “trap” (παγίδα) invokes the familiar wisdom trope of the wicked one who is hoisted by his own petard, as it were. A common phrasing of this is found in Sirach 27:26: “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever sets a snare (παγίδα) will be caught in it.” In Tobit’s final speech, the implication is that Ahiqar (and Tobit) were restored due to their “acts of charity,” specifically those done on behalf of fellow Jews.

5.2 Ahiqar and Tobit: A Structural & Thematic Intersection

Beyond the explicit references to Ahiqar, Tobit demonstrates clear formal and thematic overlaps with the sage’s narrative that can add to the conversation about Ahiqar’s function within the wisdom and Torah discourses in Tobit. Further, even within the Book of Tobit alone, the multiple Ahiqar scenes contribute to the overall structuring of the narrative. Thus, treating “Ahiqar” as a discursive site within Tobit provides a method for interpreting the text.

⁶⁵ Following GII here. GI lacks some of these details, but does include the important reference to Ahiqar, immediately following the command for Tobias to properly bury his parents.

⁶⁶ GI lacks the phrase “he (Ahiqar) came out into the light.”

5.2.1 Narrative Resonances between Ahiqar and Tobit

First of all, a broad view of both stories indicates some formal similarities. Like Ahiqar, Tobit is established at the beginning of the narrative as a prominent, righteous figure operating in the Neo-Assyrian court. They both give lengthy exhortative speeches to their child/student. They both suffer unjustly through royal execution orders. Ultimately, both are restored to their place of prominence.⁶⁷ There are, of course, some important differences. For one, the secondary figures, though paralleled in some ways, are contrasting characters. Ahiqar's nephew and adoptive son Nadan *betrays* Ahiqar, spurning his charitable support and wise advice. Meanwhile, Tobias *remains loyal* to Tobit. In Ahiqar, however, the "student" role may be said to be split among two characters: Nadan and Nabusumiskun. The latter, in direct contrast to the former, does indeed fulfill the expectations of reciprocity. Tobit, too, has a complicated layer that is not matched in Ahiqar, particularly the addition of his wife Anna, the prominence of Sarah, and, notably, the angelic figure of Raphael (Azariah).

Still, the basic contours and themes of the stories bear enough resemblance such that a comparative reading can be fruitful. For both characters, their ultimate fate depends, in large part, on a child acting charitably toward them. In Tobit both Ahiqar and Tobit descend "into darkness." Ahiqar's brush with death is recounted in 14:10 where he is said to have gown down "into darkness," but later came back "into the light." This is contrasted with Nadan who went "into the darkness." Similarly, Tobit describes his blindness as one who lies "in darkness like the dead who no longer see the light" (5:10). Both suffer these similar dead-but-not-dead experiences despite being righteous. Ultimately, it was an act of charity that accounts for their deliverance: Ahiqar's previous support of Nabusumiskun anticipates the would-be executioner's support of the sage. Tobit makes this reciprocal relationship explicit, telling Tobias that "because Ahiqar acted charitably, he escaped the fatal trap" (14:10). Likewise, Raphael tells Tobit and Tobias that "acting charitably saves from death" and that Tobit was healed because he buried the dead (12:9, 13–14), an action previously given as an example of "acting charitably" (1:16–17).

Further, on a thematic level, like Ahiqar, Tobit's narrative attends to the anxiety of life's vicissitudes, particularly those that come with living under a foreign empire. This uncertainty, in the literary imagination at least, becomes acutely felt

⁶⁷ Another structural similarity between Tobit and Ahiqar is the shift from third to first-person perspective in the stories' respective prefaces. The result is that both Tobit and Ahiqar tell their own story and, moreover, when the characters themselves give focalized speeches (i.e., to the "you") the implied reader is inclined to take on the role of the student of the sage, whether Tobias or Nadan/Nabusumiskun.

during times of transition. Tobit's first reference to Ahiqar, with its explicit attention to Ahiqar's double-appointment under Sennacherib and then again under Esarhaddon, draws attention to the tenuousness of one's status, even at the heights of power. Yet, Tobit's mini-drama also hints at the insecurity of one's status during such transitions.

On a more specifically structural level, the opening autobiographical prologue in Tobit (1:3–22) mirrors, and thus foreshadows, the overall plot in the rest of the book, at least from the perspective of Tobit. This pattern has some similarities to Ahiqar's narrative which also includes an inserted "past narrative" that prefigures the main narrative. However, in Ahiqar, the telling of this past narrative – i.e., Nabusumiskun's salvation from an unjust execution by Ahiqar – features in the middle of the story, rather than at the beginning as in Tobit. Still, the conceptual and structural overlaps are telling:

Ahiqar performed an act of charity to Nabusumiskun (Book of Ahiqar, internal story)

- a) When the latter had been sentenced to death unjustly (from the narrator's point of view);
- b) The act of charity was twofold: to "support" (implied shelter and food) and to eventually intercede on Nabusumiskun's behalf with the new king to have him restored;
- c) The act of charity is described in kinship terms: "to act as a brother/kinsman" (l. 49);
- d) The story is "retold" within the narrative present to another character, a pupil in order to elicit the proper ethical response.

Ahiqar performed an act of charity to Tobit (Book of Tobit, preface)

- a) When the latter had been sentenced to death unjustly (from the narrator's point of view);
- b) The act of charity was twofold: to "intercede" on Tobit's behalf with the new king to have him restored and later to "support" (implied food) Tobit when he was blind;
- c) The act of charity is described in kinship terms: Ahiqar's kinship with Tobit is emphasized, suggesting familial obligation as fulfillment of "acting charitably";
- d) The story is "retold" within the narrative present to another character, a pupil to elicit the proper ethical response.

The similarities are striking, but what a careful reader may observe is that (d) is not present in Tobit 1, since the preface is not directed toward any character but instead the reader. The ethical evaluation of Ahiqar's "act of charity" and "support" of Tobit is later completed at the very end of the narrative. In his final testament

in ch. 14. Tobit tells Tobias the story of Ahiqar’s betrayal by Nadan, his descent and rehabilitation, and Nadan’s punishment. Herein he also alludes directly to Ahiqar’s “act of charity,” which within the confines of Tobit’s narrative, leads one to think not (only) of Ahiqar’s behavior toward Nabusumiskun but also of Ahiqar’s earlier support of Tobit. Notably, this retelling of Ahiqar’s story and its moral implications are Tobit’s final spoken words.⁶⁸

As is clear, the introduction of Tobit strongly resembles the backstory of the Ahiqar narrative. In his plea for compassion, Ahiqar relates to Nabusumiskun (and the audience) how he had previously saved Nabusumiskun from execution under the previous king Sennacherib by interceding with the king on his behalf. Tobit’s first “telling” of the Ahiqar narrative likewise relates a time in the narrative past where Ahiqar “interceded for me” (Tob 1:22). Notably the expression in the Aramaic fragments of Tobit (4Q196a 2 5) bears some resemblance to the Elephantine text, at least in how it describes the *ideal* relation among kin. In what is seemingly an internal monologue or perhaps a statement to the king, Ahiqar supposes what the installation of the “son of his sister” would entail: that Nadan “would seek the good [on my behalf] (עלי) [הו טבתא יבעה]”. Though the context is fragmentary, the narrative setting indicates that Ahiqar expects his son Nadan to represent his interests (i.e., speak well on his behalf) at court. Of course, the exact opposite turns out to be the case, but the words are revealing in that they indicate what one expects of kin. In direct contrast to Nadan’s obvious disregard of this expectation to “seek the good” on behalf of a family member, Tobit’s Ahiqar has dutifully “interceded on my (= Tobit’s) behalf” (ἠξίωσεν Αχιαχαρος περι ἔμοῦ; 1:22)⁶⁹ or, in the (fragmentary) Aramaic, “Ahiqar sought [. . .] on my behalf” (יבעה אחיקר עלי).⁷⁰

Thus, in a certain way, Tobit draws on the presumably well-established nature of Ahiqar as one who displays charitably loyal behavior to family – i.e., to both Nadan and Nabusumiskun – and transfers this quality to the context of Tobit’s story, where Ahiqar likewise performs such loyal behavior *specifically toward a*

68 GI makes this explicit: “as he was saying these words, his spirt departed from him”; GII has a slightly different phrasing, adding a final note from Tobit himself “But now my breath comes to an end.”

69 The verb in combination with the preposition can carry the sense of “intercede/make a request on behalf of” (e.g., Plutarch, *Philopoemen* 17.6.5) or more generally “pay proper heed/attention to” (e.g., Demosthenes, *Pro Phormione*, 26.3)

70 4Q196 2 6. Given the similarity with the Elephantine Ahiqar text in other locations, it is tempting to suggest טוב “good(ness)” as the missing direct object; cf. 4Q196 18 14 (= Tob 14:2) Tobit “lived in goodness (טוב) (הוי בטב)” in his last days (GII: ἔζησεν ἐν ἀγαθοῖς), and 4Q197 4 iii 10–11 [*and Raguel said, “May there be] goodness upon [you, my child]”*] (טבא עליך ברי) (Grk εὐλογία σοι γένοιτο παιδίον). Alternatively, one can read the Aramaic verb, like the Greek ἀξιώω, intransitively (though with a factitive sense) “He *made a request* on my behalf.”

well-deserving family member. Indeed, Ahiqar's support of his kindred Tobit during the latter's blindness is described in similar terms to his support for his kindred Nadan.⁷¹ Likewise, Ahiqar's support and intercession to a foreign king on behalf of Tobit mirrors the same support and intercession he made for Nabusumiskun, except here in Tobit it is in fulfilment of Tobit's previous righteousness through his familial loyalty of burying fellow Jews. In short, familial loyalty through acts of charity works on a sort of "pay it forward" system. Much like Ahiqar's previous demonstration of charity to Nabusumiskun ultimately results in a reciprocal act of support in a time of distress, so too does the narrative and ethical logic of Tobit suggest that it is Tobit's earlier commitments to charity, specifically directed toward fellow Jews (i.e., proper burial), that result in his support from Ahiqar in a time of distress. This support and restoration are perfected in the initial cycle of the first chapter of Tobit.

5.2.2 Ahiqar's Structural & Thematic Function within Tobit

Aside from the potential external reference and symmetry to the Ahiqar narrative (in whatever form), the specific ways that the Ahiqar passages figure in Tobit affect the plot internally. Both the initial preface-story of Tobit (ch. 1) and the larger meta-narrative (chs. 2–14) begin with establishing Tobit's piety by means of celebrating the proper festivals: (a) Tobit invites the poor and marginalized to the festival meal as an act of charity (1:5–8; 2:2–3); (b) the invitees are explicitly identified as Tobit's "kindred" (thus Jewish) *and* mention is made of their piety (1:16; 2:2); (c) Tobit then buries Jewish individuals who were murdered, and the burial is a crime against the foreign king (1:18; 2:4, 8); (d) mention is made of Tobit "hiding and running away" (1:19; 2:8); (e) Tobit loses something very precious to him (1:20; 2:10);⁷² (f) Ahiqar aids Tobit (1:22; 2:10); (g) that which Tobit lost is ultimately restored (1:22; 11:9–18). Ahiqar's role in both the initial preface and the broader narrative signal how the two stories work together.

71 The Greek term used in 2:10 with respect to Tobit and in 14:10 with respect to Nadan is the same: τρέφω, meaning "to feed" but with the metaphorical extension of "to support (materially/financially)." Notably, this verb only occurs in Tobit in these two instances in connection with Ahiqar's behavior toward his relatives. Unfortunately the Aramaic mss. do not preserve the corresponding verb in either case.

72 In 1:20 Tobit loses all his property, everything except his wife and son. In 2:10 Tobit loses his sight completely. Also, the initial duration of the loss is signaled in both cases by a number related to "four" (1:21 "forty days"; 2:20 "four years").

In the first mini-drama of chapter 1 Ahiqar's involvement is what directly leads to Tobit's restoration, yet in the second "main" narrative Ahiqar's support is not enough. Tobit says that he was blind for "four years" (2:10). Aside from spoiling the plot somewhat, for it seems to imply that he was blind for *only* four years and thus presumes an afterwards, the narrator then says that Ahiqar's support was only "two years," before he left for Elymais. In other words, Ahiqar's help was only half done; he did not "finish the job," as it were. Indeed the remainder of the story, and its numerous sub-plots, appears to stretch over these missing two years. This is indicated by the repeated emphasis on things happening "at that/ the same time" (2:11; 3:11, 17), "on the same/that day" (3:7, 10), or "at that very moment" (3:16). To what day/time do all these sub-plot vignettes refer? The initial referent is none other than Ahiqar's departure to Elymais in 2:10. In other words, the sequence and impending resolution of both plots – that of the preface and the main narrative – depend on Ahiqar's actions. Intuitively, we may surmise that Ahiqar's support sustained Tobit for two years, then on the same day that Ahiqar departed, Raphael was sent to take over (3:17). In this way, Tobit's narrative artistry may actually mimic that of Ahiqar's. As noted above, the role of Nadan as subordinate family member who is expected to demonstrate kinship loyalty is incomplete. He instead betrays Ahiqar. Once he betrays his father/uncle, he no longer is "son/family"; instead, this role is overtaken by Nabusumiskun, whom Ahiqar notably names "one like a brother" (Ahiqar 49). Within Tobit's narrative world alone, though, Ahiqar plays an important role. His reappearance at the wedding feast (11:18) recalls his previous role and thus marks, at least structurally, the resolution to the internal drama. Later, his reappearance in Tobit's death-bed speech in ch. 14 likewise recalls the initial prologue, thus forming an external inclusio to the greater narrative.

The structural overlaps are reinforced by the familial dynamics that impress upon the plot's drama. Ahiqar is the nephew (or cousin) of Tobit, thus their relationship is the inverse of Ahiqar and Nadan's. Within the book of Tobit, therefore, Ahiqar is emblematic both of his own "character" (in Tobit's preface) and of the narratologically equivalent sub-character Nadan (in Tobit's main narrative). Ahiqar's familial standing further aligns him with Tobit himself as well as both Raphael/Azariah and Tobias. Tobit makes no explicit mention of Ahiqar as "wise instructor," but it is likely that his reputation as such likewise correlates him with Tobit and Raphael, both of whom give "wise speeches." To link Ahiqar with nearly every character may be overstating matters, but it is worth noting that the book of Tobit explicitly and symbolically links all of these sub-characters by drawing attention to their "relatedness" to the main character. They are all the same relative to the protagonist in the sense that they are all "family" and, ethically speaking, are expected to act accordingly.

Indeed, on the level of the story's overall ethic, Ahiqar's role fits in smoothly. The primary ethic of Tobit is kinship obligations, whether it be in terms of burial obligations, marriage, or reciprocal support. Ahiqar intercedes on behalf of Tobit (1:22) as one expects from a "relative" (1:21). This behavior is mirrored by Ahiqar himself (2:10) and by both Tobias and his "relative" Raphael. Functionally, Ahiqar's material support (echoing Tobit's earlier support of the poor) is ethically equivalent to Tobias's commitment to marry within the family: both directly result in Tobit's restoration.⁷³ Ahiqar's intercession, we are reminded in Tobit's very last words, were an "act of charity" (14:11). This final passage, not coincidentally, also links Ahiqar's charitable act of support with Tobit's concern for proper burial (14:10). Functionally, then, Tobit's acts of proper burial of family in the opening chapters, as well as Tobit's expectation that Tobias will do the same in his final testament, are the ethical equivalent of Ahiqar's "acts of charity." This same ethical equivalency is explicitly extended to the "charitable act" of endogamy that dominates the internal drama of Sarah and Tobias. As noted above, endogamy, according to Tobit, is at once a rejection of fornication and an expression of kinship obligation (4:12–13). To marry within the family is to "act charitably" toward the family; to refuse to do so is to spurn them (4:12–13). Categorically, then, Tobias's fulfillment of his father's command to marry within the family by marrying Sarah is the same as Ahiqar's earlier intercession and support for Tobit and is directly contrasted in Nadan's treatment of Ahiqar.

Finally, there is an important formal distinction between the first three occasions of "Ahiqar" in Tobit and the final one. In the former, Ahiqar appears as an actual character in the story; in the latter he is an external referent, someone whose "meaning" is but one particular construction embedded in a specific communal context or reading moment.⁷⁴ Ahiqar's story is "told" within the narrative as an external reference point that has some bearing on the greater narrative. Its position as the final speech of Tobit – in addition to the thematic and ethical links noted already above – recalls the opening "story" that Tobit (as narrator) tells about himself in ch. 1. The two mini-narratives are echoes of each other, even as much as they form an *inclusio* around the broader main narrative. Lest the reader think Ahiqar got a bad deal in comparison with Tobit by having an ungrateful nephew, Tobit emphasizes how Ahiqar was eventually saved, notably adding: "Because he [= Ahiqar] had done a charitable deed (ποιήσαι/ἐποίησεν ἐλεημοσύνην), he escaped

73 This structural/ethical parallel is mirrored in the intertwined third sub-plot of Sarah's (and by extension Raguel's) marriage-demon predicament.

74 Much of the language here is dependent on Lambert, "Tôrâ as Mode," 65–66.

the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him."⁷⁵ In all likelihood a reader familiar with Ahiqar's story would understand this to be an oblique reference to Ahiqar's dealings with Nabusumiskun. Yet Tobit, in leaving out this explicit connection, allows an interpretive window for reimagining the Ahiqar story *within the literary imagination of Tobit's world*. Hence, Ahiqar's salvific acts of charity were his intercession and support for Tobit in scene one of the Tobit metanarrative; whose resolution or reciprocal "pay off" come to fruition in the final scene of Tobit.

This is not a complete revision of Ahiqar but a clever appropriation for the purposes of Tobit's rhetorical agenda. The acts of "interceding" and "supporting" are exactly the actions that Ahiqar made on behalf of Nabusumiskun and vice versa. Tobit's integration of Ahiqar into his own narrative, therefore, has appropriated what is "well known" about the character of Ahiqar and thus adds a measure of credibility to his purported role in the "new" story about Tobit. In other words, it is reasonable to imagine that a given audience in the late Second Temple period was familiar with the Ahiqar story and further that "Ahiqar" in Tobit's story signified a certain set of ideas or qualities, one of which being that Ahiqar helps out and supports his comrades, even under threat from a dangerous and tyrannical king. Perhaps further, Tobit seems to have merged together Ahiqar's record of charitable behavior into a single descriptor that at once obscures its otherwise (supposed) "non-Jewish" character by the non-mention of Nabusumiskun and emphasizes its familial and ethical alignment with Tobit's overall message

Obligation to act charitably to one's family – whatever that may specifically entail (e.g., proper burial, endogamy, giving alms, public support) – is the "moral ethos"⁷⁶ of the book of Tobit and reflects what may be one of the primary means of performing, whether literally or imaginatively, Jewish identity in the diaspora. For the book of Tobit, therefore, Ahiqar stands as the premiere example of just such an imaginative reflection on familial obligation and, importantly, the dire consequences of when one fails to realize those obligations.

Much of the above discussion has drawn on previous scholars' arguments about Tobit's ethic and themes. However, the aspect of the narrative that has yet to be taken seriously through all of this is the fact that Ahiqar, according to Tobit, is Jewish. How, then, might this identification affect not only the way Ahiqar may have had a significance for Tobit's imagined audience but also for how scholars conceptualize "Jewish" identity, especially in a discussion of wisdom and Torah? What, we may ask, might the protagonist's final spoken words being made in refer-

⁷⁵ Translation adapted from NRSV. The GI and GII text have slightly different syntaxes here. Note also that some manuscripts (especially in GI tradition) oddly include the name "Manasseh" here instead of Ahiqar.

⁷⁶ Dimant, "The Family of Tobit," 227.

ence to such a character suggest about a narrative that has rightly been described as one utterly concerned with Jewish belonging and the kinship obligations that go with such belonging, as well as an anxiety about maintaining such a firm boundary with those outside the kinship group?

5.3 Ahiqar’s “Jewishness” in Tobit (and Beyond)

To be direct: for the audience of Tobit, Ahiqar *is* Jewish. The importance of stating this is that it stands in contradistinction to how the situation has been regularly framed previously, where Ahiqar is said to *become* Jewish in Tobit.⁷⁷ Such a statement makes one of two unstated assumptions, depending on the methodological approach of the interpreter. For those that think in essentialist (and, often, concomitantly positivist-historical) terms, Ahiqar was “in fact” Aramean, and Tobit has literarily “converted” him into a Jewish sage.⁷⁸ For others, who understand Ahiqar as a literary construction with a broad reception, there lies, at the very least, behind the phrase “becomes Jewish” an assumption that Ahiqar was understood by Tobit and, presumably, Tobit’s audience to be a famous foreign sage whose fame and prestige are being appropriated or “integrated” by the Jewish storyteller, whether to add authority or an aura of prestige to the titular character or otherwise.⁷⁹ A recent example of this kind of reading is offered by Daniel Machiela in an essay identifying broad trends across Aramaic literature from Qumran. Machiela identifies Tobit’s use of Ahiqar as one of the key examples of the authors of these Aramaic texts being open to adopting “foreign” elements and promoting an accommodationist attitude to foreigners.⁸⁰ Here, Machiela suggests that “Ahiqar and Nadin are

⁷⁷ See, e.g., J. R. C. Couslan, “Tobit: A Comedy in Error?” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 535–53, who says (p. 541) “Ahiqar is made into a Jew”; Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 32: “the narrative makes Ahiqar . . . not only an acquaintance of Tobit, but even a Jewish relative.” For an alternate appraisal, see Kottsieper, “Look Nadab,” 151 n. 17, who assumes that Ahiqar must have already been seen as “Jewish/Israelite” by Tobit’s readership, countering both general claims that Ahiqar only “becomes” Jewish in the text of Tobit or even more elaborate arguments that attempt to show how the very narrative of Tobit reveals Ahiqar’s “step-by-step” integration into the Jewish fold (e.g., Michael Weigl, “Die rettende Macht der Barmherzigkeit: Achikar im Buch Tobit,” *BZ* 50 [2006]: 212–34, esp. 213).

⁷⁸ Cf. the reference to Fitzmyer in n. 2 above.

⁷⁹ For a recent survey of scholarship on the function of Ahiqar in the Book of Tobit, see Macatangay, *Wisdom Instructions*, 10–13.

⁸⁰ Daniel A. Machiela, “The Compositional Setting and Implied Audience of Some Aramaic Texts from Qumran: A Working Hypothesis,” in *Vision, Narrative, and Wisdom in the Aramaic Texts from Qumran: Essays from the Copenhagen Symposium, 14–15 August, 2017*, ed. Mette Bundvad and Kasper Siegmund, *STDJ* 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 168–202, at 190–92.

transformed into Naphtalites in Tobit," referring to such traditions as a "foreign admixture" that has been "reshape(d)" with the result that they are "domesticated and reinscribed to the God Most-High."⁸¹ While Tobit may have been comfortable with drawing on "non-Jewish" traditions,⁸² this can hardly be the case with Ahiqar, who is explicitly stated to be Tobit's relative. The narrative takes this as a given, or, at least, cannot reasonably be understood as having the goal of turning Ahiqar into "one of us."

If one were to assume that, for Tobit's audience, Ahiqar was a well-known "foreign" sage, then this would potentially undercut not only the reliability of the author, but also the prominent attention in Tobit to maintaining strict boundaries between insiders and outsiders.⁸³ One might, however, suggest that the attention to Ahiqar's familial connection, whether through the double-formula in 1:21–22 or the seemingly unnecessary mention of Ahiqar's presence "with all the family" at Tobias's wedding feast (11:8), is overstated and thus actually speaks to the author's awareness of Ahiqar's *non*-Jewishness, thereby representing an effort to overcompensate in "making" Ahiqar Jewish. However, Tobit's somewhat repeated emphasis

81 Machiela, "Compositional," 191.

82 See, e.g., Dennis MacDonald's argument for Greek literature's influence on Tobit in "Tobit and the Odyssey," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. idem (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001), 11–40.

83 To be sure, interpreters have pointed to other aspects of Tobit that suggest a more inclusive attitude to foreign elements than the talk of endogamy, *inter alia*, suggests. In particular, there is the reference to the "whole world . . . being converted" and worshipping God (14:6). Notably, though, even in this seemingly open eschatological vision, Tobit still maintains a distinction between "the nations" and "the Israelites." While the former may convert and worship the true God, only the latter are able to "be gathered together" in safety in Jerusalem (14:7). Also, it is important to note, by the way, that this is not a direct critique of Machiela's point that certain elements within Tobit (or other Qumran Aramaic texts) may be traced to non-Jewish contexts. The aim, rather, is to demonstrate that the presence of such elements does not necessitate an accommodationist attitude. While they can play a role in evaluating sources along sociological (i.e., group identity) lines, it is not their observableness that is at issue but rather the way in which the discourse of the text frames Jewish identity and the general attitude, inasmuch as that can be discerned, toward the presumed demarcations between Jewish and non-Jewish. 1 Maccabees is a great example, for even though the text is written in Greek – and thus to some would represent a "foreign" element – the attitudes espoused therein are, ostensibly, far from accommodationist. The insular attitude observable in Tobit may not be as strictly formulated as in 1 Maccabees, but the potential presence of "foreign admixtures" would have little bearing on the perspective adopted by the narrative voice, particularly in the case here of Ahiqar, who is explicitly said to be *not* foreign. Further, even if one allows that Tobit's audience "knows" Ahiqar to be foreign, the rhetorical effect of "making Ahiqar Jewish" in the narrative is unlikely to reflect an accommodationist attitude; instead, it is more akin to a revisionist, ethno-centrism that reimagines a famous figure as "actually" one of "ours" and *not* "yours," thus functionally reaffirming a division.

on Ahiqar's kinship should not be read as an overly-done effort to "make" Ahiqar Jewish, which would presume an audience who was familiar with Ahiqar's story but assumed he was "other," or "foreigner," and then have to take Tobit's word for it that he was actually "one of their own." Instead, the emphasis on kinship with Ahiqar can be read alongside the otherwise prominent ethical and thematic thread of kinship that runs throughout the narrative. Thus, there are good structural and stylistic reasons for both of these passages to appear as they are and, moreover, that Ahiqar's relationship to Tobit is emphasized – if one can call it "emphasis" – is far from exceptional. Every major character in the story has their familial connections established plainly. This is true even for Tobit himself. Like Ahiqar, Tobit also has a doubled explanation of his genealogical chops, but his are even more overly done, with many seemingly superfluous details, including obscure (at least to modern readers) geographical references (1:2) and the somewhat extreme argument that he, and only he, of all the house of Naphtali spurned Jeroboam's calf and instead came to temple in David's Jerusalem (1:4–5). A similar concern features in the introduction to the angel Raphael/Azariah, where his genealogical connections are overly questioned (5:4–14).

If, in contrast to most readings, we take Ahiqar's "Jewishness" at face value, how does the specific hailing of the "Ahiqar discourse" in Tobit relate to the other prominent figures, including the patriarchs? In asking such a question, there are interesting points of resonance that arise. For example, Ahiqar is twice referenced in close proximity to Abraham.⁸⁴ Both Ahiqar and Abraham are known for being concerned with their lack of progeny, with specific attention to their old age (Ahiqar 1, 15; Gen 17:17). Both figures have stories circulating about them where they descend into Egypt with an anticipation of conflict but are ultimately successful in "defeating" Pharaoh and departing Egypt loaded with goods.⁸⁵

For all the discussion of Tobit as reflecting "traditional" figures of the Jewish past and their prominent concerns (e.g., endogamy), though refracted through a Hellenistic-Jewish lens and its concomitant concerns (e.g., kashrut), it may be surprising that Tobit only once mentions such figures by name (4:12).⁸⁶ Granted, Tobit

⁸⁴ The two references to Abraham are in 4:12 and 14:7. The first is slightly distant from the Ahiqar references in chs. 1 and 2, but still in the general prologue (i.e., before the travel narrative begins in ch. 5). The second directly precedes the important Ahiqar reference in 14:10.

⁸⁵ Genesis 12. The Egyptian episode in Ahiqar is not extant in the Elephantine text, though ubiquitous in the medieval recensions. There are, however, indications that this episode is ancient.

⁸⁶ Abraham, as noted, is mentioned once again in the idyllic future imagined by Tobit (14:5–7), when "the nations throughout the world will all be converted and worship God" and that "all the Israelites . . . will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham." Here, though, the reference is somewhat oblique ("land of").

makes mention of several figures from texts that come to be “Scripture,” including Adam and Eve (8:6) and the prophets Amos (2:6) and Nahum (14:4). Yet Ahiqar is mentioned by name on *four* different occasions in four separate parts of the plot. In other words, if one were to group Ahiqar with the other “famous” Jewish figures of the past that add an air of authority to Tobit, Ahiqar stands as the most prominent by far. Why, one might ask, is Ahiqar so important compared to the other ancestral exemplars? The most obvious answer is probably the correct one: because Ahiqar fits within the historical context of Tobit’s narrative. What better “Jewish hero” of the past could be used to buttress the credentials of this new hero of the Neo-Assyrian era than someone who is already famously known for being the epitome of the good and proper Jewish value of familial loyalty during that very time period?

In any case, one can consider that part of Tobit’s rhetorical strategy for promoting his ethic of acting charitably and familial loyalty is accomplished by his frequent allusions to such exemplary figures and traditions. Tobit does this both directly, in mentioning patriarchs and prophets by name, but also more subtly in his appropriation of themes, situations, and formal structures. The result is that Tobit’s literary contours reinforce the assertion within the narrative world itself as well as on the level of discourse (i.e., the imaginary author to the imaginary audience) that performing certain acts of charity and familial obligation is to be both “Torah-like” and “wisdom-like.” Quite strikingly, in Tobit Ahiqar performs this “wisdom/Torah-faithfulness” on two levels: as a character *within* the narrative world Ahiqar “performs” the ideals of Jewishness as defined in Tobit through his intercession and support of Tobit and also as *external* referent, whose “project” is one with which the implied audience is assumed to be familiar as with the other Jewish ancestors.

The function of Ahiqar as an external referent rather than a character within the story itself is also telling vis-à-vis Ahiqar’s Jewishness. In ch. 14 in Tobit’s final speech to Tobias – and thus, in terms of focalization, to the implied audience – the exonerated protagonist recalls the opening events of the narrative in bringing up the issue of the exile and making reference to Jerusalem (cf. 1:1–6; 14:4–7). This passage has drawn interpreters’ attention for good reason, not the least of which is the suggestion that “the nations throughout the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth” (14:6a). While the reference to foreigners potentially joining the fold may be taken to connect with the subsequent reference to Ahiqar, this is not the best way of understanding the rhetorical structure of the passage, especially since Ahiqar is already explicitly said to be part of the family of Israel. Instead, we may better read the speech’s opening prophetic retelling of the destruction and ultimate restoration of Israel as one that is immediately likened to the (near) death of Ahiqar “for a while” (μέχρι χρόνου; 14:4), who is ultimately redeemed. Likewise, just as Tobit’s prophetic rehashing tells of the permanent pun-

ishment of “those who commit sin and injustice” (οἱ ποιῶντες τὴν ἀμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀδικίαν) by their complete “eradication from all the earth” (ἐκλείψουσιν ἀπὸ πάσης τῆς γῆς; 14:7), so too is Nadan said to be destroyed because of his “injustice” (ἀδικία) by going into “eternal darkness” (τὸ σκότος τοῦ αἰῶνος).⁸⁷ In other words, when one considers the overall structure of Tobit’s final testament, there is a noticeable symmetry such that the final section, which is the retelling of Ahiqar’s story, stands as an individualized, exemplary model of the national narrative offered in the first section of the testament. The language for describing Israel’s restoration is also telling: “they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham” (14:7). This is the only other mention of Abraham – or any patriarch, for that matter – in Tobit outside of the first reference that also occurs in the earlier testamentary speech of Tobit. In this way, being in the “land of Abraham” is paralleled with Ahiqar’s “being in the light.” The prophetic narrative of the downfall but ultimate restoration of Israel, one anchored in the patriarchal tradition, is mirrored in the story of Ahiqar. The Jewish people, therefore, may be understood to be metonymically represented by the person of Ahiqar.

Recalling again the didactic context, where the exhortatory form of speech directly aligns the (imaginary) reader’s perspective with Tobias, we, as readers/hearers, are being told to consider Ahiqar’s story in light of corporate Israel’s story. Both stories carry an ethical-moral implication vis-à-vis “our” relationship to the divine. “We” as readers are being told to “look” to Ahiqar/the “true” Israel (14:7), to learn and emulate, lest we suffer destruction like Nadan/the apostate Israelites – a contrast Tobit earlier drew between himself and the followers of Jeroboam at the opening of the narrative (1:5–6). By the end of the story, “we” as readers, therefore, are in effect being told to go out and be as “Jewish” as Tobit *and* Ahiqar.

6 Conclusion: Ahiqar, Tobit, and “Wisdom and Torah” in the Second Temple Period

Most commentators on Tobit hardly deal with the Ahiqar references beyond a casual acknowledgment of the earlier Aramaic sage’s tale as evidenced from Elephantine and, occasionally, with some remark that Tobit has “made” Ahiqar Jewish. But what if Ahiqar was already “Jewish”? What if Ahiqar’s story, reputation, and import – however fluid – had already held a fixed status in at least some circles of the Jewish

⁸⁷ The Greek references follow GII; some of the language is evident in GI but there are some different phrasings.

historical imagination? What if the ancient reader saw Ahiqar as part of "our" (= Jewish) shared past, and thus Tobit's rhetorical utilization of "Ahiqar" as sage and ancestral exemplar was "natural" to its Jewish audience? In such a situation, an interpreter might better frame the situation *not* as the author of Tobit using his Jewish protagonist to *make or establish* the Jewishness of Ahiqar, but instead the author is actually using the *Jewishness* of Ahiqar to establish Tobit as an "authentic" Jewish hero.

Indeed, that is what this essay is suggesting: the story of Tobit elaborates on a relatively (or completely) unknown figure of the Jewish past, but whose credentials are affirmed by association with and emulation of the "known" ancestral heroes. The unknown figure, of course, is Tobit himself. The implied audience, presumably introduced to this Tobit for the first time, is immediately and at length told of his proper genealogical connections and, lest one have negative associations with "those Northerners," we are informed of his pristine Torah-faithfulness (1:1–7). His noteworthy actions, even in the face of mortal danger, are further qualified in their likening to familiar, reputable Jewish heroes of the past. Tobit, through the course of the narrative, emulates several of these "patriarchal" figures, including Noah, Abraham, Amos, but also Ahiqar.

It is not only that Ahiqar is mentioned alongside these other figures, but *how* he is mentioned. Reference to these famous figures of the Jewish past are rhetorical devices that anchor and affirm the norms and values espoused by the narrative. Their reputable actions are presented in such a way as to highlight how they are emblematic of *what it means to be Jewish*. In each case, being Jewish means performing acts of charity and doing so to support "the family" – an act subsequently played out by the characters in the present narrative. Endogamy, for instance, is promoted by explicit allusion to the patriarchs of Genesis as well as more general reference to the "law of Moses." But it is further buttressed in the very structure of the narrative which echoes quite closely the patriarchal narratives, both in specifics of plot (e.g., travel to find a wife from one's family) and in the communicative settings (e.g., the "testamentary" speeches). For Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was their commitment to endogamous unions that symbolized their "love" for their kindred and their offering of charity (4:12–13). For Ahiqar, it was his intercession and support on behalf of his kinsman Tobit. In turn, for Tobias, who symbolically represents the imagined audience and thus the intended social function of the narrative, it is both: marry within the family and support one's relatives in times of distress.

Tobit's "Ahiqar," both the character and the external "discourse," shares exactly the same function as the patriarchs. According to Tobit, he is a model of the primary ethical and moral obligation of acting charitably to one's family members. His story, like the patriarchal stories, seems to underlie the literary structure of the narrative. In fact, one could argue that Ahiqar's role in the narrative is structurally and

functionally necessary. Were it not for Ahiqar's initial act of familial charity, Tobit would not have been restored to his place of prominence. Ahiqar, though, is not just a character in Tobit. Ahiqar is also a story of the past to be looked to and emulated. He is Tobit's instructional paradigm in the final testament of ch. 14, which explicitly echoes the role of the patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in Tobit's earlier testament in ch. 4. For all intents and purposes, Ahiqar is a "patriarch" in the book of Tobit. To suggest otherwise would be to impose a division between Ahiqar and Abraham. So far as I can tell, for the specific communal context of Tobit, there is simply no reason to make such a categorical distinction.

Yet Ahiqar's role in Tobit, together with other formal and thematic features, signals another mode of discourse that scholars have generally identified as "wisdom." Tobit, like Ahiqar, speaks in lengthy didactic, exhortatory discourses to his son and successor. The ethos of the narrative overall could be described as one of paraenesis. Ahiqar plays a central role in Tobit in this regard. He is emblematic of the principle of reciprocity. Further, inasmuch as his story looms in the background, Ahiqar symbolizes the "two paths," one light, one dark, with which the student/audience is presented. Tobit's narrative exemplifies the results of choosing light/righteousness, while Ahiqar's narrative – by way of direct (14:11) and indirect allusion – exemplifies the results of choosing darkness/unrighteousness. Tobit's story ends with a final lesson to Tobias (= the audience): whom will you emulate – Ahiqar or Nadan?

To summarize and offer some concluding reflections: this re-reading of Ahiqar in Tobit, beyond offering some nuance to the narratological and rhetorical interpretations already present in scholarship, has implications for a broader scholarly discourse on Wisdom and Torah in Second Temple Period Jewish literature. Specifically, I have drawn our attention to the ways that scholars have demarcated intertextual and conceptual aspects of Tobit according to the previously constructed models of "wisdom" and "Torah" as distinctive traditions. By rethinking the function of Ahiqar's Jewishness in Tobit and treating it not as an incidental "Judaizing" of a foreign sage, but instead as an authentically meaningful signifier for the Second Temple readership, I have suggested that Ahiqar is just as much emblematic of Tobit's engagement with "Torah" (= scholarly cipher for uniquely Jewish traditions) as it is of his engagement with "Wisdom" (= scholarly cipher for acceptably "foreign" or, at best, "universal" influences). This coalescence calls for a rethinking of the categories themselves, not only with the specific result that Ahiqar might have actually been, in the eyes of at least some Jewish circles, an exemplary ancestor or "patriarch" of the Jewish past but also with the broader consequence of problematizing the very demarcation of such categories in the first place. If Tobit can so easily and seamlessly align Ahiqar, the wise sage, with the patriarchal heroes of Pentateuch, then it challenges the dichotomous way they are treated in the first

place. Where, we might ask, in Tobit’s deathbed speech (14:3–11) does the patriarchal “testament” end and the wisdom “instruction” begin? The result is that the previous hypotheses of their “confluence” in this period is problematic for it presumes a previously separate “flow” that only later comes together. These categories can be useful, but they can also get in the way, especially if they are treated as *sui generis* and mutually exclusive.

We may better understand Tobit and, in particular, Tobit’s “Ahiqar discourse” as part of a broader virtue discourse prevalent among Jewish literary production in the late Second Temple period and within which one may identify a variable set of rhetorical techniques – including especially a type of “ancestral reworking” – along with a diverse range of moral or ethical positions that are being extolled.⁸⁸ Tobit thus can be understood as a reflection on what it means to “live ethically” as a Jewish individual in any number of political or geographical contexts. The narrative’s utilization of Ahiqar stands out, then, as one of the primary rhetorical means for asserting its particular ethical message. To borrow and slightly adjust Elisa Uusimäki’s words for 4Q542 (the Testament of Qahat), I argue that the book of Tobit likewise “constructs moral models and paths for living by recognizing virtues of [prominent] figures of the past.”⁸⁹ Following Uusimäki’s line of argument further, we may recognize in Tobit’s retellings and/or expansions of stories about “patriarchs” and Ahiqar a literary occasion wherein “Jewish” identity is imaginatively “(re)constructed.”

More broadly, therefore, this reflection on Ahiqar in Tobit might contribute to recent efforts at reconsidering the ways we organize and signify literary production or (with Mroczek “bookish” critique in mind) literary imagination in the late Second Temple period. In doing so, we might ask: where does Tobit fit into the picture of late Second Temple period literary production, particularly in Aramaic?

On the one hand, Tobit has been somewhat of an outlier when measured alongside other Jewish Aramaic literature from the era. This likely has to do with the fact that Tobit is a totally unknown figure – at least as far as we know based on the current evidence – prior to the telling of this story, while the other Qumran Aramaic

⁸⁸ See Elisa Uusimäki, “In Search of Virtue: Ancestral Inheritance in the Testament of Qahat (4Q542),” *BibInt* 29 (2021): 206–28. Uusimäki’s analysis of Testament of Qahat elucidates a number of scholarly interpretive strategies for describing the book of Tobit’s “testamentary” qualities – without, incidentally, making any specific claims of genre – as it relates to the text’s virtue-discourse vis-à-vis the figure of Ahiqar.

⁸⁹ Uusimäki, “In Search of Virtue,” 208. Where I insert “prominent” Uusimäki employs the term “biblical.” The substitution is not meant to be critical of Uusimäki’s argument per se. Indeed, she later indicates that by reconfiguring 4Q542 in this way – i.e., as part of a broader context of virtue discourses in the ancient Mediterranean – she hopes to signal “a shift away from canonically oriented enterprises, which have largely dominated the analysis of ethical issues in the field of biblical studies” (p. 208).

narratives feature some familiar character or characters from the “biblical” tradition, even if they are only mentioned by name in some genealogical list. In other words, despite also being a “Qumran” text, Tobit has rarely featured in the many discussions of rewritten, parabiblical, and exegetical expansions of “Scripture/authoritative literature.”

Recent developments, however, have shifted matters somewhat, as studies are increasingly seeing Tobit as reflecting the broader trends of Aramaic (and, to some extent, Hebrew) literary imagination, namely the observable popularity of developing expansive stories based on famous ancient figures or those related to them.⁹⁰ Deborah Dimant has offered the most recent description for understanding Tobit’s place vis-à-vis the “Aramaic literary scene” of the late Second Temple period, arguing, “one of the literary facts to emerge from the Qumran evidence is the existence in the Aramaic corpus of distinct thematic cycles. Among them are the two that shaped Tobit: a) the biographies of the biblical patriarchs; b) court tales about great kings and courtiers.”⁹¹ Daniel Machiela likewise has suggested that Tobit should be read more closely alongside other Aramaic texts from Qumran, especially those that have been variously identified as “rewritten Bible” like the Genesis Apocryphon, arguing that both “share a deep concern for Israelite identity and conduct in a world beset by widespread impiety and foreign domination.”⁹²

If this is our guiding assumption for Tobit, then it would, to some degree, support the reading offered above concerning Ahiqar’s role in Tobit. We could, that is, understand Ahiqar as *the* “authoritative” figure whose legacy is the foundation out of which this new literary production (i.e., the Book of Tobit) has grown. Thus, it is on Ahiqar’s credentials as an exemplary figure of the Jewish past that Tobit’s story depends. It may be the case that Tobit could rightly be categorized as a narrative expansion of the “Ahiqar tradition” much the same way that the Testament of Qahat is understood as an expansion of the Genesis tradition. This would presume, of course, a context within which “Ahiqar” signified an authoritative (or *authorizing*) kind of discourse. As a result, it could be argued that Ahiqar held a much more formative place for at least some Jewish communities than has previously been realized.

This may seem a rather bold argument to make, and I offer it only tenuously here. For one, Ahiqar, unlike Qahat, Enoch, or several other examples of “narrative expansions” of authoritative traditions, is not from that all-important formative period as outlined in Genesis. But it is tempting to point to other examples that

⁹⁰ See Dimant, “Tobit and Qumran,” 176–77, for a brief survey of the few articles over the past 15 years where Tobit was included in the conversation with other Aramaic texts from Qumran.

⁹¹ Dimant, “Tobit and Qumran,” 177.

⁹² Daniel Machiela, “Tobit and the Genesis Apocryphon: Toward a Family Portrait,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 111–32, at 132.

may have had a very similar development from "pagan" celebrity to "famed Jewish persona," and likewise are imagined to be from later eras. In particular I am thinking of Daniel/Danel, Job, and perhaps even Esther and Mordecai. For each of these personalities, scholars have, at one point or another, suggested that they were "originally" foreign and only later grafted into the Jewish tradition, primarily *by literary means*. Yet hardly anyone questions their credentials as rightly "Jewish" or "biblical/authoritative" for the late Second Temple period. When it comes to Ahiqar, however, my hunch is that much of the hesitation for hypothesizing a similar process has little to do with the logic of the argument or even with the possibility of such a process taking place,⁹³ but with the fact that Ahiqar has been a more or less obscure figure within the Western academic-confessional tradition and, unlike the rest, never held "canonical" status (as far as we know). Indeed, the reading I have offered here has attempted, in the words of Mroczek, to "leave teleological questions in the margins" and to describe a text within a literary milieu that "had no awareness of a canonical finish line."⁹⁴ Might there not have been a time when Ahiqar was a Jewish hero of the past, whose wisdom and pious actions were examples of good "Torah-faithfulness" and therefore worthy to be emulated?

This may be pressing things too far, even if we were to completely set these "canonical" presumptions aside. Nevertheless, given the evidence we do have, it seems reasonable to interpret Tobit as a narrative reimagination of a Jewish past that illustrates how ancestral Jews were paragons of virtuous behavior over against external threats of empire and the potential loss of communal identity – the maintenance of which required a configuration of Jewishness that championed familial acts of reciprocity and charity, values that have good, "Torah" precedents. Tobit has thus crafted a pastiche-like rhetorical emulation of those stories, set during a period that has particular importance for later Jewish self-understanding, namely a time of foreign oppression – an oppression that is specifically manifested in the foreign authority's attempt to *restrict* the public practice of Jewish custom.⁹⁵ To be sure the specific "customs" that define what it means to be Jewish are subject to change – here in Tobit it may be endogamy, proper burial, and supporting family even against public threat, while in other contemporaneous texts like 1 Maccabees

93 By way of a perhaps clunky analogy, one might consider how certain groups in the "West" likewise (re)imagine figures of a tremendously diverse past that are constructed as "theirs" and thus see themselves as "natural" inheritors to their legacy, i.e., the so-called "Golden Nugget" myth; for an outline and critique thereof, see the impactful essay by Kwame Anthony Appiah, "There is No Such Thing as Western Civilization," *The Guardian*, 9 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture>.

94 Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 12.

95 For some language used here I am indebted to Molly Zahn, *Genres of Rewriting*, esp. 186–89.

it may be dietary practices, circumcision, and dressing properly – but on a discursive level the book of Tobit accords nicely with broader trends in the imaginative (re)formulating of Jewish identity through recourse to “past” figures evident in the literary record. In the same way, though somewhat ironically from our perspective, Ahiqar’s presence in Tobit may actually serve a *legitimizing* function much like Phinehas’s does for the Maccabees (e.g., 1 Macc 2:26). With Ahiqar being an already well known figure of the past, it is, in fact, his credentials that “hook” the audience into the viability of this “new” story about an unheard of, but apparently important, figure from “our” history. What better way to establish this newly remembered hero of the Jewish past than to make him a relative of an already established Jewish figure, one whose reputation is uniquely suited to illustrate the issues at hand?

So what I propose then is the very opposite of how matters have been framed up to this point. That is, instead of seeing Tobit’s Jewish credentials being used to bring Ahiqar into the fold; it is precisely the opposite: Ahiqar is the one who *makes Tobit Jewish*, who gives his story some reasonable credence for an audience that had never heard of him before. Of course, the accomplishment does not rest entirely on Ahiqar’s shoulders, not by any stretch. This essay is simply suggesting that Ahiqar is one of many “authoritative” sources on which the author of Tobit has drawn to craft his compelling tale of a hitherto unknown Jewish hero of the past. This is a figure who has been instructed in the law of Moses and performs them admirably even in the face of persecution, like the famous prophets of the same era, Amos and Nahum, but also like the ancestors of old, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His ethical example extends beyond the Torah (as text), and, in a move reminiscent of Ben Sira’s praise of ancestors (Sir 44–50), Tobit’s “Ahiqar” is an ancestor who exemplifies the virtues of wisdom. For Tobit, Torah and Wisdom coalesce in Ahiqar. Lastly, in light of the social context of the work that seems to care a great deal about establishing family ties, to confirm an “new” individual as authentically “kindred” Tobit must make it clear that its titular character and protagonist is related to “the right people.” Against all scholarly expectations, the right person to make Tobit into a Jewish hero and sage is none other than the patriarch Ahiqar.

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