

Aḥiqar and Bisitun

The Literature of the Judeans at Elephantine*

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1. Literature from Elephantine

What I would like to investigate in this article are the pieces of literature found amongst the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine: the composition headed *The words of one named Aḥiqar* and the Aramaic version of the Bisitun inscription of Darius the Great.¹ More precisely, I would like to address whether these two pieces of literature are significant examples of the literature known to the Jewish (or, rather, Judean) colony and, if they were, how they fit into the historical and cultural context of the colony.

Though evidently not of Jewish origin, from the very beginning of their publication both pieces of literature were reckoned to belong to the archives of the Jewish colony. In his 1911 edition of the Elephantine material, Eduard Sachau divided the material into four categories: letters, lists, legal documents, and literary documents (among them Aḥiqar and Bisitun, and a third fragmentary work that is, however, no longer counted as a literary work but seems to be a contract).² Arthur E. Cowley also speaks in his 1923 edition of the Elephantine material of “three literary pieces” and writes: “The literary pieces, it is true, are evidently of non-Jewish origin, but they show nevertheless the kind of literature which was current in the community.”³ Bezalel Porten, too, thinks that “the

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¹ COWLEY, Papyri, 204–248 (Aḥiqar) and 248–271 (Bisitun); TAD C1.1 (Aḥiqar) and C2 (Bisitun). If not otherwise stated, text and translation are quoted according to TAD. A further edition of the Bisitun inscription can be found in GREENFIELD/PORTEN, Inscription; on Aḥiqar, see GINSBERG, Proverbs, 427–430; LINDENBERGER, Proverbs; KOTTSIEPER, Geschichte, 320–347; NIEHR, Aḥiqar, 1–55.

² SACHAU, Papyrus; cf. UNGNAD, Papyrus. The text in question is SACHAU, Papyrus, no. 60 (= COWLEY, Papyri, no. 69 = TAD B8.5). See SACHAU, Papyrus, 183–184 with pl. 52; UNGNAD, Papyrus, 82–83.

³ COWLEY, Papyri, xiv. Cowley doesn’t specify “three pieces” here; he may have had – besides Aḥiqar and Bisitun – the rest of the tale in mind (see COWLEY, Papyri, no. 71 = TAD C1.2).

piece of Wisdom literature [Aḥiqar] may have been read by Yedanyah in his free moments.”⁴

However, the connection of these literary pieces with the Judean colony is not as evident as one might like. Unfortunately, we can no longer reconstruct precisely where the German archaeologists discovered the papyri.⁵ According to the archaeologists’ report and Otto Rubensohn’s diary (*Grabungsbuch*), the fragments of Aḥiqar and Bisitun were found during the second campaign (December 10, 1906 to February 22, 1907)⁶. The exact findspot is not clear; the report says only that the papyri were found in the “other Aramaic quarter” (*das andere aramäische Quartier*), either within or outside houses *m* and *n*. The description of the findspot is both imprecise – “am Abhang des Koms vor Mauer *m* 1, die größere Menge aber ist an der Mauer *m* 2 und an der späten Mauer *m* 3 aufgedeckt worden” – and also a bit suspicious: “Die Papyri lagen hier kaum ½ *m* unter der modernen Oberfläche im losen Schutt.”⁷ Some scholars thus tend to follow Giovanni Garbini in his suspicion that the papyri may have come from elsewhere and been deposited there by smugglers (*clandestini*) for the Germans,⁸ who themselves were under some pressure by a German papyrus cartel to achieve success in this “papyrus hunt.”⁹

The archaeological context of the findings is thus unclear. Our two literary pieces, however – Aḥiqar and Bisitun – wherever they were originally unearthed, were discovered or transmitted together with other Aramaic papyri which evidently come from the Jewish colony at Elephantine. In terms of language and content, the two literary pieces belong to the group of Arameans at Syene and Elephantine, but one has to take into account that the Arameans and Judeans were very close in terms of language and identity; Judeans are occasionally also called Arameans in the documents.¹⁰ Neither did they strictly distinguish or separate themselves in regard to culture and religion from their neighbors. There seems to me enough ground to conjecture that the Aḥiqar and Bisitun texts

⁴ PORTEN, Archives, 263, with regard to Yedanyah son of Gemaryah, who was a leader of the Jewish colony at Elephantine; see also PORTEN, Archives, 146. This seems to be the basis for the suggestion that Aḥiqar was found in the house of Yedanyah, see KNAUF, Elephantine, 180.

⁵ See NIEHR, Aḥiqar, 2–4; WEIGL, Achikar-Sprüche, 19–22. On the excavations, see HONROTH/RUBENSOHN/ZUCKER, Bericht, 14–61; MÜLLER, Papyrusgrabung 1–2, 75–88; MÜLLER, Papyrusgrabung 3; MÜLLER, Papyrusgrabung Nachtrag; on the recent archaeological campaigns on Elephantine, see VON PILGRIM, Textzeugnis, 485–497; VON PILGRIM, Quartier, 192–197; PORTEN, Elephantine, 51–54.73–84; furthermore the contribution of B. Schipper in this volume (see pp. 209–233).

⁶ See HONROTH/RUBENSOHN/ZUCKER, Bericht, 14–15; MÜLLER, Papyrusgrabung 1–2, 80–88, esp. 82–83.

⁷ HONROTH/RUBENSOHN/ZUCKER, Bericht, 28–29 with table 3.

⁸ See GARBINI, Introduzione, 152–153.

⁹ On the historical background, see PRIMAVESI, Geschichte, 173–187.

¹⁰ See KRATZ, Arameans and Judeans; furthermore the contribution of G. Grassi in this volume (see pp. 3–34).

found at Elephantine were read and (also) taught in the Jewish colony and that they are significant examples of their literature. I would thus like to undertake an experiment in what follows and read the *Words of Aḥiqar* and the Aramaic version of the Bisitun inscription as if they were the literature of the Judeans of Elephantine, asking how well these documents sit with this Judean cultural and religious context. This, however, raises the question of the relationship between Elephantine and the Hebrew Bible.

In *Der Papyrusfund von Elephantine*, Eduard Meyer argued that Aḥiqar belonged to the books read by the Jews from Elephantine, and that it is only by [historical] accident that it is not to be found in our Bibles.¹¹ Cowley, by contrast, is a bit more cautious and finds it problematic that Aḥiqar and Bisitun were the only literary pieces found at Elephantine. He thinks that “their interest consists not only in what they say but in what they omit: in the light they give and in the darkness in which they leave us.”¹² And both Aḥiqar and Bisitun are, indeed, of great significance. They are part of a corpus of literature of non-Jewish origin, widespread in oriental antiquity, and that possess a long reception history. The original version of Darius’ inscription was written in three languages: Elamite, Persian, and Babylonian.¹³ In addition, it was published throughout the empire. We know of a further Babylonian version on a fragment of a stele, as well as the Aramaic translation from Elephantine (written in the official language of the Persian Empire in the West). The *Words of Aḥiqar* are even wider spread. Like the Hebrew Bible, but independent from it, the Aḥiqar tradition became part of the canon of world literature: we have a series of translations and paraphrases of the work in several ancient languages from the common era, among them Syriac and Arabic versions.¹⁴ Traces of the Aḥiqar tradition are also to be found in several different cultures, in the book of Tobit, for example, and possibly in the Luqman-Surah of the Qur’an (Surah 31), as well as some manuscripts of the Arabian Nights.¹⁵

In short, alongside the Hebrew Bible – which was translated into Greek in Alexandria – also non-biblical and non-Jewish writings such as the *Words of Aḥiqar* and the Darius inscription from Bisitun formed part of the literature of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt of the Persian and Hellenistic times. They were not only read there in addition to the books of the Hebrew Bible, but – especially at Elephantine – possibly instead of the books of the biblical tradition. I will now

¹¹ MEYER, *Papyrusfund*, 98–128, esp. 98.106–197.119.

¹² COWLEY, *Papyri*, xiv–xv.

¹³ SCHMITT, *Inscriptions*; VON VOIGTLANDER, *Inscription*; German edition in BORGER/HINZ, *Behistun-Inschrift*, 419–450.

¹⁴ CONYBEARE/RENDEL HARRIS/SMITH LEWIS, *Story* (Cambridge); CONYBEARE/RENDEL HARRIS/SMITH LEWIS, *Story* (Oxford). A new online edition of the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts will be published in 2021 by Simon Birol and Aly Elrefaei on a platform of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (SUB) Göttingen.

¹⁵ See KÜCHLER, *Weisheitstraditionen*, 319; NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 1–32.

try to shed a little light on this argument, and go through these two works as if they were significant examples of the literature of the Judeans at Elephantine.

2. The Words of Aḥiqar: The Narrative

Column 1 of the Aḥiqar fragments from Elephantine begins with a superscription: “These are the words of one named Aḥiqar, a wise and skillful scribe, which he taught his son.” The fragments of this palimpsest should be dated to the fifth century BCE on palaeographical and material grounds. They consist of two parts: a narrative about the fate of the sage Aḥiqar, and a collection of proverbs attributed to this sage. Both narrative and proverbs form a single composition here, but they did not originally belong together. Linguistic evidence shows that the proverbs are older than the narrative.¹⁶ In general, scholars assume that both parts were independently attributed to Aḥiqar and only secondarily joined together. For my part, I believe it more likely that the figure of Aḥiqar was originally connected to either the (older) collection of proverbs or the (younger) narrative, and that his authorship was then subsequently transferred to the other (formerly anonymous) part of the *Words of Aḥiqar*.¹⁷ The title *Words of One Named Aḥiqar* (*mly ḥyqr šmh*) fits both the narrative and the proverbs.¹⁸ I begin with the narrative.

Two famous German scholars of Arabic studies, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, have characterized the Aramaic version of the Aḥiqar narrative as the gamete of the ancient novel, and thus of the novel in general.¹⁹ The narrative is formulated in the first person singular, which means that Aḥiqar tells his story.

¹⁶ See KOTTSIEPER, *Sprache*, and more recently WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*.

¹⁷ It seems likely that the name is genuine to the narrative portion of the composition. This argument is bolstered by the fact that, throughout the course of the tradition's transmission, up unto the late oriental versions, the narrative remains stable; the proverbs, by contrast, are much more variable and were changed and adapted according to one's own tradition. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the narrative was created in response to an existing collection of proverbs and that both parts were then received differently. It is highly likely that both narrative and proverbs were subjected to extensive redaction and numerous recensions before the Elephantine version; this aspect of the composition can, however, be neglected here. On this problem, see the discussion in KOTTSIEPER, *Geschichte*; KOTTSIEPER, *Look*, 145–167; WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 691–722. It is not yet certain, and is still to be evaluated, whether the composition history of the Aḥiqar material is best explained by assuming a source- or a supplementary hypothesis (or even a combination of both).

¹⁸ See WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 699–701. Despite the arguments in KÜCHLER, *Weisheitstraditionen*, 175, the heading *mly ḥyqr šmh* (“The words of one named Aḥiqar”) does not necessarily have to refer solely to the proverb collection; as the examples in Neh 1:1 or 4Q242 (OrNab) show, such a heading might refer equally to a first person narrative; the same has to be said of the formulation “before his words” in col. i:2, a reading that is not certain (see KOTTSIEPER, *Geschichte*, 324; NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 38).

¹⁹ See KÜCHLER, *Weisheitstraditionen*, 320 n. 4, referring to ALTHEIM/STIEHL, *Untersuchungen*, 183.

The plot of this story is easily summarized: Aḥiqar was a high official – scribe, counselor and keeper of the seal – of the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, and all Assyria listened to his counsel. Since he himself had no sons, he adopted Nadin, the son of his sister, and raised him as his own, teaching him everything he knew. When Aḥiqar grew old, he designated Nadin as his successor and “installed him in the palace gate,” that is, introduced him as counselor and keeper of the seal of King Esarhaddon. As soon as he takes office, Nadin begins to defame his uncle and spread the rumor that Aḥiqar was planning an uprising against the Assyrian king. As a result, Esarhaddon orders his official Nabusumiskun to kill Aḥiqar. The reader also learns that Nabusumiskun himself once fell from grace and was sentenced to death by Sennacherib, but that he was saved by Aḥiqar (who hid him and sought out an opportunity to introduce him once more to the court). Nabusumiskun agrees to do the same for Aḥiqar. A slave is thus killed in Aḥiqar’s place and Aḥiqar is hidden in Nabusumiskun’s house until an opportunity for his rehabilitation should present itself.

At this point in the narrative, the fragmentary Aramaic version of the story from Elephantine breaks off. From the later (Syriac and other Christian) versions, however, we learn how the story ends. These tell how the Egyptian Pharaoh challenged the Assyrian king with a series of riddles, as well as challenging him to send a wise man capable of supervising the construction of a palace between heaven and earth. Neither Nadin, Aḥiqar’s nephew, nor any of the Assyrian king’s other counselors could meet the challenge. It is at this moment that Nabusumiskun reveals Aḥiqar to still be alive. The king is delighted by the news and asks Aḥiqar to solve the riddles of the Egyptian king and to safeguard his rights. This Aḥiqar does. He is rehabilitated, and his nephew Nadin is punished and killed.

This is the story, but how should we interpret it, and how would a member of the Judean colony at Elephantine in the late fifth century BCE have read it? Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Nabusumiskun (in Akkadian: *Nabu-šumu-iškum*) are historical figures who lived during the late eighth and early seventh century BCE Neo-Assyrian Empire. This was a period during which the sustained symbiosis of Arameans and Assyrians in northern Syria and Mesopotamia reached its peak. For this reason, scholarship has spent a good deal of time discussing whether Aḥiqar was a historical figure and whether or not his fate might reflect historical events. Neither his existence nor his story can be proven, and both are rather unlikely, as Cowley has already noted.²⁰ The question of historicity, however, is irrelevant to the interpretation of the Aḥiqar narrative. There are indeed certain reminiscences of the historical situation around the year 700 BCE, but this historical coloring serves to produce a certain literary type, the topos of a member of an ethnic minority who rises in status (to the role of counselor, scribe,

²⁰ COWLEY, Papyri, 207–208. On the historical value of certain evidence from Uruk, see NIEHR, Aḥiqar, 9–10.28.

keeper of the seal, cupbearer, etc.) and gains influence and honor at the foreign court because of his special gifts and unwavering loyalty to the foreign king.²¹

This genre or literary topos – which can be defined as a sapiential teaching in narrative form – is perfectly fitted to the circumstances of the Judeans at Elephantine. The aim of the genre is to provide a hero for people who are in a situation similar to what is narrated; these people are then able to identify themselves with the hero and use his fate as a model for themselves and as a blueprint for how to behave as a member of an ethnic minority in the service of foreign rulers. Aḥiqar thus serves as an example of the suffering righteous person who is threatened by the intrigues of either his own family members or fellow officials. The suffering of the righteous person is a central topic of much ancient Near Eastern, and especially Mesopotamian and biblical, wisdom literature – we have only to think of biblical figures such as Job, Joseph, Daniel or Esther. The story of Aḥiqar (like these other stories) seeks to reassure those that are suffering in a similar manner that their virtue will prevail in all situations. Such reassurance reinforces a central concern of international wisdom: the connection between acts and consequences. Whosoever acts justly will, in spite of their obstacles, be rewarded in the end (just like Aḥiqar); whoever acts unjustly or wickedly will be punished (just like Aḥiqar's nephew Nadin).

We must thus ask what particular virtues define the hero of such sapiential narratives and that will be tested by his suffering? Such virtues are exemplified in different ways. Job and Daniel embody religious steadfastness, while Joseph (like Daniel, too) possesses extraordinary mantic abilities that help him to survive. Esther, in turn, is an example of ethnic responsibility. But how about the Aramean Aḥiqar? As far as he is concerned, his virtue is first and foremost his humanity as embodied in his behavior towards the official Nabusumiskun. Aḥiqar says to Nabusumiskun, who has been ordered by the king to kill Aḥiqar, and whom Aḥiqar had previously saved from death: “Now, you, just as I did for you, so, then, do for me” (*k'n 'nt lqbl zy 'nh 'bdt lk kn 'pw 'bd ly*)²². This request follows the basic principle of just retribution and is a precursor to the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. One should treat others as one would like to be treated by others.

Porten found a striking parallel to this rule in the correspondence of the Arameans from Syene in one of the Hermopolis letters Makkibanit wrote to his sister Re'ia:²³

And now, it is well for Ḥarudj here. Do not be concerned about him; as you could do for him, I am doing for him (*kdy tkln t'bdn lh 'bd 'nh*). Both Tapamet and Aḥatsin are support-

²¹ Similarly WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 704–709, who attempts to deduce insights about the literary origin of Aḥiqar from this literary topos; NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 7–12, proceeds more carefully.

²² TAD C1.1:51–52.

²³ PORTEN, *Archives*, 270–271.

ing him (*msbln lh*) ... now as much as I am doing for Ḥarudj thus may Banit do for me (*k't mlw kzy 'bd 'nh lhrwš kwt t'bd bnt 'ly*). Verily, is not Ḥarudj my brother?²⁴

This is exactly how Aḥiqar treated Nabusumiskun when he was in danger, and it is how Nabusumiskun should now treat the endangered Aḥiqar: “Now, you, just as I did for you, so, then, do for me” (verb *'bd*). This same fraternal ethic is also to be found in the letters of the Judeans of Elephantine.²⁵

In addition to the fellow feeling embodied by Aḥiqar, there is another aspect of his narrative which scholarship tends to neglect when interpreting the story. I am thinking of his relationship to the king. Aḥiqar's virtue is expressed above all by his unwavering loyalty to the Assyrian monarchs, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. In the Aḥiqar narrative, the Assyrian king is painted in almost god-like strokes: Aḥiqar bows down before him as before a god, the king loves a human being or is angry with him, he lets his face shine upon a person, he is benevolent, and he is lord over life and death. Even in his greatest distress, having been accused of subverting the land against the king and sentenced to death, Aḥiqar remains loyal to the king. Furthermore, even the failure to observe royal orders – as when Aḥiqar saves Nabusumiskun under Sennacherib, and Nabusumiskun saves Aḥiqar under Esarhaddon – ultimately serves as proof of loyalty (and is rewarded in the end).

The moral of the story is thus not simply that those who act righteously will be rewarded. Rather, the narrative also transmits a political message to officials at foreign courts: survival is built not just on one's own abilities, but also on unwavering political loyalty. This loyalty to the king can be observed in many of the documents from the Jewish colony at Elephantine. In particular, one sees such demonstrations of loyalty – be it out of diplomatic courtesy, be it (also) meant seriously – in the official correspondence regarding the rebuilding of the destroyed temple.²⁶ The greeting at the beginning of the famous letter from the Judean officials of Elephantine to Bagavahya, the Persian satrap of Yehud, is revealing:

To our lord Bagohi governor of Judah, your servants Jedaniah and his colleagues the priests who are in Elephantine the fortress.²⁷ May the God of Heaven seek after the welfare of our lord abundantly at all times, and grant you favor before King Darius and the princes a thousand times more than now, and give you long life, and may you be happy and strong at all times.²⁸

The letter itself also expresses absolute loyalty to the king, referring to the beginning of Persian rule over Egypt under King Cambyses and promising Bagavahya offerings, as well as the prayers of the whole community:

²⁴ TAD A2.3:3–8.

²⁵ PORTEN, *Archives*, 272–277.

²⁶ See KRATZ, *Second Temple*.

²⁷ TAD A4.8 adds: “and the Jews all of them.”

²⁸ TAD A4.7:1–3; cf. A4.8:1–3.

And during the days of the king(s) of Egypt our fathers had build (sic!) that Temple in Elephantine the fortress and when Cambyses entered Egypt he found that Temple built. And they overthrew the temples of the gods of Egypt, all (of them), but one did not damage anything in that Temple.²⁹

...

Now, your servants Jedaniah and his colleagues and the Jews, all (of them) citizens of Elephantine, say thus: If it please our lord, take thought of that Temple to (re)build (it) since they do not let us (re)build it. Regard your obligees and your friends (*b'ly tbt k wrhmyk*) who are here in Egypt. Let a letter be sent from you to them about the Temple of YHW the God to (re)build it in Elephantine the fortress just as it was formerly built. And they will offer the meal-offering and the incense, and the holocaust on the altar of YHW the God in your name and we shall pray for you at all times – we and our wives and our children and the Jews, all (of them) who are here. If they do thus until that Temple be (re) built, you will have a merit before YHW the God of Heaven more than a person who offers him holocaust and sacrifices (whose) worth is as the worth of silver, 1 thousand talents and [[about]] gold.³⁰

The famous Passover letter³¹ demonstrates that even King Darius II himself was involved in the matters of the Judeans, making political loyalty to be in their own best interest.

In sum: personal integrity and political loyalty (even if the latter is, in fact, just politeness or flattery) are the two virtues propagated by the Aḥiqar narrative, virtues that are handed down to its readers as teachings for life. Both teachings were needed, and obviously taken to heart, by the Judeans at Elephantine.³²

3. The Words of Aḥiqar: The Proverbs

The collection of proverbs is also supposed to be a teaching for life. On linguistic grounds it can be dated to the eighth century BCE. Its origin, however, is debated since we can trace both West Semitic (that is, Canaanite and Aramaic) and Mesopotamian influences in the form and content of the proverbs. Ingo Kottsieper proposed – on the basis of language and content – that the proverbs originated in southern Syria; several experts dispute this hypothesis, though, and argue that they originated in northern Syria, where contacts with Mesopotamia during the Assyrian period were most intense.³³ Regardless, the tradition history of the proverbs in the Aḥiqar literature has proven flexible. In later versions we find different collections with various provenances. In the fables of Aesop, for exam-

²⁹ TAD A4.7:13–14; see also A4.8:12–13.

³⁰ TAD A4.7:22–28; see also A4.8:21–27.

³¹ TAD A4.1.

³² For a similar concept in Daniel, Ezra, and Esther, see KRATZ, *Translatio*.

³³ See KOTTSIEPER, *Sprache*; KOTTSIEPER, *Geschichte*, 323; contrast NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 13–14, and WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, esp. 657–669.

ple – which seem to have absorbed the Aḥiqar tradition – we find typical Greek *gnomoi*, while in the Syriac (Christian) tradition we find more biblical proverbs, mostly influenced by the book of Ben Sira.³⁴

The exact order of the proverbs is a further difficulty. At Elephantine, several individual sheets of papyrus were discovered containing one or two columns of smaller thematic compositions of proverbs.³⁵ The original order of the sheets and the exact placement of the proverbs in relation to the narrative has yet to be determined. In the later Syriac and Arabic versions, the proverbs and the narrative are interwoven; as such, they appear first as Aḥiqar's instruction to his nephew Nadin before Nadin's intrigue and, towards the end of the story, as a philippic against Nadin. As to the Aramaic version, most scholars assume that the proverbs followed the narrative and were not yet integrated into the story. Here, too, however, Kottsieper offers a fresh explanation based on his own material reconstruction of the fragments.³⁶

There is no need to solve all these problems here. Instead, I would like to highlight the intertextual connections between the narrative and the proverbs. In some cases, such connections are made explicit through certain self-referential proverbs that reflect the relationship between Aḥiqar and the nephew that he raised as his son:³⁷

[A person w]ho does not exalt in the name of his father and in the name of his mother, may [(the) su[n] (OR: Sham[ash]) not shine [for him] for he is a bad person.

[From] my [hou]se went out my bad (situation) and (so) with whom shall I win (= be found innocent)? *

The son of my belly spied out my house and (so) what shall I say to the strangers?

[My son] was to me a malicious witness and who, then, (will) let me win will (= judge me innocent)? *

From my house went out my wrath; with whom shall I dispute and BE WEARIED (OR: be firm and flourish)?

It is evident that these proverbs reflect the poor relationship between Aḥiqar and the adopted Nadin. There are good reasons to assume that such a connection

³⁴ KÜCHLER, *Weisheitstraditionen*, 338–347.358–363.380–385.411–412.

³⁵ WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 718–722.

³⁶ For the consensus, see TAD C23; NIEHR, Aḥiqar follows TAD C23, as does WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*. Contrast KOTTSEPER, *Sprache*; KOTTSEPER, *Geschichte*; see also the detailed discussion in KOTTSEPER, *Look*. The central question here is the value of the (preserved or conjectured) datings of the fiscal list (originally written on the palimpsest) for the reconstruction of the fragments (Porten and Yardeni have to assume exceptions too!). One also has to consider whether the original arrangement of the narrative and the proverbs can, or should, be determined solely on the basis of a material reconstruction (Kottsieper). Both approaches have their difficulties, such as the uncertain readings on which arguments are based (for example, Porten's col. ii:25 [TAD C1.1] is col. ii:9 according to KOTTSEPER, *Geschichte*). The problem of the text's reconstruction thus remains unsolved.

³⁷ TAD C.1.1:138–140.

was made, or at least stressed, during the process of redaction that fused the narrative with the proverbs.³⁸

The same is probably true of those proverbs with a royal focus that reflect the narrative's theme of political loyalty.³⁹

Do not cover (= ignore) the word of a king; let it be healing [for] your hea[rt].

Soft is the speech of a king (yet) it is sharper and mightier than a [double-]edged knife.

See before you a hard (= severe) thing: [*against*] the face of a k[in]g do not stand.

His rage is swifter than lightning. You, watch yourself.

Let him not show it (= his rage) because of your sayings (= utterances) and you go (= lest you die) not in your days (= prematurely).

[*See the go*]od of a king. If (something) is commanded to you it is a burning fire. Hurry, do it.

Do not kindle (it) against you and (do not) cover your palms (= "sit on your hands").

[*More*]over, (do) the word of the king with heat/delight of the heart (= eagerly).*

[*H*]ow can wood contest with fire, flesh with knife, a man with k[ing]?

...

Soft is the tongue of a k[ing] (OR: A tongue is softer *than* [...]) but the ribs of a dragon it will break like death which is [n]ot seen.*

...

A king is like (the) Merciful (OR: indeed merciful); moreover, his voice i[s] high.

Who is there who can stand before him (= serve him) but (he) with whom El is?

Beautiful is the king to see like (the) sun (OR: Shamash) and precious is his glory to (them that) tread the earth (as) f[ree] men (OR: in tran[quility]).

These proverbs are an exception in so far as they no longer occur in the later versions. They seem to represent a very early redaction which sought to connect the narrative and the proverbs; the later (Syriac, Arabic etc.) versions accentuated the text's moral and religious foci, whereas the proverbs with a royal focus were apparently no longer needed.⁴⁰ However, in the context of the Aramaic composition – consisting of both narrative and proverbs – the sayings with a royal focus echo the narrative. In them we find reference to the word of the king that both kills and gives life; to his orders, which one should follow with his whole heart and whole soul. We hear of the king's anger, which one should not provoke; of his face, which one should not resist; of his god-like appearance; and of his mercy.

As in the narrative, so in the proverbs: unwavering loyalty towards the king is recommended as sapiential teaching. In both contexts, the king is compared

³⁸ WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 697, with a reference to LINDENBERGER, *Proverbs*.

³⁹ TAD C1.1:84–92.

⁴⁰ See WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 701–703, though his naive historical conclusions should be ignored here. The proverbs in themselves can refer either to the kings of the Aramean city-states of the ninth-eighth centuries BCE or to the Assyrian king (as the Aramean states were vassals of Assyria until they were dissolved and integrated into the Assyrian provincial system). In connection with the narrative, however, the proverbs can refer only to the Assyrian king. See the interesting historical hypothesis in NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 13–14.

to God – implicitly in the narrative, and explicitly in the proverbs (to El and Shamash), where the gods play an important role. Reference to a “lord of the holy ones” (*bʿl qdyšyn*) is made immediately before the proverbs with a royal focus; this “lord” is probably to be identified with the highest “God of heaven,” Baal-shamayn or Hadad, who rules over the hosts of heaven. The “lord of the holy ones” would seem to be the highest god of the Aramean pantheon. In the context of the narrative, he was probably identified with Aššur, the state god of the Assyrian Empire. In addition, we encounter in the proverbs both El, who is mentioned as a protective god of the individual, as well as the sun-god Shamash, who is seen – as was common in Mesopotamia – as the god of justice. Lastly, an anonymous group of “gods” (*ʾlhn*) are mentioned who interfere in manifold ways with life on earth – a life for which the proverbs seek to provide the right teaching.

It is plain that the proverbs reflect some aspects of the narrative in religious terms. Taken together, the narrative and proverbs not only demand unconditional loyalty towards the (Assyrian) king, but also unconditional loyalty towards the gods, who are seen as forming a unity with the king. If one wanted to characterize the overall teaching of the narrative and proverbs that comprise the composition entitled *Words of Aḥiqar*, we might say that the composition proclaims “Fear God (or: the gods) and the king!”

Again, this teaching fits perfectly with the evidence from the Judean colony at Elephantine. The world of the gods in the *Words of Aḥiqar* possesses a polytheistic structure and is mainly of Aramean and Mesopotamian origin. If we survey the references to the gods in this text, we see that these references are identical to the pantheon that is reconstructable from Aramaic inscriptions of the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.⁴¹ Both the Aramaic inscriptions and the *Words of Aḥiqar* stem from the same period and from the same geographic region; they reflect the Assyrian-Aramaic symbiosis of northern Syria at that time.⁴² This historical situation reminds us of the cultural, sociological and religio-historical situation on the island of Elephantine, as well as Syene, during the late fifth century BCE.⁴³ Here the Judeans lived alongside other ethnicities (especially Arameans), were connected with their neighbors through intermarriage, and worshiped (or at least respected) several other Canaanite and Aramean deities alongside the Israelite or Samaritan deity YHW. Amongst these deities were Herem, Beʿel, Herem-Beʿel, Eshem-Bethel, Anat-Bethel, and Anat-Yahu. There is also evidence that they respected Mesopotamian (Bel, Nabu, Shamash and Nergal) and Egyptian (Satet, Khnum) gods.⁴⁴ This evidence consists of papyri, which are

⁴¹ NIEHR, *Aḥiqar*, 18–20.

⁴² WEIGL, *Achikar-Sprüche*, 667–669, 677–690.

⁴³ KRATZ, *Second Temple*; KRATZ, *Temple and Torah*; KRATZ, *Ambassadors*; KRATZ, *Israel*; also BECKING, *Ezra*, esp. 128–142.

⁴⁴ See the full evidence in PORTEN/LUND, *Documents*, 425–427; see also VAN DER TOORN, *Anat-Yahu*, 80–101; BECKING, *Gottheiten*.

undoubtedly of Judean provenance, and which provide authentic insights into the life of this ethnic group on the island: the list of benefactions for the god YHW as well as for the gods Anat-Bethel and Eshem-Bethel,⁴⁵ for instance, or the greeting formulae in private and official letters, or the oaths taken before other gods besides YHW. All this attests to a religious pluralism (or polytheism) of Yahwism within the Judean or Jewish community of Elephantine.⁴⁶

In light of all the above, the *Words of Ahiqar* look like a significant – if not normative – piece of the literary canon, which may well have been used by the Judean elite at Elephantine as part of the scribal education curriculum. As instructions for living one's life, the *Words of Ahiqar* are literally timeless. They are not appropriate only to the historical context of Assyrian times, but are also valid during the time of other imperial powers, such as the Persian Empire (whose representatives, incidentally, often referred to their Assyrian predecessors). From the *Words of Ahiqar*, the Judeans and the Arameans on the island could learn how to “fear God (or the gods) *and* the king.”

4. The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great

“Fear God *and* the king” is also the motto of the Bisitun inscription of Darius the Great.⁴⁷ The papyrus found at Elephantine appears to be a copy of an older manuscript of the Aramaic version and was later reused for accounts, which were written in the blank space following the last column of the text of the Bisitun inscription. The dates of these accounts imply a *terminus ad quem* for the copy and support a palaeographical dating to the last quarter of the fifth century BCE, during the rule of Darius II. The Aramaic text is very close to the Akkadian version of the Bisitun rock, and especially to the Babylon fragment of the inscription. Both the Babylon fragment and the Aramaic version seem to be a “slightly variant and abridged version of the original.”⁴⁸ Of special interest is the end of the Aramaic version,⁴⁹ where we find a composite text consisting of both Bisitun and a passage from another Darius inscription from Naqš-i-Rustam (= DNb).⁵⁰

The function of the inscription and its translations into the different languages of the empire was, first and foremost, royal propaganda. The Aramaic

⁴⁵ TAD C3.15.

⁴⁶ See GRANERØD, *Dimensions*. Greeting formulae: TAD A3.5; 3.7; 4.1; 4.2; 4.4 (as in TAD A3.9; 3.10, etc.); TAD D7.21; 7.30; oaths: TAD B2.8; 7.2; 7.3; collection account: TAD C3.15; see PORTEN, *Archives*, 151–186.

⁴⁷ For the edition of the Aramaic text, see GREENFIELD/PORTEN, *Inscription*; TAD C.2.1; for the other versions of the Bisitun inscription, see above n. 12.

⁴⁸ GREENFIELD/PORTEN, *Inscription*, 16.

⁴⁹ TAD C2.1:64–73.

⁵⁰ See GREENFIELD/PORTEN, *Inscription*, 3.5.47; SIMS-WILLIAMS, *Paragraph*, 1–7; TAVERNIER, *Inscription*, 161–176.

version may in fact have been produced or recopied on the occasion of the centennial celebrations of the accession of Darius I to the throne (522/1 BCE), which happened to coincide more or less with the accession of Darius II (423 BCE). The personal admonition at the end of the inscription, taken from Naqš-i-Rustam (DNb), supports this hypothesis. The copy, however, also had meaning for its Aramaic-speaking recipients. As Jonas C. Greenfield and Bezalel Porten have suggested, the recopying “would have been a reaffirmation of the loyalty of the Elephantine Jews to the Persian crown,” and may also have been copied for the Arameans settled at Syene, who had likewise to demonstrate their loyalty – to Darius II in particular – as the official letters of the Yedanyah archive show.⁵¹

All the Aramaic speaking colonies at Syene and Elephantine were expected to adhere to the Achaemenid imperial ideology as expressed in the Bisitun and other Persian royal inscriptions.⁵² In their inscriptions, the Persian kings state their expectation for unconditional loyalty and integrity from the lands and nations they have conquered. The kings’ sayings – orders, as well as “laws” – were to be respected as though they were divine law. The Persian term for this is *dāta*-, used, for instance, in the original inscription (col. i:23). In the Babylonian version (line 9/section 8), the word is rendered *di-na-a-tú*: “under the protection of Ahura Mazda I made my laws effective within these lands.”⁵³ The Aramaic version is not preserved at this point, but the Persian loanword *dāt* was probably used here, just as in Ezra 7. Furthermore, the Persian kings call upon the nations to uphold the divine order of the world – an order created by the Persian god Ahuramazda. Loyalty to the king is therefore at the same time loyalty to Ahuramazda. “Fear God and the king” is thus also part of the royal ideology published in the western parts of the empire and taught to the conquered peoples, not least through the Aramaic version of the Bisitun inscription.

This royal inscription – which is, in fact, a solid piece of literature – is very close to the *Words of Ahiqar*. It shares with the narrative the idea of loyalty to the foreign king, while, with the proverbs, it shares the idea of loyalty to both god (or the gods) and the king. The similarities are particularly pronounced in the final sections of the Aramaic version of the Bisitun inscription, with its reference to the Naqš-i-Rustam inscription (DNb). These final sections invoke blessings and curses, respectively, upon those (successors of the king) who listen to lies and those who love the truth.⁵⁴

[Darius the King says: Whoever yo]u are O King who will be after me, a man who lies (yš zy ykdb) [... withdr]aw from great lies (mn kdbn šgy'n). Take heed (OR: ... [withdr]

⁵¹ See GREENFIELD/PORTEN, *Inscription*, 3.

⁵² For the royal ideology expressed in these inscriptions, see KRATZ, *Translatio*, 197–260; FREI/KOCH, *Reichsidee*; MATHYS, *Achämenidenhof*; GRANERØD, *Favour*, 445–480.

⁵³ VON VOIGTLANDER, *Inscription*, 13.54.

⁵⁴ TAD C2.1: 64–73 = DB Akkadian lines 97–98/105–106; DNb lines 50–60; DB Akkadian lines 102–103.

aw. [From great lies guard yourself). A li[a]r who lies (*k[d]yb zy ykdb*) [... *Abundantly*] make known how you are made (= what is your nature) and how your conduct is. [*Let not that be good before you which in*] your[*e*]ar one may say. Hear what openly one will say. [*Moreover, let not that be good before you which a nobleman will d*]o. What a poor man will do – that see (= observe). Moreover, before you [... *and do not in*] your well-being be remiss [*Believe*] what I did. To [*the people tell the truth. Do not hide ...*] [*If*] you do not hide (it), Ahuramazda will b[less you (*and*) love you and your seed will be abundant and your days will be longlasting. But if you do conceal it, Ahuramazda will c[urse you and you will not have (any) seed].

This admonition could easily be adopted into the individual ethics of any given person, reminding us of both the plot, and some sayings, of the *Words of Aḥiqar*:

... for the favor of a person is his trustworthiness (*hymnwth*) and his hatefulness are the lies of his lips (*kdbt špwth*). [*Moreover, if ini*]tially the throne is set up for the liar (*lkdb'*), then fina[lly] they [shall] perceive his lies (*kdbth*) and spit in his face. [*A man who*] lies (*mldb*), his neck is cut (OR: face [*and say*], Liar. May his neck be cut) like a Yemenite (Taimanite) virgin (*kbtwlh tymnh*) who [...] ... face, like a man who will do the bad [*with hi*]s [*hands*] and from gods it did not go out (= not caused by the gods).⁵⁵

El will twist the mouth of the twister (= treacherous) and tear out the tongue of [...]. Let good eyes not be darkened and [*good*] ears [*not be ...*] the upright (*kšyʿ*) and he will say it.⁵⁶

The Bisitun inscription, too, might thus have been read from the perspective which we have already seen in the *Words of Aḥiqar*, where personal integrity and political loyalty are virtues that ought to be taught, and taken to heart, as a teaching for life.

5. Elephantine and the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible, too, is teaching for life; at least, it was *supposed* to be a teaching for the life of Judaism in Persian and Hellenistic-Roman times. It is therefore surprising that no part of the Hebrew Bible was found at Elephantine. One may, of course, suggest that religious practices, such as mourning, fasting, or celebrating the festivals of Mazzot, Pesach and Sabbath, presuppose knowledge of the Torah, and that the Hebrew (Israelite) onomasticon proves the influence from biblical psalms.⁵⁷ However: “The only piece of literature found at Elephantine was the Wisdom of Aḥiqar. It is not known, therefore, whether the Elephantine Jews had collections of Psalms.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, all the religious notions and rites attested

⁵⁵ TAD C1.1:132–135.

⁵⁶ TAD C1.1:156–158.

⁵⁷ PORTEN, Archives, 105–150; PORTEN, Elephantine. For the onomasticon, see SILVERMAN, Aramean Name-Types; SILVERMAN, Hebrew Name-Types; SILVERMAN, Values.

⁵⁸ PORTEN, Archives, 146.

in the material from Elephantine can be easily explained through the lens of the traditions and customs of the traditional YHWH-religion, which – while it encompasses both the Bible and religious practice at Elephantine – does not necessarily take knowledge of either the Torah of Moses or the biblical psalms of David as a prerequisite.⁵⁹ Because of this, I still tend to think that the Judeans at Elephantine were not yet aware of the biblical writings.

In my view, the literature of the Judean colony at Elephantine reflects a pre-biblical stage of Israelite and Judean religion which can also be detected in the Bible itself.⁶⁰ There are many parallels between the literature from Elephantine and the Bible: the narrative of Aḥiqar recalls Job, Joseph, Daniel, and Esther (including the additions in the Septuagint), while the proverbs of Aḥiqar offer a multitude of parallels to Proverbs, Qoheleth, and Ben Sira.⁶¹ The proverbs with a royal focus in particular are very close to a similar group of sayings in Proverbs 16 (vv. 10–15), as well as other passages in Prov 14:35, 19:12, and 24:21–22.⁶² These parallels – both in the narrative and in the proverbs – are found not only in the Hebrew text, but also in the Septuagint, though the Greek translation differs in several passages from the Hebrew (Masoretic) original. Even the motto which we have used to describe both the *Words of Aḥiqar* and the Bisitun inscription is derived from a biblical parallel in Prov 24:21, where we read: “Fear YHWH, my son, and the king!”

Such features that are shared by the Elephantine and biblical literature belong to a pre- or non-biblical stage of the Israelite and Judean tradition which only later became part of canonical biblical literature. The material was reinterpreted, reshaped and transformed within the context of biblical literature, and it is the religious perspective of the Hebrew Bible that makes the difference between Elephantine and the later biblical traditions: in the biblical narratives, the virtue of the protagonist is delineated in theological terms; his virtue finds its clearest expression in his faith in the true God. God and the king are not equal in Proverbs; just like any other human being, the king is subordinated to the one and only God.⁶³ It is this difference that allows us to recognize the transformation from non-biblical to biblical Judaism that is apparent not just in comparisons of non-biblical with biblical texts, but in the Hebrew Bible itself. A critical analysis

⁵⁹ A relic of (pre-biblical) cultic literature may be preserved in the fourth century BCE P. Amherst 63. The reading and interpretation of this papyrus, however, are still debated. See STEINER, Text, 309–328; WESSELIUS, Gebet; KOTTSIEPER, Texte, 200–202; RÖSEL, Psalmen, 81–99; VAN DER TOORN, Papyrus; furthermore the contributions of T. L. HOLM and K. VAN DER TOORN in this volume (see pp. 323–352 and 353–362).

⁶⁰ See KNAUF, Elephantine; KRATZ, Second Temple; KRATZ, Temple and Torah; KRATZ, Ambassadors; KRATZ, Israel; furthermore BECKING, Ezra, esp. 128–142; GRANERØD, Dimensions.

⁶¹ NIEHR, Aḥiqar, 24–25; in detail, WEIGL, Achikar-Sprüche, 733–756 and *passim*.

⁶² WEIGL, Achikar-Sprüche, 740.742–743; in detail 110–185.

⁶³ SCHERER, Wort, 189–210.

of the Hebrew Bible shows that older (non- or pre-biblical) traditions, comparable to the *Words of Ahiqar*, were transformed by later reworkings and recensions of the Hebrew and Greek texts that introduced the supremacy of the true God.⁶⁴ On an analogy with the shift from Graeco-Roman paganism to Christianity, or pre-Islamic paganism to Islam, Judaism, too, underwent a change from a pre-biblical “paganism” to an exclusively monotheistic biblical faith.⁶⁵ This can be seen both when we compare the religious practice of the Judeans of Elephantine with the theological concepts of the Hebrew Bible, and when we differentiate between the literary strata within the Hebrew Bible itself.⁶⁶

The literature from Elephantine had obviously not yet been transformed in this way. The process of transformation and integration of this kind of literature into the biblical tradition, however, took place in the book of Ezra and in Daniel 1–6. In these books we find the adoption and transformation of Persian imperial ideology and language into the biblical concept of pure loyalty – loyalty of both the people and the foreign king – to the one true God, his temple and his law.⁶⁷

In the case of the Ahiqar tradition, we can trace such a change even more clearly when we look to the transformation of the fifth century BCE Aramaic *Words of Ahiqar* into a Jewish version as it is found in the book of Tobit. With Tobit we make a rough leap in time of approximately 200 years to arrive in the Hellenistic period. This was a time when the literature of the Hebrew Bible and Greek Old Testament was widespread amongst the Judeans in Palestine and the Egyptian Diaspora. We learn from Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek sources that the non-biblical and non-Jewish Ahiqar tradition continued to circulate alongside this literature.⁶⁸ It is possible that this tradition continued to be read and taught by Judeans (be they in Palestine or in the Egyptian Diaspora) that did not yet feel bound by the biblical commitment to the one true God and his law.⁶⁹ The motto “Fear God (or: the gods) and the king” was now – depending on political circumstances, as well as personal interests – simply transferred from the Persian to the Seleucid (Syrian) or Ptolemaic (Egyptian) king.

⁶⁴ WILKE, Kronerben, esp. 158–179.284. In the case of biblical narratives, such changes can be seen best in the tradition history of Daniel 4–5 and 4Q242 (PrNab), as well as in the additions to Daniel and Esther in the Septuagint; see KRATZ, *Translatio*, 77–160; KRATZ, *Nabonidus*.

⁶⁵ WELLHAUSEN, *Reste*; KRATZ, *Reste*.

⁶⁶ KRATZ, *Second Temple*; KRATZ, *Temple and Torah*; KRATZ, *Elephantine und Qumran*; KRATZ, *Ambassadors*; KRATZ, *Elephantine und Alexandria*; KRATZ, *Israel*; furthermore BECKING, *Ezra*, esp. 128–142.

⁶⁷ See KRATZ, *Second Temple*; KRATZ, *Ezra*; KRATZ, *Ambassadors*. A different view is found in PORTEN, *Archives*, where no distinction is made between Elephantine and the biblical tradition; the similarities in language and style, however, which also MEYER, *Papyrusfund* used as an argument, do not prove the authenticity and historicity of the Aramaic documents in the book of Ezra.

⁶⁸ NIEHR, *Ahiqar*, 28–29.

⁶⁹ This could apply, for example, to the Judeans of the military colony at Leontopolis; see KRATZ, *Elephantine und Alexandria*.

Things are different in the book of Tobit. Tobit is a piece of biblical literature from the third or second century BCE known to us in two Greek versions, as well as from the Dead Sea Scrolls, where two recensions – one Hebrew and one Aramaic – are attested in fragments.⁷⁰ The fictitious narrative of the sage Tobit is set in the distant Neo-Assyrian past of the Israelite people. This was a time when Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was conquered by the Assyrians, under the rule of King Shalmaneser V and King Sargon II. As a result of this conquest, a large portion of the Samaritan population was exiled to Assyria and Media, where they continued to live under Sargon's successors, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. The plot of the Tobit narrative is thus set in the same period as the story of Aḥiqar, and it is little surprise that Aḥiqar appears as a marginal figure in some passages of Tobit.⁷¹

From these passages in Tobit, we can reconstruct almost in its entirety the story of Aḥiqar and of his nephew Nadin (called Nadab). As in the later versions of the story, though, narrative variants (already) present themselves: the house of Nabusumiskun, where Aḥiqar hides until he is rehabilitated, is a dark hole in the ground in Tobit, and Aḥiqar's salvation is seen as a deliverance from darkness into light. Like his house, Nabusumiskun himself – the Assyrian counselor who was once saved by Aḥiqar, and who subsequently saves Aḥiqar from death – has vanished; his role is partly transferred to Aḥiqar, who now saves Tobit from Sennacherib and enables his return to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. The proverbs of Aḥiqar are also distributed differently in Tobit: they are placed in Tobit's mouth (Tobit 4 and 14) and serve as an exhortatory speech directed towards his children. Above all, Aḥiqar takes on a new identity in the book of Tobit. Here, he is a relative of Tobit (and thus a member of the Israelite tribe of Naphtali) who was exiled by the Assyrians. Aḥiqar and Nadin (Nadab) are no longer Arameans but have become Israelites. As a result, Aḥiqar's charity towards members of the Aramean people, and towards his own family, is now limited to a family that is identical with the people of Israel. The Aḥiqar story that paired the charity of the protagonist with loyalty towards the gods and king is transformed into an exemplary narrative of the biblical ideal of compassion (*eleosyne* in Greek) for the members of one's own people.

Tobit's reinterpretation of Aḥiqar's rescue is also motivated differently. Aḥiqar remains a high official at the Assyrian court in the book of Tobit, but loyalty towards the Assyrian king, in contrast to the Aramaic version from Elephantine, is no longer a significant topic in the book. The same can be said of loyalty towards the gods of the Aramean or Mesopotamian pantheon. In the book of Tobit, Aḥiqar's rescue is no longer the result of his loyalty towards gods or king, or his charitable behavior towards Nabusumiskun. Rather, it is the one, true God

⁷⁰ HANHART, Tobit; FITZMYER, Tobit (1995); FITZMYER, Tobit (2003).

⁷¹ Tob 1:21–22, 2:10, 11:18–19, 14:10–11 (and 14:15); see KÜCHLER, Weisheitstraditionen, 364–379.

of the biblical tradition who delivers him; and who demands compassion and righteousness from his followers (and rewards them for it).⁷² It is thus no longer the actions of Aḥiqar, or the gods, or the god-like king,⁷³ but simply an act of the one, true God – who alone decides matters of life and death – that rescues Aḥiqar. Like any other pious person from the people of Israel, God leads Aḥiqar from darkness into light. Aḥiqar becomes in the book of Tobit an exemplary believer in the one, true God.

These changes in the book of Tobit – especially the ethnic absorption of Aḥiqar, and his rescue by the one, true God – reflect a significant step from pre- or non-biblical, Aramaic-Judean paganism towards biblical monotheism. This step was also a prerequisite for the Christian reception of the story in the Syriac and Arabic versions. These versions also attribute the narrative's course of events to the one, true God, while towards the end of the Syriac version, Aḥiqar says to his nephew Nadin:

My son, I taught thee that there is a God; and thou risest up against good servants, and beatest those that have not sinned; and like as God has kept me alive on account of my righteousness so hath He destroyed thee for thy works But God is He that hath kept me alive, and He will judge between us.⁷⁴

The Arabic versions formulate this sentiment as follows:

O my boy! he who doeth good shall meet with good; and he who doeth evil shall meet with evil, for the Lord requireth a man according to the measure of his work.⁷⁵

If it is true that the figure of Aḥiqar also lurks behind the pre-islamic sage who teaches his son in Surah 31 of the Qur'an, then Islamic tradition, too, continues seamlessly – but with its own accentuation – the Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Aḥiqar tradition:

And call to mind when Luqman said to his son, while exhorting him: 'My son, do not associate others with Allah in His Divinity. Surely, associating others with Allah in His Divinity is a mighty wrong.'

⁷² Thus according to Tob 14:10 G^{II}; in G^I we find a *passivum divinum*.

⁷³ All three motifs still resonate in Tobit and later versions of the story, but are subsequently anchored in a new monotheistic interpretative context; see, for example, CONYBEARE/RENDEL HARRIS/SMITH LEWIS, *Story* (Oxford), 751 (gods), 758 (a king like the sun), 769 (compassion and righteousness with, and without, divine assistance).

⁷⁴ CONYBEARE/RENDEL HARRIS/SMITH LEWIS, *Story* (Oxford), 775–776; see 775 for the Armenian version.

⁷⁵ CONYBEARE/RENDEL HARRIS/SMITH LEWIS, *Story* (Oxford), 776.

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