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MEETING JOB IN THE EARLY JEWISH TRADITION THE FOREIGNER WHO TOOK CARE OF FOREIGNERS

Lieve TEUGELS

ABSTRACT

In early Jewish interpretations of the Bible, Job is associated with foreigners in various ways, either as a foreigner, i.e., a non-Israelite, himself, or as one who was generous towards foreigners and strangers before his suffering began. As to the first, Job's national origins and the time in which he lived, about which the Bible is silent, are a source of speculations throughout the Jewish, as well as the Christian, history of interpretation. Whereas Second Temple sources such as the Testament of Job are unanimously positive about Job's generosity and his acceptance of suffering, the rabbinic sources are more nuanced. Specifically in the comparison with Abraham, whose course of life displays many similarities to that of Job (blessed – suffering [Gen 22] – blessed again), Job's generosity is downplayed. In this essay two reasons are given for this rather lukewarm rabbinic attitude towards Job: first that many rabbinic sages considered him a gentile, and, second, the awareness of Christian interpretations of Job as a prophet to or even as a prefiguration of Christ.

Introduction

In early Jewish interpretations of the Bible, to which I reckon the whole range of biblical commentaries and expansions in their various forms, dating from the Second Temple to the classical rabbinic works (ca. 5th cent. CE), Job is associated with foreigners in various ways. For one, he is often considered a foreigner, i.e., a non-Israelite, himself. Since in the biblical account information about Job's national identity is sparse, this topic gave rise to many discussions and speculations, some of which will be presented here. Second, Job is also seen as someone who was good hearted towards strangers and foreigners himself. The way this is appreciated differs among the sources, the rabbinic sources being less generous than the Second Temple and early Christian texts in their praise of Job. Both topics are related, as Judith Baskin laconically writes: “the

primary concern is his ethnic origin for on this all other considerations rest.”¹ If Job was not an Israelite, his generosity could not possibly be as great as Abraham’s, his predecessor, and according to some his ancestor, with whom he is often compared because their lives follow similar patterns. In this thematic collection about foreignness dedicated to Klaas Spronk,² a selection of relevant ancient Jewish texts about Job, his foreignness, and his attitude towards foreigners will be presented; meanwhile, and in conclusion, some suggestions for the reasons behind the diverse appreciations of Job in these sources will be ventured.

Job the Edomite or the Egyptian king?

In the Septuagint, the final verse of the book of Job contains a long section that is found neither in the MT nor in any Aramaic version of the Bible, despite its alleged origin in a “Syrian” source.³ This supplement reads as follows:

This man is interpreted from the Syriac book as living in the land of Ausitis, on the borders of Idumea and Arabia, and previously his name was Jobab; now he took an Arabian wife and fathered a son whose name was Ennon, and he in turn had as father Zara, a son of the sons of Esau, and as mother Bossora, so that he was the fifth from Abraam. And these are the kings who reigned in Edom, which country he too ruled: first Balak the son of Beor, and the name of his city was Denaba, and after Balak, Jobab, who is called Job [...]. Now the friends who came to him were Eliphaz, of the sons of Esau, king of the Thaimanites, Baldad, the tyrant of the Sauchites, Sophar, king of the Minites. (LXX Job 42:17)⁴

¹ Cf. Judith Reesa Baskin, “Rabbinic Interpretations of Job,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 102. Baskin investigates the various, non-uniform rabbinic traditions about Job’s identity and his character in her *Pharaoh’s Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition*, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 47 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983). According to her, the rabbis saw Job first and foremost as the type of the righteous gentile. On p. 7 she states that the absence of any genealogical data for Job in the Bible, as well as the lack of the assertion that he was an Israelite, de facto implies that he was not.

² It would be tacky to call Klaas a “righteous gentile” but at the PThU we know him as a teacher who is especially devoted to foreign students, from visiting BA exchange students to his many PhD students.

³ See Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Job as Jobab: The Interpretation of Job in LXX Job 42: 17b–e,” *JBL* 120 (2011): 31–55.

⁴ NETS translation based on the critical edition of Ziegler. See <https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/28-iob-nets.pdf>. I changed the spelling “Job” and “Jobab” to the more common “Job” and “Jobab” used in the present study.

This addition, if we may call it such, provides some answers to a question that remains open in the MT version of Job: what were the historical circumstances of his life? In Job 1:1 we read that he lived in the land of Uz (in the LXX “Ausitis”). The location of this land is, however, not specified. Moreover, nothing can be found about the time in which he lived. The gap could be intentional; some scholars are of the opinion that this story was never meant as a historical account but rather as an exemplary story.⁵ On the other hand, evidence from El Amarna letters (1353–1322 BCE)⁶ mention a king Ayyabu of Ashtarot, who may be identical with the biblical Job.⁷ Ashtaroth was part of the Egyptian territory. In any event, most⁸ post-biblical interpreters, from the LXX to the rabbinic sages did not appreciate poetic language and fictive stories in the Bible: they read these as facts and history and used them for teaching and homiletics.⁹ In the Jewish interpretative tradition, we find several attempts to fill the gaps left by the biblical story. They did this, typically, by identifying unknown figures with better-known figures and providing locations and relations.¹⁰ Some of these interpretations also point to Egypt, as we will see.

⁵ Carole Fontaine treats the work as a folktale in “Wounded Hero on a Shaman’s Quest. Job in the Context of Folk Literature,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 70–85.

⁶ EA 256 and EA 364.

⁷ See Johannes C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism*, 2nd Rev. and enl. ed., BETL 91 (Leuven: University Press, 1997), 151–52. Although Meindert Dijkstra was more sceptical about the historical content of the book of Job, he still referred to a possible place where the events could have transpired, and where they are still remembered, i.e., Sheich Sha’ad in Syria which is close to Astaroth. Cf. Meindert Dijkstra, “Het gelijk van Job: Over de vorm en betekenis van het boek Job,” *NedTT* 72, no. 3 (2018): 229, note 8.

⁸ An exception is a rabbinic sage quoted in the Babylonian Talmud who said that the story of Job was a “parable.” See b. Bab. Bat. 15a: “One of the sages sat before rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani and said: Job never existed and was never created. Rather (his story was) a parable.” In one of his interpretations in Gen Rab 57:4 (see further), this sage is identified as Shimon ben Lakish. When the other sages remark that Ben Lakish contradicts himself because elsewhere he said that Job lived in the time of Abraham, it is explained that he meant that Job “was never exposed to the sufferings ascribed to him. Why then were they ascribed to him? Because had they come upon him, he would have been able to withstand them.”

⁹ Jessie Rogers, “The Testament of Job as an Adaptation of LXX Job,” in *Text-Critical and Hermeneutical Studies in the Septuagint*, ed. J. Cook and H.-J. Stipp, VTSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 395–408, esp. 397–98, emphasises that the LXX deliberately fades out the distinctions between the prose narrative frame and the poetic middle part of the story of Job, and obliterates poetic parallelism.

¹⁰ About filling gaps in the Testament of Job (see further): Rogers, “The Testament of Job as an Adaptation of LXX Job.” About gap-filling in the rabbinic midrashic reception

What do we learn about Job from this extended LXX verse in comparison to its laconic MT counterpart? First, that “Ausitis” is located on the border of Idumea and Arabia. Second, that Job was also called “Jobab.” Third, that he was a direct descendant from Abraham, from the line of Esau: his father was “Zara” and his mother “Bossora.” Fourth, that he was king of Edom after “Balak, the son of Beor.” Two of these names may provide hints to well-known figures in the Bible, even though the tradition of the LXX also generates some confusion. In a list of the kings of Edom in MT Genesis 36 we find a king “Jobab son of Zerah” (v. 33), of which the LXX version is indeed “Zara.”¹¹ His predecessor in the LXX is indeed “Balak, son of Beor” (v. 32). In the MT the latter is not called Balak, but “Bela.” From Numbers 22 we are acquainted with “Balak, son of Zippor” (v.2) and “Balaam, son of Beor” (v.5). Both the names Balak and Balaam feature often in the early Jewish interpretations of Job, as will be seen. It seems safe to conclude that the LXX wants to situate Job as a descendent of Esau, only five generations removed from Abraham. We can also infer from this that he was not from the line of Jacob. The reference to the mother “Bossora” is a remarkable deviation from Genesis 36:33, where Botsra (LXX Bossora) is mentioned as the birthplace of Jobab. Annette Yoshiko Reed concedes that the author of the LXX appendix “fixed” this because otherwise there would have been a contradiction with Job’s origin in Uz, attested in Job 1:2.¹² Possibly, the author used the occasion present in the text to read “from (*ek*) Bossora” as a reference to Job’s mother rather than to his birthplace.

of Job, see Joanna Weinberg, “Job versus Abraham. The Quest for the Perfect God-Fearer in Rabbinic Tradition,” in *The Book of Job*, ed. Wim Beuken, BETL 115 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 293. For gap-filling as an essential part of reading, also of the Bible, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 186–229. About gap-filling in rabbinic literature, see Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 39–49; Lieve M. Teugels, “Gap Filling and Linkage in the Midrash on the Rebekah Cycle,” in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. André Wénin (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 585–98; Arnold Goldberg, “Die Schrift der rabbinischen Schriftausleger,” *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung: Gesammelte Studien II*, 1999, 230; Man Ki Chan and Pieter M. Venter, “Midrash as Exegetical Approach of Early Jewish Exegesis, with Some Examples from the Book of Ruth,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.787>.

¹¹ Cf. Reed, 37–38. With reference to other studies, he discusses the correspondence between this passage and the Edomite genealogy and king list in MT and LXX Gen 36.

¹² Reed, 41–42.

In the prologue to the Testament of Job (1st cent. BCE–1st cent. CE) we find similar but also different information.¹³ There, too, Job is presented as a descendent of Esau. His wife is said to have been Dinah, Jacob’s daughter. In his testament, Job emphasises that he is a descendant of Esau, but that his children, whom he addresses, are from the seed of Jacob, through their mother (T. Job 1:5-6).¹⁴ He explains that he was first called “Jobab” and that he lived among heathens, next to a pagan temple (T. Job 2) but that he soon realised that the pagan gods could not be the creators. This reminds us of similar stories about Abraham in the post-biblical tradition.¹⁵ Like Abraham (Gen 22), Job, when called by God, expresses his readiness with the answer “here I am” (T. Job 3:2), and is asked to purge the place of the idols (T. Job 4:1). In passing, it had already been said that he was the ruler of the region, which is so far not identified (T. Job 3:7). Yet, further in the Testament we read:

When they [the kings] came to Ausitis asking in the city, “Where is Jobab, the king of all of Egypt?” (T. Job 28:7)

The Egyptian location of Ausitis is not unproblematic, given the LXX’s location of the place in Edom.¹⁶ Spittler remarks that one of the textual witnesses to T. Job (V)¹⁷ adds to “king of Egypt” “and all its territory.”¹⁸ This may indicate an awareness of the past vastness of the Egyptian Empire in the Amarna period, which at some point included the entire coastal region.

To conclude our brief discussion of the identity of Job in T. Job: this text repeats much that is already found in the appendix to LXX Job 42:17b–e, and, like that appendix, teaches us some things about Job that also surface in later rabbinic texts, i.e., that he was a descendant of Esau, that he was married to Dinah, that he is compared to Abraham in several ways, and that he was a ruler of either Edom or Egypt. The distinction between his descent from Esau and his children’s from “the

¹³ Rogers, “The Testament of Job as an Adaptation of LXX Job,” sees T. Job as an adaptation based on the LXX version of Job, which he in turn already considers an interpretation (399).

¹⁴ For T. Job I used the translation of R.P. Spittler, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), Vol. 1, 839–63.

¹⁵ Stories about Abraham’s crusade against idols are found in Jub. 12:12; Gen Rab 38:13. For more references see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), vol. 5, note 26.

¹⁶ Cf. Reed, “Job as Jobab,” 42–48.

¹⁷ Rome, Vatican, Greek 1238.

¹⁸ Spittler (trans.) in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 852 note i.

honoured race from the seed of Jacob” (T. Job 1:6) is worth noting, as this will be an important issue in the rabbinic sources to be discussed in the next sections.

2. Job an Israelite or a Convert?

In line with the rabbinic habit of exploiting the absence of details in the biblical text to fill in gaps and forge connections to other biblical texts,¹⁹ various suggestions are adduced by the sages for situating Job in space and time.²⁰ In the Babylonian Talmud, Job is presented as living in Egypt during the time of Moses.²¹ In b. Sotah 11a, we can read that Pharaoh consulted with Job about what to do with the prolific Israelite people living in his country (Exod 1):

Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba said that Rav Simai said: There were three in that plan: Balaam, Job, and Jethro. Balaam who devised it²² was slain; Job, who was silent, was afflicted with sufferings; Jethro, who fled, merited that his descendants should sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone [...].²³

This text does not state that Job was a king; rather, he is presented as an important advisor of Pharaoh.²⁴ Job’s presence in Egypt during the time of Moses is also found in the following rabbinic source to be discussed.

An entire section in Midrash Genesis Rabbah (Gen Rab 57:4), commenting on Genesis 22:21, is devoted to Job’s provenance.²⁵ In typical rabbinic style, not one, but many solutions are given, attributed to various sages. The suggestions for Job’s identity offered in this long midrash focus on biblical chronology, i.e., on the generations that are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible among whom Job would have lived. These identifications are all based on biblical verses in other books that bear a resemblance, usually on a lexical level, with verses in the book of Job.

¹⁹ See the references in note 10.

²⁰ See about the rabbinic treatment of Job, also Weinberg, “Job versus Abraham.” With a different focus, Constanza Cordoni and I have discussed some of the rabbinic sources presented here, in a forthcoming publication: C. Cordoni and L.M. Teugels, “Early Jewish Readings of Job,” in *Job in Early Christianity*, ed. Albert C. Geljon et al., VCSup (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

²¹ This is generally the most common opinion in rabbinic literature, see Weinberg, “Job versus Abraham,” 282.

²² I.e., the plan to kill the newborn sons.

²³ All translations of the Talmud are my own, based on the Soncino and the Sefaria translations.

²⁴ Cf. the title of Baskin, *Pharaoh’s Counsellors*.

²⁵ See also the parallels in y. Sotah 5:6 [20c]–5:8 [20d]) and b. B Bat 14b–16b.

The proposed times in which Job would have lived range from the time of Abraham to the days of Esther. We will look in more detail at the first four suggestions.²⁶

When did Job live? Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said in Bar Kappara's name: In the days of Abraham, for here it says, *Uz, his firstborn* (Gen 22:21), while it is written, *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job* (Job 1:1).

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: In the days of Jacob, for Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: Dinah was Job's wife (for in the case of Job's wife it is written), *You speak as one of the foolish women (nevaloth) would speak* (Job 2:10), while with respect to Dinah, it says, *because he had done an outrageous thing (nevalah) in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter* (Gen 34:7).

Rabbi Levi said: He lived in the days of the tribes [i.e., the twelve sons of Jacob], as it is written, *What wise men have told without hiding it from their fathers* (Job 15:18). And what reward did they receive for this? *To whom alone the land was given* (ib. 19).

Rabbi Jose ben Halafta said: He was born when they went down into Egypt and died when they went up out of Egypt. You will find that in essence his life's span was two hundred and ten years, while Israel spent two hundred and ten years in Egypt²⁷ [...] (Gen Rab 57:4).

The first opinion, attributed to Shimon ben Lakish, is based on the identity of the name of the place Uz, mentioned in the first verse of Job, and that of one of Abraham's nephews, Nachor's firstborn son Uz (Gen 22:21). Shimon ben Lakish derives from this that Job was identical with this Uz, who supposedly was named after the place where he lived.²⁸

The second, third, and fourth opinions situate Job during the time of Jacob's children. The last of these, Jose ben Halafta's opinion, matches the one from the Bavli that was just mentioned, which places Job in Israel's time in Egypt. This does not necessarily make him an Egyptian; rather, it seems that he would have been one of the Israelites who went down to Egypt. Not mentioned in this source, but possibly a factor behind this dating, is that one of the sons of Issachar, who is said to have come

²⁶ Translation based on Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1939), with adaptations. The quotations of verses from the Bible are rendered in accordance with the English Standard Version; in some cases these have been altered to make the reasoning in the midrash more transparent.

²⁷ This view is already attested in the tannaitic work *Seder Olam*, the purpose of which is to date biblical events in history. The figure 210 is computed by combining Job 42:10 (double portion) and Job 42:16 (Job lived 140 years); Job would thus have lived 70 years before his downfall and 140 years afterwards. See Weinberg, "Job versus Abraham," 285–86.

²⁸ See, however, note 8 on the other view attributed to Shimon ben Lakish.

to Egypt (Gen 46:8), is called Job (Gen 46:13), however, spelled differently. Note that, according to this midrash, Job's life was exceptionally long.²⁹

Particularly relevant to our topic is the midrash presented in the name of Abba bar Kahana, which states that Job was married to Jacob's daughter Dinah. That Job would have been married to Dinah is brought up in several places in rabbinic literature as well as in T. Job, as we have seen.³⁰ It is here based on a lexical similarity between a phrase related to Job's anonymous wife in Job 2:10 (*nevalot*) and a phrase found in the story of Dinah (*nevalah*, Gen 34:7). This is another example of gap-filling and linkage: because the name of Job's wife is not mentioned in the Bible and because Dinah's husband is not mentioned either, these two are connected and identified. Moreover, it solves the problem that nothing more is heard about Dinah in the Bible after her rape by Shekhem in Genesis 34, except that she went down to Egypt in Genesis 46:15. The marriage of Job to Dinah deserves a closer look.

In another chapter of Genesis Rabbah, commenting on Genesis 32, which contains the account of Jacob's meeting with his brother Esau after their long separation, the issue of Job's marriage to Jacob's daughter, Dinah, is brought up. In this midrash, it is suggested that Job had been "converted," that is, at least brought onto the good path, but maybe also circumcised³¹ by Jacob in preparation for this marriage. It should be noted that Genesis 32 precedes the account of Dinah's rape by Shekhem (Gen 34) in biblical chronology.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok (Gen 32:22). And where was Dinah? He put her in a chest and locked her in, saying, "This wicked man has ambitions; let him not see her and take her away from me." Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Abba Bardela

²⁹ See about Job's longevity also Gen Rab 61:4. See also the previous note.

³⁰ So also attributed to Abba bar Kahana in Gen Rab 19:12.

³¹ There are several text-critical variants of the following text and its parallel in Gen Rab 80:5. See Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba* (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 908, who discusses all the options, with additional references to later sources. Another possible reading would be "you did not convert him." This translation is favoured by Baskin, "Rabbinic Interpretations of Job," 106. From the context of the midrashim in Gen Rab it can, in my opinion, be derived that Job was converted to a good way of life (so also Albeck), even though not necessarily that he was also circumcised. See also note 33 as to the question who is meant with the "uncircumcised one," in the continuation of the midrash. The question as to whether Job was circumcised or not may have become of more importance in the later Jewish interpretation than it was in the earlier rabbinic sources.

the Priest: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: *He who withholds kindness from his fellow forsakes the fear of the Almighty* (Job 6:14): you have withheld kindness from your fellow, from your brother; when you gave her in marriage to Job, did you not convert him?³² You would not give her in marriage to a circumcised person [Esau]; See, she is now married to an uncircumcised one.³³ You would not give her in marriage the legitimate way; See, she is now taken in illegitimate fashion; thus it is written, *And Dinah the daughter of Leah... went out, etc.* (Gen 34:1) (Gen Rab 76:9)³⁴

This midrash draws on the fact that only eleven of Jacob's children are mentioned when he went out to meet Esau. Dinah, who was already born at the time, is supposed not to have been included in these eleven. The midrash explains this in a narrative fashion: Jacob did take Dinah along, but hidden in a chest, so that Esau would not see her and want to marry her. The midrash, however, disapproves of this decision of Jacob. In the meantime, it also disapproves of Dinah's (later) marriage to Job. It states that God rebuked Jacob in that he should have given Dinah in marriage to his brother Esau, who was already circumcised. In that way, Esau would have become a better person by converting to the true God for this marriage, just like Job did when he married Dinah. Yet instead of all this, Dinah now ended up being raped by an uncircumcised man, i.e., Shekhem.³⁵ In all likelihood the passage implies that Job would marry Dinah only later, as his second wife, Shekhem being killed by Dinah's brothers, and Job's first wife having died. This opinion that is also found in other sources, such as T. Job discussed above.³⁶

That Job was a "Jew"³⁷ or a gentile divides the rabbinic sages, as seen in this passage from the Babylonian Talmud:

Seven prophets prophesied to the nations of the world, and they are: Balaam and his father [Beor], and Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, and Elihu ben Barachel

³² See the previous note.

³³ This could be either Job, so Baskin, "Rabbinic Interpretations of Job," 106, see note 31, or Shekhem, so Freedman and Simon in the notes to their translation of *Genesis Rabbah*: H. Freedman and M. Simon, *Genesis Rabbah*, vol. 1, The Midrash Rabbah (London; New York: Soncino Press, 1977), 709, note 3.

³⁴ See also Gen Rab 80:5.

³⁵ See the above note 31 as to whether Job was circumcised or not.

³⁶ See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938), vol. 1:396; vol. 2:241; vol. 5:388n35.

³⁷ Obviously, the term "Jew" is anachronistic when speaking about the generations of the patriarchs. Since the rabbinic sages, however, project their own view of the world onto the Bible (by, e.g., saying that Isaac or Jacob went to the synagogue), it is appropriate to use this term here, reflecting rabbinic world view rather than biblical chronology.

the Buzite. He said to him: And according to your reasoning was Elihu ben Barachel not from Israel? Is it not written: *Of the family of Ram* (Job 32:2) [meaning Abraham]? Rather, he [Elihu] prophesied to the nations of the world; and so, too, Job prophesied to the nations of the world. (b B Bat 15b)

Some sages, as reflected in this text, hold that Job was one of the righteous prophets from the (non-Jewish) nations of the world, along with Beor, Balaam (Num 22:5), Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar (Job 2:11), and Elihu (Job 32:2), the last four being the friends of Job. That Elihu would have been a gentile is, however, debated, which leads to the question whether he and Job could maybe have been Jewish prophets who prophesied to the nations.³⁸

The question whether Job was an Israelite or a gentile is, therefore, undecided in rabbinic sources. As has been demonstrated, this question relates to the biblical generation in which he lived and to his family relationships. However, even that is not always decisive, because, if we assume that Abraham was the first in his family to believe in the one God and to circumcise, this could mean that his nephew Uz, with whom Job is identified by some sages, stayed in Aram Naharaim with his father Nachor and was neither circumcised nor believed in the God of Israel (just like Laban and Rachel, who still had idols, cf. Gen 31:34).

3. Job's hospitality towards the needy and the foreigners

In T. Job 9-10, Job is extolled, or rather he praises himself, for his exemplary hospitality, with the following words:

So listen, for I will show you all the things which have befallen me, my losses. For I used to have 130,000 sheep; of them I designated 7,000 to be sheared for the clothing of orphans and widows, the poor, and the helpless. [...] And I established in my house thirty tables spread at all hours, for strangers only. I also used to maintain twelve other tables set for the widows. When any stranger approached to ask alms, he was required to be fed at my table before he would receive his need. Neither did I allow anyone to go out of my door with an empty pocket.

Job's hospitality is represented here, in retrospect, as a positive effect of his having been rich, before his undoing due to the test and the suffering which came upon him. In this, Job is again presented in terms similar to

³⁸ On Job as one of several gentile prophets in other versions of this list, see Constanza Cordoni, "On Seder Eliyahu, Wisdom, and Job," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 44 (2022): 1–25.

Abraham, who, in the Jewish tradition is also known for his wealthy but generous lifestyle, but who also suffered greatly when he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22).³⁹ It is noteworthy that Job's hospitality is presented in T. Job as in no way less than that of Abraham. This is different in the rabbinic sources which, despite displaying respect for Job, spare no effort in downplaying his generosity when compared to the patriarch's.⁴⁰

In rabbinic midrash, the legendary hospitality and generosity of Abraham is based on his performance in Genesis 18, when he, suffering from the pains of his recent circumcision at the age of ninety-nine, spared no effort to cook a meal for his visitors, who later were revealed to have been angels. A similar, yet more modest, generosity is attributed to Job, who was also a rich man before his suffering began. The good fortune of both is expressed in biblical terms in that they were both "blessed" before their suffering and again after their suffering (Gen 12:2–3 and 24:1 about Abraham; Job 1:10 and 42:12 about Job). This parallel use of the expression "blessing" leads the sages in Genesis Rabbah to the following comparison:

And I will bless you (Gen 12:2). Rabbi Levi said: No man ever bought a cow belonging to Abraham without becoming blessed, nor did a man ever sell a cow to him without his becoming blessed. [...] Rabbi Isaac said: To Job, too, He did thus, as it is written, *You have blessed the work of his hands* (Job 1: 10): no man who took a penny (*perutah*) from Job had to take a second one from him (Gen Rab 39:11).⁴¹

Obviously, Job's generosity amounts to but a fraction of Abraham's in this midrash, which contains several more extravagant examples of

³⁹ The suffering of Job, and the issue of theodicy is also a theme in the Jewish interpretation history, cf. Weinberg, "Job versus Abraham," 282–84; Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors*, 7. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of this study. The exegete Benno Jacob, who used Genesis Rabbah extensively in his commentary on Genesis, makes several connections between the stories about Abraham and those of Job, specifically with respect to Gen 21–22. One of his focusses is on the role of Satan in both stories. In this, Jacob goes much further than his source Genesis Rabbah: a crucial point in his exegesis is that the name "Elohim," used in Gen 22:1 and in the prologue to Job, in fact refers to Satan. He also connects the "testing" in Gen 22:1 to Satan's testing of Job. See Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 491–92; Hilde Burger, *De zandloper van Genesis: de visie van Benno Jacob op Genesis 22 in het licht van zijn tijd en van de Traditie* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002).

⁴⁰ The difference between the one-sided pietistic image of Job in the non-rabbinic Jewish writings, which influenced the later Christian interpretations, and the response to this by the rabbis is addressed by Baskin, "Rabbinic Interpretations of Job," 104; *Pharaoh's Counsellors*, 116, and *passim*.

⁴¹ See also b. Bab Bat 15b.

Abraham's blessings for strangers in the passage that was left out. It is quite plausible that the rabbinic sages wanted to diminish Job's generosity in favour of Abraham's, because many conceived him as a gentile, as discussed above. It also stands to reason that the popularity of Job in the Christian interpretation, where he is conceived as a foreshadowing of the suffering Christ – a concept known to the rabbinic sages – has influenced the rather lukewarm attitude of the rabbis towards Job.⁴² A similar downplaying of Job's generosity and compassion is also found in the following midrash about Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah.

Rabbi Levi said: Two men said the same thing, Abraham and Job. Abraham: *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked* (Gen 18:25). Job: *It is all one; therefore I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked* (Job 9:22). Yet Abraham was rewarded for it, while Job was punished for it! Abraham said it appropriately, while Job said it inappropriately: *It is all one!*' (Gen Rab 49:9).

Another reference to Job's hospitality is found in a midrash on the blessing of Jacob by Isaac, where a verse from Job is quoted as proof text.

May God give you of the dew of heaven (Gen 27:28). It is written: *My roots spread out to the waters* (Job 29:19). Job said: Because my doors stood wide open, when everybody reaped dry, I reaped ears full of sap. What is the proof? *With the dew all night on my branches* (Job 29:19 cont.) (Gen Rab 66:1)

Job himself, as it were, warrants the good choice of the proof text Job 29:19, by referring to his own open doors. This self-praise may be

⁴² Judith Baskin, with reference to Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel. Étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire Romain* (Paris: De Boccard, 1964), discusses the interaction between Jews and Christians in the 3rd–5th century CE as to the interpretation of Job. In the case of Jerome, e.g., this led him to hire a Jewish teacher to instruct him in the rabbinic interpretations of Job. Baskin concludes that the question of Job's origin was "not only a rabbinic concern but had become a matter of Jewish-Christian dispute." See Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors*, 40. Job's attitude towards suffering is presented as a foreshadowing of that of Christ by certain church fathers such as Jerome who sees Job 19:23–26 as a proof of Job's belief in resurrection. Similar views of Job are found in Augustine and Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*. The fact that Job was a gentile was cherished by the church fathers, because it could serve as proof that there were chosen people also outside of Israel, cf. Baskin, 37–43, 117–21. See also Leong Seow and others, "Job (Book and Person)," in *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception Online*, ed. Constance M. Furey, Joel Marcus LeMon, and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), https://www-degruyter-com.pthu.idm.oclc.org/database/EBR/entry/MainLemma_2775/html.

seen as ironic.⁴³ The comparison to Abraham, whose open doors are legendary in rabbinic literature,⁴⁴ is evident. Again here, Job cannot live up to the comparison with Abraham.

Conclusion

The figure of Job has led to associations with foreignness and strangeness in the various phases of ancient Jewish biblical interpretation. This has been spearheaded by the scant information about Job's origins in the Bible. By means of "gap-filling," the hermeneutic procedure ~~by means of which~~ all forms of early biblical interpretation, even the Septuagint, ~~tackled~~ hiatuses in the biblical account, Job's origins were situated alternatively within and outside of Israel, and sometimes in between, as a foreigner who became an Israelite by conversion. In a separate interpretative track, Job was compared to Abraham because of their similar courses of life: both started out blessed, rich, and generous toward the poor and the strangers, but then suffered from a severe divine test from which they both came out unbroken and even richer than before (Job 42:10; Gen 24:1). A development can be discerned, however, in the appreciation of Job from the earlier to the later sources. The classical rabbinic sources are less generous in their praise of Job than the Second Temple texts. This may be accounted for by the fact that some rabbis considered him a non-Israelite, at least in origin. It may also be due to an awareness of Christian interpretations that saw in Job a prefiguration of Christ.

⁴³ Job praises himself also in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan A and B ch. 2, and in Pesiqta Rabbati 33:5–6. These midrashim are discussed in the upcoming study by Cordoni and Teugels mentioned in note 20.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Gen Rab 48:8, 9, where it is said that Abraham's tent doors opened on both sides. About Job's houses being open on all sides, see also Avot R. Nat. B 14.

