

Chapter 3: Genesis Pseudepocryphon

3.1 ABRAM IN THE DIASPORA: KEYING AND FRAMING IN GENESIS APOCRYPHON

Having dealt with the Genesis Apocryphon as the product of cultural memory in terms of its relationship to its inherited biblical memory (including the traditions which were ancillary to Genesis proper), we may now turn our attention to the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon addressed its audience at the level of *social* memory. In this section I will address the way that the Genesis Apocryphon *speaks to* its audience and the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon changes and adapts its cultural memory into a meaningful piece of literature for Second Temple Judaism.

As I have already noted, the narrative of the Genesis Apocryphon is not simply a straight-forward retelling of Genesis from the perspectives of Lamech, Noah, and Abram, but particuiates more broadly in the “biblical memory” of Genesis. However, what is most compelling about RwB texts very often is the ways that they adapt biblical memory. These adaptations can come at the level of story—by adding, removing, or rearranging events—or at the level of narrative discourse by describing events differently or with different emphases. In the case of Genesis Apocryphon, and in particular in the account of Abram in cols. 19–22, the biblical narrative has been recast as a (first-person) Hellenistic novella in a similar vein to other well-known Second Temple Jewish works such as the narrative portions of Daniel (including

the Greek additions), Esther, Tobit, and (arguably) the so-called Joseph novella of Genesis 37 and 39–50.¹

The reading of Genesis Apocryphon 19–20 as a Hellenistic Jewish novella has recently been very thoroughly explicated by Blake Jurgens, who has further argued that the utilization of Hellenistic literary motifs and structures in Genesis Apocryphon altered the overall purpose of the pericope for the purpose of edifying Jews living in the Hellenistic world in the shadow of empire.² Although much of Jurgens’s paper is based on long-established observations about the literary influences on Genesis Apocryphon, he makes the important discursive turn toward the audience by claiming that the Genesis Apocryphon was meant to be useful to readers:

By imbuing its story with literary tropes and techniques similar to those found in Dan 1–6, Esther, and other Jewish texts arising out of the Hellenistic period, the author successfully attends to the narrational ambiguities of Gen 12:10–20 through interpretive expansion upon the latent exegetical links of the text while

1. See especially Lawrence Wills work on the Jewish novels and novellas in antiquity:

Lawrence Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) as well as his important earlier works Lawrence Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) and Lawrence Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990).

2. Blake A. Jurgens, “A Wandering Aramean in Pharaoh’s Court: The Literary Relationship Between Abram’s Sojourn in Egypt in 1QapGen 19-20 and Jewish Fictional Literature,” *JSTJ*, 2018, 1–34.

concurrently modifying the narrative to appeal to contemporary literary expectations.³

The process of this transcription, which he terms “fictionalization,” is described by Jurgens in the six distinct narrative units within cols. 19-20 of Genesis Apocryphon which describe Abram and Sarai’s sojourn in Egypt: the descent into Egypt, Abram’s dream vision, the banquet Scene, praise of Sarai’s beauty, Abram’s prayer, and the final court contest. In each section Jurgens notes the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon utilizes literary structures common to its broader Hellenistic milieu to rewrite the events of this story. Jurgens offers a very thorough description of the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon utilizes these literary structures and makes a plausible claim that these changes were meant to engage readers in familiar style. Thinking in terms of social memory, however, we can appreciate the way that the story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt is “remembered into” the social context of Hellenistic Judaism and is fitted into the contemporary social frameworks (read: literary conventions) therein.

While Halbwachs addressed the fact that memories are shaped by the present, recently Barry Schwartz has attempted to more clearly articulate this process. One of the most important contributions of Schwartz’s work in this area is his conviction that the interactions between the remembered past and the present are not unidirectional. Where Halbwachs limits his discussion to the describing the ways that memories of the past are shaped by the present, Schwartz sees the past as a potent force in the present as well. In other words, not only does

3. Jurgens, “A Wandering Aramean in Pharaoh’s Court,” 27.

the present influence the way the past is remembered, but the past *itself* (that is, both the remembered and “actual” past) also effects the present.

Schwartz employs two terms, “keying” and “framing,” to describe this additional dimension to the way that the past impacts the present. On the one hand the idea of “keying” can be understood as way of

3.1.1 Setting

One of the primary features of these novellas is their setting. Jurgens notes that, typically, these Jewish novellas are set in the diaspora, which invariably place the Jewish (or, in Tobit and Judith’s case, Israelite) protagonist under the hegemony of a foreign power. In the case of Genesis Apocryphon, although not properly “diaspora,” Abram is a sojourner in a foreign land and is under foreign hegemony. Moreover, from a modern perspective, these stories have a tendency to commit rather egregious factual errors about certain historical particulars such as the names of rulers (Judith 1:1; Dan 4; Tobit) and geographic items (Tobit 5:6). Likewise, Genesis Apocryphon seems to utilize details which almost certainly were inventions of the author (or an earlier tradant) such as referring to “Pharaoh Zoan” (we know of no such figure) and Herqanos, a name popular in the Ptolemaic period, but not attested otherwise as well as referring to the “Karmon River” (probably the Kharma canal), as the one of the seven heads of the Nile river, which it is not.⁴ These details, according to Jurgens, are meant to create a sense

4. Jurgens, “A Wandering Aramean in Pharaoh’s Court,” 7; See also Daniel A. Machiela, “Some Egyptian Elements in the Genesis Apocryphon: Evidence of a Ptolemaic Social Loca-

of verisimilitude and authenticity within the narrative. Thus, although the story of Abram's sojourn in Egypt as narrated in the biblical text engages with discourses of the *foundation* of Israel, the narrative of the Genesis Apocryphon seems to be turning the story to engage with the contemporary discourses around the idea of *diaspora*.

3.1.2 Abram in the Court of a Foreign King

3.1.3 Abram the Sage

3.1.4 Abram the Oracle

tion?" AS 8 (2010): 47–69; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 3 ed., BO 18a (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2004), 197–99.

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