

INTERTEXTUAL AND INTRATEXTUAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE TESTAMENT OF JOB¹

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Abstract: Biblical Job is a character that simply cannot escape comment and his story has been retold across the monotheistic religions and across a wide variety of genres, in which he is sometimes praised and sometimes condemned. The Book of Job contains many ambiguities that leave plenty of room for ambivalent interpretations, as is especially evident in the reception history of the Book of Job in the Jewish literary tradition. The long reception history of the Book of Job helps exemplify how intertextuality functions, how old material is reset into new contexts and how characters transform, both from one text to another and within the changed context of a single text. A good example of this is the pseudepigraphic Testament of Job when explored in light of its reception history both in the Jewish tradition (or the lack of such) and in the context of the biblical Book of Job. The aim of the current paper therefore is to highlight the intertextual (from patient sufferer to an enduring “athlete”) as well the intratextual transformation of Job (from reward-oriented suffering towards freedom from sufferings thorough insight) as presented in the Testament of Job.

Keywords: Testament of Job, reception history, perception of suffering, intertextuality.

The story of the chief protagonist of the biblical Book of Job has provided material for profound discussions on the sufferings of a just man. It has made Jewish sages and Christian theologians argue about the nature of evil and of divine justice, it has brought about countless academic studies and addressed the doubts, fears and hopes of numerous people from the

¹ This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant (PRG938).

earliest times to modernity. All of them find a trait in Job that they can identify themselves with, be it his righteous side, rebellious side or something in between. Job is a character that simply cannot escape comment and his story has been retold across the monotheistic religions and across a wide variety of genres, in which he is sometimes praised and sometimes condemned. The Book of Job contains many ambiguities that leave plenty of room for ambivalent interpretations, as is especially evident in the reception history of the Book of Job in the Jewish literary tradition. Despite its limited place in the liturgy,² the book was widely rendered in pre-rabbinic Jewish literature (Pseudepigrapha, Targumim) and in the rabbinic tradition (Midrashim, Talmudic and Geonic literature, Jewish Bible commentaries), as well as in medieval and modern Jewish philosophy and mysticism. All these genres display a lack of consensus on Job: was he a real person or fiction, was he a Jew or a non-Jew, when did he live, did his suffering have a reason or not etc.?

The long reception history of the Book of Job helps exemplify how intertextuality functions, how old material is reset into new contexts, and how characters transform, both from one text to another and within the changed context of a single text.³ The aim of current paper is to show the transformation of Job as presented in the Testament of Job.

TESTAMENT OF JOB

Testament of Job (from this point forward, *TJob*) is one of the most distinct and interesting examples of the reception of the Book of Job. This pseudepigraphic text, written somewhere in the period from the 1st century BCE to 1st century CE,⁴ is widely described as a folklorist retelling of the biblical story (e.g. Gruen 2009: 163; Rogers 2012: 395; Wisse

² According to Mittleman (2009: 25–26), the Book of Job has no liturgical use per se (although it has been used occasionally on the Fast of the Ninth of Av) and rabbis seem to have gone to great lengths to avoid reading Job as the source for such Jewish mourning customs as sitting for seven days or rending one's garment, both of which could easily be traced back.

³ On intertextuality in context of early Jewish literature, see e.g. Boyarin (1990), on transformations of Job see e.g. Del Sordo (2008).

⁴ For a bibliography of research on the TJob in the past decade, see List (2018). Among earlier studies, the following are to be highlighted (from older to newer): Kohler (1897), Nicholls (1982), Spittler (1983), Haas (1989), Spittler (1989), Begg (1994).

2003: 35) or even as an ancient, entertaining novel.⁵ It takes the form of a (pre-rabbinic) haggadah and belongs to the genre of the Jewish testament literature of the Second Temple period. The exact date and location of its formation are still a matter for debate.⁶ The earliest evidence for the text is a Sahidic Coptic translation preserved in the fragments of a papyrus codex dating from the fourth century (P. Köln 3221) (DiTommaso 2012: 314; Haralambakis 2012: 4–5). The only complete copies are four Greek manuscripts from the 11th to 16th century (P, P2, S and V)⁷ and nine Old Slavonic ones (Haralambakis 2012: 3–4).

Most scholars agree that *TJob* was originally written in Greek (and most of the analysis on *TJob* has been conducted based on its Greek versions). According to Trotter (2016), Dochhorn (2010) and others the similarities in phraseology and syntax between the Testament of Job and the Old Greek version of the Book of Job (*OGJob*) and the Septuagint indicate that there existed a strong relationship and mutual influence between these books, although the transmission history of these versions is still unclear (Trotter 2016: 1 and 399).⁸

There has been a long debate on the context of the text. Although a majority of scholars suggest a Jewish provenance for *TJob* (Haralambakis 2012: 150), there are also voices that claim a Christian influence on the text and ascribe a redaction layer to Montanist Christians, or even the entire work to a Christian community. But even if it was composed in a Hellenized Jewish diaspora community somewhere in Egypt, or more specifically in Alexandria, as Gruen (2009: 166) convincingly suggests, the reception of the Jewish Testament of Job seems mostly to have taken place in an Eastern-Christian context (therefore also its translations into Coptic and Old-Slavonic) (Haralambakis 2012: 150; Oberhänsli-Widmer 2003: 11). In contrast, while the Jewish pre-rabbinic and early rabbinic

⁵ As shown by Rogers (2012: 396), there are also authors (like Seow) who claim that Testament of Job is not a commentary on the biblical story of Job but a replacement story or even an alternative version.

⁶ For thorough studies on the context of *TJob* see: Haralambakis (2012) and Gruen (2009).

⁷ There are two critical editions of the Greek versions of *TJob*: Brock, Picard (1967) based on P; and Kraft (1974) based on S and V.

⁸ For connections between LXX Job and *TJob* see Spittler (1983: 831), Kalman (2005: 148–149), Dochhorn (2010) Nicholls (1982), Rogers (2012), Schaller (1980).

sages still seem to have some knowledge of Job as characterized in *TJob*, the later sages and medieval Jewish authors know nothing of him or ignore him.⁹ However, looking at the accusations of Jewish authors against biblical Job, it could be argued that the Job of *TJob* is precisely everything they say biblical Job was not.

JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS JOB

In order to understand the place of the *TJob* within the wider Jewish tradition, and its neglect, one should briefly examine the way that Jewish attitudes towards Job have changed from antiquity to the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Jewish literary tradition concerning Job is far from unanimous. As some authors have poignantly said, the tradition is confused and contradictory (Jacobs 1971: 2) and has a “decidedly mixed assessment of Job” (Mittleman 2009: 25). The biggest contradiction is to be found between pre-rabbinic or early rabbinic Hellenistic Jewish literature and classical rabbinic literature together with medieval Jewish philosophy.

Job’s perception in the *TJob* is aligned with the early positive attitudes towards Job (in prerabbinic haggadah, midrash Iov, *OGJob*, LXX and in early Christian literature—especially in the Epistle of James), that saw in Job a hero or even a martyr-ideal and completely ignored his rebellious side. *TJob* repeatedly describes Job as an “athlete.” For the Jewish audience this side of Job may have had connotations with another biblical hero or “athlete”—Gideon. The latter destroyed the sanctuary of Baal and Asherah, followed by a battle with the Midianites, while the God fearing Job of *TJob* destroyed the temple of the idol, followed by the battle with Satan. Wisse (2003: 48–49) points out that:

The Gideon story, if indeed alluded to in the Testament, functions as a text in between the Book of Job and the early Jewish interpreters. It helps the interpreters to overcome the difficulties they experience

⁹ According to Kalman (2005: 150), the work of Emanuel Tov shows that whereas Talmudic rabbis were aware of the contents of the Septuagint text of the Pentateuch, the extent of their knowledge of Greek translations of Job is far more difficult to ascertain. In comparison, the Western Church fathers were aware of these earlier traditions as they appeared in the Septuagint and many were likely aware of them in the Testament of Job.

¹⁰ See on this Jacobs (1971), Leibowitz (1987), Oberhänsli-Widmer (2003), Wiernikowski (1902), Gordis (1978).

with the original text, and eventually enables the religious community to maintain the authority of both their interpretation and the original text.

At the same time the term “athlete” became an epithet for the martyr in early Christian patristic literature, where Job is called the Athlete of the Church before the advent of Christ, as shown by Irving Jacobs (1971: 43, 64). Job was seen as a pious sufferer, the exemplary *patient one*, whose behaviour in the face of suffering should be emulated.¹¹ Several scholars are of the opinion that exactly this positive attitude toward Job preached by the church led the rabbis to change their position concerning Job, shifting from holding him up as the model of righteousness to that of a blasphemer who was kept from his place in the world-to-come (Kalman 2005: 238). This shift was also rather gradual. In tannaitic sources (1st–2nd century) Job was still acknowledged for his endurance and piety, but these virtues were seen as inferior compared to the ones of Abraham who, like Job in *TJob*, burnt down “the house of idols” as testified in the Book of Jubilees (Jub 12:12–24). This attitude intensified in the amoraic sources (3rd–5th century) and further in the geonic ones (8th–10th century), which started to negate the virtuous side of Job and to describe him as a rebellious and unstable figure who was by no means a match for Abraham (Jacobs 1971: 41).¹²

¹¹ Although the focus of the current paper is on the intertextual and intratextual transformations in the Testament of Job in the light of the Jewish tradition, one should also keep in mind the centrality of biblical Job in the Greek-Orthodox/ Byzantine and Church Slavonic tradition, his place as exemplary Martyr and venerated Saint (and the respective iconography) and the popularity of the *TJob* especially in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In addition, one should not overlook the possible relationship between the Medieval Eastern Orthodox Greek and Slavonic versions of *TJob* as well as the Syriac tradition and the image of Job as *ṣābir* in the Qur’anic and post-Qur’anic Islamic view (cf. e.g., the *qisās al-anbiyā’* or Stories of the Prophets). For Job in Islamic tradition see Schreiner (2012).

¹² A good example of the contrasting virtues of Job and Abraham comes from the Babylonian Talmud (tractate Sanhedrin 89b), where Satan challenges God to get Abraham to prove his worthiness—the test being the binding of Isaac or the *’akedah*, whereupon Abraham pleads with God not subject him to any more trials. God agrees and tells Abraham that all his future trials will be inflicted on Job. In another tractate, Bava Batra 16a, Satan feared that because God was so favourable toward Job, God would forget the merits of Abraham: R. Levi said: “Satan, when he saw God inclined to favour Job said, Tar be it that God should forget the love of Abraham.” A similar attitude is also reflected, for example, in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, a Jewish aggadic work probably compiled in the geonic era (ca. 700–900 CE). Whereas *TJob* emphasizes Job’s charity, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* criticizes

Kalman (2005: 241) shows that a good number of the rabbinic responses to Job leave the reader with the understanding that Job's afflictions were justified; later Jewish interpreters further maintained and encouraged this position. Within the same rabbinic materials, an even harsher response to Job—accusation of blasphemy—can be found (Bava Batra 16a):

The Gemara considers the character of Job. The verse states: "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). Rava says: A close reading of the verse indicates that he did not sin with his lips, but he sinned in his heart. What did he say that suggests that he had wicked thoughts? "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked, he covers the faces of its judges; if not he, then who is it?" (Job 9:24). Rava says: Job sought to turn the bowl upside down, that is to say, he alluded here to a heretical thought, as he said that the earth is given into the hand of the wicked, indicating that he had God in mind.¹³

According to Kalman (2005: 148) this kind of specific critique of Job is unique as no other recorded rabbinic tradition hints at Job's denial of resurrection. Both the Septuagint and the Testament of Job recognized Job as a pious non-Jew, the latter clearly stating that Job "glorified God and did not blaspheme" (*TJob* 16:7)¹⁴.

Viewing Job negatively, the Jewish sages preserved God's status as just since the afflictions through which he allowed Satan to attack Job were perceived as deserved. Job was not a righteous sufferer but a hypocrite and heretic being punished (Kalman 2005: 5 and 10).

him for his failure to employ his hospitality: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Job: "Job, thou hast not yet reached half the measure of Abraham. Thou sittest and tarriest within thy house and the wayfarers come in to thee. To him who is accustomed to eat wheat bread, thou givest wheat bread to eat; to him, who is accustomed to eat meat, thou givest meat to eat; to him who is accustomed to drink wine, thou givest wine to drink. However, Abraham did not act in this way. Instead, he would go forth and make rounds everywhere, and when he found wayfarers, he brought them in to his house. To him who was unaccustomed to eat wheat bread, he gave wheat bread to eat; to him who was unaccustomed to eat meat, he gave meat to eat; to him who was unaccustomed to drink wine, he gave wine to drink"" (Goldin 1955: 47).

¹³ Translation taken from Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Batra.16a.10?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en, based on The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud.

¹⁴ Quotations from the Testament of Job are from Spittler's translation (1983).

The **Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages** continued the rabbinic criticism of Job as a rebel against God,¹⁵ the only exception being Saadia Gaon, the first Jewish philosopher to write a commentary on Job.¹⁶ In his commentary on Job, the Book of Theodicy, he explained that Job's sufferings were a test inflicted by God upon the righteous because they can bear them and they serve as a way of modelling the righteous response to suffering (Kalman 2005: 242). These sufferings imposed by God can be seen not as punishments but as "sufferings of love," as a means to higher blessedness and reward that enlighten the believer on the perfect justice and rationality of God's universe and of his actions within it (Mittleman 2009: 32). The majority of philosophers, however, followed the suit of Maimonides, whose view of Job became most prevalent in the Middle Ages.

Maimonides' views on Job can be found in his Guide of the Perplexed (Book III: 22–23) where he argues that Job, while being pious, was never described as wise. It was exactly Job's ignorance of that explained his sufferings because according to Maimonides a person with a perfected intellect could not suffer. Job would not have suffered if he would have apprehended that the ultimate reward was the immortality of the intellect and if he had recognized the temporary nature of all material things (Kalman 2005: 12–13).

However, if we turn to Job in *TJob* we can see that he incorporates exactly this kind of knowledge and apprehension. He evinces most of the traits he was accused of lacking. Job of *TJob* is neither a blasphemer, rebel nor ignorant but instead glorifies God, endures his sufferings with patience as he knows the cause and the reward. According to Wisse (2003: 45), *TJob* removes much of the ambiguity of the Book of Job by pointing out why Job had to suffer and how he had to cope with it from the very outset. This could be seen at the same time as both an advantage and disadvantage of the Testament over the biblical account as it makes the latter less open to fresh interpretations of evil and suffering than its biblical counterpart.

¹⁵ For a general overview of the topic, see Eisen (2004). For further source material, see Schwartz (1868).

¹⁶ An outstanding exposé on Saadia is Lenn E. Goodman's introduction to his translation of *The Book of Theodicy* by Saadia Ben Joseph Al-Fayyūmī (1988), cf. already Goitein (1890).

TJob is indeed lacking ambiguity, but in my opinion, it is nevertheless open to new interpretations, especially concerning the suffering. The text of *TJob* is multilayered (belonging at the same time to the genre of the testament and apocalyptic eschatology, combining folklore, mysticism, ethics and homiletics) and it shows an intertextual transformation of its character¹⁷, as well as intratextual transformation of Job. As shown by Guffey (2012: 13), *TJob* narrates the

[i]nterior journey of Job from conversion, to patient detachment, to heavenly-minded vision, to angelic living, the last of these becoming the inheritance of his daughters. The narrative begins with ethics and ends with mystical transformation in the present alongside personal eschatological salvation.

Job's sufferings in *TJob* are not a spiritual test of righteousness but a chance to prove his faith, transform to a true lover of God and to experience God.

TRANSFORMATIONS

The story in *TJob* diverges significantly from canonical Job. One can agree with Jessie Rogers (2012: 401) when he says that:

the arbitrary nature of Job's suffering and God's complicity in it in biblical Job is rewritten as suffering that Job willingly accepts as part of his righteous opposition to Satan. Here is none of the existential crisis of biblical Job where the suffering has to be endured in the absence of any explanation, where there is no promised end to the suffering, and where Job remains ignorant of Satan's involvement. In the words of the angel, Job "will be like a sparring athlete, both enduring pains and winning the crown" (*TJob* 4:8).

TJob is not an exploration of unexplained suffering but an example of patient endurance under trial. It is an exploration of explained suffering, of its objective and subjective causes and of ways to face them.

The objective or material cause behind the sufferings in *TJob* is Satan, who is void of all his problematic elements present in the biblical Book of Job. He is no match for the wisdom, faithfulness and patient endurance of

¹⁷ On the characters of the Book of Job and their transformation in the *TJob*, see Begg (1994).

Job, as shown by Trotter (2016: 402). Satan of *TJob* is the typical trickster known from Talmudic and Midrashic Literature.¹⁸ He is not a fallen angel nor an evil force that is the equal and opposite of God (as the Christian tradition tends to portray him), but a tempter of humankind, a tester of the righteous and a deceiver in disguise.¹⁹ Or, as Talmud says, Satan—the evil inclination—and the angel of death are one and the same (Bava Batra 16a).²⁰ As shown in *TJob*, Job knows what to await and can therefore see through the disguise of Satan while others cannot. This raises the question: if all is made so clear and easy for Job, is it then not breaking in through an open door?

Satan rather becomes a tool. His existence and the sufferings caused by him give the sufferer the chance to understand the true nature of sufferings that lie much deeper and are bound to detachment from the material world. Satan has the power to inflict harm only in earthly matters. He can push Job to the edge, but he is not allowed to take his soul or his life, a limitation that made Satan suffer. In Rabbi Yitzhak's words: "Satan's suffering was more difficult than that of Job. This can be explained by means of a parable involving a servant whose master said to him: Break the barrel but save its wine" (Bava Batra 16a). However, as shown in *TJob*, Satan could not even break the barrel and had to explicitly acknowledge his defeat (*TJob* 27:2–6).

In order to defeat Satan Job needs endurance, but the endurance relies on the understanding of distinction between earthly and heavenly realities that is gained through suffering. Job of *TJob* is a perfect example of this kind of process of transformation.

Unlike biblical Job, Job in *TJob* is utterly pious, an "athlete," who knows where his sufferings come from:

But if you are patient (ὀπομείνης), I will make your name renowned in all generations of the earth until the end of the age. And I will return you again to your goods. It will be repaid to you doubly so you may know that the Lord is impartial—rendering good things to each one who obeys. And you shall be raised up in the resurrection. For you will be like a **sparring athlete, both enduring pains and**

¹⁸ On Satan as a trickster see Friedman, Lipman (1999).

¹⁹ On Satan's disguise see O'Connor (2017).

²⁰ This interpretation—that Satan is actually a person's evil inclination—is also prevalent among the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages.

winning the crown. Then will you know that the Lord is just, true, and strong, giving strength to his elect ones (*TJob* 4:6–11).

His **first transformation** takes place with his conversion, with the change of heart and with the revelation by the angel of God that there is a distinction between the temporary earthly reality and the eternal heavenly reality. Or, as Trotter (2016: 7) puts it:

Job has knowledge about and accepts the existence of these two spheres, and, as a result, his perspective on the world is changed so that he is able to endure his suffering and be assured of his resurrection and heavenly reward.

Moreover, by destroying the temple of Satan Job takes responsibility and accepts Satan's retaliation. He does not have to suffer, but he chooses to out of love for God. Knowing what he might lose, he is motivated by the **promise of earthly and heavenly rewards** (*TJob* 2:2–11 and 18:5): fame, twice the amount of his possessions and the crown or resurrection (*TJob* 52:8–10) (Trotter 2016: 3).

What he needs in order to cope with the sufferings—and what people in distress can emulate—is to have patience. The central theme of *TJob* is repeated admonition of endurance.²¹ This is the active endurance and stamina of an athlete holding his ground, of an athlete who becomes a martyr-ideal. But he does not just endure pain but also wins the crown. This can be understood in the terms of afterlife, or as Irving Jacobs has put it:

Affliction became the purifying agent of the pious, cleansing them of their few transgressions, thus ensuring their place in the hereafter. As such, afflictions were to be welcomed as a mark of Divine favor, bestowed by God in love, and therefore, to be received in a similar spirit of love and joy (Jacobs 1971: 49).

But one can understand the “winning of the crown” also as a chance to already experience God in this life. This is what Job's **second transformation** is about. It comes with a change of mind and with an understanding

²¹ The different terms used for patience and endurance in *TJob* and their aspects have been studied by Haas (1989).

of the subjective or efficient cause of sufferings, which is attachment to earthly things and false reasoning. Seeing the distinction of the earthly and divine spheres—“Thus I also considered my goods as nothing compared to the city about which the angel spoke to me” (*TJob* 18:6–8), “The Lord gave, the Lord took away. As it seemed good to the Lord, so it has happened. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (*TJob* 19:3–4) and “My heart is not fixed on earthly concerns, since the earth and those who dwell in it are unstable. But my heart is fixed on heavenly things, for there is no upset in heaven” (*TJob* 36:3)—Job can detach himself from the earthly things, thereby freeing himself from suffering and gain (mystical) apprehension of the higher world.

As Andrew Guffey has shown, this side of the athletic striving resembles Hellenistic moral philosophy, especially Stoicism. According to Guffey, the end goal of athletic striving in Stoicism is to reach a state of *apatheia* (impassibility) or *ataraxia* (imperturbability), and ultimately to live in accordance with nature. This involves overcoming one’s sensory impressions, passions and emotions, and the whims of fortune under the direction of one’s “ruling reason” (Guffey 2012). A similar way of thinking can be found in 4 Maccabees 8:15²²:

But when [the seven brothers] had heard the inducements and saw the dreadful services, not only were they not afraid, but they also opposed the tyrant with their own philosophy, and by their right reasoning nullified his tyranny.

When Job sums up the moral of the first part of the *TJob*’s narrative (1–27), saying: “Now then, my children, you also must be patient in everything that happens to you. For patience is better than anything” (*TJob* 27:6–7), the patience is not to be understood as passive suffering but as steadfast endurance. Active detachment from earthly things means not only overcoming adversity but understanding its essence. As such Job in *TJob* sets the perfect example not just for how and why we must survive hardships, but also how true patience is possible only through recognition and acceptance of the temporary nature of all material things. This example comes centuries before Maimonides came to the same conclusion. The

²² New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation used.

passively suffering, unknowing and rebellious biblical Job is transformed in *TJob* into an athlete, who actively and knowingly endures his faith and glorifies God without any doubt.

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