

THE TEACHINGS OF TOBIT TO HIS SON TOBIAS

Abstract

The main purpose of the Book of Tobit is to promote faithfulness to the Law and authentic family values. Although it is a narrative, its purpose is educational, and it can thus be perceived as part of a long tradition of academic literature. The same can be said of a much later text, from a different cultural context: *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius*. Tob 4 contains a section of direct teaching within the Book of Tobit. In the present paper, I will compare it with the second part of *The Teachings*. Special emphasis is given to Tob 4:3-4 which presents Tobias' filial duties towards Anna, his mother. Based on my comparison, the fathers in both works, Tobit and Neagoe Basarab, demonstrate diligence by being committed to their roles and responsibilities as fathers, urging their sons Tobias and Theodosius to remain faithful to ancestral traditions.



Keywords

Tobit, Neagoe Basarab, Family values, Education, Filial duties

Introduction

In the third chapter of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius*, titled in the original Slavonic: "Letter of Neagoe the Voivode to the bones of his mother Neaga and his sons Peter and John and his daughter Angelina. A word of humility", the pious voivode of Wallachia (1512-1521) praises his mother in imitation of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Philosopher, who also, in a similar speech, transmitted in a unique manuscript, praised his father, Emperor Basil I the Macedonian (Wright III 2008, 25-6). The ruler Neagoe Basarab owed his theological culture to a great contemporary of his, "a man of soul and full of all goodness", namely St. Nephon, former Patriarch of Constantinople (1486-1488 and 1496-1498) and Metropolitan of Wallachia (1498-1505):

“And blessed Nephon strengthened him with his teachings, that he might grow and exalt himself in all good deeds and rise in good fortune and be pleasing in the sight of God and men, how afterwards, with the prayer of his holiness, he might fulfil both” (*Life of Nephon*) (Mihăilă 1971, 80-1). Also, Neagoe Basarab’s marriage to Milița Despina [1], daughter of the despot of Serbia, Iovan Brancovici, and granddaughter of St. Maxim Brancovici, a well-known scholar of the time, metropolitan of Wallachia (1505-1508), later metropolitan of Belgrade and Srem (until 1516), and facilitated by kinship ties that brought together in a kingly pair traditions of three countries: Byzantine Empire, Serbia and Wallachia, respectively of three Orthodox dynasties: the Cantacuzin, Brancovici and Basarab.

Among the sources of inspiration for the first monument of Romanian literature, specialists cite the biblical sources (Old and New Testament) but also fragments from the works of Saints John Chrysostom, Athanasius the Great, John Climacus, Ephrem the Syrian and other Eastern Fathers (*The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 403, n. 4). *The teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius* are part of a long tradition whose origins go back to pre-Christian antiquity. The many quotations from the Holy Scripture prove the author’s theological depth, wide reading and literary mastery. This paper aims to evaluate the possible influence of the Book of Tobit on chapter III of the second part of the second part of the *Teachings*.

Father and Mother teaching their sons in Ancient Israel

The responsibility of parents to teach their children is a prominent theme in Old Testament wisdom literature. Jesus the son of Sirach writes: “He who teaches his son will make his enemies envious and will glory in him in the presence of friends. The father may die, and yet he is not dead, for he has left behind him one like himself.” (Sir 30:3-4 – RSV; cf. Ps 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Sir 7:23-24; 30:1-13) Proverbs of Solomon and other wise Israelites counsel the young to heed parental teaching: “My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.” (Prv 3:1-2 – ESV; cf. Prv 1:8-9; 2:1-5; 4:1-13, 20-22; 5:1-2; 7:1-4; 13:1; 19:27; 23:22-25).

Judeo-Christian literature records numerous examples of wise teachers speaking through the father’s voice. In some cases, especially in texts that have been classified as sapiential, the *father* (the presumed author of the text) is the sage who gives instructions to his *son* or *sons* (disciples, readers), which he addresses in the singular or

plural (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes / Qohelet, Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach / Ecclesiasticus). In other writings (*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Testament of Job*, *I Enoch*) the father speaking to his sons occupies a central place in the narrative (Wright III 2008, 25-6). The Second Temple period texts in which the author assumes the father's role, stand in a dependent relationship to a literary tradition preserved in the older texts of Old Testament wisdom literature. The Book of Proverbs, possibly the creation of Israelite didactic literature par excellence, presents the transmission of wisdom from father (and sometimes mother) to son [2]. Subjects however varied – social conduct, wealth and vices, family life, etc. – are all conveyed as parental advice to the beloved son (Wright III 2008, 26). An Israelite youth would benefit greatly from his instruction in the parental home, and the sage's adoption of this role indicates the crucial importance of that institution as a place of instruction (see King and Stage 1994, 199-212).

So strong is the authority of the teachings that develop out of family life that they continue to function as a motivation for discipleship even when the instruction has been codified literally and housed in *scriptures* (Fontaine 1990, 159). In Ancient Israel, education developed out of a desire for order and continuity. To combat the powerful and seductive temptation of chaos in its various forms, societal or personal, the older and more experienced strove to guide the younger generation not to fall into the inherent traps of everyday life. The aim of this education was moral formation and character building. Later authors would extol the cardinal virtues of Hellenistic philosophy: temperance (*σωφροσύνη*), prudence (*φρόνηση*), justice (*δικαιοσύνη*), and manliness (*ἀνδρεία*, Sol 8:7; cf. 4:1; 5:3; 4 Macc 1:3-4) [3].

Text versions of the Book of Tobit

The text of the Book of Tobit constitutes an intermediary stage between the didactic and historical writings of the Old Testament (Miller 1940/41, 7) [4]. Reading the Book of Tobit with its parallels in the Book of the Pharaoh leads the reader into a world of *midrashic delight* (Jacobs 2014, 232) [5]. A considerable number of commonalities between the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach and the Book of Tobit have been pointed out in the literature, specifically in the section containing the version of the extended counsels (Tob 4:3-19) [6]. Uncertainty about the genre and purpose of the Book of Tobit would have contributed to its different placement either in the group of sapiential or historical books (Delcor 1989, 474) [7].

Codex Sinaiticus (4th century), discovered by Constantine von Tischendorf in the monastery of St. Catherine of Mount Sinai and largely preserved at the British Library in London, contains the textual form known as Gⁿ. *Codex Vaticanus* (4th century), discovered and preserved in the Apostolic Library in the Vatican, contains the textual form called G^l. *Codex Alexandrinus* (5th century), preserved in the British Library in London, is textually close to *Codex Vaticanus*. In the Greek manuscript of Ferrara (106), written in cursive script around 1334 and preserved in the Biblioteca Municipale of Ferrara, the section between Tob 6,8 and Tob 13,8 corresponds to the textual form Gⁿ. Greek Manuscript 319, dated 1021 and preserved at Mount Athos, contains Tob 3,6-6,16, and is textually close to *Codex Sinaiticus* (Zappella 2012, 31).

Codex Vaticanus groups the Book of Tobit among the sapiential writings, while *Codex Sinaiticus* joins it with the historical writings. Most likely this grouping was determined by the extensive collection of moral and religious counsels in Tob 4 in the version of the codicil preserved at the Vatican, which belongs to the G^l group of textual recensions. Since the collection of instructions in the Sinaitic codex is shorter, Tob 2-12 cannot be considered a sapiential narrative. In the placement of the Book of Tobit in the mentioned codexes, *Codex Sinaiticus* is the preferred text for analysis, as it is closer to the original Hebrew version (*Urtext*) of the Book of Tobit. The codex mentioned is the long Greek recension with the shorter version of the fourth chapter because it omits some of the sapiential instructions. The G reviewⁿ has two textual gaps, namely Tob 4:7-19b and Tob 13:6-10b (Macatangay 2011, 47).

The chiastic structure of the Book of Tobit

Within the chiastic structure of the Book of Tobit, Tobit's words of instruction (4:1-21) parallel the eponymous character's song of praise (13:1-14:1a). The wedding of Tobit and Sarah is at the centre of the narrative, and the account of Tobit's suffering and end of life frames this scene as well as the inner frames of the narrative (Macatangay 2016, 52). In the exposition, the narrator speaking in the first person, singular, portrays the devotion and diligence of Tobit's righteousness in fulfilling his duty to bury his countrymen who died because of the tragic persecutions initiated by the Assyrian king (Tob 1:17-18). The last scene captures the death and burial of Tobit and Hannah's parents and their son Tobias (14:13-15). Marriage and the covered tomb represent two sides of the same coin: successive, parallel or cyclical alternations of life.

The Sufferings of Tobit and Sarah (1:1-3:17)

A^I . The teachings of Tobit (4:1-21)

B^I : Search for a travelling companion for Tobit (5:1-6:1)

C^I : Journey to Ecbatana (6,2-7,9a)

D: Marriage in Ecbatana (7:9b-10:13)

C^{II} : Journey to Nineveh (Tob 11:1-18)

B^{II} : The parting of Tobit from his travelling companion (12:1-22)

A^{II} : Song of praise of Tobit (13:1-14:1a)

Epilogue: Tobit's Testament and Death (Tob 14,1b-15)

The didactic and poetic character of the Book of Tobit is supported by the presence of three literary forms within it: a sapiential discourse (4:3-21), a hymn dedicated to Jerusalem (13:9-18) and a testamentary word spoken on his deathbed (14:3-11) (Machiela and Perrin 2014, 116). The narrative framework (Tob 4,1-2.20) that includes Tobit's counsel (Tob 4,3-19) presents interesting peculiarities. Tobit's thoughts turn first to the material well-being of his son (Tob 4:1- 2), and then, soon enough, to the spiritual well-being of Tobit (Tob 4:3-19) (Moore 1996, 163). In addition to the ten talents kept by a fiend from Rhages of Media, there are other *talents* hidden in the very words of the father. Tobit's teachings will be the most precious fortune he will bequeath to his son and future generations.

But a careful reading of Tobit's word of instruction (Tob 4) reveals a paradox caused by the dissonance between the rules of wisdom and Tobit's unhappy life so far. The father promises his son: "Mercy delivers you from death and does not let you go down into darkness" (Tob 4:10). From the autobiographical data given in the first chapter of the book, we learn that the faithfulness of the main character was unquestionable and that it often went beyond the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. However, Tobit faced many trials in life which caused him continuous suffering. Tob 4 could also be called "old Tobit's parting word" because it is preceded by the eponymous character's prayer asking God to be released from the burden of suffering and to be placed in the eternal resting place (Tob 3:2-6). Merten Rabenau argues that, although the speech in Tob 4 was not placed immediately before the epilogue (Tobit's testament and account of his death), the author made skilful use of this stylistic device to endow Tobit's words with a special dignity and authority as the "sum of a very famous life" (*Summe eines hochberuhmten Lebens*) (Rabenau 1994, 28).

In the following, we set out the chiasmic structure of the teachings of the Tobit law according to the German biblical scholar Paul Deselaers (Deselaers 1982, 380-92; Macatangay 2011, 689).

A ^I . Introductory instructions	- 4:5a: “Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments.” (RSV)
B^I. Four parallel instructions on practicing justice	<p>- 4:5b: “Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing.” (RSV)</p> <p>- 4:7a: “Give alms from your possessions to all who live uprightly, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it.” (RSV)</p> <p>- 4:8: “If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have.” (RSV)</p> <p>- 4:9,11: “So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity... and for all who practice it charity is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.” (RSV)</p>
C ^I . Two parallel instructions on inbreeding	- 4:12: “Beware, my son, of all immorality. First of all take a wife from among the descendants of your fathers and do not marry a foreign woman, who is not of your father’s tribe; for we are the sons of the prophets.” (RSV)
C ^{II} . Two parallel instructions on loving your neighbor	- 4:13: “So now, my son, love your brethren, and in your heart do not disdain your brethren and the sons and daughters of your people by refusing to take a wife for yourself from among them. For in pride there is ruin and great confusion...” (RSV)

B^{II}. Four parallel instructions on education	- 4:14b: “Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and be disciplined in all your conduct.” (RSV) - 4,16a: “Give of your bread to the hungry, and of your clothing to the naked.” (RSV) - 4:16b: “Give all your surplus to charity, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you made it.” (RSV) - 4,19: “Bless the Lord God on every occasion; ask him that your ways may be made straight and that all your paths and plans may prosper...” (RSV)
A ^{II} . Final instructions	- 4:19: “So, my son, remember my commands, and do not let them be blotted out of your mind.” (RSV)

Father’s advice

After old Tobit had instructed young Tobias by his example, he now teaches him by word. In teaching his son, Tobit follows the example of his grandmother Deborah (Tob 1:8). This series of teachings bears similarities to sections of other books of Old Testament wisdom literature, particularly the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach, a book contemporary with the Book of Tobit [8].

Tobit’s advice (4:3-20) is conveyed in the form of a testamentary discourse, reminiscent of the farewell words addressed to future generations by biblical patriarchs and other prominent figures in Israel’s history (cf. Jacob – Gen 49; Moses – Dt 33; David – 1 Kgs 2:1-3). This shows that the author was keen to portray Tobit as a patriarch of his family and an important personality in the Jewish Diaspora (Ego 2021, 176).

The contents of these counsels include provisions concerning the burial of fathers and honouring the mother (4:3b-4c), almsgiving (*ἐλεημοσύνη*, 4:6b-11), warning against fornication and the commandment of inbreeding (4:12-13), the punctual payment of labourers (4:14a-c), the offering at the graves of the righteous (4:17), the exhortations to seek useful counsel (4:18), and the command to praise God and ask his guidance in the right way (4:19). Between these counsels are placed general prescriptions:

- daily remembrance of God and his commandments (4:5-6): “Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the

ways of wrongdoing. For if you do what is true, your ways will prosper through your deeds.” (RSV)

- the cause-and-effect relationship between doing good deeds and the final reward: “for to you also shall be rewarded, if you serve God.”

- care for your conduct in daily life (4:14d): “Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and be disciplined in all your conduct.” (RSV)

- observance of the *golden rule*: “And what you hate, do not do to anyone.” (4,15a – RSV)

- the permanent remembrance of the commandments, “Tobit 4:19 So, my son, remember my commands, and do not let them be blotted out of your mind.” (4.19f-g – RSV)

- the connection between the fear of God and doing good works (4:20).

These dispositions may be grouped as follows: looking to the past (4:3-6, 18-19); openness to the present in dialogue with all creatures (4:7-11) and blessing the Lord in all circumstances (4:18); looking to the future for a bride (4:12-13) (Župarić 2020, 444, n. 17).

The key terms *ἀλήθεια* (*truth*), *δικαιοσύνη* (*righteousness*) and *ἐλεημοσύνη* (*mercy*) are mentioned in Tob 4:5b.6.7 anticipate the deposition sequence. Tobit advises his son to conduct himself by these ethical requirements so that his labours may be crowned with success (Tob 4,5b.6). While the statements about *ἀλήθεια* and *δικαιοσύνη* are limited to general imperatives, the topic of *ἐλεημοσύνη* is treated in detail (Rautenberg 2015, 66). Incidentally, almsgiving – caring for the poor – stands out as an important practice of Jewish piety in the Old Testament (Dt 15:10-11; Lv 19:9-10; Ps 112:9; Prv 14:21, 31; Is 58:6-8) [9]. Mercy is an important *educational* cornerstone for Tobit, being the attitude of compassion and love through which the hero of the book recognizes in other creatures who, like himself, are on a pilgrimage (cf. Tob 1:6-8) on the roads of this world [10].

Beate Ego analyses the father-son relationship in the Book of Tobit and notes that it certainly knows numerous other examples in parallel biblical traditions, such as the encounter between Joseph and his father Jacob (Gen 46:29-30). Nevertheless, Tobit’s narrative remains remarkable because it skillfully interweaves the emotional aspect with other motifs, forming an integral whole (Ego 2013, 85).

Honouring the mother

3^b Bury me with honour;

3^c Honor your mother;

3^d and do not leave it as many days as you have;

3^e do to her what pleases her, and in nothing grieve her spirit;

4^a Remember, my son (*μνήσθητι, παιδίον*);

4^b that she endured many dangers for you when you were in her womb;

4^c And when she dies, you shall bury her with me in the same tomb.

(Tob 4,3-4) [11]

a. O my mother, and the sweetness of my heart, and the handmaid of my God, Neago;

b. how much you have had for me, for you have been with me a long time, day and night;

c. and yet not only day and night but all the days and all the hours of the day and all the hours of the night you have been pregnant and burdened with my body;

d. until the time when God commanded you to give birth to me.

(*Teachings of Neago Basarab*, III) [12]

The first provision of Tobit's law concerns the proper burial of parents [13]. Tobit believes in the imminence of his death (Tob 3,6). His piety and zeal for the fulfilment of religious duties are marked by the avoidance of Gentile food, the celebration of feasts prescribed by the Law of Moses, the deeds of almsgiving, and the provision of proper burials for deported countrymen (Tob 1:11, 16-18; 2:1-9) [14].

It is not surprising that Tobit asks his son to give him a proper burial. The five references to burial reinforce the importance of this duty in the narrative. This gesture recalls the testamentary requirement of the patriarch Jacob to his sons (Gen 49:29-32; cf. Gen 25:9; 35:29)[15] to bury him in the same tomb where his parents are buried (Macatangay 2011, 37) and to provide both him and his wife with proper burials after they are buried (cf. 4 Mac 16:11). At the end of every apocryphal testament attributed to the patriarchs of the people of Israel there is a record of the burial of the parents accomplished by the sons, e.g., "After he had made these recommendations to his sons Reuben died. They laid him in a coffin until they brought him out of Egypt and buried him at Hebron in the cave where his father was." (*TestRub* 7:1-2).

Patriarch Joseph commanded his sons, “Take with you Asheneth your mother from the hippodrome and bury her beside Rahilah my mother” (*TestIos* 20:3) [16].

Tobit continues his word by exhorting Tobias to care for Hannah, his mother. In Tob 4:3c the general imperative is formulated: *τίμα την μητέρα σου* (*honour your mother*), which recalls the fifth commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:12 = Dt 5:16). And after the mother has died, the son must provide her with a proper burial as befitting a mother. Later in his journey, Tobias learns from his relative Azariah (the angel Raphael) that he is to marry Sarah (Tob 6:11-13), whose seven previous grooms had each died in turn on their wedding night (Tob 6:14), and on this occasion Tobias expresses his concern that if he were to die, no one would give his parents a proper burial (Tob 6:15). Above all duties, Tobias is concerned not about his death, but about fulfilling his filial obligation, as his father had previously instructed him (Macatangay 2016, 49).

As long as his mother is alive, Tobias must put into practice the five verbs that the father uses in his advice: honour her, do not forsake her, do what is pleasing to her, do not grieve her, and remember her (cf. Prv 23:22b: “do not despise your mother when she has grown old”). [17] In these recommendations we note the alternation of verbs in the imperative (“to [+ verb]” and vetitive (prohibitive: “not to [+ verb]”) modes (Rabenau 1994, 36).

In the absence of his father Tobit, the son Tobias is to honour his mother in old age with compassion, care, and obedience (*πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς σου*, “all the days of your life”), and when she dies, Tobias is to bury her properly with his father in the same tomb (*ἐν ἐνὶ τάφῳ*) [18]. This provision is in keeping with Tobit’s conduct, for he cared for the widows by offering the third tenth for their maintenance (Tob 1:8). The great honour that the son is duty-bound to offer to the mother is justified by the hardships the mother endured in childbirth. Tobit draws attention to Anna’s maternal role in the past (pregnancy) and in the present (old age). He makes no mention of the pains of childbirth (cf. Is 13:8; Jer 13:21); nor of the death of women in childbirth, as was the case with the matriarch Rachel (cf. Gen 35:16-19) and Phinehas’ wife (1 Sam 4:19-21). In contrast, the father Tobit tells his son Tobias “that many perils (*ὅτι πολλοὺς κινδύνους*) she [= mother] endured for you at the time when you were in her womb (*ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ*)” (Tob 4:4) (Murray 2023, 96). The term *κίνδυνος* sums up all the dangers associated with the mother’s pregnancy, including the hardships and

pain endured (Rabenau 1994, 37). However, during pregnancy, a particularly close relationship is established between mother and child.

Widows without rights, along with orphans and strangers, were entrusted to the special care of the community (Ex 20:12 = Dt 5:16; Ex 22:21; Lv 19:3; Dt 10:18; 24:17-22; Is 1:17; Jer 22:3). God himself was their protector (Ex 22:21-23; Ps 68:6; 146:9) [19]. Widows also enjoyed special respect in the cultures of other peoples of the ancient Near East. The sage Ani, whose teaching was widespread in early Middle Kingdom Egypt, warns his disciple: “Give twice as much bread to your mother and ask her how she is doing. She has had many hardships with you... After your months (of childbirth), after you were born, she carried you again on her lap, and for three years was her breast in your mouth. And she did not grumble at your filthiness, she did not grumble and say, *What shall I do (now)?* She took you to school when you learned writing and every day she came (to school) with bread and beer from her house. ... When you are a young man when you get a wife, and when you have your own house, then turn your eye (of your mind) to the way your mother bore you and how she brought you up in all things. May she not rebuke (blame) you, and may she not lift her hands to the god, and may he not hear her cry.” (*Wisdom of Ani*) (*Gândirea egipteană antică în texte* 1974, 145)

Jewish wisdom speaks to us through Jesus, the son of Sirach, teaching us, “With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?” (Sir 7:27-28; cf. Prv 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 19:26; 20:20; 30:17; Sir 3:1-16). The author of the eulogy dedicated to the mother of the seven young men of Jerusalem (Solomonias) [20] martyred by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2 Mac 7) writes in the same vein: “In what manner might I express the emotions of parents who love their children? We impress upon the character of a small child a wondrous likeness both of mind and of form. Especially is this true of mothers, who because of their birthpangs have a deeper sympathy toward their offspring than do the fathers. Considering that mothers are the weaker sex and give birth to many, they are more devoted to their children. The mother of the seven boys, more than any other mother, loved her children. In seven pregnancies she had implanted in herself tender love toward them, and because of the many pains she suffered with each of them she had sympathy for them.” (4 Mac 15:4-7) [21].

Ross Shepard Kraemer, exploring epigraphic and papyrological evidence from the Jewish Diaspora in late antiquity – a few centuries later after the writing of the

Book of Tobit – notes that Jewish women, like their Greek and Roman sisters, put their lives at risk every time they gave birth, although maternal mortality is impossible to determine with precision (Kraemer 2009, 5960). The same author mentions a poignant epitaph dating from the mid-2nd to late 1st century BC from Leontopolis, Egypt: “This is the tomb of Arsinoe, the traveller. Stop and weep for her, unhappy in all things, whose fate was hard and terrible. For I was deprived of my mother when I was a young child [perhaps when my mother was giving birth to another child (?)], and when the flower of my youth prepared me for a bridegroom, my father married me to Phabeis, and Fate brought me to the end of my life when I bore my first child. I lived a few years, but a great grace blossomed in the beauty of my soul. This tomb hides in its bosom my chaste body, but my soul has flown to the holy ones. Lament for Arsinoe. In the year 25, Mechir 2.” (CPJ/CIJ 1510; JIGRE 33) (Kraemer 2004, 122)

Tobit’s book also delights with particularly sensitive and moving images. Both parents, Hannah and Tobit, consider Tobias “the light of [their] eyes” (τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου, Tob 10:5; 11:14) and “the rod of [their] hands” (ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς χειρὸς ἡμῶν, Tob 5:18). Extremely touching is the way the author describes the mother’s anguish over the longing of her son who has gone far away. Almost without hope, Hannah every day searched the way by which her son had gone, and at night she wept and could not sleep (Tob 10:7; 11:5). Expressions of a similar sensitivity are also found in the prayer dedicated to his mother by Neagoie Basarab:

Hannah, Tobias’s mother – “And his wife said to him, The lad has perished; his long delay proves it. Then she began to mourn for him, and said, Am I not distressed, my child, that I let you go, you who are the light of my eyes? (τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου)!” (Tob 10:4-5 – RSV) “Then he saw his son and embraced him, and he wept and said, Blessed art thou, O God, and blessed is thy name for ever, and blessed are all thy holy angels” (Tob 11:14 – REV)

Neaga (Neagoie Basarab’s mother) – “For I was brighter than the rays of the sun before your eyes, and you never had *before your eyes* a *brighter light* than I, nor your heart had any other treasure dearer to you than I. Therefore, O my mother, your heart and your eyes, until your death, could never be satisfied with me and the sight of me. And then it did not befall me to be with thee, that thine eyes might be satisfied with me, and that I, thy son, might take pardon and blessing from thee. And not only because I did not have wholehearted love for you, I did not come to be with you at your death, that your heart might be sweet to me since even in your lifetime you were not satisfied

with my love, but even at your death your heart was still burning with longing and pity for me, and your eyes were not satisfied with the sight of me.” (*Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 155)

Information about the personality of Neaga, the mother of the ruler of Wallachia, is sketchy and uncertain. We do not know if she had any other children besides Neagoe Basarab. Neaga’s death occurred in circumstances that were very difficult for the ruling house, a fact that deeply affected the ruler, as is clear from his own words.

The first passage of Tobit’s counsel concludes in a chiasmic manner with the command to bury Tobias’s mother Anna (Tob 4:3b // Tob 4:4c), including the climactic statement ἐν ἐνὶ τάφῳ (“in the same grave”, Tob 4:4c). Here we find the high esteem of the conjugal bond continuing even after death (Oeming 2011, 553), and the commandment to honour the mother remains particularly significant. Sons must be prudent when their parents reach old age: “O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him.” (Sir 3:12-13).

Possible thematic parallels

There is a curious similarity between the structure of Tob 4 and the plan of the second part of *Neagoe Basarab’s Teachings to his son Theodosius*, but not exactly easy to support with a solid argument. The eulogy dedicated to Neaga, the mother of the Romanian ruler, contained in the sixth word, corresponds with Tob 4:3-4. Also in the same words, the members of the ruling family and the courtiers are exhorted to worship Jesus Christ and to remember his mercies (cf. Tob 4:5-6). The seventh word deals at length with the theme of works of mercy (cf. Tob 4:6-11). The following words develop the themes touched on in Tob 4:12-15: divine retribution, moral conduct, attitude towards subjects, including the reward due to each one. The echo of the golden rule of Tob 4:15a resounds at the end of the thirteenth word in the form of the warning about the measure of God’s justice at the Last Judgment. Immediately in the next word the author presents the good manners that Theodosius and the courtiers must observe when they sit at the table. In the same vein, Tobit is warned about the harmful effects of wine (Tob 4:15b). The 21st word takes up the series of teachings on mercy (cf. Tob 4:16-7). The 24th word develops the quintessentially sapiential theme of the perpetual application of good counsel (Tob 4:18), here specifically against the sin of envy and revenge. The last words agree with Tob 4:19 in the presence of prayers

and doxologies. In the future, a more careful study of these parallels could, I believe, provide an answer to the question that motivated the present research concerning a model of the structure of the recommendations of Tob 4 for the second part of the *Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius*, as well as the history of the reception of the literary motifs present in these writings and a possible reconstruction of their route from the models whose origins are lost in the mists of antiquity to the form in which they have been valorised in the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Conclusions

The main purpose of the author of the Book of Tobit is to promote fidelity to the Law and authentic family values. Although in the Diaspora the institution of the family is preserved in a hidden and modest life, it becomes the hope for the future resurrection of the nation of Israel. This can be realized through the education of children. There is no activity more beautiful or more noble than the father's concern to guide his son in the ways of the Lord (cf. Phil 18:19). Like Tobit, Neagoe Basarab would be content only if his son surpassed him by becoming a better disciple than his father in the school of the Wisdom: "The Holy Scripture says: Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning (Prv 9:9)" (*Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 145) [22]

Notes

[1] The royal face of Despina Milița [Elena] (1487-1554) enjoyed a special reception in contemporary Romanian literature as a model of a devoted wife, daughter-in-law, mother (of six children) and a devoted Lady in the service of the country (*His Majesty Neagoe Basarab* 2012).

[2] For an analysis of the numerous Old Testament texts concerning those responsible for upbringing in the family, which include father and mother, and sometimes also the nanny, see Vatamanu 2023, 253-66.

[3] James Crenshaw points to the cultivation in ancient Egypt and Israel of four other virtues: *silence, eloquence, timeliness* and *modesty*. Silence implies control over anger, lust, greed and envy. Eloquence enables the wise to persuade their listeners and communicate effectively, while restraint involves an awareness of the right time to speak, valuing non-speech as a powerful form of communication. Modesty indicates the humility that stems from the knowledge that the mysteries of life will never fully divulge themselves to truth seekers (Crenshaw 1998, 71-2).

[4] Although the Book of Tobit is primarily a historical narrative, many biblical scholars believe that because of certain passages (especially Tob 4:3-19) it would rather be classified as part of the wisdom literature.

[5] Its character of pedagogical model is in the line of exegetical literature of the Midrashic type (Stancovici 2012: 24-5).

[6] For example, the acts of mercy prescribed by Tobit (Tob 4:7-11) are found in Sir 3:30-4:10; 7:34-38, etc. On the similarities present between the Book of Tobit and the *Apocrypha of Genesis*, discovered at Qumran, see Jacobs 2018, 10; Machiela and Perrin 2014, 111-32.

[7] A recently published study aims to determine the boundaries that demarcate the fictional elements from the authentic historical events mentioned in the Book of Tobit (Chrostowski 2023, 313-28). The Book of Tobit, written from a considerable temporal perspective, concerning the events described (3rd-2nd century BC), portrays them in the manner of a parable of faithfulness to God in the conditions of the first Israelite diaspora, whose origins were outlined in Tobit.

[8] The close thematic links between the Book of Tobit and the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) are eloquently illustrated in the contributions contained in the volume: *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit* (2005), and particularly for Tob 4 in the study: Di Lella 2014: 171-85. Alexander A. Di Lella has been a proponent of adopting a literary approach to the two books. Both anaginoscomena (deuterocanonical) books were composed probably within a century of each other, around 200 BC.

[9] The insufficiency of the space allotted will not allow us to deal at length with the three important themes (*ἀλήθεια, δικαιοσύνη* și *ἐλεημοσύνη*) in this study. On the relationship of the Hebrew term *חֶסֶד* (*hesed*) and its Greek counterpart *ἐλεημοσύνη* in the Book of Tobit, cf. Deselaers 1982, 348-58. Marten Rabenau argues more convincingly by appealing to the Hebrew text of ben Sirach that in the Book of Tobit, *ἐλεημοσύνη* corresponds to the Hebrew *שְׂדָאָה* (*sedāqā*), and *ἐλεημοσύνη* corresponds to the Hebrew *שְׂדֵדָה* (*sedeq*) (Rabenau 1994, 128-34; Otzen 2002, 357).

[10] We fulfil the deeds of mercy not when we have more and give to those who have less, but when we recognize our fellow human beings as equals and promote solidarity in the common participation in one condition of pilgrims on the roads of the world: “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:34). The gift that I give to another is not an act of generosity, but a duty that flows from the fact that I recognize the other as a son of God and therefore my brother, with the same rights and duties that I have: “I say to you, truly,” the Lord Jesus Christ will say

to us at the Last Judgment, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:34 – RSV).

[11] *Sinaiticus*: Θάψον με καλῶς· καὶ τίμα τὴν μητέρα σου καὶ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπης αὐτήν πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ποίει τὸ ἀρεστὸν ἐνώπιον αὐτῆς καὶ μὴ λυπήσης τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῆς ἐν παντὶ πράγματι. μνήσθητι αὐτῆς, παιδίον, ὅτι κινδύνους πολλοὺς ἐώρακεν ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς· καὶ ὅταν ἀποθάνῃ, θάψον αὐτήν παρ’ ἐμοὶ ἐν ἐνὶ τάφῳ. (Littman 2008, 10). The *Vulgate* text differs considerably from the Greek versions: *Audi, fili mi, verba oris mei, et ea in corde tuo quasi fundamentum construe. Cum acceperit Deus animam meam, corpus meum sepeli: et honorem habebis matri tuae omnibus diebus vitae ejus.* “Listen, my son, to my words and keep them in your heart as a foundation. When the Lord takes my soul, bury my body, and honor your mother all the days of her life.” (Tob 4:2-3) (Fitzmyer 2003, 167). The textual subdivisions of the quoted excerpt are according to Ego 2013, 96.

[12] “The book of Neagoe Voivode to the Bishop Macarius and other abbots and hieromonks and priests and all the clergy, when they buried the second time, in the Monastery of Arges, the bones of his mother, Lady Neaga, and his sons, Peter Voivode and John Voivode, and Lady Angelina. With words and teachings of humility” [The Sixth Word]).

[13] *Vaticanus* renders θάψον με, while *Sinaiticus* reads θάψον με καλῶς by adding to the provision the adverb which has the meaning: *well, beautiful, fitting*. According to Littman, proper burial means burial *properly, with due rites* (Littman 2008, 87).

[14] These facts of Tobit reflect the religious atmosphere of the Jewish Diaspora communities, attested in other contemporary Jewish writings: the Prophet Daniel avoided eating the food prepared at King Nebuchadnezzar’s table (Dan 1:8, 14-15); in her prayer, Queen Esther states that she did not eat at Haman’s table (LXX Est 4:17x). Likewise, the heroine Judith while spending time in the camp of the Assyrian general Holofernes, ate only of the food she brought with her (Idt 10:5; 12:2-4,9,19). These are, of course, practices characteristic of the Second Temple period, when the Book of Tobit was composed (Dimant 2017, 196, n. 21).

[15] In the case of the patriarch Jacob, the command to be buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 49:29-32) is the last word addressed to his sons. In the case of Tobit, however, the burial requirements are even found at the very beginning of his recommendations.

[16] The passages from the Apocrypha mentioned follow the translation: *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* 2001. For a detailed exposition on the duty of sons to bury their fathers while encompassing several Jewish sources, see Balla 2003, 95-7 (*Providing a funeral*).

[17] Tobit shows sensitivity to Anna's potential needs. However, beyond the advice given to Tobit not to cause sorrow or pain to the mother, the book presents an irony, for Tobit has already caused distress to Ana. First, he falsely accused her of stealing the animal (*ὁ ἔριφος*, Tobit 2:13) she had received as payment earned from the cloth trade. Tobit again caused her distress by sending Tobias to retrieve the silver kept with his friend Gabael of Rhages of Media. When Hannah expresses her wish that Tobias remains at home (Tob 5:18-21), Tobit rejects her request. At the same time, Tobit's assurance deriving from his deep trust in God and the guardian angel becomes evident, even if this is not explicitly shown. The emotional scenes reach their climax with the reunion of Tobit and his parents, a moment full of tears, joy and hugs.

[18] This provision will be taken up again in the testamentary word in the epilogue of the book when old Tobit is on his deathbed giving his last instructions to his son (Tob 14:10). Here we find the high esteem of the conjugal bond even after death. In this way, family cohesion is strengthened and the Jewish tradition handed down during life is preserved in Diaspora conditions (cf. Tob 3:10; 5:1; 6:15; 10) (Niebuhr 1987, 205).

[19] Widows in Ancient Israel are referred to in the triadic formula "the stranger and the orphan and the widow" (e.g. Dt 14:29), one of the preferred modes of expression of biblical authors, a fact noted by its frequent use. The formula in its dyadic form (widows and orphans only) preceded the Israelites' settlement in Canaan, as it is found in ancient Near Eastern literature. The dyad even finds its way into the New Testament in the famous dictum about pure and undefiled holiness in Jas 1:27 (Mark 1999, 501).

[20] In the calendar of the Orthodox Church, the seven Maccabean martyrs, their mother Solomonia and the teacher Eleazar are celebrated on August 1.

[21] See also Solomon's lament for her sons in the next chapter, "Alas for my children, some unmarried, others married and without offspring. I shall not see your children or have the happiness of being called grandmother. Alas, I who had so many and beautiful children am a widow and alone, with many sorrows. Nor when I die, shall I have any of my sons to bury me." (4 Mac 16:9-11). Romanian translation of these passages: *Septuagint III* (2005).

[22] "Teaching of that Neagoe Voivode to his son Theodosius and other lords, to all. The Assize to the Patriarchs, to the Bishops, to the boyars and the abbots, to the rich and the poor. Pronouncement and confession for the fear and love of God" [Slovo 5]).

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