A semantic comparison of the conclusion of LXX Tobit and Semitic 4Q Tobit

Introduction

It is not known how old the earliest Greek version of Tobit is. The shorter GI version was preserved by the church, contained in Codex Sinaiticus. The one Hebrew 4Q200 and four Aramaic versions 4Q196–199 found at Qumran are the oldest extant pre-Christian versions we have. Although the surface context of the narrative of Tobit is the Jewish tradition of proper observation of mitzvot and sacrifice and eventual reward, the various versions contain varying degrees of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, and an ironic, subversive reflection of hypocritical righteousness. Could a better understanding of the differences in the rhetorical currents in the earliest versions cast light on the cross currents in the Jewish roots of early Christianity? The discoveries of the Semitic copies of Tobit at Qumran suggest that Tobit was most probably originally written in Aramaic, between 225 and 175 BCE, and that GI is a reworking of GII. At the beginning of the 20th century, the shorter Greek version GI version was still regarded as the oldest version of Tobit. The book was depicted as ‘a lesson on almsgiving and its redeeming powers’, but GI emphasises the rewards of almsgiving to such an extent that today a ‘prosperity cult’ comes to mind (Kohler 1906:1).

The trigger for this study was that in the transcription, reconstruction and translation of the Semitic fragments of Tobit in DJD, the lexeme ἐλεησία [righteousness] is translated as ‘almogiving’. Yet, the Greek translators of Tobit found something in the versions they translated from, presumably Semitic, which they rendered as ἔλεος [mercy], not righteousness. It was the lexeme ἔλεος ‘mercy’ in the Septuagint, not δίκαιος, which was subsequently rendered into English as almsgiving. The rationale for Fitzmyer’s rendering of the lexeme ἔλεος in the Septuagins as almsgiving is that at some point, during the Second Temple period, ἔλεος became a synecdoche for almsgiving because almsgiving was believed to result in a state of righteousness.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the shorter Greek version of the book of Tobit, GI, which is included in the Catholic Bible, was thought to be the oldest version. It was defined as ‘a lesson on alms-giving and its redeeming powers’. As the discoveries of the Semitic copies of Tobit at Qumran, GI is recognised to be a reworking of the longer version GII, most probably originally written in Aramaic, between 225 and 175 BCE. In all versions of Tobit, the theme of almsgiving is introduced as specifically directed to Jewish kinsmen, but towards the end, is to be directed to all poor, suggesting that it may have been written by a Hellenistic Jew. Although the surface context of the narrative of Tobit is the Jewish tradition of proper observation of mitzvot and sacrifice and eventual reward, the various versions contain varying degrees of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, and an ironic, subversive reflection of hypocritical righteousness. This article questioned why the endings differ markedly in different versions. To try to find answers, a semantic comparison was made between GI and the most complete Aramaic version 4Q196.

Contribution: This article considered the implications of source criticism in the reception of the various versions of Tobit. The possibility was examined that the pre-Christian, Aramaic version 4Q196Tobit does not confirm the excessive focus on almsgiving as righteousness apparent in the GI version of LXX Tobit.

Keywords: LXXTobit; Semitic4QTobit; 4Q196Tobit; 4Q200Tobit; almsgiving; righteousness; mercy; wisdom literature; Deuteronomy.

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for the one who gives alms. The question arises: if the Septuagint translators used the word ἐλεημοσύνας to describe almsgiving, why, and when, did the close association between mercy and righteousness become subsumed into ἔλεος [righteousness without reference to mercy] as a synecdoche for almsgiving in Hebrew and Aramaic? How did this facile cart land up before the horse – instant righteousness and prosperity as reward if alms are given? Faced with the complexities of Semitic lexicography, no wonder Walter Bauer, in near despair, commented ‘How great is the ocean, and how tiny the shell with which we dip’.

**Methodology**

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee. Proverbs 3:3a (KJV)

The initial research question was whether there could be a direct semantic correlation of the Greek word ἐλεημοσύνας and its Semitic counterparts ‘compassion/mercy’ in the Semitic fragments of 4Q Tobit?

The first methodological step was thus to compare the expected association of these lexemes with the appearance of the lexeme ἔλεος ‘righteousness’ in Semitic 4Q Tobit. The surprising result was that the Aramaic lexeme for ἔλεος ‘mercy’ only appears three times in all the fragments of 4Q Tobit, and in each position, it is described as a quality possessed by God, and is not in association with righteousness. Therefore, the search for a correlation of mercy or compassion in relation to righteousness in the Semitic 4Q Tobit and LXX copies was relinquished. Instead, a preliminary comparison of the association of these two qualities, mercy and righteousness in GI and GII was made. In both Greek versions, the lexeme ἔλεος is rendered in English as ‘almsgiving’ and the lexeme ἔλεημοσύνας as ‘righteous’. The initial methodological step was to compare the semantic implication of the combination of these two lexemes in GI and GII. During this process of comparison, it was confirmed that the motivation for almsgiving is portrayed differently in different versions of Tobit. Therefore, the next methodological step was to compare the motivation for almsgiving between the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic versions.

**Righteousness in the LXX and Qumran versions of Tobit**

In the deuteronomistically oriented introduction in GI and GII, Tobit describes himself as having walked in the ways of righteousness and δίκη [righteousness], and as having performed many acts of ἔλεος [charity] for his kin.

(1:3). But then Tobit is accidentally blinded whilst performing his legalistic Jewish duties. A counterpoint to Tobit’s claims to righteousness and honesty follows: Tobit, not being able to see accuses his wife Hanna of dishonesty. Provoked by his unjustified accusation she lashes out at him, challenging the truthfulness of his claim of ἐλεημοσύνας and δίκαιοσύνας: ‘Now where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds? See, these things are known about you in the community?’ After this rhetorical juxtaposition of righteousness and self-righteousness in which Hannah plants the suspicion in the reader’s mind of the possibility that Tobit’s claims to righteousness may be false, the grief-stricken Tobit prays and acknowledges that it is God whose deeds are δίκαιος [righteous] and all his ways are ἔλεος [mercy] and ἀληθής [truth] (Tob 3:2). Although in his prayer, Tobit expresses the deuteronomistic orientation to theodicy that he is being punished for communal sins committed by his ancestors, ironically, he who falsely accused his wife complains that he has been falsely accused.

When Tobit decides to send his son Tobiah on a perilous journey to retrieve his money deposited with a relative far away, Hannah provides another subversive hint. In her anxiety about the dangers of the journey, she pinpoints Tobit’s materialistic drive for money at the cost of their son’s safety: ‘Do not add silver to silver’ (GI and GII). This incident is also extant in 4Q197 Frg. 4i, line 1: ‘Let my son not cling to money’. Again, a typical wisdom statement follows this subversive incident: as Tobiah departs on his journey, Tobit admonishes him: Tobiah must do righteousness ἔλεημοσύνας all the days of his life, and if he keeps to the truth ἀληθής, he will have success in all his deeds. Up to this point, GI and GII are virtually identical, but 12 additional verses in GI in which almsgiving is excessively emphasised introduce a crucial divergence which is not present in GII.

At GI 4:7ff., Tobit motivates his instruction to Tobiah to give alms ἔλεος with the promise of reward. That alms are to be given to all who do righteousness, but not to sinners is repeated several times. This striking proviso that the recipients of alms must also be righteous is strengthened as the passage continues in GI 4:9–11 with Tobit’s instruction to his son: even if you have little, give alms ἔλεος because:

[You will be storing up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. Therefore, alms delivers from death and a denial of God’s providence. For instance, the centralisation of the Jerusalem Temple, the concept of ‘the good land’ and a sense of communal sin (Di Lella 1979:381, 385, 387). Also see Kiel (2011:268) for the shift in the Deuteronomistic theology in Tobit.]

1. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (1955:xxiv). But see Gsell (2009:78) who states that ‘linguistic dating of the Aramaic texts from Qumran is ripe for reinvestigation ... no existing chronology of the (Qumran Aramaic) texts should a priori be enforced on the study of the material’. He maintains that contextual features must be taken into account.

5. The Aramaic word δίκη appears once in Dan at 2:18 (Holladay 1988:421).

6. In each case, it is God who shows mercy: 4Q197 4ii1 1 (Tob 6:18); 4Q198 1 9 (Tob 14:5); 4Q200 6 6 (Tob 13:2).

7. For the complexities of the term ‘deuteronomistic’, see Laato (2003:189–235). For instance, the centralisation of the Jerusalem Temple, the concept of ‘the good land’ and a sense of communal sin (Di Lella 1979:381, 385, 387). Also see Kiel (2011:268) for the shift in the Deuteronomistic theology in Tobit.

8. Tobit 2:13–14 in GI and GII.


10. Tobit 4:5, 6a.


12. This entire passage Tobit 4:7–18 is not in GI, and not attested in any of the Aramaic copies from Qumran.

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This instance of self-centred motivation for almsgiving is not extant in any of the Aramaic versions, but is mirrored in the Hebrew copy 4Q200, fragment 2.

4Q200 Hebrew fragment 2 lines 6–9 Tobit 4:6–9 (Fitzmyer 1995:65)

The idea that almsgiving is ‘a good deposit’ is clearly stated in line 9.13 Stuckenbruck and Weeks (2015:255) warn that ‘one should be cautious in assigning differences between the recensions to distinguishable ideologies’, but the materialistic tone in 4Q200 is unmistakable in GI 4:9–10: ‘For you will be storing up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. Therefore almsgiving delivers from death and prevents entering into the darkness’. In contrast, GI breaks off 4:6a after ‘And to all those who do righteousness δίκη …’ and continues at 4:19 with ‘… the Lord will give them good enlightenment which occurs after his blindness is healed.’ 19. In both GI and GII, the turning point of the narrative actually only arises at 12:6–10 when Tobit’s sight is restored and he asserts that mercy or almsgiving must be extended beyond the boundaries of his own kin.19

From chapter 4:19 onwards, the continuation of the narrative in both GI and GII is more or less identical until the last part of the narrative. However, as the narrative develops, another aspect of mercy other than almsgiving become dominant. At 6:18, Raphael (alias Azariah) instructs Tobiah to pray for God’s mercy ἔλεος; in 7:11, Raguel repeats the instruction and in 8:4, Tobiah and Sara pray for God’s mercy ἔλεος and consequently, their problem is solved. It seems possible that the author intends to transfer the example of God’s mercy to that of acts of mercy (in the form of almsgiving) by human race. In the last chapter in both GI and GII, the reader is told that after he was healed, Tobit made acts of almsgiving ἔλεος and increased in fear of the Lord, and praised him. In 4:11, another major difference between GI and GII occurs. In GI, Tobit tells Tobiah to see what almsgiving does and how righteousness delivers’ διότι τί ἐλέησαν ποιοί, καὶ ἐκκαθιστήσαν ἐπέθετο. GII has ‘see what almsgiving does, and what injustice does: it kills!’ διότι τι ποιοὶ ἀδικοῦσαν, καὶ τί ποιεῖ ὁ δικαστής, ὁ ἀποκτέννει. GI states ‘righteousness delivers’, whereas GII has ‘injustice kills!’; thus, an equivalence between righteousness and justice is implied.

As the narrative draws to a close, in contrast to the incentive in GI 4:9 that you will be storing up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity’, in GII 12:8–9, almsgiving with righteousness is stressed, rather than the short-circuiting in GI to the positive rewards of almsgiving as righteousness.20 The difference between LXX and MT in Proverbs 11:18b is an interesting example:

15. For the relation between GI and GII, see Di Lella (2007:456–456) and Stuckenbruck and Weeks (2015:238).
16. To make hard and fast judgements about ideological differences between the versions is always fraught with uncertainty because there is so much overlap that cannot be distinguished from recensions.
17. To my knowledge, these verses in GI are not extant in any earlier witnesses.
18. Cf. Fatmore (2007:241) who has suggested in the case of Ezekiel that the Qumran evidence has cast into doubt some of the currently accepted reconstructions of the Old Greek.
19. In another significant addition in GI 4:12–13 that is not in GI, loyalty and adherence to own kin is reinforced, again associated with reward: Tobit advises his son to take a wife from their own kindred as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did: ‘and their descendants will inherit the land’.
20. In both GI and GII at 12:10 in Tobit’s prayer of rejoicing at the recovery of his sight, he instructs the ‘sons of Israel’ to acknowledge, bless and extol the Lord of
In LXX, the just or righteous sow a certain seed, and truth is their reward; MT is more direct: ‘those’ sow the seed – the seed sown is ‘righteousness’, and ‘those’ who sow righteousness get a reward, unspecified, but which is true.

In GI 14:10 to 14:13b, 14b, the ending of the narrative reinforces the ethos of self-interested reward: Tobit tells Tobiah that Manassas (the evil one) gave alms ἔλεος and escaped death. The reader is told that Tobiah inherited the property of his parents-in-law, and rejoiced over the destruction of Nineveh. In striking contrast, in GII 14:8–10, the combination of righteousness, mercy or almsgiving and truth comes to the fore: Tobit tells his children that their property of his parents-in-law, and rejoiced over the destruction of Nineveh. In striking contrast, in GII 14:8–10, the combination of righteousness, mercy or almsgiving and truth comes to the fore: Tobit tells his children that their children must practice righteousness δίκη and almsgiving ἔλεος, and be mindful of God and with all their strength bless his name in truth ἁληθείας. In GII the last word, as it were, is ‘truth’, in combination with ‘and he blessed the Lord God for ever and ever’ (14:14). This confirmation that GII is closer to 4Q196 and 4Q197 in ideological orientation of righteousness and truth between GI and the most complete and relevant Aramaic text (4Q196).

Comparison between GI and 4Q Tobit Aramaic

4Q196, Fragment 10, line 1 Tobit 4:7

[according to what is in] your hand, my son, gi[ve alms]

In this fragment, Fitzmyer has reconstructed the phrase as if almsgiving is present. Yet, in the photograph of 4Q196 fragment 10, there is no evidence of אָלָמֶס, and not even ‘give’. Fitzmyer must have decided to insert ‘almsgiving’ by referring to the Hebrew copy 4Q200, fragment 2 line 6 (‘according to your ability my son, gi[ve alms]’, and to GI Tobit 4:7–4:19 which stresses almsgiving. The warning by Weeks et al. (2004:1, 5) against the self-reinforcing hazards of using later copies to reconstruct earlier manuscripts is pertinent, yet Weeks et al. (2004:13) regard the ‘omitted’ verses 4:7–18 as a result of carelessness on the part of the scribe, but no indication of almsgiving or of a materialistic tone is present in any of the Aramaic fragments.

Another indication of possible subversive rhetoric is to be seen in the Aramaic text 4Q197 4i, line 1 (Tob 5:19) where Edna again hints at false righteousness with regard to a materialistic orientation: ‘Let my son not cling to [more]ly, but (let it be for him) like [. ’. Another possible hint of a deliberate rhetorical critique of a superficial claim to righteousness is to be seen in the same Aramaic text 4Q197 Frg. 3ii line 9 (Tob 7:7). Raguel expresses his approval of his kinsman Tobit when he exclaims to Tobiah ‘you are the [so] of a righteou[es] man’. By alluding to his kinsman as righteous, Raguel implies that he himself is a righteous man (the reader knows better): A sardonic twist later emerges in both GI and GII. Raguel, in expectation that Tobiah will die, has secretly prepared a grave for him, and then – when to his surprise – Tobiah has survived, the reader is told at Tobit 8:18 that the apparently righteous Raguel quickly has the grave closed up so that no one will know what his expectations were. This wry touch of humour reinforces the subversive rhetoric about false righteousness, and it strengthens the suspicion that a subtly subversive rhetoric is undermining the stress on righteousness as reward for almsgiving, including material prosperity.

Towards the end of the narrative in all the versions under discussion, there is a striking shift away from materialism, or self-interest: Tobit’s demeanour has changed. As if to emphasise the change, the word ἁθετάομαι [truth] appears four times in the penultimate fragment of 4Q196.

4Q196, Fragment 17ii, lines 1–5 Tobit 13:6

δέλτάντος δὲ τῶν καταμαθησάσεων ἱεροί ἡμῶν ἡ Ἰουδαία, ἡ λαοῦ υἱὸς


For dating, see Fitzmyer (1995:63) and Zanella (2013:271, diagram 2).


24. See Zanella (2013:269f) for an explanation of the Mishnaic concept of righteousness as a synecdoche for almsgiving. Zanella (2013:271) notes that the syntagmic relationship between the lexemes הָיָד הָעַד הָיֹם and הַיָּדָו in BH frequently occur in fixed pairs which actually lexicalize ‘gift-giving’, but not in Aramaic.

25. In the Aramaic, the adjective אֶלֶף rendered here as ‘righteous’ is defined by Cook (2015:214) as אָלָמֶס as ‘honest’ or ‘true’. GI and GII have ‘noble and good’ קָזָבוּ קָזָבוּ as ‘noble and good’. Compare Prov 22:21 where both words appear in the same sentence. קָזָבוּ comes translates as ‘certainly’.

In every instance where the lexeme הושענו appears (in lines 1, 3, 5 and 9), Fitzmyer renders it as righteousness or righteous. Vogt (2011:299) gives the meaning of הושענו as ‘truth’ or ‘justice’, as, for example, in the contemporaneous text Daniel 4:34. Because up to this point, he has translated the lexeme הושענו as almsgiving, Fitzmyer’s translation here of הושענו as almsgiving reinforces his stress on almsgiving.27 Compare the rendering of the passage by Garcia Martinez (1994), where הושענו is translated sequentially as ‘truthfully or justice or justly’:

... your heart and with all your soul to act truthfully before him. Then, he will turn to you and no longer hide his face from you. And now, consider what he has done for you and give him thanks with your whole mouth, and bless the Lord of justice, and exalt the eternal king. In the land of exile, give you thanks and declare his power and his greatness to a nation of sinners. Turn, you sinners, and with all your heart act justly before him. (n.o.p., [author’s own italics])

According to this more straightforward translation by Garcia Martinez, here in the Aramaic fragment, the stress is on truth and justice, as it is in GII at Tobit 13:6.28 If GI is indeed primarily about the benefits of almsgiving, then GII is certainly closer to the Aramaic version 4Q196. Interestingly, GII does not contain the tell-tale verses 13:7–9 in GI which are reminiscent of Daniel 4:27, and which refer confusingly and out of context to Jerusalem.29

4Q196 fragment 18, lines 14–15 Tobit 14:2b30

[restore מָד־מֶל מֵאָדֵם וּמִבָּנָה יַעֲבֹר] 

[restore יללש בֵּית יְהוָה תְּרוּמָה הַיָּשָׁם] 

14. [the sight of] his [eyes. He lived in goodness and in all[ he gave alms] 

15. [to bless] the Lord and to acknowledge [his] majesty[y. 3 he summoned]

Here, in 4Q196 Aramaic, the lexeme which Fitzmyer presents as ‘alms’ is not actually present, it is inserted. If almsgiving is indeed the subject of the largely reconstructed line 14, the true motivation for almsgiving is clearly not for personal reward, but to ‘bless the Lord and acknowledge his majesty’.31

Discussion

Simkovich (2014:1–2) has noted that the Book of Tobit was preserved at different times for different reasons. Just as the promotion of tithing would have appealed to Jews during Second Temple times, and to the early church, so charity or almsgiving would have appealed to Jews experiencing poverty and an uncertain future during the medieval diaspora. The comparison of the Aramaic fragments from Qumran with the Septuagint versions suggests that possibly the first reconstructions and translations of 4QTobit may have been overly influenced by the many centuries of usefulness of the GI version.

Whereas the earliest Greek versions tend to emphasise almsgiving as a means to gain righteousness, the older Aramaic versions 4Q196 tends to highlight truthfulness as the primary value. In the case of the Hebrew version 4Q200, Fitzmyer’s reconstruction and translation of הושענה as almsgiving is justified, but in the Aramaic 4Q Tobit is questionable because in the Aramaic copies, the lexeme הושענה always appears in a reconstructed form. At least in 4Q196, the focus in the end appears to be more on truth as a quality of righteousness or justice than on almsgiving as righteousness. Even if in 4Q196 at Tobit 4:7 and Tobit 14:2b, the reconstruction (actually insertion) and translation of הושענה as almsgiving is acceptable, the message of 4Q196 is still that truthfulness must be operative in almsgiving. Thus, ultimately, in Aramaic 4Q196, the motivation for giving alms would to bless and extol God, not for personal gain.

The deliberate subversive reflection of hypocritical righteousness perceptible in Tobit hints at cross currents. Dimant (2009:140 n. 88) has mentioned the possibility of concurrent contesting schools of halakah during Second Temple times for instance ‘an older halakah, later changed and developed by the Tannaim’ (cf. Nodet 2020:37). This would go some way to explain the different currents and subversive elements in the Book of Tobit, but as Dimant notes, the Qumran scrolls indicate that the situation was more complex. Part of the complexity of Tobit is the influence of Hellenism, for instance, the high value placed on Philanthropia in Greek culture.32 The shift from the Deuteronomistic kinship altruism orientation in the Book of Tobit reflects a response not only to the later prophets such as Jonah, Amos and Micah to observe charity to ‘the nations’ as a form of witnessing to God’s majesty but also to the Hellenistic cultural context.33

The results of this enquiry raise more questions than answers. Could the concept of almsgiving as righteousness which is prominent in the Hebrew version 4Q200 and in GI be evidence of the oral phase of the Mishna? Does 4Q200 reflect a Hebrew vorlage which propounded the rhetoric of reward of righteousness and prosperity for kinship almsgiving during the deuteronomistic era of nation building? Could the GI version be a translation from the Hebrew 4Q200? Traditionally, Israelite biblical theology has ignored biblical

30. This fragment is the influence of Hellenism, for instance, the high value placed on Philanthropia in Greek culture.32 The shift from the Deuteronomistic kinship altruism orientation in the Book of Tobit reflects a response not only to the later prophets such as Jonah, Amos and Micah to observe charity to ‘the nations’ as a form of witnessing to God’s majesty but also to the Hellenistic cultural context.33

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assocations with foreign literature (Weeks 2016:8). Could the GII version have been influenced by the original Aramaic? If so, this would contradict Anderson’s suggestion mentioned in n.3, because the 4Q196 fragments have no definite evidence of almsgiving, but portray an ideal of witnessing to all nations by blessing God with truthfulness in heart and soul.

Conclusion
In the end, in the final fragment of 4Q196 when Tobit is healed and his vision restored, he redefines the true way to achieve righteousness: the healed Tobit ‘lived in goodness and in all [he gave alms] to bless the Lord and to acknowledge his majesty’. The penultimate fragment makes it clear that truth in combination with justice must be operative if the motivation is to bless, praise and extol God’s majesty. I would like to suggest that the Book of Tobit was part of the transition away from the deuteronomistic rhetoric of national identity formation. The syncretistic tendency of Hellenism reinforced the message of the prophets of unconditional inclusion of all nations in the orbit of God’s mercy, rather than caring for Jewish righteous kin only. The enduring fascination and relevance of the narrative of Tobit is that although it has a Torah setting, millennia before Darwin, it explores the implications of the deuteronomistic theology of sin and punishment.

Earlier research argued that 4Q196Tobit is a subversive rhetorical construction aimed at exposing the lack of truthfulness in the ‘shortcut’ giving of alms to attain righteousness. This article suggests the possibility that the ending of the Aramaic copy 4Q196 indicates that it is not primarily about almsgiving at all. However, to make judgements of theological or ideological differences between the versions, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the halakhic cross currents in Second Temple theologies and their relation to the dating of Tobit. Greatly improved new technical resources for the study of ancient fragments are becoming increasingly available, and hold out the promise of new ways to confirm suspicions such as those raised in this article.

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