Wisdom in Distress: A Literary and Socio-Historical Approach to the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar

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WISDOM IN DISTRESS:
A LITERARY AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH
TO THE ARAMAIC BOOK OF AHIQAR

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ABSTRACT

The Aramaic Book of Ahiqar, an ancient instruction that combines a novella and set of wise sayings, was discovered among a cache of papyri dating to the 5th c. B.C.E. belonging to a community of Judeans on the southern Egyptian Nile-island of Elephantine. The text describes a court scribe named Ahiqar who is betrayed by his nephew and successor Nadan and sentenced to death by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon. Ahiqar is saved, however, by his friend Nabusumiskun, the very person who is supposed to execute him. At this point the text breaks off, but it picks up again in the middle of a series of instructions, presumably from Ahiqar to his son. The content and form of these sayings share significant stylistic, thematic, and contextual similarities to the biblical wisdom corpus, particularly the book of Proverbs and the Egyptian instructions.

Much of the past century of research on Ahiqar has centered on philological, paleographical, and lexical matters in an effort to determine the text’s original language, provenance, and date. This has left some very large interpretive gaps. In particular, very little analysis has been done with respect to Ahiqar as a piece of literature. What is the overall message and character of Ahiqar? What is its underlying ethic? What does Ahiqar say about the divine, humanity, and the cosmic order? How do the answers to each of these questions relate to the text’s material context and readership? Three primary impulses will guide this study in trying to answer these questions: (1) the Book of Ahiqar will be treated as is, thus the narrative and sayings will be interpreted together and not separated according to some diachronic-redactional analysis; (2) comparison with external sources will feature the Egyptian materials, especially the instructions, which have been largely ignored in previous studies; and (3) the message and characteristic features of Ahiqar will be measured against the backdrop of the Judean community at Elephantine.

After a survey of previous scholarship and methodological response (Chapter 1), I begin with a literary and formal analysis of Ahiqar (Chapter 2). Narratological and other recent approaches to the Ahiqar narrative reveal a complexity in plot movement and character. Two significant aspects come to the surface: the ambiguous role of the king and the opposition drawn between Nadan and Nabusumiskun. A survey of the formal and stylistic features among the sayings demonstrates a tremendous amount of variety and yet at the same time significant coherency and overlap in theme and ethic, indicating that a saying’s immediate literary context is integral to understanding the nuances of its meaning. The overall structure, content, and function
of Ahiqar suggest that its genre should be understood in relation to the ancient instruction tradition, particularly those from Egypt. Understanding Ahiqar as “wisdom literature” broadens the intertextual scope, though primarily from an etic perspective. In Chapter 3, I find that the primary message of Ahiqar revolves around the power and danger of the spoken word. Discretion is generally advised. A pervasive ethic of caution undergirds this message. The text also extols the virtues of contentment and humility. In Chapter 4 I take a rhetorical approach that centers on the financial and economic advice of Ahiqar. In contrast to several other instructions, the social outlook in Ahiqar typically appropriates the perspective of someone in financial distress or from a lower socio-economic position. Shifting to the socio-political sphere, I determine that the narrative and sayings blur political allegiances, resulting in a reimagining of community that no longer depends on strict ethnic or familial boundaries. Finally, I turn to anthropological and theological issues (Chapter 5). Here, I show that Ahiqar evinces a negative anthropology, a conclusion supported by the ethic of caution and a few sayings that speak to human nature and its limits explicitly. Ahiqar’s portrayal of the divine contributes to a pervasive tone of anxiety, whereby the gods are symbols for justice but at the same time are inscrutable in their benevolence and wrath. The king, who symbolically stands at the intersection of humanity and the gods, is a similarly ambivalent figure, and, like the gods, can be terribly and unpredictably destructive.
INTRODUCTION

The Aramaic version of the Book of Ahiqar, also known as the Tale and Proverbs of Ahiqar or simply the Proverbs of Ahiqar, comprises a narrative of betrayal and friendship in the life of the wise scribe Ahiqar, who is an adviser in the Neo-Assyrian court of kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. The fictive story is coupled with a lengthy collection of sayings that are presented as instructions from Ahiqar to his nephew and betrayer Nadan. In the ancient Mediterranean world, Ahiqar had a fame that could hardly be matched. References to the sage, his story, and his wisdom appear in numerous witnesses from Greece, Egypt, Syro-Palestine, Mesopotamia, and, eventually, more distant lands such as Armenia, India, even Turfan (western China). Indeed, there are several medieval and early-modern manuscripts of the Tale and Proverbs of Ahiqar, in over a dozen different languages, such as Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, and Slavonic, to name a few. However, the most important witness to Ahiqar—at least in terms of antiquity—came to light in the first decade of the 20th century, during German excavations of the small Nile-island settlement of Elephantine. There, among a number of other papyri in Aramaic, the oldest version of Ahiqar by nearly 1,500 years was unearthed.¹

For just over a century, the Elephantine Book of Ahiqar has intrigued scholars. Perhaps most notable is that this text was found among a large cache of papyri whose owners were self-identified “Judeans” (Aram. אַחיּר). These papyri testify to the existence of a military colony of Judeans, Arameans, and Babylonians (among others) who were living in southern Egypt for the better part of the 5th c. BCE, when the Achaemenids of Persia controlled most of the ancient Near East. The text’s significance also lies in that, to date, the Elephantine Ahiqar is nearly the oldest extant Aramaic literary text, pre-dating the famous Dead Sea Scrolls by at least 200 years. As one of the few and lengthier examples of pre-Hellenistic Aramaic, Ahiqar is of monumental

¹ A terminological note is appropriate here: Ahiqar (italicized) refers specifically to the Elephantine text; Ahiqar (plain-text) refers to the character, either in the text itself or in secondary sources; “Ahiqar tradition” refers to the comprehensive record of the text, person, reception, traditions, etc. surrounding the persona of Ahiqar. Translations of Ahiqar are my own unless otherwise noted; biblical citations generally follow the New Revised Standard Version; Egyptian materials are from an assortment of sources but primarily rely on Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature (2d ed.; 3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) = AEL 1–3.
significance for its raw philological and lexical data, adding greatly to the understanding of the grammatical development of Aramaic. Among the sayings especially, there are dozens of Aramaic terms that do not appear again until late antiquity, as well as a number of previously unknown lexemes. Indeed, there is hardly a study concerned with the Aramaic language before the Hellenistic period that fails to reference *Ahiqar*.

Furthermore, the content and literary form make the Aramaic *Ahiqar* especially intriguing for scholars of early Judaism and biblical literature. The text combines a narrative and a lengthy set of sayings or instructions, and both sections are reminiscent of other ancient literature, especially the biblical materials. The tale of a wise sage who endures trials while working in the court of a foreign king is certainly a familiar trope when one considers, for example, the comparably crafted court tales of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther. Similarly, the nearly 150 extant lines of sayings recall a similar body of literature throughout the ancient Near East: the so-called wisdom instructions. The sayings of *Ahiqar* have frequented conversations and studies devoted to wisdom literature in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel, especially the book of Proverbs.

There have also been several studies centered on the Aramaic *Ahiqar* itself. The text’s linguistic import cannot be overestimated given its relative antiquity. Indeed, it is often considered to be one of, if not the only, remnant of an indigenous Syrian literature, perhaps harking back even to the days of the independent Aramean city-states which were prominent at the turn of the first millennium B.C.E. Analyses of a textual, philological, and/or lexicographical nature are prevalent. The Neo-Assyrian setting of the narrative has also invoked some interest among Assyriologists, who sought connections to relevant Mesopotamian literature and even some historical features.

Despite having had this text for over a century, however, some serious issues remain unresolved. Among biblical scholars, the perspective has largely been from the side of Israelite/Jewish literature; that is, *Ahiqar* has often only been mined for parallels and correspondences as a means of better understanding the biblical texts. Comparisons between the two, thus, are often quite superficial or atomistic in their regard for the Aramaic text. Moreover, biblical scholars are often unfamiliar with or misinformed about basic issues such as from where or when the text comes. Among *Ahiqar* scholars proper, the Aramaic text has, of course, taken center stage, yet there has hardly been any sustained analysis that pushes beyond the textual and linguistic issues of dating, dialect, and reconstruction. Only in the past decade have we begun to
see any appreciation for the literary features of *Ahiqar* or comparisons with related literature that move beyond simple identification of parallels.

A further point on this matter: the scholarship on *Ahiqar* seems to be stuck in the mire of what one might call an “origins-fixation.” The scholarly assessments of *Ahiqar*, including even the most recent, are typified by a relentless search for and debate over *Ahiqar*’s “original” authorship, date, geographical provenance, circumstances of composition, historical context, etc. This historical endeavor is dependent upon redaction-oriented and linguistic approaches, and it results in relegating large portions of the text (often arbitrarily) to a “secondary” status, as if certain parts were somehow less important because they manifest different grammatical features. Such treatment leaves us with tenuous assumptions about a disjointed, hypothetical *Urtext* that belonged to an equally indeterminate time and location. Indeed, we know relatively little about the Aramean cities (and much less about their literary activity) at the end of the 8th century B.C.E.—the time to which most scholars assign the earliest stratum of the sayings of *Ahiqar*. Although some valuable insights may stem from such an investigation, in the end what can it really tell us about the text *as we have it*? The text in its Elephantine manifestation must have had some significance for the people that produced it and, presumably, read it. This is all the more significant for the Elephantine *Ahiqar* because it offers us the relatively infrequent opportunity of assessing an ancient text *in situ*. In other words, with the Aramaic *Ahiqar* we have a reasonable understanding of the precise date, location, and even reading community of an ancient piece of literature. Moreover, if we follow the traditional historical-critical logic, there is increasing evidence that suggests this “received text” from 5th c. B.C.E. Egypt may not be so distant from the “original” production of *Ahiqar*; namely, there are other Aramaic literary texts *from Egypt* closely connected to *Ahiqar* in both content and date. An Egyptian approach to *Ahiqar*, therefore, is needed.

I am not trying to dismiss the importance of the philological or redactional studies, but only to show the limitations it has had on our understanding of a text that has been available for over a century. It is disappointing that the biggest debate in *Ahiqar* studies today is still about the “original” provenance and language (northern vs. southern Syria). The textually and linguistically centered analyses have left little room for other approaches or other contexts through which the text might be interpreted. In particular, the more nuanced view of ancient literature as a dynamic or fluid phenomenon—where texts, in their transmission and reception, are perceived as being in a continual state of revision, modification, and re-appropriation—has yet to make an impact on
Ahigar scholarship. Even the not-so-recent advances in literary analysis (e.g., the shift in focus away from author to audience) have only rarely been applied to Ahigar.

The motivating concern of this dissertation, therefore, is to account for some of these shortfalls in scholarship and to offer a fresh analysis of the Aramaic Book of Ahigar as a piece of literature in its own right. This study must address some of the more fundamental questions that have gone unanswered in previous studies. For example, does Ahigar as a whole (including the seemingly disparate sayings) have a basic message or promote a coherent agenda or outlook? If so, what is the text trying to accomplish? What are its underlying ethic and worldview? What are the major themes, topoi, or creative features? An careful consideration of the historical, social, and political contexts of the Aramaic papyri have also been left by the wayside. For instance, what is Ahigar doing in Elephantine? How does the context in which the papyri themselves were produced add to or affect our understanding of the text? Put another way, how might the above-mentioned aspects (message, themes, worldview, etc.) have been received by the Aramean/Judean audience in a Persian-controlled Egyptian environment?

A final consideration rests on comparative analysis. Though biblical and ancient Near Eastern scholars have frequently cited Ahigar for parallels, not until very recently has the conversation moved beyond simple identification. The notable exception is the study by Michael Weigl, whose 2010 monograph took up directly—and, at over 900 pages, with great length—the formal, stylistic, compositional and comparative-literary features of the sayings of Ahigar. This study, likewise, maintains that our understanding of Ahigar can be greatly improved by putting it into conversation with generically and chronologically related literature, not simply for the sake of citing parallels or postulating dependencies, but as a productive means of shedding different, more nuanced light on passages, thereby allowing for a multiplicity of meanings. This dissertation, therefore, will often be in dialogue with Weigl’s study, though it extends well beyond it in scope. Moreover, the nearly complete neglect of the narrative, a glaring flaw in his analysis—and in many of those before him—will be remedied. While the sayings are important in terms of comparison with similar wisdom collections, they are but one part of a larger text which deserves to be evaluated in its completeness.

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2 Michael Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine und die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur (BZAW 399; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010)
In sum, this dissertation seeks to answer two simple questions: what is the Aramaic *Book of Ahiqar* and what is it doing? As the discussion above indicates, the guiding principles for undertaking this investigation are grounded in both literary and socio-historical sensitivities. Thus, the fundamental aim of this dissertation is to assess the basic message, ethic, and worldview of the Aramaic *Book of Ahiqar* and to evaluate this reading in light of its literary and socio-historical contexts, especially in Egypt and Elephantine.

It is my contention that the *Book of Ahiqar* represents a wisdom instruction that accords nicely with similar compositions, particularly the Egyptian instruction genre and the Israelite and early Jewish wisdom texts. Thus, comparative analysis adds some clarity in interpreting the often fragmentary and difficult text. Even so, this study will show that *Ahiqar* has a demonstrable pedagogic objective and it draws on a variety of rhetorical techniques to convey a message of discretion, contentment, and moderation that is, in turn, undergirded by an ethic of caution. These objectives are further reinforced by an outlook that speaks to a persistent anxiety about life in the social, political, and theological climates which the text imagines. The attitudes expressed therein, if extended into the historical and literary milieu in which the text itself was produced, transmitted, and received—5th c. B.C.E. Achaemenid-controlled Egypt—resonate strongly with a number of social and political conditions as evidenced by contemporaneous materials, literary and otherwise.

As may already be evident, the history of *Ahiqar*—as both text and tradition in its ancient and modern-scholarly reception—is as complicated as it is diverse. So, before proceeding into my analysis, the following chapter (Chapter 1) will give attention to some of the necessary introductory matters as well as providing a survey of scholarly assessment on *Ahiqar*, making it evident how this dissertation relates to earlier studies. This introductory chapter will conclude with a more detailed layout of the methodology and scope of this dissertation, with special attention to the literary and historical contexts that will be operative in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of *Ahiqar* in terms of its genre and broader formal features. I first apply relatively recent literary-theoretical approaches to the narrative of *Ahiqar* alone. Then, I survey some of the formal and stylistic features present within the sayings section. I next consider *Ahiqar*’s overall structure in terms of genre. The text’s didactic impulse signals that it should be considered a “wisdom” text. The difficulties of defining this label notwithstanding, the category of “wisdom” does provide a reasonable basis for evaluating the literary context of *Ahiqar*. Here, I engage Weigl’s study of the comparative biblical and (to a lesser
extent) Mesopotamian literature more closely. Yet, I also modify this approach by evaluating the literary character of Ahiqar against the backdrop of a body of literature that has gone relatively underappreciated in Ahiqar studies: the Egyptian Instructions genre. In terms of the broader sapiential tradition of the ancient world, Ahiqar may be situated more closely within the Instructions genre and comparisons with the Egyptian witnesses are a more profitable endeavor than has been previously recognized. This, of course, should not, and will not, require a dismissal of other ancient bodies of literature—Israelite/Jewish and Mesopotamian—as useful interpretive contexts (far from it!). The goal is simply to broaden the literary milieu by including Egyptian materials that have generally been neglected, while at the same time sharpening the focus when it comes to understanding the text’s constitution. This chapter, thus, represents the transition point wherein I engage previous scholarship, yet at the same time I operate with the objective of moving the scholarly conversation in a new direction.

In Chapter 3 I begin with a survey of the various topics, themes, and images in the narrative and sayings in effort to characterize the basic message of Ahiqar. A detailed examination of what I have found to be the most prominent theme—the importance of the spoken word—provides a convenient mechanism for offering a synthetic analysis of the narrative and the sayings together. The underlying ethic throughout the text’s entirety is that of caution; hence, the basic message is to exercise caution in every situation. In effort to buttress this objective, the text simultaneously propagates the virtues of contentment and humility.

The final two chapters assess the worldview of Ahiqar in the social and cosmic realms, respectively. Chapter 4 discusses the social aspects of Ahiqar, highlighting the constituents of the familial, financial, public, and political and how the text envisions its audience behaving in such situations. According to the internal logic of the text, a comprehensive evaluation of the aforementioned aspects conveys a reasonable picture of the social structure or worldview of Ahiqar. In particular, we find that the text has a pronounced anxiety when it comes to social interactions. The addressee(s) must always be on guard when it comes to financial dealings, for instance. The circumstances of the narrative and the perspective of many of the sayings reveal a frustrating instability when it comes to one’s social standing. Even more outstanding is the persona of one in financial distress and/or in public disregard that is adopted by the speaker, despite the high social standing of Ahiqar with which the text begins. Lastly, the narrative’s depiction of the complicated social and political relationships—particularly the ambiguous role of the king and the
opposition drawn between Nabusumiskun (foreigner) and Nadan (family)—result in a complex and unstable picture of socio-political status which may, in turn, reflect a similar scenario for the historical audience at Elephantine.

Chapter 5 turns to the cosmic order and considers the theological and anthropological worldview exhibited in the text. *Ahiqar* raises the issue of human nature itself. On the one hand, the text promotes a distinguishable “negative anthropology.” This is particularly evident in the animal sayings/fables which correlate the predatory nature of animals with a certain human type. The limits of human achievement and knowledge are also explored, particularly over against divine will and, interestingly, a notion of fate. As for the divine, engagement with the gods is largely restricted to their interaction and involvement in human affairs; the text does not seem concerned with mapping out the particularities of the divine sphere. The function of the divine in *Ahiqar*, therefore, is more closely related to issues of justice, determinism, and theodicy than with any cultic or essentialist aspect of the deities. Much of the discussion centers on the issue of retributive justice as it relates to individuals. On this issue, though, the rhetoric paints a fairly muddled picture. There is no rigid system of deeds and consequences here. On the one hand, the divine, and its earthly representative the king, are responsible for the meting out of justice. Yet there are also occasions where they themselves are the source of (unjust) suffering. The text reflects on the inscrutability of both the gods and the king. The association of the king with the divine—the “god-king complex,” as I will call it—is a multi-faceted component of *Ahiqar* that deserves careful attention, even more so as it relates to the current political and literary milieu at Elephantine.

The conclusion synthesizes the findings of the previous chapters and offers a concise summary of the message, worldview, and function of the *Book of Ahiqar*. I also suggest some of the implications this study might have on future research for *Ahiqar* specifically, as well as more generally on the study of wisdom literature and on the interaction of Semitic and Egyptian cultures in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.
CHAPTER ONE

THE ARAMAIC BOOK OF AHIQAR:
A CENTURY OF SCHOLARSHIP AND A METHODOLOGICAL RESPONSE

1.1 The Aramaic Text and the “Ahiqar Tradition”

The Book of Ahiqar has a long, complicated history and, therefore, any study of this text requires an overview of introductory matters such as the state of the papyri, the basic content, and its place relative to the much larger “Ahiqar tradition.” Furthermore, it is also important to review the major scholarly assessments and debates that have arisen in the past century since its discovery. A final section will identify the “gaps” in past research, such as the only superficial treatment of the narrative and sayings together and the relative lack of engagement with comparative Egyptian materials, and in response offers the methodological aspects that will guide this dissertation. This will help to situate the following investigation relative to previous scholarship and to demonstrate how this study will advance scholarship and offer new insights into the study of the Book of Ahiqar.

1.1.1 Discovery, Condition, and Dating of the Papyri

In the early 20th century, German and French excavations uncovered large caches of papyri and ostraca at Elephantine, a Nile-island settlement in Upper Egypt. The discovery of papyri at Elephantine and their reception into the scholarly world has a long and complicated history that begins before the 20th century, including the purchase of significant finds on the antiquities market rather than through excavation. For the purposes of this study, it was the (chiefly) German excavations in 1906–1908 that are important. It was during this season that the Ahiqar papyri were unearthed along with many of the other Aramaic papyri that belonged to the “Judean” community there. The first of these papyri, including Ahiqar, were published in 1911 by Eduard Sachau, Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer Jüdischen Militär-koloni zu Elephantine (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911), whose introduction and comments provide details of the excavations including some based on the field notes themselves.
millennium B.C.E. to Arabic manuscripts from the early 7th century C.E. For scholars of ancient Israel and early Judaism, the most important discoveries were the numerous documents in the Aramaic language, most of which belonged to a community of self-identified “Judeans.” Nearly all of the Aramaic texts date to the 5th century B.C.E., when these Judeans were serving as mercenaries for the Achaemenid Empire, presumably acting as border guards for trade in the southern part of Egypt.

Most of the Aramaic Elephantine papyri are the commercial, legal, and epistolary records of a community of Judeans living in Persian-controlled Upper Egypt. No biblical texts were found among the documents belonging to the Judeans. The archival evidence allows us to have a decent

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3 The community is often referred to in scholarship as a “Jewish” community. The Aramaic term is (אַרְמָאִי). There is some debate on whether “Jew(ish)” is the appropriate translation, since the term seems to be properly geographic, i.e., they identify themselves as people who originated from Yehud/Judah. Indeed, some of the papyri attest to a continued relationship with people from their homeland (e.g., *TAD* A4.8). There are also good reasons scholars have opted to use “Jewish,” not the least of which is that some are identified both as “Aramean” and “Judean,” suggesting that the latter may carry more than just an ethnic identity. I prefer the term “Judean,” though I would stress that this should not be taken to discount the importance these texts have for the history of the Jewish people, nor does it indicate that I think they (including *Ahiqar*) are any more or less “Jewish.” The issue, as one might think, is complicated and controversial, and a full account is beyond the scope of this study. For an entry point, see the seminal monograph by Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). On the Judean/Jewish issue more broadly in scholarship see the recent exchange on *Marginalia* in response to Adele Reinhartz’s entry “The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity,” *Marginalia* (June 2014). See also the references in n. 6 below.

4 The earliest Aramaic documents are probably a set of letters (*TAD* A2.1–7) from between about 510 and 490 B.C.E., while the latest can probably be dated to no later than 395 B.C.E.; cf. Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 75.

5 The Aramaic (and a few Demotic) texts from this period also attest to the presence of Arameans, Bactrians, Babylonians, among a few other ethnicities, including, of course, native Egyptians and Persian aristocracy.

6 There has been some debate on whether or not the papyri allude to the biblical corpus, especially the Torah, and thus that the residents at Elephantine knew these books at least in some form; see, e.g., Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” in *Semitic Papyrology in Context: A Climate of Creativity: Papers from a New York University Conference Marking the Retirement of Baruch A. Levine* (ed. L. H. Schiffman; Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 14; Leiden:
understanding of the daily life among this community: what they ate; who they married; how legal and financial issues, such as inheritance or divorce, functioned. They even testify to the presence of a temple devoted to their chief deity *Yahu* (Aram. יאֹה). Among the Aramaic texts at least one


literary text was recovered, and it was recognized immediately as a very ancient version of the well-known Book of Ahiqar (= TAD 3, C1.1).

First of all, it must be stated that the papyri containing Ahiqar are fragmentary and more than a few columns are missing entirely. There are eleven separate sheets of papyrus extant, on which are a total of fifteen columns of text. Five of the columns (cols. 1–5; sheets A–D) contain narrative portions, with the other nine columns (cols. 6–14; sheets [in order acc. to Porten and Yardeni] E, K, G, F, J, H, L) containing sayings. Of the approximately 220 extant lines only about 150 of them are discernible to any meaningful degree. The first 78 lines contain the narrative, while the rest comprise the sayings. Hardly a single line is completely preserved, thus making restoration and reconstruction at times very difficult.

9 Two other Aramaic texts recovered from Elephantine may be labeled “literary.” The first is a very small fragment of “The Tale of Hor Son of Punesh” (TAD C1.2), a court magician known from other Demotic texts. Secondly, one could be tempted to consider the Aramaic copy of the famous Besitun Inscription (TAD C2.1) that was found at Elephantine as literature. Porten and Yardeni assign it under the section of “Historical Texts” (TAD 3:59).

10 For a good, though brief, summary of the discovery of the papyri (which is not without controversy) see Herbert Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar (JSHRZ, NF II/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 3–5. The papyri are currently housed in the Papyrus-Sammlung of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (P. 13446 A–H, K–L) with the exception of one sheet that is located in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Pap. No. 3465 = J 43502). See Ada Yardeni, “Maritime Trade and Royal Accountancy in an Erased Customs Account from 475 B.C.E. on the Ahiqar Scroll from Elephantine,” BASOR 293 (1994): 67–78, at 77 n. 2.

11 Unfortunately, the German excavators were not as meticulous in their notes as we would like, and thus we do not know exactly where or in what state the Ahiqar papyri were found. We do know (acc. to notes in Sachau, Aramäische Papyri) that the papyri were certainly from excavations at Elephantine (as opposed to having been purchased by salesman in Aswan, as a few others had been).

The most controversial problem in terms of restoration of the papyri, however, has been in determining the proper arrangement of the columns. The narrative portions are for the most part obvious in their order, at least in relation to one another. However, as one might expect, the arrangement of the sayings columns has led to many disagreements (see Excursus below). Nevertheless, the matter seems to have been finally settled by Porten and Yardeni, whose 1993 edition of the Aramaic text offered a new and, most likely, final say on the arrangement. The most important factor for their argument is the fact that the Ahiqar papyrus is a palimpsest. This feature had been known since its discovery, but it was not until the meticulous work of Porten and Yardeni that the underlying text was finally deciphered. The erased text turned out to be a record for a customs account for shipping from Ionia and Phoenicia to Egypt over a ten-month period.13 Because the list of duties collected were arranged in chronological order and with some regularity, the original sequence of the once-united papyrus scroll—as well as an approximate number of missing columns!—could be determined with relative certainty.14 Only two sheets/columns (H, L = 13–14) lack the underlying customs account, indicating that they belong to a separate scroll that presumably had been attached at the end when the scribe ran out of space. So, while the total length of the Ahiqar text is ambiguous—there is no way of knowing how long the second scroll was, or what was contained thereon—the arrangement of the extant Ahiqar columns, including the location and number of intermittent missing columns, is as follows: 1 (A), 2 (B), 3 (C), 4–5 (D1–2), four missing columns (with one containing the transition from narrative to sayings), 6 (E), 7–8 (K1–2),

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13 Interestingly the customs account is about shipments in the Delta region, a far distance from Elephantine. How this papyrus scroll made its way down to Upper Egypt is unknown.

14 See the explanation of the methodology by Yardeni, “Maritime,” 68: “The reconstruction of the scroll was based on several factors: the chronological, papyrological, and textual data—the months’ order on both sides of the scroll, the width of the papyrus sheets, and the repeated formulae—as well as on arithmetical calculations of the duty collected from the different items in comparison with the total summation preserved almost intact at the end of the list. This made it possible to estimate the original size of the scroll as well as the sizes of damaged and missing columns of both the list and the Ahiqar text. As the result of the reconstruction the order of the Ahiqar columns has been changed.” Also of note, the erased customs account appears on both sides (recto and verso) of the papyri, while the Ahiqar text is only on the recto; cf. Pierre Grelot, “Les Proverbes d’Ahiqar” RB 108 (2001): 511–28, esp. 513–16.
9–10 (G^1-2), one missing column, 11 (F), 12 (J), one (?) missing column,\textsuperscript{15} 13 (H, new papyrus scroll), 14 (L), unknown number of missing columns.\textsuperscript{16}

The decipherment of the erased customs account has also proven helpful for dating the Aramaic Ahiqar. A mid to late fifth-century date for the Ahiqar papyri has been suggested based on a number of reasons, including both its paleography and that it was found with a number of other papyri that largely date to that time.\textsuperscript{17} As for the customs account, the text is dated to the 11\textsuperscript{th} year of King Xerxes (r. 486-464 B.C.E.), thus the text is a record of duties collected in the year 475 B.C.E. So, allowing for some time between the papyrus’s use as customs account and its eventual reuse, we can estimate with a high degree of certainty sometime between 450 and 400 B.C.E. for the actual production of the Elephantine Ahiqar

\textsuperscript{15} Yardeni, “Maritime,” 77 n. 99, estimates one missing column at the end of the scroll, though it could have been more or even none, considering that sheet J contains duties listed for the last month of the year. John Strugnell, “Problems in the Development of the Ahiqar Tale,” in \textit{Frank Moore Cross Volume} (ed. Baruch A. Levine, et al.; Eretz–Israel 26; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1999), 204–11, esp. 209–10, makes an interesting case for the uncertainty with respect to the number of missing columns.

\textsuperscript{16} Porten and Yardeni, \textit{TAD} 3:23, suggest an original total of around 21 columns. This is partly based on the poor state in which H and L are in, also indicating that the scroll as found by excavators may have been rolled from right to left (hence, H and L, the most damaged, were on the outside). Furthermore, H and L also contain an erased text, though they are so fragmentary it makes reconstruction very difficult. Their recto is hardly legible (especially given the presence of the Ahiqar text), but it appears to be another customs account which, for mathematical reasons, cannot be included in the earlier account (cf. Yardeni, “Maritime,” 68, 77 n. 11). But it is their verso that is most interesting, for on it is the remnants of another copy of Ahiqar! Specifically, it comprises lines 43–64 (parallel to parts of columns 3 and 4). The transcription of the text seems to stop in the middle (i.e., a scribe began to copy it, but then stopped). Grelot, “Les Proverbes d’Ahiqar,” 516, has suggested the scribe gave up on this copy due to orthographic mistakes (particularly in the spelling of the king’s name) and the accidental skipping of one line (due to homeoteleuton), both of which are corrected when compared with the primary version. The connection of H and L with the other columns seems certain not only based on content of the non-erased sayings, but also because the erased Ahiqar text is in the same hand as the other Ahiqar columns. Thus, the Ahiqar text that we have may very well represent the scribe’s second attempt. Yardeni, “Maritime,” 67, calls the erased version: “our false start of Ahiqar”; cf. Strugnell, “Problems,” 210.

\textsuperscript{17} On the paleography of the Ahiqar letters, see Yardeni, “Maritime,” 77 n. 12.
text.\textsuperscript{18} A date of sometime during the latter half of the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E. makes this the oldest version of the \textit{Ahiqar} text by far,\textsuperscript{19} and among the oldest extant Aramaic literary texts.\textsuperscript{20}

1.1.1.1 Excursus: The Editions and Arrangements of the Papyri
Since its discovery there have been numerous editions and translations of the Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar}. This has resulted in there being nearly as many numbering systems for \textit{Ahiqar} as there are editions of the text, making it “one of the most annoying aspects of dealing with the Aramaic [text].”\textsuperscript{21} The references to \textit{Ahiqar} in secondary scholarship can thus be confusing. This excursus will briefly survey some of the major editions and arrangements of the Aramaic papyri, as well as clarify the numbering system.

The individual sheets comprising \textit{Ahiqar} were alphabetized (A–L; there was no sheet ‘I’) by Hugo Ibscher, the restorer of papyri at the museum in Berlin. These letters continue to be the customary way to refer to the sheets (not the columns) despite the fact that they were rearranged already in the first edition of the text. A mere three years after its discovery, Eduard

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\textsuperscript{18} We could even speculate a more precise date of the final quarter of the century, given that the \textit{Ahiqar} papyri were found alongside several other papyri, most of which can be dated to the reign of Darius II (424–404 B.C.E.). Speculation about the precise date has long been assumed to include the timeframe listed above, even without knowledge of the dates on the underlying text. See the introduction in Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, \textit{The Story of Ahikar}, xc–xcii; cf. Sachau \textit{Aramäische Papyrus}, iii-vii.

\textsuperscript{19} It is not until the 11\textsuperscript{th} or 12\textsuperscript{th} century C.E. that we have the next complete version of \textit{Ahiqar}. The only exception is the extremely fragmentary Demotic papyri of \textit{Ahiqar} which are usually dated to the 1\textsuperscript{st} c. C.E.

\textsuperscript{20} The Sheikh Faḍl inscription, usually dated to the first half of the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E. is probably the earliest extant piece of Aramaic literature. On this text and its date see, e.g., Tawny L. Holm, “Memories of Sennacherib in Aramaic Tradition,” in \textit{Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem} (701 B.C.E.): \textit{Story, History and Historiography} (ed. Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson; Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 71; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 295–323 at 297 n. 8; and Holm, “The Sheikh Faḍl Inscription in its Literary and Historical Context,” \textit{Aramaic Studies} 5 (2007): 193–224. The “Tale of Ḥor Son of Punesh” (\textit{TAD} 3:54–56, C1.2) is dated to the first half of the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E. and most likely also pre-dates the \textit{Ahiqar} papyri.

\textsuperscript{21} Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 30 n. 16.
\end{flushright}
Sachau published the first edition, translation, and photographs of the Elephantine papyri, including *Ahiqar*.\(^{22}\) His re-arrangement of the sheets is as follows: A–D, J, E, F, G, K, H, L.

The 1923 edition by A. E. Cowley, with transcription of the Aramaic into block script accompanied by a relatively smooth English translation, followed Sachau’s arrangement of the sheets, but offered different (and better) readings of the Aramaic.\(^{23}\) Cowley’s English translation was the most prominent edition of *Ahiqar* until 1983, when James M. Lindenberger published the first ever book-length commentary on *Ahiqar*, which included his edition and translation of the Aramaic sayings.\(^{24}\) Lindenberger’s edition has since been (and, in some studies, continues to be) the primary English-language resource for *Ahiqar*, especially given the parallel publication of his translation in the popular *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* volumes. Both Lindenberger and Cowley followed Sachau in his arrangement of the papyri, but there was disagreement on where certain sayings should be divided and thus we were left with three different numbering systems.\(^{25}\)

Ingo Kottsieper’s revised dissertation, published in 1990, comprised a thorough investigation of the linguistic features of the Aramaic sayings, but within this volume he also

\(^{22}\) Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus*, 147–82 (translation). Though lacking any commentary or philological notes, the volume did include some very good, high-resolution photographs of the papyri (*Tafeln* 40–50), which were the most accessible way of viewing the actual papyri themselves, at least until their digitalization nearly 100 years later. In the same year as Sachau’s edition, Artur Ungnad, *Aramäische Papyrus aus Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911), 62–83 published an Aramaic transcription, German translation, and some textual notes; cf. the reviews of both Sachau’s and Ungnad’s editions by Herm L. Strack, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 65 (1911): 826–32 and 832–38, respectively.


\(^{24}\) James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1983). This volume had limitations. Aside from not dealing with the narrative portions (and not even providing a translation!), the commentary on the sayings were largely limited to philological and textual remarks, many of which have proven to be false since its publication. The same year also saw the publication of the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), the second volume of which reproduced Lindenberger’s translation of Ahiqar, including the narrative.

\(^{25}\) For a synoptic chart of the various numbering systems mentioned here and a few others see Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 36–39; Bledsoe, “Can *Ahiqar*,” 127; and Michael Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine und die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur* (BZAW 399; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 850–60.
included a transliteration of the Aramaic, a German translation, and an alternative order for the papyri. Most notable is that Kottsieper split the narrative columns in two, setting the sayings between them, thus creating a narrative frame for the instructions. He also rearranged the order of the sayings columns themselves. Hence, Kottsieper’s order of sheets is: A–B, G, K, J, E, F, H, L, C–D.

Finally, the most recent “new” edition and arrangement of the Ahiqar papyri are by Porten and Yardeni, in the third volume of their TAD series. As already noted above, they offered a different arrangement of the Ahiqar papyri based on their decipherment of the underlying text—an erased customs account. Significantly, the dates on the underlying text (when set in order) support the original order of placing all four sheets of the narrative at the beginning. At the same time, it resulted in a wholly new sequence of the sayings columns, hence: A–D, E, K, G, F, J, H, L.

As already indicated above, the 1993 edition by Porten and Yardeni (TAD C1.1) has proven to be “the definitive edition,” at least in terms of the arrangement of the papyrus sheets, the decipherment of the underlying text, and the reconstruction of difficult or


27 Kottsieper was not the first to split the narrative. In his 1961 translation into French (“Les Proverbes D’Ahiqar” *RB* 69 [1961]: 178–94), Pierre Grelot also changed the order of the columns from Cowley’s. Taking into consideration the later recensions of Ahiqar and its genre by comparing it with similar pieces of literature, Grelot argued that the narrative most likely formed a bracket around the sayings. Thus, his order was: A, J, E–G, K, H, L, B–D. Interestingly, though he has since revised his arrangement of the papyri, Grelot, “Les Proverbes” (2001), was the first to number the individual sayings (as opposed to using simply line numbers), and oddly enough this numbering system was taken up by later scholars, including Lindenberger, despite the disagreement about the order of the columns.

28 The Book of Ahiqar, is titled “Words of Ahiqar,” and is text number C1.1 in Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, vol. 3, Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Texts and Studies for Students; Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1993), 23–53. Their comprehensive edition of Ahiqar includes: transcription into block-script; an English and Modern Hebrew translation; and hand-drawn sketches of each column, done meticulously to scale, allowing for an appreciation of the papyri themselves that was previously unattainable.

fragmentary sections of the *Ahiqar* text. The order of the columns in *TAD* has since been followed by most of the subsequent translations and editions, including the most recent edition by Michael Weigl.\(^3\)

Only Kottsieper maintains an alternative arrangement. Even after the publication of the *TAD* version—which, unfortunately for him, came out less than three years after his edition—Kottsieper reaffirmed his argument that the narrative columns should be split. The underlying

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\(^3\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*. I did not include an assessment of Weigl’s edition here partly because he follows the *TAD* volume so closely. While his edition is monumental for *Ahiqar* studies, its importance lies less in its edition of the Aramaic text, but rather in its lengthy commentary and his near exhaustive collection of parallels of individual words, phrases, and entire sayings from *Ahiqar* with comparative literature, primarily the Hebrew and Aramaic texts that make up the biblical corpus. There are, of course, a number of other translations not mentioned above. As for the others, they are omitted because they have had little impact on scholarship or because they closely follow one of the others listed above. Pierre Grelot, who has already been mentioned, published a French translation on three separate occasions, the last of which (in 2001) was heavily revised and followed the *TAD* volume; cf. Grelot, “Les Proverbes D’Aḥiqar” (1961); idem, “Histoire et sagesse d’Aḥiqar l’Assyrien,” in *Documents araméens d’Égypte* (ed. Grelot; Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 5; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1972), 427–52; and idem, “Les Proverbes D’Aḥiqar” (2001). Riccardo Contini, who has edited along with Grottanelli a very important collection of studies on the various versions of *Ahiqar*, presents in the same volume an Italian translation of both the narrative and sayings with a significant number of notes of both textual and philological nature; see Contini, “Il Testo Aramaico di Elefantina,” in *Il Saggio Ahiqar: Fortuna e transformazione di uno scritto sapienziale; Il testo più antico e e sue versioni* (Studi Biblici 148; Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 2005), 113–39. Herbert Niehr’s German translation is also worth noting, having been published in the well-known series *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch–römischer Zeit*; see Niehr, *Aramäischer Ahiqar* (*JSHRZ*, NF II/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 2007). I have yet to mention the very first English translation, which, though admittedly poor and now outdated, appeared in F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Story of Aḥiqar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 168–73 (the first edition was published before the discovery of the Elephantine version). Still this should not diminish the volume’s importance for Ahiqar scholarship in general, for it remains to this day the best starting point/edition for most of the later versions, including Syriac, Armenian, Slavonic, and Arabic, among others. The translation by H. L. Ginsberg, “The Words of Ahiqar,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ed. J. B. Pritchard; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 427–30 (there were no changes made in the second [1955] or third [1969] editions) had some impact, but Cowley’s predominantly remained the preferred English translation, at least until Lindenberger’s. Anis Fraya, *Ahiqar: A Wise Man from the Ancient Near East* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1962) [Arabic], has produced a commendable translation of the Aramaic portions of the narrative into Modern Standard Arabic.
text, after all, is not the only physical evidence for arranging papyri, one should also consider: the height of the papyri, evidence of folds and/or joins, and other material factors such as damage patterns. Indeed, the bases on which Kottsieper offers his arrangement and the critiques he makes about the TAD edition are compelling and warrant further consideration.31

31 Kottsieper’s primary arguments are based on the following observations: (a) the varying height of the sheets: sheets A and B are noticeably shorter (28.6 cm and 27.9 cm) than C and D (31.1 cm and 31.2 cm) and thus belong to two different parts of the scroll (outer and inner, respectively); (b) the sequence of foldings in C and D is much tighter than in A and D, corroborating the view that C and D belong to the innermost part of the scroll; (c) the reading “year 11” on sheet B (recto, line 6 = CR3.7 BR1.6) ignores traces that suggest a different number, which would mean that this list would not belong to the same customs account; (d) in cols. 1–2 the name “Sennacherib” is written with ס, but in cols. 3–5 it is with פ; and, similarly, in cols. 1–2 the word for “gate” is וּב and in cols. 3–5 it is בּוע; and (e) the presence of a seemingly random, upside-down line at the bottom of the verso of sheet G (see TAD 3:166) which, apparently, is the first line of an entirely different text and, according to Porten and Yardeni’s arrangement, sheet G sits squarely in the middle of the scroll, a very odd place for a scribe to begin a new text! In general, Kottsieper takes issue with the implied connection between the underlying account and the order of the Ahiqar papyri. That the sequence of dates on the erased customs account can supply us with the correct order of columns is built upon the presumption that the papyrus scroll was never dissected into individual sheets between the time of its use for the account and when it was reused for Ahiqar. In other words, the scribe took a single, used scroll and, when he ran out of space, simply attached a second, used scroll. Kottsieper, however, argues for just the opposite. That is, the scribe compiled several detached sheets from at least two earlier customs accounts (already demonstrated by H and L) in order to create the newly stitched-together scroll for the Ahiqar narrative and sayings.

This is only a simplified summary of Kottsieper’s main arguments; for a fuller treatment refer to Kottsieper, “‘Look, son, what Nadab did to Ahikaros …’: The Aramaic Ahiqar Tradition and its Relationship to the Book of Tobit,” in The Dynamics of Language and Exegesis at Qumran (ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz; Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2,35; Göttingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 145–67, esp. 152–56; cf. idem, “The Aramaic Tradition: Ahikar,” 109–11. To my knowledge, Kottsieper’s have not been adequately addressed, and it is beyond the purview of this study. I will say that while some are compelling (especially the random line in G), others are not. For example, the critique of reading “year 11” in BR1.6 is weak. There are certainly more marks, but they need not be indicative of a higher number. There is enough space to suggest that the traces are a new word, as we see, for example, in GR3.3, 8, and 11. The repeated formulae, the month, and the content all suggest that this column belongs to the same account as the rest. Also, if Kottsieper’s suggestion about the scribe using individual sheets (from at least four different used manuscripts) is right, then it would be quite a coincidence for the four sheets that have the narrative to also happen to have four previously separate sheets brought together in the correct chronological order.
The criticisms of Kottsieper notwithstanding, the TAD edition stands as the primary edition to the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar and will continue to be the basis for Ahiqar scholarship in the foreseeable future. In this study, references to the Aramaic text of Ahiqar are from this edition unless otherwise noted.32

1.1.2 Brief Summary of the Contents

Despite the poor condition of many of the papyri, a general orientation of the text is possible. The text opens with the sage Ahiqar already at the highest level possible in government, acting as an adviser to the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. Among his titles are: “adviser to all of Assyria” (2, 12; Aram. יָעִישׁ אֲחִיאַר) and “bearer of the (king’s) signet ring” (3, 19; תַּנָּךְ חָמוֹל). After the death of Sennacherib and the passing of the kingdom to his son Esarhaddon, Ahiqar realizes that he too is getting old (5–6) and decides he must find a successor. Because he has no children of his own, Ahiqar decides to adopt Nadan, his nephew.33 For reasons unclear in the

32 So as not to complicate matters, the Ahiqar text will be cited throughout this study according to the line numbers in TAD 3. On occasion, I offer alternative readings than those by Porten and Yardeni; these are rare and generally insignificant, often relating to reconstruction of corrupt passages, but, of course, will be noted. In terms of translation, I usually follow my own, but there are numerous occasions where I make recourse to the translation of Porten and Yardeni, as well as to those of Weigl, Kottsieper, and, to a lesser extent, Lindenberger.

The recent translations by Niehr, Contini, and Grelot (citations in n. 26 above) rarely diverge from TAD and that of Niehr’s is nearly consistent with Weigl. It should also be noted that the importance of translations differs depending on whether one considers the narrative or sayings. As for the narrative, the translation of Porten and Yardeni is to be preferred (Weigl does not even provide one). Lindenberger only includes the narrative in the OTP volume, but it is far from careful and should never be used to any serious degree. Niehr, though following the TAD edition closely, offers a clear and cautious translation with a significant number of notes. Likewise, Kottsieper’s translation of the narrative is worth considering, though his reconstruction of troublesome Aramaic portions frequently departs from the TAD edition—especially at the crucial point in column 2, which nearly all other translations see as the beginning of Nadan’s betrayal (l. 25: מַעֲשָׂת הָאָדָם “Nadan devised (a plot) against [me”; and l. 30: בָּרִי בֵּיתוֹ “my son slandered [me”). Kottsieper, on the other hand, understands the passage differently (l. 25: Kümmere dich um[ ganz Assur!”; and l. 30: בָּרִי בֵּיתוֹ “mein Sohn, der Sohn [meine Schwester”), suggesting: “vermutlich folgte eine Einleitung der Sprüche, die möglicherweise schon in Zeile 15 (= TAD C1.1.31) begannen” (cf. “Die Geschichte und die Sprüche,” 327 n. 14a).

33 Note that the name of Ahiqar’s nephew is not present in the extant portions of the Aramaic version, except in one place where it is restored (18; though there are traces of letters that could match his spelling, hence the confident
Aramaic text, Nadan betrays his uncle and accuses him of treason against the Assyrian king, at which point Esarhaddon immediately sentences Ahiqar to death. Nabusumiskun, another court official, is called on to carry out the execution. However, on the way to the chopping-block, Ahiqar reminds the would-be executioner about a previous time when Nabusumiskun had done something to upset King Sennacherib and was sentenced to death, but Ahiqar had come to his aid and kept him hidden until the king’s anger abated. Now, Ahiqar asks Nabusumiskun for the same favor, saying: “Now you! Just as I have done for you, so also do for me!”

Nabusumiskun agrees, conceals Ahiqar in a pit, and in his place executes an eunuch-slave so that a body might be shown to the king. At this point the Aramaic narrative cuts off. Clearly there is more to the story, but on this we can only speculate by making recourse to the later evidence. The conclusions of the medieval versions of Ahiqar as well as Tobit and the Aesop Romance—both of which clearly knew some reconstruction of Ἱử in most of the editions). The name Nadan (or Nadin) is fairly consistent throughout the later versions and makes sense in the Aramaic text based on the evidence (cf. LXX (G) Tob 14:10, where his name is “Nadab”; oddly in the LXX (S) Nadan is called Ἀμαν “Aman” and even more oddly in 14:10 Ahiqar is at first named Χριάχαρος but in the very same verse it later calls him Μανάσσης “Manasseh.”

In later versions the motivation for his betrayal varies among impatience, arrogance, or as a response to discovering that Ahiqar (who has already come to realize Nadan’s lack of wisdom and evil nature) has decided to train Nadan’s younger brother instead.

The Aramaic title is עיבר (ll. 33, 41, 46, et al.). Porten and Yardeni’s translation “young man” should probably be rejected. Although the term comes to have that meaning in later Jewish Aramaic, this would be the only occurrence in such an early text. Instead the rendering “officer,” or “chief official” (Ger. Oberst, Offizier) is to be preferred. On literary grounds “young man” would also seem out of place, for Nabusumiskun appears to be of a similar rank/age with Ahiqar. Note that the text refers to an earlier time when they were both working in Sennacherib’s court. The details of the reflection imply that Nabusumiskun was both known by the king personally and, along with Ahiqar, had some station of privilege.

According to Tobit 14:10 Ahiqar is rehabilitated and Nadan is punished.

The Aesop Romance includes the lengthy Egyptian episode and shares many specific details with the later versions; though the hero of the story is Aesop himself and it is set in the Babylonian, not Assyrian, court. Because some have suggested that the Aesop Romance might date back as far as the 4th or even 5th c. B.C.E. (the earliest fragments, P. Berol. 11628 and P. Oxy. 3720, are from 2nd/3rd c. C.E.), it could support the notion that the Egyptian episode is quite ancient, and was not simply added at a date much later than the Elephantine version. One might also mention the Demotic narrative fragments, the contents of which (though highly fragmentary) would fit nicely in the Egyptian
version of the Ahiqar tale—and their, albeit limited, use in assessing the Aramaic text’s conclusion will be addressed in the next chapter.\textsuperscript{38} In any case, it seems safe to assume that in the missing columns Ahiqar somehow come back into favor with the king, even if the particulars of how this was accomplished remain obscure.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} A brief synopsis of the later recensions’ so-called “Egyptian episode” is worth outlining here. Word of Ahiqar’s “execution” reaches the Pharaoh in Egypt (usually unnamed). This pleases him because Ahiqar was famed for his wisdom, so the Pharaoh decides it is a good opportunity to challenge the Assyrian king to a battle of wits. The Assyrian king, familiar with the legendary wisdom of the Egyptians, is afraid he will lose and laments that he had his wisest servant Ahiqar killed. Nabusumiskun, of course, sees this as the opportune time to reveal his secret and informs the king that Ahiqar is, in fact, still alive. The Assyrian king is overjoyed and sends Ahiqar to Egypt, where, as expected, Ahiqar succeeds in meeting the numerous and impossible challenges made by the Pharaoh (e.g., building a castle in the sky). Successful and loaded with gifts and wealth from the Egyptians, Ahiqar returns to Assyria. The narrative ends with Ahiqar berating Nadan with more wise words—usually in the form of parables—that are more aggressive and vindictive in tone. Finally, in at least one version, Nadan simply blows up. For variations on this episode see the different versions in Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, \textit{The Story of Ahikar}.

\textsuperscript{39} At first glance, it seems odd to have a collection of wisdom from someone in a state of disrepute; although in the Egyptian \textit{Instructions of Ankhsheshonqe} the protagonist Ankhsheshonqe records his wisdom on potsherds while wasting away in prison for failing to foil an assassination attempt on the pharaoh. The sage, notably, remains in prison at the end of the story. Incidentally, this Egyptian text has often been connected with Ahiqar; cf. Miriam Lichtheim, \textit{Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: A Study of Demotic Instructions} (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1983), esp. 13–21. Among the Egyptian corpus of instructions, we might also refer to the, albeit unique, \textit{Instruction of Amenemhet I to his son Sesostris I}. Here, the late pharaoh (presumably as a shade) tells his son about the successful plot of betrayal and murder by his trusted advisers. Though fragmentary, the brief recounting of the assassination is followed by advice on how to rule and includes strong warnings against trusting anyone—an altogether pessimistic piece of literature when compared with other instructions; for translation and summary of this text see, e.g., Miriam Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature} (3 vols.; 2d edition; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1:135–39.
The remaining columns contain the words or instructions of Ahiqar—a collection of sayings that share a number of formal and topical similarities to other ancient wisdom collections from Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia. Just over 100 sayings are extant. Though, due to the corruption of the papyri, only about three quarters of these have any discernible meaning. They treat a variety of subjects, many of which are typical for wisdom collections, such as discipline of children, discretion in speech, and advice about social or financial dealings. More thought-provoking reflections on larger issues such as justice, especially as it relates to the gods and the king are also found among the sayings. Exhortations, chiefly in the negative (i.e., vetitives), are the most prominent form of the sayings, though there are also a large number of maxims. Proverbs, in the strictest sense of the term, are rare. We also find one numerical saying, and possibly the remnants of a royal hymn as well as a series of complaints. The most striking feature may be the handful of animal fables, a popular literary form in the ancient Near East, though rare among

Still, in every other version of Ahiqar and in the secondary evidence (Tobit, Aesop), Ahiqar is restored to his position of honor. This may be the case even if the Aramaic version did not include the lengthy Egyptian episode (i.e., the resolution to the plot could have occurred sometime in the missing four columns between the last narrative column [5] and the first sayings one [6]). Most commentators follow this line of thought, and thus assume that the Egyptian “contest” episode was an originally separate and independently-circulated narrative that was at some point attached to the Ahiqar “court tale,” perhaps so as to provide a more satisfying account for the sage’s restoration. All of the hypotheses are speculative, however, based entirely on much later evidence.

40 According to the arrangement in TAD C1.1 the sayings appear to be attached after the end of the story. The placement of all the narrative columns before the sayings dates back to the first edition by Sachau and at least on this point specifically has been followed by nearly all other editions. To date, only Kottsieper maintains that the sayings split the extant narrative columns. Kottsieper, based on the later editions as well as following some of his own reconstructions and observations about the Aramaic papyri, places the instructions after the second column of the narrative, hence before Nadan betrays Ahiqar; see Kottsieper, “Die Geschichte und die Sprüche,” 320–47 and Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 109–24. Some have questioned relationship of sayings to narrative since the transition from one to the other is not extant; although, Strugnell, “Problems,” 208–10 makes a valid point that because it is clear an extra papyrus scroll was needed to complete the composition, we have no way of knowing how many more columns there were. Thus, it is conceivable that the missing columns of the Elephantine text did, in fact, contain the latter half of the story (i.e., the Egyptian episode), as well as any number of extra columns of sayings.
wisdom collections. A much closer evaluation of the forms and content of the sayings will be provided in subsequent chapters.41

1.1.3 The Legacy of Ahiqar: An Ancient “International Bestseller”

The Elephantine Ahiqar papyri are but one witness, albeit the most ancient, to a much broader and considerably more diverse “Ahiqar tradition.” The story and wisdom of the wise courtier who was betrayed by his nephew only to be saved by his colleague was tremendously popular in the ancient world and his fame continued well beyond antiquity.42 While this dissertation is primarily concerned with the 5th c. Aramaic text, a cursory appreciation of the legacy of Ahiqar, his story, and his wisdom is also needed. This section will only briefly survey the various witnesses to the “Ahiqar tradition.”43

There are dozens of extant manuscripts of The Story and Proverbs of Ahiqar in a variety of languages, the earliest of which dates to around the 12th century. The most important of these is


43 Surveys of the following materials can also be found in the following: Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 3–34; idem, “Ahiqar” in OTP 2:479–507, esp. 480–93; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar–Sprüche, 12–18; Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, The Story of Ahikar, viii–lxxviii; the various entries in the volume by Contini and Grottanelli, Il Saggio Ahiqar; and Max Küchler, Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen: Zum Fortgang weisheitlichen Denkens im Bereich des frühjüdischen Jahwegeängens (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1979), 319–413.
probably the Syriac, a later form of Aramaic. A handful of Syriac copies exist, and these medieval witnesses are generally assumed to reflect a much earlier version, perhaps as early as the late 2nd century C.E. From Syriac the story and teachings of Ahiqar passed into the Armenian Christian tradition, beginning sometime around the 4th century C.E., though again the textual evidence is only from the 15th to 18th centuries. There are many Arabic and Karshuni manuscripts of Ahiqar, likewise based on a Syriac version. Also of import is the Old Slavonic recension. It is significant both because it represents a text-tradition distinct from the Syriac one, and because it clearly derives from a Greek translation, although, unfortunately, no Greek version of Ahiqar survives (save for the adaptation of the narrative found in the Aesopica). We have further versions of Ahiqar in Georgian, Romanian, Old Turkish, Neo-Aramaic, a few versions of the story and an abridged copy of the sayings in Ethiopian, and a fragmentary version in Sogdian.44 While these myriad “recensions” are often considered part of an interconnected literary web of a text-tradition—and often modelled as such—it is important to emphasize that the ancient Aramaic text has little in common with these later attestations save for the basic contours of the narrative and only a very

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small set of sayings. So, in assessing the Aramaic *Ahiqar* vis-à-vis the medieval witnesses, we are clearly dealing with a closely related tradition that deserves some attention, but the connection only marginally extends to the level of literary transmission) and thus any side-by-side or text-critical analysis is imprudent.

Moving on, there is another witness to *Ahiqar* from antiquity in Demotic translation, but sadly they are only fragments which are quite limited and a few have yet to be published. Nevertheless they are the second most important textual witness (next to the Elephantine text), because of their dating—the papyri date to the 1st c. C.E., though possibly reflecting a 3rd c. B.C.E. translation.45

Besides the many extant recensions of the text itself, there are also several allusions to the figure of Ahiqar which contribute to his legacy, and the ancient Aramaic scribe has been identified as the inspiration for a number of texts and legendary figures. Perhaps the most recognizable text inspired by *Ahiqar* is the *Aesop Romance*, a scene of which—the so-called “Babylonian episode”—is clearly an adaptation of the *Ahiqar* tale.46 In Tobit, both Ahiqar and Nadan are

45 The Demotic fragments of the *Ahiqar* narrative are comprised of P. Cairo Nat. Bibl. (inv. no. unknown) and P. Berlin P 23729. They are usually dated to 1st c. C.E, though Quack suggests the language may reflect a 3rd or 2nd c. B.C.E. translation. A third fragment (P. Berlin P 15658) may contain remnants from the sayings portion of *Ahiqar*. Quack, “The Interaction,” 378, notes a similarity in hands between this latter fragment and the other two which may suggest the same scribe, though it is still uncertain and the fragment itself has yet to be published. For further remarks on the Demotic Fragments, see: Karl-Th. Zauzich, “Demotische Fragmente zum Ahikar-Roman,” in *Folia Rara: Wolfgang Voigt LXV. Diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicate* (ed. Herbert Franke, et al; Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 19; Wisebaden: Steiner, 1976), 180–85; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 310–12; W. Spiegelberg, “Achikar in einem demotischen Texte der römischen Kaiserzeit,” *OLZ* 33 (1930): col. 961–62; Ryholt, “The Assyrian Invasion,” 497–99; and Holm, “Memories of Sennacherib,” 299 n. 14.

46 The relationship between *Ahiqar* and the *Aesop Romance* is clearly strong, and some have suggested that Ahiqar’s story made it into the Greek tradition (via translation) as early as the late 5th or early 4th centuries B.C.E. (see Grottanelli reference below). Unfortunately no Greek version of *Ahiqar* (save for the Aesopic reconfiguration) is extant, though there is little doubt such a translation and disbursement through the Greek-speaking world existed. Aside from Aesop, the existence of Old Slavonic versions of *Ahiqar* adds to the argument that a Greek version existed because the Slavonic clearly derives from a Greek Vorlage. There are also some parallels between the Aesop’s fables and *Ahiqar*. The bibliography on *Ahiqar*’s connection to Aesop is lengthy; see, for example, Cristiano Grottanelli, “Aesop In Babylon,” in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien*
referenced by name. Ahiqar is identified as Tobit’s nephew, he attends to his uncle in his ailment, and he vouches for him in the Assyrian court. In a final passage (14:10–11), Tobit betrays a strong familiarity with Ahiqar’s story. Less obvious, though also likely, is Ahiqar’s influence on the


Although included in a number of conversations about court tales, the book of Tobit has a special place in the history of Ahiqar scholarship, not the least of which reason is the direct reference both to the person of Ahiqar and
Demotic Instructions of Ankhsheshonqe, which dates to the Hellenistic period. The overall structure and details of the plot resonate strongly with Ahiqar, and a few parallels can be observed in the instructions. The figure of Ahiqar has also been connected with later traditions, usually seen as an inspiration for similarly wise personalities, for example: in Christian circles with the Acts of Thomas, in Arabic-Islamic tradition with the famous wise man Luquman, and in Sasanian Persia with the Pahlavi Admonitions of Adurbad.

Finally, there are the passing references to the fame of Ahiqar’s wisdom, especially in Greek sources of the Roman period. For example, the 2nd c. C.E. Christian author Clement mentions Ahiqar (Strom. 1.15.69), claiming that the Greek philosopher Democritus plagiarized from a “Stele of Akikaros.” References to Ahiqar as a wise sage are also found in Strabo to his story. Others have also suggested Tobit’s basic structure is modeled on Ahiqar and even a few of the wisdom sayings in Tobit may share some connection with the Aramaic text. Of particular importance for the Aramaic version of Ahiqar specifically, are the fragments of Tobit found at Qumran. One Hebrew and two Aramaic copies of Tobit were discovered at Qumran, and with great fortune one of the passages that references Ahiqar is preserved. 4Q196 (= Tob 1:21b–22) reads הַשַּׁלְּכַּת הַשֶּׁלֶם הַשְּׁלָמִי. The lexeme קִנָּמָו is particularly significant for we find the very same one in the Elephantine text (ll. 3, 19 のやマソによって). On the Qumran fragments of Tobit, particularly as they relate to Ahiqar, see Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 156–58; Armin Schmitt, “Die Achikar–Notiz bei Tobit 1.21b–22 in aramäischer (pap4QTob^ar – 4Q196) und griechischer Fassung,” Biblische Zeitschrift 40 (1996): 18–38; and Michael O. Wise, “A Note on 4Q196 (papTob ara) and Tobit I 22” VT 43 (1993): 566–69.

For the original thesis on this connection see Miriam Lichtheim, Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: A Study of Demotic Instructions (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1983), 13–21.


(Geography 16.2.39) and Diogenes Laertius (5.50). In a Seleucid era inscription from Uruk, there is also mention of Ahiqar as an ummānu of Esarhaddon.

This overview, though not exhaustive, ought to convey the diversity and complexity of the “Ahiqar tradition.” When we return to the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar, then, it is important to understand that we are not just dealing with an obscure ancient text, but, in fact, we are engaging a document that was just one part of a growing tradition that had a very wide circulation and has informed the cultural ethos of a large number of communities over a very long period of time. Ahiqar truly is one of the world’s first “international bestsellers.”


53 See Alan Lenzi, “The Uruk Dist of Kings and Sages and Late Mesopotamian Scholarship,” JANER 8 (2008): 137–70

54 This survey was largely limited to explicit references to Ahiqar (the person or text) and to those texts that are deemed to have borrowed directly from Ahiqar’s story or wisdom. For a much more detailed account of the broader “Ahiqar tradition” see Riccardo Contini and Cristiano Grottanelli, “Introduzione,” in Il Saggio Ahiqar, 11–89. The many parallels between the Aramaic Ahiqar and the biblical, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian literature will be addressed with more specificity and detail throughout the course of this study; on the possible literary relationship between some of them with Ahiqar, see Chapter 2.

55 The importance of these witnesses for understanding the Elephantine text varies, and most will not be addressed in any detail. Still, occasions do arise where recourse to the later evidence can help us to reflect on the Aramaic version, and, though separated by great chronological (and, at times, linguistic or geographic) distance, the later versions are nevertheless connected to the ancient Aramaic text; see, for example, Seth A. Bledsoe, “The Relationship between the Elephantine Ahiqar Sayings and Later Recensions: A Preliminary Analysis of the Development and Diffusion of the Ahiqar tradition” in Enoncés sapientiels: traductions, traducteurs et contextes culturels (ed. Marie-Christine Bornes-Varol and Marie-Sol Ortola; Aliento Échanges sapientiels en Méditerranée 4; Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2014), 223–50.

56 Eduard Meyer, in 1912, said of Ahiqar: “[It] is the oldest book of world literature, internationally diffused through the most disparate tongues and diverse peoples” (citation and translation in Daniel L. Selden, “Mapping the Alexander
1.2 The Aramaic Book of Ahiqar: A Century of Scholarly Assessment

The Aramaic Book of Ahiqar—while remaining relatively obscure for modern audiences when compared with, say, any given biblical text—has nevertheless attracted attention from a wide range of scholarly circles. This is because the “Ahiqar tradition” touches upon many different areas. In order to assess its status in scholarship one must therefore consult studies by Aramaicists (or Semitic philologists), biblical scholars, Egyptologists, Assyriologists, and Classicist, among others. Indeed, the vast majority of Ahiqar scholarship can be characterized as a diffuse assortment of articles, book chapters, or smaller sections thereof, with relatively few studies centered on the Aramaic text itself. Add to this the fact that hardly any aspect related to the Aramaic text has had any lasting agreement, it makes for a very complicated history. As result, the review of scholarship that follows will be organized differently. Rather than a simple chronological survey from beginning to end, the review will be divided into various “threads” of scholarly conversations centered on a specific issue. They are: (1) text stabilization, reconstruction, and translation; (2) the language/dialect, provenance, and date; (3) the genre and literary background; (4) and, finally, recent trends and the trajectory of Ahiqar research. The most important benchmarks of Ahiqar scholarship—Cowley, Greenfield/Kutscher, Lindenberger, Kottsieper, Portent/Yardeni, Niehr, and Weigl—will be highlighted throughout, since most have contributions in more than one thread.

This arrangement will hopefully provide some clarity on the history and trajectory of Ahiqar scholarship that might have been lost if one was forced to follow a sporadic, though chronologically arranged, synopsis.

1.2.1 The Aramaic Text: Reconstruction, Stabilization, Translation

I begin with the most straightforward issue: the reading of the Aramaic text itself. The review above of the various editions of the Aramaic Ahiqar has already discussed the general arrangement

57 Each “thread” will, in itself, be arranged chronologically.
58 For a good review of scholarship up to the 1970s see Max Küchler, Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen, 319–413, and for a review of the most recent studies see Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 1–36 and Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 30–51.
and numbering of the columns and sayings. Alongside this, however, was the difficult task of establishing the actual text itself, i.e., paleography and lexicography. More than half the margins are missing, and there is hardly a line that is not without at least a few letters missing. This has made the reading of the individual letters, the words, and their proper meaning very difficult, resulting in a great deal of discrepancy in transcription and translation. Still, there have been a few benchmark publications that have helped to stabilize the text.

After the discovery of the Elephantine papyri and its publication by Sachau, there was a flurry of scholarly publications on this new, and much more ancient witness to *Ahiqar*. A handful of short articles or reviews of Sachau’s edition appeared almost immediately, offering alternative readings of the text—thanks in part to the excellent photographs of the papyri made available in the Sachau edition.59 The short monographs by Nöldeke60 and Stummer61 are noteworthy examples from this first wave (ca. 1911–1914), not only for their length, but also because they both compiled previously published observations as well as making many of their own.

In 1923, A. E. Cowley produced a new edition of the Aramaic text that proved to be a major benchmark in stabilizing the text and thus providing a basis for further study. He too accounted for many of the earlier studies and offered numerous new readings.62 Additionally, he provided an English translation and copious notes, with comments on nearly every line. His edition is significant for a number of reasons: it represents the summation of the first wave of *Ahiqar*

59 The first of these generally included examinations of the parallels between the Aramaic text and the major witnesses to the later versions—namely, the Syriac, Armenian, and, occasionally, the Arabic—though it became quickly evident that direct parallels were few and far between. Thus, recourse to these medieval recensions would prove to be of little use for reconstructing or interpreting the meaning of the many difficult passages in the Aramaic. This was especially true among the sayings, where there were hardly any connections. The only significant exception was in certain portions of the narrative, but even there it was less for reconstructing the actual Aramaic words than for supplying a model for the basic contours of the narrative. On the issue of the relationship between the Aramaic *Ahiqar* and the later versions see Contini and Grottanelli, “Introduzione,” 38–43; Bledsoe “The Relationship”; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 4–7.


61 F. Stummer, *Der kritische Wert der altaramäischen Ahiqartexte aus Elephantine* (ATA V/5; Münster: Aschendorff, 1914).

In that year James Lindenberger published his dissertation on the Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar which proved to be monumental for Ahiqar studies, especially among English-language scholarship. Most important are the countless textual and philological comments, as well as the many alternative reconstructions of difficult passages. His etymological discussions on nearly every lexeme in both the textual commentary and (even more so) in the endnotes are also significant for their contribution to the conversation about the linguistic background of the sayings (see below). Unfortunately, a good number of Lindenberger’s formulations would prove to be wrong. Moreover, his volume is limited in that it never treats the narrative nor does it offer much beyond the ad hoc commentary (i.e., there is no synthetic or contextual analysis, indeed there are barely any interpretive remarks on the meaning of the proverbs). He does refer to parallels in both

63 A full account of these studies is unnecessary here, though see the list of those “most worthy of attention” according to Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 204–5; cf. the chronologically arranged bibliography of this time period in Kottsieber, Die Sprache, 289–91; see also Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 8–10 and Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 30–31, esp. n. 80.

64 Citation from Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 9.


66 As mentioned above, the commentary was coupled with the publication of a translation with lengthy introduction in Charlesworth’s OTP. This translation had its own impact on scholarship, chiefly because it provided (at that time) a reliable English translation that was much more accessible to biblical scholars than Cowley’s. Moreover, it also included a lengthy introduction (much of which parallels the one in his monograph), as well as identifying some parallels with biblical texts.

67 His publication came at a crucial juncture in this regard. Although he followed the views of those studies which came beforehand, his etymological analyses added weight to the growing consensus about the Aramaic original over against an Akkadian one. See especially “Appendix A” in Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 279–304. Lindenberger, in the words of Weigl (Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 35), “insbesondere insistierte auf der Bedeutsamkeit der zahlreichen in den Sprüchen nachweisbaren ‘Kanaanismen,’ die Absenz eindeutig akkadischer Etymologien, [usw].”
Hebrew and Mesopotamian literature, but they are irregular. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, Lindenberger’s textual and philological commentary on the sayings of Ahqar would remain unmatched for nearly three decades.

Finally, a further mention of Porten and Yardeni’s 1993 edition should be made here. While they did not include any textual or philological commentary, they did advance many new readings of the difficult passages. This work is due in large part to the advanced imaging technology applied to the papyri as well as the superb paleographic analysis by Ada Yardeni, who has since come to be the leading figure in this field. Unless new materials come to light, there should no longer be much discrepancy with the actual Aramaic text.

1.2.2 Language/Dialect, Provenance, and Date

Perhaps the most discussed and most debated issue throughout the century of Ahqar scholarship has to do with its language and, by implication, its provenance and date. Where, when, and by whom was this text “originally” produced? Before the Aramaic text came to light, it had previously been assumed to be a Hebrew original, later translated into the various languages extant from the already known medieval and early-modern recensions. However, with an ancient Aramaic witness, there was no longer any reason to suspect a Hebrew forbear. This left scholars with two options. One, of course, is Aramaic. In 1913 Harris stated plainly in response to the discovery from Elephantine: “The Aramaic, then, is the original language: there is no sign of Hebraism anywhere in the book. We are as near to the first form of an ancient book as we are ever likely to be.”

On the other hand, the antiquity of the story itself was given such a boost by the date of the papyri that, consequently, many scholars began to speculate a Neo-Assyrian origin (or at least

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68 For another view on the importance and limitations of Lindenberger’s commentary, see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 35–36.

69 Weigl’s more recent contribution (Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche), though certainly helpful with regard to philological issues, will be addressed later, primarily because its contributions to Ahqar scholarship lie much more on the side of literary form and style and its comprehensive assembly of biblical parallels than in the textual or philological domain.

influence) and thus supposed the Aramaic to be a translation from Akkadian.\textsuperscript{71} This position was taken up famously by Cowley in his influential edition, though with a slight emendation. He cautiously proposed a Persian intermediary, at least for the narrative. This hypothesis, however, has been summarily dismissed.\textsuperscript{72} In any case, other features besides the narrative setting seemed to add weight to an Akkadian original, for example: the Akkadian personal names (Nabusumiskun, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon) were transcribed correctly; the mention of the deity Shamash, particularly in his role as a god of justice; and there were even few “Akkadianisms” identified as well as Akkadian loan-words which seemed to offer lexical support.\textsuperscript{73} The notion of an Akkadian original took root early on and became the prevalent opinion.\textsuperscript{74}


\textsuperscript{72} Cowley, \textit{Aramaic Papyri}, 205–6. So it went: the Persians translated this originally Akkadian story into Old Persian, which was then translated and transmitted throughout their empire in its official language Aramaic, at which point it was connected to a much older collection of popular Aramaic sayings. Cowley states (p. 205): “one cannot read a few paragraphs of Old Persian (such as Darius’ inscription at Besitun) without being struck by the general similarity in style of the Aramaic narrative of Ahiqar.” Though his thesis is not taken seriously (and never really was), we must recall that there was an Aramaic translation of the Besitun Inscription found among the same collection of papyri as \textit{Ahiqar} (Cowley pp. 248–71), so it is not entirely unbelievable. He offers some examples: Assyria is spelled אֲבִירָי (cf. אֶבַּירָי in Zencirli, from ca. 9\textsuperscript{th} century); Aramaic was the official language of the Achaemenid empire, particularly in the western provinces; the use of אֶבַּירָי after a personal name is “not found in ordinary Aramaic, but is a common idiom in Old Persian as Besitun ii, 6” (206); the use of אֲבִירָי (“then” or “afterwards”) “as an almost redundant conjunction, is exactly parallel to the OP pasava.” Each of these points is put to question by Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 31 n. 24. Unfortunately, on this point it would have been better for Cowley had he left off at the suggestion that, to use his own words, “the Aramaic is under Persian influence” (205) rather than hypothesizing a separate Persian translation.

\textsuperscript{73} These arguments (with their counterpoints) are collected nicely in Lindenberger’s introduction to \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 16–17. For an earlier list and discussion of the “Akkadianisms” see, e.g., Stummer, “Zur Ursprache,” 103–5; cf. Grelot, “Histoire et sagesse,” passim, but esp. 429.

\textsuperscript{74} This view was championed, for example, by Grelot, “Les Proverbes” (1961) and “Histoire et sagesse” (1972).
This all changed in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the independent and near simultaneous publications by Jonas Greenfield and Eduard Kutscher. Both maintained that Aramaic was, without question, the original language of Ahiqar. They determined that the sayings were free of Akkadianisms and of Akkadian influence in general. While the narrative did have some Akkadian aspects, it was no more than what was typical of Aramaic of that time (including that of the other Elephantine documents). These two studies provided the groundwork, but it was

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77 See Jonas C. Greenfield, “Linguistic Criteria in the Sefire Inscriptions.” Lešonenu 27 (1963): 303–13 [Hebrew], esp. 312. Some of the earlier supposed Akkadian loan–words (e.g. ṣēb, “colleague”) turned out to be Aramaic terms that made their way into Akkadian (rather than the other way around, see discussion and bibliography in subsequent footnote; cf. Kottsieper, Die Sprache, 243–44). The sole exception is the presence of an Akkadian loan-word in line 165 (Aram. 𐤏颃; Akk. labbu), which, however, does not necessitate an Akkadian original, but rather that the particular scribe was familiar with an Akkadian term (if the saying were originally in Akkadian, there would be no word–play!); cf. Lindenberger’s comments on this saying (saying no. 34 acc. to his reckoning in Aramaic Proverbs, 105–7); see also Kottsieper, Die Sprache, 243, who argues against  עש being an Akkadian loan-word; cf. Kottsieper, “Die alttestamentliche Weisheit im Licht aramäischer Weisheitstraditionen,” 133.

78 For Akkadian influences on Aramaic, see S. A. Kaufman, The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic (AS 19; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), esp. 8–9; cf. Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 16. On the Elephantine documents also being characterized as “Imperial Aramaic,” along with the concomitant “Assyrianization” see Kutscher, “Aramaic,” 363–64; following Muffs, Studies, 196. This change in Ahiqar studies coincided with a general change in the Semitic linguistics field which began to understand that influence was not one-directional; that is, just as Assyrian began to assert influence on Aramaic, so also did Aramaic (especially by the time of the Neo-Assyrian empire) assert influence on Akkadian. On this crisscrossing of linguistic influence and the fashionable term “Assyrian-Aramaic symbiosis,” especially as it relates to Ahiqar, see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar–Sprüche, 34; F. Mario Fales, Aramaic Epigraphs on Clay Tablets of the Neo-Assyrian Period (Materiali per il Lessico Aramaico 1; Rome: Università degli Studi “La Sapienza,” 1986), esp. 44–46; Küchler, Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen, 364–65; André Lemaire, “Remarks on the Aramaic of Upper Mesopotamia in the Seventh Century B.C.,” in Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting (ed. H. Gzella and M. L. Folmer; Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 50; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 77–92; finally, I would be remiss if did not point to the recent publication by Holger Gzella, A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings
Lindenberger, in the introduction to his philological and paleographic commentary on the sayings, who convincingly and concisely argued that the Aramaic origins of Ahiqar should no longer be questioned. For one, he pointed out that neither a story’s historical setting nor the presence of loan-words can hardly be used as justification for linguistic concerns. If that were the case, then, Lindenberger sardonically proposes that “it would be equally possible to argue that the book of Daniel was originally written in Akkadian!” Among other factors, Lindenberger noted that the presence of Aramaic puns (e.g., Ahiqar 128: שין “sin” and צח “arrow”) and the lack of any typical Akkadian stylistic features speaks against it being a translation.

The linguistic studies by Kutscher and especially Greenfield and Lindenberger from the 1970s and early 1980s represent one of the major milestones in the history of Ahiqar scholarship. Their arguments for an Aramaic original were accepted by nearly every subsequent scholar. Yet

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80 Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 16.
81 Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 17.
82 There are, however, a few exceptions who still appraise the connection between Ahiqar and Akkadian literature to be so close as to warrant the possibility of an originally Akkadian form of Ahiqar. Lindenberger has even commented on the “tenaciousness” of such a view in the face of evidence against it (Aramaic Proverbs, 29). For recent scholars who still favor an Akkadian original, see, e.g., Daniel Bodin, “The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar and Some Akkadian and Hebrew Parallels,” in Aliento: Corpus anciens et bases de données (ed. Marie-Christine Bornes-Varol and Marie-Sol Ortola; Vol. 2 of Collection Aliento; Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2011), 13–25, esp. 17–19; and Simo Parpola, “Il retroterra assiro di Ahiqar,” in Il Saggio Ahiqar, 91–112. Parpola’s arguments here are certainly unique: on the one hand, he argues for an Akkadian original (at least upon which some part of the Aramaic is based) and he seems to take seriously that Ahiqar was a historical figure from the Neo-Assyrian court; both of these views are fairly positivist in their estimation of the narrative (i.e., seeing the story more as history, really autobiography, rather than as fiction). On the other hand, Parpola downplays the dialectical differences and, consequently, the independent origins of the sayings and story (pointing to similarly structured texts, especially the Code of Hammurapi, which also reflects different dialectical traits in the respectively distinct formal parts—prologue vs. legal code); moreover, he even suggests Egypt (specifically an Assyrian settlement from the 8th c. B.C.E.) as a possible location for its original production. These latter two ideas (though grounded on wholly different principles) are relatively “progressive,” as we will see, in terms of Ahiqar scholarship. Needless to say, this speculative, albeit intriguing, hypothesis has met disapproval (it is even questioned by the editors of the same volume in which it is published! See Contini and
in addition to the Aramaic vs. Akkadian question and perhaps more significant for future studies, Greenfield and Kutscher also demonstrated that the sayings and the narrative represented two different dialects of Aramaic.\textsuperscript{83} The sayings, in their view, attested a much earlier form, while the narrative displayed the typical features of the so-called Reichsaramäisch or Standard Literary Aramaic that was developed during the Neo-Babylonian period and was later stabilized and prevalent during the Achaemenid era.\textsuperscript{84} Besides the chronological distinction, they recognized a geographical one, as well. In a later article, Greenfield stated his views succinctly: “The framework story is in early Standard Literary Aramaic and is Eastern in linguistic coloring, while the Proverb collection is written in the ‘Mesopotamian’ dialect and is Western.”\textsuperscript{85} Kutscher did recognize a difference in dialect between narrative and sayings, but it should be noted that he also found in the sayings a combination of both Western and Eastern features.\textsuperscript{86}

The discussion about the Aramaic dialects of \textit{Ahiqar}, however, has not gone on without some debate. While, there is near complete consensus that the narrative belongs firmly to Reichsaramäisch, there has continued to be some disagreement (as indicated already by Kutscher’s quote above) surrounding the precise dialect of the sayings, and thus its exact provenance and date. Lindenberger followed the basic outlook that the two sections were distinct linguistically, but he,


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{83} Interestingly, it was Stummer, \textit{Der kritische Wert}, 80–81, who, in 1914 (!) had already suggested that the sayings were older than the narrative; cf. Niehr, \textit{Aramäischer Ahiqar}, 13.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{84} In many ways, this conclusion has left the largest imprint on \textit{Ahiqar} scholarship, for since then hardly any study has treated both sections together. As a result, the history of scholarship is split into two paths, with a disproportionate amount of attention paid to the sayings. This is immediately obvious in the fact that the all three monographs on \textit{Ahiqar} (two of which—Lindenberger and Weigl—are actually commentaries and third—Kottsieper—is a grammar) since Greenfield/Kutscher are concerned \textit{exclusively} with the sayings. There is no such lengthy study on just the narrative portions.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{85} Jonas C. Greenfield, “Early Aramaic Poetry,” \textit{JANESCU} 11 (1979):45–51, citation at 45–46; Greenfield, “The Dialects of Early Aramaic,” \textit{JANESCU} 97 provides a list of features which he found in the sayings that pointed to a Western provenance (e.g., the dissimilation of emphatics; the \textit{mem}-prefix in Pael and Haphel infinitives; the lack of Akkadian loan-words; use of strict construct state over against the analytic use with \textit{dy/zy}, etc.). Some of these will be discussed below.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{86} Kutscher, “Aramaic,” 365–66.}
too, offers a cautionary argument about such a strict dichotomy of eastern/western when it came to the sayings, especially at such an early date and on the basis of such a fragmentary witness.\textsuperscript{87} In contrast to the “bipolar” model, Lindenberger suggests a “continuum” whereby the dialectical features of a language that has a widespread distribution—and Aramaic certainly did—cannot easily be distinguished between one particular locale (or point in time, for that matter) and another.\textsuperscript{88} Thus, Lindenberger argues: “in dealing with a text of unknown date and provenance written in a sparsely attested dialect, we must be extremely cautious in drawing conclusions about time and place based on developmental typology of the language.”\textsuperscript{89} Nevertheless, he does offer a hypothesis about the provenance of the sayings, suggesting “a locale in northern Syria.” This is based, in part, on the observed Canaanite linguistic features as well as on the specific gods mentioned by name in the sayings.\textsuperscript{90}

The Northern hypothesis put forward, albeit cautiously, by Greenfield and Lindenberger would be challenged directly by Ingo Kottsieper in the revised publication of his dissertation \textit{Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche}.\textsuperscript{91} His study, as its title indicates, is essentially a grammatical analysis

\textsuperscript{87} See “Appendix A” in Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 279–304, esp. 292–94.

\textsuperscript{88} To this point, we might add Kutscher’s (“Aramaic,” 366) important comment regarding this “clash” of dialectical features: “proverbs keep wandering and it is therefore not surprising to find in them ingredients of many dialects.”

\textsuperscript{89} Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 294. It is ironic that Lindenberger conveys such a cautious attitude in this regard, and yet when it comes to the relationship between the sayings and the narrative (on a literary level?) he is quite harsh: “The Aramaic version does not integrate the narrative and sayings at all. Nowhere is there any bridge from one to the other. There are simply columns which contain portions of the narrative and other disconnected columns which contain sayings” (\textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 18). To a certain extent, this is correct—we do not have “a bridge from one to the other,” but this is likely due to an accident of preservation, and should not be taken to imply an irreconcilable distinction when it comes to interpretation. Lindenberger does admit (32 n. 30) that “we cannot state absolutely that no such link can have existed,” yet he continues “there is no hint of it [= the link] in the extant text,” and even adds elsewhere (18) that “a more natural reading of the narrative fragments leads to the conclusion that the proverbs were not embedded in the story but separate from it.” Such a strong opinion on their relationship has certainly left its imprint on later studies, some of which take it as a given that they two are irreconcilable.


\textsuperscript{91} Briefly, it must be said that this is only the first in a long list of publications by Kottsieper, whose work on Ahiqar—which continues up to the writing of this study—is substantial. No one has published as much on the Aramaic Book
of the sayings of *Ahiqar* and represents one of the major benchmarks in *Ahiqar* scholarship.\(^{92}\) In addition to providing a transliteration, translation, detailed philological and lexical notes, an annotated dictionary, and a grammatical discussion of forms (verbs, nouns, etc.), Kottsieper includes a concise and synthesized summation of the dialectical features.\(^{93}\) As for the dialect of the sayings, he has described it (in a later article) as “Ausläufer des Altaramäischen.”\(^{94}\) Most importantly, at least for the issue of dialect, Kottsieper argues that the sayings exhibit a *uniform* linguistic layer\(^ {95}\) and that they do *not* belong to the North-Syrian area but rather to a southern Syrian one, most likely the Aramaic states of ante-Lebanon or around Damascus.\(^ {96}\) His reasons for this are: the use of *m*-prefix in the G-stem infinitive; the use of the third, masc. plural form for third, fem. plural verbs; not a single form found among the sayings is elsewhere represented only among Eastern Aramaic texts; following Greenfield, there are no Akkadianisms present; against this, there are “viele Kanaanismen”; adding to this last point, even those rare Akkadian loanwords that were still acknowledged (e.g., יבִלָע and זִבֶּל) come, in fact, “aus der kan. Sprachen des *Ahiqar*, and though many of his observations—e.g., on the arrangement of the columns; the reconstruction and translation of key passages; and the provenance of the sayings—have met strong disagreement, the sheer volume of his contributions to the present understanding of *Ahiqar* are unmatched and certainly should not be overlooked!\(^ {92}\) Weigl’s description (*Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 37) of Kottsieper’s book is worth noting: “Er näherte sich der Fragestellung mit einer ausschließlich philologisch-semitistisch ausgerichteten Perspektive und präsentierte seine Hypothesen—ganz im Stil der großen Grammatiken eines W. Gesenius oder P. Joüon—in Form einer nach Paragraphen geordneten ‘klassischen’ Grammatik.”

\(^{93}\) These are listed on pp. 241–46. In addition to the ones discussed here, I have already mentioned above that Kottsieper also presents in this volume an alternative arrangement of the columns, as well as numerous readings of individual passages that are distinct from most of the other editions; further, some of the previously understood Akkadian loanwords that Kottsieper understands as Western (i.e., Canaanite/Phoenician) are also referenced above (but see esp. pp. 242–44). The dating of the dialect will be mentioned shortly.

\(^{94}\) Kottsieper, “Die alttestamentliche Weisheit,” 131.

\(^{95}\) On this point, Kottsieper (p. 241) adds: “Die Abweichungen einzelner Formen von der Mehrzahl der übrigen Belege sind entweder als Lehnhwort oder aber als spätere Zufüngung einzuordnen.”

\(^{96}\) In Kottsieper’s words (pp. 241–42), “der Dialekt [ist] wohl in den südägyptischen Raum zu lokalisieren,” and then later (p. 245): “Als Herkunftsgebiet bieten sich dann die aram. Staaten des Anti–libanon bzw. Um Damaskus an.”
westsyrischen Raumes”; and the presence of Egyptian loanwords. Kottsieper supports these linguistic observations with mention of cultural and topographical features that align well with the realia of southern Syria—for example, that wine is the usual drink rather than beer.

Despite the recognized value in much of the linguistic analyses throughout his volume, Kottsieper’s claim for a southern Syrian provenance has not been well received, and many of his observations have come under criticism. In particular, some of his etymological connections are questionable, the lack of Akkadian influence is overstated, and his suggestion that generally taken to be a plural based on the common, later Eastern Aramaic plural morphology /qalal/- of the sing. formulation /qall/- is a singular form, though carrying a plural meaning is


98 Other features include the reference to bears, the Sidonian and Arabian saying, the reference to the sea and the tidal wave, etc. These are listed on p. 245. Very shortly after his monograph, Kottsieper published an article defending this thesis about the provenance; see “Die alttestamentliche Weisheit,” 128–62.

99 See, for example, see the reviews of Kottsieper, Die Sprache, by K. Beyer, Theologische Literaturzeitung 116 (1991): 733–34 and T. Muraoka, JSS 40 (1995): 332–33; cf. also the harsh criticism by Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar–Sprüche, 35–37, who, among other things, questions Kottsieper’s motivations for locating Ahiqar to an area that would conveniently increase its interest for biblical scholars, hence: “Sowohl die vom Autor praktizierte hypothesenfreudige Methodik als auch sein grob verallgemeinernder und simplifizierender Stil stießen in der Forschung auf—berechtigten—Widerstand. Die Studie ist nicht nur methodisch schwer defizitär, sie trägt auch außer auf Allgemeinplätzen und Banalitäten beruhenden Einsichten … nichts wirklich Neues zur Diskussion.” For a positive review, though not without some criticisms, see those of S. D. Sperling, CBQ 55 (1993): 340–42 and Bernard Grossfeld, JBL 113 (1994): 326–28. As is already obvious by the passage in Weigl cited above, the North vs. South Syrian debate led to some heated arguments between Kottsieper and others, Weigl in particular. The unfortunate consequences of which are that because there is much to be criticized by Kottsieper, some of his other, sounder arguments have been dismissed too casually (see, for example, the comments about Kottsieper by Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 39 n. 104, which are incorrect). This should not be taken to mean that his translation and edition had no influence; for examples of subsequent studies that followed Kottsieper closely, see Andreas Scherer, “Vielfalt und Ordnung,” esp. 28–30 and K. Engelken, “Ba’alšamem: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Monographie H. Niehrs,” ZAW 108 (1996): 233–248, 391–407, esp. 403–5.

100 For example, in the case of Kottsieper turns to “Southern Tuarge, a language remote from Aramaic,” rather than the more realistic Akkadian mindēma (citation from Sperling, 341); cf. comments by Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 29 n. 14.
doubtful. Other subsequent studies continued to favor the northern Syrian (western Mesopotamian) hypothesis over against that of Kottsieper’s, with the most notable being those by Herbert Niehr and Michael Weigl. Niehr, following earlier studies (especially Lindenberger), suggests one of the Northern Aramean kingdoms which flourished in the 9th and 8th centuries before their destruction by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He hesitates to name one of the kingdoms specifically, but adds “vielleicht kann man an das obere Euphrattal denken, eine Gegend, für die das Zusammentreffen von Luwier, Aramäern und Assyrern bisher am besten untersucht worden ist.”

Likewise, Weigl, in his 2010 monograph, sides with the Northern hypothesis. Such a view depends on the cumulative effect of a number of linguistic features, “die sich nur durch eine gewisse Ostorientierung des aramäischen Dialekts zumindest einzelner Sprüche oder

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101 See full discussion in Kottsieper, *Die Sprache*, 118–21. For the argument that it is plural and, thus, indicative of an Eastern dialect, see, e.g., Kutscher, “Aramaic,” 365–66; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 645–46; on this form in its Middle Aramaic, eastern attestations see, e.g., W. Randall Garr, “The Determined Plural Ending –ē in Targum Onqelos,” in *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting*, 173–206. It should be added that increasing evidence seems to support Kottsieper on this point; see the apparent singular usage (in a very similar idiom as in *Ahiqar*) on an Aramaic bowl from the 3rd or 2nd c. BCE in E. Eshel, A. Kloner, and E. Puech, “Aramaic Scribal Exercises of the Hellenistic Period from Maresha: Bowls A and B,” *BASOR* 345 (2007): 41–47 (this point was brought to my attention by Kottsieper through personal correspondence).

102 Beyer, review of Kottsieper, 733.


Spruchgruppen erklären lassen.”\footnote{Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 677. The most notable features, according to Weigl, are: the construction with /operator\textsuperscript{1} followed by a cardinal number (\textit{Ahiq}. 187); the plural emphatic -ē ending in ʩʦ (98, 197; discussed above); and the dissimilation of emphatics before velars or velarized consonants (e.g., ʩʦ 85).} Weigl further suggests a relatively specific area as a likely point of origin:

In die Region zwischen den Flüssen Balīḫ und Ḥābūr, und dort wiederum am ehesten in eines der bedeutenden aramäischen Lokalzentren: Harrān, Gozān oder Sikkān, die auch nach der politischen Eingliederung in das assyrische Reich ihre Prägung durch die aramäische Kulturtradition nicht verloren und schon mehr als ein Jahrhundert zuvor durch die auf Tel Fekheriyē geborgene zweisprachige Votivstatue des Hadd-yiṯi den symbiotischen Interaktionsprozess zwischen westlichen und östlichen Kulturelementen auf eindrucksvolle Weise dokumentiert hatten.\footnote{Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 678.}

As is evident, Weigl’s proposal for the Ḥābūr river basin as the specific provenance for \textit{Ahiqar} depends a great deal on the observed linguistic affinities between the \textit{Ahiqar} sayings and the Aramaic of the Tel Fekheriyē inscription.\footnote{Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 678.} Yet, Weigl does not deny the differences between the two, particularly in the readily apparent Western (and Canaanite) features of the \textit{Ahiqar} sayings. To account for this he poses an interesting theory: the collection may represent the literary product of one of the many large groups of deportees “aus dem \textit{syro-palästinischen Raum}” who were transported eastward to various locations (e.g., Harran, Gozan, Sikkan) at the end of the 8\textsuperscript{th} and beginning of the 7\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E.\footnote{Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 678–79. This theory is not original to Weigl, as it was hinted at, almost in passing, by Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 22.}

Briefly, mention should be made of the various dates that have been suggested for the composition of \textit{Ahiqar}. Although this point certainly hinges on much of the discussion above about dialect and provenance, it has been less controversial since the chronological window is relatively

\footnote{See the section title “Die Achikar-Sprüche und die Bilingue aus Tel Fekheriyē” in ibid., 670–77; cf. S. A. Kaufman, “Reflections on the Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual from Tell Fakhrīyeh,” \textit{Maarav} 3 (1982): 137–175, esp. 151–52; note also that the Habur valley was proposed earlier as a possible provenance for \textit{Ahiqar} by Jonas C. Greenfield, “Two Proverbs of Ahiqar,” in \textit{Lingering Over Words} (ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990), 195–202, at 196. For an earlier reference to \textit{Ahiqar} as reflecting dialectical traits from other texts of the Ḥābūr area (Bar Rakib and Neirab), see Tropper, \textit{Die Inschriften}, 299.}
small. The Aramaic papyri, of course, provide a convenient terminus ante quem at around 425 B.C.E, and, at least for the narrative, the mention of Esarhaddon provides the terminus post quem. Further, it was recognized immediately that the language was reminiscent of Reichsaramäisch. Thus, at the very beginning of Ahiqar scholarship, Sachau proposed a date between 550 and 450 B.C.E., allowing for some time between its composition and its arrival in Elephantine. The earlier theories about an Akkadian original notwithstanding, this window remained essentially unchanged until the 1970s when the narrative and sayings were separated on linguistic grounds.  

The proposed dating of the narrative has remained basically the same, ca. 550–450 B.C.E., with only minimal variation. It often depends on whether a particular study emphasizes the Mesopotamian context (even without suggesting an Akkadian original) or if it holds to the observable Persian influences. Niehr has aptly noted that the Assyriologists tend to prefer the earlier dates, while biblical scholars are often more comfortable at the latter end of the spectrum.  

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111 There are still some that see Ahiqar as a product of the Neo-Assyrian court, whether in Akkadian or Aramaic, and thus propose earlier dates into the 7th c. B.C.E. Interestingly, Greenfield—who was so integral to “freeing” Ahiqar from its Akkadian background—has also suggested that the narrative (in some form) may go back as far as the reign of Esarhaddon himself and indicated that the even the sayings may have been compiled by Esarhaddon; see Greenfield, “The Wisdom of Ahiqar,” in Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton (ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43–52, at 49. Those who prefer the Neo-Assyrian court as the provenance and date for the narrative are generally the same who see in it some historical kernel (see discussion below).  

112 The observation of Old Persian influences on the narrative was already made by Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 205–6 (who unfortunately assumed this meant a Persian intermediary translation). While they have been dismissed by later scholars (e.g., Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 31 n. 24), a few studies have since demonstrated that the narrative does, in fact, contain Persian features; see, e.g., Greenfield, “Studies in Aramaic Lexicography,” JAOS 82 (1962): 290–99, esp. 292–93, and John Makujina, “Old Persian and the Marking of Narrative Sequence in Biblical Aramaic: The Possible Influence of Pasva on Bdayin and dayin Author(s),” JNES 72 (2013): 85–97, esp. 88–89.  

113 Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 11; cf. e.g., Parpola, “Retroterra,” 106. As result, most agree that it was either put into writing during the Achaemenid period (which would not allow much room before the Elephantine papyri!) or, at the very least, it underwent a Persian “contemporization.”
As for the sayings, the disparity is slightly greater, with the earliest proposals dating to the late 9th or early 8th c. and the latest to the beginning of the 6th c. B.C.E.\textsuperscript{114} Most, however, agree with Kottsieper’s suggestion for the end of the 8th/beginning of the 7th c. as a likely time-frame, hence 725–650 B.C.E.\textsuperscript{115}

A final, unfortunate aspect of this thread of research has to do with the nearly continuous attention by scholars on the possible historicity of the text and, likewise, on the historical figure Ahiqar. Early scholars familiar with Assyrian materials searched for names and uncritically assigned a one-to-one correspondence between the disparate sources and the 5th c. Aramaic text. Von Soden\textsuperscript{116} and Olmstead\textsuperscript{117} were among the first to try and connect Ahiqar, Nabusumiskun,

\textsuperscript{114} This does not include the spurious suggestion by Michael Chyutin, \textit{Tendentious Hagiographies: Jewish Propagandist Fiction BCE} (LSTS; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 32–33, that \textit{Ahiqar} was composed by “a Jewish author living in Elephantine”; while intriguing, Chyutin offers little evidence for this suggestion.

\textsuperscript{115} N.B. the “date” for the sayings generally refers to when they were collected, as most studies readily admit that on an individual basis the sayings could have been formulated across a long period and through a series of oral and written transmissions—for example, Weigl suggests that some of the earliest sayings could have been coined as early as 1200 B.C.E., though he maintains that the first collection (and possible set-to-writing) occurred around 700 B.C.E.; cf. Weigl, \textit{Die aramäische Achikar-Sprüche}, 689–90 (see also pp. 36–37); Kottsieper, \textit{Die Sprache}, 175; cf. Niehr, \textit{Aramäischer Ahiqar}, 21; F. Mario Fales, “Riflessioni sull’Ahiqar di Elefantina,” \textit{OAM} 1 (1993): 39–60. It seems unnecessary to give in detail the specific leanings (earlier or later) of each individual study, as there is not much discrepancy between the various ranges suggested.


\textsuperscript{117} A. T. Olmstead, “Intertestamental Studies” \textit{JAOS} 56 (1936): 242–57, at 243: “Ahiqar, ‘counsellor of all Assyria and seal bearer of king Sinaherib,’” [quote from Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar} 1–2] is Ahiqar, second officer of Barhalza, who appears in a document of 698, probably also the Ahiqar, official of Bit Sinibni, mentioned in a letter. His nephew and adopted son, Nadin, is the scribe Nadinnu, who appears in 671 and writes letters to Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. When Nadin accused Ahiqar to Asurahiddan … the king summoned Nabu-sum-iskun, who mounted his swift horse in pursuit; he is well known as the \textit{mukīl apāte}, ‘rein holder,’ or cavalry commander, of Sennacherib and writer of several letters. Perhaps the disgrace of Ahiqar was connected with the harem intrigues for the throne at the close of Esarhaddon’s reign when other important officials met a worse fate.” Such assumptions were made despite there being nothing in the Akkadian materials to connect the persons mentioned there directly (or indirectly) with the characters in \textit{Ahiqar} other than similarity in name and approximately same date (with the only slight exception in Nabusumiskun who, in the story, is said to ride a horse swiftly). In fact, as von Soden already admitted (“Die Unterweltsvision,” 28), if we take claims about Ahiqar’s status in the Aramaic text at face value than it couldn’t be the same person referred
and Nadan with people of the same or similar names mentioned in Neo-Assyrian documents from the 7th c. B.C.E.\textsuperscript{118}

Also, much like the arguments for an Akkadian original, scholars pointed to certain details of the story, both linguistic and the \textit{realia}, which seemed to support the historicity of the account, for example: Akkadianisms and Akkadian loan-words (see above); the correct spelling of the names, especially Nabusumiskun and the kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon;\textsuperscript{119} mention of the

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to in the letters, who was merely “second officer” to Barhalza and (at the same time no less!) the “official of Bit Sinibi.” It appears that in Olmstead’s mind (and many others) there could be only one person named something like Ahiqar/Ahiaqar throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. I use this as an illustration of the often rudimentary, uncritical way the ancient texts were treated. It is as if the discovery of the Tel–Dan inscription with its mention of “bet–David” proves that David slept with Bathsheba or, even more, that David composed all of the psalms associated with his name; see also Cullen I. K. Story, “The Book of Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Literature,” \textit{JBL} 64 (1945): 319–37, esp. 331–32.

\textsuperscript{118} For a brief overview of the discussion of dates and provenances from an Aramaicists perspective see Folmer, \textit{The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period}, 732–34.

\textsuperscript{119} That a “correctly” spelled name is evidence for historicity is illogical and hardly provides evidence for historical personages behind the characters; see the comments by Stanley A. Cook, “The Significance of the Elephantine Papyri for the History of the Hebrew Religion,” \textit{The American Journal of Theology} 19 (1915): 346–82, at 367: “Written in the first person, the narrative is a good specimen of quasi-autobiographical literature, but of no independent value as a historical source, in spite of its irreproachable names (Sennacherib and Esarhaddon).” That Nabusumiskun, in particular, is spelled correctly is not surprising given that such a name is found even among the Elephantine Aramaic papyri (cf. \textit{TAD} 2:20; keep in mind that the Judeans interacted—and on some occasions intermarried—with a wide variety of ethnicities, including Babylonians). Some also point out that the Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar} has the correct order for the rule of kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon; this in itself should not be that important, except that in nearly all of the later versions the order is reversed, i.e., Esarhaddon plays the role of father/predecessor to Sennacherib (cf. Harris, “The History,” in \textit{APOT}, 2:720). But does this really make the Aramaic text more or less “historical”? Again, it is a logical fallacy, built on the assumption that in cases where mistakes are made (spelling, order, etc.) it speaks against the historical accuracy. This does not, however, prove the opposite. As for the inaccuracies in the later versions, we might consider Judith, Daniel, Aesop, Tobit, and many other similar stories and court tales which make anachronistic errors. The phenomenon is so frequent (and, at times, egregious) that it suggests an intentional literary trope. For a brief summary of how these stories (esp. Judith, Tobit, and \textit{Ahiqar}) relate to history (albeit with a cautiously conservative outlook) see Millard, “Judith, Tobit, Ahiqar and History,” 195–203.
The deity Shamash, and Esarhaddon’s fondness for proverbs and well-known epithet “Merciful,” and Esarhaddon’s purportedly Aramaic mother.

Added to these observations, in 1960 an Akkadian inscription dated to the Seleucid era (ca. 164 B.C.E.) from the ancient site of Uruk (Warka) was discovered. It comprises a list of Mesopotamian kings (antediluvian and postdiluvian) as well as the apkallu and ummānu for each ruler. Among these we find the passage: “During the reign of Esarhaddon, the king, Aba-Enlil-dari

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120 It should be pointed out, though, that the vocalization for Šamaš as it appears in Ahiqar usually follows Akkadian convention, but there is nothing that suggests it must do so; moreover, that a solar deity would feature in the context of divine justice—while having precedent in Mesopotamian texts—is nearly ubiquitous across the Ancient Near East. One might also point out that Shamash does not appear in the extant narrative portions (nor any deity for that matter) and thus would provide no evidence for the historical aspects of the story, especially among those that see the sayings as deriving from elsewhere. See the discussion on Shamash in Chapter 4 below, but cf. also Lindenberger, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” 112–14; Lipinski, Aramaeans, 623–25; and Mark Smith, The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 115–20.

121 Albright, “Babylonian Sage,” 64, was among the first to point out that a proverb cited by Esarhaddon in one of his letters (Harper, Letters no. 403) has a parallel in the later Syriac Ahiqar (note that earlier Meissner, Sprichwörter, had erroneously cited the Aramaic Ahiqar as having the parallel); cf. Küchler, Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen, 329.

122 See line 53: “Easarhaddon the king is merciful as is known” ( Eašarra ša šamaš 듯 Leoš šamaš ь); in the proverbs, line 91, we find the phrase “A king is like (the) Merciful One” ( ממלכת רַהַנּ). On this point with reference to Akkadian sources, see Greenfield, “Wisdom of Ahiqar,” 49–50, who also notes that “merciful” is a frequent epithet of the solar deity and Esarhaddon “was a devotee of Shamash”; Greenfield, “From ‘Ih Rhm to al–Rahān: The Source of a Divine Epithet,” in Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications and Interaction, Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner (ed. B. H. H. Mary, J. L. Hayes, and F. Astren; Brill’s Series in Jewish Studies 27; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 381–94, esp. 382–84; and Lindenberger, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” 110–11 n. 31.


124 The published edition of this tablet can be found in Jan van Dijk and Werner R. Mayer, Texte aus dem Rès–Heiligtum in Uruk-Warka (Bagdader Mitteilungen Beiheft 2; Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1980), text no. 89. For a more recent transcription with translation and commentary, see Alan Lenzi, “The Uruk List of Kings and Sages and Late Mesopotamian Scholarship,” JANER 8 (2008): 137–70, esp. 141, 143 (the translation below follows Lenzi).
was scholar (ummānu), whom the Arameans call Ahiqar.”

The tablet reinforced the notion of historicity for many of the early studies and continued to influence subsequent ones—this despite the fact that it has a Seleucid date as well as the obvious problems within the text itself. As Tawny Holm has rightly noted, “The Uruk text only attests to a Seleucid-era tradition of Ahiqar, however, and does not necessarily represent a historical reality five centuries earlier.”

With some exception, recent studies have eschewed the historical search as either unimportant or unattainable. Also, the supposed accuracy with which it depicts an Assyrian

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126 See, for example, Küchler’s summary of the “historicity” of Ahiqar (Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen, 326–31) in which he cites the Uruk inscription as “aussagekräftiges Zeugnis.” Consider also the comments by Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 22: “The tablet itself dates from the Seleucid era, but appears to be based on much older traditions. It provides for the first time independent evidence from the Mesopotamian side of the existence of a wise man, presumably an Aramean, whose name, date, and role match those in the Aramaic and other traditions about Ahiqar.”

What a coincidence that a 2nd century text would match perfectly with a narrative tradition that by its time was nearly 400 years old and had probably already circulated throughout the eastern Mediterranean and much of Mesopotamia. For a study that takes the Uruk tablet as historical fact, see Stephanie Dalley, “Assyrian Court Narratives in Aramaic and Egyptian: Historical Fiction,” in Historiography in the Cuneiform World: Proceedings of the XLVe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Part I (ed. T. Abusch et al.; Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2001), 149–61; for a different approach, see John Strugnell, “Problems,” 204–11

127 Besides the legendary character of many of the listings (which includes Gilgamesh), the supposed Akkadian name for Ahiqar (Aba-Enlil-dari) is unknown at the time of Esarhaddon, but instead is the exact parallel of a Sumerian wise-king (Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ḫātin); see the discussion in Holm, “Memories of Sennacherib,” 302. Even Parpola, “Retroterra,” 106–11, has called the tablet (as is) pure fiction because of the clearly anachronistic associations, though he also has suggested that this Sumerian wise-king may be the author of the Counsels of Wisdom and thus it is not surprising that these two legendary wise figures (he and Ahiqar) would be brought together.


129 See, for example, the recent comments by Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 704–9, esp. 704: “so stellt sich doch zwangsläufig die Frage, ob die Suche nach dem ‘historischen’ Achikar nicht grundsätzlich zum Scheitern verurteilt sein muss, und ob sie überhaupt je zu einem überzeugenden Ergebnis führen kann.”
environment must be weighed against the inaccuracies (which are often overlooked), as well as reckoned with a strong possibility that these features are simply the result of verisimilitude. Indeed, most of the observations from above are circumstantial at best, and smack of an uncritical positivism, especially when arbitrarily connecting the characters to any known document that mentions a person of the same (or similar) name. Of course, one could certainly grant that this story, even the wisdom, was inspired by some real figure—who may have even been involved in a court drama concerning treason or succession—that was later memorialized by a narrative drama. Still, to continue to search for a “historical” Ahiqar seems a misguided endeavor, much like if we were to continue to speak of Daniel as a historical figure from the Neo-Babylonian period. It is better instead to appreciate the Book of Ahiqar as a work of fiction, not that this should lessen its historical value (for, indeed, I think it can tell us a great deal), only that the who, what, and (most importantly) the how of its relating history are much different.

130 Niehr’s sentiments (Aramäischer Ahiqar, 10) are telling: “In alle diesen Fällen erübrigt sich die Frage nach der Historizität dieser literarischen Gestalten.” For a brief overview of this discussion, see Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 7–10; Holm, “Memories of Sennacherib,” 302–4; Lindenberger, “Ahiqar” in OTP 2:480–83. For a well-crafted counterview to the arguments for historicity see Michael Chyutin, Tendentious Hagiographies, 26–34; cf. Fales, “Riflessioni sull’Ahiqar di Elefantina,” 39–60. Parpola remains one of the major exceptions, even trying to connect Ahiqar directly to one of the named ummānē of Sennacherib from Neo-Assyrian records; see Parpola, “Retroterra,” 110; cf. Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in Death in Mesopotamia (ed. B. Alster; Copenhagen, 1980), 171–82. Unfortunately, though, this “search” has left its imprint on the numerous casual references to Ahiqar by non-specialists.

131 For example, M. J. Luzzatto, “Grecia e Vicino Oriente: tracce della ‘Storia di Ahiqar’ nella cultura greca tra vi e v secolo a.C.,” Quaderni di Storia 36 (1992): 5–84, cites the passage where Clement (in the 2nd c. C.E.) accuses Democritus (from 5th c. B.C.E. Greece) of plagiarizing a “stele of Achikaros,” and proceeds to claim that a real stele existed, written in Akkadian, that commemorated the wisdom of a historical sage from the Neo-Assyrian court. This obviously far-reaching hypothesis is soundly denounced by Fales, “Storia,” 142–45; cf. Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 31–32 n. 83.

132 This statement will be unpacked more below. I would add here, though, the comments by Niehr (Aramäischer Ahiqar, 10 with a citation of Parpola, “Retroterra,” 101) on how to understand the figure of Ahiqar: “Dieser letzte Aspekt lässt sich weiter präzisieren, da die Ahiqar-Erzählung das Ziel verfolgt, Ahiqar als Identifikationsfigur für die aramäischen Einwohner des Assyrerreichs zu etablieren: ‘… un uomo che parlava la loro lingua, che era arrivato ai più alti gradi dell’impero, un saggio secondo solo al re, l’epitome della suprema sagezza, conoscenza e virtù.’” This near truism for the function of literary protagonists need not only apply to subjects under the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
Before moving forward, a brief response to this complicated section seems necessary. The linguistic analysis of the Elephantine text has had serious implications for the trajectory of *Ahiqar* scholarship.\textsuperscript{133} As the next section will show, the Akkadian connections (though now largely dismissed) have left *Ahiqar’s* literary background firmly in the Mesopotamian context; this remains the case even with the sayings, which are supposedly “frei von irgendwelchen Akkadismen.”\textsuperscript{134} Thus, nearly every study concerned with the literary influences on *Ahiqar*, looks north and eastward toward Mesopotamia. Secondly, and probably most important, any investigation of the Aramaic *Book of Ahiqar* must reckon with the fact that nearly every study since the 1970s has treated either the narrative or the proverbs.\textsuperscript{135} There are very few sustained treatments of *Ahiqar* that have engaged the narrative and the sayings together. In other words, the pre-history of the Aramaic *Ahiqar*—its hypothetical Urtext, provenance, and date of composition—has set the precedence for interpretation and, to a large extent, comparison.

This study, on the other hand, will take a different approach. In terms of language, provenance, and date, the importance lies not in the supposed “original,” but in that of the text as

One might also consider Konstantakos, *Akicharos*, 1:11, who seems to follow Parpola’s suggestion about seeing a specific historical person as the inspiration for the first part of the *Ahiqar* narrative (the degradation and rehabilitation of a courtier), but he also views the second half of the story, i.e. the riddle contest, (which, admittedly, is not extant in the Aramaic) as an extended metaphor for the political conflicts between Assyria and Egypt during the 7\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E. which eventually saw the Assyrians triumph.

\textsuperscript{133} Not mentioned above, two recent Aramaic grammars are focused primarily on the corpus of materials with which the *Ahiqar* papyri are situated and thus should be considered in any linguistic analysis of the text; these are M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation* (OLA 68; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), see esp. 731–41, and Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HdO 132; Leiden: Brill, 1998).


\textsuperscript{135} The few notable exceptions that argue for a contemporaneous composition of both sayings and narrative are Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen*, and Parpola, “Retroterra.” Küchler (p. 330) recognizes the linguistic differences as pointed out by Greenfield and Kutsher, yet maintains that “Eine grundsätzliche Dissozierung von Rahmenerzählung und Weisheitssammlung ist aber trotzdem nicht anzuraten”; he points to other ancient examples that display some linguistic and stylistic diversity (e.g., Hesiod, *Works and Days*; Tobit; *Aristeas*; Ethiopic Secundus). Parpola (pp. 94 and 101), likewise cites ancient precedent for combining two distinct forms, especially the *Code of Hammurabi*. Following this logic, one might also add examples from Egyptian literature, e.g., *Instructions of Ptahhotep*, *Instructions of Amenemut I for his son Sesostiris*, and (possibly) the *Brooklyn Wisdom Text*. 

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we have it. In other words, when it comes to interpretation and comparison, the present form of the text is paramount, and the primary context will be that of the papyri themselves, whose date and location are securely situated in late 5th c. B.C.E. Elephantine.

1.2.3 Genre, Literary Background, and Literary Environment

Turning now to a survey of the comparative literary analyses of *Ahiqar*, it is important to recall that the secondary literature on *Ahiqar* is scattered across numerous articles and book chapters wherein only select passages of *Ahiqar* are compared with other primary sources. There are hardly any analyses that offer a comprehensive assessment of *Ahiqar* in light of comparative materials.

The issue of genre will be discussed with more detail in the following chapter, but this section will review the various ways scholars have assessed *Ahiqar* in light of its literary influences and comparative literature. Even before Greenfield/Kutscher’s linguistic separation, scholars have observed the formal differences between the narrative and the sayings. For this reason, the bibliography on these two sections is largely independent. As for the narrative, it has variously been considered: history, historical fiction, (auto)biography, didactic novel, Jewish court tale, Mediterranean romance, etc. The sayings are generally assessed in light of the individual passages and the micro-structures (e.g., admonition, exhortation, sentence, fable, proverb, etc.), but as a whole they are usually linked with Mesopotamian instructions and proverbs collections, as well as the Israelite and early Jewish wisdom literature (especially Proverbs and Ben Sira).

1.2.3.1. Mesopotamia: The Literary Background and Influences

We begin with a similar scenario to the linguistic one. After the Elephantine version was unearthed, there was an immediate and substantial departure from the previously held theories. The “Jewish” view had surmised that the figure of Ahiqar was “Jewish,” whether he was thought to be historical or apocryphal.136 The Elephantine version, of course, shifted the focus entirely. Despite its

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136This was in large part due to his appearance in Tobit, wherein Ahiqar is designated as Tobit’s nephew and, thus, like the protagonist, would have belonged to the Northern tribe of Naphtali. The numerous medieval recensions, which had long been known to scholars, were generally seen as later by-products of an originally Jewish composition. One need only consult the titles of some of the earliest studies on (pre-Elephantine) *Ahiqar*, for example, E. J. Dillon, “Ahikar the Wise: An Ancient Hebrew Folk Story,” *Contemporary Review* 73 (1898): 362–86. See further on this point in Harris, Smith, and Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar*, xlviii–liv and xci–xciv; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-
provenance among a collection of texts belonging to Judeans, scholars saw little within the *Ahiqar* text itself to associate it with a “Jewish” identity,\(^\text{137}\) let alone having a Hebrew background.\(^\text{138}\) Indeed, some aspects of the text were understood to speak directly against any such association.\(^\text{139}\)

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*Sprüche*, 33. The opinions varied on how old the original story of Ahiqar really was and from whence it came, with the earliest guesses “in the generation preceding that of Tobit” (Dillon p. 363). On the other side of the spectrum, it was even supposed by some to be an “apocryphal” elaboration of the biblical text, sprung entirely from the passing reference to the otherwise unknown figure. Still, some, especially those that argued *Ahiqar* “pre-dated” the biblical text, suggested *Ahiqar* was “pagan”; cf. Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar*, xxxvi–xxxviii.

\(^{137}\) I put quotes around the term “Jewish” here for a number of reasons—besides the discussion mentioned above of whether or not we can call the Judeans at Elephantine “Jews,” there is the complicated issue of what it means to be Jewish, especially during the 5\(^{th}\) c. B.C.E. For many scholars (both listed and not listed here), the polytheistic character immediately discounts it from being considered Jewish. For my part, I do not think the issue is that simple, nor should we ascribe to such an essentialist approach to defining ancient religions. This matter will be addressed more fully in Chapter 5. Briefly, though, I would add that regardless of what we as modern scholars think about the concept of “Jewishness” in the post-exilic period, *Ahiqar* certainly had a strong and lasting reception among Jewish communities (and I would include Elephantine, here). So, even if the theological worldview espoused by the Aramaic text contradicts such a preconceived (scholarly) concept, the story and wisdom of *Ahiqar* seems to have played an informative role in at least some parts of early Jewish cultural identity such that, e.g., the author of Tobit would deem it an instructive, even paradigmatic, tradition to tap into. Interestingly, Stanley Cook, “The Significance,” 368–68, who was among the first generation of scholars to engage the Aramaic text, made the following remark: “If the introduction of Achiacharus in the Book of Tobit is to indicate that Tobit was related to this great sage, it is just conceivable that the story was also of traditional interest to Jedonian.” In other words, because the author of Tobit saw some value in connecting his protagonist with the (presumably) well-known and respectable personality, Ahiqar, then it is just as likely that the sage was also respected and valued by a leader of the Jewish community at Elephantine named Jedaniah (the patriarch of the family to whom many of the documents belong, and thus, possibly, the *Ahiqar* papyri as well; cf. Porten, *Archives*, 262–63 and Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 125–51).

\(^{138}\) Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 205, for example, said plainly: “Although it was found in a Jewish colony, the story shows no sign of Jewish origin. It is not derived from Hebrew sources and there is no reason why we should expect it to be so.”

\(^{139}\) Most notable is the polytheistic outlook of the sayings that include no mention of Yahu/Yahweh. The deities represented in *Ahiqar* will be discussed below, but see especially Lindenberger, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” 105–17. As for the later versions, they are almost entirely void of any polytheistic character, and many even include direct statements by Ahiqar that reflect later Christian (or Islamic, in the case of the Arabic) dogma; cf. Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar*, xxxvi–xxxviii. Note the possible exception, though, in Armenian (A), where Ahiqar prays to his gods “Belshim and Shimil and Shamin” (p. 24). The same prayer in Armenian (B) lacks the list of gods;
Instead, scholars began to take the story’s Neo-Assyrian court setting more seriously, with the result that when searching for the literary background and influences on *Ahiqar*, most turned toward Mesopotamia. Periodic studies on individual passages, sayings, or phrases of *Ahiqar* assessed parallels in Mesopotamian literature (e.g., Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian) in order to shed light on the various etymological, philological, and/or interpretive peculiarities. Even after the overturning of the “Akkadian original” hypothesis, *Ahiqar*’s literary background remained firmly in its Mesopotamian context. Greenfield himself went on to publish a number of short articles dealing with the background of individual sayings in which he consistently looked to Akkadian sources and he even later insinuated that the sayings themselves may have been commissioned (in Aramaic) by the Sargonid court.

The sayings of *Ahiqar* are often likened to similar materials in the *Counsels of Wisdom*, and to a lesser extent the *Instructions of Shuruppak* and the disparate, often fragmentary collections of proverbs. W. G. Lambert was among the first to suggest that the Babylonian *Counsels of Wisdom* could be the “prototype” of *Ahiqar*. This idea was closely followed by subsequent scholars, even though Lambert only noted a few general parallels with *Ahiqar*, such as the *Ahiqar* simply prays to “my gods” (p. 56). Syriac saying 70, interestingly, mentions idols in at least a neutral (but possibly positive) manner (p. 109).

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140 Among the first is the well-balanced, general discussion by Stummer, *Der kritische Wert*, 69–82 in the section titled “Die Heimat und die literarische Art des Ahiqarbuches.”


142 To be sure Greenfield just as often looked to Hebrew literature, though see Greenfield, “Background and Parallel” for Mesopotamian curse and legal codes as a background to a saying in *Ahiqar* (156) and Greenfield, “Two Proverbs,” for the phrase “to grasp the hem” (*Ahiq*. 107–108) as a common cultural in Mesopotamia and the Hebrew Bible (cf. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 77–78).

143 Greenfield, “Wisdom of Ahiqar,” 49. For example, Greenfield, “Background and Parallel,” 59, would later also say of the sayings: “It is my opinion based on linguistic criteria that the ‘Proverbs of Ahiqar’ are a product of Northern Syria or of the Aramaic speaking Western part of the Assyrian realm … As a product of an area of strong Assyrian influence they also reflect the legal practices and presumptions of that Empire.”

instructional setting (a father to a son), the advice about being a vizier, and the formulaic address in the admonitions: “my son.” McKane, likewise, classified Ahiqar as “Babylonian and Assyrian Instruction” on the basis of its similarity with Counsels, though not without some qualification.

Most studies only make passing reference to Counsels and the other materials. This is largely because the correspondences are basic thematic ones (many of which are ubiquitous in ancient wisdom texts), and any direct parallels between individual sayings are few and far between. Michael Weigl, however, in his 2010 commentary, stands out in that he regularly presents parallel passages (including transcriptions of the Akkadian), which often extend beyond mere thematic similarities. The use by both texts—Ahiqar and Counsels—of a related lexeme (Aram  יָאָשָׁג, אָשָׁג; Akk. šu-qu-ra) in a very similar way in a passage about discrete speech is a good example.

145 W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 90, 96, 102–3. Lambert only cautiously suggests these connections, yet his comment about Counsels as an archetype for Ahiqar has been well received by later scholars; cf. William McKane, Proverbs: A New Approach (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 151–52; Parpola, Letters, 449–50, who points to the two figures named in the Uruk tablet, and states: “This passage is clearly fictitious and of no historical value. Aba-ninnu-dari alias Mannu-kima-Ilil-hat~in, a Middle Babylonian scholar was possibly the author of the Counsels of Wisdom, the Babylonian archetype of the Sayings of Ahiqar”;


146 McKane, Proverbs, 151–52, 156–60. His hesitation is not the Assyrian identification, but that of “instruction,” since, formally “only a small part of the material consists of instructions conveyed in the imperative or jussive” and content-wise, “some of the instructions are general in character and have no special application to the training of a vizier … the instructions of Ahikar do not, then, as a whole, read like the directives of Ahikar to his heir-designate.” Of note, McKane also signals a couple other correspondences between Counsels and Ahiqar: both texts refer to a seal-bearer (Counsels, l. 82 [BWL, 102–3] and Ahiq. 3, 19); the role of the solar deity is similar in both (at 160, he states: “As in the Counsels of Wisdom, Shamash is the overseer and guarantor of morals and mores”). Still, despite the categorization under “Babylonian-Assyrian,” McKane identifies many more parallels with the biblical (and even some Egyptian) materials than Mesopotamian (see below).

147 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 96–101, esp. 97; cf. Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 75, 236 n.167. In the Counsels (l. 27; acc. to Lambert, BWL, 100) the expression is “mögen deine Lippen (dir) kostbar sein!”; in Ahiqar (82), “macht schwer das Herz!” (both translations are from Weigl). For other corresponding passages cited by Weigl, consult the indices (pp. 821–24).
Weigl finds particularly strong resemblances to *Ahīqar* in two passages from *Counsels*, one of the complaints in *Ludlul*, and in isolated instances from a variety of Neo-Assyrian letters during the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Along with these, Weigl suggests varying degrees of similarity between individual passages in the *Ahīqar* sayings and a handful of other sources, such as the epics of Gilgamesh and Tukulti-Ninurta, the proverbs in *Dialogue of Pessimism*, etc. In sum, when it comes to *Ahīqar*’s literary relationship to the Mesopotamian materials, Weigl arrives at the conclusion for several passages, “dass keine andere als eine genetische Beziehung der aramäischen Texteinheiten zu jenen neuassyrischen Texten vorstellbar ist.”

Among the various types of sayings in *Ahīqar*, there are a handful of animal fables and one plant fable. Although generally not found in collections of wisdom sayings, the fable has a long and rich tradition in the ancient Near East, and scholars have often pointed to Mesopotamia and Northern Syria as the background for this literary form. McKane, for example, states: “A distinctive feature of *Ahīqar*, which marks its kinship with Babylonian and Sumerian literature, is the fable.”

Oettinger and, later, Niehr saw the *Ahīqar* fables as exemplars in a long-line of fable traditions that can be traced back to the Hittite/Hurrian texts of eastern Anatolia and Northern Syria.

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150 For a list of these and a brief summary of *Ahīqar* as it relates to Mesopotamian literature, see Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 729–31.
151 Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 730.
153 McKane, *Proverbs*, 157; he references the fables collected by Lambert in *BWL*, 118–120, 165–205.
in the mid-2nd millennium B.C.E. Further, Daniel Bodi has observed that “Neo-Assyrian letters by scholars addressed to the kings often quote animal proverbs.” Some have downplayed such connections, noting the differing forms (especially the length) between the Ahiqar fables and the Mesopotamian and Hittite/Hurrian ones; a better comparison can be found in the Hebrew Bible (see discussion in next section).

As for the narrative, the basic contours and themes (suffering of righteous, rehabilitation of disgraced courtier, ungrateful son/nephew, treason and succession, etc.) have often been loosely connected with similar motifs in Mesopotamian literature. For example, Ahiqar and Ludlul bēl Nemeqi are brought together because both deal with the motif of a righteous man (specifically a court official) who suffers, but is eventually restored. Thus, Stephanie Dalley observes, “The tale has developed out of a thoroughly Mesopotamian genre of wisdom literature, comparable with Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, in which a discredited courtier, Šubši-mešre-šakkan (floruit 1290 B.C.E.), is eventually restored to favour after much suffering.” Mesopotamian examples of the literary motif of the ungrateful nephew as well as the disgrace and rehabilitation of the courtier have also been noted by Reiner and Beaulieu, among others.

154 They both point especially to the Hittite/Hurrian bilingual poetic text known as the Song of Emancipation, which includes a number of animal fables and, incidentally, deal with topics similar to Ahiqar (e.g., loyalty); see N. Oettinger, “Achikars Weisheitssprüche im Licht älterer Fabeldichtung,” in Der Äsop-Roman: Motivgeschichte und Erzählstruktur (ed. N. Holzberg; CM 6; Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1992), 3–22, esp. 6–16; Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 14–15. For contra this connection see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 46 n. 128, 690–91 n. 161; cf. Kottsieper, “Die altestamentliche Weisheit,” 17.

155 Bodi, “Aramaic Proverbs,” 18. Some of the animal proverbs cited are fables. Of course, among these is the proverb (presumably cited by Esarhaddon himself) about the dog who barks in front of the baker’s oven (mentioned above) that has a parallel in the later Syriac version; cf. Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, The Story of Ahiqar, 125; Küchler, Früjüdische Weisheitstraditionen, 328–29.

156 For reference to Ludlul in light of the Ahiqar narrative, see Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 12; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 730.


Epistolary witnesses have also been linked thematically with *Ahiggar*. Of special note is the case of Urad-Gula, who, along with his father Adad-šumu-uṣur, were “exorcists” and advisers in the court of kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal. In letters addressed to Assurbanipal, Urad-Gula relates that he had been demoted (seemingly without reason) from his prominent position when Assurbanipal came into office.  

In 1936 von Soden pointed to the letters of this “exorcist” and his father and the story that they weave as the real historical events that inspired the writing of the *Ahiggar* narrative. The historical issue aside, others have pointed to the rhetorical flourish with which the letters are written and suggest that some of the aspects (e.g., poverty and social disdain of the author, injustice of demotion, etc.) may be simply literary topoi of that era, all the while recalling similar motifs from *Ahiggar*. It has also been suggested that the

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159 The writer also includes laments of his lost status that are reminiscent of complaints in *Ludlul*, Job, and a passage in *Ahiggar*; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 343.


Ahiqar narrative resembles (auto)biography—whether fictional or not—by scholars such as Niehr and Longman, among others.

In sum, with the exception of the increasing attention toward the Hebrew Bible, the Mesopotamian sources have continued to serve as the leading interpretive crucible for the literary context of Ahiqar.

1.2.3.2. Egypt: The Reception of Ahiqar

Although largely overshadowed by Mesopotamian sources, the Egyptian record does have a small place in the history of Ahiqar scholarship. A few studies, scattered across the past century, mention Egyptian materials, though with little to no in-depth analysis. Studies by Donner and Kayatz are of note in that they tried to link a passage in Ahiqar with the Egyptian deity Ma’at and the personified wisdom figure from Proverbs 8. Kottsieper has recently remarked upon the shared impetuses for Ahiqar and the Instructions of Ptahhotep: both sages lament their old age and thereafter seek a successor.

162 Niehr, *Aramäischer Ahiqar*, 12, points to the Luwian and Aramean tomb inscriptions from Northern Syria, though he offers very little by way of direct comparison. To be fair, his likening of Ahiqar to these autobiographies is borne out of a response to Dalley (“Assyrian Court Narratives,” 154–55), whose study implied that no such genre existed outside of Egypt during the chronological window in which Ahiqar was composed.

163 Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991), esp. 119, 123–28, sees similarities between Ahiqar and three “fictional Akkadian autobiographies”: the Cuthaean Legend, the Adad-guppi autobiography, and the Sennacherib autobiography. The comparison with Ahiqar is built upon Longman’s thesis about a tri-partite structure (first-person introduction; first-person narrative; first-person instruction; at p. 119 he notes “a general similarity exists between Ahiqar and Akkadian fictional autobiographies with a didactic ending.” His structural hypothesis for many of the texts he considers, however, has been met with strong criticism; see, e.g., Yee-Von Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth* (BZAW 369; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 106–12.


Recently, a few studies by Egyptologists have brought *Ahiqar* into conversation with similar narrative materials from Egypt, including other Aramaic examples as well as Demotic texts from the Greco-Roman period (e.g., the Inaros [*Petubastis*] cycle, the Sheikh Faql, inscription, and Papyrus Amherst 63). Stephanie Dalley, for example, sees the narrative of *Ahiqar* reflecting Egyptian autobiographical traditions, including those such as the New Kingdom tale of *Wen-amun* that have acquired a literary function “beyond the confines of a tomb.”168 Kim Ryholt includes *Ahiqar* in his survey of narratives about the Assyrian invasion of Egypt in the “Egyptian literary tradition.”169 Tawny Holm has also very recently looked to similar literary motifs from Egypt (especially the other Aramaic sources) and concluded: “Indeed, in terms of literary parallels, there are no non-Aramaic correspondences to the courtier story in Mesopotamia (the ‘court tale’ genre is not Mesopotamian), and it is possible that the *Story of Ahiqar* was composed in Egypt where it was connected to the Syrian proverb collection.”170 Betrò and Grottanelli have pointed to similar literary motifs—e.g., the feigned death, rehabilitation of the disgraced courtier, the riddle contest with impossible challenges—that appear in older Egyptian sources, such as the *Tale of Sinuhe*, *Story of Truth and Falsehood*, and *Story of Apophis and Seqenenre* (among others), with the result that they “proposed that the *Story of Ahiqar* gained its standard form in Egypt.”171 Quack, however, in response to the studies by Betro and Grottanelli, maintains that: “In all cases, the similarities remain in a very broad and unspecific way. It should not be difficult to point out equally similar

168 Dalley, “Assyrian Court Narratives,” 155. As indicated above, Dalley also sees strong Akkadian literary influences, concluding that: “The tale of Ahiqar, therefore, is a mixture of Akkadian and Egyptian genres.” Contra Dalley, see Niehr, *Aramaischer Ahiqar*, 12 and Quack, “The Interaction,” 383–84, who points out that *Wen-amun* is “using the outward form of an administrative report, not an autobiography!”


170 Holm, “Memories of Sennacherib,” 304.

171 Grottanelli, “Introduzione,” in *Il saggio*, 49–89, esp. 84–88; and M. C. Betrò, “La tradizione di Achiqar in Egitto,” in *Il saggio*, 177–91. Both studies allude to the later, complete versions of the *Ahiqar* narrative and the Demotic fragments, as well as the Elephantine version. In another article, Betrò, “La storia del Mago Hi-Hor: Variazioni egiziane sul tema di Achiqar,” in *Donum Natalicum: Studi presentati a Claudio Saporetti in occasione del suo 60. Compleanno* (ed. P. Negri Scafa and P. Gentili; Rome: Borgia, 2000), 23–35, traces similar motifs (e.g., the disgraced courtier) in *Ahiqar* and in the only other Aramaic literary text from Elephantine, the “Tale of the Magician Hi-Hor” which presumably goes back to an Egyptian original. Citation from Quack, “The Interaction,” 384; cf. Grottanelli, “Introduzione,” 87–88.
ideas in many other cultures, and it would be bad methodology to base any conclusions about literary contacts on them.”

Lastly, no discussion of *Ahiqar* in terms of Egyptian literature is complete without reference to the Demotic *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqe*. Since the publication of Lichtheim’s monograph *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context*, the *Book of Ahiqar* has continuously been linked with this Late Period instructional text, primarily on account of its narrative resemblances, though some formal and content similarities have also been noted among the sayings. The standard assumption is that the narrative of *Ankhsheshonqe*—a courtier involved in an assassination plot, though innocent, is punished and composes wisdom instructions while in a pit underground—was inspired by *Ahiqar*’s tale. The scribe who composed *Ankhsheshonqe* perhaps relied on a Demotic translation of *Ahiqar*. As for the sayings, there has been some debate, but the opinion of Quack (who also takes into account the Demotic fragments which may belong to the *Ahiqar* sayings) stands out: “For me, the similarity in the specific formulation is still a plausible indication that *Khasheshonqy* has taken over some sayings of *Ahiqar*, even if they do not amount to a dominating influence in his work.”

The significance of the connection between *Ahiqar* and *Ankhsheshonqe* is paramount, for with it we can say with some confidence that *Ahiqar* had a meaningful reception in Egypt; the fact that we have a Demotic version attests that it was familiar to at least some native Egyptian audiences. Unfortunately, hardly any study has considered the Egyptian instructions or related sayings to *Ahiqar* in this light.

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173 Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature*, 13–21; it should be noted that most of the parallels among the sayings cited by Lichtheim refer to the later versions.
174 Fortunately we have a few fragments of a Demotic *Ahiqar* making this suggestion highly probable. For the publication of these Demotic *Ahiqar* fragments see K.–T. Zauzich, “Demotische Fragmente zum Ahikar-Roman,” in *Folia Rara: Wolfgang Voigt LXV. Diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicate* (ed. Herbert Franke, et al.; Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 19; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976), 180–85.
175 Quack, “The Interaction,” 386; for a discussion of the Demotic sayings fragments, which Quack believes to be part of the same scroll as the narrative fragments see pp. 375–82.
materials as a possible literary influence or context in which to interpret the wisdom instructions in the *Book of Ahiqar*.\(^{176}\)

1.2.3.3 The Hebrew Bible and the West Semitic Wisdom Tradition: The Literary Environment

The discovery of a 5th c. B.C.E. Aramaic literary text immediately drew the attention of biblical scholars. From a biblical scholar point of view, the Aramaic *Ahiqar* represented an intriguing “extra-biblical” source with which to compare the biblical record, and a notable one at that given that it is linguistically, chronologically, and geographically more proximate than most cuneiform and Egyptian sources. As for the *Ahiqar* specialists, the biblical and early Jewish literature, unlike most of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources, were not viewed as “influences” or part of the literary “background,” but instead the Hebrew and Aramaic texts were seen as subsequent or, at best, concurrent with *Ahiqar*—i.e., they were part of a similar (if not the same) literary and cultural environment. This did not exclude questions of literary dependence and influence as we will see, though the direction of dependence is different.

Also, as with the other studies (and perhaps even more so), comparisons between *Ahiqar* and biblical materials can generally be divided into those that concern the narrative and those that deal with the sayings. We begin with the sayings.

Correspondences between the wisdom sayings in *Ahiqar* and the biblical and early Jewish wisdom literature were recognized immediately. Many of *Ahiqar*’s sayings share formal and thematic similarities with the biblical wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs, and has led many scholars to identify parallels. Despite the ubiquitously-recognized association, the place of *Ahiqar* vis-à-vis biblical scholarship is still marginal, with most of the references to our text being found in a long line of footnotes in articles or book chapters and sections in commentaries (especially on Proverbs) or introductions that have offered little more than rote identification of the parallels between individual sayings and corresponding passages in the biblical record. There is some exception, though, when it comes to the fables in *Ahiqar*. McKane and, later, Kottsieper (along with several others) have paid close attention to some of the fables in *Ahiqar*, especially the

one about the bramble and the pomegranate (101–102), for its similarity to the fables of Jotham (Judg 9:8–15) and Jehoash (2 Kgs 14:9–10). In most cases, though, the space devoted to similarities with the biblical and early Jewish texts, even among the studies by Ahiqar specialists, rarely extended beyond notation of the same sets of passages.

Nevertheless, a few studies considered the similarities to be close enough to speak of a relationship between Ahiqar and one biblical book in particular: Proverbs. Oesterley, for example, in his 1927 commentary on Proverbs, was among the first to suggest a connection between Ahiqar and the biblical text. Most, however, were hesitant to make any direct claim of dependency, even in cases of exact parallels. For example, there is one saying found among the Ahiqar papyri (176–177) that stands out and is oft-cited as the exact same saying as the one in Prov 23:13-14. Yet despite the obvious connection—even in specific terminology—scholars have generally refrained from suggesting a direct borrowing. The commonality of wisdom themes among the

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177 On Jotham’s fable (Judg 9:8–15) and Ahiqar 101–102 see McKane, *Proverbs*, 178–79; for these with reference also to Jehoash’s fable (2 Kgs 14:9–10) and with an eye toward their formal structure, see Kottsieper, “Die alttestamentliche Weisheit,” 145–53; and for these with comparison to similar fables in Aesop see Philippe Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 55–74.


180 Ahiqar 176–177 reads “Do not withhold your son from the rod. If not, you will not be able to save him … If I strike you, my son, you will not die; but if I leave you to your shame […]” (trans. TAD). It should be mentioned that a form of this saying was already known from the later versions (previously considered a borrowing from Proverbs); cf. Syriac, Saying 22–23; Armenian (B), Saying 14; Arabic, Saying 23–24; citations according to Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar*, ad loc.

181 Cf. Sir 30:1–13. Another oft-cited “exact parallel” is C1.1.206b = Jer 9:22; though, as numerous studies since have shown, there are many other close or approximate parallels—many of which will be addressed throughout this study.
various Near Eastern corpora and the mobility of the wisdom-saying were often cited as reasons against assuming a direct borrowing, even in cases such as this where we are clearly dealing with the same saying. Ginsberg’s comments on this are worth repeating: “Though parental discipline and the desirability of corporal punishment are common enough themes in wisdom literature, the close verbal similarity … is greater than could be accounted for by similarity of theme alone. It cannot be claimed that either saying is borrowed from the other, but it is likely that some common oral or written tradition underlies both.”

The last comment by Ginsberg stands out and in many ways is indicative of the status of *Ahiqar* relative to Proverbs up to the last two decades of scholarship. The hypothetical “common source” of wisdom sayings that apparently floated around the eastern Mediterranean was a frequent way for scholars to acknowledge the proximity of the two while not committing to any strong opinion of dependency. In his 1965 dissertation, Robert Price, whose stated goal was to determine whether *Ahiqar* had any direct literary relationship with Proverbs, also landed on the side of “definitely related” but likewise suggested the link was indirect, and consequently hypothesizing some “common source.” Other examples of this hypothesis include, for example, Max Küchler, who stated that the Aramaic *Ahiqar* “hat die nächsten und die meisten Parallelen im Proverbienbuch, und zwar auch in dem alten Sammlungen. Es spiegelt sich darin der gemeinsame altorientalische Ursprung.” Lindenberger also refused to claim any direct dependence and

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183 Robert Price, “The Elephantine *Ahiqar*: A New Edition and Commentary with Special Reference to Babylonian and Hebrew Wisdom Literature” (Ph.D. diss., Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1965). He also devoted smaller chapters to answering the same question with other biblical wisdom texts, namely (according to his reckoning) Job, Qoheleth, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon. A further note on Price’s yet unpublished dissertation; although it seems to break the mold in that it is taking up directly (and with some length) the question of literary dependence, this work still comprises little more than a collection of the previously cited parallels between *Ahiqar* and Proverbs, as well as with other wisdom texts. Further, he offers hardly any methodological basis for why he thinks a relationship is more or less likely beyond the simple “numbers” game (i.e. there are more in this source than that one) and his general impression of the structure and style of each text.

184 Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen,* 385. Further mention should be made here of Küchler’s 1979 study of “early Jewish wisdom literature.” He devotes an entire chapter (pp. 319–413) to *Ahiqar,* in which he provides a
likewise suggested “it does appear that some common tradition underlies both.”\textsuperscript{185} The supposed common source was the predominant opinion among those few studies that brought \textit{Ahiqar} together with Proverbs.

The idea of a common West Semitic wisdom tradition, of which \textit{Ahiqar} and Proverbs are representatives, was given a clear and organized formulation in a 1995 article by John Day.\textsuperscript{186} With the Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar} as one of his major primary sources,\textsuperscript{187} Day laid out those features which substantial review of scholarship up to that point, brief sections on the Demotic fragments, as well as on \textit{Ahiqar}'s relationship to Tobit and Aesop, and a few annotated lists of parallels between the Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar} and biblical literature (OT and NT), rabbinic literature, and the later versions. He does focus a great deal on the later versions, which are not so important for this study, but Küchler’s study (though in general not well received by early Jewish scholars) continues to stand as one of the very few studies that treats \textit{Ahiqar} as an important and lively part of the early Jewish wisdom tradition. Consider, for example, some of his concluding remarks (411–12): “\textit{Achikar} ist in all diesen Formen als zum Erzählgut der Antike gehörig erwiesen, und kann somit auch als Faktor in die Geschichte der frühjüdischen Weisheit einbezogen warden … So begleitet die Gestalt und die Weisheit Achikars die Geschichte der frühjüdischen Weisheit durch ihre wechselhaften Bezugsfelder (spätestens) seit der Persenzeit bis ins klassische jüdische Schriftum … Mit \textit{Achikar} ist der Bereich, innerhalb dessen sich die frühjüdischen ‘Worte der Weisen’ entfaltet haben, umschrieben.”

\textsuperscript{185} Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 50.

\textsuperscript{186} John Day, “Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel,” in \textit{Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine} (ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 55–70; it should be noted that the idea of a common West Semitic wisdom tradition had been hinted at in various earlier studies (see, e.g., Story, “\textit{Book of Proverbs},” 319–37). Day’s thesis is significant for the study of wisdom collections in first millennium Syro-Palestine, even if it hasn’t taken root as firmly as this author might like. Still, it has certainly been influential for some prominent circles, including the highly esteemed Michael Fox, whose recent commentary on Proverbs represents the current standard in (American) scholarship on Proverbs; see Michael V. Fox, \textit{Proverbs 1–9} (AB 18a; New York: Doubleday, 2000) and \textit{Proverbs 10–31} (AB 18b; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{187} The other representative besides the Hebrew Bible is Ugarit. Although, typical “wisdom” texts are sparsely attested among the Ugaritic materials, Day looks to passages within other texts as evidence of a lively wisdom tradition among early Canaanites that, by way of accident, were not preserved. One specific example is frequently mentioned in relation to \textit{Ahiqar} sayings: the graded numerical proverb of the form \(x/x + 1\); cf. \textit{KTU} 1.4.III.17–21. Mention should also be made of the \textit{Instructions of Šube-awilum}, a fragmentary text from Ugarit, though in Akkadian and thus of Mesopotamian origin; see J. Tigay, \textit{The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 166–67.
were “characteristic” to the book of Proverbs—i.e. features that were either not extant or not prominent in wisdom traditions from Egypt. They are: the righteous/wicked contrast, graded numerical proverbs, animal proverbs, the ‘my son’ formula, mother’s teaching, the fear of the Lord, and the personification of wisdom.

One of these features deserves a brief explanation: the “personification of wisdom.”¹⁸⁸ For much of its history, a specific passage in Ahiqar has intrigued biblical scholars. Lindenerger’s translation in OTP (2:499) is representative of how the passage was understood: “From heaven the peoples are favored; Wisdom is of the gods. Indeed, she is precious to the gods; her kingdom is et[er]nal. She has been established by Shamayn; yea, the Holy Lord has exalted her.” Among the earliest to suggest that these lines refer to a wisdom goddess or figure similar to that of Proverbs was W. F. Albright.¹⁸⁹ H. Donner looked to this figure as the “connecting link” between personified wisdom in Proverbs 8 and the Egyptian goddess Ma’at.¹⁹⁰ Later, John Day, speaking about Ahiqar, says, “Here Wisdom is clearly personified.” Lindenerger’s take is that, “The saying is evidently a hymn in praise of wisdom, praising her divine origin, her benefits to mankind, and her exaltation by the gods.”¹⁹¹ A final example, Michael Fox discusses this passage in his recent commentary, calling it “a foreign personification of wisdom.”¹⁹² As is clear, regardless of the relationship to the biblical text, most scholars agree that Ahiqar had a wisdom figure that at least resembled the one in Proverbs.

¹⁸⁸ The following is a brief synopsis of my recent article in JBL (“Can Ahiqar Tell Us Anything about Personified Wisdom?”). See esp. pp. 121–25 for a survey of scholarly opinion on this passage in Ahiqar as it relates to the figure in Proverbs.

¹⁸⁹ Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), 283–85.

¹⁹⁰ Herbert Donner, “Die religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprünge von Prov. Sal. 8,” Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde 82 (1958): 8–18, at 18. In his discussion, he gives close analysis of a specific passage from Ahiqar that he identifies as “das Bindeglied zwischen der auslösenden Funktion ägyptischer Denk- und Vorstellungsart und der in Prov. Sal. 8 vollzogenen Hypostasierung der Weisheit.” Coincidentally, W. F. Albright, “The Goddess of Life and Wisdom,” AJSL 36 (1919–1920): 258–94, at 287, had earlier used very similar terminology as Donner, but instead to describe the location of Ahiqar between Proverbs and Assyrian literature: “the Ahiqar romance has been discovered … forming the connecting link between Jewish and Assyrian gnomic literature, and, by the irony of fate, demonstrating the Mesopotamian origin of wisdom and indirectly of Sophia” (emphasis added).


¹⁹² Fox, Proverbs 1–9, 332.
The saying quoted above is made up of two (fragmentary) lines that are on separate sheets, with the first part being found on the bottom of sheet J and the second on the top of sheet E. The problem, however, is that, unlike all of the previous editions, in Porten and Yardeni’s “definitive edition,” J and E are no longer together! The order of the sayings columns (following the underlying customs account) goes: E, K, G, F, J, H, L. The two lines that made up this saying, therefore, are separated. As a result, the interpretation of the two disparate lines must be reassessed, and the presence of a personified wisdom figure in Ahiqar is no longer likely.

Not all of the features listed by Day make an appearance in our text, but his study is significant for Ahiqar studies in that it provided a framework through which to illustrate the relationship between the Aramaic text and the biblical record, especially Proverbs. This model was followed closely by Michael V. Fox in his two-volume commentary on Proverbs in the Anchor Bible series. Notably, Fox took the issue of the relationship of Ahiqar and Proverbs a step further, arguing that “overall the evidence indicates that the sages of Proverbs knew the book of Ahiqar.” In addition to the same features noted by Day, Fox also points out that in the relevant sections of Proverbs (especially the “Words of the Wise” 22:17–24:22) there is “a greater frequency of Aramaisms than any other part besides [Lemuel].” From this, he suggests “that some Aramaisms may reflect more specifically the influence of the Aramaic Ahiqar and—possibly—an Aramaic translation of Amenemope.”

Finally, in 2010 Michael Weigl published a revised version of his dissertation in which he took up directly the connections between the Aramaic sayings of Ahiqar and the Old Testament.

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193 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, xvii.
194 It should be recalled that the word בתשת “wisdom” in line 189 is largely reconstructed, so even as it stands the reading is uncertain. Also, an alternative interpretation for the second part of the now-disrupted saying (line 79) will be discussed below.
197 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 767.
198 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 706, for list of features see pp. 767–69. Lemuel (= Prov 31) is directly “ascribed to a foreign queen” (p. 706) and hence the presence of Aramaisms is not surprising.
199 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 505; for some examples of Aramaisms see Fox’s list on 504–5, though most are referenced throughout the commentary. Fox also points out that the direct parallel in Prov 23:13–14 with Ahiqar 176–177 also happens to be in the “Words of the Wise” where the Aramaic and foreign influence is strongest.
wisdom literature. His volume will be discussed at length below, but briefly, he argues that there are clearly verses and clusters of verses in Proverbs which demonstrate a “genetic” relationship to relevant passages in Ahiqar. These “direkten Kontakt-punkten” are, however, relatively limited; yet there is still an observable preponderance of correspondences or echoes (not direct parallels). These are especially prominent in the Hezekian collection (Prov 25–29). Here, Weigl also cautiously puts forward an alternative thesis. With consideration of the previously-established dating for Ahiqar based on linguistic criteria, Weigl maintains that they—Ahiqar and Prov 25–29—were compiled concurrently, and consequently their relationship may better be characterized not as “one-way” (i.e., Ahiqar → Proverbs), but instead as reciprocal. In other words, he allows that in the continuous cultural and literary interchange of this era, it is entirely likely that Ahiqar could be both donor and receptor vis-à-vis Proverbs.

Turning now to the story of Ahiqar, we find a similar scenario with the sayings in that the scholarship on its relationship to the biblical and early Jewish materials is spread out across a diverse selection of articles or sections in books. There are no monographs or lengthy articles devoted solely to the narrative of Ahiqar vis-à-vis the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. References to Ahiqar crop up in countless examinations of similarly structured or situationally

200 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 743.
201 See, Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 735.
202 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 744.
congruent narratives such as the Joseph story, Daniel, Tobit, Esther, Job, and, to a lesser extent, Judith and select passages from Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah. To some extent, *Ahiqar* has been viewed as direct inspiration for the Jewish court tales, especially Daniel, Joseph, and Esther. Many, however, are content to evaluate them as comparative examples of a literary form that was popular and broadly attested during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

A full rundown of these studies is unnecessary, but some representative examples are worth mentioning. Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, for example, take a folkloristic typological approach to *Ahiqar* (primarily the Syriac), Daniel 2, and Gen 41 in order to identify and outline various “types,” and thus allowing for “an important form-critical tool which may be used to gauge the style, content, form, and message of comparable pieces of narrative literature.”

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209 For a brief list of motifs in the *Ahiqar* story that may have had some influence on biblical texts see B. Klar, “From Ahiqar to Jeremiah” *Tarbiz* 20 (1940): 33–34 [Hebrew].

210 One must also exercise caution when dealing with scholarship on the *Ahiqar* narrative, for very often analyses of the Aramaic narrative are blended together with the later medieval witnesses, as if the two sets of exemplars are interchangeable. To be fair, it is difficult to talk about the story of *Ahiqar* from only the Aramaic text because of its fragmentary and incomplete state. Nevertheless, scholars are sometimes not careful in distinguishing which aspects are only present in the Elephantine text when comparing with the similar biblical and early Jewish sources.

211 For a quick survey of some of these views, see Niehr, *Aramäischer Ahiqar*, 11–12.

Wills, who continues to be the starting point for any study on the ancient Jewish novels or court tales,\textsuperscript{213} also devotes a great deal of attention to \textit{Ahiqar} and regards the Elephantine version (and its impression in the Aesop romance) as a “straightforward court conflict” narrative.\textsuperscript{214} Though in his later volume, Wills regards \textit{Ahiqar}, in its connection to Tobit, as a “didactic novel.”\textsuperscript{215} Amy-Jill Levine has highlighted the diaspora aspect in Joseph, \textit{Ahiqar}, and Tobit and its function with regard to issues of identity and social anxiety.\textsuperscript{216} Grottanelli put forward an interesting hypothesis, proposing that \textit{Ahiqar}, Joseph, and Aesop “were created at the same time [7th–5th c. B.C.E.] in the context of an Eastern Mediterranean \textit{koinē} and by using a complex narrative repertoire.”\textsuperscript{217} Robert Gnuse has submitted that Ahiqar, along with Joseph and a few Greek court tales, “might be termed ‘literature of resistance.”’ Gnuse drew attention to the strong dichotomy in presentation of the king against that of the protagonists in each text, an opposition which subtlety—because open criticism may be dangerous—speaks against the propagandistically reinforced notions of the monarch’s power and divine favor.\textsuperscript{218} Lastly, in addition to its basic structure (narrative framework around

\textsuperscript{213} Lawrence M. Wills, \textit{The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends} (Harvard Dissertations in Religion 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) and \textit{The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World} (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995).

\textsuperscript{214} Wills, \textit{Jew in the Court}, 48.


\textsuperscript{218} Gnuse, “From Prison to Prestige,” esp. 44.
sayings/dialogue), *Ahiqar* has frequently been mentioned in comparison with Job as an example of an innocent sufferer.\(^{219}\)

Regardless of the exact angle taken by each scholar—whether seen as diaspora novel, court tale (contest and/or conflict), didactic narrative, or simply as exemplar and validation of the wisdom instruction—the general assumption among scholars is that the story about Ahiqar, his treacherous nephew, and his loyal colleague definitely has a place in the conversation about Jewish novelistic literature during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

1.2.4 Recent Trends and the Trajectory of Ahiqar Scholarship

1.2.4.1 Beyond the Philological

In 2010—a full century after the discovery of *Ahiqar*—Michael Weigl made the following statement:


For the most part, Weigl is correct. When it comes to studies on *Ahiqar* itself the questions are largely still the same ones that are fixated on the “origins” question and the concomitant linguistic or historical issues. Outside of this, *Ahiqar* has still rarely escaped the footnotes of biblical studies.\(^{221}\)

Nevertheless, a few studies have appeared in recent years that are concerned with evaluating *Ahiqar* for its own sake and that have pushed beyond the philological. In the late 1990s and 2000s, there was some discussion about the divine world imagined by the *Ahiqar* sayings and

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\(^{220}\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 32.

\(^{221}\) The second volume of Fox’s commentary on Proverbs is a glaring exception, which should hopefully have an effect on subsequent studies of wisdom literature.
its relation to the pantheons of Northern Syria. Herbert Niehr’s thesis about a three-tiered pantheon with Hadad at the peak is prominent, and based largely on comparisons with “contemporary” inscriptions from Sam‘al and Neirab, among others.\textsuperscript{222}

Scherer,\textsuperscript{223} Yona,\textsuperscript{224} and Kottsieper\textsuperscript{225} have all provided analyses of the stylistic and formal features displayed in the sayings, with the former two paying close attention to how the Ahiqar sayings are both similar and distinct when compared with Hebrew poetry and its characteristic \textit{parallelismus membrorum}.\textsuperscript{226} In terms of structural analysis (though still with an eye toward compositional history) the studies by Kottsieper\textsuperscript{227} and Weigl\textsuperscript{228} stand out. Kottsieper, for example, argues that many of the smallest units that make up the sayings are not the individual units; instead, he finds evidence that “proverbial clusters” of two or three sayings (sometimes more) were transmitted together as coherent units which were then incorporated into the larger text (thus, for Kottsieper, explaining some irregularities in the topical arrangement). Similarly, Weigl’s 2001

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{223} Andreas Scherer, “Vielfalt und Ordnung,” 28–45.
\textsuperscript{226} Cf. Niehr, \textit{Aramäischer Ahiqar}, 15–16.
\end{flushleft}
article traces grander editorial crafting, sometimes stretching across entire columns, demonstrating that *Ahiqar* is not made up of a haphazard collection of atomistic sayings.  

Ingo Kottsieper has recently offered a cursory examination of the social background espoused by the sayings, an aspect that has for some reason almost completely been ignored. He finds that the sayings belong “to a wisdom tradition that is deeply rooted in familial wisdom, which expresses the ideology of the middle class.” Kottsieper’s conclusions, though, are nevertheless redaction-oriented, adding that:

> This [familial] tradition was handed down through the generations. And it was kept even by those who gained a more educated status and who added not only their own experiences, such as serving in the king’s court or in the realm of trade, but also used their intellectual skills to expand this tradition with several deeper insights into the nature of humanity and the world.

He, likewise, has an “origins” objective in attempting to isolate the historical *Sitz im Leben*, proposing that the meager circumstances combined with a court setting would fit well with the smaller Aramean kingdoms of the 9th and 8th centuries.

The trajectory of *Ahiqar* scholarship appears to be moving beyond the philological issues and into more synthetic approaches with broader concerns. The fullest expression of this type of analysis can be found in the 2010 monograph by Michael Weigl.

### 1.2.4.2 Michael Weigl’s *Die aramäische Achikar-Sprüche*

Although we have already mentioned Michael Weigl’s exhaustive study on numerous occasions in the review above, it merits special attention both for its length and methodological pursuits. Weigl’s monograph is arranged like a commentary in which he offers a thorough analysis of each column (excluding the narrative columns) and saying in *Ahiqar*. In addition, he provides lengthy

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229 On the issue of compositional techniques, see also Niehr, *Aramäischer Ahiqar*, 16–18 and the other studies cited there.


231 Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 120.

232 Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 120.
concluding chapters in which he synthesizes his assessment of the entire text, particularly in terms of its style and literary character. Weigl pushes the scholarly field past the previous monographs by Lindenberger (1983) and Kottsieper (1990) which dealt primarily with lexical, philological, and grammatical issues. Instead he offers a threefold objective: (1) a comprehensive assessment of the stylistic and formal features of each saying; (2) an evaluation of how each saying is embedded in its immediate context, i.e., as part of a larger organizational scheme; and finally (3) the identification and elucidation upon the various correspondences in content and/or form with the Hebrew Bible and, to a lesser extent, Mesopotamian literature.

Concerning the representative forms of the individual sayings and the “stylistic und ornamental” features, Weigl is meticulous in categorizing each and every example and draws many conclusions about the overall literary character of the sayings. Some notable conclusions are: the paucity of proverbs in the strictest sense; the high number of complex and multi-tiered (as opposed to basic two-tiered) formulations; parallelism is present but not as prominent as one might expect; and the sayings are “rich in imagery” and metaphorical representations.

Moreover, while admitting that the sayings can, at first glance, appear to be a random amalgamation of disparate forms and topics, Weigl demonstrates (convincingly, I might add) that upon closer inspection a well-crafted editorial scheme made up of large sections of interrelated sayings is discernible. These short “treatises” or “discourses” extend across a number of sayings—sometimes even entire columns. The individual sayings or sayings-pairs are connected by a variety

233 For the outline of his objectives, see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 51–52. In this same section, Weigl describes his study in terms of a two-fold objective: “Auf diese Weise verfolge ich ein doppeltes Ziel: Die Erhebung von Stil- und Gestaltungsmerkmalen des umfangreichsten erhaltenen, aramäischen literarischen (Weisheits-)Textes aus prä-achämenidischer Zeit, und dessen literaturvergleichende Durchdringung vor dem Hintergrund bzw. im Blick auf die in ihrem literarischen Stil, ihrer Verwendung von Formen und Gattungen sowie in ihrem Motivrepertoire anerkanntermaßen ‘kongenialen’ alttestamentlichen Weisheitsliteratur.”

234 A comprehensive list and evaluation of these can be found in “Chapter 11,” which summarizes his findings in the commentary, see pp. 543–600, esp. 548, 600. The remainder of the chapter (pp. 600–636) is devoted to summarizing the stylistic features (word-pairs, repeated formulae, syntactic peculiarities, etc.), themes, and elements (flora, fauna, human-types, etc.). These will also be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

235 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 544, here he even uses the term “Florilegium”; cf. p. 710.
of devices (e.g., repetition of key words, similar formal structures, basic content, etc.), and in some cases the larger units themselves are demarcated by the use of an inclusio.\textsuperscript{236}

One of the primary motivating factors for Weigl’s study is that while there has been throughout its history a recognition of Ahiqar’s importance to the Israelite and early Jewish literary tradition, at the same time we have also witnessed a dearth of any substantive appreciation of this importance. Put briefly: “Einerseits anerkennt man dessen Bedeutung für die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur, andererseits wird selten dargelegt.”\textsuperscript{237} For this reason, a more detailed examination of Ahiqar vis-à-vis the biblical corpus, especially the wisdom texts, is required. In general Weigl finds that the Ahiqar tradition “belongs to the very closest linguistic, cultural, and chronological circles of biblical Israel” and, therefore, ought to be the “first external, interpretive horizon … [and] the primary reference point for any comparative-literary analysis of the wisdom literature in the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{238} Indeed, Weigl’s observations about Ahiqar on the formal and stylistic level are constantly in conversation with Proverbs and other biblical and early Jewish literature. Such a thorough and sophisticated comparison is refreshing when compared with a century of only superficial identification of parallels.\textsuperscript{239}

In sum, Weigl’s study represents a clear and decisive response to the pressing need for more sustained treatment of Ahiqar as a piece of literature in its own right. For his part, Weigl has competently and thoroughly taken up the question of the stylistic and compositional aspects as well as the relationship to the biblical literature and the relevant Mesopotamian texts. Weigl’s colossal commentary, with its extensive attention to stylistic and comparative literary aspects, will no doubt shape the future of Ahiqar studies and the study of wisdom literature in general, perhaps especially in terms of the compositional techniques of wisdom collections.

\textsuperscript{236} Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 58, 713. For a brief discussion of how the presence of larger treatises impacts the study of wisdom literature in general, see pp. 709–22; cf. idem., “Compositional Strategies,” passim.
\textsuperscript{237} Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 733–34.
\textsuperscript{238} Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 723.
\textsuperscript{239} For a summary of his findings concerning Ahiqar’s literary connection to the Old Testament literature and Ben Sira, see Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 733–56.
1.3 The “Gaps” in Scholarship and the Methodological Response

1.3.1 Motivating Factors for this Study: The “Gaps” in Ahiqar Scholarship

As is evident by the survey above, the focus of scholarship on Ahiqar has until very recently been aimed in two directions: one, on textual, philological, and other linguistic matters, namely as a way to establish the date, provenance, and character of the presumed Urtext; and, secondly, on correspondences with biblical wisdom literature (and frequently Mesopotamian as well), with the interest on this latter point leaning much more heavily on how Ahiqar can help enlighten the biblical texts rather than the other way around.\footnote{Very little analysis has been done with respect to Ahiqar as a piece of literature itself. Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 32, aptly describes the problem: “The research continues to stand across a long stretch around the discussion of the philological, lexical and paleographical problems, and it pushed forward from there only rarely and rudimentarily toward over-reaching literary questions.”} Weigl’s recent volume has worked to correct this problem by offering a comprehensive analysis of the formal, compositional, and comparative-literary aspects in the sayings of Ahiqar. His study is, on the one hand, an important and sizeable first step. On the other hand, there continues to be a number of lacunae in Ahiqar scholarship.

These “gaps” represent the motivating factors for this dissertation. Specifically, the areas of Ahiqar study that demand consideration are: (1) a close analysis of the Aramaic narrative itself and of the two sections—narrative and sayings—together as a unified text; (2) a comprehensive assessment of its themes, basic message, ethic, and worldview (social, political, theological); (3) sufficient comparison with Egyptian literature; (4) its reception or interpretation at Elephantine or, more broadly, in the socio-political and literary climate of 5th c. Egypt.

1.3.1.1 The Narrative and Sayings of Ahiqar as a Unified Text

What should be at once obvious from the survey above is the overwhelming amount of scholarly attention given to the sayings and the relative lack of close attention to the narrative.\footnote{Consider, for example, that the only three monograph-length studies on the Aramaic Ahiqar from the past 30 years (Lindenberger, Kottsieper, Weigl) are focused entirely on the sayings. Indeed, there is no true commentary on the narrative portions included in any of the texts devoted to the sayings, let alone a volume that deals with the narrative text in its own right. Kottsieper’s self-proclaimed “annotated translation” of the narrative in the TUAT series is hardly sufficient (citation from Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 109).} Granted

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the Aramaic narrative is fragmentary and incomplete, but a thoughtful deliberation on its motifs, imagery, and message is lacking. But even more, is the nearly ubiquitous neglect—especially since Greenfield/Kutscher—of the relationship between the narrative and sayings. Weigl’s commentary, for example, deals exclusively with the sayings, only making passing reference to the narrative in the introduction and sporadically throughout the commentary. At no point, to my knowledge, has there been a sustained investigation of how the two sections complement each other, how the themes and concerns in the narrative are reverberated throughout the sayings, how the interpretation of a number of sayings is affected by the circumstances of the narrative, or how the two sections work together to create a larger textual unity with a coherent message and outlook.  

Indeed, this separation of narrative from sayings has characterized much of Ahiqar scholarship and thus represents one of the primary aspects to which this study is responding. This is also why I have chosen to use the title Book of Ahiqar, which implies both the narrative and sayings sections, rather than follow Lindenberger’s The Proverbs of Ahiqar or Weigl’s Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche.

1.3.1.2 Themes, Message, Ethic, and Worldview

Many themes or topics have been addressed throughout the past century of scholarship, but they are scattered across a number of articles, chapters, and sections of studies that generally only deal with a few select passages. There are no comprehensive analyses of the themes or basic message of Ahiqar. With the exception of a single article by Kottsieper, there is in-depth no treatment

242 At best we find speculation about a scribe, perhaps sometime in the 6th c., who combined the two and made only minor redactions in the sayings, such as adding the oft-cited complaints which seem to directly recall the narrative circumstances (lines 129–130). This study, therefore, will not frame the question in terms of when or why the two sections (hypothetically) came together; instead, the goal is to understand how they function together as part of a larger textual integrity. Cf. Weeks, Instruction, 13 who comments on how narrative-prologues and sayings work together in Egyptian instructions: “the identity of the protagonists is potentially significant, and their situation may also be linked to the nature of the advice. Merikare and Amenemhet are obvious examples, where the situation is critical for an understanding of the advice.”

243 In a few occasions, we can find lists of themes or topics, e.g., “Excursus 1” in TAD 3:xi–xvi and Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 617–35.

244 Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition.”
of the social worldview exhibited by the text. Even when it comes to the theological outlook, the handful of articles by Niehr (et al.) mentioned above are more concerned with establishing the “correct” historical pantheon than in discussing what the text actually conveys about the divine.\textsuperscript{245} Weigl’s study, while offering a comprehensive evaluation of the forms and stylistic features, only summarily considers the thematic or ethical aspects.\textsuperscript{246}

Some glaring questions, therefore, are left lingering: What is the text trying to do, or say, or achieve? What are its major themes or concerns? How do the topics relate to and convey information about the social, political, and/or theological worldview? The message of \textit{Ahiqar}, in other words, has yet to be clarified; and, like the formal and stylistic features of Weigl’s study, they need to be measured against the relevant literary and historical contexts.

1.3.1.3 Comparison with Egyptian Literature

The Aramaic \textit{Ahiqar} has been compared most often with the biblical materials (and rightly so), especially Proverbs. Comparison with Mesopotamian literature has also taken place, even if only superficially. In contrast, there has been relatively little effort made in comparing \textit{Ahiqar} with Egyptian literature, including the instructions. Engagement with the latter should not preclude that with the others. For the most part, I follow Weigl in seeing the Hebrew wisdom texts as one of the closest points of contact with \textit{Ahiqar} and thus deserving of the sustained treatment provided in his commentary. Still, Weigl hardly addresses the Egyptian materials despite acknowledging Egypt as one of the possible influences or backgrounds against which to interpret \textit{Ahiqar}.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{245} See discussion above; cf. Niehr, \textit{Aramäischer Ahiqar}, 16–17. Lindenberger’s 1982 article, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” is an exception in that he devotes a significant amount of space to the functional aspect rather than just the historical context.

\textsuperscript{246} He does have a section on the “Zentrale Themenfelder,” but it only makes up about 35 pages of his study, and mainly consists of lists of the various elements (e.g., flora, fauna, human groups, geographical areas, etc.); see Weigl, \textit{AAS}, 611–36.

\textsuperscript{247} See his discussion in \textit{AAS}, 32. To be fair, Weigl’s primary concern is with the biblical material, and at nearly 1,000 pages his tome is already pushing the boundaries of a single volume. Lester Grabbe, for example, in his review of Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, \textit{JSOT} 37 (2012): 205, also remarks on the (unnecessary) length of the volume, referring also to Weigl’s “rather prolix writing style.” Weigl provides nearly every possible biblical parallel imaginable for each saying, phrase, or word-pair, the majority of which are left without comment, leaving one wonder how useful such an exhaustive compilation really is. The dozens of references to the Mesopotamian texts are well-
strikes me as that one must emphasize Ahiqar’s discovery in Egypt, and thus there was the strong possibility for influence. It is also surprising that the Egyptian instructions are rarely evoked in Ahiqar studies given the impact this genre seemed to have had on the Western Semitic wisdom traditions.\textsuperscript{248} Ignoring the fact that Ahiqar was discovered in Egypt, even a superficial treatment of the literary character of Ahiqar (genre, structure, themes, etc.) is such that it invites comparisons with Egyptian literature, especially the instructions. Further, the reception and influence that Ahiqar itself had on the native Egyptian instructions tradition demonstrates that Ahiqar had at least some role in an Egyptian literary context.\textsuperscript{249} Why has an Egyptian literary background never been explored (to any significant extent) for Ahiqar?

1.3.1.4 Historical and Literary Context of Elephantine Papyri

Finally, and perhaps most outstanding, is the near complete dismissal of Elephantine as an informative historical and social context for interpreting Ahiqar. The same goes for the broader context of Egypt during its Achaemenid occupation in the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.E. Again, Weigl poses a good question, but never really attempts to answer it:

Hat der Auffindungsort – eine judäisch-aramäische Diasporagemeinde – irgendeine Signifikanz für die Literaturgeschichte der auf den Papyri zum ersten Mal historisch konkret greifbaren Weisheitssprüche und die ihr vorgeschaltete Hoflegende … oder hat der Fund reinen Zufallscharakter? Erfolgte die Überlieferung des Manuskriptes quasi in einer „Kulturblase“, in völliger Isolation vom ägyptisch-aramäischen Umfeld?\textsuperscript{250}

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suited to the respective analyses, with only some exception. In contrast, on only about twenty occasions does he mention an Egyptian text, and even these are of a fairly general nature.

\textsuperscript{248} The influence of the New Kingdom Instructions of Amenemope on the book of Proverbs (esp. 22:17–24:30) is the best example of this.

\textsuperscript{249} So the logic goes: that Ahiqar was incorporated into the native Egyptian tradition (directly by way of translation or indirectly by way of influence on Ankhsheshonqe’s structure and content) insinuates that there was something familiar or desirable about Ahiqar that appealed to the sensibilities of the Egyptians.

\textsuperscript{250} Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 52, see also his questions about this issue on pp. 36–37.
The fluid nature of literature in its transmission and reproduction would suggest that one should at least consider the possibility that the narrative and sayings of Ahiqar had some immediate significance to the audience at Elephantine (whomever that might have been specifically).

Additionally, Ahiqar has only recently been considered in light of the growing body of Aramaic literature discovered in Egypt. These texts, being in the same language and from generally the same time period and location, should thus stand as the primary interpretive horizon for Ahiqar. The Sheikh Faḍl inscription, for example, was inscribed no more than 50 years prior to the Elephantine Ahiqar and, even more, includes a story set in the same historical period and dealing with some of the same issues! The inscription contains a number of texts but in one panel we find a narrative that mentions the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (אסירדון) alongside of the last Cushite pharaoh Taharqa (תארחא) as well as Necho I (נ/change-h), founder of the Saite dynasty, whose reign partly coincided with Taharqa’s. The text also mentions a certain Yinḥaru (יינחרו), whom Holm (as well as Lemaire and Ryholt, among others) considers to be the hero Inaros of Athribis, “who was an Egyptian rebel against the Assyrians in the seventh century B.C.E. … [and] is best known from

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251 Even if we concede that there is a strong Mesopotamian influence on the composition of Ahiqar, both in literary structure and historical referents, this should still not prevent a reading of the text in light of its more immediate historical and literary context, i.e., Aramaic-speaking communities in 5th c. Egypt. Consider, for example, the discussion of Proverbs 1–9 by Weeks, “Instruction,” who, like many others, looks to Egypt as the literary background for the Hebrew text, but maintains that even if a direct dependence is demonstrable, it should not constrain our reading of Proverbs in light of its Jewish literary and historical setting. He states (p. 36): “To take a loose analogy, if we were to try to read Proverbs 1–9 solely in light of the foreign instructions, rather than the Jewish context in which it was composed, this would be like reading the Aeneid solely on the basis of Greek epic tradition while ignoring its context in Roman literature and thought.” I find this to be a fantastic illustration of the obvious pitfalls of scholarly assessments that display such tunnel-vision in their interpretations (whether intentionally or not).

252 The most up-to-date and exhaustive analysis of this text with translation is by Tawny L. Holm, “The Sheikh Faḍl Inscription in its Literary and Historical Context,” Aramaic Studies 5 (2007): 193–224. The Aramaic text, including a reproduction and translation, can be found in TAD D 23.1 (pp. 286–98). Technically this is not an inscription since it is written with ink on stone. An even closer example would be that of Hi-Hor (TAD C1.2) from Elephantine, and there are some reasons to think they are related (see, e.g., Betro, “La tradizione di Achiqar in Egitto”). Unfortunately, it is very fragmentary and far from completely preserved.

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The most extensive story cycle in Egyptian literature, found in several published and unpublished Demotic manuscripts dating to the late Ptolemaic and Roman periods.”

When weighed against the literary witnesses from Egypt, both Aramaic and Demotic, from around the same time period as Ahiqar, it becomes increasingly clear that the Mesopotamian setting is far from prescriptive relative to the either the text’s production or reception. As Tawny Holm recently states:

“We are continually gaining more and more evidence that in fact writers in Egypt, whether they were native Egyptians or Aramaic-speakers displaced from Syria-Palestine or Mesopotamia, did sometimes choose to place their compositions in Mesopotamia or the East, and they knew enough about eastern traditions to aspire to verisimilitude in their fiction.”

The questions remain then: How does the political, social, and literary climate of the Elephantine Ahiqar papyrus affect its interpretation? How might it have been received by the Elephantine audience? What was its significance, function, impact there?

1.3.2 Methodological Response: Strategies of Interpretation for this Study

The above “gaps” in Ahiqar scholarship represent the motivating factor for this dissertation. In response, I offer some methodological principles upon which the following study will depend. The interpretive mechanisms of this dissertation will be undergirded by two related principles. First, the text ought to be interpreted as is (that is, in the form we have it) and in its entirety—i.e. that the narrative and sayings should be understood together as parts of a unified whole. The second guiding principle is that Ahiqar will be assessed in situ. In other words, when it is relevant or

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254 Tawny L. Holm, “Daniel 1–6: A Biblical Story–Collection,” in Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christianity and Jewish Narrative (ed. Jo–Ann A. Brant, Charles W. Hendrick, and Chris Shea; SBLSym 32; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 149–66, at 165. Besides Sheikh Fadl (in Aramaic) and the Inaros (Petubastis) cycle (in Demotic), Holm adds (pp. 165–66 n. 51): “among other works in Egyptian, we have the story on the Bentresh stela that is set in Bakhtan (possibly Bactria), and the ‘Doomed Prince,’ set in Nahrain (Mittani). In Aramaic, we have the examples of the story of Ahiqar , which is set in Assyria, and the ‘Revolt of Babylon’ on Papyrus Amherst 63 (cols. 18–23), a historical poem written in Demotic script, set in Babylon and based on historical events during the days of Shamash-shun-ukin and Assurbanipal.”

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helpful to speculate on how *Ahiqar* was read/received by an ancient audience, the historical and literary context that will be considered is the same as the one in which *the papyri themselves* were produced.

Although scholars such as Kottsieper or Lindenberger may be ultimately correct in locating the “original” *Ahiqar* in Syria during the 8th to 6th centuries (though I remain unconvinced), there is virtually no way of telling just what this original copy looked like, which sayings it had and in what form, or which details of the story were present and/or emphasized. Even if these could be established, we know very little about the specific communities in which this hypothetical text was received. What we can know a great deal about, however, is what *Ahiqar* looked like in the 5th c. B.C.E. Granted, the language and even some of the content can give us clues about the text’s past, and such a scholarly endeavor has its merits, but meanwhile the character of the text as we have it has been overlooked. Moreover, the search for the original date and provenance says nothing about the text’s significance for the Elephantine community. If this were some medieval manuscript, and we had good reason to think it went back to an ancient composition, then maybe there would be more benefit for excising the “obvious later accretions.” But with the Aramaic *Ahiqar*, we have an ancient text *in situ*.

The importance of taking *Ahiqar as is* becomes ever more apparent when weighed against recent trends in biblical studies. Briefly, with the discovery of the texts from Qumran, especially of those that would later become part of a canon, we have found that the “sanctity” of a text’s integrity was not as rigid as once was thought, even among those that have for a long time been deemed “authoritative” in earlier periods. I am thinking here of texts like the Temple Scroll, Jubilees, or the *Genesis Apocrypon*, among others, which freely cut, pasted, deleted, added to, and rearranged the supposed authoritative texts whose integrity is not as firm as we would like. This is not to deny the importance of text-critical approaches, but to recognize that in many scholarly circles these days, the work of text-critic is no longer after some “original” text, but at trying to establish what a text looked like at various times and in various places and evaluating how and why the various witnesses exhibit such differences. As result we might pose the simple question: are the MT Jeremiah and the Qumran Jeremiah (4Q72) the same text or are they different manifestations of a more complicated text-tradition? The answer is complicated and beyond the

255 We must, though, be aware of its incomplete and fragmentary state, and thus we still do not have a full picture.
scope here, but it speaks to a necessary shift that has taken place in biblical studies concerning how we understand the scribal traditions, forcing us to reevaluate our understanding of each textual witness as an independent, though not wholly autonomous instance of a larger, more complex picture.

This shift has not, as of yet, found its way into Ahiqar studies. To date most of the studies on Ahiqar still have this obsession with “origins,” and rely on imprecise application of redactional models which view texts as static entities, all the while admitting the proclivity for accretions, deletions, adaptations, during the process of transmission. In other words, comments like Kottsieper’s above about “unified strata” in Ahiqar assume that there is some “core” part of the text that harkens back to an “original” form that can be recovered by applying a redactional analysis.256 However, this approach is fraught with problems, the most notable of which is the seemingly arbitrary way in which certain sayings or passages are assigned to earlier layers while others are considered secondary. On what methodological basis does Kottsieper, for example, argue that “familial wisdom” is older than the so-called “erudite” wisdom that relates to the court and which speculates on human nature and the cosmos?257 Kottsieper’s “unified” strands of “family” vs. “erudite” wisdom are built on presuppositions about what “older” looks like and what is “secondary.” Ironically, for an otherwise careful scholar in terms of philological analysis, his criteria for delineating redactional layers is at no point connected to the linguistic character of each saying, but instead is an arbitrarily constructed model of form and content that is based on an apparently aesthetic reading. Thus, his schema is that more simple or pastoral equals older and popular wisdom, while the more complex or speculative equals later and professional wisdom.258

257 Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 120.

258 It is not difficult to make the assumption that Kottsieper is still dependent upon the earlier, outdated models that were applied to Proverbs which separated the “secular” folk wisdom from the “religious” or Yahwistic proverbs. As we will discuss below in the conversation about genre, there is simply no reason to suppose that a saying concerning farm-life in proverbial form must pre-date a saying which speculates on the divine-human relationship in a more imaginative, metaphorical form. To make a diachronic distinction between these simply on form and a perceived “erudition” (as Kottsieper does) is methodologically unsound and has been largely disproven based on the evidence from comparative materials. See, e.g., Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 15–52, for a brief rebuttal to previous models.
Even if these two “strands” could be filtered out neatly—and, to be sure, they cannot—we might still ask, in Nickelsburg’s words, “Does a coherent set of themes necessarily indicate a compositional stratum that is to be differentiated from other strata, composed of their own sets of coherent themes? Do narrative tensions necessarily reveal the hand of an editor who is bringing together disparate material or expanding received traditions?” Moreover, what does the identification of distinct strands of sayings add to our knowledge of the Elephantine version as we have it? Does the finished product not represent a new literary creation? Some of the hesitancy for viewing it as such comes, no doubt, from the literary character itself, i.e. a collection of seemingly disparate sayings. However, according to Kottsieper’s own logic there is at least a possibility for a unified logic in such a literary genre.

There is also the implication that incongruity within the text necessitates such a diachronic view and, likewise, invalidates any synchronic appreciation of the text as representing a unified

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of Egyptian instructions that argued for such a development and the implications it has on understanding biblical wisdom literature. For my part, this is one of the many reasons why a synchronic analysis is more appealing.


See, for example, Michael Fox’s recent article wherein he argues that “the creator of this passage (the “Words of the Wise”) was an author. He created the passage reusing and reshaping the material from earlier texts and writing new material of his own” (“From Amenemope to Proverbs”, ZAW 126 (2014): 76–91, at 77). Even if a later compiler, redactor, author (whatever you want to call them) simply stitched together two previously independent pieces whole-cloth, does this not also reflect an “authorial” activity for presumably (s)he sees something that justifies their connection and presumably would expect the audience to make such a connection as well? To be sure, even the most critical assessments see the bringing together of narrative and sayings as more than just unedited attachment by pointing to the passage in 139–140, even if they do not see any thorough revision among the sayings in light of the new context. The question stands, then, how many changes have to be made before we can call the redactor an author? How much before we can talk about a “new literary creation”? If it is not clear, the questions are facetious for two reasons: first, any answer is arbitrary, and secondly the premise of these questions is faulty. The assumption is that we can get into the mind of an author and try and decide if (s)he intended to create something new, when a more reasonable assumption is to consider it from the perspective of the reader who would, no doubt, see this not only as “new” but as a unified and complete text, even if that reader was intimately familiar with the compositional history (a speculative notion at best). Each reading, each performance of a text is new and offers difference circumstances for discerning meaning. In the following chapter we will consider recent literary theory and related discussions in response to semiotics wherein we find a shift in focus from “author” to “reader(s).”

A theory of coherence in the sayings genre will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.
whole. This perspective on literature, in general, and within biblical studies more specifically, has been met with criticism. Consider, for example, a recent study by Christine R. Yoder on repetition and contradiction in Proverbs.262 Yoder does not seek to account for the incongruities in Proverbs through some compositional explanation, but instead fully appreciates them as a part of the text’s pedagogical purpose. She argues that the incongruities in the proverbs implicitly “call attention to incongruities in the world … they convey that the arena of wisdom is replete with competing discourses, with divergent perspectives on reality and morality … [and they] point readers to a reality larger than the proverbs in question: the moral self inevitably holds views that are in conflict with one another and applies those views depending on the immediate circumstances.”263 What Yoder is hinting at here is that wise behavior—and, by extension ethics and morality—is situational, at least according to the biblical author, rather than absolute. Most important for this study, though, is that Yoder treats Proverbs “as a book,” that is as a single textual unit with a unified, though complex, message. So, while conceding that the way in which Proverbs has arrived in its current (= MT) form involved bringing together disparate sources with their different social and ethical viewpoints, she nevertheless sees these disparate “layers” as contributing to the overall pedagogical technique of the text and, moreover, that contradiction “is also a theme of a book.”264

There are other ways to account for the apparent incongruity in form or even message in Ahiqar. For one, there is a concurrent shift, in light of literary theory’s influence on biblical studies, which moves the locus of meaning from the author’s involvement with the text to that of the reader. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 2. But, for the moment I will consider another significant aspect in this regard, namely the “ideological strategies” discernible in the text which contribute


264 Yoder, “Forming ‘Fearers,’” 180. For example, she suggests (at p. 182) that for the listener the “contemplation of contradictory proverbs may teach the moderation of impulses” and thus the representation of two extremes in the very same collection may aid the listener in finding the “sensible ‘middle way.’” For other studies that appreciated the incongruity within Proverbs, see, e.g., Hoglund, “The Fool and the Wise in Dialogue” on Prov 26:4–5; and van Leeuwen “Wealth and Poverty” and Sandoval, Discourse of Wealth and Poverty on contradictory statements in Proverbs with respect to wealth.
to notions of identity as well as its worldview. The strategies in Ahiqar are primarily narratological and rhetorical, but we might also consider a third: the dialogical. With Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and polyphony in mind, we can both discern and account for the multiplicity of voices within the text. The speaker in Ahiqar, at first glance, does not appear to be a “monologic” or ideologically consistent rhetorical entity. We find, for example, appeals to divine justice (107–108), and yet at the same time we also find imaginative presentations of the arbitrariness—even unjustness—of the gods (e.g.,106, 162–163). Additionally, the image of the king in both the narrative and the sayings is contradictory, being the symbol of both beneficence and abuse. While some might treat the apparent inconsistencies in perspective as representative of the haphazard nature of collections or some other transmission-related factor, I suggest that a better and more fruitful approach is to see these voices as representing a conversation, a discourse. In this I am reminded of a study of the Psalms by Davida Charney, who draws on recent rhetorical theory “to account for the apparent shifts in mood or voice in the individual psalms.” Instead of the traditional redaction models that likewise draw on rhetorical sensitivities in order to identify compositional “layers,” the approach taken by Charney attempts to show “how these apparent digressions actually build a connected line of argument and contribute to a coherent and persuasive reading of a psalm as a whole.” In Chapter 5 I will offer a more thorough assessment of the conflicting impulses in Ahiqar with respect to the dialogic approach.

267 The speaker is, from a rhetorical perspective, the “voice” within the textual universe, which need not be equated with the author.
268 I will speak to the “divine/royal” complex in Chapter 5.
269 Charney, “Maintaining Innocence,” at 36.
270 Charney, “Maintaining Innocence,” 36. Even the specifics of Charney’s readings of some of the psalms resonates with the content of Ahiqar, for Charney’s description of the two voices as “a quarrel between a voice speaking from
The diachronic models and the attendant debate concerning the precise location, date, and linguistic character of the “original” *Ahiqar*, while important for their own objectives, bear little weight when we are trying to understand the text at hand. Briefly, though, even if we enter into the debate about the diachronic linguistic analysis, we may note that Greenfield and others (nearly 50 years ago!) have already observed that the text *as we have it* had undergone some “Achaemenid” updating.\(^{271}\) Moreover, several formulae in narrative and the sayings are also found among the Elephantine documents contemporary with the *Ahiqar* papyri. This demonstrates that even if these forms were used centuries before, they still continued to be used by (and thus have significance for) the 5\(^{th}\) c. Aramaic-speaking communities in Egypt. Take, for example, the phrase “to seek the welfare” which is found in both the narrative (24) and sayings (167–168) of *Ahiqar*. This expression is frequently found in the epistolary evidence from Elephantine (e.g., TAD A2.3.3; A3.5.1; A4.1.1; A5.3.1; et al.), hence it is an idiom that was used in everyday language by the very same people who probably produced or read *Ahiqar*. Yet this connection (and several others) is hardly given significance in terms of *Ahiqar*’s reception at Elephantine. At best, though still utterly frustrating, are the comments by Fales about this expression, which, according to him, “points univocally to the age of the Neo-Assyrian empire of the period of formation of part of the cultural experience displayed by the Aramaic scribes of Achaemenian Egypt … Aramaic texts from Persian Egypt may be shown to preserve … some literary stylistic, and linguistic materials attested in the cultural horizon of the late Assyrian capital in its last century of existence.”\(^{272}\) He brings attention to the similar usage in the *Ahiqar* text and the other Elephantine documents but his takeaway is to add further evidence for his argument that *Ahiqar* and the Elephantine community itself have their roots in Neo-Assyrian period. On one level, this observation has some merit; it is indeed interesting to see formulaic phrases from earlier periods being employed in much later periods and in very

\(^{271}\) Greenfield, “Dialects,” 97; cf. Makujina, “Old Persian and the Marking of Narrative Sequence,” esp. 88–89. See also the list of features that are “characteristic of Aramaic texts from the Achaemenid period” in Folmer, *Aramaic*, 736.

\(^{272}\) Fales, *Letters*, 457–59 (cited by Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 416 n. 110 in his commentary, who does not counter Fales’s conclusion, but, to be fair, Weigl does indicate that the dating of this phrase is not that important and instead focuses on what it’s use implies when considered against the outside evidence)
distant contexts. On the other hand, if such a phrase was “common” to the Elephantine audience, how can its usage in *Ahiqar* in any way point to a Neo-Assyrian origin for the sayings? Of course, this could be some remnant of an earlier text passed down over the centuries. But, it is just as likely (perhaps even more so) to assume that an Elephantine author composed (or even reformulated) the text himself and simply drew on the dialectical conventions of his day, which happened to include this “ancient” formula. The more cautious conclusion, therefore, is that this phrase does not prove anything about the “origins” of *Ahiqar* either way. What it does demonstrate, however, is that regardless of the text’s “origins” the language of *Ahiqar* would have made sense to the Elephantine audience.

Ultimately, the concern in this study is the *reception* of literature. Reception can, of course, be extended well beyond the ancient contexts, but because we have in *Ahiqar* a text *in situ* we can, and should, begin with the text’s *immediate* reception. When it comes to a historical-critical reading, the priority of interpretation rests on the material audience of the ancient text which can more easily be identified than on any hypothetically assigned earlier context. In a critique of similar approaches that were made with respect to Egyptian Instructions, Antonio Loprieno makes the following assertion: “Scholars should pay more attention to the unambiguous historical context in which the Egyptian literary texts were read than to the putative settings in which they were composed. While a Middle Kingdom manuscript does not tell us precisely when the text was originally composed, it does tell us that it fulfilled some need in Middle Kingdom society.”

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273 The problem with this logic is magnified when we consider that the idiom even made its way (presumably via Aramaic) into Demotic letters of the Ptolemaic and Roman period (e.g., Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, texts C17 and C23).

274 Even more so, the contemporary usage of the formula is a more appropriate context for teasing out the implicit, underlying aspects of this idiom (e.g. what it conveys about social status). This will be discussed in Chapter 4; though note that Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 416 n. 110, places some emphasis on what this idiom (in both its Elephantine and Neo-Assyrian usage) conveys about the social status of the two speakers relative to each other.

275 Loprieno, “Foreword” to Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:xxix. Similarly, Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, 98 makes the claim: “It appears that, in the Egyptian tradition of wisdom books, each rendering of a work was considered something of an original combination by the scribe, who normally made certain alterations, deletions, and additions to the work. Each manuscript becomes, then, something of a different type of the work.” Sanders points to Francois Lexa’s discussion of Phibis “where such apparently ‘original’ reformulations of this famous text can be demonstrated in considerable number” (p. 98); cf. Lexa, *Les Enseignements moraux d’un scribe égyptien du premier siècle après*
Loprieno’s comments are strongly informative for this study’s approach to Ahiqar, more specifically they point to the application of New (or Material) Philology.

Although Loprieno himself did not lay out such an approach, Fredrick Hagen has recently taken up the principles of Material Philology in an important study of the Egyptian Instruction of Ptahhotep. Briefly put, the logic of this approach “hinges in part on the assumption that examples of individual readings in antiquity may be representative.” In other words, regardless of a text’s pre-history, the individual attestations of a given text are meaningful for the community which produced and/or received it. This principle of Material Philology is further substantiated by the recognition of the fluidity in transmission. Texts are continuously being update, reimagined, and reformulated in order to serve the needs of the receiving community.

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J.-C., texte démotique avec transcription, traduction française, commentaire, vocabulaire et introduction grammaticale et littéraire (Paris: Geunther, 1926); with regard to other Egyptian texts and this phenomenon see Aksel Volten, Studien zum Weisheitsbuch des Anii (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgard, 1937).


277 Hagen, Ptahhotep, 26; who applies principles of Material Philology to the multiple ancient witnesses to the Instruction of Ptahhotep. Antonio Loprieno also points to Ptahhotep specifically (probably because it is often cited as representative of the “canon” of Egyptian instructional literature), adding “the composition of an Egyptian text probably underwent more changes and adaptations in a society that primarily relied on oral interaction and transmission … and in the case of some literary texts for which we have examples from different historical periods, such as the Instructions of Ptahhotep, we can observe that the New Kingdom versions display numerous emendations when compared with the Middle Kingdom version of the same text. In some cases, therefore, it may prove advisable to take the evidence provided by the manuscript tradition as a point of departure for our reading of Egyptian literary texts rather than to reconstruct an ideal period for its composition”; see Loprieno, Foreword, xxix.

278 In this respect I am largely influenced by recent trends among some circles of Egyptologists, particularly as these principles are applied to the Egyptian Instructions genre. See, especially, Hagen, Ptahhotep and Loprieno, Foreword, at xxix, who calls for a general readjustment in scholarly approaches: “Scholars should pay more attention to the unambiguous historical context in which Egyptian literary texts were read than to the putative settings in which they were composed. While a Middle Kingdom manuscript does not tell us precisely when the text was originally composed, it does tell us that it fulfilled some need in Middle Kingdom society.”
Returning to *Ahiqar*, at least in its ancient attestation, the picture is much simpler. While it is unfortunate that we do not have another ancient witness with which we can compare it directly,\(^{279}\) we do, however, have the fortuitous occasion of a clear snapshot—the fragmentary nature notwithstanding—of an ancient text *in a specific historical setting* with a *specific constitution*. This makes it all the more frustratingly ironic that hardly any study has appreciated *Ahiqar* simply for what it is rather than trying to dig at some hypothetical compositional history built on often speculative assumptions with very little evidence.\(^{280}\) It seems much wiser and methodologically sound to assess the text *as is and in situ*. 

With the Ahiqar papyri we are fortunate to have a piece of literature for which we also have a precise date and location, as well as a reasonable understanding of the receiving audience. This allows us a pretty good contextual “lens” through which to view and interpret the text, especially when compared with the many biblical texts or passages that are so distant from their production. In opting for a more reader-oriented, literary approach, this should by no means entail that historical-critical approaches are entirely invalid. Looking backwards to earlier historical periods or literary influences can still inform this interpretation, but how we use these materials differs. For example, the narrative’s setting at the Assyrian court is not that important for establishing some historicity to the actual account. But, we might argue that the Neo-Assyrian Empire clearly left an imprint on the memory of large swaths of peoples in the ancient world, including the Israelites/Judeans and Egyptians. That this era had a lasting impression on both these groups is signified by the respective literary traditions that dealt with this period and which continued down through the Greco-Roman period. The historical period in which the narrative of *Ahiqar* is set, therefore, likely had some meaningful significance for the Elephantine audience. In particular (and this point, among others, will be expanded upon later) we might explore how the memories of an historical epoch influenced both the way these communities perceived themselves

\(^{279}\) The Demotic version is certainly too fragmentary and as for the instances of the narrative in Aesop and the later versions, they are still quite distant in terms of a line-by-line text-critical analysis.

\(^{280}\) And I am certainly including here the linguistic analyses which place a superb amount of weight on forms that have only a couple, sometimes even one occurrence and from which “firm” suggestions of time and location are placed. The most sobering and restrained analysis of the linguistic features in *Ahiqar* seems to be that of Folmer, *The Aramaic Language*, esp. 736, who emphasizes the paucity of both the contemporary evidence from the supposed 8th/7th c. Syrian setting as well as the instances of certain forms.
as part of a much larger tradition as well as how it affected their estimation of the present social and political circumstances in which they find themselves, i.e. by making ideological connections between ancient examples and the present realities.281

In the effort to understand what the Ahiqar text means (or, better, could mean) and what worldview its wisdom espouses, the relatively minor dialectical differences, while interesting, are not so significant. The presumption should be that the text as we have it—that is, with all its linguistic particularities and supposed loan-words, etc.—was read or heard by an audience at the same time. The point I am trying to make, and one that is informed by the principles of Material philology, is that the Ahiqar papyrus represents an artifact in itself to be taken seriously as is rather than de-materialized into “textual studies” where the words and phrases are free to be deconstructed, rearranged, classified, and, in essence, manipulated so that they might be situated within a linguistic-historical paradigm for which we hardly any evidence. In applying the principles of Material Philology, the goal is to read a particular manuscript in its context as something material with which an ancient reader interacted; rather than as merely one witness to a hierarchy of manuscripts brought together by scholars in order to comment on some hypothetical Urtext. Reading an individual manuscript as is and in situ allows for the occasion where literary theory and historical criticism come together. Hagen states it plainly: “To acknowledge each manuscript as an example of medieval or an ancient Egyptian ‘event’ is fundamental to our understanding of a text and its context, but we are still in need of traditional philological studies of text transmission and textual criticism to map the social and literary life of any given text.”282 So, in the case of Ahiqar, where we only have the one witness (at least from antiquity), I would add that we are still in need of traditional historical-critical and comparative literary studies in order to map its social-historical and literary impact in the particular community from which the manuscript itself derives.

Moving forward, then, what we are left with is what I might call a rhetorical approach that is both historically-informed and dependent (in part) on comparative literary principles, whereby

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282 Hagen, Ptahhotep, 27.
the message, themes, worldview, and ethic of Ahiqar as determined by a close reading of the text itself can be characterized further and given more nuance by recourse to the text’s broad literary context while at the same time giving some attention to the social and historical setting in which the physical papyri themselves were found. In this regard, we can not only speak to the literary artistry and thematic diversity exemplified by Ahiqar, but we can also speculate on how a specific ancient and informed audience responded to the particularities of the text. This is a complicated endeavor, but not an impossible or even improbable one, and more importantly, this approach stands on firmer footing, both methodologically and evidentially, than previous, diachronic models. As the next chapter will show, Ahiqar’s literary character reflects an association with the Egyptian instructions genre and a reading of Ahiqar can benefit from keeping an eye toward relevant and comparable materials from Egypt—as well as, of course, those from Israel and, to a lesser extent, Mesopotamia. Moreover, evidence of a vibrant Aramaic literary tradition in Egypt during this period (7th-4th B.C.E.), in which Ahiqar takes part, suggests that an equally, if not greater, crucible for textual analysis and comparison is not necessarily some “international wisdom tradition” but the handful of texts coming to light that clearly line up with Ahiqar’s interests, chronologically, geographically, linguistically, thematically, and (sometimes) generically.

Finally, I end this methodological response with a brief illustration and explanation. The following saying, found in column 11 of Ahiqar will stand as an interpretive example for the modus operandi of this study:

Ahiqar, 166-168a

A leopard happened upon a goat, and it (the goat) was naked. The leopard answered and said to the goat, ‘Come and let me cover you with my skin.’ The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, ‘Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!’ – For [a leopard] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.”

Several fables like this one appear in the Book of Ahiqar, and they are often considered a distinctive feature of the text. Each of the following chapters will begin with a brief analysis of this fable as a representative example of the respective focus of that chapter. For example, earlier we discussed the Elephantine documents as important witnesses to the historical context of Ahiqar. In an
evaluation of the fable vis-à-vis its Elephantine environment, we might point out that the phrase “to seek the welfare”—which, by the way, is also found in the narrative portion—was a common greeting at Elephantine according to the epistolary record. Could this, then, intimate some special connection with a particular social setting? We might then question whether the way in which this idiom is used in the daily life of Elephantine affects the way we interpret this saying. If so, how should we aptly configure this relationship between a text and its apparent context? This question, and many others, will be discussed in more detail throughout this study, but for now the example of the fable above has made it abundantly clear that an analysis of *Ahiqar*, merits consideration on a many levels. The immediate material context is only one piece of the puzzle.

The analysis above and in the subsequent chapters depends upon a close, synthetic reading of the entire text along specific thematic lines, which are, generally, the formal.generic (chapter 2), thematic/ethical (chapter 3), social (chapter 4), and theological (chapter 5). The thematic organization of this study is admittedly arbitrary. As the fable of the leopard and the goat will make clear, the various aspects cannot easily be dissected from one another. Nevertheless, the successive treatments of this fable also speak to the overall heuristic purpose for arranging my dissertation in such a way—as opposed to, say, a commentary form as Weigl has done. This is partly because the close philological, paleographical, or textual matters are not of primary concern, nor am I looking to treat each saying in isolation, though a select number will be given more detailed attention than others. Likewise, the atomistic nature of the saying is recognizable, as it can certainly have meaning in isolation; however, each chapter will demonstrate that neither this fable nor the other sayings are without context, whether it be the immediate context of the respective column or the compositional context of *Ahiqar* as a whole, or even in the much broader contexts that are external from the text. The interpretation and significance of each saying, like the fable above, depends not simply on the inner logic of the saying alone, but must be tempered against these other contexts. *Ahiqar*, as the saying goes, is not simply a sum of its parts, each component has a function that contributes to a much larger purpose and, moreover, that purpose, along with its multiple significances, is given direction and nuance when appraised further by literary and socio-political

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283 As stated already in the previous chapter, these aspects have been discussed ad nauseum over the past century. Still, when the occasion arises that there is some debate about paleography or lexicography, the comments will be largely relegated, with only minor exception, to footnotes so as to allow for a smoother flow of the analysis.
sensitivities. In brief, the point of this arrangement and the exercise with the fable at the beginning of each chapter is to demonstrate symbolically the value of a topically-arranged, synchronic approach. When it comes to trying to unravel this ancient text for a modern audience, the brief analyses of this fable can illustrate on a manageable level both the complexity of such an undertaking—which operates on multiple levels of meaning—but also that the text’s polyphony can still be reconciled and thus reveal a unified, coherent message, even if that message may resonate differently depending on the contextual lens through which we read it.

As this chapter has shown, even when restricting our study of the “Ahiqar tradition” to just the Elephantine witness, there is still a great deal of complexity. How then can we filter the multitude of issues, concerns, and problems into a single monograph? In truth, this cannot be done; we must necessarily be selective, not only in which aspects to highlight, but also to which sayings we pay closer attention and to which external sources—literary and historical—we look for aid and a framework for interpretation. The leopard-goat fable is but one of the many passages I could have chosen to illustrate these competing impulses. With so many distractions, the primary objective can easily be lost in the messy details. Prefacing each chapter, however, with a brief look at a singular example not only allows for a convenient and manageable way to demonstrate the specific aims of the respective chapters, but at the same time it can also convey how these issues ultimately interrelate. The following pages represent my best effort at offering clarification of an ancient text in as concise and intelligible manner as possible.
CHAPTER TWO

“THE BEGINNING OF THE WORDS”
A LITERARY AND FORMAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARAMAIC BOOK OF AHIQAR

2.1 The Self-Presentation of Wisdom: ¹ A Literary Approach to the Book of Ahiqar

Ahiqar, 166-168a

A leopard happened upon a goat, and it (the goat) was naked. The leopard answered and said to the goat, ‘Come and let me cover you with my skin.’ The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, ‘Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!’ – For [a leopard] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.”

The general structure of this fable appears to be a contest of words and wit between two natural foes: the leopard as predator and the goat as prey. We may also note the presence of an explanatory clause, signaled by the subordinating conjunction כ. The addition of what we might call “exterior commentary” is a typical stylistic feature of many of the sayings, not just the fables. That the animal fables have a symbolic function, which is often tied to some moral or social aspect of human behavior, is reinforced by attending to the proclivity toward rhetorical devices in the sayings. Specifically, we might speculate that the term גֶּזֶל, often taken to mean “gazelle”—which, in itself is odd, given that the animal of prey in the fable is גֶּזֶל, “the goat”—may, in fact, be a pun recalling the similar sounding plural, determined form of the substantive-adjective “good ones” (from יֵשָׁבָה). The pun is elsewhere attested as a stylistic device in Ahiqar. The immediate literary context, therefore, has a part to play in interpretation. The opposition between the goat and the leopard—as “good” and bad animal-types respectively—echoes a similar oppositional aspect in

the two sayings which immediately proceed and follow the fable, especially the latter one, which also happens to be a fable pitting a predator (a bear) against its prey (lambs). More broadly though, we can discern a didactic aspect, not only in its apparent aim of trying to teach a lesson, but in that the lesson depends upon natural observations about the world and its constituents—in this case the typical behavior of animals. Observations about the natural world and a pedagogic intent likewise recall similar literary traditions in the ancient world that can provide taxonomic guidance but, more importantly, it also guides interpretation. Moreover, we should also consider that the lesson of the fable can only be achieved by a reasoned response on the part of a reader that is attuned to the internal logic implicit within the text itself, as well as one nuanced by external inputs. We might ask then: whom or what do the goat and leopard represent or with whom should the reader identify? The importance of the reader for the interpretation of a saying should not go unnoticed. For this reason, a methodology for reading, which includes an aspect of intertextuality, is necessary.

This chapter is concerned with the literary quality of Ahiqar, its formal and stylistic features as well as its genre, particularly in relation to the broader literary context. In one respect, then, this chapter aims to treat Ahiqar as a piece of literature in its own right—a desideratum in Ahiqar scholarship that is only recently beginning to be addressed. The purpose is also to familiarize the reader with the rhetorical makeup Ahiqar, to “get a feel” for its formal constitution and stylistic idiosyncrasies. In another way, this chapter functions as an introduction to as well as an interpretive undergirding for the readings I offer in the following three chapters, which make up the core analyses of this dissertation.

In terms of overall structure, we can observe two large sections in the Book of Ahiqar. First, we have a narrative. There are characters, dialogue, and a plot. Moreover, the plot is propelled by a sequence of tensions that must be resolved. Secondly, we also have a set of sayings, which exhibit a variety of individual forms and structures. Consideration of each major section separately can be convenient given their dissimilar literary form. However, despite their distinction on a formal level, it is important to note that the two sections are directly linked by in the text’s very first lines: “[The beginning of]² the words of Ahiqar by name, a wise scribe and a maher, that he taught to his

² Aram. רاياֹ [ ראעא]; cf. Dan 7:1 “the beginning of the words” (Aram. ראעש פָלֵיל); 2 Esdras 8:19 “the beginning of the words of Ezra’s prayer, before he was taken up” (NRSV; Syr. ראהֲאֳאִלֲאִי דִבָאֲאֲדוֹ הָאִי הָיְאֲאֲנָא תִיֲאֲאֶלֲאֲוֹ; similar in Ethiopian, though Latin reads “the beginning of the words of Ezra”). A more frequent suggestion for the opening lacuna
son … (but) before his words …”3 The importance of this incipit, therefore, should not be overlooked as it ties these two formally disparate sections together. Unfortunately, the column(s) at which the text transitions from narrative to sayings (and perhaps back again) is missing. In any case, the sayings are apparently presented as instructions from the main character Ahiqar to another character, most likely his (adopted) son Nadan and, moreover, a number of features in the sayings themselves directly recall this context, though not all of them require it as such. An interpretation of both the narrative and sayings is only complete when we read them together and allow for a reciprocal relationship. In other words, when reading the sayings we should recall the events and lessons from the narrative, allowing them to have some influence on the interpretation of the sayings, and vice versa. Moreover, the self-presentation of the wisdom sayings—as instructions from a father to a son in the context of a narrative setting—has implications not only on how we are to interpret the individual sayings but on how we conceive of the overall structure and genre of the work itself. We will return to the overall structure later, but first it is important to walk through the formal and stylistic features represented in each major section and the individual passages therein.4

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3 Translation mine; for discussion of the term “maher” see Cazelles, “Ahiqar, Ummân and Amun,” 51, who states that maher, “well known from Ps 45:2, is a West Semitic term, attested in the Kassite period (Ugarit, perhaps El-Amarna), it spread to Ramessid Egypt, where the determinative is either a young man sucking his thumb, an armed man, a seated man, or even a boomerang. Often used in a military context, the term is also applied to an investigating judge, a groom, and several times to a scribe in the Satirical Letter (Papyrus Anastasi I); finally, it is also an epithet for Pharaoh”; cf. Zorn, “Role of mhr in Egypt and Ugarit,” JNES 50 (1991): 129–38, esp. 133–34.

4 Some of the syntactical and/or stylistic features may relate more to linguistic constraints or scribal preference (i.e. the actual hand that produced the manuscript before us) rather than to some literary or rhetorical strategy. For example, the syntagm of PN + בָּשָׂב frequently found in Ahiqar is likely the result of a broader linguistic convention rather than some meaningful rhetorical device. On whether this expression is of Persian influence—as argued by Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 208 (cf. note 71 in chapter 1); and Bowman, Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis (University of Chicago Oriental Publications 91; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 34, 66; or perhaps Egyptian (Whitehead, though he prefers Persian); Akkadian, or uniquely Imperial Aramaic—see the discussion in Christopher Tuplin, The Arshama Letters from the Bodleian Library, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–7; it is of frequent use in the other Aramaic documents from Elephantine (e.g. TAD A6.6–13; B3.3–9; B8.6; C3.8III.A,6;
The first part of the chapter begins with an analysis of the narrative itself. The readings offered here rely upon a number of recent literary-theoretical approaches to narrative and are generally based on the idea that we ought to “see texts as works of art in their own right (where) texts are conceived of as coherent intelligible wholes more or less independent of their authors, creating meaning through the integration of their elements.” Formalist/structuralist, rhetorical, and narratological approaches are particularly illustrative for unpacking the various components of the story and for hinting at some answers to the broader interpretive questions. The second section turns to the sayings of *Ahiqar*, surveying and describing the various formal features therein, as well as paying attention to some larger stylistic aspects (e.g., rhetorical voice) and overall structure. As is evident, the sayings invite a different approach than the narrative. Assessment of their style and form on the individual, group, and larger unit levels will take priority. Yet some larger, structural elements will also be discussed.

In the third part of this chapter I bring both the sayings and narrative together and consider the overall structure and, consequently, genre of *Ahiqar*. A question of genre inherently involves elements external to the text itself. Under consideration here is the literary tradition with which *Ahiqar* has been ubiquitously associated, namely “wisdom literature.” Whether taken as a distinct genre or a broader tradition, the label “wisdom” brings with it as many problems as it does answers. A brief review of recent scholarly discussions about “wisdom literature” in the ancient Near East, though still also with personal names (C2.1.V.19; VII,36); cf. also Saqqara 63:3.


6 The section dealing with the forms, style, and compositional units of the sayings relies a great deal on the recently published dissertation by Michael Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine und die altestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur* (BZAW 399. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010) which took up these issues directly. Many of the observations I make in the examination of the various forms and rhetorical features presuppose some of the conclusions from the subsequent section that discusses the broader literary context of *Ahiqar*. Indeed, the terminology I use (some of which comes from Weigl) for describing the forms represented in the sayings (not to mention the various parallels cited) are drawn from analyses of related literature and, likewise, guided by assumptions about *Ahiqar’s* literary context. Thus, on one level, the formal and rhetorical analysis takes for granted the subsequent discussion of genre and intertextuality.

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therefore, is necessary. Although ultimately—and with the necessary caveats—it seems acceptable to speak of *Ahiqar* as “wisdom,” when it comes to assigning a genre and clarifying the more proximate literary circles, we are better served by more precise language. Specifically, I find the term “instruction” to be more fitting. As such, Egypt, with its long tradition of instructional literature, stands as a productive literary context for evaluating *Ahiqar*. The objective is, on one level, to *broaden* the literary horizon to include the Egyptian materials as important representatives for comparison, without necessarily dismissing the biblical texts’ value in this regard (and, to a lesser extent, the Mesopotamian materials, as well). At the same time, however, the chapter also intends to *sharpen* the focus when it comes to describing the formal constitution of *Ahiqar*.

When it comes to the final section on genre, the purpose of establishing a comparative literary context will be reassessed and ultimately reformulated on the basis of more recent theoretical approaches. The symbolic universe of *Ahiqar* and its ancient audience extends far beyond genre constraints, as even the versatile character of the genre itself indicates. In particular, I will consider Genette’s notion of intertextuality in the discourse of semiotics as well as recent responses to (post-)structuralism in New Philology and New Historicism in order to demonstrate and clarify the models for comparative analysis in this study.

### 2.2 The Story of *Ahiqar*: A Conversation on Plot, Structure, and Discourse

In analyzing the narrative of *Ahiqar* I follow formalist, structuralist, and narratological principles. The goal here is to provide a more careful presentation of the forms, structures, plot movement, rhetorical devices, and so on, in light of recent theoretical approaches to narrative. My aim is not

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7 See Martin Cortazzi, *Narrative Analysis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), especially the chapter entitled “Literary Models of Narrative” on pp. 84–99. For a brief summary and bibliography of these methodologies as applied to biblical studies see Clines, “Contemporary Methods,” esp. 149–60.

8 To be sure, some of the readings offered here are not so “recent”; the rigid formalist and structuralist approaches, for example, are quite old in literary circles such that they have already been prominent, fell out of prominence due to criticism, and cycled back into fashion with modification. Likewise, in biblical studies many literary analyses were fashionable in the 1980s and have since been diminished, while others are only starting to take hold. The point is, simply, that even the not-so-recent models of narrative analysis that were applied to biblical studies have yet to be applied to *Ahiqar*, at least not to any meaningful degree. See, e.g. Paul R. House, ed., *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays* (Phila: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
to offer the definitive reading; rather, it is to demonstrate that for Ahiqar, as with most narratives, there are any number of strategies for interpretation and oftentimes a comprehensive understanding of a text’s purpose and/or message requires more than one approach, and certainly more than just a linear one.\(^9\) The following analyses, therefore, are representative of possible types of approaches. Attention to Ahiqar’s narratological quality reveals a complex web of meanings reflected in a not-so-linear plot development, and a number of salient features become evident, such as: the ambiguous nature of the king; the diametric opposition between Nadan and Nabusumiskun, especially as the two are related to Ahiqar; and the consistent use of irony to create meaning.

### 2.2.1 Plot Movement and Structures

A formalist approach can concern itself with a number of aspects related to the narrative, including plot, characterization, narration, themes, etc.\(^10\) Here, my focus is primarily directed at the plot, the vagaries of its movement, as well as its superstructures and micro-structures, though observations related to the other aspects will no doubt arise organically in such a discussion.

We begin with a superficial overview of the narrative which allows for a model of the plot’s movement in a typical tri-partite structure made up of premise, tension, and resolution:\(^11\)

**Premise** (lines 1–24) → **Tension** (24–45) → **Resolution** (45–?)

- Ahiqar sets Nadan as successor
- Nadan betrays Ahiqar
- N. repents/is punished

\(^{9}\) Indeed, it is a generally understood principle of the more reader-oriented literary methodologies that no reading is ever definitive.

\(^{10}\) See, e.g., House, “Introduction,” 164.

\(^{11}\) This section is informed by similar studies of plot in relation to biblical narratives and narrative theory in general. For example, though I have chosen to employ my own terminology for the three-part structure, consider Gerald O. West, “Deploying the Literary Detail of a Biblical Text (2 Samuel 13:1–22) in Search of Redemptive Masculinities,” in Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines (ed. J. K. Aitken, J. M. S. Clines, and C. M. Maier; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 297–313, at 308, who states: “A common way of analyzing how plots ‘move,’ since Aristotle, has been to see plot as having three fundamental movements: exposition, complication, resolution.” Cf. Aristotle, Poetics, esp. 27–30.
This is a simplistic model of the plot movement. The precise components, though, can be modified depending upon which aspect is emphasized. For example, instead of focusing on Ahiqar’s relationship to Nadan, a moralistic view is also possible:

**Premise** (lines 1–24) → **Tension** (24–45) → **Resolution** (45–?)

Ahiqar is wise, loyal, good → Ahiqar suffers unjustly → Ahiqar is restored (?)

The plot movement is thus arranged according to a conceptual apparatus centered on the issues of justice and suffering, where the tension arises from the morally just having to face seemingly unjust treatment. Regardless of where the emphasis is placed, the premise (1–24) entails Ahiqar’s adoption and training of Nadan, the solicitation of King Esarhaddon’s approval for Nadan to be his successor, and Nadan’s eventual appointment at the palace gate. The tension (24–45) arises when Nadan betrays Ahiqar and accuses him (of treason?) before the king; it continues with the king ordering Ahiqar’s execution. The tension is twofold—as is also indicated by the two plot movements laid out above—and likewise, so is the resolution: Ahiqar is saved from execution, and he is (presumably) restored. The immediate tension, Ahiqar’s impending execution, is resolved with the help of Nabusumiskun. Ahiqar is put into hiding and supported by Nabusumiskun. As for the second resolution, i.e., the restoration of Ahiqar to his previous status, we can only speculate that it takes place since the text breaks off at this point.

A closer reading, however, reveals a much more complex structure than is represented above. The larger narrative can be broken down into several smaller sequences, or sub-plots, each with their own distinguishable components and movements. The narrative begins, for example, by

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12 Lines 6–10 appear to comprise the narratival description of Ahiqar training Nadan to be his successor; unfortunately, these lines, as well as the subsequent ones concerning his presentation before Esarhaddon, are fragmentary and exact details remain unclear.

13 This takes place in column 5 which is extremely fragmentary, but extant evidence points to this being the case; e.g. in line 49 Ahiqar recalls when he hid Nabusumiskun from the king (Aram. נַבְעַוסְמִיסְקָן הָיָה מְפָלָא לְאָחָיו), and in 72, where Ahiqar is presumably narrating, we read “he took care of me there” (Aram. נַבְעַוסְמִיסְקָן הָיָה מְפָלָא לְאָחָיו).

14 For a similar formalist approach that observes this double-tension/resolution, see the interpretation of Esther by David Cline, “Reading Esther,” esp. 4–5, where he notes that the death of Haman is only a partial resolution of the plot, with the threat of Jewish genocide still lingering.
introducing the protagonist Ahiqar, whose objective is to instruct (Aram. חכם) his son in wisdom.\(^15\) This provides the first basic premise or situation, upon which rests an immediate problem: Ahiqar has no son. This is the first (sub-)plot tension that must be resolved, and in doing so it leads to another problem, namely Ahiqar must first ask the king’s permission before he can install Nadaq as his successor and, moreover, the king must determine if the successor is worthy.\(^16\) This sequence, and its resolution, then leads to another sequence, and another, and so on. Some of the tensions are easily (= quickly) resolved, while others extend into, and thereby affect, subsequent sub-plots. Ahiqar’s anecdote—a full sub-plot in itself—about a previous time he helped Nabusumiskun (45-52) interrupts the sub-plot which features Nabusumiskun as the primary character (38-55).\(^17\) The plot models, whether simple or complex, are helpful in that they allow for a basic visualization of the narrative’s flow.

There are other factors that impress upon the movement of plot which, in turn, have their own distinct function.\(^18\) For example, there is often a moment of *climax*, where “the narrative...

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\(^{15}\) In lines 6 and 17 we find that the occasion for Ahiqar’s desire to teach his son is that: “I am old. I will not be able to work at the gate of the palace […]” (here acc. to 17; Aram. צה כלא אמה לא פלאה יבכ הכהל). Perhaps the recognition of his old age (and impending death) is brought to mind by the death of his beloved king Sennacherib, of whom we are reminded often that Ahiqar served loyally and whose death is mentioned in line 4.

\(^{16}\) Lines 7–23 are fairly corrupt, although a decent amount of the content is still discernible. That Ahiqar must seek permission from the new king Esarhaddon and that the king gives permission is clear (cf. ll. 10–11, 19–20). Still, what remains obscure is whether Esarhaddon actually “tested” Nadaq. This suggestion was first made by Grelot and followed by Lindenberger (among others), and was in part based on the familiar trope of a king “questioning” a would-be counselor (cf. *Aristeas*, Daniel 4; and the “Egyptian Episode” in the medieval Syriac and Armenian versions of *Ahiqar*). See the discussion below for various ways of rendering the fragmentary lines, especially the crucial section in 10–14.

\(^{17}\) Nabusumiskun is the primary character since we are told the story from his perspective—even though it is Ahiqar-as-narrator, who is actually telling the story. The premise of Nabusumiskun’s story is that he is ordered by the king to execute Ahiqar. The tension—of which Ahiqar’s anecdote plays a part—is that Nabusumiskun does not want to kill Ahiqar. The resolution, of course, is that he decides not to do so, and kills a slave instead.

\(^{18}\) While I have opted, for the most part, to assess *Ahiqar* on the basis of a simpler plot structure (premise, tension, resolution), there are other models. The following comments, for example, are based on Labov’s model of narrative analysis, which incorporates several other plot elements (cf. W. Labov, “The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax,” in *Language in the Inner City* [ed. Labov; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972], 352–96), though ultimately this model similarly depends on the basic approach stretching back to Aristotle. See a
achieves the moment of the highest tension.” This comes in line 45. Nabusumiskun ends his relatively lengthy address by telling Ahiqar of Esarhaddon’s command to execute him, at which point Ahiqar says “Conse]quently, I, Ahiqar, indeed was afraid.” This is not a part of the dialogue between Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun; instead it is from Ahiqar, the narrator, speaking to the audience and thus stands as a rather poignant and unique window in the emotional state of Ahiqar the character, a state of uncertainty that is no doubt shared by the intended audience who, likewise, is left in a state of suspense.

Similarly, the anecdote told by Ahiqar (46-54) to Nabusumiskun, which immediately follows this statement, can be considered as (part of) the evaluation. The evaluation “comprises the devices by which the narrator indicates the point of the narrative … it is the narrative part which reveals the narrator’s attitudes and emotions towards the events related.” So, at least on one level, the reason for the story and its message have to do with friendship and reciprocity, i.e., the proper behavior in response to being shown kindness. In the first half of the story, Ahiqar showed kindness towards Nadan by choosing him to be his successor, training him, and eventually establishing him at court where he was given the privilege of having an audience with the king. Nadan, however, responded to this kindness with betrayal. Contrarily, in the second half of the narrative Nabusumiskun, to whom Ahiqar had likewise demonstrated kindness as indicated in this anecdote, reciprocates the behavior and shows beneficence to Ahiqar. The anecdote, thus, has a double function of effecting a change in Nabusumiskun in the present circumstances of the narrative, while at the same time recalling an entirely distinct event from the past that conveniently allows for a reimagining of the present. Importantly, Ahiqar ends the anecdote by saying: “Just as I have done for you, so also do for me.” This statement on the importance of reciprocal behavior,

discussion of this in Georgakopoulou and Goustos, Discourse Analysis, 60–61, 142–43; cf. Sonek, Truth, 57–58, esp. n. 58 and Cortazzin, Narrative Analysis, 42–49.

19 Sonek, Truth, 57.

20 See the narratological analysis below on the various levels of speaker, narrator, intended audience, dramatic audience, etc.


22 This is a dramatic representation of the so-called ‘golden rule’ and will be discussed on several occasions throughout this study.
therefore, functions as the evaluation for it encapsulates the “attitudes and emotions (of the narrator) towards the events related.”

Let us consider more closely the double-plot structure referenced above. The first concerns Ahiqar’s desire to have a successor to whom he can pass on his legacy (1-2). The tensions would be that he has no heir (2) and he is getting old (6, 17), i.e. time is running out. The resolution comes when he establishes Nadan as his successor in Esarhaddon’s court (21-24). However, this resolution is a false one as it does not return the story to a state of equilibrium; instead it directly results in a destabilization of the narrative-world in that Ahiqar is no longer (remembered as) a good and faithful servant to the king. Thus, this “false” resolution of the first half initiates the complication of the second half: the disgrace and impending death of Ahiqar. The story continues but with a different wrinkle in the plot. The resolution of one (i.e. Ahiqar’s impending death) is accomplished by means of Nabusumiskun’s assistance, and the trajectory of the narrative suggests the other complication will be resolved shortly thereafter.

A further observation in this respect is worth emphasizing. The initial premise—Ahiqar’s desire to pass on his wisdom and install a successor—is still unrealized. Nadan’s betrayal, thus, has taken over as the primary plot tension for the initial premise. Ahiqar’s desire to pass on his legacy is no longer due to his lack of an heir, but rather due to the wickedness of that heir. Also, from the formalist perspective, we note that contrary to the smaller sequences where Ahiqar immediately responds to the tensions (no son, king’s permission), the resolution of the central plot tension (i.e. Nadan’s betrayal of Ahiqar) is further delayed by a subsequent series of sub-plots. Unfortunately, the specific way this primary tension is resolved remains uncertain on account of the missing conclusion of the story. Does Nadan repent? Is he punished for the betrayal? How, if at all, is Ahiqar restored to his prominence? Or, to put it in terms of plot analysis, how does the

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23 Analyzing the evaluation is a tricky endeavor especially if we bring the sayings into the picture and allow them to have an impact on how we understand the message or point of the narrative; therefore, aside from this brief example, I have opted not to include any detailed discussion of it here. However, as is already evident, the evaluation directly relates to the message, themes, and overall ethic of a text so any observations that could be made here (in a narrative analysis) will naturally be raised elsewhere, though, of course, under different circumstances. For a brief, but interesting, appraisal of the difficulties involved in discerning the evaluation in a narrative see Georgakopoulou and Goustos, Discourse Analysis, 64–66.
plot return to its (relative) state of equilibrium or stability? We can only speculate (see section 2.2.4).

Nevertheless, on a smaller scale some of the sub-plots are extant and continue. Notably, their composition is affected by the pivotal tension-point of Nadan’s betrayal. The effect of this betrayal on the level of the plot structure itself is signaled by a number of formal changes. First, though Ahiqar is still (presumably) the narrator, the new sub-plots operate on the basis of a change in perspective. Specifically, the tensions in these sub-plots are only meaningful when we consider other character’s concerns. The first sub-plot after the betrayal (lines 31–37), for example, is from the king’s point-of-view. Esarhaddon has a problem: Ahiqar, his servant, has betrayed him. The king opts to resolve this problem by ordering his execution. This is relatively straightforward if we consider the situation from the king’s perspective. Unfortunately, the resolution of the king’s problem creates an entirely new problem from Ahiqar’s perspective, as well as the reader’s.

Before returning to Ahiqar’s point-of-view, however, a second sub-plot from another character’s perspective serves as a bridge between the diametrically opposed viewpoints of Ahiqar and Esarhaddon/Nadan. Enter Nabusumiskun, whose character, actions, and concerns operate on a variety of meaningful levels. His sub-plot, as indicated above, can be described as follows – premise: the king orders Nabusumiskun to kill Ahiqar → tension: Nabusumiskun is Ahiqar’s friend and had been previously saved by Ahiqar, or, simply put, Nabusumiskun does not want to execute

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25 This change appears, in fact, to have taken place earlier in line 24 where Ahiqar hands off the reins, so to speak, to his successor Nadan and thus anticipates the formal constitution of the second half of the narrative. Beginning in 24 we have a conversation between Nadan and Esarhaddon, where the intermittent thoughts between the dialogue represent Nadan’s concerns (even if they are presented as told from Ahiqar as omniscient narrator; cf. lines 24–25). This is probably where we find Nadan’s motivation for betraying Ahiqar, who is not even present in these scenes, at least on the narratival level. Ahiqar’s departure from the palace took place in line 22 (“I took myself away to my house”), and thus the two actors in the scene are Nabusumiskun and King Esarhaddon. Note also 38–40 where Nabusumiskun, who has just been ordered to seize and execute Ahiqar, must take a “swift horse” to go and catch him and it takes “three days” before he finds Ahiqar, who was “walking among the vineyards,” indicating that Ahiqar had been gone from the palace for some time.

26 The motivation for Nadan’s betrayal is not extant. See sec 2.2.4 for some speculation on this point.
Ahiqar, but it is a king’s decree\textsuperscript{27} \textit{resolution}: Nabusumiskun executes a eunuch in Ahiqar’s stead, and convinces his two comrades to go along with the deception, thus providing witnesses to convince the king. This sub-plot is, likewise, complicated by the fact that the perspective switches from that of Nabusumiskun to Ahiqar in the middle; thus there is a symbolic handing of the narrative back over the Ahiqar by means of the relatively lengthy back-and-forth between him and Nabusumiskun.\textsuperscript{28}

If we take a step back a look at the whole picture, there are some discernible features that unite the sub-plots together and likewise aid in forming a more comprehensive plot structure. We have noticed, for example, that the series of sub-plots are not always arranged neatly or even linearly. There is overlap and aspects of one sub-plot infringe upon that of another, and, moreover features from certain sub-plots affect those that are not necessarily in their immediate proximity.\textsuperscript{29}

Identification of these various sub-plots, however, is only part of the interpretative process. Here, we should be reminded of Propp’s structuralist research, which emphasizes that what we are studying when we describe plot-structure are the “relations between elements rather than [the]...\textsuperscript{27} This aspect taps into a larger moral dilemma in both the narrative and the sayings concerning one’s relationship to the king. I will speak to this in detail below.

\textsuperscript{28} The changing perspectives can further be modeled on a narratological level, see below.

\textsuperscript{29} This, of course, is not wholly unexpected, otherwise we would be left with a rather stiff structure of incidents. The interwoven nature of various sub-plots recalls the Joseph story in Genesis (chs. 37–50). As with Ahiqar, Joseph encounters a series of obstacles that are seemingly unrelated, but elements from the earliest parts of the story factor in the latter parts thus unifying the different scenes in a dramatic fashion. This narratival strategy becomes typical of many other narratives from the ancient Mediterranean such as Aesop, Apuleius, the Greek Romances, etc., and in many ways reaches its culmination in antiquity with the \textit{Aethiopica} of Heliodorus, whose very purpose in creating such a complex drama almost seems to be to play with such a rhetorical strategy. He has artfully interwoven and entangled so many plots and sub-plots, as well as created a disjointed and far-from-linear temporality that the notion of plot is stretched to its limits, and yet by the end nearly every knot is unraveled and most, if not all, are recognizably significant to the overall story of the two lovers. On Greek Romances and ancient narratives in general see B. Edwin Perry, \textit{The Ancient Romances} (Sather Classical Lectures 37; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) and the various entries in Gareth Schmeling, ed., \textit{The Novel in the Ancient World} (Mnemosyne Supplementum 159; Leiden: Brill, 1996); on Heliodorus’s complicated plot structure see J. R. Morgan, “Narrative Doublets in Heliodorus’ \textit{Aithiopika},” in \textit{Studies in Heliodorus} (ed. R. Hunter; Supplementum 21; Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society), 60–78 and Morgan, “The \textit{Aithiopika} of Heliodorus: Narrative as Riddle,” in \textit{Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context} (ed. J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman; London: Routledge, 1994), 97–113.
elements themselves.” The identification of these sub-plots is not the key issue, rather it is how they interact with each other to create a larger narrative that is most interesting. To put it in formalist terms, “establishing the moments of the plot does not equate to the delimitation of the narrative; the moments ‘are rather the principal articulations of the dramatic action.” These articulations are often referred to as “expressive devices” and can aid in establishing “context dependence” for otherwise seemingly disparate segments of a narrative. For example, Ahiqar’s faithful service to the previous monarch Sennacherib is repeated on several occasions and by most of the characters—Ahiqar (4, 15); Nabusumiskun (42–43, 55–56, 60–61); Esarhaddon (12, 28[?], 36)—as well as at the very beginning by the third-person incipit (2–3). This feature can hardly be a coincidence and seems to serve some specific functions in the plot. For one, each repetition of the formula recalls the opening statement when the plot was in a state of (relative) equilibrium: Sennacherib was king, and Ahiqar was his faithful and wise servant. By recalling the initial starting point in nearly every sequence, there is at the very least a formal correlating of the several subplots. Indeed, what is at stake in the story-world is this very dictum. Ahiqar’s reputation—as a skilled sage and faithful servant to the king—is what is being challenged and must be restored. Perhaps more meaningfully is the “truth” that the repetition of this formula conveys to the audience: Ahiqar is a good and loyal servant. This view is seemingly shared by every character.

30 Citation from Cortazzin, Narrative Analysis, 87.
33 Line 12 is among the more difficult sections and it is not clear who exactly is speaking, though it is likely still King Esarhaddon who began speaking in the previous line. Similarly, line 28 is complicated. It is most likely King Esarhaddon, though it could also be Nadan.
34 In the sayings (esp. 139–140), we find that it is not just that his reputation is under scrutiny, but the one who disturbed it, i.e., his own “son,” that has further socio-cultural implications. Thus, even if Ahiqar is eventually found to be “innocent” in the public eye, there is a persistent tension—that does not seem to ever be resolved, even in the later versions—in that his own family betrayed him.
(and the audience) with one notable exception: Nadan!\(^{35}\) It may be no coincidence, then, that all of the named characters express these words directly except Nadan himself, who is the very person that, from the outset, is supposed to learn how to be like Ahiqar in this regard. The major turning point, therefore, hinges upon this “lost” lesson. Nadan betrays Ahiqar, apparently by stating the exact opposite, i.e. that Ahiqar had not served the king faithfully.\(^{36}\) Moreover, the rapidity with which the betrayal is carried out must be measured against the weighty repetition of Ahiqar’s faithful service. Despite the constant reminder of Ahiqar’s just character and prominent status, it appears that in only a matter of six or seven lines (25–32) is Nadan’s treachery accomplished. Therein, Nadan accuses Ahiqar, the king’s mind is swayed seemingly without pause, and the king promptly orders Ahiqar’s execution. An added irony is that even in ordering Ahiqar’s execution the king still repeats the formula that praises Ahiqar’s wisdom and loyalty (35–36)! There are other implications for this swift change which will be explored below, but from a formal approach we can at least entertain the idea that these few lines—though corrupt—represent the dramatic fulcrum of the entire narrative.\(^{37}\) The statement by Nadan is presumably one which asserts the contrary to everything around it, as neatly symbolized by the fact that the formulae of Ahiqar’s faithful service

\(^{35}\) It would be as if in the book of Job the opening refrain about Job’s upstanding character were repeated throughout the text and not just by Job himself (or the objective third-person narrator as in 1:1) but by every major character save for the Opponent, i.e. *ha–satan*. The same goes for Nadan’s epithet, and not merely in its repetition but in the change it undergoes, starting as “nephew” then “son” but then back to “nephew” (see n. 37).

\(^{36}\) The papyrus at this point—the last few lines of column 2 and the first few lines of column 3—is frustratingly corrupt, so we do not know exactly what Nadan says to the king in lines 25–31. We can surmise, based on evidence in line 36 (cf. 44), that Nadan accused Ahiqar of some disloyalty toward the king. There, Esarhaddon asks (rhetorically), “why would/should he [Ahiqar] *damage the land* (Aram. *לְדָעַת עֲדַיִן*) against us?” This phrase may be an idiom for the act of committing treason; cf. its similar use in the narrative of Inaros—a local Egyptian leader who led a revolt against the Neo-Assyrian empire in the 7\(^{th}\) c. B.C.E.—in the Sheikh Fadl inscription (9:6 “let him [= Inaros] not damage Egypt” אֲרָם לְדָעַת *[אֲרָם לְדָעַת]*, trans. according to Tawny Holm, “The Sheikh Fadl Inscription in its Literary and Historical Context,” *Aramaic Studies* 5 [2007]: 193–224, at 199). In any case, that the term relates in some way to disloyalty that leads to injury is made abundantly clear by its use later in this column (line 44) where Nabusumiskun describes Nadan’s behavior toward Ahiqar, hence: “he [Nadan] damaged you [Ahiqar]” (Aram. *לְדָעַת עֲדַיִן*).

\(^{37}\) For example, aspects before and after the pivot point mirror each other and create an inverse relationship; hence, e.g., the king switches from helper of Ahiqar to enemy, all the while still maintaining a similar function in both halves of the narrative as issuer of decrees in his capacity as the authority figure. This mirrored structure (possibly chiastic) will be explored below.
is repeated both before and after this accusation. Such a reading reveals, then, that the repetition of this “title” is no mere accident of style. Instead, it has a rhetorical function of uniting each of the sub-plots wherein the premise has been (or will be) repeated and serves as a formal bridge connecting the initial sequence to each of the subsequent sub-plots, thereby adding to the larger “meta-narrative.” As a result, the accusation by Nadan, in its implicit invocation of this premise by means of stating the exact opposite, functions as the central or primary plot tension, not only for the characters within the story itself, but on the narratological level as well.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, the premise is repeated so often and by nearly every character that it carries a persuasive, rhetorical force, making it nearly impossible for the audience to underappreciate its importance. In other words: that Ahiqar is wise and reliable becomes axiomatic and to state the contrary, as Nadan appears to have done, is—at least from the perspective of the audience—illogical.

We could also make similar observations on other repeated refrains, including epithets. For example, at nearly every mention of Nadan, we are reminded that Nadan is not Ahiqar’s son, but “the son of my sister” (6, 12, 25, 30). This could serve one of two possible functions (or both at the same time): it could be to emphasize the beneficence of Ahiqar for choosing a successor who is not, in truth, his son, or it may function as a subtle reminder of the distance between Ahiqar and Nadan, i.e. because he is not actually his son, we may be clued in from the very beginning not to expect the familial loyalty of a son to his father, even though they are still related. With this in mind, we may detect a rhetorical force behind the explicit switch in epithets used by Ahiqar about Nadan in column 2. By line 18 Ahiqar simply calls Nadan “my son” when speaking to Esarhaddon, suggesting that at this point the sage (and the reader) had begun to see Nadan as completely grafted into his lineage, signaled by Ahiqar’s relenting of his position at court to Nadan. However, in line 30, when explaining Nadan’s treachery, Ahiqar says: “when my son who was not my son (but) the son of [my sister].”\textsuperscript{39} Thus, Nadan’s increasing “familiarity” with Ahiqar is immediately revoked in light of the betrayal—he is no longer “my son” but has returned to being “not my son.”

\textsuperscript{38} I will discuss the difference between the story level and narratival level (or: fabula and discourse) shortly.

\textsuperscript{39} This reading follows the recommendation by Kottsieper that the last legible word in line 30 is _segments “son” not Segments “to devise a plot” as assumed by Porten and Yardeni. Though the verb could make sense here (and there is definitely confusion between _segments and _segments in the Egyptian-Aramaic script), it is otherwise unattested this early and, moreover, the repetition of the word “son” fits the formula when compared with line 12 (though there it is in the third-person, not first). Contrary to Kottsieper’s argument (see esp. “Look son,” 152–56), this does not automatically discount the fact
Other features can also guide in how we appreciate the various smaller sequences. As Jean-Louis Ska has argued, “change of time, change of place, change of characters can be signals of

that Nadan’s treachery is being described here. Most of line 30 and all of 31 (save for a small mark which may be the top stroke of an š; cf. TAD 3:28) are missing wherein the explicit accusation is made. This reading is likely given the context initiated in line 25 where Nadan begins speaking with King Esarhaddon. Also, in line 32 (the first line in the next column) we pick up with the king ordering Ahiqar’s execution. Nevertheless, in order to accommodate Porten and Yardeni’s immediate juxtaposition of these two columns and the subsequent interpretation of the missing parts (i.e. the defamation of Ahiqar by Nadan and the king’s subsequent judgment and sentencing, the latter of which is picked up at the top of the next column), I suggest that at the bottom of column 2 we are missing not just one line (which is certain based on the ink traces) but two lines. This hypothesis rests on two complementary grounds.

First, as indicated already, if we are correct about the plot shift here, then one and a half lines hardly seems sufficient to describe a betrayal, especially given the text’s proclivity to repeat the epithets for each character (as we have just discussed). Hence, the names of the characters and even the abbreviated form of their epithets would take up a majority of the presumed missing lines (30–31). For this reason, the possibility of another line at the bottom of column 2 would ameliorate some of the space constraints. Secondly, there are several material bases for this suggestion. For one, the bottom margin of column 2 is not intact, and thus the original height is not certain. When set against column 1, whose bottom margin is also missing, this observation becomes important. The height of column 1 is roughly 28.6 cm. If we take into account the fact that there is at least one more missing line (16; evidenced by traces of ink), then the height must be increased by at least a few centimeters to include both the missing line and the margin itself. Turning to column 2, then, we find that the height is 27.9 cm. If we added the difference between it and that of column 1 (i.e. 1.3 cm) this would be just enough room for the already proposed missing line 31 and some of the margin. However, Porten and Yardeni, though consistent in not assigning line numbers when there is no evidence, have not taken into account the necessary extra centimeters in column 1 to account for the missing line 16. If we add those centimeters to column 2 to make the two columns more uniform, this would allow for another missing line in column 2, which we might label 31a (so as not to disrupt the numbering system for the remainder of the Ahiqar text; it would be very confusing to have my line numbers always be off by one from the system in the TAD volume). This suggestion also helps bring the total number of lines closer. Note, for instance, that columns 1 and 3 have 16 and 17 lines respectively; whereas currently column 2 only has 15. This is not impossible if we consider that columns 4 and 5, whose top and bottom margins are largely intact, only have 15 lines each. The different number of lines in each column can be attributed to the variations in letter size and spacing between lines; hence in column 3 the lines appear to be squeezed more tightly together just barely enough so as to allow for a seventeenth line in the column, in contrast the line spacing in plate D (cols. 4–5) is a bit more broad resulting in only 15 lines for each of the columns. To sum up: it is entirely possible that a larger part of the bottom margin of column 2 was broken off, allowing for a column height more closely paralleled with those before (col. 1 at 29.6 + 2–3 cm) and after (col. 3 at 31.1 cm) for a sixteenth line (31a) that would, in turn, allow sufficient room for Nadan’s, albeit still brief, accusation against Ahiqar.
passage from one unit to the other if they indicate a shift or a progress in the dramatic action."\(^{40}\)

In the Ahiqar narrative we can trace a number of these plot-clues, e.g.: passage of time – “before his words” (2; Aram. מָזֹן; "הַבָּשָׁתָם ") ; “whe]n my son, Nadan by name, has grown up” (18; אֱלֹהֵי אַחֲרֵי הַבָּשָׁתָם; "I am Ahiqar, who rescued you previously”) (46; אֱלֹהֵי אַחֲרֵי הַבָּשָׁתָם); change in location – “in the ga]te of the palace” (9; מֵאוֹר הַבָּשָׁתָם; "I took myself away to my house” (22; אֱלֹהֵי אַחֲרֵי הַבָּשָׁתָם; "I was walking among the vineyards” (48; מַגִּיר הַבָּשָׁתָם; "I brought you to the house that is mine” (48; מַגִּיר הַבָּשָׁתָם); and change in characters. This last aspect, the change in characters, can be traced both in terms of who is present in the scene and from whose perspective the incidents carry the most resonance.

This leads to the final observation: attention to these minor structures also invites a reimagining of the way we understand the broader movement of the plot. On the one hand, as was shown above, we can trace the sequence in the typical linear fashion (premise \(\rightarrow\) tension \(\rightarrow\) resolution); however, the particularities of the sub-plots complicate this assessment and allow for an alternative model that is not necessarily unidirectional. For example, the mapping of the sub-plots above by means of character interest reveals a chiastic structure:\(^{41}\)

A. Ahiqar (1–7): Ahiqar is wise scribe, counselor; seeks successor
   B. Ahiqar (7–23): Ahiqar trains Nadan; establishes him at king’s court, then leaves
   C. Nadan (24–32): Established at court; accuses the absent Ahiqar
   D. King Esarhaddon (32–37): Hears of Ahiqar’s betrayal; Orders execution
   C’. Nabusumiskun (37–55): Ordered to kill Ahiqar; goes to Ahiqar; saves Ahiqar
   B`. Ahiqar (45–51): Afraid of death; convinces Nabusumiskun to save him
   A`. Ahiqar (55–?): Ahiqar is saved from death and restored to place of prominence (?)

This model of the plot helps us tease out a few parallels between distant scenes by imagining plot as mirrored halves. In this regard, I draw particular attention to the central part of the chiasm. That

\(^{40}\) Ska, Our Fathers, 3; cited in Sonek, Truth, 57.

\(^{41}\) It is difficult to be certain of this chiastic model on the level of the superstructure given that the conclusion is missing and generally the final segment, in its recalling of the first segment, is crucial for forming the inclusio. Regardless, the chiastic reading is primarily a heuristic exercise to demonstrate alternative ways of conceiving of plot movement than simply the linear.

\(^{42}\) It is not clear if Nadan’s accusation comes in line 31, 31a, or 32 (see nn. 25 and 39). Nadan is definitely speaking with the king and somewhere in the missing portion accuses Ahiqar. At which point, the king’s perspective takes over (line 32). His words to Nadan and, subsequently, Nabusumiskun in lines 32–36 represent his perspective.
something critical is taking place is partially signaled by the fact that Ahiqar himself is no longer present. Instead we have Nadan, who has seemingly taken Ahiqar’s place, and King Esarhaddon. Then, during the king’s second section Nadan seems to disappear and Nabusumiskun takes his place. The centrality of Esarhaddon’s scene is also likely given that this is where the dramatic tension comes, namely in his ordering of Ahiqar’s execution. This is, of course, an extension of the preceding tension of Ahiqar’s “disloyalty” as put forward by Nadan, but importantly the accusation only becomes efficacious (in the narrative world) when the king is persuaded and, in turn, responds. Even more significant for seeing the king’s speech as the center of the narrative is that it represents the transitional point. Esarhaddon goes from supporting Ahiqar (as evidenced in previous lines) to opposing him. This shift is further mimicked in the ‘C’ level which immediately surrounds this section, represented by Nadan, on the one side, and Nabusumiskun, on the other. Nadan has been shown beneficence by Ahiqar, but then opposes him. Inversely, Nabusumiskun is ordered to oppose Ahiqar, but decides to show beneficence towards him. As we extend out, then, into the Ahiqar sections, more comparisons can be drawn, though they are limited on account of the text’s corruption. Ahiqar’s training of Nadan and presentation of him to Esarhaddon could be recalled by the anecdote in lines 45-52 where Ahiqar recalls a time that he supported Nabusumiskun and presented him before Sennacherib.\(^4\) Note, for instance, the symbolic act of Ahiqar “bringing [Nabusumiskun] into [his] house” (4κν χραμέʩʬʩʦʠʺʩʡʬʪʺʬʡʩ), which also may bring to mind Ahiqar’s earlier act of adopting Nadan (i.e., a sort of symbolic bringing into his house).

There are other ways of visualizing the grand plot-structure. For example, instead of a character-perspective based division, we can revert to the tension-centered view from above, but this time applying broader parameters. Incidentally, this, too, reveals a chiastic shape:

Tension 1 – Ahiqar attempts to pass on wisdom/legacy
  Tension 2 – Ahiqar is betrayed; sentenced to death by Esarhaddon
  *Tension 3 – Nabusumiskun is sentenced to death by Sennacherib
  *Resolution 3 – Nabusumiskun is saved by Ahiqar; loved by Sennacherib
Resolution 2 – Ahiqar is saved by Nabusumiskun; loved by Esarhaddon (uncertain)
Resolution 3 – Ahiqar passes on wisdom/legacy (uncertain; but probable given sayings)

\(^4\) The anecdote, of course, is also a microcosm of the entire plot, at least the second half, as Ahiqar himself makes explicitly clear (cf. line 52).
In this view, we see three interrelated plots, with the tension and respective resolutions split by the subsequent level. Ahiqar’s desire to transmit his wisdom is not fully realized when Nadan takes over; thus, the initial plot tension is still lingering even while more pressing matters (i.e., Ahiqar’s impending death) arise. Though the ending is missing, it is clear when the text breaks off that there is more to the story than simply Ahiqar being saved from execution by Nabusumiskun. The second plot tension, therefore, interrupts the first; yet this plot, too, is interrupted by another sub-plot: the past drama concerning Nabusumiskun’s near-death experience. Notice that before telling this story Ahiqar is still afraid (l. 45); this is a direct indication that the tension is still unresolved as we listen to this story. The tension in the anecdote—which, in itself, is another complete (albeit, skeletal) narrative—is immediately resolved. Incidentally, the resolution to the second tension is thereafter accomplished. Apparently then, the resolution to the Tension 1 would follow shortly. According to this model, the anecdote told by Ahiqar to Nabusumiskun is the key turning point. It takes center stage in the grand narrative and may have implications on how we understand the purpose of the text more broadly. For instance, we might suggest that on the level of pedagogy, it is the act of story-telling that is most effective, as evidenced by the anecdote’s positive impact on the plot—e.g., the “instruction” of Nadan by Ahiqar (referred to in col. 1) is ineffectual in that Nadan turns (or remains) wicked whereas the “story-telling” of Ahiqar to Nabusumiskun effects a positive change (i.e. Nabusumiskun moves from would-be executioner to supporter).

In sum, the formalist approach has allowed for a methodical appreciation of the various components in the narrative and their interrelationship. As is evident, there are several options for interpreting the plot structure(s), each one emphasizing different aspects. The division of the larger narrative into a series of sub-plots neatly reveals the complexity of the plot’s movement, showing that it is not merely a one-dimensional, or one-directional, structure. The chiastic models for understanding the plot’s structure have highlighted some interesting features in the narrative. One relates to the characters as both actors within the plot and symbols for the movement of the plot, revealing in particular the king’s transitional role and the diametric opposition between Nadan and Nabusumiskun. The other model draws attention to the act of story-telling.
2.2.2 Narratology: Actants, Characters, and the Narrator/Audience Complexity

A significant branch of literary analysis, narratology comprises “a systematic analysis of narrative” and, moreover, “studies the form and functioning of narrative and tries to account for narrative competence.” As such, it is common to speak of a “grammar” of narrative, which—similarly to the syntactical appreciation of a sentence—consists of “a limited number of principles of structural organization of narrative units, complete with rules for the combination and functioning of these units, leading to the production of narrative object.” Narratology, therefore, stands in a complex web of relationships to other theories, with its growth partly out of Russian formalism (Propp) and its being shaped to a certain extent by the influence of French structuralism (Saussure) as well as recent trends in semiotics (e.g., post-structuralism).

One of the primary procedures of narratology is “distinguishing the ‘story’ (or, ‘fabula,’ the sequence of events) from the ‘discourse’ (the manifestation of the story in a text).” Again, the fabula refers to “the event or the sequence of events (the action); and narrative discourse is those events as represented.” Borne out of Russian Formalists, this two-tiered distinction of narrative has imposed itself upon most narratological analyses. It is, however, merely an operative

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48 Clines, “Contemporary Methods,” 153. In fact, Ronald van der Bergh, “The Distinction,” 83, recently remarked that “the distinction between story and discourse has become all but canonical in narratology.”
49 I have opted to use fabula as the technical term rather than story (they are nearly interchangeable in narratological studies) in light of the confusion that may be caused from the more common usage of the term story. Fabula is generally paired with the term sjužet, both of which are derived from terms developed by Russian formalists. There is some debate about the subtle differences in the way literary scholars have used the paired terms story/fabula or discourse/sjužet; at this point, and for my part, they are representative of basically the same aspect; see, e.g., van der Bergh, “Distinction,” 84–85; cf. Chatman, Story and Discourse and H. Porter Abbott, The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18–20.
50 Abbott, Narrative, 19.
framework, a guiding principle, for understanding how narratives are (generally) constituted and how they function. 51

2.2.2.1 Actantial Analysis of Ahiqar Narrative

I begin with a type of analysis that operates primarily on the level of the fabula. The issue at hand is the very basic way that the narrative unfolds; that is, how the various elements in Ahiqar’s narrative can be reduced to the roles they fulfill in the narrative’s attempt to create meaning. What we are touching upon here are the “deep narrative structures, an abstract level of narrative from which the surface text is generated using selections of rules and units corresponding to a generative sentence grammar.” 52 A particularly enlightening method in this regard—at least for our purposes—is known as actantial analysis. 53

51 The distinction between fabula and discourse, while helpful for conceptualizing how narratives function simultaneously in a universal sense and a specific one, is still an oversimplification. I am reminded here of Barthes’s response to this two-tiered approach in his influential “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” at 85: “however many levels are proposed and whatever definition they are given, there can be no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of instances. To understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in ‘storeys,’ to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative ‘thread’ on to an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next … the ‘search’ [for meaning] carried out over a horizontal set of narrative relations may well be as thorough as possible but must still, to be effective, also operate ‘vertically’: meaning is not ‘at the end’ of the narrative, it runs across it.” See also Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories,” in Narrative Theory (ed. M. Bal; 2 vols.; New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 1:95–116, at 111, who has criticized this “dualistic model of narrative discourse” and the investigations based on such as “not only empirically questionable and logically frail but also methodologically distracting, preventing us from formulating the problems of narrative theory in ways that would permit us to explore them more fruitfully in connection with whatever else we know about language, behavior, and culture.”


53 Actantial analysis of narrative, developed and built-upon during the 1970s and 1980s, has fallen out of fashion in more recent literary theory, both for its simplicity and its reliance upon the now-questionable formalist principles which undergird it. See especially David Herman, “Role-Theoretic Frameworks for Narrative Analysis,” Semiotica 2007 (165):191–204. Nevertheless, I find it useful—as least in a brief sketch—for illustrating some important features that will affect interpretation of social and interpersonal dynamics.
The actantial type of narrative analysis grew out of “the attempt to create a systematic framework for describing how characters participate in the narrated action.” An actant, however, is not equivalent to a character, and the difference is significant. As biblical scholar Ruth Sheridan recently put it: “actants are not characters per se, but abstract ‘roles’ supposedly inherent in the structure of the narrative … one character can fill the position of many actants, and many characters can fill the role of just one actant.”54 An actant is distinguished according to the role it plays in the narrative’s makeup; thus, an actantial role can be played by multiple characters, animals, natural events, and even inanimate objects.55 The actantial model of narrative analysis was primarily developed by Algirdas J. Greimas.56 An outline of how this method was developed was recently summed up by Tischleder:

55 Mieke Bal, Narratology, 115, adds further: “an actor is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit.” What Bal means by ‘actor’ here was later modified into the term ‘actant’ by Greimas, who maintains the term actor, but distinguishes it from actant; for example, an actor is necessarily a human character, while an actant, as already indicated, “denotes ‘a person, creature, or object playing any of a set of active roles in a narrative’” (Tischleder, Literary Life, 29 n. 25 citing The Oxford English Dictionary’s entry for ‘actant’). For a clear and concise explanation of this and the actantial analysis as developed Greimas generally, see his article, “Actants, Actors, and Figures,” in On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory (ed. and trans. P. J. Perron and F. H. Collins; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 106–20; cf. idem, Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method (trans. D. McDowell; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). The mention of “structural position” is significant. For one, actantial analysis is also regularly considered a part of literary structuralism because what is under study is the “structure of actantial relations” (Sheridan, Retelling, 80 n. 142). Yet, this view depends upon the assumption that these relations belong to “what may be thought of as the grammar of narrative” and thus, as with literary structuralism, “concerns itself with structures deeper than the level of the text” (Clines, “Contemporary Methods,” 159–60; cf. Clines, Reading Esther, 5) and, therefore, are not dependent upon a surface level reading of a story but instead are integral to “narrative as a specific autonomous level in the semantic organization of texts with its own rules and invariant patterns” (Cortazzin, Narrative Analysis, 88). As this blending of comments should make clear, literary structuralism, at least in this regard, is best seen as under the umbrella of narratology, though others may see this interrelationship as a particular brand of “structuralist narratology” from which later narratologies have outgrown (see Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 191; cf. Barthes, 1977). Later, attention will be paid to structuralist aspects with an emphasis on semiotics rather than just literary theory, though, as is well known, the two are closely related.
56 See Greimas, “Actors,” 108–10; for an outline of this model in terms of biblical exegesis, see Daniel Patte, What is Structural Exegesis? (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 36–44. Structuralist approaches, including actantial analyses on
Greimas has introduced the concept of actants or actantial roles to the study of narrative in order to designate particular functions in the ‘narrative grammar’ of a story. Shifting the perspective from a notion of character as a cluster of personal traits to actants as elements of narrative discourse, Greimas … subordinates characters to action and determines the latter from the perspective of the specific functions they assume within the course of narrative action. A function “is a participatory slot in the syntagmatic unfolding of a narrative, and ‘character’ is a relatively loose (if traditional) way of thinking about kinds of slots and the relational networks linking them together.” Joined together, diverse functions add up to a “sphere of action.”

The actantial model proffered by Greimas is made up of six actants whose relationship are usually charted as below:

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Sender  ---  Object  ---  Receiver

Helper  ---  Subject  --  Opponent
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As the arrows indicate, the model of six actants can be further characterized as a configuration of three axial relationships: the axis of desire – the Subject desires the Object, the achievement of which is known as the “junction”; the axis of knowledge (or transmission) – “the sender is the element requesting the establishment of the junction between subject and object … the receiver is the element for which the quest is being undertaken”; and the axis of power – the Helper and Opponent assist and obstruct, respectively, the achievement of the Object by the Subject.

According to an actantial model, we may visualize Ahiqar as follows:

the basis of Greimas’s model, to biblical narratives and exegesis became increasingly popular during the 1980s and 1990s. For a recent actantial analysis based on Greimas’s model applied to a similar Jewish narrative, namely the book of Esther, see Clines, “Reading Esther,” 5–6. I should also add here that Greimas later revised his model with respect to these roles in particular, abandoning the terms Opponent and Helper and rather classifying them as “positive and negative ‘auxiliants’” rather than being actants themselves (cf. Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 192).

57 Babette Bärbel Tischleder, The Literary Life of Things: Case Studies in American Fiction (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014), 29. Note the “syntagmatic” aspect that was likewise emphasized by narratologists, especially Barthes (cf. Cortazzi, Narrative Analysis, 88).


If we designate the “words” of Ahiqar and their transmission to future generations as the primary Object, then the model here makes the most sense, at least in terms of the basic narrative. The Subject, then, is Ahiqar whose desire is to meet this objective. The Sender element is also fulfilled by Ahiqar, though only insofar as he is the narrator. According to the actantial analysis, the various “tensions” and “resolutions” identified in the formalist analysis above are rather designated as either helping or opposing the junction of the Subject with the Object. The objective of transmitting his wisdom is either hindered or facilitated by these elements. For example, both Nadan’s betrayal of Ahiqar and Esarhaddon’s order of his execution serve to hinder Ahiqar’s goal of transmitting his wisdom/legacy before his death and thereby these actions reveal Esarhaddon and Nadan to be Opponents. In the same vein, Nabusumiskun’s actions in saving Ahiqar from death and supporting him in hiding demonstrate that he is a Helper. The end of the narrative is missing, so we cannot know precisely where each character stands by the story’s completion, but it is abundantly clear that the junction—i.e. the achievement of the Object by the Subject—has not yet occurred, despite Nadan’s newfound position at court. The existence of the sayings columns further suggests that the transmission of wisdom in its fullest extent has yet to take place when the narrative breaks off.

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60 What I mean by the basic narrative here is the text-actual world (cf. Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 194); that is, the world imagined within the confines of the text itself. See further below in the discourse analysis.

61 There is an interesting switch from third-person narration to first-person from the perspective of Ahiqar. I will speak to this below, but its importance here lies in the fact that Ahiqar as both narrator and character initiate the action. Thus, the Receiver becomes both Nadan, the character, and the (implied) audience as those to whom Ahiqar the narrator is speaking. For this reason I have put an asterisk beside Ahiqar as Sender as well as Nadan as Receiver.

62 An interesting aspect to consider here is that the fulfilment of transmitting wisdom is only seen as complete or efficacious when it is carried out, that is in its practical application and not simply in the listening thereof. Nadan’s replacement of Ahiqar at court after his initial lesson is incomplete because Nadan has not demonstrated a measurable response to having received the wisdom. Indeed, upon witnessing his maleficent behavior we are immediately confronted with the awareness that the conferral of wisdom has not been achieved, and thus, on the actantial level, the
A further aspect of this model that must be considered is mentioned by David Herman:

A processor cannot assign a role to a character without already having knowledge of the overarching plot-structure of which the character is an element. Roles are needed to build up an understanding of this larger configuration, i.e., the plot; yet roles can be matched with participants only after the fact, on the basis of a fully developed plot-model that allows roles to be (retrospectively) attributed to characters in a given time-slice of the unfolding storyworld.63

So, for example, we (as processors of the narrative) can only know that Nadan fills the role of Opponent after having a basic understanding of the entire plot. A workable solution to this problem is to encounter a text and its actantial roles both reciprocally (as has been done, because we do not simply process narrative linearly; rather we are constantly reflecting upon previous events even as the plot moves forward) and in a moment-by-moment capacity that allows for a dynamicity in terms of “character-to-role mappings.”64

The model offered above is one that takes into account the entirety of the narrative, but even in its most skeletal form, the actantial model reveals some important aspects that, in turn, can be supported by a more dynamic reading. Broadly speaking, the actantial model draws our attention to a couple important features:

1) The role of Esarhaddon is ambiguous; insofar as he authorizes Ahiqar’s objectives, Esarhaddon is a Helper; yet, insofar as he responds to Nadan’s accusation and commands Ahiqar’s death, he joins Nadan in the role as Opponent.65
2) Nadan and Nabusumiskun have an inverse relationship; they trade places, as it were, in terms of how they “act upon the narrative.”

junction of Subject and Object has not been met. Presumably, it is achieved with the recitation of the wisdom sayings, though how exactly they fit into the scheme of the plot is not certain.

63 Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 192.
64 Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 193. The “words” of Ahiqar, for example, besides being an Object-element, can also fill the role of Helper in that Ahiqar’s anecdotal response to Nabusumiskun is what sways Nabusumiskun, who up this point (at least from the reader’s perspective) is an Opponent, into relenting his duty as executioner and taking up the role of Helper. Thus, the “words” only act upon the narrative (so far as we know) later in the plot; it is not self-evident from the outset that this will be the case.
65 Some of the language here is inspired by David Clines’s actantial analysis of Esther in “Reading Esther,” 6.
The ambivalent role of Esarhaddon in terms of the “narrative grammar”—i.e. how he acts in support of and against the interests of plot-trajectory—is mirrored by the paradoxical responses by the Esarhaddon’s supposed loyal servants, Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun. Both of them directly disobey Esarhaddon’s commands, thus showing on a superficial level a lack of respect for his authority. The irony, however, doubles over as we see that this disobedience is qualified (by Ahiqar himself, to be sure) as a beneficence toward the king. In line 51 Ahiqar tells Nabusumiskun, “Indeed, King Sennacherib loved me greatly because I let you live and did not kill you.” To complete the irony, we can observe that the king, on the one hand, orders their (Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun) respective executions precisely when the two have been loyal (i.e. falsely accused of disobedience). Yet, on the other hand, the king comes to love his two servants precisely for their disobedience in letting the other live.

The second and related observation that the actantial analysis exposes concerns the relationship between Nadan and Nabusumiskun. According to the actantial model, the Helper (Nabusumiskun) and the Opponent (Nadan) are measured along a similar axis of power; both having some influence on the Subject’s ability to achieve the Object. Beyond this Nadan and Nabusumiskun may also share a connection in that they both receive wisdom from Ahiqar and, interestingly, their responses are almost exactly the opposite. As indicated above, the change in actantial roles of Esarhaddon signifies a broader shift in the narrative trajectory. Interestingly, this shift also, in some ways, reinforces the chiastic structure from the previous section. What became clear in that structural model and is now undergirded by an actantial consideration is that Nadan and Nabusumiskun have a directly inverse relationship that can be observed on a number of levels. Structurally, the scenes that feature both of them as actants straddle the scene which features Esarhaddon. Further, with respect to their actual interactions with the king, we see that Nadan—

66 This is at least clear in the case of Nabusumiskun’s near-execution as told by Ahiqar (45–54). This is not certain in the present circumstance with Ahiqar, though the later evidence makes it likely that Nabusumiskun’s saving of Ahiqar will ultimately prove beneficial to the king (see sec 2.2.4).
67 Aram. ʪʺʬʨʷ ʠʬʥ ʪʺʩʧʤ ʩʦ ʬʲ ʩʰʮʧʸ ʠʫʬʮ ʡʩʸʠʧʰʱ ʠʩʢʹ ʳʠ.
68 Nadan’s accusations are clearly false; the same seems to have been the case for the past episode where Nabusumiskun was saved by Ahiqar “from an innocent killing” (Aram. ManagedObject ʪ ʪʫʦ ʬʨʷ ʯʮ).
69 This chiastic structure with the king’s actantial role as the signal posts is further reinforced if we assume that Esarhaddon later reinstates Ahiqar and thus returns to his original role as Helper.
who has just switched from Helper to Opponent—is speaking about Ahiqar to Esarhaddon, who up to that point was a Helper. Esarhaddon then becomes an Opponent and, as such, speaks to Nabusumiskun, who moves from Opponent to Helper.

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70 Nandan’s role as Helper is only evident on the broadest level of the narrative (see immediately below).

71 That Nabusumiskun is ever an “Opponent” to Ahiqar is only observable from the perspective of the audience, who presumably is unaware of impending switch to Helper. To be sure, this reading only works on the “moment-by-moment” analysis of actantial roles; regardless, the reciprocal one still reveals a contrast where Nandan is Opponent, Nabusumiskun is Helper, and Esarhaddon, who splits them, is both.

72 Clines, “Reading Esther,” 5.

73 On a side note, the dual roles of Ahiqar and the other characters in terms of the actantial paradigm recalls the doubled plot-structure from above, where there are two tensions (Ahiqar’s desire to transmit legacy and his betrayal/disgrace) and two resolutions (Ahiqar’s salvation/restoration and transmission of wisdom). Recall that the inner-plot of Ahiqar’s near execution and public shame also has a two-part structure and that when the narrative breaks off only half of this tension has been resolved. That Ahiqar ultimately transmits his wisdom seems certain given the presence of the wisdom sayings, whose position in the narrative—though not absolutely certain—at the very least testify that Ahiqar at some point passed “his words” onto the next generation.

74 In the later versions, Nandan returns to being the Receiver at the end of the narrative and this could be the case here, as well (note that the Sayings come into the narrative later and many of them include the phrase “my son” suggesting
Contrarily, Nabusumiskun moves from being Opponent to Receiver. In columns 1 and 2 Ahiqar “instructs” Nadan, thereby making him at least an implicit receiver of Ahiqar’s words (cf. lines 7-9). In response to receiving this wisdom, Nadan counters conventional wisdom by opposing Ahiqar and seeking out his death. Turning to Nabusumiskun, he is initially introduced as an Opponent who is given charge to seek out Ahiqar and execute him. Then, Nabusumiskun too receives Ahiqar’s words. Here, we actually have the content of the “words,” namely the telling of a story. Nabusumiskun’s reaction to Ahiqar’s words is the exact inverse of Nadan’s. Instead of seeking out his death, Nabusumiskun decides to help preserve Ahiqar’s life.

The changes in both Nabusumiskun and Nadan, though, are mediated through Esarhaddon, as well as Ahiqar himself (see chart above). Attention to the transitions in actantial roles reveals a tightly-packed course of action that revolves around Esarhaddon. His change is both immediately anticipated by the (unexpected) change in Nadan—from Helper/Receiver to Opponent—and immediately recalled by the (unexpected?) change in Nabusumiskun—from Opponent to Receiver/Helper. In the narrative as we have it, then, these lines are a meaning-filled fulcrum in

that Ahiqar is speaking to Nadan); although, to be sure, the plot structure of the later versions is noticeably different than the Aramaic.

Apparently, none of the actual words which Ahiqar spoke to Nadan are present here; thus, we are only told that Ahiqar instructed Nadan.

The story-telling here, incidentally, recalls that we are already in the midst of another story also being told by Ahiqar. This will be discussed shortly.

As with the king, when we apply social conventions to our interpretation of the actions of Nadan and Nabusumiskun, we find a particularly meaningful situation where expectations are reversed. This will also be unpacked in the following chapters, but briefly I would point out that it is Ahiqar’s actual kinsman who betrays him, while, on the other hand, the relationship he has with the foreigner Nabusumiskun is described “as a man with his brother” (49; Aram. ָ֯֔֗֗). Consider the passage in the sayings which poignantly recalls the circumstances of the narrative and ironically reinforces the typical social expectations even as they are being overturned: “[From out of] my [hou]se went my accursedness, so among whom will I be found innocent? The son of my belly has spied on my house, so what will I say to foreigners? // [My son] was a criminal witness against me, so who then will find me innocent? From out of my house went my fury, and with whom can I dispute and contend?” (139–140).

That Nabusumiskun had initially intended on executing Ahiqar is unclear, at least from the perspective of the audience but possibly also by Ahiqar as well (cf. line 45 Ahiqar says “I was afraid”). Still, there are clues that suggest Nabusumiskun never planned on killing Ahiqar, even before the latter reminded him of the past demonstration of charity; e.g., Nabusumiskun is described as “tearing his cloak and lamenting” (41) that Ahiqar is to die.
the plot, a point of tremendous significance and tension where all components (i.e., actants) come together in a dramatic recalibration of the status quo.

In terms of a character analysis, one could argue that Esarhaddon’s hasty back-and-forth decisions suggest that he is simply inept or whimsical. Such a view is for the most part accurate, but what should be emphasized first is how Esarhaddon both supports and acts as a detriment to Ahiqar’s objectives—only secondarily can (and indeed should) we consider why he does both and how these actions are impacted by or have an impact upon the symbolic universe in and outside of the text. The actantial analysis brings this ambiguity to the fore. Exposing and clarifying the roles fulfilled by each actant in the service of the plot provide the theoretical support for such a “character-oriented” estimation and, moreover, reveals a more nuanced appreciation of the king’s actions. The observation comes from the narratological analysis, but its significance is operative on broader levels: the fact that Esarhaddon is the king is what makes his ambiguity interesting.

Thus, the actantial analysis is necessarily incomplete in that it merely lays out how the various elements in a narrative act upon the plot, yet in its reductive simplicity this analysis provides the basic components that can be used for further investigation, allowing theoretical support for the more nuanced interpretations which are otherwise preoccupied with issues such as semantic values, impressions of a comparative-literary character, and various social, political, and/or historical resonances. The approach, then, is both synthetic and bottom-up, working from the basic narrative structures and eventually reaching to the more nuanced semantic layers of meaning that can be integrated into any number of interpretive circles (e.g. intra-/inter-textual, social, historical, etc.). As Herman has recently explained, “action-sequences afford heuristics for assigning roles to characters whose doings trigger the inference that the characters are engaged in

79 That the foreign king is oft portrayed as easily pliable through persuasion from those courtiers surrounding him is a well-recognized topos in numerous Jewish court tales such as Esther and Daniel; see, for example, Shemaryahu Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther,” VT 13 (1963): 419–55, at 439–40, and Stephanie West, “Croesus’ Second Reprieve,” 422–23; for a more recent and lengthy treatment of this motif see Michael Chan, “Ira Regis: Comedic Inflections of Royal Rage in Jewish Court Tales,” JQR 103 (2013): 1–25. Cf. Lawrence Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Harvard Dissertations in Religion 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), esp. 45–49.
some culturally salient behavioral pattern or another.”

In the same manner, the actantial analysis which sees Nadan as Opponent is only part of the issue. It gains saliency outside of the fabula level only when we consider his familial relationship to Ahiqar. Indeed, the text itself, in its persistent repetition of the various epithets and precise relationships, cues us to the fact that the characters’ social roles are as an informative feature as their narrative (actantial) roles.

2.2.2.2 Discourse Analysis

As we draw closer to a wider view of the text—one that will account for the sayings as well as the narrative—our analysis of the narrative must move beyond the abstract “underlying structures” of narrative and consider surface-level features which hint at the way in which the story is being communicated and for what purpose. A discourse analysis looks primarily toward the first aspect; it is concerned with how the story (i.e. fabula) is told. Abbott clarifies that “we never see a story directly, but instead always pick it up through the narrative discourse. The story is always mediated … so that what we call the story is really something that we construct.”

An analysis of the discourse—the way in which the fabula is communicated—is essential, since we can only know the fabula by means of discourse. As Herrnstein Smith has put it simply, narrative discourse consists of “someone telling someone else that something happened.” This type of analysis, however, is not a simple one. When it comes to examining the intricacies of narrative as discourse,

80 Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 193. This will have serious implications for when we discuss the figure of the king in more detail in Chapter 5. Briefly, though, we ought to note here that the dual or transitory role of Esarhaddon as both Helper and Opponent complicates the picture of the king as representative of (divinely-backed) justice, which consequently impacts the text’s royal ideology, as well as the text’s attitude toward more practical matters, namely how one behaves in relation to the king and/or the royal decree.

81 Again consider the comments by Herman, “Role-Theoretic,” 191: “Roles in narrative are constellations of structural, semantic, and other factors any subset of which may be more or less salient, depending on the nature and distribution of the discourse cues used to trigger role–based inferences in narrative contexts. The multi-facetedness of roles in stories, and the resulting need to combine multiple role-theoretic perspectives, are pertinent for emergent research initiatives concerned with ‘narrative intelligence.’”


83 Abbott, Narrative, 20.

84 Herrnstein Smith, “Narrative Versions,” 111 (emphasis original).
we find that there are any number of ways that can impress upon the act of communication. This section will chiefly focus be on issues related to narration, recalling, for instance, Clines’s description of narratological analysis we may note that its interests include “identifying and distinguishing narrators from implied, ideal, and actual authors and readers.”

These narratological categories—and a few others not mentioned by Clines—can be largely traced back to Gerard Genette, one of the most influential voices among literary theorists with respect to discourse analysis. A full explanation of Genette’s contributions to the analysis of narrative is well beyond the scope of this paper. Here, we will focus on a couple of aspects that are of particular interest for the study of Ahigar. In particular, we may consider Genette’s “division of the analysis of narrative discourse into the verbal categories of ‘tense,’ ‘mood,’ and ‘voice.’”

Each of these divisions emphasizes a specific aspect of the narrative discourse, though it is also important to note that they often overlap. The concept of mood indicates the method(s) by which

85 The concept of an implied author, narrator, and/or audience recalls the closely related discipline of rhetorical criticism. On the relationship between the two disciplines of narratology and rhetorical criticism see, briefly, Barthes, “Introduction,” 81–83. It may also be important to emphasize that the purpose of the narrative analysis applied here is not simply to marvel at the rhetorical or formal trappings of an ancient narrative. Interesting and informative though they may be, this type of procedure is merely descriptive and remains incomplete if left at the level of plot structure. Of concern here is the persuasive force of the text: what is it trying to do or say? Of what is it trying to convince its audience and how? So far we have only touched upon the effect or rhetorical force of the structures highlighted above. While in my mind there is always an “art for art’s sake” impulse, at the same time a study of a text’s structural, formal, and rhetorical patterns is lacking if we do not also consider how these features operate on a deeper level. As Michael Fox, “Rhetoric,” 177–78, has put it: “A study becomes rhetorical only when it removes a text from its ‘autonomy’ and inquires into the transaction between rhetor and audience, focusing on suasive intentions, techniques, and effects”; cited in Brad E. Kelle, Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective (Academia Biblica 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 30. Notably, Clines, “Contemporary Methods,” 152, has made a similar accusation about rhetorical approaches in Hebrew Bible scholarship, generally: “Rhetorical criticism, which has become firmly embedded in many areas of Hebrew Bible criticism, has usually been rather descriptive and has lacked critical edge. It may be revived if the function of stylistic features in texts is brought within its scope, that is, if it begins to examine how style serves the persuasive intentions of texts.”


88 Waugh, Literary Theory, 275.
narratives are represented and consequently deals with how “distance and perspective” relate to the telling of the story. In **Ahiqar**, then, we may point out that the story is told by Ahiqar himself, and moreover it is presented as a reflection on a past event which, incidentally, also includes within this telling a secondary *analepsis* (flashback). The use of *analepsis* and the general presentation as a reflection on a previous time relates to the other category of discourse, namely *tense*, whose primary concern is the “difference between story time and narrative time” as well as any disruptions or reconfigurations thereof. Temporality is an important feature in **Ahiqar**. The crux of the story depends in several ways upon earlier realities (e.g., Sennacherib’s esteem of Ahiqar, Ahiqar’s service to Sennacherib and Assyria, Ahiqar’s demonstration of charity to Nabusumiskun, etc.) that are previous both to the narrative’s telling as well as the chronology of the fabula itself. Finally, Genette presents the notion of *voice* and the related distinction between *focalization* and *narration*.

This last feature, namely *voice*, and the issue of *focalization*—which Genette classifies under *mood*—have a pronounced significance when it comes to understanding the mode of discourse in **Ahiqar** and, therefore, invite more careful elucidation. Beginning with the theoretical level, *voice*, according to Genette, is often confused with *mood* and this happens largely as result of the assumption that “point-of-view” must always coincide with the notion of the narrator, hence what we are left with is “a confusion between the question who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective? And the very different question: who is the narrator? Or, more simply, the question *who sees?* And the question *who speaks?*” In **Ahiqar**, as in a number

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90 On analepsis and the related prolepsis (flash-forward) see Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 41–46.


92 On temporality, by which Genette primarily means *order*, see *Narrative Discourse*, esp. 44–54.

93 See the discussion above where the anecdote (i.e., an example of *analepsis*) also perfectly corresponds on the level of discourse to the larger narrative, thus being a microcosm of the broader *telling*: the narrator in both cases is Ahiqar and, likewise, he is also a central character is both stories, though, of course, the roles are reversed.

94 Genette spends a great deal of effort elucidating the notion of focalization and its various manifestations: ‘zero,’ ‘internal’ (fixed, variable, or multiple), and ‘external’; see *Narrative Discourse*, 189–211.

95 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 286. Waush, *Literary Theory*, 276, has called Genette’s distinction between “who sees” and “who tells” as “his most innovative contribution in this section.”
of narratives, the narrator is also the main character and thus some confusion between point-of-view and narration is to be expected. Although Genette maintains that instances of focalizing and narrating “remain distinct even in ‘first-person’ narrative, that is, even when the two instances are taken up by the same person,” as we have with Ahiqar, there is a specific point at which the two overlap, i.e., “when the first-person narrative is a present-tense interior monologue.”96 For my part, I think Genette’s distinction in this regard is a bit forced (perhaps due to overcorrection in light of previous models). For instance, in line 45 we hear Ahiqar say, “I, Ahiqar, was afraid.” On the one hand, Genette is correct in that this is a “narrative instance.” The narrator, presumably recounting this story at some indeterminate point in the future, is telling his audience about a significant part of the narrative: that he, the main character, was afraid is an important instance. It makes clear that there was, in the character’s mind, a real fear of the possibility of death. From the audience’s perspective (the “narratee” to use Genette’s terms), this adds suspense; they share the fear of unknowing. Meanwhile, the narrator himself already ‘knows’ the outcome. Indeed, the narrator, “almost always ‘knows’ more than the hero [i.e. main protagonist], even if he himself is the hero, and therefore for the narrator focalization through the hero is a restriction of field just as artificial in the first person as in the third.”97 In other words, a difference in focalization (e.g., first or third; “I was afraid” vs. “he was afraid”) makes no difference in terms of narration. On the other hand, while Genette’s distinction is important, it can, on occasion, lead to a muting of the inherent significance of a narrator “speaking” in concert with the character “who sees.” The narrative of Ahiqar is a particularly noteworthy example because in it we find what appears to be a very intentional interplay between what Genette calls the “narrative instance” and the “focalization.” A prominent example—again as I have already raised on a number of occasions—is the instance of story-telling within the story itself: Ahiqar-as-narrator is narrating a story about Ahiqar-as-hero in which Ahiqar-as-hero narrates a story, thus becoming a narrator himself, and moreover this sub-story being narrated by Ahiqar-as-narrator through the lens of Ahiqar-as-hero-as-narrator is about Ahiqar-as-hero. The layers of discourse can be confusing, but the point is that Genette’s emphasis on separating narrator (an attribute of voice) from focalization or point-of-view (an attribute of mood) is helpful in demarcating the previously “clumsy formula(e)” in this regard; nevertheless,

96 Genette, Narrative Discourse, 194.
97 Genette, Narrative Discourse, 194.
there are several occasions (as we have in *Ahiqar*) where such a strong distinction is inevitably broken down, seemingly intentionally.\(^98\)

Let us turn now to a more focused analysis of *Ahiqar’s* discourse with the concepts of *voice* and *focalization* as guiding posts. First, we should point out that the text switches (back-and-forth?) between first- and third-person.\(^99\) At least initially the narrative begins with a zero focalization, i.e., with a third-person omniscient perspective (“[The beginning of ] the words of Ahiqar by name, a wise scribe and a *maher*, that *he* taught to his son … before *his* words …”); however, at a certain point Ahiqar himself takes on the role of narrator. This is most evident in those lines which include the phrase “*I, Ahiqar, did such-and-such*” (first-person verb + Ahiqar; e.g. 14: “ʩʦʧ ʩʦʫ ʸʷʩʧʠ” or 45: “’yʮʠʥ ʺʩʰʲ ʸʷʩʧʠ ʭʬ ʺʬʧʣ”). The text opens with a typical third-person incipit, and this perspective

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\(^98\) To be fair, Genette concedes somewhat on this matter in his admittance that a strict interior focalization is hardly ever achieved in literature; the narrator almost undoubtedly will describe a situation outside of the consciousness of the main character (with the exception of carefully crafted interior monologues); cf. *Narrative Discourse*, 192–94.

\(^99\) In the ancient context specifically, the switch from first- to third-person is not unique to *Ahiqar*. Qoheleth, for example, opens and closes with a third-person narration that is clearly distanced from the narrative “*I*” that dominates the remaining entirety of the text. Likewise the Egyptian *Instruction of Ptahhotep* and the *Instruction of Amenemhet I* both contain transitions from third-person incipits to first-person narratival prologues before finally moving to instructional sayings. One should also consider the book of Daniel, esp. chs. 7–12 (where the text transitions from third-person narratives about Daniel to first-person accounts of Daniel’s visions) and ch. 4 where Nebuchadnezzar takes on the role of the first-person narrator, however briefly. For discussion of the switch from third to first-person in Daniel, see, e.g., C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 71–72; Tawny L. Holm, “Daniel 1–6: A Biblical Story–Collection,” in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christianity and Jewish Narrative* (ed. Jo-Ann A. Brant, Charles W. Hendrick, and Chris Shea; SBLSS 32; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 149–66, esp. 155; G. Goswell, “The Divisions of the Book of Daniel,” in *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis* (ed. Raymond de Hoop, Marjo Korpel, and Stanley Porter; Pericope 7; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 89–114, esp. 103–4; in conversation with a similar switch in Tobit, see, e.g., Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 71; for a similar switch in the *Parables of Enoch* (*1 En. 70*), see, e.g., Leslie W. Walck, *The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch and in Matthew* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 137. Finally, Michael Kaler, “The Heretics’ Apostle and the Two Pauline Pseudepigrapha from Nag Hammadi,” in *Paul and Pseudepigraphy* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Gregory P. Fewster; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 337–52, at 338 n. 5, pointed to such a switch in the *Apocalypse of Paul* and, interestingly, stated “it is a characteristic of Judeo-Christian apocalypses to change from first to third or third to first (person), found in the *Testament of Abraham*, the book of *Daniel*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, etc.”
is maintained in the next two lines. The final clause of line 3 may be the point at which Ahiqar takes on the role as narrator. Notably here, Ahiqar begins to speak to himself, or perhaps better to the narratee. At least, there does not seem to be any other character addressed directly. The next few lines (4–14) are where the text gets tricky; again, this is primarily due to corruption of the papyrus. Each line could certainly still have Ahiqar as speaker, but in lines 10–14 there are some questions raised when we make this assumption. The most ideal and simplified scenario would be that after the initial switch in line 3, Ahiqar should continuously be understood as both actor and narrator, even if there are some occasions where the text may slip back into third-person.

Moreover, it is not simply a matter of point-of-view; rather, it has to do with the knowledge of the narrator—hence, Genette’s preference for focalization. For example, even when Ahiqar takes over as narrator the focalization is not strictly an internal one; it is not simply from his point-of-view. Ahiqar-as-narrator is privy to external knowledge, and not just what transpired. He knows the thoughts of other characters. Take line 25 where we read “Nadan conspired [lit. thought or devised evil things] against me”). Ahiqar-as-narrator knows something about Nadan’s motives that clearly Ahiqar-as-character did not. In the line that immediately precedes this thoughtful betrayal Ahiqar-as-narrator narrates how Ahiqar-as-character was completely unaware: “I said, ‘He will seek [my] welfare.’” Such a blurriness among the focalizations and types of knowledge is not wholly unexpected. Genette reminds us that “the commitment as to focalization is not necessarily steady over the whole length of a narrative … any single formula of focalization does not, therefore, always bear on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section, which can be

100 For example, does King Esarhaddon do the “instructing” in line 10? Is king still speaking in line 12, and if so to whom? If yes, then presence of “his son” here suggests the addressee is Nadan, though it could still be Ahiqar. The “him” in 11 would necessarily be Nadan if Ahiqar were the narrator; yet, there are factors which suggest Ahiqar himself is the referent, thus suggesting a third-person perspective. That it is Esarhaddon doing the “testing” of Nadan’s qualifications is implied by the translations offered in Lindenberger, “Ahiqar,” OTP 2:494 (following Grelot, “Histoire et sagesse,” 439) and Kottsieper, “Die Geschichte,” 325. Generally speaking, it may not matter much who precisely is “narrating” here, as the audience (real or implied) would most likely always imagine Ahiqar as the speaker; but in some specific instances (such as column 1) it is important to determine as best we can who is doing/saying what. One important implication is whether or not the text attests to a “contest” (specifically that of a king challenging wise man or his protégé), a familiar trope, or sub-genre, of literature.

101 Again, as Genette has pointed out such a slippage is near ubiquitous in literature, see Narrative Discourse, 192.

102 On the frequent confusion between internal variable focalization and non-focalization see n. 99.
very short.”\textsuperscript{103} Thus, Genette may be right, at least to some extent, about emphasizing some difference between point-of-view and narration.

We might still ask: why tell the story using Ahiqar as narrator? Why make the switch from the external third-person to the internal first-person? A simple answer may be that it creates an intimacy on the level of narration that would be lost if the focalization is too distant. Consider the two options: “I, Ahiqar, was afraid” vs. “Ahiqar was afraid.” As we will see later, the idea that Ahiqar himself is addressing (and instructing!) the actual audience may be important and thus framing the narrative in such a way that the narrator is Ahiqar himself speaking to the \textit{implied or narrative} audience is meaningful. Still, such a narratorial maneuver can cause a great deal of confusion, especially given that the narrative is very much dialogue driven, not to mention the fragmentary state of the papyri which likewise hinders our analysis.\textsuperscript{104} This can be somewhat simplified if we center our discussion of Genette’s narrative instance around two primary questions: “\textit{Who speaks?} and \textit{How does the narrator relate to the narrated events?}”\textsuperscript{105} Consider, for example, the observation made above about the frequent refrain relating to Ahiqar’s previous faithful service to Sennacherib. That the narrative begins with an external testimony to this “fact” gives weight to the numerous times that Ahiqar-as-narrator makes this statement, or when he puts it on the lips of others.\textsuperscript{106}

Added to these two questions is the notion of the “narratee,” the “communicative partner of narrator … as distinct from the flesh and blood reader.”\textsuperscript{107} Genette’s interest in the ‘narratee’

\textsuperscript{103} See Genette, \textit{Narrative Discourse}, 191.
\textsuperscript{104} Several of the first-person lines scattered throughout the extant columns may very well be Ahiqar-as-character speaking to another character, rather than Ahiqar acting in the role of narrator; though it does seem that at some point probably in column 1 the text moves to a first-person narration and continues as such throughout. Again, because much of the text consists of dialogue between characters, the first-person point-of-view often results in a complicated juggling of direct and reported speech. For example, the syntagm “I, Ahiqar …” opens both direct speech (l. 45) and narration (l. 14).
\textsuperscript{105} Waugh, \textit{Literary Theory}, 276
\textsuperscript{106} Similar examples in ancient literature abound, but as a biblical scholar I would be remiss in not mentioning the exegetical importance of Job 1:1 for substantiating the character’s repeated assertion of his own “uprightness” (Heb. תמצות).
\textsuperscript{107} Waugh, \textit{Literary Theory}, 276.
was patterned after Greimas’s Receiver/Sender relationship. The narratee receives this story from Ahiqar, the one who is speaking. Important here is not only the distinction between Ahiqar-as-narrator and Ahiqar-as-character in the narration, but also that between Ahiqar the narrator and the (implied or actual) author. Ahiqar the narrator is a fictive identity that is distanced semantically from the (implied) author—a distance that is, in part, signaled by the shift from third to first person. The narrator and narratee, thus, should also be distinguished from the implied author and implied audience respectively. These latter two are “outside” the text and thus are not of immediate concern to most literary analysis; nevertheless, they will be important concepts shortly as we move towards a more “culturally embedded” reading of the text. It is in this complex of narrator/narratee, characters, actions, events, etc. that we recognize the intimate connection between the story itself (fabula) and the story as told (discourse).

The concept of the narratee, moreover, has an increased significance if we take into account the entire text of Ahiqar, including the sayings. The formulation of the sayings are largely in the first person and directed at a fictive “my son.” Whether or not the “son” in the sayings—also, often, simply “you”—is to be identified with Nadan is unclear, though we can be reasonably certain the “I” in the sayings is still Ahiqar. While the sayings are not narrative in any strict sense, they do have an impact on our understanding of the narration of Ahiqar (even more so if the sayings are situated within the narrative rather than being attached as an appendix; see section 2.2.4). Put more clearly, just as we may presume that the narrator-Ahiqar has some temporal distance from the story—i.e., he is telling it as past events—so also may we presume that the narratee is distanced, in a sense, from the narrated events. Unfortunately the incomplete nature of the narrative leaves us wondering just how closely related the narratee is to the narrated events. This may seem trivial, but consider the following possibilities? Is it a future “reformed” Nadan? If so, this would certainly shape our view of his character (as well as Ahiqar’s; e.g., in his capacity for forgiveness). Is it a different pupil/son whom Ahiqar has adopted as a replacement or second attempt after Nadan? Or, is it merely an ambiguous “you” → “we” (as audience), whose identity may have more to do with social setting than strict literary critics would prefer to admit?

108 See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 215 n. 5
109 Alternatively we might call the narratee the narrative audience.
Indeed, these distinctions we make on some vertical plain of literary analysis should not
discount the idea that the reading audience (the “flesh and blood one”) is being invited into the
role of narratee. It may even be restrictive on the interpretive process to ignore this perspective.
To be clear, I am not suggesting a full-fledged socio-historical reading here—that will come in
chapter 4—instead simply allowing for the heuristic exercise of imaging the narratee as the
external audience to whom the internal narrator Ahiqar is speaking. Thus, we may reasonably
speak of a narrated “you” that equals the “we” who are the receivers of this story as told by the “I”
who is Ahiqar-as-narrator. The goal is to understand how the role of the narratee is impacted by or
impacts the narrative-instance. Consider again the anecdote. The story Ahiqar narrates to
Nabusumiskun is in many ways just like the story Ahiqar narrates to “us.” Within the narration
Ahiqar is still the “I” except that the “you” becomes explicitly Nabusumiskun, only a future
Nabusumiskun who is reflecting upon a past situation and expected to make a present change
(“Just as I have done for you, so also [now] you do for me”). In the same way, the present narratee,
particularly in the sayings where we find the “you” terminology, is invited to reflect upon a past
event (the fabula) and, moreover, to make a present change as result of hearing this story and the
sayings. That the audience shares in the role as narratee with Nabusumiskun is further emphasized
by the fact that Ahiqar’s story to Nabusumiskun sets the Receiver of this story as an actor therein.
If we transfer this relationship of Receiver to actor, then we, too, as the audience are invited to see
ourselves within the story. Furthermore, at this point, then, the audience-as-narratee can identify
with Nabusumiskun-as-narratee—a noticeable shift since beforehand the implication was the
audience should identify themselves with Nadan (the one to whom Ahiqar has previously been
sharing “his words” according to the opening lines). The betrayal by Nadan creates a moral crisis
for the narratee/audience, because it was with Nadan—as student, receiver, listener—that the
narratee was invited to identify. The tension extends, incidentally, over the very lines in which
Ahiqar’s fate is “unknown” and thus suggests that “we” too are implicitly to blame. The resolution
of this “meta-tension” comes when Ahiqar finds a new Receiver and narratee in Nabusumiskun,
with whom we can safely identify, though only after the narrative instance. Hence, the change
effected in Nabusumiskun is likewise (expected to be) effected in the narratee as well as the implied
audience, again recalling the complex connection between the narrated anecdote and the narrated
“story.” This, of course, is part of the mystery of narrative discourse; the ability to construct a
world and a drama that is completely outside ourselves and yet somehow it also has the ability to arouse a participatory, often cathartic, reaction.

2.2.3 Summary of Literary Analysis of Narrative

Applying newer methodologies from literary theory, which see Ahiqar as a text in its own right, has allowed for a much more nuanced appreciation of the narrative. For example, instead of dismissing the constant repetition of Ahiqar’s status as a matter of bland style or in a diachronic model as evidence of redaction, we have observed that it plays an integral function on a formal level of unifying the various sub-sequences, as well as contributing subtlety to the trustworthiness of the narrative discourse by distancing somewhat the narration of Ahiqar from a strictly internal focalization. Laying out the different plot structures and their multi-dimensional movements has familiarized us with the basic organization of the narrative and the various ways in which these formal (sub-)sequences are used create meaning, especially as they relate to the individual characters and their interrelationship.

Furthermore, the ways in which each character acts upon the narrative has also highlighted how important their roles are both within the narrative world and, presumably, in the social world that is reflected in the text. The broad layout of sub-plots combined with this actantial analysis makes us much more attuned to the opposition created between Nada and Nabusumiskun, as well as the function of Esarhaddon in his capacity as an authoritative, yet indeterminable figure. Clearly, “the king” represents an important, yet complex concept.

The literary analyses above have, on the one hand, unlocked a number of insights into the internal dynamics and narrative logic of Ahiqar, as well as highlighting other aspects that were only superficially recognizable. On the other hand, the application of these methodologies falls short if we do not at least attempt to comment on how narratives function outside of themselves. As should be clear (hopefully), the above approaches to the Ahiqar narrative have endeavored to press beyond the “taxonomical bend” that has frequently plagued literary and narratological studies, especially in the heyday of structuralism. Demarcating passages, identifying patterns, and recognizing compositional structures is all well and good, but it does not necessarily indicate anything about how the text can (or should) be understood. Interpretation and analysis is (much) more than mere classification. As Mieke Bal has aptly put it: “Between a general conception of narrative and an actual narrative text—or object—lies more than a classification. The distribution
of actual objects over a restricted number of categories is only meaningful—if at all—after insight into a text has been gained.”

Besides uncovering these underlying structures or discursive strategies, we ought also to be asking: how are these organizational and formal qualities being used to create meaning? For Ahiqar specifically, an appropriate speculation—in anticipation of the subsequent discussion about the sayings and the genre of Ahiqar—on the primary function of the text is that it is to instruct the reader in proper and/or good behavior. The final investigation on the level of discourse and, more specifically, narration, for example, has revealed a number of functional strategies of the narrated event. In part, we have seen the blurring of the borders between character and narrator, narrator and implied author, as well as between character and narratee, and narratee and implied audience. A pedagogical connotation is strongly implied by having the famously “wise” character act as both the narrator of the story and the reciter of the sayings. Here again we see the multi-layered relationship on the vertical axis from fabula (Ahiqar, Nabusumiskun, and Nadan as actants) to discourse (Ahiqar as narrator and an unknown narratee, though one modeled on both Nadan and Nabusumiskun as receivers of Ahiqar’s words) and lastly to social setting (the implied author to the implied audience). The rhetorical effect on the reader, therefore, may be to get “us” to decide with whom we want to identify: Nadan or Nabusumisku? The choice seems easy, but the narrative’s telling—as well as the sayings—forces the reader to imagine themselves from both perspectives. Still, despite the incriminating effect of making “us” hear Ahiqar’s words with Nadan’s ears, the eventual transition to sharing in Nabusumiskun’s listening may be meant as encouraging. What is noticeable from the first two levels—i.e. those that we have explored thus far—is that the telling of a story can be tremendously efficacious, perhaps even more so than the recitation of wise words. Nabusumiskun’s positive change in response to Ahiqar’s story-telling is directly set against Nadan’s negative change after hearing Ahiqar’s “instructions” (whatever they may have been). This, however, should not necessarily be taken to mean that the sayings are worthless simply because they did not effect any positive change in Nadan; however, it does make

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111 Bal, Narratology, 221.
112 This discourse-level reading which complicates the sympathies of the audience will be significant in the socio-political reading in Chapter 4, where attention to Nadan’s status as “family” and Nabusumiskun’s as “non-family/foreigner” may have politico-ethical implications for the reading audience at Elephantine.
clear that the telling of the story has a fundamental worth as a means of instruction and, when we consider the broader questions of social setting and genre, the narrative should not be cast aside as a mere prop or convenient vehicle for the wisdom sayings. Indeed, a better perspective is one that sees both story-telling and sayings-recitation as having a symbiotic relationship that is mutually reinforcing. The complementary and interdependent relationship between the narrative and the sayings will be given full explication in the subsequent chapters.

2.2.4 Finishing the Story: The Missing End and the Later Witnesses

There is, of course, a major hindrance that leaves any literary analysis of Ahiqar wanting: the story is incomplete. Not only is it fragmentary, and thus missing any number of interesting or important details, but the story leaves off just where the plot gets exciting. How long must Ahiqar stay in hiding? Will he be restored to his former position? What will become of Nadan? Will he be found out? forgiven? punished? That Ahiqar survives the ordeal is already apparent when the text breaks off, but in what circumstances does he continue, or, more specifically, where, when, and to whom does Ahiqar give his “words”? The presence of the sayings—and their formulation of “I” (who is presumably Ahiqar) to “you”/“my son”—suggests that Ahiqar will encounter Nadan again, though other scenarios (e.g., another “son,” appendix, etc.) are also plausible. Where the sayings fit into the overall story is certainly important.

In Porten and Yardeni’s edition—which this author for the most part accepts—the sayings come after the betrayal. Only Ingo Kottsieper maintains that they split the existing narrative columns (between cols. 2 and 3). Alternatively, John Strugnell follows Porten and Yardeni but points out that any number of missing columns could come before or after plates H and L, thus the conclusion could either split or frame the sayings. Fortunately, there are a few clues that make some options more likely than others. For example, a number of sayings seem to explicitly refer to circumstances in the narrative, especially the betrayal (e.g., lines 139–140). Thus, suggestions

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113 This will have implications in later discussions but is worth emphasizing here; cf. Cowley, Aramaic Papyri, 209;
of their absolute separation are to be dismissed outright. Kottsieper’s suggestion about where to integrate the sayings would also not make much sense in the context of the narrative. In any case, it is clear that the betrayal by Nadan takes place at the end of column 2 and beginning of column 3; therefore, the sayings, in relation to the narrative sequence, come after the betrayal.

From the Aramaic text itself, there is not much that we can say with certainty. However, we are fortunate to have a great number of traditions connected to, but external from, the Elephantine Ahiqar that can at the very least provide us with some circumstantial evidence and, thereby, allow for a few possibilities for “finishing” the story. The matter is somewhat complicated, however, in that there are several different options based on how the overall story is structured, where the sayings fit in, and what happens to each character. For this reason, I will only look at only a couple of aspects: (1) the broader structure of the Book of Ahiqar, and (2) how the sayings are integrated with the narrative (if at all).

(1a) Story concludes shortly after break, before Sayings. This view is the general consensus of how the Elephantine text is structured, based chiefly on Porten and Yardeni’s edition. They speculate, in light of the underlying customs account, that there are four missing columns (DD1-4) between column 5 (where the narrative breaks off) and column 6 (which is the first of the extant sayings columns). Where exactly the sayings begin is unclear. But, according to this model and given the small amount of space for the remainder of the narrative—as well as the narrative’s proclivity for repetition—the transition from narrative to sayings was probably on DD4. Hence, the narrative’s conclusion must be quite short, extending only another three to three and a half columns, leaving no room at all (in most interpreters’ opinion) for the “Egyptian episode” that appears in nearly every medieval recension and Aesop. There is some

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116 There are material reasons for maintaining a closer integration of the story and the sayings, namely that they are written in the same hand; cf. Yardeni, “Maritime Trade,” 67–70.


118 That is, where Ahiqar proves his worth by travelling to Egypt and solving impossible riddles posed by pharaoh, and after having bested the Assyrian king’s archrival he returns home, loaded with treasure and restored to his exalted status. In the later versions the king of Egypt is anonymously called “Pharaoh,” while in Aesop he is named: Nectanebo (probably Nectanebo II from the mid–4th c. B.C.E.); cf. Konstantakos, Akicharos, 3:5–7.
evidence against this overall arrangement, which sees narrative and sayings as two complete sections side-by-side, since this kind of structure is unattested in the later versions. Still, it could have been the case at Elephantine. Also, we do know that the story circulated independently and thus would have been “complete” without any intervening sayings. In Aesop the narrative is divorced completely from the sayings which figure much later;\(^\text{119}\) similarly, in some Ethiopic witnesses we have the narrative in its completeness (though abridged relative to the other medieval versions) and likewise find a collection of Ahiqar’s sayings separate from the story.\(^\text{120}\) None of these, however, can be determinative for the Elephantine version, but it is important to recognize that there is some diversity among the various witnesses in terms of the text’s overall structure.

\textbf{(1b) Story continues after Sayings, length unknown.} This would conform to the “framing” structure evident in the medieval versions, especially if cols. L and H came after the second part of the narrative, thus forming two separate sections of sayings. There is no evidence from Elephantine either way, but the existence of two separate sayings sections in the Aramaic text seems unlikely given that in the later versions there was a distinct difference in form and character between the two.\(^\text{121}\) The discernible sayings in L and H do not stand out in any way as significantly different from those in the previous sayings-columns. As for the conclusion coming after the sayings, this is certainly possible. In this case, the sayings could begin relatively quickly after the narrative breaks off, perhaps even in the next column (DD1). This does not necessarily mean that the “Egyptian episode” must be on the missing second section. For all we know, it too could be a very short ending, only that it comes after the sayings rather than being squeezed into less than four columns. An important issue concerns the antiquity of the


\(^\text{121}\) The second section of the sayings in the later versions, often called “the Parables,” are illustrative reproofs meant to chastise and shame Nadan. Such accusatory sayings do appear in the extant Aramaic portions, but they are interspersed throughout, being integrated with the typical instructions which lack any vindictive tone.

134
“Egyptian episode” since there is no evidence in the Elephantine version to support its early existence. Support may come from the Demotic fragments of the Ahiqar narrative (from around the 1st c. C.E.), which are purportedly from the “Egyptian episode,” but this is not certain and nevertheless still far removed from 5th c. Elephantine. Aesop, too, includes a modified version of this section, but the antiquity of the Aesop Romance itself is also under some scrutiny. The book of Tobit, however, has often been looked to as evidence against the “Egyptian episode” being in the oldest versions of Ahiqar, since it is nowhere hinted at in Tobit’s various references to the text. Yet, to be fair, Tobit hardly gives any “summary” of Ahiqar, instead making only a brief takeaway statement (cf. Tob 14:10).

For my part, the question of the overall structure of the Elephantine Ahiqar must remain unanswered, though I would speculate that there must have been some sort of prose epilogue

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122 Most scholars assume that the “Egyptian episode” was added to the court tale much later. Though, contra to this opinion see Greenfield, “Wisdom of Ahiqar,” 43–52; cf. the more complicated argument by Luzzato, “Grecia e Vicino Oriente,” 55, who suggests that the Elephantine version, in lacking the Egyptian episode, is an “abridged” copy of an earlier, longer version that included the Egyptian contest.
123 On this see, e.g., Quack, “The Interaction of Aramaic,” 377–78.
124 For a discussion and bibliography on the debate surrounding the dating of the Aesopica see Kurke, Aesopic Conversations, 5–49.
125 The Aramaic fragments of Tobit from Qumran make this text’s connection to Ahiqar all the more intriguing given that both texts include similar titles (e.g. 27 in 4Q196 7–8 = Tob 1:22; cf. Ahiq. line 3 [7]. That Tobit is now confirmed to have been written in Aramaic and its date goes back at least to the 2nd (but probably 3rd c. B.C.E.) make it an even more important witness to the “Ahiqar tradition” generally, even though it cannot shed that much light on the Elephantine version specifically; on the Qumran fragments of Tobit that mention Ahiqar, see, e.g., Armin Schmitt, “Die Achikar-Notiz bei Tobit 1,21b–22 in aramäischer (pap4QTob'ar – 4Q196) und griechischer Fassung” Biblische Zeitschrift 40 (1996): 18–38; and Michael O. Wise, “A Note on 4Q196 (papTob ara) and Tobit I 22,” VT 43 (1993): 566–70.
126 It is important to mention here that there are still hundreds of papyri fragments from Elephantine that have yet to be edited or translated (in fact, they are still in the very same boxes in which they were put over 100 years ago!). Currently, there is a project in the works at the Papyrussammlung in Berlin to scan them and thus make them available for study. Whether or not the “missing” portions of Ahiqar are contained therein is impossible to know, but may be unlikely since the other sheets were all collected together.
after the sayings, even if it is a short one. Thus, I lean toward a closer integration between the narrative and sayings on the basic level of narration. Nevertheless, it has become standard among scholars to assume that (a) the story and sayings are two separate sections only loosely connected, and (b) that the “Egyptian episode” is not ancient. It is important, however, to make it clear that these too are assumptions and other possibilities are just as likely.

As for how the sayings are integrated into the narrative, two structures allow for several possibilities:

(2a) Sayings as an Appendix: That the sayings have little to no direct impact on the narrative seems to be the general assumption of most interpreters. This, of course, makes treating them as altogether separate entities (as has been done) all the more convenient. At best, then, we can speculate a quick transitional sentence after the conclusion. At worst, it has been hinted by some that the sayings and narrative are completely independent of each other at Elephantine, and thus their relationship need not be discussed at all. For my part, both of these seem unlikely given the strong connection in themes and outlook in both sections and in light of the direct references to the narrative circumstances. Examples related to this last point have, of course, been noted by most interpreters, but they are generally taken to be “editorial” or “redactional” and thus (whether intentionally or not) are given a secondary status among the sayings themselves and likewise of marginal importance for the narrative.¹²⁷

(2b) Sayings as Final Lesson (or Reflection of previous lesson) to Nadan: The other possibility following scenario (1a) from above is that the sayings represent Ahiqar’s “final lesson” to Nadan. Hence, after being restored Ahiqar then gives Nadan another lesson—since clearly the first didn’t stick. There are some accusatory lines in the

¹²⁷ See, for example, Weigl’s recent comments (Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 760): “Die Sammlung von Weisheitsworten bedurfte jedoch auch einer gewissen biographisch stilisierten Anpassung an die in der Erzählung geschilderten Vorkommnisse, um so eine gänzlich harmonische Einheit schaffen zu können. Deshalb kam es zu einigen strategisch gesetzten redaktionellen Eingriffen in das Weisheitskorpus, welche das dem Titelhelden von seinem (Zieh-)Sohn zugefügte persönliche Ungemach – vor allem die Verleumdung und Verunglimpfung des Namens – auch in der Spruchsammlung verankern sollte” (emphasis mine). Though oddly, Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 558 n. 9, earlier appears to have criticized the “editorial” hypothesis and those predecessors (esp. Lindenberger and Kottsieper) who had tried to undermine the relationship between the narrative and the sayings.
sayings which support this (e.g. 105–106, 111, 128). Alternatively, the sayings could be cast as a reflection of what Ahiqar had previously taught NADAN, only set at the end so as not to disrupt the flow of the narrative. This, however, seems unlikely given the arguments made above concerning Kottsieper’s arrangement (i.e., the accusations would not make sense at that point in the narrative). We might also point to the important phrase in line 2: “before his words.” This suggests a chronological relationship between the events of the story and the “publication” of his wise words. In other words, before this wise man Ahiqar composed his famous wise words, he went through the following ordeal: betrayal, suffering, and (presumably) rehabilitation. Thus, that his “words” would follow this narrative is not altogether surprising.

(2e*) **Addressee is Someone Other than NADAN.** It is not necessary that NADAN be the addressee of the sayings. Granted, those sayings which explicitly relate to the narrative are generally accusatory in tone. Yet, the accusatory sayings that use “you” are fragmentary and do not necessarily indicate a wrong having been done, only the possibility thereof (though, lines 106 and 126 are exceptional); moreover, in those sayings which are explicit about a son’s betrayal (139–140) they are curiously phrased in the third-person (hence, “my son” or “the son of my belly”) and thus the addressee could easily be a third party. This, of course, is not certain, and the use of third-person in 139–140 may have some dramatic or formulaic basis (e.g., it could be a “lament” and thus the speaker “Ahiqar” is not addressing anyone directly). Still, that NADAN would receive this wisdom after betraying Ahiqar seems odd. Interestingly, in a couple of the later versions we find that Ahiqar had begun to train NADAN’s younger brother after NADAN had proven himself unworthy in Ahiqar’s eyes. This provides motivation for NADAN’s betrayal (which, notably, the extant Elephantine version lacks) and, moreover, may indicate a possible alternative as to whom Ahiqar transmits his legacy. Recall that each of the later versions ends with NADAN’s death. Still, NADAN is always the receiver of the wise instructions, so to suggest otherwise in the Aramaic version would result in a unique situation.

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128 This scenario could work with pretty much any structural model listed here, hence the asterisk. But it bears full explanation on its own, rather than simply offering it as an alternative possibility in each of the other scenarios.
(2d) Ahiqar records his Wisdom in Hiding. From where (from what position, social status, physical location) does Ahiqar recite his wisdom? This may seem an unimportant detail, but consider the impact that the narrative’s circumstances would have on the tone with which the sayings are related.\footnote{That the sayings can be assessed in such a way is made abundantly clear when we consider the later versions, where the two sets of sayings can be distinguished on several levels, not the least of which is the emotional. Consider two representative examples from the Syriac version: (a) “My so do not tell all that thou hearest and do not disclose all that thou seest” and (b) “My son, thou hast been like the man who saw his companion shivering from cold, and took a pitcher of water and threw it over him” (the text is from Cod. Add. 2020, translated in Conybeare, et al., The Story of Ahikar, 60, 80). Saying (a) is from the first set of “instructions” which appear in the narrative before Nadan’s betrayal. They are a part of his training to succeed Ahiqar as a wise sage and counselor to the king of Assyria. The second example (b), however, comes after Ahiqar suffers his ordeal—the betrayal, near execution, and rehabilitation through trial-by-wisdom. This is but one example from the “Parables”; so-called because their form and tone have a distinct character when compared with the earlier “instructions.” In the Elephantine version, however, it should be emphasized that sayings of the type (b) appear alongside of those of type (a). How then does this affect the tone of the Elephantine sayings generally? Do the otherwise routine instructions for a son to obey his father or for a father to discipline his son not take on a completely different nuance in the context of a narrative about betrayal and disobedience? Do they not have a more powerful impact when surrounded by sayings that allude to some instance wherein a son brought his father’s name “into foulness” (106; cf. 180)?} In the Elephantine text the answer to this question is not clear, though it does seem certain that Ahiqar relates his wise sayings after his betrayal by Nadan, thus already distinguishing this text dramatically from the later versions in which the “instructional” section of sayings comes before Nadan’s deceit. We are left here with two options: they are either given after his rehabilitation or Ahiqar recites his wisdom while in hiding, that is, during his disgrace and suffering. The first possibility has already been implied by option (2a) from above, and, incidentally, is the basic assumption by most interpreters. However, I would like to propose that the alternative scenario is also possible, if not more likely. We have already pointed to the evidence in the Elephantine text itself: the accusatory sayings, the laments (139–140), and a preoccupation with the tenuousness of one’s status (e.g., 80, 96) all indicate that the speaker has endured a particularly stirring hardship. That such reflective instructions can be connected to a specific situation of suffering gives them some substance, thus making their worth more authentic for the intended
audience. Granted, these sayings could come at any point after the ordeal, including after its resolution. Unfortunately, the text as we have it makes this unclear and, moreover, the later versions are of little help since the general structure of sayings vis-à-vis narrative is clearly different. For this reason, I suggest we look to two other external sources, both of which have been shown to have directly depended on the “Ahiqar tradition”130 and both of which have their respective protagonists recite wisdom from a position of disrepute and/or disgrace. They are: the Demotic Egyptian Instructions of Ankhsheshonqe and the Jewish novella of Tobit. In Ankhsheshonqe, the protagonist is involved in a court intrigue similar to Ahiqar which results in his public disgrace. Ankhsheshonqe, while also not guilty of disloyalty, is nevertheless arrested on charges for failing to prevent an actual plot against the king. While in prison, Ankhsheshonqe contemplates his death and having a similar desire to pass on his wisdom and legacy, decides to inscribe a set of wise sayings to be delivered to his son.131 The text breaks off before the conclusion so, like the Aramaic Ahiqar, it is not clear if Ankhsheshonqe is ever rehabilitated, but herein we have an important example from a time period and location not too distant from Elephantine wherein a wise sage transmits his wisdom from a position of disrepute.132 In a somewhat different situation, Tobit suffers a misfortune and thereafter delivers a set of wisdom instructions to his son and successor Tobias. Although Tobit is not in prison or in hiding, Tobit does pass on his wisdom “from the dark”—he has been blinded, he considers his death imminent (Tob 4:2), and there is even a hint of public disgrace (cf. 2:8). He decides to pass the

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130 I refer to the “Ahiqar tradition” here to emphasize that while both of the following texts—Tobit and Ankhsheshonqe—have a close relationship to Ahiqar, it is not certain how exactly they were influenced; that is, we do not know whether they had a version of Ahiqar in front of them or simply were familiar with the story; or, if they did have it, what it looked like relative to the Elephantine version. In other words, while there seems to be enough correspondence—both in the narrative and sayings—to say with confidence that both texts knew “the Ahiqar tradition” there is, unfortunately, not much we can say about the character of the “Ahiqar” witness that each author had before them, respectively.

131 For an introduction with translation see Lichtheim, AEL 3:159–84.

132 Ankhsheshonqe was probably composed sometime between the 3rd and 1st c. B.C.E., but it is set in the Saite period which almost exactly coincides with the historical setting of Ahiqar’s narrative.
torch of leadership of the family on to Tobias and this transition is signaled, in part, by Tobit’s recitation of a set of wise sayings (Tob 4:3–21). Scholars have frequently pointed to the similar plot structure and motifs shared by Ahiqar and Tobit.¹³³ Is it coincidence that the elder decides to relate his wise instructions only after suffering some misfortune? We might also consider other examples from ancient literature where we find “wisdom from the dark.” In the book of Job, for instance, the dialogues—wherein the issue of theodicy, among other things, is hashed out—take place during Job’s suffering, not after. Also, from Egypt we have the vastly popular Instructions of Amenemhet I for his son Sesostris II, which is presented as a speech from the recently deceased pharaoh for his son and successor. Amenemhet, thus, “instructs” Sesostris from death, that is, after his betrayal and assassination by his own advisors.

To be sure, much of the evidence presented here is circumstantial, but is an intriguing possibility to consider that the wise sayings in Ahiqar come from the lips of a person who is currently languishing in hiding, in a state of public disrepute, even while we, the audience, are certain of his innocence. Still, in relying primarily on the Elephantine text as we have it, it is best to be cautious. Thus, I err on the side of multiple possibilities rather than assuming one structure or narrative-sayings integration is definitive. Despite the ambiguity concerning how exactly the two sections are linked, there is nonetheless a great deal of evidence to suggest a closer degree of integration than has been previously assumed.

2.3 The Sayings of Ahiqar: Forms, Contexts, and Compositional Schemes

A literary or formal analysis to a collection of sayings requires a different approach from that of a narrative. For one, there is no story, at least not in the strictest sense. Still, even if the sayings lack

¹³³ See bibliographic citations in footnote 48 in Chapter 1. The comparisons are usually made with the later, medieval versions since they are complete, but it is interesting to note that in this instance Tobit resembles the ancient Aramaic text more closely, i.e., he recites his wisdom only after experiencing trials; consider also, for example, the “mini-ordeal” of Tobit’s disgrace and restoration relative to the Assyrian monarchy (Tob 1:13–21; in which, notably, Ahiqar himself figures).
a plot, it does not discount the possibility of a certain flow. As one progresses through each saying in sequence, is it not possible to conceive of a movement in terms of tone, attitude, or emotion? In the same way, even though the sayings lack actants, they might still have characters. Likewise, the notion of a narrator may not be apt, but there is certainly a speaker, addressee (or addressees), and implied audience as well as any number of third parties (gods, colleagues, children, slaves, etc.) which may or may not be cast as having a direct relationship to the supposed addressee(s). We might, nonetheless, ask: what of the relationship between the speaker or addressee with the characters in the narrative? Is the speaker of the sayings always to be identified with Ahiqar? If so, how strictly must we connect this advice with his station in life? As has already been indicated several sayings are clearly reminiscent not only of the basic positions occupied by the speaker (e.g., sayings about king in col. 6 could relate to one who works in court) but also of very specific circumstances of the narrative (e.g., the various references to betrayal or disgrace of a son to his father). On the other hand, there are as many sayings which do not fit the narrative context whatsoever, and most could equally apply in a wide array of situations.

First, we ought to familiarize ourselves with the sayings on an individual level. I begin, therefore, by briefly surveying the various structures, types, and a few of the stylistic devices represented in the sayings of Ahiqar. Then, I will move to the question of interpretation, with a specific focus on context and the role it plays in such a collection. Finally, we will step back and assess any grand compositional schemes. The direction of this investigation—from isolated unit to a larger compositional matrix—will eventually lead us the overall structure of the Book of Ahiqar, narrative included, at which point the question of genre becomes important.

2.3.1 Sayings-Types, Structures, and Stylistic Devices
This section aims to give the reader a basic grasp of the sayings-types, structures, and stylistic devices found in the sayings of Ahiqar, which exhibit a wide diversity in this regard. The terminology used in this section is intended solely for descriptive purposes; thus, the designation

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134 To be sure, there is some discrepancy among the earlier editions and translations concerning the delimitation of each saying. For example, the string of sayings in column 6 about cautious speech are so closely connected by terminology and content that distinguishing between them can be difficult, especially in those places that are corrupt and which, therefore, might disguise any connecting or transitional words.
of a saying to a particular type is not meant to be restrictive when it comes to content or relation to other sayings. The following discussion of sayings-types is by no means an exhaustive list of every instance of a particular form, instead I offer only a couple of representative examples with some commentary. There is no particular order, though I have tried to group certain types according a shared sense (e.g. imperatival, proverbial, etc.) or structure.

*Exhortations* are a frequent occurrence among the sayings. Grammatically, they are instances of a direct imperative: line 113: “Admonish (三大职业) a person who does not know what he will ....” In most cases, the exhortations are followed by motive clauses, which either explain the benefits of obeying or warn of the consequences for disregarding the advice: line 129: “... you, O my son! Borrow the grain and the wheat so that you may eat and be satisfied and give to your children”; or line 82: “More than anything else that’s guarded guard (TPL) your mouth, and concerning that which you’ve heard, make heavy (ስለ) heart, for a bird is a word and the one who releases it is a person with no sense (lit. heart).”

*Admonitions*, a form of instruction related to exhortations, are the most common sayings-type represented in *Ahiqar*. These are typified by vetitives—i.e., negative commands usually in the form of the negative particle ʬʠ followed by the shortened form of the imperfect. Strictly speaking the verbal form in the vetitive (also called the “prohibitive”) is not the same as the regular imperfect. Muraoka, *An Introduction to Egyptian Aramaic*, (vol. III/1 of Lehrbücher orientalischer Sprachen; ed. Josef Tropper; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2012), 64–66, distinguishes between the “long imperfect” (PCδ) and “short imperfect” (PCS), the latter form of which is used in the jussive, energic, and prohibitive. This suggests, then, an even closer grammatical connection between the two forms, though Muraoka also admits (while pointing to examples from *Ahiqar*, ll. 81, 84) that the “functional opposition” between the PCL and PCS can break down (p. 66 section ‘d’; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 592; Muraoka and Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HO; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

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135 Nor should the use of this vocabulary be taken to imply a specific social or compositional background, as some have suggested; cf. Kottsieper, “Aramaic Tradition,” esp. 113–14.
136 Formally speaking many admonitions and exhortations are quite similar and may be considered of the same type. In *Ahiqar*, for example, there are instances where both types make up two halves of the same saying; see, e.g., line 136: “[Enjoy/eat the lit.]tle that is in your lot, and do not covet the large (amount) that is withheld from you.”
137 Strictly speaking the verbal form in the vetitive (also called the “prohibitive”) is not the same as the regular imperfect. Muraoka, *An Introduction to Egyptian Aramaic*, (vol. III/1 of Lehrbücher orientalischer Sprachen; ed. Josef Tropper; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2012), 64–66, distinguishes between the “long imperfect” (PCδ) and “short imperfect” (PCS), the latter form of which is used in the jussive, energetic, and prohibitive. This suggests, then, an even closer grammatical connection between the two forms, though Muraoka also admits (while pointing to examples from *Ahiqar*, ll. 81, 84) that the “functional opposition” between the PCL and PCS can break down (p. 66 section ‘d’; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 592; Muraoka and Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HO; Leiden: Brill, 1998).
heart.” But, as with the *exhortations*, the *admonitions* are most often they are followed by a motive clause and there are several ways in which this can be accomplished. It can be attached directly via the subordinating conjunction ר “for/because” (e.g., 207: “[Do not] point an Arab to the sea nor a Sidonian [to] the […] for their work is distinct […]”); the conjunction בל “[lest” (e.g., 126: “[Do not bend] your bow and do not your arrow at a righteous one, lest the gods come to his aid and turn it back upon you”); or with an idiom of the conditional conjunction של “[if not” (e.g., 176: “Do not spare your son from a rod, if not, you will not be able to save him […]”). There are also a number of sayings that begin with the *prohibition* but whose second half is a *jussive*, usually in the negative (לא followed by a third-person, shortened form of the imperfect, though occasionally the energetic is also used). While not grammatically subordinate, the meaning of the *jussive* sentence usually depends upon the *prohibition*. For example, line 141 reads: “Do not reveal your [secrets/poverty] in front of your [fr]iends; let your name not become light (לא יכין בידם) in front of them.” Alternatively, we may find a similar pairing of *admonition* and *jussive*, but in the opposite order, e.g., 90b: “Let your heart not rejoice over a greatness of sons, and in their fowness [do not mourn].”

On a few occasions, the *jussive* saying-type stands on its own and, while also carrying an imperative sense, it remains grammatically and rhetorically distinct from *exhortations* and *admonitions*. The rhetorical distinction is perhaps most important. The use of the *jussive* third-person creates a certain distance between the implied addressee and the subject. Take, for instance, the following examples. Line 206 reads: “Let not the rich say, ‘In my riches, I am glorious.’” The question, thus, stands: should the addressee—who is not explicitly addressed as s/he would have been were it a direct imperative—identify with “the rich (person)” or is “the rich” a third party? If

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138 The reconstruction of the lacuna in Aramaic would be לא תימן, following Porten and Yardeni (*TAD* 3:43; though cf. also Lindenberger, *APA*, 134). It depends on taking the term הַלּוֹיִם to mean “wealth”; however, it more regularly means “strength,” “force,” or “troop/garrison/army.” Indeed, this later meaning is the only one attested among the Elephantine documents which testify to the military “troop” of Yehudeans (cf., e.g., *TAD* C.3.15.1), and it even carries this meaning elsewhere in Ahiqar (55, 61) where the “army of Assyria” is said to have relied “upon [Ahiqar’s] counsel” (בלו יד). The term meaning “troop/army” also frequently appears in the Aramaic copy of the “Besitun Inscription” (*TAD* C.2.1).

139 This line, found at the top of sheet L, is very fragmentary, but the sense seems clear enough.

140 It is not certain what word belongs in the lacuna, though the latter half strongly suggests something negative.

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we take the present form and only consider the saying on its own, then we cannot answer with any certainty. Note that this is not a problem for 141 mentioned above. Even if the first half of 141 were missing the use of the possessive pronoun “your” points to an intimacy between the subject “colleagues/friends” and the addressee. Consider, however, another example, 155: “Let my hands cause ruin, and not my mouth, and not …” Interestingly, the jussive is used here reflexively, that is, directed back onto the speaker and not the addressee. This shows that there is variety in how the sayings are formed, not only structurally but rhetorically as well.

In only one instance we find the use of the direct imperative where the implied addressee is not the “you” or “my son”; instead, the saying addresses the divine. Line 109 reads: “Establish me, O God, in righteousness with you […].” If we consider the entirety of the sayings together, this break from the typical addressee to an external third-party might be considered an apostrophe. Strictly speaking it is an exhortation, but given the change in addressee, we are inclined to see it as exceptional. Two other related examples are worth noting here: 156 “May God twist the mouth of the twister and rip out the tongue of […]”; 138 “[One w]ho does not lift the name of his father and the name of his mother, may Shama[sh] not shine [for him], for he is a disreputable person.” Categorically, we might consider these two curse-formulae, but such a consideration depends largely on external evidence, even if we might infer it independently. The two main verbs are seemingly jussives, though the sense is less imperatival and more wishful; thus a more precise term may be optative.

Reference to the divine recalls another saying-type that can carry the imperatival sense: the conditional or (perhaps better) situational instruction. Again, though certainly similar to the examples above, the situational instruction is structurally distinct, with the exhortation or admonition being prefaced by a hypothetical scenario thus creating an “if … then …” arrangement. Lines 107-108 read: “If the wicked grasp onto the fringes of your cloak, leave (it) in his hand. Then make a formal appeal to Shamash; he will take that which is his (= the wicked) and give it to you.” Similarly, though in the negative, we also find line 191: “If your master sets you in charge of water, [do not] drink [it …].” The conditional saying also occurs without any imperatival sense.

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Line 177 states: “If I strike you, my son, you will not die; but if I allow (you) to your own senses (lit. heart) [then …].” As with the examples above, the conditional need not be directed explicitly at the “you/my son”; hence, we read lines 171b-172a: “If goodness proceeds from the mouth of a per[son …] but if wanton-disregard proceeds fro[m] their mouth, the gods will disregard them.”

Proverbs in the strictest sense are not as frequent in Ahiqar as one might expect. When they do occur, they are generally in the form of aphorisms, i.e., terse and imaginative observations. A representative example is line 161: “A sword disturbs tranquil waters among good friends.” On occasion, though, the proverbial statements are affixed to the end of a string of imperatives, thus functioning—in a manner—as the “truth” upon which such commands are justified; see, for example, line 83: “[Maintain?] the seals(?) of your mouth. Later, therefore, you may let your [words] go forth in its time, for mightier is the ambush of the mouth than the ambush of battle.”

Comparisons are quite common among the sayings, appearing in a variety of forms. In one case a simile—line 95: “A person of beautiful stature and a keen mind (lit. heart) is like a strong city in [whose] midst there is wat[er].” Elsewhere, the comparison is metaphorical, often in a distended sense, e.g., 84b: “Soft is the speech of a king, (but) it is sharper and mightier than a (double-)edged blade.” Sensory metaphors are also prominent; see, e.g., 159: “I have lifted sand and carried salt, but there is nothing that is heavier than (being) a foreigner.” There are also several comparisons made on the basis of natural observation often connected to human nature or some aspect of society. Formally speaking, they can appear in a variety forms (especially the fable, to which I will speak below), but prominent example is the direct metaphor, as in line 164: “Many are [the s]tars of [the skies, whose] names no one knows. Behold thus is humankind, which no one knows.”

There are also a few sententiae or maxims extant among the sayings. These differ in form but are typified by direct statements, primarily in the indicative mood, and are distinguished from aphorisms and comparison by a general lack of imagery or metaphor. Take, for instance, line 99:

142 See, for example, the comment by Niehr, “Weisheit und Musar,” at 181: “Es ist interessant, daß die Tiersprüche z.T. nur Naturbeobachtungen auflisten, z.T. aber hieraus Vergleiche mit dem menschlichen Verhalten ziehen. Damit erfolgt eine Ethisierung der Naturbeobachtungen. Aus einer Erkenntnis wird eine Regel für die Anwendung gezogen.”
“A person [does not know] what is in the mind (lit. heart) of his colleague … […]”143 Included among the sententiae are sayings that comment upon nature: 165 “There is no lion (יִרְאוֹ) in the sea, for this reason they call the tidal wave/sea monster (אַשָּׁר) a ‘Lion’ (אַשָּׁר).”144

Rhetorical questions are regularly attested among sayings. While the content often changes, the context and function of the questions are largely uniform, usually appearing among a string of sayings concerning the gods or the king and the futility of opposing them. In line 88b, for example, the question metaphorically compares a king with fire and a knife: “How can wood compete against fire, flesh against a knife, an individual against a king?” Likewise, line 96a asks: “[How] can a person be on guard against the gods?”

A notable exception to the gods/king connection are the string of rhetorical questions in lines 139-140, although the impetus is nevertheless one of futility:

[From] my [ho]use proceeded my disrepute; so among whom will I be found innocent? The son of my belly has spied on my house; so what will I say to the foreigner? [My son] was a criminal witness against me; so who, then, will find me innocent? From my house proceeded my fury; so with whom could I dispute and succeed?

Taken as a whole, we can also judge these lines as an individual lament, similar to such forms we might find among psalms or other literature.145 The hymnic quality of these lines is not unique among the Ahiqar sayings. Lines 79 and 91-92 which praise the king, his authority, and divine backing are similarly outstanding in their poetic flavoring.

Another saying in the form of a question is the riddle, and there may be one instance of such in Ahiqar, though it is uncertain due to corruption of the papyrus. Line 174 begins “What is stronger than the braying ass … […]?”146 Unfortunately the rest of the line is missing.

143 The saying continues on line 99 and through 100; it is quite fragmentary but a number of other phrases are identifiable and they all seem to be direct statements related to work and hiring practices.

144 There is a great deal of debate about this saying, mostly of an etymological bent on the two words אַשָּׁר (which may actually be אַשָּׁר, the text is corrupt) and אַשָּׁר. The reading I offer sides with Kottsieper’s views on this saying, see, e.g., Kottsieper, “Die alttestamentliche,” 133 esp. nn. 29 and 30.

145 See Weigl’s discussion of this passage’s genre as a Klage in an intertextual perspective, especially with Job and other disputational literature in Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 336–39.

146 See a similar format in the answers to Samson’s riddle by the Philistines in Judges 14:18 “What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?”
Among the sayings we also find an example the numerical saying, specifically of the form $x/x+1$. Lines 187-89a read:

Two things are beautiful, but the third is cherished by Shamash: one who drinks wine and pours a libation; one who grasps wisdom and [...] // and one who might hear a word but will not make (it) known * Behold! This is precious before Shamash! But the one who might drink wine and does not [...] // and whose wisdom fails and [...] who declares [...].

The tri-partite structure of the saying stands out, as well as the repeated refrains cast in the negative.

**Fables** are perhaps the most interesting sayings-type found in Ahiqar, at least in terms of how the Ahiqar sayings relate to comparative literature. I will come to this point later, but a brief discussion of the structure of the fables in Ahiqar is worthwhile. There are at least six fables extant among the Ahiqar sayings (94–?; 101-102; 166-168; 168-171; 203-204; 209-210); unfortunately three of them (94–?; 203-204; 209-210) are too corrupt to make much sense out of them. All of the fables feature animals in conversation with each other save one (101-102) which features plants. It goes:

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147 Cf. examples of the similar form in Proverbs 6:16–19; 30:15–31; Job 5:19–22; and Amos 1:3 et al.


150 Two other fairly corrupt sayings (183–184; 184–186) might be fables if the lacunae contains the animals’ speeches, but as they stand it is best to consider them as simple animal proverbs.
The [thorn-b]ush sent a message to [the] pomegranate, it read: “The thorn-bush to the pomegranate: ‘What good are your numerous thorns [for] the one who happens upon your [fruit]?’” // [Then] the pomegranate [an]swered and said to the thorn-bush, “(What about) you? You are entirely (made up of) thorns for the one who happens upon you.”

What is of note here is the structure: the fable is presented as a verbal challenge by the “bad” plant against the “good/beneficial” plant, a challenge which the “good” plant succeeds in answering. Structurally speaking, therefore, this model is mirrored in the animal sayings where a predatory or dominant animal approaches an animal of prey. The notion of a contest of wits between the two parties is likewise evident, though it is not necessarily posed in the form of a question. Consider the fable in 166–168a, for example:

A leopard happened upon a goat, and it (the goat) was naked. The leopard answered and said to the goat, “Come and let me cover you with my skin.” The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, “Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!” – For [a leopard(?)] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.

The only major difference on the formal level with the plant-fable is the addition of the “exterior commentary” signaled by the explanatory conjunction מ “for/because.” I use the term “exterior” here to indicate that it is not a part of the fable itself, but rather an external, interpretive comment. The presence of such a clause at the end of a saying resembles the many motive clauses from the sayings-types mentioned above (see, esp. line 82). In this fable the exterior commentary remains within the natural world, though we may be inclined to discern a more abstract meaning, i.e. someone who is, by repute, dangerous ought not to be trusted even when appearing favorable. That the lesson of the fables can and, probably, should be translated over to the human world is clearer in the subsequent fable in 168b–171a about the bear and the lambs:

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151 The translation here is loose as the Aramaic style in the pomegranate’s response is fairly idiomatic, making any direct (i.e., word-for-word) translation problematic for English.


153 The classical term for the “exterior commentary” is either pronymythium (if it precedes the fable) or epimythium (if it follows). On these terms and their application to Greek fables see, e.g., Gert-Jan Van Dijk, Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature (Mnemosyne Supplementum 166; Leiden: Brill, 1997), xv–xx.
A bear approached unto [the] lambs […] saying “[…] I will be quiet.” The lambs answered and said to him, “Pick for yourself that which you will pick from us. We […]” For it is not in the hands of humanity to pick up their feet or to put them down apart from the gods […] For it is not in your hands to pick up your feet and to put them down.

Although the first line is mostly absent, it is clear that its structure resembles the other fables, but, significantly, its exterior commentary is almost completely intact, doubly structured, and explicit in its symbolism.\(^{154}\)

In sum, the diversity of sayings-types or forms represented among the *Ahiqar* sayings is tremendous. Besides the several examples provided above, there are numerous other sayings, some of which may belong to the categories identified above yet several others are not so easily identifiable. It is important to recall that many of the extant lines are fragmentary and, therefore, their forms are either not readily distinguishable or they may be assigned to various forms depending on how the lacunae are reconstructed. In effort to avoid being bogged down by the problematic and often tedious taxonomic issues, this section has simply presented examples of several types of sayings and related features without providing much discussion of the categories themselves.

### 2.3.2 Weigl on “Das Formen- und Gattungsrepertoire der Spruchsammlung”

On several occasions the above list of forms has depended upon the classificatory scheme offered by Michael Weigl in his exhaustive analysis of the *Ahiqar* sayings.\(^{155}\) Weigl classifies the sayings-

\(^{154}\) The interpretation of these fables will be explored in much more detail, especially in chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

\(^{155}\) This section follows closely the section titled “Das Formen- und Gattungsrepertoire der Spruchsammlung” in Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 544–80. When citing the individual sayings Weigl ubiquitously refers to the *saying’s* number rather than the *line* number. This can complicate matters when comparing this study (in which I prefer to use the line numbers in *TAD*) with his; for this reason I will include in this discussion (but only when necessary or relevant) the saying number as well as the line number. The saying number will be fronted by an “S”; e.g., 126 (S42) = line 126, saying 42. Although I do offer some criticisms on Weigl’s scheme, the survey I offer here should not be taken to replace Weigl’s much more extensive analysis of the formal and stylistic characteristics in the sayings. Any serious consideration of these aspects in *Ahiqar* should begin there. In addition to Weigl and aside from my own observations below, a formal analysis of the *Ahiqar* sayings and proverbs-forms in general can also be supplemented by considering other studies which include brief comments thereupon, e.g., Kottsieper, “Aramaic
types found in *Ahiqar* according to three broad categories: *Aussageworte, Wünsche*, and together the *Aufforderungen, Warnungen*, and *Mahnworte*. This last group is similar to what I have labeled the *imperatival* and has the *Mahnspruch* or *Manhwort* as its representative example. As is evident, the formal distinction is loosely based on the verbal property known as *mood* and is often characterized as a feature of the speaker’s attitude toward the action or situation. At some points I diverge from Weigl’s analysis. For example, I downplay Weigl’s categorical separation between the latter two categories, *imperatival* and *Wünsche*, somewhat since the *Wünsche* are identified as such based primarily (according to Weigl) on the use of the jussive form, which can itself be considered a type of imperative. Also, how Weigl assigns sayings to these categories is not solely defined by formal criteria. He assigns 109 (S28)—“Establish me (*חָרָתֵך*), O God, in righteousness with you …”—under a sub-category of the *statements* which he labels *Biographische Aussagen*, or “biographical statements,” even though the verb *חרתך* is an


158 The label “imperatival” is my own, since Weigl merely lists the three related forms—*Aufforderungen, Warnungen*, and *begründete Mahnworte*—together without any general description.

159 On the *Wünsche* according to Weigl, see *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 581–85; he further divides this category into *Selbständige Wünsche* and *Wünsche als Einleitungen zu Zitaten*.

160 Contrary to what Weigl states about this section; see, e.g., his comments in *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 548: “Die anschließende Systematisierung erfolgt anhand zweier formaler Kriterien: der Frage nach der syntaktischen bzw. semantischen Zuordnung der Glieder (Parallelismen, Vergleiche) und der Differenzierung zwischen nominaler oder verbaler Aussage” (emphasis added).
The apparent reason for Weigl not classifying this under any imperative (+ pronoun suffix). The apparent reason for Weigl not classifying this under any imperative category almost certainly relates to the fact that the implicit “you” in the imperative is explicitly identified as God (or El). In other words, because it is not a command directed at the hypothetical audience, it should not be considered an Aufforderung. Thus, the issue is rather one of rhetorical strategy which, in turn, depends upon interpretation or, better, interaction by an (implied) audience. Put another way: contrary to what Weigl insinuates, many of his categories are not inherently dependent on the form of a saying; instead, he is frequently guided by assumptions concerning a given saying’s function; i.e., to whom is it directed and for what purpose. To be sure, this is not an altogether unreasonable way to proceed.

Before expanding on this point, let us turn to Weigl’s first category, Aussageworte or sentence literature. This group is the most diverse and, incidentally, is the one with which I take the greatest issue. A cursory sketch of his categories and the examples therein is revealing. Besides the Erfahrungsweisheit and Biographische Aussagen, the Aussageworte category is comprised of Sprichwörte (proverbs, in the strict sense), Weisheitsprüche/Sentenzen (wise sayings/sententiae), Vergleiche (comparisons/similes), Gleichnisse (parables), Rätsel (riddles), Zahlensprüche (numerical sayings), Fragen (questions), Tierbeobachtungen (animal observations), Disputationen (disputations), Hymnische-descriptive (hymnic descriptions), and Lehrreden (discourses). Even a casual glance in translation makes it clear that there is hardly any formal thread connecting these. In fact, they are so diverse that rather than being labeled Aussageworte the category might as well be called “potpourri” and thus puts to question the usefulness of such a classification system in the first place. Besides failing in usefulness, such categorizations can even lead one astray in terms of interpretation.

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161 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 557.
162 For a discussion of whether this is a name or simply the title, see chapter 5.
163 See Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 545–81, for a description and examples of each category.
164 'Take, for instance, Weigl’s comment on the relationship between two “mutilated sayings” (die verstümmelte sprecherbezogene Bemerkung) in 109 (S2κ) and 122 (S3κ) from column κμ: “Nur in einigen wenigen Fällen finden sich in der Sammlung kurze Statements, die auf ein Erlebnis des Sprechers Bezug nehmen. Vor allem die erste Hälfte von Kolumne 8 könnte ursprünglich mehrere solcher kurzer Berichte enthalten haben, doch macht die umfangreiche Textverderbnis gerade an dieser Stelle des Papyrus weitreichende Analysen unmöglich. In der erhaltenen Form lassen sich nur (28) und (38) mit einiger Sicherheit dieser Kategorie zuordnen” (Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche,
Weigl’s classificatory system (or any for that matter, including my own) leaves us with sayings whose designations are often forced and whose distinctions can be somewhat arbitrary. This would not be so crucial except that this formal analysis is one of the major aspects with which Weigl is concerned. His analysis on the sayings in terms of syntactical structure, form, and several other features is both thorough and for the most part careful, but his objective ultimately seems to be taxonomic, at least in this regard. For his part, Weigl readily and frequently admits that the sayings are a complex kaleidoscope of forms, structures, and stylistic devices that cannot be easily delineated into neat groups.\textsuperscript{165}

If the ultimate goal were simply descriptive, then making such categorizations could simply facilitate the way in which we, as scholars, view our source material. However, there are other implications, both negative and positive, for undertaking this type of formal analysis. Admittedly, as my own analysis above has insinuated, we can make a formal distinction between the imperatival sayings (i.e. “instructions”) and the “sentence literature,” even if sometimes the line between them gets blurred; however, this does not require us to make a form-critical distinction. By form-critical I refer to the type of “form criticism” or Formsgeschichte that was prominent among biblical scholars, especially since Herman Gunkel in his study of Genesis and the Psalms, for a large part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Weigl stands in long line of biblical scholars of wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs, who have made a categorical distinction between \textit{Aussageworte} and \textit{Mahnsprüche}. In other words, they see a generic distinction between “sentence literature” and “instructions” which in turn affects the way they view a text in terms of its basic

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\textsuperscript{165} Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 600; cf. his previous comments (p. 544) on the sayings as a whole: “In ihrer Endform repräsentieren sie ein Kaleidoskop weisheitlicher Redeformen, dessen Buntheit und Ausdehnung besonders im Blick auf andere, vergleichbare Weisheitstexte des Alten Testaments, Ägyptens oder Mesopotamiens beim ersten Hinsehen den Eindruck grober Unordnung und Beliebigkeit erweckt.”
literary context, *Sitz im Leben*, and worldview. Such a view, if accepted, can have serious implications in how we discuss and interpret a given text. For example, the *Mahnsprüche* have been typologically associated with practical instructions, while the *Aussageworte* were seen as more formally connected to “reflective” wisdom. Thomas Kruger, for instance, writes about Qoheleth: “While the book presents itself in the form of a didactically oriented wisdom text (like, for example Proverbs and Sirach), its content, by contrast, belongs to a ‘reflective, problem-oriented’ wisdom tradition (like, for example, Job), which is to be judged more as an expression of a ‘critical wisdom’ than as the symptom of a ‘crisis of wisdom’.”

Kruger takes for granted that a critical attitude is generally incompatible (or, at the very least, unexpected) with a particular formal model, leading him to make a number of problematic assumptions about Qoheleth and its reception. For instance, he states: “the expectations of readers awakened by the form of the book of Qoheleth as a work of instructive wisdom literature are, however, systematically disappointed by its content.” Kruger is not alone in continuing to make a formally-based distinction between “didactic” and “reflective.” In the Egyptian tradition H. Brunner has said about the Instruction of McKane, *Proverbs*, 160, for example, says “the motive clause … is a characteristic element of the form of the Instruction.” Yet, we have shown that the motive clause is, in McKane’s own words, “prominently represented” in *Ahiqar* and, more importantly, not restricted to admonitions, exhortations, or the like. Indeed, it frequently occurs after several other sayings–types which McKane, Weigl, and others would otherwise classify as “sentence literature.”

Thomas Kruger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 11–12. Kruger is thinking here of the so-called “crisis of wisdom” model which saw Job and Qoheleth as responses to the social and political circumstances of the post-exilic period, while Proverbs—with its optimism in the divine retributive justice system—naturally belonged to a period of “security” under the native monarchy. Similarly, the related view proposed most famously by McKane, *Proverbs*, esp. 10–22, that wisdom underwent a religious updating, from secular to religious. This view has all but been entirely dismissed in current scholarship; see, e.g., Dearman, *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel* (Peadoby, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 200–201: “the assumption is no longer valid that wisdom was originally a secular concept in the older cultures of the ANE or in early Israel … Wisdom in the ANE has a central place in the attempt to comprehend a moral order in the cosmos and in human affairs. This order is not a closed system but is a creation of the gods or a process in which they are active. Even the so-called secular proverbs which do not overtly mention a deity still presuppose that human activity stands under a larger scheme of ‘world order’ established by the gods in which human activity engenders a positive or negative reaction”; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 482–83.

Kruger, 11. Such a statement about “reader’s expectations” is indeed ironic in an introduction to a commentary that is almost entirely author- and redaction-oriented. One is left wondering who exactly these “readers” are; my hunch is that it is Kruger, himself.
Merikare: “In terms of content, the Teaching of Merikare belongs in the circle of ‘debate literature,’ in that it deals with problems of world order and theodicy, but in terms of form belongs to teachings about life.”\textsuperscript{169} As we will see, though, Ahiqar too has more “reflective” questions in mind, and there are several other ancient collections whose formal make-up would leave Kruger, \emph{et al.}, “awakened” by their profound concerns beyond the merely practical.\textsuperscript{170}

In the end, making formal distinctions can be a helpful exercise, both in the descriptive sense and for aiding in understanding via comparison. But, these categorical assignations should not be determinative when it comes to the sayings outlook or \textit{Sitz im Leben}. Ahiqar represents a multiplicity of sayings-forms which together create a much larger, motley composition. In this study’s attempt to treat Ahiqar as a unified piece of literature—and therefore not one to be dismantled for tracing typological and form-critical histories of sayings-types according to strict taxonomical observations but rather one that is subject to literary analysis—those observations of a compositional or redactional nature are much less important than a reading which appreciates this diversity in form and, more importantly, is attentive to the creative, meaningful interplay among the various sayings-forms.\textsuperscript{171} Besides the healthy mix of forms, Ahiqar likewise demonstrates a preoccupation with several topics including the practical, but also those that attend to the apparent disorder, injustice, and suffering in the cosmose, i.e., the so-called “reflective” concerns.

\subsection*{2.3.3 Summary Observations on Formal Patterns, Rhetorical Devices, and Style}

Although I would resist classifying these sayings according to any strict taxonomy, this should not preclude any summary descriptions of patterns, tendencies, or style when taking a broad overview of the sayings. First, the largest, single saying-type seems to be the admonition.\textsuperscript{172} The prohibition


\textsuperscript{170} See also, e.g. Amenemhet I, Any, Ankhsheshonqe, Insinger; Proverbs (e.g. 16:1–9; 19:21), and Shubeʾawilum.

\textsuperscript{171} Moreover, breaking apart the text goes directly against a “truth” about the text that ought to be taken for granted: the sayings of Ahiqar together with the narrative were \textit{read} and \textit{processed} by an ancient audience as we have them (the corruptions notwithstanding).

\textsuperscript{172} I arrived at this conclusion by also considering those sayings which are incomplete, yet nevertheless their form may be clear. More the half of the lines in Column 10, for example, appear to begin with prohibitions, but unfortunately
is prominent but it is almost always followed by a motive clause. If we include those sayings which are in the negative jussive form, then this number increases. Several other types of sayings, such as fables or comparative statements (similes, metaphors, etc.), appear with regular frequency, while others have only a few (e.g., proverb) or even a single occurrence (e.g., numerical saying). Interestingly, one can discern some larger patterns in the distribution of the sayings-types, namely, that each column predominately contains a certain type (or types) of saying. Column 10 is mostly admonitions and jussives; while, column 7, has only a single imperative form (107-108), but comprises a variety of sayings such as a fable, a simile, and various observational statements. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, however, as column 6 is made up of a healthy mix of admonitions, metaphorical comparisons, hymnic lines, and even a fable. Overall, however, there is a general balance between those sayings which carry an imperatival sense and the rest.

Also, while the use of first- and second-person, which includes the notable formula “my son,” is prominent among those sayings which are imperatival, its use is not restricted to them. In several sayings that are otherwise non-imperatival, we find the “my son” formula (e.g., 139–140) or the use of first- and/or second-person (e.g. 89, 105–106, 111–112, 159–160, 177). Still, many of the non-imperatival are in the third-person and, therefore, stand (at least rhetorically) at a greater distance from the audience. Again, this rule is not absolute (e.g., 178, 159, 160). The dichotomy between these two broader types (imperatival and non-imperatival), therefore, should not be over-emphasized, especially in a discussion of the literary and rhetorical aspects. There are examples where no imperative form is used, and yet it is clear that the impulse is instructional. For example, 178 states: “A stroke for a male-slave, a reprimand for a female-slave, for all your slaves admonishment.” Clearly, the impetus of the statement is that the addressee—who, notably, is referenced directly through the use of the pronominal suffix “your”—should discipline slaves. Likewise, there are sayings which explicitly bring up the speaker/addressee relationship and yet their form is not imperatival and the underlying message is universal (e.g., 139–140). This is only a superficial accounting and, of course, the data is skewed by the incomplete nature of the text itself. Nevertheless, the preponderance of a particular type of saying or saying-construction is revealing.

because the entire left two-thirds of the column are missing it is unclear how the sayings continue. Cf. Kottsieper, “Aramaic Literature,” 416: “the negative admonitions are by far more numerous than positive precepts.”
Rhetorically speaking, the frequent admonitions, exhortations, as well as the several other sayings which reference the addressee as either “you” or “my son,” all convey an instructional setting.\textsuperscript{173} Hence, the speaker—whom we may call ‘Ahiqar’ based on the narrative (esp. 1–2, 9, 19), although he is never explicitly identified as such in any of the sayings—is giving the addressee a number of instructions, which often take the form of a direct warning against certain behavior or actions and occasionally against the threatening behavior of others (especially kings). Sometimes the instructions are direct commands in the positive, and in a few cases the “you” is simply identified as the listener while the speaker is making an observation about some aspect of society or the cosmos. As such, we may also see the sayings, in toto, as discourse, albeit a lengthy one and without any evidence of a retort from the addressee.\textsuperscript{174}

However, there is some inconsistency in terms of rhetorical setting that should not be overlooked. On the one hand, many of the third-person sayings could very well still function as if the speaker “Ahiqar” was still speaking to his “son.” Observations about nature, humanity, etc. can carry this pedagogic intent even if they are not directly formulated as such. Even the several rhetorical questions can still fit within this literary context. On the other hand, a number of sayings appear to break from this father-to-son discourse. I have already mentioned the direct appeal to “God/El” in 109. In a similar vein there are other sayings wherein the speaker reflects on himself and his situation. For example, we read in 110: “Let my enemies die but not by my sword [ … ].” This could still be a part of the appeal to the divine from the previous line, unfortunately it is unclear. But what is interesting is that immediately following these two lines, the discourse

\textsuperscript{173} Important: by “setting” here I mean literary setting, and not the so-called Sitz im Leben. The latter will be discussed further below and (especially) in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{174} To my knowledge there is no version of Ahiqar in which Nadan (if we assume he is the “you”) responds to Ahiqar’s instructions directly; however, an interesting parallel is the “narrative discourse” earlier in the story where Ahiqar relates the anecdote to Nabusumiskun, who notably does respond. That a set of instructions or sayings can include the literary audience’s response is not unheard of; see, e.g., the intriguing and (for that time) innovative epilogue in the Egyptian Instruction of Any, where the son Khonshotep is given the chance to respond to the set of instructions Any, his father, has just presented to him, and the two engage in a powerful dialogue on the efficaciousness of wisdom instructions. For the text and brief discussion see Lichtheim, AEL 2:135–45; cf. Michael V. Fox, “Who Can Learn? A Dispute in Ancient Pedagogy,” in Wisdom, You are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday (ed. M. Barré; CBSMS 29; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 62–77, esp. 71–75.
directed at the “you” (who is presumably still the “son”) returns: “I left you under the cover of the cedar …” Perhaps the most curious passage in this regard is the oft-cited lament about the son’s betrayal in 139-140. Here the formula “my son”—along with an idiomatic parallel “the son of my belly”—occurs and yet it is abundantly clear that the “son” is not the addressee. The speaker could be speaking to no one in particular, simply lamenting to himself what has befallen him. However, this passage, along with a few others (e.g., 128, 112) confuse the otherwise casual way in which the “son” is identified with the addressee. In any case, despite the lack of consistency the overall tone is one of pedagogy; the speaker is attempting to educate and instruct the addressee, even if the identity of the latter is fluid.

Returning to matters of style and structure, there are a preponderance of “motivational extensions”—to borrow a phrase from Michael Fox—to as well as “exterior commentaries” which provide an interpretive or explanatory aspect within the sayings themselves. Notably, these secondary clauses appear in all sorts of sayings regardless of type, from exhortations and admonitions to fables, comparisons, natural observations, etc. They add weight to the instructional aspect of the sayings, especially for those where the lesson is not readily apparent. Additionally, they clarify the (often enigmatic) observations, making discernment easier on the addressee. Several sub- or coordinating particles (e.g., נ, ר, פ, צ, ד, א, כ, ו, ר, כ, א, כ) can be found which connect these complementary clauses to the initial expressions.

Although proverbs, in the strictest sense, are few, there is, nonetheless, a “high incidence of imagery.” A majority of the sayings, regardless of type, are built upon the comparative principle. Metaphors abound and the symbolic meaning of the constituents is not always easily recognizable. This is due, in large part, to the fact that the descriptions are made using colorful language and vivid imagery. Often, these images are drawn from the natural world, with appeals to animals (174, 186), plants (89a), natural phenomena (104, 164), and topographical features being prominent. The appeal to the senses, however, extends much beyond that of sight, including

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176 My use of the term ‘secondary’ should not be taken to imply some redactional or editorial layer, only that they often have a complementary status relative to the initial expression.
177 McKane, Proverbs, 157.
smell (106, 180), taste (89a, 123, 131), touch (84b, 89b), as well as the kinesthetic or proprioceptive (159–160).

Rhetorical devices such as puns, metonymy, and personification also give a certain flavor to many of the sayings. In 128, for example, there is a play on the similar sounding words of גֵש ("your arrow") and גֵש ("a sin"). Orolingual imagery—references to the mouth, tongue, lips, or other features related to the act of speaking—are common and often function in a metonymical sense to represent an individual’s speech or, in the case of the king, his royal decree. A good example is 89b–90a: “Soft is the tongue of a k[ing] / but it will break the ribs of a sea-serpent (Aram. יְנֵה) like death, which is unseen.” The personification of “a vessel” (Aram. נָש) in 93 as one that has a heart (= mind) and can speak allows for a creative abstraction on human nature and the benefits of discretion: “A good vessel conceals a word in its heart, but the one that is broken has let it go outside.”

Furthermore, the structural aspects of many of the sayings contribute to a sense of climax. In particular, we may note the frequent incidence of a “tri-partite saying.” While usually an internal feature, that is, within a single saying (e.g., 88b, 89a, 159, 160, 178, 187–189a), one might also discern a similar structure spread across three sequential sayings (e.g., 130–131). Shamir Yona, who has identified a number of these “tri-partite sayings” in Ahiqar and related literature, describes them as having a “climactic structure” based on the observation that the “main point” of the saying is predominately located in the final clause. Let us look at the numerical saying in 187–189a as an example:

180 Yona, “Shared Stylistic,” 33. Yona discusses the numerical saying (187–189a) and the sayings in 89a, 159, 160, and 178 as examples of tri–partite sayings in Ahiqar. Oddly, though, in the case of 178 Yona argues that, in light of the comparative example in Proverbs 26:3 (“A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools” NRSV; cf. Sir 33:29), the saying in Ahiqar does not have climactic structure because the third clause “does not take us into a realm other than that of slaves.” In my view, this should not preclude a “climactic” reading; rather that there being a climax in subject (as in Prov 26:3 and the numerical saying in Ahiqar) there is a climax in degree. Hence, one ought to discipline not just male-slaves or female-slaves, but all slaves. The “principal message,” then, to borrow Yona’s phrase, is that all slaves should be disciplined, i.e. do not play favorites or, alternatively, do not neglect discipline for any case.
Two things are beautiful, but the third is cherished by Shamash!
One who drinks wine and pours a libation;
one who grasps wisdom and [...] and one who might hear a word but will not make (it) known.
Behold! This is precious before Shamash!
But the one who might drink wine and does not [...] and whose wisdom fails and [...] who declares [...] 

The introductory line already clues the reader in to a climactic structure whereby “the third” part is the most important.

Even without the introductory formula, we may still discern an emphasis in the third point based on distinctive formal features. We can see, for example, parallel structures in each part which reinforce the comparison; however, there is some variation in the third clause. Yona points to the different verb forms, but perhaps more intriguing is the recognition that the logic of third part is, ironically, grounded upon the exact opposite principle from the first two, thus creating a “dramatic turning.”

Specifically, in the first two parts the activity is one of receiving and then dissemination (whether wine or wisdom), while in the third part the activity is directly negated: one receives but ought not to disseminate a word. The change in direction highlights the climactic movement of the saying and thereby the prominence of the third aspect relative to the previous two. Similarly, the climactic emphasis in 178 is highlighted by a change in the syntactical formula:

The third part is lengthened, both by the addition of the coordinating particle ר but also, more importantly, by a pronoun suffix ר- “your” which gives an added personalized aspect not present in the initial two clauses. Moreover, the final clause is reversed, with the one punished coming before the form of discipline, again adding emphasis on this last part. In any case, the formal

\[ \text{מַחַא לְלֵילִים} \quad \text{form of discipline} + \text{ר-one punished} \\
\text{כָּהֲל אַלָּתָה} \quad \text{form of discipline} + \text{ר-one punished} \\
	ext{אֶל לְלֵלֶה עַבּוֹדָר} \quad \text{coord. part. + ר-one punished} + \text{suffix then form of discipline} \]

181 Such is the case for this type of saying, i.e. the “graded numerical saying” of the form x/x+1 in general; on this saying-type see the bibliography in n. 146 above and discussion in Chapter 3.
182 Yona, “Shared Stylistic,” 45. The verb forms are, admittedly, tricky to discern; in several instances it is not clear if the verbal forms are participles or third-masc. sing. forms of the suffix-conjugation.
features in this saying and the other tri-partite sayings is recognizable by way of the parallelism among the various parts, even if the latter part inverts or modifies the parallelism.

In addition to the tri-partite sayings, parallelism, while not prolific, is nonetheless present among the *Ahiqar* sayings. Several pairs of sayings are linked via repetition of syntax and/or terminology (e.g. 148a & 148b; 142 & 143). These are mostly complementary, but instances of antithetical parallelism can be found (e.g., 132).\(^\text{183}\) Also, like the numerical saying, there are other cases where the structure is parallel but the logic of the saying is antithetical (159–160). Further, the parallelism, while not always formal, is often intensified by the use of word-pairs (e.g., לְחָם/עֵבֶר ‘good/bad’; דַּבָּר/דַּבָּר ‘trustworthiness/lies’; רָשָׁע/דָּרֶשׁ ‘righteous/wicked’).\(^\text{184}\) Sometimes, as we have seen, the parallelism is internal (e.g. 178).\(^\text{185}\) Similarly, we may also find examples of internal chiasmus (e.g., 130, 141) as well as more extended chiasmus, such as lines 139–140, whose four parts clearly have an A-B-B-A organization. Likewise, lines 126–129 is made up of four otherwise independent sayings but the apparent parallelism between the sayings in 126//128 and 127//129 respectively creates a distinguishable A-B-A-B structure.

Besides these last two examples, there are a number of sayings or clusters of sayings that work together, yet they are made up of several distinguishable parts, and each one of which may demonstrate a different type of structure. The sayings in 130-131 are a good example:

(a) *Do not take out* a heavy loan and from a disreputable person do not borrow.
(b) But, if you do take out a loan, do not let yourself rest until // [you pay back] the loan
(c) *For* the [con]suming of a loan is sweet like[...] but its repayment is (worth) a houseful

Each section—(a), (b), and (c)—could theoretically stand on its own as an independent saying. Thus, (a) would be a pair of simple prohibitions; (b) a conditional instruction; and (c) a two-part proverb or aphorism. The three parts, however, are connected—both syntactically through the use


\(^{184}\) See the lengthy list of word-pairs assembled by Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 604–5; cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, 157.

\(^{185}\) On this saying specifically as an instance of internal parallelism, see Yona, “Shared Stylistic,” 32–33; cf. Watson, “The Ahiqar Sayings,” 254.
of coordinating conjunctions ἦς and ἃς as well as topically with the keyword “loan” appearing in
each utterance—and work together to make a larger unit centered on the topic of “loans”

2.3.4 Coherence, Context, and Compositional Units: A Theory of Reading and Meaning
Tracing the various formal, rhetorical, or stylistic patterns can also be more than just a practice in
description. Shamir Yona, for example, argues that “careful attention to the rhetorical patterns
employed in a given aphorism is vital to uncovering the precise meaning of the aphorism.”\footnote{Yona,
“Shared Stylistic,” 29.} The
same can be said for consideration of style. Yona further adds that identifying such rhetorical
patterns can aid in our reconstruction of the numerous lacunae in the papyri. The points are well
taken. If the logic of a certain saying is clear and we find another saying of the same or similar
form, there is some likelihood that the latter will too operate along the same type of logic. The
presumption is that some degree of coherence guides a saying’s meaning. In Ahiqar, however, the
“coherence with expected form/rhetorical pattern” is not indisputable. Even when a similar
structure can be discerned the underlying logic of the parallel saying(s) can differ, thus
undermining any one-to-one correspondence. Lines 159–160 are a good example of this
phenomenon. Also, there are just as many occasions where texts diverge from formal structures or
patterns and, in some cases, only to return to such structures later. As we have seen, variation is
the key word when it comes to Ahiqar’s literary flourish.

An application of coherence to the sayings can be helpful, but we must be careful not to
presume that it should require a particular reading. When similarities do arise—or at the very least
seem likely—they can open up possibilities for viable readings and interpretations, especially
when we (as modern readers) are faced with a lacuna or obscure phrase that is otherwise
indiscernible from the information at hand. As a representative example of how these aspects can
aid interpretation of a difficult saying, let us return to the fable about the leopard and the goat
(166–168a) with which this chapter began. This is the only fable that is (almost) completely intact;
therefore, attention to its structure or rhetorical pattern can aid in reconstructing the lacunae in the
other fables which, though incomplete, appear to demonstrate a similar structure. This is especially
the case in the immediately subsequent fable about the bear and the lambs (168b–171a). The
meaning of the leopard-goat fable, however, is nevertheless unclear—especially in light of some
persistent anomalies, such as the change in victim from goat to gazelle—and we are left wondering how exactly its lesson extends beyond the tautological aspect that is apparently heralded by the motive clause (i.e., “predatory animals are, by nature, predatory”).187 Ironically, the fragmentary bear-lambs fable can provide some support. When set side-by-side, we see a strikingly similar organization, yet the final explanatory clause in the bear-lambs fable—also signaled by the subordinating conjunction ָכ—is more direct in its anthropological implications. The conversation between the bear and the lambs is directly translated into the human (and divine) arena by the two-fold motive clause in 170–171a.188 Consequently, we are invited to do the same with the leopard-goat fable. We might speculate, therefore, that the leopard represents a threatening force (another person, the king, the gods?) and the goat symbolizes an average person with whom the addressee is to identify and who is susceptible to destruction—that is, if his wits are not as keen as the goat’s.189 In any case, based on the rhetorical pattern we can reasonably discern an anthropological interpretation. As for stylistic considerations, a familiarity with the text’s overall proclivity for certain stylistic devices, types of imagery or metaphor, and comparisons can also aid in unraveling this tricky saying. For example, we may recall the use of puns which may provide clarity for the troublesome switch from the “goat” (עברית) to the “gazelle” (תבש). Taken with the anthropological aspect, we might hear the term not only as “gazelle” (תבש;  теб야) but also as “the good persons” (תבש; תבאי). The closely parallel structure between the leopard-goat fable and the bear-lambs fable gives some justification for a comparative interpretation, but we should not overlook the variation within each saying as well.

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187 This is an interpretive paraphrase of the motive clause which actually reads: “For [the leopard] will not seek the welfare of the gazelle, but instead (will seek) to suck its blood.” It should also be noted here that this fable’s “obscurity” may only be from our modern perspective, that is, its interpretation may be readily apparent to an ancient audience which would, no doubt, be more attuned to the symbolic universe within which the text operates.

188 The double motive clause is fragmentary but its message is clear: “For it is not in the hands of humanity to pick up their feet or to put them down apart from the gods […] for it is not in your hands to pick up your feet or to put them down.” The shift from the abstract formulation of humanity in general to the more direct “you” in the last clause is striking. As far as I can tell, in none of the other fables does the speaker make such a direct application to the addressee.

189 That the addressee should identify with the weaker animal is again reinforced by attention to the subsequent fable; see the above footnote; cf. the beginning of chapters 3 and 5 for lengthier analysis in this direction.
A final aspect within the text itself may also contribute to a more nuanced reading of the fable, namely its immediate surroundings. The fact that the bear-lambs fable comes immediately after the leopard-goat one strengthens the parallel reading, but what of the other sayings in the fable’s proximity? A brief scan of the column in which this fable is found is revealing. For instance, the suggestion made above that that root 좁, meaning “good,” is invoked by the change in animal from goat to gazelle (אנרצ) is reinforced by 좁’s regular appearance in this column (161, 163, 171). The notion of “goodness,” especially as it relates to human behavior, is a prominent concern in the fable’s immediate proximity. We might also notice that “goodness” is generally set in opposition to a negative principle (e.g. רע “bad”) in the sayings. This further intensifies the antagonism between the leopard (= bad) and the goat/gazelle (= good) as an anthropological commentary whereby bad human-types are set against the good human-types, with the latter being given a cautious reminder about the predatory behavior of the former. Taken together, then, the formal, stylistic, and contextual aspects all contribute a great deal of insight and nuance to our understanding of the fable.190

In studies of sayings collections like Ahiqar, however, it is not always taken for granted that an individual saying’s immediate literary context can or should contribute to its interpretation. Questions about applying a sense of coherency of purpose or meaning have plagued biblical wisdom scholars for decades;191 but, in my mind, their answers are inherently problematic because of their preoccupation with the author and authorial intent. Michael Fox, in a recent article, exemplifies the state of affairs in biblical wisdom scholarship. For him the importance of an individual proverb’s immediate context is a given, and he defends that view by maintaining an authorial intent on the part of the “compiler.” In an evaluation of the “Words of the Wise” as a distinct literary creation, Fox argues that “the creator of this passage was an author. He created the passage reusing and reshaping the material from earlier texts and writing new material of his

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190 See a similar reading of the cluster of sayings in lines 126–129 in section 4.1.3.

own. Even if a later compiler or redactor simply stitched together two previously independent pieces whole-cloth, does this not also reflect an “authorial” activity, for presumably (s)he sees something that justifies their connection and presumably would expect the audience to make such a connection as well? To be sure, even the most critical assessments see the bringing together of narrative and sayings of Ahiqar as more than just unedited attachment by pointing to the passage in 139-140, even if they do not see any thorough revision among the sayings in light of the new context. The question stands, then, how many changes have to be made before we can call the redactor an author? How much before we can talk about a “new literary creation”? If it is not clear, these questions are being asked somewhat facetiously. The premise behind them is circular: because we as careful, informed readers (such as Fox) can see certain patterns, the logic is that they must have been intentional, i.e., authorial, and therefore we can talk about an author. What Fox, and others, often underemphasize (or even forget) is the role of the reader in this process. The “author” is a construction of the reader based on the assumption that we can get into the mind of an author and by deciding if (s)he intended to create something new. But, we can a similar assumption about the text, but with a focus not on how it came to be but on how it is (at least as we have it). I find this angle—i.e., from that of the reader—more satisfying since, at least with

192 Michael Fox, “From Amenemope to Proverbs”, ZAW 126 (2014): 76–91, at 77. A frequent topic in recent studies on editorial art or the work of the compiler in Proverbs is the repetition of proverbs; see, e.g., Knut Heim, Poetic Imagination in Proverbs: Variant Repetitions and the Nature of Poetry (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns); Bernd Schipper “The Phenomenon of ‘Textual Coherence’ in Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom Literature,” in Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East (ed. R. Müller, J. Pakkala, and B. ter Haar Romeny; Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming); cf. the earlier exhaustive analysis on this topic D. C. Snell, Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993). See also Fox’s essay on “Coherence Theory” as applied to Proverbs in his commentary, Proverbs 10–31, 967–76.

193 Rarely do we find an example where the author speaks directly to a reader and explains carefully how and/or why s/he has arranged the text in such a way. In other words, while we are able, on the one hand, to point to a preponderance of evidence in the text that would speak against the arrangements being mere coincidence, on the other hand, the very act of recognizing these patterns lies with the reader, not the supposed author. One could claim that focusing on the reading experience denies agency to the author. On the contrary, this type of approach assigns the author complete agency in that it presumes everything in a text is intentional. Meaning, then, derives from an interplay of reader and the author-as-text. The implication then is that we are no longer concerned with trying to “prove” authorial intent by pointing to patterns; intent is assumed even where the patterns are absent.
Ahiqar, we are seeing the text just as an ancient audience saw it. The methodological leap, therefore, has to do with the appropriation of an ancient’s “lens” for seeing, unlike for the author where we are also forced to consider those unseen elements, namely the preliminary stages or components of a text. Thus, I prefer a consideration the text from the perspective of the reader who would, no doubt, see this not only as “new” but as a unified and complete text, even if that reader was somehow familiar with the compositional history—a speculative assumption at best. Each reading, each performance of a text is new and offers difference circumstances for discerning meaning. The question of author or reader, then, has to do with where meaning itself resides.

Before stepping further into the theoretical conversation, we might also briefly consider examples besides Michael Fox in the scholarship on biblical wisdom literature where priority has stayed, for the most part, with the author. I do so primarily because these models have influenced the approach to Ahiqar. As with Fox, even when the immediate literary context plays a part in determining a given saying’s meaning, it is nevertheless attributed to an author’s creative arrangement or style. Furthermore, the notion of the author is often split between that of the “original” author and the “compiler/redactor-author” who brought the sayings together. Consider, for example, Roland Murphy, whose commentary on Proverbs was among the first and certainly among the most influential to reject the notion that a “proverb in a collection is dead.”\footnote{The quote is famously from W. Mieder, “The Essence of Literary Proverb Study,” \textit{Proverbium} 23 (1974): 888–94, at 892; cited by Roland Murphy, \textit{Proverbs} (WBC 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), at 67. To be clear, Murphy here is critiquing this “dictum” which characterized an earlier time in Proverbs scholarship.}

\footnote{Murphy, \textit{Proverbs}, 67. There are, of course, those who still hold to the view that proverbs ought to be treated in isolation; for a prominent example from Murphy’s generation that has still held some sway, see McKane, \textit{Proverbs}, at 10, who states: “there is, for the most part, no context in the sentence literature and that the individual wisdom sentence is a complete entity.”} He states:

‘Context’ is to be understood broadly, not in an interpretive sense. That is to say, a given saying does not lose its independence, its own meaning. A new dimension of \textit{meaning} has not been added in virtue of its place within the collection. It can be balanced, as it were, by being placed in opposition to another saying. But both sayings retain their own meanings; it is simply the nature of a proverb to come up short of total reality, and to be in conflict with other sayings … no proverb says everything … Hence ‘context’ has to be properly understood when applied to the sayings. It does not change their meaning; rather, it situates them in a broader world of reality.\footnote{Murphy, \textit{Proverbs}, 67.}
Thus, even when acknowledging that the literary context has some effect, there was still the tendency to view an individual saying—whose provenance pre-existed the creation of the text—as having an “original” meaning; in other words, an author embedded an intended meaning that is fixed and “correct.”

In the latter part of the 20th century there was a growing consensus that the thematic connections among select groups of proverbs in the book of Proverbs were not accidental and, moreover, that the interpretation of a proverb ought to take into account its context. Yet, even among this consensus there was some discrepancy in how this recognition was formulated. A culmination of this scholarly trajectory on the contextualized interpretation of proverbs can be found in Knut Heim’s 2001 monograph Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver, who stated plainly at the outset of his study that “a contextual interpretation of the individual sayings against their literary background is suggested by the material itself; simply to comment on one proverb after another, as has been the custom in the past, would neglect the various signs that unite them.”^196

There is still a distinction to be made, however, in terms of the contextual approach. Heim, for example, in an evaluation of Murphy, states:

For Murphy the context does not provide a new meaning, but rather a ‘new impact’ and the ‘possibility of new application.’ It is this balance between the supposedly unaltered ‘meaning’ of the proverb as such and its function in context that distinguishes Murphy from other scholars who have noticed the contextual arrangements of proverbs.°197

What Heim is discussing here is Murphy’s tremendous effort to recognize the contextual aspects of the proverbs while at the same time to make concerted effort at maintaining that a proverb inherently has a single, original, and “unalterable” meaning (i.e., the one that the author intended). Murphy’s take here is really just a work in semantic gymnastics when trying to distinguish between a saying’s “meaning” and its “impact.” In response, Heim proposes a “theory of reading” wherein he describes the notion of the “proverb reader intention.” His notion of the reader, though, is fully entwined with his primary thesis about the clusters of proverbs; hence the development of a reading strategy depends, in large part, on the ability of the reader to discern these clusters and interpret

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^196 Heim, Like Grapes of Gold, 65.
°197 Heim, Like Grapes of Gold, 67.
them accordingly.198 A final interesting comment in his discussion of the reader, Heim states that “reading the proverbs in the collection Prov 10:1-22:16, then, demands a certain competence on behalf of the reader.”199 This latter point recalls the seminal article by James Kugel wherein he demonstrates nicely through a series of examples that “if a proverb was to be truly understood (and not simply picked up like a thorn), it had to be savored for its full implications.”200 In other words, by its very nature a proverb requires some work on the part of the reader to unravel its logic and meaning; they must participate, mull over, meditate upon its various components and filter them through a multi-faceted lens that takes much more into account than just the proverb itself for in most cases, including the seemingly straightforward imperatives, a proverb does not carry its message openly on its shoulders.

Finally, mention should be made of Carole Fontaine’s thesis concerning the “performance-meaning” of proverbs.201 Reacting against Mieder’s “dead” proverb, Fontaine argues for a more contextual approach. Although primarily focused on proverbs’ use, or performance, in biblical narratives—and the presumed oral performance behind these examples—her analysis has certainly had implications on scholarship that deals with proverbs in a collection, as well.202 Thus, Claudia Camp, in following Fontaine, has, on the one hand, pointed to proverbs in a collection as having undergone a “literary de-contextualization”—that is, they do not have a performative context, save for perhaps the “father-to-son” setting.203 On the other hand, the bringing together in a collection

198 See, Heim, Like Grapes of Gold, 72–74.
199 Heim, Like Grapes of Gold, 74–75.
203 Claudia Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 209–22; cf. Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 484, who states: “the dimension of proverb performance is absent in a collection … the most a reader can do with regard to performance potential is imagine some of the ways a proverb could be used: how it might influence people, what goals it could serve, how it could be slanted in different directions depending on the wishes of the user.” In response, I would say that of course we are talking about “performance potential.” What makes the indeterminacy of meaning so unnerving for some scholars? Must the “dimension” of a saying be singulare in order for it to be “present”?
has created a “literary re-contextualization,” in other words they have gained a (new) literary performance context. Studies such as Heim’s depend in part upon Fontaine’s strong reaction against any isolated approach to a proverb’s meaning, leading him to conclude:

Proverb ‘meaning’ is dependent on context: although the ‘kernel’ (= the relationship between the saying’s topic A and its comment B) remains stable on the semantic level, there is some variability when the same text is transferred from one setting to another, so that one can speak of ‘proverb performance meaning’ rather than ‘proverb meaning’ as such. In my view this is because the various parts of the proverb can take on new nuances of meaning, depending on the things, persons or concepts they refer to in the real world of the situation in which the proverb is actually used. Different kinds of inferences can be made, depending on a complex set of relationships between the interlocuters involved.

There has been a steady stream, then, in Proverbs scholarship which has at least partly taken into account the notion that the reader or audience—depending on whether one imagines a literary or performance/oral context—is an integral participant in discerning a saying’s meaning(s) and, as such, the social and literary contexts can (and should) contribute to our evaluation of a given saying’s potential.

In returning to Ahiqar, two recent studies that deal with this issue directly are worth noting, those by Andreas Scherer and Michael Weigl. Scherer examines a single column of Ahiqar, which he divides into three distinct units and argues for a coherent and intentional structure, thereby implying that interpretation of individual sayings are related at least in part to their contexts. He concludes:

Von daher legt sich nicht die Annahme nahe, daß der Sammler/Redaktor verschiedene ursprünglich selbständige Spruchgruppen oder Einzelsprüche mehr oder weniger planlos aneinandergereiht hat. Statt dessen werden Anzeichen für eine durchdachte Komposition sichtbar, die sich, wie der vorliegende Fall zeigt, auch auf größere Textzusammenhänge erstreckt.

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205 This is based on the typical two-line structure of proverbs.
206 Heim, Like Grapes of Gold, 22.
208 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche and “Compositional Strategies,” 22–82.
Context, thus, plays a part but it is entirely dependent upon Scherer’s concept of the author and his compositional strategy.

Weigl likewise takes the context of each saying as informative. In the progression of his commentary, he addresses every column in its entirety and carefully considers each saying in light of its immediate context. Like Scherer, Weigl’s rhetoric demonstrates that his focus still very much leans on the side of authorial or compositional strategies. Although, he does occasionally consider the “Leserperspektive,” especially when acknowledging the multiple possibilities for a saying’s meaning.\(^{210}\) Weigl’s observations about the artistic arrangement of the sayings-columns and the importance of a saying’s context are insightful and have no doubt influenced my own readings,\(^ {211}\) yet he offers no real theory of interpretation on the part of the reader and even when he does refer to the “Leser/Leserin” his rhetoric suggests the impetus still lies on the compositional intent of the

\(^{210}\) See, for example, his comments on line 93 (S16) in Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 71: “In der Leserperspektive des umfassenderen Kontextes erfährt der Spruch aber eine Re–Interpretation. Die Polysemie von ἔλαφος und die voraus liegenden häufigen Wiederholungen des Nomens im Zusammenhang mit der Wahl des rechten Zeitpunkts für den Wortgebrauch insinuieren nun eine gewandelte Bedeutung, ebenso wie ἐβραίον und eine ethische Konnotation erhalten: Das ‘gute Gefäß’ wird zur Chiffre für einen integren Menschen, der Anvertrautes bewahrt und nur zur angemessenen Zeit redet, während das ‘zerbrochene Gefäß’ zum Bild für den nicht Vertrauenswürdigen uninterpretiert wird, der alles ihm zur Bewahrung Übergebene wie ein undichtes Gefäß an seine Umwelt weitergibt.”

\(^{211}\) For example, Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” at 77, states: “It is no longer possible to regard the Aramaic sayings of Ahikar as a random and chaotic amalgamation of unrelated proverbial units. The investigation confirms the existence of a far–ranging and comprehensive editorial concept … refined compositional techniques not only facilitate a continuous reading without harsh thematic breaks, but at the same time they assure a correct interpretation of the individual saying by positioning it within a wider context. Often context re-interprets a saying which would have a different meaning if taken for itself … mutual interpretation is a most substantial factor for the assemblage of proverbs of different provenance. As a consequence, context and meaning prove inseparable” (emphases added).
author as “editor.”

212 Weigl, and Ingo Kottsieper for that matter, speak of “compositional units” with which the author created his text. The impetus for their studies, therefore, is on answering the “heavily debated question of how such collections of proverbs and sayings were established” and, moreover, in demonstrating that Ahiqar in particular is not a “random and chaotic amalgamation of unrelated proverbial units.”

I agree with Weigl’s and Scherer’s assessment of column 6 as a relatively tightly-knit textual unit. However, the difference lies in the way in which I conceptualize this arrangement in terms of its meaning. Instead of asking, as they do, was this intentional, I would ask what does, or better can, this mean? And, so as not to eschew any notion of a historically aimed analysis,

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212 See the emphases in the citation from the note above; cf. Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 552, in his comparison of the parallel sayings in lines 84b (S7) and 89b–90a (S12): “Die vollkommene Übereinstimmung in der Syntax und Semantik der jeweils ersten, nominalen Feststellungen sichert im umfassenderen Kontext der Kolumne primär die Strukturwahrnehmung des Lesers/der Leserin.” One exception, however, is his strong disagreement with previous scholars (especially Lindenberger) who dismiss the importance of the narrative context when it comes to interpreting those sayings which, in light of said context, seem to directly recall it: “Diese Bezugnahmen auf das Schicksal des erzählenden Ich entspringen praktisch ausnahmslos der spannungsgeladenen Situation zwischen den Hauptprotagonisten der Erzählung. Achikar und Nadin und können vor deren Hintergrund vom Leser/der Leserin nicht anders verstanden werden denn als direkte Referenzen auf die Ereignisse der vorgeschalteten Darstellung” (Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 697); cf. his critique of Lindenberger on p. 558 n. 9. That Weigl is such a staunch defender of the narrative context having an impact on the interpretation of many of the sayings makes it all the more odd that he does not include a more thorough analysis of the narrative itself, let alone its impact upon the sayings.

213 Kottsieper’s arguments about the compositional process of Ahiqar are taken from a paper he presented at the International Meeting of the SBL in 2013 (St. Andrew’s) titled “On Ahiqar and the Bible.”


216 Weigl’s contributions to the study of Ahiqar as it relates to the presence of complex and multi-layered units among the sayings should not be underappreciated. His arguments for extended compositional units across entire columns (particularly columns 6 and 7) are convincing even if I approach the data from a different angle. Indeed, the connections that he draws between sayings—thematic, structural, or otherwise—through close analysis of these columns have informed several of the readings I offer throughout this study.

217 To which they would answer, ‘yes’ and thus presume to then know something about the author himself and thereby also know something about “redactional practices,” historical contexts, transmission history, etc.; cf. Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” esp. 120.
what could this have meant to the ancient reading audience (at Elephantine)? Admittedly, any attempt to read a text in concert with an ancient audience is tenuous. We do not know very much about reading strategies in antiquity generally nor in Elephantine specifically. However, we do know some things about the concerns of the Elephantine readers, even if these concerns are broadly applied. The king, for example, would surely have had a specific socio-political (and, I would argue, theological) resonance for the readers. It may be no coincidence that nearly all of the king-sayings are here in a column that concurrently dwells on the very negative aspects of life (death, poverty, night, dearth of sons, etc.). The impact of this correlation hints at the king’s destructive power, something that is, in fact, directly addressed in the column itself. And yet, the string of pessimistic, caution-filled sayings are all couched in a poetic shell of praise for the king as one whose rule and authority have divine backing. It is as if the nearly (not fully) critical sayings about the dangerous wrath of the king have been wrapped in a dogmatic, laudatory package. The question now is: does this aptly reflect a (possible) outlook of a people who are employed by a foreign king, living in a foreign land, and thus occupy a tenuous social position, one that is completely dependent upon the authority of the king going unquestioned and yet at the same time the primary source of this very real threat of loss, even death, is the king himself? Is it a surprise then to find these competing impulses within this seemingly unified treatise on royal power? Moreover, are we not surprised, then, that the harshest critique of royal prerogative is to be found in the most coded language, i.e. the animal fable? These readings are not certain, but they are possible, perhaps even probable. I am getting ahead of myself, though as I will unpack specific examples in the chapters which follow. The issue at hand is how this type of procedure—which focuses on the audience and reading strategies—allows for a much richer appreciation of Ahiqar’s message, than that of Weigl’s or the others, and yet we are drawing on much of the same data.

Wherein does meaning reside: the text, the author (and his/her intent), or the reader? This entire discourse could be extended to all type of literature and is a tricky aspect for literary theory generally. In Ahiqar studies, as we have seen, the focus has remained almost entirely on the author.

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218 Cf. Hagen, Ptahhotep, 26, who was influenced heavily by Stanley Fish’s concept of “interpretive communities” when argues that it is “likely that ancient readers who shared a similar socio-political and historical background, and with the same (broadly speaking) knowledge of literary genres and expectations, reacted in similar ways to the same text.”
Even among those interpreters of Proverbs that allow the reader some role, there is still a lagging concern for how a text was composed or redacted. However, in literary theory and in some circles of biblical scholarship more broadly there has been a shift to reader as the primary interpretive complex. The question, then, is no longer concerned with trying to decide if we “must” read something in a certain way because it was “intended.” Instead, the simple question is, can we do so? There is a fear, however, from many scholars that this reader-oriented approach lacks the idealized aim of “objectivity.” What is ironic, however, is that the very notion of the “author” itself is the result of a practice in aesthetics.\(^{219}\) We, as readers or interpreters, attend to certain philological, syntactical, and compositional features and deem them “authorial” based on a nebulous sense of coincidence and intent. Further, the “author” is often the result of a positivist view of history by which historians—in their simplistic correspondence between a text and its context—ironically imagine that “history” itself in a deterministic manner is what constitutes the “author” as an individual persona.\(^{220}\) The “author” then is as much a construction of the reader as s/he is an actual force for meaning.

\(^{219}\) This statement, and the following discussion, is influenced by an essay of Friedrich Nietzsche, originally presented as his inaugural address upon becoming chair at the University of Basel under the title “Über die Persönlichkeit Homers.” I follow the English translation in its later publication under the title “Homer and Classical Philology,” in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (ed. Oscar Levy; trans. J. M. Kennedy; 18 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1909–1913); Accessed online 25 May 2015; http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18188/18188-h/18188-h.htm. In his illuminating critique of “Homer” as an authorial personality Nietzsche arrives at the critical conclusion that “Homer as the composer of the Iliad and the Odyssey is not a historical tradition, but an aesthetic judgment.” I thank Hindy Najman for directing me to this essay.

\(^{220}\) Even more, the idea of “history” as it relates to the “author” has frequently depended upon a large swath view (e.g., “Golden Ages”; periods of turmoil; occupation, Exile, etc.). This aspect has particularly plagued biblical wisdom studies as well as Egyptology: in the biblical context with the so-called “crisis of wisdom” theory and its chronological scheme wherein the “positivism” of Proverbs belonged to the heyday of monarchic period and the pessimism of Qoheleth and Job “must” be situated in the Hellenistic era, a period of national distress and uncertainty; and in the Egyptian context with a similar approach in earlier generations to the dating of the instructions (e.g., the optimisin of Ptahhotep with the stability of the Old Kingdom, despite no evidence suggesting such an antique date) or other related literature (e.g., the Admonitions of Ipuwer which was first assigned by Gardiner [The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage (Leipzig, 1909), 111] to the First Intermediate Period since it reflects the disorder and instability of that era; again despite that the earliest evidence comes from the Twelfth Dynasty); see especially Leo G. Perdue, The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 17–25, for a brief
Thus, what is also at stake here when we speak about the author as a historicized persona is how we configure a text’s relationship to its external context. Too often we find casual one-to-one correspondences between a text and its (supposed) cultural environment, and this correlation is often dependent upon and embodied by (from the historian’s perspective) the person of the “author,” who has produced a text as result of his/her historical circumstances. Taking a page from semiotics, we can problematize any positivist views on a text’s direct relationship to context, maintaining that:

It is impossible to establish the priority of one to another [i.e. author to historical context], to say that society determines or ‘causes’ in any mechanistic sense the cultural production of meaning, or that there is an ontological difference between the imaginative and the ‘real’ (between, for instance, literature and extralinguistic events, actions, or institutions).

The bringing in of semiotics is not coincidental here, for I think a quick recognition of its impact on historicism and literary theory—and the subsequent reaction to semiotics—can be helpful for situating my approach methodologically.

Specifically, recourse to recent literary theory provides a theoretical framework for this shift in focus from “author” as historicized persona with a clear and coherent objective to the “reader(s)” as a more malleable entity that often undermines any sense of coherency or “intent” within a given text, particularly in terms of a text’s relationship to its context. Gabrielle Spiegel, for instance, discusses this issue in terms of semiotics and its concomitant understanding of language as a codification of “arbitrary (because conventional) ‘signifiers’ capable of producing multiple significations” as a means to illustrate how this view “radically disturbs traditional notions of the author as a centered subject, in conscious control and responsible for her own utterances.”

Spiegel continues:

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Roland Barthes declared all authors “dead.” What remains as the literary work, from a semiotic perspective, is not an autonomous expression of a centered, speaking subject, but coded texts and the multiple readings to which they are appropriate.

summary of Egyptian materials according to such an outdated, simplistic model of periodization corresponding to tone and outlook; cf. Lichtheim, AEL 1:135.


susceptible. What in positivism, historicism, and even New Criticism was deemed to be a text’s coherent statement or point of view, ultimately discoverable through close reading, is fractured into a series of discontinuous, heterogeneous, and contradictory codes which defy interpretive unification except at the level of allegorical recodification, itself suspect as the ideological imposition of a false coherence where none in truth exists.  

In this article, which appears in a volume of *Speculum* dedicated to New Philology, Spiegel offers a brief history of semiotics and describes the implications that the “death” of the author has had; namely, that “a historically grounded view of literary and cultural production is extremely difficult to theorize in the wake of the semiotic challenge, and the obstacles to doing so have so far loomed large.” In other words, what is at stake is not only the loss of a supposed “objectivity,” what semiotics can ultimately arrive at is the notion that a text is *ahistorical*. This “semiotic challenge” complicates the work of a historian, for it ultimately “severs (sic) language from any intrinsic connection to external referents.”

*However,* Spiegel is reacting against these implications and her ultimate aim is to rehabilitate the idea that history is indeed at play in a text’s creation and reception. Drawing on the principle of New Philology, Spiegel promotes a “New Historicism” which—in response to this loss of materiality and, consequently, history—attempts “to restore the historicist posture … by focusing on the social construction of meaning in historically determinate cultural discourses.”

Spiegel, as a proponent of New Historicism, is seeking to establish “a language-model

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225 Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 61. For a representative complication of the semiotic problem Spiegel points to semiotics eventual move into deconstructionism, such as Derrida and his ‘infinite chain’ where “behind language stands only more language…” (cited in Spiegel, p. 63). She adds (p. 64): “This dissolution of the materiality of the sign, its ruptured relation to extralinguistic reality, is necessarily also the dissolution of history, since it denies the ability of language to ‘relate’ to (or account for) any reality other than itself.”
226 Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 64.
227 See the appraisal of Spiegel’s efforts in the same volume by Stephen G. Nichols, “Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 1–10, at 9–10: “In her quest ‘to restore history as an active agent in the social construction of meaning,’ [Spiegel] finds that New Historicism has not managed to rehabilitate history itself as distinct from textual construction about historical topics. Insisting that the text be distinguished from its historical context(s) by remembering that ‘texts represent situated uses of language,’ she argues that the sites of linguistic usage are ‘essentially local in origin and therefore possess a determinate social logic.’” Spiegel is careful, as Nichols points out,
epistemology, which views language not as a reflection of the world it captures in words, but as constitutive of that world, that is, as ‘generative’ rather than ‘mimetic.’”228 This model accounts for the often unacknowledged “circularity” when it comes to treating literature as both reflective of history, while at the same time being “conditioned” by the very historical environment to which it purportedly belongs.229 As was noted above, even strictly literary theorists, such as Mieke Bal, have come around to realize that despite their assumptions about a universal “grammar” when it comes to narrative (or literature more generally) at some point we cannot ignore a text’s “cultural embeddedness.”230

In recalling the literary theorist I am attempting to demonstrate how this conversation of semiotics directly relates to the issue at hand, namely a literary appreciation of the Ahiqar sayings as contextualized entities, both in their immediate literary surroundings and in their culturally-charged, historical environment(s). Semiotics and the New Historicism are intimately connected (as Spiegel attempts to demonstrate) with literary theory and the notion of a reader. Thus Spiegel’s theory, which is significant in a lot of ways, nuances the way I understand the concept of the “reader” and the reader’s correlation with meaning. The “reader” forms the representational bridge between the New Historicism as offered by Spiegel and the practice in literary theory from above. In other words, how we frame the relationship between Ahiqar and its historical and/or literary environment is filtered through the lens of the “reader” who is coincidentally both a representative of the historical/social environment as well as a rhetorical prop for a literary-theoretical interpretive strategy. Perhaps even more significant are the implications that Spiegel’s study has not to regress in to previous eras’ “totalizing concepts” in terms of a text’s relationship to a specific era (e.g., “golden age”; “age of turmoil”; etc.; see n. 218 above). Robert D. Hume, Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo–Historicism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), at 5, adds that one of the criteria of New Historicism is that “no period is intellectually monolithic, and that ‘tensions’ should be sought”; cf. Nichols, “Philology,” 9–10. Rather than propose linear models with matted views of historical epochs vis-à-vis literature, it is better to appreciate that concurrent viewpoints are often in conflict; this can be between texts themselves, but is even evident within a single text. As we will discover, this is especially noticeable within collections of wisdom sayings, for they can easily combine a pithy saying that is optimistic in outlook with a lament or complaint that undermines the very principle upon which the previous maxim was built (see, e.g., Ahiqar 95–96; discussion in Chapter 5).

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228 Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 60.
on the notion of “meaning.” She writes: “meaning, therefore, is relational, not stable or inherent within the text itself; it emerges only when the text is situated within a local environment of social and political networks which it seeks to shape and which are being organized around it.”

In this way, following Spiegel—among others, who are both informed by the near century of semiotics, but also responding to it in allowing for a re-appropriation of “history”—this study views Ahiqar “as a situated use of language” with a “social logic.” More pointedly, this is not a roundabout way back to an author or some idea of a singularity of meaning that is either completely conscious or entirely intentional. Instead, it allows for the recognition of a polyvalence of inputs and outputs that are not simply autonomous language codes disjointed from any “external referent,” but instead are “situated” not just in the literary or historical, but a combination of both.

In the shift from author to reader (or audience), the question is no longer about text as a “response” to a particular social or historical environment—regardless of how tempting such a view is, and admittedly some of my comments may inadvertently still be structured in such a way. This view destabilizes understanding of that relationship, in particular the priority that author-centered analyses give to context as the impetus behind text-production. Instead, the voices and concerns that a modern reader discerns in an ancient text can and should be bounced off of and balanced against the particularities of the historical environment (and vice-versa) in an effort to open up the possibilities of meaning or alternative reading strategies.

2.4 Genre: The Wisdom and Instruction of Ahiqar

The Book of Ahiqar comprises a variety of forms each of which could dictate their own generic discussion. The following discussion, however, is limited to a consideration of Ahiqar’s genre in

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233 With this theory of “the reader,” my analysis is also influenced in part by “reader-response theory” vis-à-vis phenomenology, among whose more well-known proponents are Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser; see especially the preface in Stanley Fish, Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost (London: Macmillan, 1967); and the final chapter entitled “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” in Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 274–94.
light of its overall structure, taking both the narrative and sayings together.\textsuperscript{234} The very notion of “genre,” however, is perpetually changing both in biblical/ancient studies as well as in literary theory. There are numerous models and likewise several ways we can define what we mean by “genre” in itself before ever getting to the issue at hand. As Benjamin Wright recently stated, “what we can expect out of genre analysis depends on why we invoke questions of genre and what problems we want to solve by doing so.”\textsuperscript{235}

In assessing Ahiqar’s genre, we are moving beyond the borders of the text itself. By its very nature the identification of a text’s genre has as much to do with how a text relates to (or is to be distinguished from) a larger body of literature as it does with the text’s formal character. Genre can be a useful tool for situating a text within a specific literary context. Despite the outward aspect, the significance of a text’s genre is still inward-looking. For understanding a specific text—and not its genre as such—the importance centers largely on the expectations it sets up for the reader—expectations that are either realized or unsatisfied. Mark Sneed, for example, writes: “The goal of genre criticism is better to understand the role of genre in the production and organization of meaning … the point here is that the classification of genres is not etched in stone but is a heuristic device that aids in understanding literatures that resemble each other.”\textsuperscript{236} In assessing Ahiqar on the basis of its genre, therefore, we are better served by eschewing any rigid taxonomic approach that decides who’s in or who’s out. Carol Newsom put it recently, “Texts do not ‘belong’ to genres, so much as participate in them, invoke them, gesture to them, play in and out of them, and in doing so continually change them … The point is not simply to identify the genre in which a text participates, but to analyze that participation in terms of the rhetorical strategies of the


In this final section, therefore, I begin with a suggestion for the specific genre in which Ahiqar primarily “participates,” namely the instruction genre.

2.4.1 The “Instruction of Ahiqar”

When it comes to genre studies in the ancient world, scholars must tread lightly. There is often little evidence to support any direct correspondence between the generic categories we create (etic) and those that an ancient author/audience conceived of (emic). However, there are certainly some exceptions, and one of those is the ancient instruction (Egypt. sb3.yt) genre, specifically from the Egyptian tradition. Antonio Loprieno, a leading Egyptologist, states:

In most cases when scholars arrange groups of texts into categories or genres there is little to no evidence that an ancient audience would have conceived of such a categorization. One exception, however, is in the Egyptian ‘instructions’ (sb3.yt), which are the most cohesive and representative textual form in Egyptian literature.

Similarly Frederick Hagen added recently: “Wisdom instructions constitute one of the few clearly marked ancient Egyptian literary genres, where the opening lines of each composition conform to a formulaic phraseology that establishes its genre identity.” As both scholars would readily admit, though, the textual situation is not so hard and fast as these statements suggest. The cohesion among the instructions must be qualified, as there are significant differences among the various representatives. Likewise, in response to Hagen, there are several compositions whose incipit names them “instruction” and yet they display very few similarities to the representative forms of

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237 Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12. The other side of the coin, i.e. how a text reconfigures our understanding of a genre, is, of course, important, but it is not the primary concern of this study.

238 N.B. some Egyptological studies refer to this category as “teachings” rather than “instruction”; in this section specifically, therefore, the two labels will be interchangeable. I will make mention of instructions from other traditions (e.g. Mesopotamian and Israelite) but the Egyptian instructions are by far the most widely attested and for which we can speak most strongly of an ancient awareness; cf. Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).


the genre. Such a diversity, as well as the appropriation of the genre’s formulae, is not unexpected given that we are engaging a literary tradition that spanned nearly 2,000 years. Representative examples come from as early as the Old Kingdom or First Intermediate Period and continue—with only some pause—all the way into the Roman period. Perhaps most important are the witnesses from the Middle Kingdom, the heyday of ancient Egyptian literature. Again, though, Stuart Weeks has observed that even among the so-called “typical” instructions of this period (and earlier) there is a recognizable diversity both in formal structures of the instructions as well as in their content or outlook. Thus, even within the broader purview of instructions we may find classifications such as: typical instructions, royal testaments, loyalistic instructions. These divergences notwithstanding, the comments by Hagen and Loprieno still hold weight, especially when considering modern approaches to genre which often appreciate the diversity rather than problematizing it.

In terms of overall structure, the instructions each have a basic resemblance. Beyond the “common heading … the $sb\tilde{y}.t$ is generally cast as indispensable advice from a father to his son.” The father is usually either a senior or mid-level official (e.g., Ptahhotep, Amenemope, Papyrus Lansing (P. BM 9994) is a good example of a text that is generally not considered an instruction proper, though it both carries the formulaic incipit—“The beginning of the instruction …”—and several sections of advice; cf. Weeks, Instruction, 19–20. P. Lansing is often included among the other New Kingdom “miscellanies” which are an outstanding literary phenomenon of this period and which, in Weeks’s words, “defy any brief summary.” Among them we can find the traditional incipit and they certainly comprise instructional material but there is generally such a diversity of form that one can hardly classify them singularly. We might also compare literature that seems to invoke the instructions, such as the extended lament known as The Complaints of Khakheperre-Sonb and which begins in a similar manner to the instructions: “The gathering of words, the heaping of sayings, the seeking of phrases by a searching heart, made by a priest of On, Seni’s [son], Khakheperre–sonb” (Lichtheim, AEL, 1:146).

241 Papyrus Lansing (P. BM 9994) is a good example of a text that is generally not considered an instruction proper, though it both carries the formulaic incipit—“The beginning of the instruction …”—and several sections of advice; cf. Weeks, Instruction, 19–20. P. Lansing is often included among the other New Kingdom “miscellanies” which are an outstanding literary phenomenon of this period and which, in Weeks’s words, “defy any brief summary.” Among them we can find the traditional incipit and they certainly comprise instructional material but there is generally such a diversity of form that one can hardly classify them singularly. We might also compare literature that seems to invoke the instructions, such as the extended lament known as The Complaints of Khakheperre-Sonb and which begins in a similar manner to the instructions: “The gathering of words, the heaping of sayings, the seeking of phrases by a searching heart, made by a priest of On, Seni’s [son], Khakheperre–sonb” (Lichtheim, AEL, 1:146).

242 See Weeks, Instruction, 4–32, esp. 10–12.

243 On these categories, see, e.g., Richard B. Parkinson, “Types of Literature in the Middle Kingdom,” in Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms (ed. A. Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 297–312; and in the same volume Antonio Loprieno, “Loyalistic Instructions,” 403–14 and Miriam Lichtheim, “Didactic Literature,” 243–62, esp. 243–44; as Lichtheim’s title suggests she prefers the broader categorical notion of “Didactic Literature” but with two exceptions—laments and disputations—the sub-categories she lists have all been elsewhere considered under “instruction.”

244 Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 16.
Any, Ankhsheshonqe); although in a few cases the speaker can be the king himself (e.g., Merikare, Amenemehet I) or even anonymous (e.g., Loyalist Instruction, Instruction of a Man for his Son, Insinger). This formal setting or preface can vary in length. Many examples, but certainly not all, comprise only a few lines which introduce the speaker (usually with a long list of his titles), the addressee, and the occasion for the instruction. Hardjedef, for example, begins: “The beginning of the instruction made by the Hereditary Prince, Count, King’s Son, Hardjedef, for his son, his nursling, whose name is Au-ib-re.” Some prefaces, however, are of a greater length, usually expounding further upon the occasion for the instruction. Ptahhotep and Amenemhet I are prime examples from earlier periods, while the Late Period Ankhsheshonqe stands out for its significant expansion of the preface into a full-blown drama, much like Ahiqar’s (see below). In his brief but incisive analysis of the Egyptian instructions, Stuart Weeks gives priority to the preface as the marker of the genre. He claims that hardly any of the actual instructions are distinctly similar either in form or content, with the exception that “all of these texts share the same basic narrative setting.” Thus, he offers as a “very basic definition: in an ‘instruction,’ one character delivers a speech addressed to his son, usually at the point when he is preparing to hand over to the next generation, or has already been compelled to do so.” While I agree to some extent about the essential nature of the preface, Weeks may be going too far when it comes to evaluating their literary character, adding: “All of this comes close to saying that early instructions should be

245 Lichtheim, AEL 1:58.
247 Weeks, Instruction, 11–12.
248 Weeks, Instruction, 12.
249 Weeks, Instruction, 14–15, for example, distinguishes between the Mesopotamian Shuruppak which he considers an instruction on the basis of its “narrative setting” and the Mesopotamian “sayings collections” which are not to be considered instructions due to their lack of such a setting. The “testamentary character” of the narrative setting is, therefore, essential for Weeks. We may also note the irony of this conclusion because Weeks’s primary goal here is to establish Proverbs 1–9 as an instruction, although it does not explicitly display such a setting, even if it may be implied by the appearance of the ‘my son’ formula and the incipit in 1:1. Similarly Michael Fox, in a study of “the way that Wisdom books present themselves and define their speakers and audiences,” also makes a categorical distinction between those texts which “are given a performative setting” and those that are not—which, according to Fox, “are marginal to the genre of ‘Wisdom literature’”; see Fox, “Wisdom and the Self–Presentation,” 154–55, who
viewed, like much of Egyptian literature, as stories dominated by the speech of a single character."^{250} For one, Weeks is playing fast and loose with the terms “story” and “narrative” in his discussion;^{251} though, his point that the preface and its performative setting—regardless of length—are vital for understanding the basic message and underlying ethic for each of the instructions stands.

Following the preface or frame-narrative are the instructions themselves. In most cases the Egyptian instructions “are organized in cluster groupings of related sentences, often called ‘maxims’ or ‘chapters.’” In many cases, maxims are arranged topically to emphasize a specific behavioral trait or real-life situation.”^{252} Amenemope and Ptahhotep are especially consistent in this regard. Still, some examples, especially the much later Demotic witnesses of Ankhsheshonqe and Insinger, display a more monostichic style of organization; that is, they are, like Ahiqar and Proverbs, not arranged according to strictly defined “chapters” but rather in a continuous sequence of individual sayings—though sometimes pairs or clusters of sayings—which may (or may not)

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adds that the performance setting “is a deliberate literary choice” and speaks directly to the functional aspect of the text.

^{250} Weeks, Instruction, 13.

^{251} In light of Weeks’s assertion I am tempted to side with him, not based on material literary evidence, but on the assumption (tenuous though it may be) that the personages mentioned at the beginning were “famous” for something and thus any text that is fronted by their name would recall in the minds of the ancient audience a set of “stories” or traditions. For example, hardly any commentary on Proverbs neglects to mention the Solomon traditions from 1 Kings (3:1–28 and 4:29–34). But, what if no other mention of Solomon was known to posterity save for the incipit to Proverbs and perhaps an ancient Israelite king-list? So, even though the Instruction of Hardjedef, for example, only has the two-line incipit—which hardly qualifies as “story”—the name Hardjedef may have recalled for ancient Egyptian audiences some story or tradition about the famous sage and which might have had some impact upon the nature of the instructions and/or how they were received (cf. his reputation in P. Chester Beatty IV; see citation below). Hypothetical scenarios are, of course, unsatisfying, but it conveys the point that even in the single-line incipits such as we have in Proverbs 1:1 and several Egyptian texts, there may yet be an underlying “narrative” tradition (oral or textual) with which an ancient audience might have been familiar and of which they are reminded. Moreover, the issue is also not dependent upon any historical basis behind these traditions (so also with the case of Solomon, as well); it matters not if the events actually happened, only that they were perceived to have happened. Hence, Weeks, Instruction, 14, in his discussion about fiction and history, rightly sees in the instructions—both Egyptian and Mesopotamian—a “symbolic rather than historical significance.”

^{252} Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 17.
be formally associated with surrounding sayings by way of theme, form, style, etc. Formally, the Egyptian instructions are diverse, though there are some types which predominate. Samuel Adams has recently summarized:

"Although the subject matter varies, the format is relatively consistent within individual texts. Negative imperatives appear in all of these instructions, and the two-line unit is the most common form for a particular saying. Parallelism such as one finds in the book of Proverbs (e.g., synonymous, antithetic) is also a prominent feature. For the most part, individual maxims had no fixed length in the Egyptian texts, and the sages often introduced new material to make a related point. It is often through secondary statements and incidental references that one glimpses underlying theological beliefs."

In other words, as with Ahiqar admonitions are frequent as well as conditional imperatives (“if X, then do Y”), likewise so is the proclivity for motivational or explanatory clauses which, as Adams aptly put it, allows one “glimpses [of the] underlying theological beliefs.” Still, there are some interesting divergences formally speaking, particularly in the epilogues: Ptahhotep’s epilogue is formally and thematically distinct from the chapters in that admonitions mostly disappear and instead we (mostly) find refrains about the positive rewards of listening and obedience; Merikare ends with a “hymn in praise of the creator who made the world and maintains its order”; Any’s epilogue comprises a rebuttal from the teacher’s son which appears to undermine the efficacy of the teaching itself; Amenemhet I, though admittedly incomplete, hardly has proper admonitions,

\[\text{253}\] Notably though these later Demotic instructions do have a largely careful stichic arrangement, with nearly every saying making up exactly one line and several sayings of similar form set in sequence, both factors making the manuscript itself visually appealing. Since Lichtheim’s *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature*, it has generally been assumed that the monostichic organization was a new development that only came about well into the Late Period, perhaps via Semitic influence. However, some recent studies and witnesses are challenging this view; cf. Richard Jasnow, *A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text* (P. Brooklyn 47.218.135) (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 52; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1992), and Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 9. Other generalizations about the differences between the later Demotic instructions and the earlier ones have also been made; e.g., they are generally shorter, parallelism is less frequent, etc. Cf. Weeks, *Introduction*, 9; W. John Tait, “Demotic Literature: Forms and Genres,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (ed. A. Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 175–87, esp. 185–86.


but instead has frequent first-person reflections and laments intermingled with commands and
warnings; *Dua-Khety* is unique in presenting satirical portrayals of various occupations; *Ankhsheshonqe* includes a series of formulaic sayings that are distinctive: “When Pre is angry with
a land, he does (such and such).”

Adams is correct in noting that the subject matter of the various Egyptian instructions often
varies; although, this is not to say that there are not some general trends. For example, many of the
instructions draw a contrast between the ideal “silent man” and the disdained “heated man” and
Ma’at generally serves as the unifying principle which undergirds the moral and ethical advice.
Thematically several of the instructions have a characteristic aspect that makes them outstanding.
In the two royal instructions, *Merikare* and *Amenemhet I*, the topic of rebellion comes to the fore.

Any, as indicated above, is distinctive for its epilogue, wherein the efficacy of instruction itself is
questioned. The loyalistic instructions, according to Loprieno, are characterized by “three semantic
neutralizations of potentially conflicting spheres”: the anonymity of the authors; the complex
representation of the god-king nexus (contra most other instructions that are generally dogmatic in
their royal divinization); and the conflict “between success in this world through loyalty to the
king and survival after death as guaranteed by the funerary cult.”

Even among the so-called ‘typical’ instructions, such as *Ptahhotep* or *Amenemope*, there are noticeable idiosyncrasies. *Ptahhotep*, for example, though purportedly instructions from an official to his son and successor,
has very little advice which directly relates to the vizierate, “instead the teachings are aimed at all
aspiring officials and at Everyman.”

This last example brings up an important point: in many of

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256 This text, which is alternatively known as the “Satire of Trades,” nevertheless does contain typical instructional forms.
260 Loprieno, “Loyalistic Instructions,” 405–10; cf. Loprieno, “Loyalty to King, to God, to Oneself,” in *Studies in
261 Lichtheim, “Didactic Literature,” 245; cf. The above summary primarily comprises generalizations for the sake of
brevity; more in-depth treatments no doubt reveal myriad subtleties of formal and thematic contours. For suveys of
the instructions the “fictional audience may not have corresponded with the actual intended audience … the actual audience may have included a wider group than the one for which the written text was intended.”²⁶² The social setting of the instructions will be discussed later, but for now it is important to note that while the father-to-son fictional setting is fairly ubiquitous, the actual content of the instructions was most likely operative in a variety of situations.

Turning to Ahiqar specifically, there is little doubt that the basic outline of the Egyptian instructions matches that of Ahiqar. As with most of the instructions, the overall form and general presentation of Ahiqar is a narrative preface (or frame) followed by a set of instructions. The narrative setting or occasion for the instructions is likewise testamentary, i.e. a wise sage or high official who wishes to transmit his wisdom onto his son before his death. The superficial aim also appears to be that of training in order to prepare the successor to take his father’s place. Though, like the Egyptian examples, many of the sayings speak to a variety of situations beyond that of a professional station at court. Formally, the sayings of Ahiqar have much in common with the typical examples from Egypt. Leo Perdue’s assessment of the Egyptian instructions, for instance, sounds a lot like the conclusions made above about the Ahiqar sayings: “A list of admonitions and exhortations … with occasional proverbs inserted and the voice of the teacher in the first person interrupting to tell of his own experiences and insights.”²⁶³ As we will see in the following chapters, there are several instances where Ahiqar and Egyptian instructions overlap in terms of theme, tone, and general outlook.

That Ahiqar belongs to or, better, participates in the instruction genre is not necessarily disputed among scholars. We find such a designation as early as McKane’s 1970 commentary on Proverbs.²⁶⁴ Part of the aim here, though, is to offer a corrective to McKane’s and other studies which generally view Ahiqar under the branch of “Mesopotamian Instructions.”²⁶⁵ This is despite

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²⁶² Parkinson, “Individual and Society,” 141.
²⁶³ Leo Perdue, The Sword and the Stylus, 17.
²⁶⁴ McKane, Proverbs, 156.
²⁶⁵ In the scholarly taxonomic schema of ancient “wisdom literature,” we generally find Egyptian, Israelite/Jewish, and Mesopotamian, with the latter encompassing Babylonian, Sumerian, and generally any text in Akkadian. Since scholars largely have resisted any “Jewish” connection to Ahiqar (despite its provenance and reception) and, moreover,
the fact that instructions are only barely attested in Mesopotamia, whereas in Egypt we have a much more prolific record. Even the discussion of Ahiqar by Stuart Weeks—in his survey of the instruction genre that is predominately Egyptian in focus—has a noticeably Mesopotamian flavor, despite the credit Weeks gives Ahiqar in rejuvenating and transforming the Egyptian instruction tradition. In its basic structure Ahiqar does indeed resemble the Mesopotamian examples—e.g., Šuruppak and Counsels—but, when we consider some of the particularities of form, content, ethic, etc. Ahiqar demonstrates a significant amount of correspondence with the Egyptian witnesses over against those in the Mesopotamian.

For example, although the Instructions of Šuruppak does include a brief introduction about an ancient, articulate king who is teaching his son, there is hardly any narrative context comparable to that of Ahiqar. Instead, the closest analogy to Ahiqar’s narrative setting among the instructions comes from Egypt, and not just that of the chronologically much later Ankhsheshonqe. Although several Egyptian instructions, as we have observed, are brief like Šuruppak, some of the introductory passages are longer, such as in Amenemope, Amenemhet I, and most notably Ptahhotep. Granted, aspects of Ahiqar’s narrative are no doubt of Semitic origin and thus related to the so-called “court tales” genre; however, certain details resemble Egyptian examples. Thus, Stephanie Dalley is correct in saying that “The tale of Ahiqar, therefore, is a mixture of Akkadian

considering its heretofore presumed Neo-Assyrian origins, the text has usually been labeled generically or, at least, categorically “Mesopotamian.” A recent exception is Day’s thesis about a distinct West Semitic Tradition; cf. Day, “Foreign Semitic Influence” and the discussion in Chapter 1.

266 Weeks, Introduction, 15–16; cf. ibid., 26–29, who states (p. 27): “Ahiqar is an instruction much the same way as Šuruppak was: a collection of sayings presented as an instructional speech.” This comes after his extended analysis of the Egyptian instructions, in which he prioritizes this very same self-presentation. Why did Weeks not say “Ahiqar is an instruction much the same way as Ptahhotep, or Amenemope, or Amenemhet I”? It is not that his comparison about Ahiqar and Šuruppak is wrong, only that why is the Mesopotamian text consistently the external barometer in terms of Ahiqar’s literary background? The same is not generally done when speaking of Proverbs, another Semitic instruction, even though Ahiqar, according to Weeks’s own definition, resembles the Egyptian instructions much more than Proverbs does.

267 On this genre see, e.g., Lawrence Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Harvard Dissertations in Religion 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) and, more recently, Tawny Holm, Of Courtiers and Kings The Biblical Daniel Narratives and Ancient Story-Collections (Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013).
Specifically, we might compare *Ahiqar* with *Ptahhotep*, whose lengthy and quasi-dramatic prologue stand out among the other instructions. The *occasion* for the instructions of Ptahhotep is that of the vizier’s old age (P. Prisse 4.1–5.4), and the sage’s desire to train his son to take over his position in court. Like Ptahhotep, Ahiqar brings attention to his old age (ll. 6, 15), but even more in both texts the sage must seek permission from the king in order to train their sons to be their successors. We might also consider the *Instruction of Amenemhet I*, which also has a lengthier preface, one which is much more story-like. The text begins, after the traditional incipit, with the late king Amenemhet I telling his son Sesostris II about his assassination. Although there is little specific correlation with the circumstances in *Ahiqar*, the Egyptian text is notable for its general preoccupation with betrayal as well as the first-person story-telling—both of which resemble *Ahiqar*.

As for the sayings, nearly every topic broached by *Ahiqar* can also be found among the Egyptian instructions. The same, of course, can be said of the Israelite and early Jewish texts, as well. This is not surprising as many of the issues—such as discipline of children, discretion in speech, contentment, etc.—are universal in application. Specific parallels between *Ahiqar’s* sayings and Egyptian instructions (as with Israelite and Mesopotamian) will be discussed during the course of this study and need not be listed here. Suffice it to say that content-wise nothing precludes *Ahiqar* from comparison with Egyptian instructions, although nor does it exclusively tie it to them either. A similar comment may be made about Proverbs and Amenemope, but they are brought together nonetheless.

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269 The lament of old age in *Ptahhotep* is an outstanding feature; Hagen, *Ptahhotep*, 217–18, notes: “The literariness of the composition is established in the introduction by the use of poetic imagery and a departure from the ideological norm: the text’s presentation of old age is frequently quoted in Egyptological literature precisely because it is such an unusual and vivid portrayal of the problems associated with growing old.”

270 Note also that *Ahiqar* and *Ptahhotep* both share an ironic absence of specific advice related to the vizierate, despite their purported narrative settings. For comments on *Ptahhotep*’s preface; see comments above, cf. Hagen, *Ptahhotep*, 28, 217–18.
Let us return for a moment to the narrative. Its length and the details of Ahiqar’s betrayal and (presumed) rehabilitation are without parallel in the instructions before the Late Period. The presence of the extended narrative is, therefore, often one of the primary bases for objecting to a connection with the Egyptian instructions.\textsuperscript{271} Among the strongest counterarguments to my comparison between Ahiqar’s narrative preface and the Egyptian Instructions comes from Joachim Quack who states:

Whereas it is normal to give a specific name and situation to a wisdom teacher in Egyptian teachings … and within the teaching he can speak in the first person, there is no single attestation that the frame story is couched as an autobiography. Normally, an Egyptian wisdom text does not have a long narrative introduction, and the best case in which it does have one (the Teachings of Khasheshonqy) is stylized in the third person. So I am reluctant to see in this formal trait [of Ahiqar’s] any evidence of Egyptian influence.\textsuperscript{272} (384).

Quack is treating the Ahiqar preface as an autobiography,\textsuperscript{273} primarily in light of an earlier study by Dalley, wherein she compared Ahiqar with similar autobiographical accounts from Egypt, especially, as she argues, Wenamun.\textsuperscript{274} Quack, however, is unconvinced by these comparisons

\textsuperscript{271} Though oddly this does not seem to have stopped the frequent association with the Mesopotamian ones.


\textsuperscript{273} It may be worth noting here that the Egyptian instructions are frequently thought to have developed out of the tomb-autobiographies; see the discussion in Weeks, Instructions, 5–11, esp. bibliographic citations in nn. 2 and 3. Weeks notes (p. 5): “it is possible not only to discern connections between funerary inscriptions and early instructions, but to see a continuing relationship between the two.”

\textsuperscript{274} Dalley, “Assyrian Court Narratives,” 152–55. Part of the problem with Dalley’s methodology is that she assumes that Ahiqar is a historical figure and thus operates under the assumption that at least some form of the text was in fact written by an Aramaic speaking courtier during the reign of Esarhaddon (see p. 152–53). Thus she goes on to ask such questions as “What circumstances brought such high-ranking Assyrian officers who wrote in Aramaic to Egypt?” Now, while the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III and his successors down to Esarhaddon are certainly an appropriate time period in which we might imagine a strong cultural interaction between Assyria and Egypt using the international language of Aramaic, there is hardly any evidence to suggest that an Assyrian scribe living in Assyrian–controlled Egypt during the beginning of the 8\textsuperscript{th} c. would have been the author of an Aramaic so–called ‘autobiography’ which said scribe chose to model on Egyptian materials, though drawing on Assyrian motifs. Although intriguing, especially in her locating Egypt as a possible location for composition, this hypothesis is extremely dubious based on linguistic
which only contain vague similarities and have parallels in non-Egyptian literature as well. He also correctly points out that, for one Wenamun is modeled on an administrative report, not an autobiography; and two, he maintains that Egyptian tales are almost always in the third person, not the first.  

On the one hand, Quack’s criticisms of Dalley are generally sound. On the other hand, he also belies the evidence somewhat, both in Ahiqar and the Egyptian materials. In the first column of Ahiqar the Aramaic, rather awkwardly, switches back and forth from a third-person to a first-person point of view. The text opens in a similar way to the incipits found in the Instructions: “[The beginning of] the sayings of one whose name is Ahiqar, the wise and skilled scribe who taught the son of his sister … Great was Ahiqar and a counselor to all of Assyria and holder of the signet-ring of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.” Then, it continues (for the most part) as a first-person account of Ahiqar’s story. Thus, it is not so simple as Quack has put it to say that the Ahiqar “autobiography” is entirely in the first-person. Additionally, we find a similar scenario in the two Egyptian instructions mentioned above. In Ptahhotep, we a find a double introduction where the text begins with the typical incipit, followed by a first-person account from Ptahhotep where he laments his old age and seeks approval from pharaoh to instruct his son as his successor; thereafter we find another traditional incipit, which is then followed by the maxims in the first-person.

criteria alone and certainly doesn’t account for the Aramaic Elephantine version as we have it. Her piece of supporting evidence is one of the Barrakib inscriptions from Sam’al (Sincirli) from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III which, according to Dalley, “records the life of his father Panammu in a more elaborate and personal biographical form than any Assyrian cuneiform inscription of the eighth century” (155).


276 This kind of switch is not unique to Ahiqar or the Egyptian instructions; cf. the book of Daniel, esp. chs. 4 and 7.  

277 “Instruction of the Mayor of the city, the Vizier Ptahhotep, under the Majesty of King Isesi, who lives for all eternity. The mayor of the city, the vizier Ptahhotep said:” (AEL 1:62).  

278 “Beginning of the formulations of excellent discourse spoken by the Prince, Count, God’s Father, God’s beloved, Eldest Son of the King, of his body, Mayor of the city and Vizier, Ptahhotep...he spoke to his son...” (AEL 1:63). Need to check what Hagen says about the instructions.  

279 The double-incipits in P. Prisse led to frequent speculation on redactional layers. Notably though, it is directly against this type of approach that Hagen is reacting in his lengthy analysis of the various witnesses to the Ptahhotep prologue besides just that of P. Prisse. Also, as with Ahiqar, the uniqueness of Ptahhotep’s prologue has led to some treating them separately; Hagen, Ptahhotep, 218, notes that “the change in discursive mode between the introduction
Similarly, in *Amenemhet I*, after the formulaic incipit, the text continues in the first-person with some laments and warnings about the untrustworthiness of humankind. Next, the king begins to describe, again in first-person, the circumstances of his own assassination in a narrative form which is followed by a recitation of the great deeds he had accomplished as king in a style quite similar to the royal autobiographies of the Middle Kingdom. The text breaks off but it appears to switch to a more imperatival type discourse. Again, in contrast to Quack’s passing statement that instructions can have first-person “in the teaching” but not the prologue, what we find in *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemhet I* are first-person accounts that are not really part of the maxims and both of which happen to have striking similarities with *Ahiqar*.

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For translation see Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:135–39, which is based on P. Milligan, though there are numerous other fragmentary witnesses as well as allusions or quotations. Despite the uniqueness of both its tone and topic (i.e., the death of a pharaoh), the *Instruction of Amenemhet* seems to have enjoyed a lasting popularity with over two hundred ostraca and a handful writing boards and papyri extant, spanning a large time period as early as the 18th dynasty to numerous fragments from the Ramesside era and even a Late Period (Achaemenid or Ptolemaic) papyrus fragment from Elephantine! For the Elephantine copy, see Quack “Aus einer späzeitlichen literarischen Sammelhandschrift” *ZÄS* 130 (2003):182–85, and H. W. Fischer-Elfert, “Hieratische Schriftzeugnisse,” in *MDAIK* 58 (2002): 216–17. For *Amenemhet* in general see Faried Adrom, *Die Lehre des Amenemhet*. (Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca 19; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).
Therefore, rather than being a point of dissimilarity, the *Ahiqar* narrative which prefaces (or perhaps frames) the Aramaic instructions displays certain characteristics which, I argue, actually strengthen the connection between *Ahiqar* and the Egyptian tradition. *Ahiqar* begins in a strikingly similar manner to some of the Egyptian instructions and even the differences therein can better be understood simply as one example of the many variations upon and expansions of the literary formula which has precedence already within the Egyptian tradition (e.g., *Ptahhotep*) and whose development happened to be followed by a later, native Egyptian author, in *Ankhsheshonqe*.\(^{281}\) I do not wish to draw any strict genealogical lines or linear models; nevertheless, we can confidently go forward with the assumption that when it comes to *Ahiqar*’s genre, the Egyptian instructions are the most salient literary context. And while the lengthy narrative about *Ahiqar*’s betrayal and rehabilitation has no direct parallel in the earlier Egyptian instructions, this should not discount the possibility of an Egyptian literary context, but rather attests to the fact that the Aramaic author was drawing on a *variety* of traditions in creating this new composition.

One final point of concern is the vast chronological distance between the Elephantine *Ahiqar* and the Egyptian instructions. Most derive from the Middle and New Kingdoms, both being periods of extensive literary production, and yet even the latter ended more than a half a millennium before our text.\(^{282}\) Yet, we should not discount the fact that though these texts were *originally* produced in the earlier periods, many of the continued to be copied, quoted, and alluded to well into the Late Period.\(^{283}\) Also, while literary production in Egypt may have slowed a great deal in the first millennium, it did not stop altogether.\(^{284}\) Moreover, the chronological distance has

\(^{281}\) *Ankhsheshonqe* presents itself as an “Instruction” while also including a lengthy narrative preface quite similar to that of *Ahiqar*; cf. Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature*, 13–21.


\(^{284}\) Although we can speak relatively firmly of the continued reproduction of earlier materials well into the Late Period, Egyptologists have often noted the sharp decline in *new* instructions being produced after the end of the New Kingdom.
not prevented biblical scholars from drawing lines of influence from Egypt to the biblical texts, especially the book of Proverbs and its nearly universally assumed forebear Amenemope. If a New Kingdom Egyptian text could find its way into the relatively small kingdom of Israel (or province of Yehud), then it is just as likely that Egyptian instructions could stand behind a 5th c. Aramaic text as well. In this regard, the provenance of Ahiqar should not be underappreciated, nor the fact that Ahiqar clearly had an impactful and lasting presence within Egyptian literary tradition. Miriam Lichtheim has made a convincing case that Ahiqar inspired, at least in part, the narrative preface of the Demotic Instructions of Ankhsheshonge. Even aside from the two stories’ resemblances, the very fact that a native Egyptian instruction contains such an extended narrative frame speaks to Ahiqar’s participation and impact on the genre. Stuart Weeks went so far as to say: “in the last few centuries B.C.E. … the composition of new instructions seems to have enjoyed a tremendous resurgence in Egypt, the initial impetus for which probably came from

Somewhat recently this picture has come under some scrutiny, most notably by Jasnow, who published a translation and commentary on what he identified as a “Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text.” While its dating to the Late Period is secure—probably fourth or fifth century for the papyrus, but could have been composed as early as the reign of Apries in the 6th c. B.C.E.; cf. Weeks, Instruction, 21—many of Jasnow’s readings and his overall assessment have not been well received. For this reason, and considering its very fragmentary condition I chose not to consider this text very closely, despite the fact that if Jasnow’s estimation is correct, it would have serious implications for how we understand Ahiqar as well as the later Ptolemaic Demotic instructions. The text, according to Jasnow, begins with a lengthy narrative set in the 26th dynasty (Saite), and the setting may even be in a foreign land rather than Egypt. There are also poetic sections, a second narrative section that involves the gods, as well as the typical instructions. See Jasnow, A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text. For a brief summary with a more cautious estimation, see Weeks, Instruction, 21–22


286 Note that Fox, among others, have suggested that between the Egyptian Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs was an Aramaic translation or adaptation of the Egyptian text.

287 Lichtheim, Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature, 13–21.
a foreign work, *Ahiqar.*” Additionally, there are a handful of fragments of *Ahiqar* from Egypt besides the Elephantine version, but rather than in Aramaic they are Demotic. This adds further weight that *Ahiqar*, contrary to Weeks’s slight misspeak, was not necessarily a “foreign work” when compared with the Egyptian instruction genre.

Egypt stands as the most represented witness to the ancient instruction genre, and thus *Ahiqar*’s generic designation depends upon this tradition. However, its participation in this literary tradition is not restricted geographically. As we will discuss, there are several occasions where *Ahiqar* resembles the Hebrew Proverbs quite closely.

### 2.4.2 Ahiqar and Wisdom Literature: Definitions, Problems, Usefulness

*Ahiqar*’s formal features, overall structure, content, purported setting, and didactic impulse all indicate an association with the category of “wisdom literature.” However, there has been significant debate among scholars on what exactly we mean by the term “wisdom literature.” For this reason, any evaluation of *Ahiqar* vis-à-vis its literary context requires careful consideration of the problems that come with “wisdom.” In order to be brief and to remain close to the topic at hand, the aim here will not be to “solve” the problem of the definition of wisdom. Instead, in addressing some of the issues with this scholarly category, I will focus on how I understand *Ahiqar* in relation to “wisdom.”

I have opted to present my basic assertions and conclusions beforehand as guideposts. They are: (1) “Wisdom literature” is a problematic category in terms of genre, even when applying more recent theoretical approaches; nevertheless, “wisdom” is still useful but exclusively in its etic sense in that it conveys to a scholarly audience at least something (however indeterminate) about a text’s content, form, function, setting, and/or literary context.; (2) In light of the sheer

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288 Weeks, *Introduction*, 15. He goes on later to characterize *Ankhsheshonqe* as “a deliberate imitation [of *Ahiqar*] which rejuvenated, but also transformed the Egyptian tradition of instructions.”

diversity within “wisdom literature” from the ANE, we should avoid using normative terms, especially “traditional wisdom,” as they imply a standard or “authentic” form, from which others diverge; on a related note we should also a move away from viewing the book of Proverbs as the “prototype” or representative par excellence against which all other “wisdom” texts are assessed; and (3) We may continue, therefore, to refer to Ahiqar as a “wisdom text” but recognizing that this is also not restrictive in terms of function, setting, or worldview.

The issue of “wisdom literature” as a literary form or genre has received a tremendous amount of attention, especially among biblical scholars from whom the terminology first arose—though it has subsequently been adopted by a number of Egyptologists as well as scholars of Mesopotamian literature. The core problem is that the term has come to be used to designate a vast and diverse body of literature from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syro-Palestine. Attempts to pinpoint “wisdom” with any meaningful precision, therefore, have often been met with disapproval. The notion of “wisdom” as it relates to a literary phenomenon or ancient genre, has defied any consensus among scholars and nearly every definition of such is less than satisfactory when weighed against the sheer number and diversity of materials that have been considered

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290 For the use of “wisdom literature” by Egyptologists see, e.g. Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature*, although she later prefers “didactic literature,” but see her discussion of wisdom as a term “adopted from biblical studies” and that “the term ‘wisdom literature’ is commonly used for Egyptian didactic works” in *Didactive Literature,* in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 243–62, esp. 261. Lichtheim seems to imply here—by way of a brief lexicography—that “wisdom” is a misnomer until we arrive at the Demotic literature where the “wise man” and the “fool” became prominent symbols; see, in the same volume, the discussion of “Demotic wisdom literature” by W. John Tait, “Demotic Literature: Forms and Genres,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (ed. Loprieno), 175–90, esp. 185–86. Also in the same volume, Loprieno, who is very much conscious of his terminology, regularly uses the term “wisdom literature” as a representative category in his entry “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theories,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (ed. Loprieno), 39–58, esp. 46–47. Cf. R. J. Williams, “The Sages of Ancient Egypt in the Light of Recent Scholarship,” *JAOS* 101 (1981): 1–19.

291 In Mesopotamian literature the most representative example is, of course, Lambert’s anthology, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, though, to be sure, he immediately concedes that “wisdom is strictly a misnomer as applied to Babylonian wisdom literature,” (p. 1); cf. also B. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2005). See especially the discussions by Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, esp. 3–19, and Richard J. Clifford, “Introduction,” in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamian and Israel* (SBL Symposium Series 36; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), xi–xiii.
“wisdom.” As a result, John Collins has said: “there is universal agreement that wisdom does not constitute a literary genre, and that it can find expression in various literary forms.” Yet even as Collins dismisses the genre aspect, there is still the presumption that “it” (i.e., wisdom) is something.

With “wisdom literature,” scholars are usually referring to an ancient *international* phenomenon. Thus, we may speak of an “Israelite wisdom literature” or an “Egyptian literature” as distinct entities, yet the assumption is also generally maintained there is still something categorically (perhaps even intrinsically) common between the two traditions. In other words, the ancient authors themselves, in crafting these various works, were intentionally participating in a sapiential tradition that extended beyond the borders of their respective homelands. Situating a text within such a broad tradition, however, can be complicated. On the one hand, this problem can be simplified by focusing on a single geographical or national tradition. So, for example, we find several studies on “biblical wisdom literature” as a distinct body of texts with its own idiosyncrasies, but is part of a somewhat larger Israelite and early Jewish literary tradition.

On the other hand, *Ahiqar* is uniquely problematic in this regard, since there are no other Aramaic wisdom texts from the same era with which to compare it—indeed there are very few Aramaic literary texts in general from this period. To talk about *Ahiqar* as “wisdom,” therefore, we must


293 Three popular examples of introductions to “biblical wisdom literature are,” e.g., James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (3d ed.; Louisville: West Minster John Knox, 2010), the first edition was published in 1989; Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*. Although, nearly all of these still include a chapter or section which situates the “biblical wisdom” in its ANE context (especially Perdue). Further, even though most would still agree that this literature resembles sources external to the tradition of Israel and Second Temple Judaism, any basis for establishing the Hebrew examples as distinguishable must rely upon a comparison, at least superficially, with the outside evidence. The same, of course, can be said of Egyptian wisdom literature of Mesopotamian wisdom literature.

294 I do think it would be a fruitful endeavor to situate *Ahiqar* within a much broader (chronologically speaking) Aramaic literary tradition that would include, for example, the texts from Qumran. Some of the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls will, in fact, be considered later, but unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this study to assess in any detail the broader ancient Aramaic literary tradition or *Ahiqar’s* place therein.
consider the international context.\textsuperscript{295} Sifting through millennia of texts that are spread across several geographic regions in order to properly “situate” \textit{Ahiqar} is challenging. Having a more precise genre in mind—rather than “wisdom” broadly—is, therefore, extremely helpful for situating \textit{Ahiqar} in its literary context. The “instruction” genre allows us a sharp enough focus comparatively speaking, and yet also appreciates the international aspect. Though Egypt is a primary representative in this regard, the book of Proverbs and Ben Sira are also prominent. Based on generic considerations, then, \textit{Ahiqar} sits firmly among these two traditions.

Much of the scholarship on \textit{Ahiqar} to this point comes from biblical scholars; consequently, the parameters, terminology, and trajectories of the conversation about the text have, for better or worse, generally reflected this fact. For this reason, in entering the conversation about the definition of wisdom literature, it may be helpful to begin with biblical scholarship specifically, for even when restricted to the Hebrew literature there is significant debate. One such definition that has stood out in the past few decades of biblical scholarship is James Crenshaw’s:

Formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentence or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection; thematically, wisdom comprises self-evident intuitions about mastering life for human betterment, gropings after life’s secrets with regard to innocent suffering, grappling with finitude, and quest for truth concealed in the created order and manifested in a feminine persona. When a marriage between form and content exists, there is Wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{296}
Originally presented in 1981 in his introductory volume *Old Testament Wisdom*, this definition has continued to be influential. The last line about the “marriage of form and content” has reverberated especially in wisdom circles for its brevity and catchiness. Critics, however, have argued that this definition hardly works even when restricted to the traditional examples from the Old Testament (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) or the Apocrypha (Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon), while it certainly falls short when we look beyond the canonical lines (e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls), let alone when we consider sources external to the Israelite/Jewish tradition. Even a superficial survey of the formal features and primary concerns of all the texts which are viewed as “wisdom” reveals a tremendous amount of diversity. Also, several of the texts seemingly share much more in common—in terms of form and content—with other “non-wisdom texts.” In the end, we are left with two competing problems in terms of the formal argument about wisdom. For one, the forms typically considered “wisdom” occur in several texts that are otherwise not considered “wisdom texts.” Secondly, among the texts considered to be “wisdom literature,” there is such a diversity in form that no single form can be said to be representative. This last point has become especially important in recent years, since the number of texts assigned to this category has continuously grown to the extent that the term hardly carries any meaning.

The growth of “wisdom texts” has a lot to do with the Dead Sea Scrolls especially since the publication in the mid-1990s of several previously unavailable materials. Consequently, the concept of “wisdom literature” as a distinct corpus has been scrutinized especially of late by Qumran scholars. Besides an increase in the number of texts, the scrolls also give witness to a corresponding expansion in literary diversity, especially in texts that were viewed as sapiential. Indeed, with each new publication it became increasingly clear that we have nearly as many types of wisdom literature as we have texts. The result has been that Crenshaw’s definition should be abandoned. Indeed, as early as 1997 John Collins could rightly state that “the marriage of form and worldview seems to end in divorce in [the late Second Temple] period.” In attempting to offer a solution to this problem, Collins distinguishes among “three possible ways to approach this

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297 For a good discussion of this phenomenon in scholarship and survey of studies, see Matthew Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre,” *DSD* 17 (210): 315–35.
question, focusing on literary form, worldview, or function and setting.” For his part, Collins prioritizes the latter one (which is really two): function and setting. Specifically, he argues that the pedagogic intent or “instructional” aspect is what distinguishes these texts from other genres: “The coherence of wisdom literature … lies in its use as instructional material rather than in literary form, strictly defined.” Matthew Goff, in a more recent review of the “wisdom” problem vis-à-vis the Dead Sea Scrolls, responds in part to Collins’s suggestion, noting that instructional intent can hardly be used to distinguish sapiential texts, because, as Collins himself had admitted, “many texts … are instructional in a broad sense.” Is not every text, in some way, trying to inform its reader of something, usually with the aim of eliciting some type of response? Goff, too, avoids strict formal definitions in his attempt to delineate sapiential literature; instead he offers two “identifying factors.” The first, in direct response to Collins, is to suggest the term “noetic” as more apt and decisive than “instructional.” This is because noetic implies that “the point is not just for the student to learn what is being taught,” rather, for Goff, the term stresses that “wisdom texts foster in their intended addressees a desire to search for understanding of the world.” As for his second identifying factor, Goff proposes that participation in a “sapiential discourse” is necessary; in other words, a wisdom text will appropriate and reconfigure older traditions.

Recent discussions of “wisdom literature” have also been influenced by an appreciation of the developments in genre theory among literary scholars. A recent article by Carol Newsom, for example, surveys several models of genre such as “family resemblance,” and has since been

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298 Collins, “Wisdom Reconsidered,” 265. To this we could also add wisdom as a concept, a body of knowledge, or cognitive faculty see, e.g., Michael Fox, “Concepts of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs,” in Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (ed. Chaim Cohen, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Avi Hurvitz, Yochanan Muffs, Baruch J. Schwarz, and Jeffrey H. Tigay; 2 vols.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1:381–98, who, at 382, state: “wisdom in the oldest and broadest sense is the faculty that allows one to assess and choose effective means to carry out one’s intentions.” The implications of this definition, though, removes any direct link to a literary phenomenon in that “this [faculty] can be applied to a number of areas, not simply the ethical or moral, but also handiwork (artistic craft), social/commercial expertise, mantic/magical art, etc.”


300 Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 321.

301 Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 327.

302 Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 328. I will return to this second point below.
influential in introducing to biblical and early Jewish studies—particularly for the apocalypse genre—the cognitive models of genre, namely “prototype theory.” Newsom states:

The significance of this analysis of cognitive models for genre is that ‘elements’ alone are not what trigger recognition of a genre; instead, what triggers it is the way in which they are related to one another in a Gestalt structure that serves as an idealized cognitive model. Thus the elements only make sense in relation to a whole. Because the Gestalt structure contains default and optional components, as well as necessary ones, individual exemplars can depart from the prototypical exemplars with respect to default and optional elements and still be recognizable as an extended case of “that sort of text.”

The prototype theory, therefore, has a number of advantages when it comes to evaluating wisdom literature, not the least of which is its way of accounting for the diversity of formal features. In particular is the contrast between the ways in which cognitive theories describe the development of the prototype against, for example, the way intertextual theory develops its sense of essential features. Cognitive theory argues that the way people think of genres is via prototypical examples in the group. “Thinking in terms of prototype exemplars” does not, therefore, attach the constraints of the “yes” or “no” questions in terms of representative features.”

Thus, Benjamin Wright argues: “Rather than a clear demarcation of which examples are in or out, we might conceive of texts falling on a continuum where ‘membership in a category may be a matter of degree.” Prototype theory can also aid us in that it frees us from linear-type genre models wherein varieties are seen as developments upon an earlier “pure form” of the genre. In contrast, the “prototype exemplar” need not be the oldest and, therefore, the schema does not need to trace lines according to some historical development—older texts can demonstrate variety, just as chronologically later texts can represent the prototypical form; “that is to say one can read the prototypical exemplars out of historical order and thus without a sense of how one text influences or imitates another.”

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305 Wright, “Join the Club,” 293; following Newsom, “Spying out the Land,” 445.

That prototype theory “operates ahistorically” can be helpful for addressing these types of problems inherent to wisdom studies in particular. The convenience of the prototype approach is that it does not need to account—at least not directly—for the differences relative to dating. As Michael Sinding, a leading proponent of the prototype theory upon whom Newsom and Wright rely, has put it: “We could read the originary prototypical works all out of order, hence with a skewed sense of the sequence of influence and imitation, and still have as good a grasp of the genre, as a genre, as anyone.” For Wright, however, this does not mean that the diachronic approach must be abandoned whole-cloth. Appreciation of “how genres change over time” is, nonetheless, interesting.

Although we need not create a model along linear lines, there is some impetus to allow cultural or historical factors to have an input in how we determine what wisdom text is “prototypical.” An updated conception of texts and how they interrelate according to a cognitive model of prototypes is not all that is at stake, as Newsom herself admits. Among other aspects, the question of history or geography also relates to how exactly the “mental structures” develop that serve to construct the prototypical exemplars of genre in the first place. Take, for instance, the oft-cited example of birds for illustrating what we mean by mental categories and prototypes. That a robin or sparrow has come to serve as the prototypical example of the mental category “bird” must depend, in part, on historical and geographical constraints. One wonders how this typical example would resonate with readers from northern Brazil, Australia, or Alaska. When it comes to wisdom, then, we must still reckon with genre as a historical phenomenon.

For my part, I am resistant to the casual way in which Wright, among others, have simply assumed that those texts already identified as “wisdom” can serve as the prototypes without actually working out why. This may not seem like an important process, but presumptions about

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308 Wright, “Join the Club,” 298–99 n. 27.
309 See Newsom, “Spying out the Land,” 445–49.
311 Wright, “Join the Club,” at 299–300, writes: “It is important to note that one could begin an inquiry into prototype theory with respect to genre by inductively creating a set of prototypes that would serve as the exemplars. In the cases of both wisdom and apocalyptic texts, scholars are almost uniformly agreed on which texts constitute these basic sets
where the center of wisdom lies can have adverse effects on how we treat those examples that are
given less attention. An unfortunate consequence, even in the more nuanced approaches to wisdom
literature—such as those by Collins, Goff, and Wright—is the persistence of certain biases that are
leftover from earlier generations of scholarship. This reverberation is most notably apparent in the
continued use of the phrase “traditional wisdom.”

Goff, for example, identifies as one of his two major “identifying factors” for categorizing
a Qumran text as “wisdom literature” is “that texts so designated participate to a significant extent
in a sapiential discourse. That is, such compositions were written in a way that is characterized, as
evident in the themes, motifs or vocabulary that they utilize, by engagement with the traditional
wisdom of Israel, as exemplified by Proverbs.” Yet, even in his acknowledgment of the sheer
diversity among the Qumran materials in terms of form, worldview, social setting, even function,
Goff’s use of the term “traditional wisdom” has implications on how wisdom from an earlier age
presumably looked. For Goff, “traditional wisdom” seems to be “advice regarding practical
spheres of life or ethical admonitions” as one finds in the book of Proverbs. Beyond Goff,
“traditional wisdom,” as scholars use the term, seems to imply some amorphous collection of
proverbial or sentence wisdom that deals with more practical, day-to-day matters and on the
occasion that more “deep” issues arise (e.g., theodicy, justice, etc.), the outlook is optimistic,
perhaps even dogmatic. Thus, the more sentence-like and the more straightforward in terms of act-
consequence—i.e. the more a text is like Proverbs—then the closer it is to “traditional wisdom.”

Wright, too, makes this assumption, though in a more muted way. Consider his definition
of wisdom:

We might understand a genre wisdom as one kind of instructional literature whose system
of expectations focuses on the way that study and investigation provides insight into the
nature of the cosmos and human behavior, particularly as that activity takes place, at least

… that is, we are already working with some sort of template that forges the initial consensus about the set of
prototypes.”

Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 328. Ironically, Goff explicitly stated earlier (p. 320) that “the task of
determining which [Qumran] compositions should be considered wisdom literature is no longer grounded by the
anchor of the biblical canon.”

Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 322.

On the so-called Tun-Ergehen zusammenhang; see the discussion in chapter 5.
in part, as reflection on an accumulated tradition of sapiential insight, the purpose of which is to inculcate the insights of that tradition in the wisdom recipient and to train the recipient to discover the validity of these values for him/herself and to pass them to others.\textsuperscript{315}

Like Goff, Wright includes an “engagement with earlier sapiential tradition” as one of his “four central properties that function together as an ICM [idealized cognitive model] of wisdom literature.” His definition of wisdom, then, depends upon the chronological priority for a certain type of tradition. Texts, of course, are never created in a vacuum and, therefore, can always be said to engage with earlier materials, but why is engagement with an earlier “sapiential tradition” an “indisputable component” for defining wisdom?\textsuperscript{316} The question also remains: what exactly does Wright mean by “sapiential tradition”? Later, Wright makes it clear that he means Proverbs.\textsuperscript{317}

Proverbs, therefore, for Goff and Wright is still the anchor for establishing a text’s sapiential character, regardless of the genre-theory being applied. These two, of course, are not the only ones guilty of using Proverbs as the barometer against which all other supposed “wisdom” texts may be gauged. Michael Fox, for example, stated plainly: “the closer a text is to Proverbs the more it deserves comparison.”\textsuperscript{318} On the one hand, these models work, but only if we consider those texts from the late Second Temple period that are identified as wisdom, several of which do indeed draw on Proverbs. However, this approach does not work for Ahiqar. Based on the above definitions of wisdom, if I were to call Ahiqar “wisdom literature” or “traditional wisdom,” then scholars would immediately “think” of Proverbs. Granted, the two texts share a great deal in common, but there are several ways that they differ, and it is misleading to characterize these

\textsuperscript{315} Wright, “Join the Club,” 298.

\textsuperscript{316} Wright, “Join the Club,” 302.

\textsuperscript{317} See, e.g., Wright, “Join the Club,” 305, 307, 309. To his credit, Wright makes a strong effort to show how the prototype definition of wisdom allows for consideration of texts outside the category (e.g. Jubilees; on pp. 310–11); hence he states “we can presumably look at other similarities and differences among texts … and examine them without having to try to force square generic pegs into round generic holes.”

\textsuperscript{318} Fox, Proverbs 1–9, 17. In truth, Fox may be excused for this comment since it is made in a commentary on the book of Proverbs; however, it is still somewhat unsettling since he makes the comment in the context of a discussion on “an international wisdom tradition.” The implication then is that, for Fox, Proverbs is the center, i.e., the prototype. I should also note that Fox, at least in his discussion here, applies the family-resemblance model of genre in describing wisdom literature (cf. 17–27).
divergences in such a way that suggests Ahiqar is “non-traditional.” For example, in chapter 5 when discussing issues of theodicy and divine justice, I find that Ahiqar’s outlook aligns much more with Qoheleth than it does with Proverbs—that is, when commenting on the notion that the gods are upholders of justice, there is a great deal more emphasis by Ahiqar on the inscrutable even arbitrary nature of their beneficence and wrath than on any rigid system of rewards and/or punishments. Or consider Chapter 4, where I will show how Ahiqar adopts a persona that is more often from the perspective of the poor or the socially disinherited than with the rich elite. This too contrasts with the typical perspective of Proverbs, though interestingly it aligns well with the supposedly “innovative” Qumran wisdom text 4QInstruction. Moreover, as we will see in the subsequent chapters several of the features, where Ahiqar “diverges” from Proverbs, are in fact represented by other texts such as Ptahhotep, Amenemhet I, Qoheleth, and several other instructions, not to mention the disputations or texts like Job. That Proverbs serves as the “prototype” in Hebrew tradition, thus, skews how we understand the other materials beyond the issue of genre.319

In this study of Ahiqar specifically, I have made a concerted effort to evaluate Ahiqar—whether generically, formally, thematically, or otherwise—without presuming Proverbs as the “control” in the scientific experiment that is the interpretive analysis of a so-called “wisdom text.” Does this mean that I have not compared Ahiqar with Proverbs? Of course not! But, I have done so on the basis of observable similarities and not because Ahiqar’s association with “wisdom” demands it. I have also attempted (as much as possible) to refrain from making these comparisons using normative terms—such as “traditional”; “conventional”; “customary”; “(un)expected”; “unusual”; or “innovative”—that might imply Proverbs as reflecting the “prototype” or the

319 Is Qoheleth responding to Proverbs? Perhaps, maybe even likely. But is this a “critique of traditional wisdom,” either in the generic sense or as representative of a national ethos? I would disagree. Does Qoheleth give expression to a tension related to ethics, retributive justice, and reality? Yes. But does this “critical attitude” contrast with the “didactic form” of proverbial sayings? No! There are myriad ways of appreciating Qoheleth’s message of pessimism, sarcasm, and despair, but to presume his work’s form is incompatible with this outlook based on some a priori notion of “traditional wisdom” (and what it should look or sound like) grossly misrepresents the evidence, from Israel and abroad.
“original” type of wisdom. While understanding Proverbs in this way can work if we limit the scope to late Second Temple period Jewish texts, it is simply not helpful for understanding Ahiqar as a participant in a broader generic (or simply literary) tradition. In fact, when set in an international context—i.e., not just the biblical one—we could say that Proverbs stands as the “odd one out,” so to speak, in its near pervasive optimism, lack of a narratival setting (the “my son” formulations in chs. 1-9 notwithstanding), among other aspects. Incidentally, if we approach this bastion of dogmatism with the assumption that “critical wisdom” is the typical outlook, then the way in which we read the text changes dramatically.

This may not seem that important, especially in a study that is not really concerned with Proverbs, at least not directly. However, as we engage Ahiqar via comparative materials in the context of a literary “tradition,” the way Proverbs has occupied the center of that “tradition” has no doubt influenced the way scholars have approached these texts. This is not to say that Proverbs will not have an important role in a comparative-literary reading of Ahiqar. To be sure, the Hebrew

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1. To be clear, it is not that I will refrain from this kind of vocabulary altogether, only that in comparing Proverbs (or Proverbs–types) and Ahiqar specifically I will do my best to avoid language that might imply Ahiqar either diverges from or upholds what is generally assumed to be “typical” because of its exemplification in Proverbs. In most cases, when discussing “wisdom” as a literary phenomenon, I will attempt to refrain from making any normative claims. This does not mean that concepts such as innovation or tradition (and their like) are necessarily inaccurate, only that they are often made too casually and built upon (often anachronistic) scholarly presuppositions about ancient texts and the way in which they interrelate. Is, for example, Ahiqar innovative in its incorporation of fables into a collection of wise sayings? Perhaps it is so, at least according to the available evidence. However, this does not mean Ahiqar is ‘innovative’ relative to Proverbs. If anything, it should be the other way around. In the end we should keep in mind Newsom’s words above about text’s not belonging to genres, but interact with, engage, adapt, etc. There are several outstanding features in Ahiqar when compared with similar texts. Appreciation of Ahiqar’s (or any other text’s) uniqueness should not require hierarchical relationships of texts in some arbitrary generic spectrum that has a single example at its center.

2. Indeed a similar phenomenon occurs in the Egyptian tradition such that the Instructions of Amenemhet I, based on the evidence at hand, appeared to enjoy a very broad and lasting popularity despite the modern scholarly assumptions about its unconventional themes and pessimistic outlook (cf. Lichtheim, AEL 1:134–45). Amenemhet’s unusualness depends in large part upon the assumption that the older, “classic” example of the instruction is Ptahhotep, which, according to Adams, Wisdom in Transition, at 35, “like most ancient Near Eastern instructions … is conservative in orientation. The author affirms the status quo, does not advocate the emendation of existing social structures, and offers a generally optimistic assessment of human potential.”
text intersects with *Ahiqar* on a number of levels, especially in the individual forms and content of the sayings. The point, however, is that those instances where *Ahiqar* and Proverbs disagree should not be taken to mean the *Ahiqar* is digressing in some way from some wisdom ideal. Put bluntly, the way we should understand *Ahiqar* vis-à-vis Proverbs is that both texts were participating in a reasonably similar tradition whereby instruction and pedagogy are couched in the form of wisdom sayings, several of which are in concert both topically and formally. For this reason, close comparison between the two is desirable. However, as this dissertation will show, *Ahiqar* and Proverbs disagree on a number of points, not the least of which is the basic outlook on causality, justice, and the divine. In this regard, *Ahiqar* resembles a stream of thought that—at least in the Hebrew tradition—is evoked more poignantly by texts such as Qoheleth or Job. These general statements will be unpacked below, but it is important to emphasize that definitions of “wisdom” that put Proverbs at the center have adversely affected the way *Ahiqar* is understood relative to the category “wisdom literature.”

On a final and different note, there is a prevalent idea that “wisdom” has its own worldview and relatedly its own setting (or *Sitz im Leben*) and function, but this view, too, must be problematized. It is difficult to treat each of these three areas—function, worldview, setting—separately, but we may begin by looking at a general problem related to wisdom as separate “worldview.” John Collins, for example, has commented that although form has for the most part fallen short as the lynchpin for wisdom, “the idea that wisdom constitutes a particular understanding of reality or worldview has enjoyed far greater popularity in recent scholarship.”322 As with form, though, the Qumran texts disrupted this ‘popularity’ significantly.323 Even beyond the expansion in examples and the concomitant “worldviews” (plural), there is a methodological flaw in separating wisdom, based on the assumption that different genres denote different worldviews. Sneed criticizes this assumption, saying:

Genres produce worlds, though these are never complete. Each genre reflects built-in assumptions, values, and expectations—in other words, a distinctive world … but a generic

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322 Collins, “Wisdom Reconsidered,” 266.
323 Collins, “Wisdom Reconsidered,” 278, for example, admits that while many of the Qumran wisdom texts share themes with Proverbs, “the worldview of some of them departs radically from the older sapiential tradition.” The apocalyptic worldview of *4QInstruction* is an oft-cited example.
world is not the same thing as a worldview that a particular social group holds. Genres simply are not capable of carrying that much information; they are not comprehensive enough for that.\textsuperscript{324}

The distinction Sneed is trying to make between the “worlds” a genre (or text) produces and the “worldview” is important. People interact with a variety of genres on a daily basis and yet their worldview does not (usually) change. In Elephantine, for example, we can imagine that an individual read/wrote a letter, signed a contract, and perhaps even skimmed through \textit{Ahiqar} or Bisitun in a single day. Did his/her worldview change with each genre? No. \textit{But}, each text to some extent produces a “world,” with its own assumptions and expectations (e.g., in a letter we expect certain formulae). The “world” that a text (or genre) creates is, of course, conditioned by a shared worldview, which signals a particular set of ideological or functional boundaries, even if these boundaries are at times transgressed. However, the “world” of a text/genre is hardly holistic in terms of a society’s overall worldview.\textsuperscript{325}

I agree with Sneed’s corrective in the way we treat a text vis-à-vis a particular worldview; although, I will continue to use the term “worldview” (rather than adopt Sneed’s “world”), but with the understanding that a text’s—in this case \textit{Ahiqar}’s—worldview is related to but not necessarily constitutive of a society’s outlook. Following Sneed, it would be wrong to view \textit{Ahiqar}, by reason of its “wisdom” status, as somehow isolated from its immediate literary and social environment. This can have very real, material implications since the \textit{Ahiqar} papyri were discovered among the documents of a community. \textit{Ahiqar} was most likely read by the very same people who were reading the royal decree of Besitun and the magico-narrative of Hi-hor\textsuperscript{326}, there is a good chance it belonged to someone who was working (or previously worked) in the temple of Yahu and, even if that is not the case, there is a very strong likelihood that the reader(s) of \textit{Ahiqar} were familiar with the social and political events taking place, for example the destruction

\textsuperscript{324} Sneed, “Wisdom Tradition,” 55.

\textsuperscript{325} See Sneed, “Wisdom Tradition,” 59–60 for his discussion on “Generic Worlds, Not Worldviews.”

\textsuperscript{326} I should add here that these two labels are not to be taken as prescriptive for the two texts respectively; Besitun, for example, has traits similar to royal autobiography, inscriptional material, as well as wisdom instructions (namely the royal testament), while Hi-Hor is so fragmentary its generic character is far from certain (though it clearly demonstrates some narrative aspects).
of the Temple of Yahu at Elephantine. That the king figures in the narrative and sayings, thus, should not necessitate the royal court as the primary functional context. Why, then, should the worldview that Ahiqar espouses be treated as something foreign to this community? I will return to the question of Ahiqar’s socio-historical context during the course of this study, but this is one specific area where wisdom scholarship (until very recently) has adversely affected the way we understand a wisdom text vis-à-vis its contexts, both literary and historical.

Despite the downplaying of distinctive worldviews for wisdom, the pedagogic function of wisdom—i.e., that its Sitz im Leben is in an educational context from teacher to student—has retained a priority of place among scholars. Collins, for example, in lumping function and setting together, maintains that “the function and setting of wisdom is to be found primarily in school education.” The argument for a school setting behind the Hebrew wisdom texts is generally made via analogy with Egyptian texts where we have strong evidence that schools were at least one place where wisdom texts were used for scribal education. Unfortunately strong evidence

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327 See the discussion on this point specifically in Chapter 4.

328 Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, at 52 n. 148, for example, states: “Natürlich dürfen die Achikar-Papyri ‘nicht als ein für die Religion der “Juden” in Elephantine konstitutiver Text angesehen werden. Anders gesagt: Achiqar ist nicht die Bibel der Elephantiner’”; citing Bob Becking, “Die Gottheiten der Juden in Elephantine,” in *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel* (ed. M. Oeming and K. Schmid; AThANT 82; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2003), 203–26, at 205. One suspects that Becking’s inclination to excise any religious aspect to Ahiqar vis-à-vis the “Jews” in Elephantine has as much to do with traditional views on early Jewish monotheism as it does with traditional views on wisdom literature’s “place” in society; see Becking’s comments in note 346 below.


330 While it is accurate to say that wisdom texts, such as the Egyptian Instructions, were used for teaching future scribes how to read and write, the frequent glosses about their use in this setting because of their simplicity is just false: see, e.g., David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, esp. 3–16, who argues that prior to the late Hellenistic/early Roman period “there was a pattern shared by classical culture and the ancient Near Eastern world, whereby wisdom literature was studied first before students proceeded to more complicated genres” (citation from Sneed, “Wisdom Tradition,” 65). Any Egyptologist, for instance, would tell you that the Instructions are far from simplistic and that they occupied an exalted view in the ancient mindset as well is evident by a number of writings—most especially in the oft–cited quote from the New Kingdom P. Chester Beatty IV (pBM 10684), 3.6: “‘Is there one like Hardedef [= Hordjedef]? Is there another like Imhotep? None of our kin is like Neferti, or Khety, the foremost among them. I give you the name of Ptah-emdjehuty, of Khakheperre-sonb. Is there another like Ptahhotep or the
for an ancient Israelite school system is lacking, and scholarly estimations on scribal culture in ancient Israel, Yehud, and later are unclear.\textsuperscript{331} Aside from the school, the other two popular settings to which wisdom has been assigned are the royal court and the family.\textsuperscript{332} As the review of scholarship in the previous chapter has shown, \textit{Ahiqar} scholars have generally opted for the royal court as the operational setting for the text. This view, however, depends entirely on the literary features: in the narrative Ahiqar works at court, his wisdom deals with the king, and (according to most) his wisdom reflects the view of the elite. To be sure, Kottsieper has offered a more nuanced view, based on a redactional approach, which sees a core set of sayings from a family setting overlaid by a later, erudite layer from the royal court.\textsuperscript{333} Also, Bob Becking recently suggested, in passing, that \textit{Ahiqar} was in use for scribal education and, moreover, was commissioned by Persian authorities for supporting Persian ideology.\textsuperscript{334} Part of the problem is the near-unwavering

\textit{equal of Kaires?"} (translation from Lichtheim, \textit{AEL} 2:177); cf. Weeks, \textit{Instruction}, 16–17. Even if they did have this function in scribal training, we should nevertheless appreciate the complexity of these “referentially fictional, intertextually dialectic, and historically transmitted texts” in which the “ideological expectations of Egyptian society” were conveyed (Loprieno, “Loyalistic Instructions,” 404). It is clear for the author of the passage cited just above that these sages—most of whom we know or suspect are the fictional authors of instructions or other “wisdom” texts—represent the apex of Egyptian literary tradition (recall this is a New Kingdom author reflecting on the traditions received from centuries before in the Middle and, possibly, Old Kingdoms).

\textsuperscript{331} Despite some valiant, albeit misguided, efforts, little evidence—textual or material—has come to light to support the existence of schools in Israel, at least not until the Roman period. This, however, does not mean an absence of some sort of scribal culture, only that arguments about some “wisdom school”—I am thinking here of Bernard Lang, \textit{Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs} (Grand Rapids: Pilgrim Press, 1986)—generally stand on shaky grounds. For recent research on scribal culture in ancient Israel and the Second Temple period see, e.g., Carr, \textit{Writing on the Tablet of the Heart}, esp. 111–75; and Laura Quick, “Recent Research on Ancient Israelite Education: A Bibliographic Essay,” \textit{Currents in Biblical Research} 13 (2014): 9–33.

\textsuperscript{332} For a quick survey of these three \textit{Sitz im Leben} of wisdom, see Johnny Miles, \textit{Wisd King, Royal Fool: Semiotics, Satire and Proverbs} 1–9 (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 7–9.


\textsuperscript{334} Bob Becking, “Yehudite Identity in Elephantine,” in \textit{Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context} (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns: 2011), 403–19, at 414, writes: “A copy in Aramaic of Darius’s Behistun inscription was found in Elephantine. This text was—like \textit{Ahiqar}—in use for scribal education. In reading and writing this text, the intelligentsia from Elephantine of the various ethnic and/or religious groups were trained in the Persian imperial
preoccupation with the author and that its function can be limited to a singular *Sitz im Leben*. For wisdom texts, especially those that comprise an assortment of sayings as in *Ahiqar*, any attempt to pinpoint a solitary setting and function based on internal evidence is not only challenging, but imprudent, at least when the aim is at the “original” situation of production or its “original” intended use. The sheer variety of “worlds”—to borrow Sneed’s term—imagined by each saying, from farm life, to the royal court, the family, trade, natural observation, and so on, makes this impossible without having either to mute several sections or to propose complicated redactional/editorial schemes that account for the various layers. Take Kottsieper’s study of *Ahiqar*’s social setting, for example.\(^{335}\) As I had indicated earlier, Kottsieper, for the most part, has been the only one to offer this kind of analysis to any significant degree for *Ahiqar* and, therefore, should be commended. However, Kottsieper’s approach is a combination of redaction criticism (see above on the family/erudite layers) with an unfiltered specificity of linking referents in the sayings to actualities of the intended audience. He takes nearly every saying as revealing for the author or the addressee, such that their social and familial status, even their possessions, have become extremely specific.\(^{336}\)

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ideology … One way or another, they had integrated this ideology within their own identity, as can be proven by the fact that the Yehudites never revolted against the Persian power.” I will discuss *Ahiqar*’s possible connections with Persian ideology in Chapter 5, but for now Becking’s state-sponsored scribal school is of interest.

\(^{335}\) Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition.”

\(^{336}\) E.g., because the addressee is told not to “shoot your bow” (ll. 126, 128) then, according to Kottsieper, “they [the addressees] own weapons, including a bow” (“The Aramaic Tradition,” 111–12), without considering the possibility that (1) the bow here is a metaphor and (2) that even a “middle class” farmer (p. 112) would likely understand the basic functionality of a bow-and-arrow without having to own one. Incidentally, though, I would say there is a strong possibility that the audience of *Ahiqar* would own a bow, but not because of this saying, rather because of the text’s readership being among professional soldiers at Elephantine. The better takeaway, then, is not that these two sayings prove that the addressee had a bow, instead it is that bow-and-arrow imagery would have had a particularly meaningful impact for a reader (or readers) who lived in a community of mercenaries, even if he/she was not a mercenary him/herself. Methodologically, Kottsieper’s focus is on the author and the intended addressee, i.e., he was writing *for someone* who owned a bow; a reader-oriented approach, however, finds a meaningful interplay between the referents in the text and the social and/or historical circumstances of the likely readership *without* making presumptions of intent or causality. (Although admittedly here it is tempting to think of an Elephantine author intentionally using bow-and-arrow imagery in crafting his sayings because of how strongly it would land with his audience.)
The view that wisdom has a specific *Sitz im Leben* and function—regardless of where exactly it is to be located—has had serious implications in how wisdom texts have been treated vis-à-vis other forms of literature. For one, there is the issue similar to the one above about wisdom occupying a distinct location in the scribal culture. This view, however, has been challenged of late. David Carr, in his seminal volume *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, maintains an educational setting for biblical wisdom literature, *but* he makes it clear that this should, by no means, indicate that these texts should be treated as separate from other texts. He summarizes earlier views and the problematic implications thusly:

In the past, most arguments for educational use of books like Proverbs have been connected to the anachronistic assumptions about ‘schools’ … and most scholars have assumed that books like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes were distinguished from other biblical books by their educational purpose. As a result, such scholars have misinterpreted the thematic and terminological distinctiveness of such ‘wisdom’ books … The comparative evidence I have worked with so far suggests that the concept of ‘wisdom literature’ can be misleading for both biblical and non-biblical evidence, insofar as it suggests that didactic tales and sage instructions were separated from other forms of literature by their educational usage. Teachers in all these cultures [i.e., Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Israel] authored and (re)used a wide variety of genres of texts. Therefore, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and other Israelite wisdom texts are only an initial pointer to the educational use of other biblical texts.  

Carr does not deny the educational function or setting of wisdom, yet he makes it clear that this is no reason to separate them from other genres since they too were part of the educational training of scribes.

Carr’s point is taken well, but I would also offer the reverse: namely, that wisdom texts also functioned *outside* of their educational settings and likewise, therefore, should not be considered as something entirely distinct from the larger symbolic universe of ancient cultures. The Egyptian tradition—upon which much of these discussions in biblical circles depend in the first place—has made it increasingly clear that “wisdom” texts had a variety of uses, beyond the school. Excerpts, brief quotes, and allusions from the instructions appear in a number of texts from funerary stele, letters, to other types of literature such as the journey-narrative demonstrating a

larger audience and use of the instructional literature outside of a classroom setting.\textsuperscript{338} Similarly, entire (or near entire) copies of instructions are extant in contexts that certainly do not convey a pedagogic (either school or familial) context.\textsuperscript{339} A conversation between two scribes in a satirical letter (well-known by Egyptologists) indicates that the Instructions (among other literary forms) had a much broader function than simply the classroom.\textsuperscript{340} Frederik Hagen, for example, recently remarked on this text:

The famous reference to \textit{Hordedef} in the \textit{Satirical Letter} of P. Anastasi I, where a scribe berates his colleague for not knowing his classics, provides an example of how a wisdom poem would not only have been learned—and the passage specifies that it was learned by heart—but also how it would have been used in a functional way: to signal one’s learning, which could be mobilized in support of one’s arguments in appropriate contexts.\textsuperscript{341}

What Hagen is getting at here is that persistent problem of what we mean when we call something “literary.”

Antonio Loprieno has been a leading voice among Egyptologists dealing with the issue of a theory for literature, especially as it relates to function and social setting, asking rhetorically: “Could one posit for Ancient Egypt a textual domain that transcended its purported \textit{Sitz im Leben} and aspired to general statements about man, gods, or life that were not bound to a specific

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\textsuperscript{339} See, for example, the so-called “Loyalist Instruction,” a reworked version of which appears on in a funerary inscription (Cairo CG 20538) of one named Shetepibra in Abydos from the late Middle Kingdom. On this text see Stephen Quirke, \textit{Egyptian Literature 1800 BC: Questions and Readings} (London: Golden House, 2004), 108–11.
\textsuperscript{341} Hagen, \textit{Ptahhotep}, 241–42.
\end{flushright}
instructional, religious, or political aim?” Loprieno, following renowned scholar Jan Assmann, further argues that “it was necessary to view Egyptian literature not only as instrument for the codification of religious or social rules, but also as autonomous cultural ‘discourse.’” Thus, in response to the search for functional settings of literature which dominated Egyptological studies through the 1970s, Loprieno questions the genre-to-function orientation towards Egyptian literature—as exemplified, for example, in Lichtheim’s volumes for which Loprieno is writing—and adds:

Beginning with Assmann’s article ... scholars privileged a look at Egyptian literature as exemplary discourse in which function is sacrificed to the advantage of fiction, with the tacit understanding that individuals or facts described in these texts do not have an immediate real life correspondence, but rather offer a paradigmatic perspective on Egyptian society and civilization as a whole.

If we transfer this notion over to wisdom literature and Ahiqar specifically, then a better appreciation of the text in light of its function and relationship to society arises. The narrative and wisdom sayings are as much about inculcating right behavior—regardless of where we locate it, i.e. father-to-son or teacher-to-student—as they are about a careful articulation, and thus a paradigmatic reaffirmation, of values already held by a particular community. This holds true even as the particularities of a given text, such as Ahiqar, comprise a critique of these very same values. The sayings, then, are not simply a collation of wise responses or guidelines toward a particular worldview; they also represent a basic expression of that worldview, even while they, at times, seek to undermine or reevaluate it. Indeed, in Ahiqar, as with several other so-called “wisdom

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344 Loprieno, Foreword, xxiii.
345 Assmann, “Der literarische Texte im Alten Ägypten.”
346 Loprieno, Foreword, xxvi.
347 Put another way, Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 77, states: “All texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain often
texts,” there is a recognizable tension related to these values and how one deals with life’s circumstances, though the extent to which this tension is expressed varies from text to text.

In sum, the problems surrounding the concept of “wisdom literature” as a genre or literary tradition are numerous. For the most part the status quo in scholarship is still one of uncertainty, but there is a growing acceptance of this unease for the sake of the term’s heuristic usefulness. Despite all the baggage that comes with the term “wisdom,” we may continue its use simply as a matter of convenience, although how we use it must still be clarified. For one, there is the needed caveat that this convenience only applies to the current scholarly conversation and should not indicate any ancient awareness. To speak, then, of “wisdom scholars” or “biblical wisdom scholarship” as I have already done in previous sections, is to identify a particular area of scholarly discourse and should not be taken as a normative outlook on the primary literature that is discussed therein. Similarly, to label *Ahiqar* as a “wisdom” text immediately brings to mind for the scholarly audience a set of readily identifiable, though formally and thematically diverse, texts from various ancient traditions, even if the methodological basis for why they are brought together in the first place remains unclear. In other words, I agree for the most part with Goff who still finds that “the label wisdom still has value as a literary category,” who at the same time cautions that “that one must acknowledge that wisdom is an inductive category based on our reading of ancient literature, rather than a precise class of texts that was rigidly defined by their authors.”

Furthermore, the above discussion makes it abundantly clear why a more precise generic designation is desirable, if anything because it allows more incisive comparisons and a more accurate estimation of *Ahiqar*’s literary constitution. Just because I have identified *Ahiqar* as an “instruction,” however, does not suggest that the Egyptian texts should be the primary context for complex and contestatory relations. In that sense, texts both mirror and generate social realities, are constituted by and constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform.”

348 Goff, “Qumran Wisdom Literature,” 318. The use of the word “category” is deliberate as it should not be equated with genre. Goff (at p. 333), for example, maintains that “when using the term ‘wisdom’ … one should not confuse scholarly terminology with historical reality … it is better to recognize that they [i.e. wisdom and Apocalypticism] are categories, and thus, while helping us make sense of ancient texts, constitute projections onto the material. Here Goff is following comments by George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion,” in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (ed. B. G. Wright and L. Wills; SBLSymS 35; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 17–37, at 36.
interpretation. Other instructions or instruction-like texts from outside of the Egyptian tradition can be equally as important. The emphasis I have placed on it here is mostly as a corrective to the previous century of study that has all but ignored the correspondences. When it comes to comparison with an eye towards an ancient awareness the genre identification should not constrain our estimation of the text in terms of intertextuality, in its socio-political or ideological significance, or in its function and purpose. The primary objective of this study is to treat Ahiqar as a piece of literature in its own right, and genre (as well as mode) is certainly a contributing factor for how we approach a given text. However, by making such a generic statement this does not, by any means, explain away every feature as dependent upon some earlier attestation. Genre, as we have, seen is not prescriptive. There is plenty in Ahiqar that is unique, whether in its form, content, or in the way in which it articulates its ideas, and familiarity with Ahiqar’s genre is not always necessary to have a full appreciation of the text. Treating Ahiqar on its own terms and interpreting the individual passages in light the parameters of the text itself should take priority, and only secondarily should we consider outside evidence. Even then, it should be more as a guiding tool, rather than a determinative force.

2.5 Intertextuality and Literary Awareness

I turn now to the notion of intertextuality, along with the related aspect of awareness, both of which have been referenced already but need to be explored further in order to show how these concepts will underline the comparative method applied throughout this study. Intertextuality is often brought up as a theoretical basis for establishing lines of literary dependency among a number of texts. When two texts are being discussed in terms of genealogical relationship, the fact that they exhibit similar generic features increases the likelihood of a literary awareness. The significance of genre identification (cf. Genette’s architextuality) for mapping out genealogical connections is, therefore, important. By labelling Ahiqar as “instruction” in a particularly Egyptian framework, I am explicitly giving consideration to how the Aramaic text participates in—conforms, adapts, undermines, advances, etc.—this literary tradition.

Because of Ahiqar’s striking similarity with the biblical wisdom literature, for example, recent efforts have been made to trace genealogical lines between the two. This has been done with great dexterity by Michael Weigl in his recent commentary, and it is worth including a brief
summary of his conclusions. During the course of his commentary Weigl notes an overwhelming number of parallels in form or theme with the biblical and early Jewish literature, and, to his credit, he often does so without being weighed down by issues of dependency or literary influence between *Ahiqar* and the biblical texts. Instead, he often focuses on comparing the formal and literary features in order to demonstrate the qualities and character of *Ahiqar* by way of distinction.\(^{349}\) For example, he argues that the *Ahiqar* sayings, while dealing with abstract concepts such as “wisdom,” do so in a much more limited way than in the Proverbs.\(^{350}\)

Still, Weigl does provide a summary wherein he assesses any “genetic” connection between *Ahiqar* and specific Hebrew texts, especially those generally identified as Jewish wisdom literature.\(^{351}\) Weigl is responsibly cautious, though, and fronts his arguments with recognition of the difficulties inherent in attempting to assign literary dependence.\(^{352}\) In particular, he aims to avoid the trap of “occasional topical contacts” but rather only to speak of influences and dependencies when it cannot be questioned.\(^{353}\) In this regard, Weigl prefers to pose questions not of entire texts (i.e., whether the book of Proverbs used/knew or did not use/know *Ahiqar*), but rather of specific passages or collections (e.g., the Hezekian collection, Prov 25–29). This point is

\(^{349}\) It must be said that while not bringing up the issue of dependency overmuch, Weigl’s commentary on the columns incorporates hundreds of citations of biblical texts that may (or may not!) share formal, linguistic, or topical features with *Ahiqar*, from entire verses and lengthy units, to phrases, idioms, syntagms, even the occasion of just a single, albeit rare, lexeme. The accumulation of so many references certainly weighs down his analysis and dilutes the significance than any single parallel might actually have (aside from the frequent, though in relative terms rare, times that he offers significant assessment of it). Cf. Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 1, who says of the comparative method that the point is not to engage in so-called “parallelomania” where every correspondence need be cited as if it must have some connection, but for the purpose that through “the identification of the traditions utilized by a particular writer and in the analysis of the way in which he used them, one may gain a richer appreciation of the unique contribution of that writer.”


\(^{351}\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 733–56, with subsections on individual books: Proverbs (738–45); Qoheleth (745–48); Ben Sira (749–51); Job and Psalms (752–53); the Joseph story (753–54); and Jeremiah (754–56).


supplemented by Weigl’s other primary thesis concerning the extended compositional strategies evident in *Ahiqar*.\(^{354}\) This trend towards larger compositional units can also be observed, according to Weigl, in Proverbs, particularly in chapters 1–9 and in the “Words of the Wise” (22:17–24:22). To wit, Weigl’s survey of “genetic” relationships comprises a column-by-column list of specific textual units that fit nicely with corresponding passages from Proverbs; for example, the “Kings-sayings” in column 6 of *Ahiqar* (84–92) are paired with select passages from Proverbs which correspond to each individual saying (e.g. Prov 16:10–15).\(^{355}\) In sum, Weigl blankly states that when there are distinguishable parallels of form, content, and progression (i.e., sequence) in a given textual unit, then a genetic relationship can be assumed; these “direkte Kontakt-punkten” are, however, relatively limited;\(^{356}\) yet there is still an observable preponderance of correspondences or echoes (though not necessarily direct parallels). These are especially prominent in the Hezekian collection (Prov 25–29), about which Weigl suggests—based on his previously established dating for *Ahiqar* based on linguistic criteria—that they (*Ahiqar* and Prov 25–29) were compiled concurrently, and interestingly he even intimates that the relationship between the various parts of *Ahiqar* and Proverbs may not be one-way (*Ahiqar* → Proverbs), but instead could be reciprocal.\(^{357}\)

Weigl, for the most part, applies the same methodology in evaluating the connections between *Ahiqar* and the other biblical texts. With Qoheleth as a whole, Weigl is a bit more firm: “Die (oder Teile der) aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche müssen dem Autor zur Verfügung gestanden sein, der aus ihnen selektiv auswählte und kritisch kommentierte, was seinen theologischen Zielsetzungen am ehesten entsprach.”\(^{358}\) As for Ben Sira, Weigl cites the many issues that problematize efforts at trying to determine a relationship, not the least of which is that Ben Sira clearly drew on a wide variety of sources—Jewish and non-Jewish. Thus, Weigl refrains from

\(^{354}\) See Weigl’s summary statement on this in, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 740; cf. “Compositional Strategies,” 81–82.

\(^{355}\) The specific connections noted by Weigl (pp. 740–42) need not be listed here as they will be addressed *ad loc.* during the course of this study.

\(^{356}\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 743.

\(^{357}\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 744.

\(^{358}\) Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 748.
making any bold statements because “der Irrtumsfaktor ist entsprechend hoch.”

The book of Job also has a few specific passages that may indicate a connection, but not enough in Weigl’s mind to speak securely of an Ahiqar-reception. The same goes for many of the Hebrew Psalms and the Joseph story. Weigl’s conclusions are, for the most part, reasonable and the implications of appreciating Ahiqar as a direct influence on the Hebrew materials will no doubt be felt by subsequent generations of scholars.

Often, however, and especially in the ancient world, establishing these lines with any degree of certainty is difficult, despite the generic similarities. Yet, the resemblances remain nonetheless. For this reason, when approaching ancient texts, and Ahiqar specifically, a looser approach to intertextuality is needed. According to Kristeva, intertextuality, “in its most basic meaning … denotes an awareness of the ‘universe of texts’ that surrounds and influences the creation of any new text”. Rather than see Ahiqar along intertextual lines of transmission, it would be better to speak of a “literary awareness.” This does not mean awareness of specific texts, but rather that behind the text and its reception we may surmise the implicit awareness that it is participating in something bigger than itself. The goal, therefore, is to approach Ahiqar not as

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359 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 750. Ben Sira has a long scholarly history in terms of its relationship to Ahiqar, but the studies generally relied on the Syriac version rather than the Elephantine one (hence its absence from this review of scholarship). Add to this the fact that Ben Sira’s relationship to an Egyptian literary setting is already made explicit in the prologue as well as from a scholarly perspective in terms of the (somewhat debated) relationship between the Jewish wisdom text and the Demotic instructions of Ankhsheshonqê and, in particular, Papyrus Insinger. The scholarly conversation on Ben Sira’s connection of Egypt is beyond the scope of this study. I refer simply to the primary argument for a direct relationship by Jack Sanders, Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom.

360 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 752.

361 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 752–54. Interestingly, Weigl also points to a particular passage in the sayings (107-109) which recalls the scene in Gen 39:12 where Potiphar’s wife grabs the hem of Joseph’s garment as he flees. Weigl points out that linguistically there is an exact equivalent in Ahiqar to the Hebrew formulation, as well as a strong connection in terms of the scenario (though hypothetical in the case of Ahiqar). Weigl continues by noting a pair of other formulations in the Joseph story (39:4, 6, 22; and 41:40, 44) that mimic closely sayings in Ahiqar (191-193 and 170-171, respectively). Consequently, Weigl states: “Damit scheint es durchaus im Bereich des Möglichen zu liegen, dass die Josefs-Geschichte zumindest mit den relevanten Einheiten der aramäischen Spruchsammlung in einer direkten genetischen Beziehung stand.

362 Citation from Hagen, Ptahhotep, 143 following Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality; cf. J. Kristeva,
dependent upon any one text or even tradition in any prescriptive sense, but rather to cautiously suppose a “textual universe” based on a number of salient factors, including, but not limited, to generic, linguistic, chronological/geographical, material, and cultural. This does leave us in relative state of ambiguity, even subjectivity, when it comes to bringing in outside materials; yet the benefits outweigh the costs for it allows some freedom in the comparative method that is not wholly dependent upon the strictures of authorial intent.

For this reason, my immediate concern in terms of comparison with other materials has little to do with establishing genealogical relationships between Ahiqar and other texts, even if at times it will flirt with the possibility. Though I may agree in most cases with Weigl’s views concerning Ahiqar and the biblical record, the conclusions are still built on too loose a foundation. Moreover, if we were to give priority to genealogical model of intertextuality, then an endeavor to understand the message and meaning of Ahiqar would be little served by Hebrew texts because they are, for the most part, chronologically secondary to Ahiqar—Weigl’s theory about reciprocity between Proverbs and Ahiqar notwithstanding—and thus would be more beneficial for interpreting the receiving texts (i.e. the biblical texts) than the donor text (i.e. Ahiqar), or at best useful in an effort to answer “the broader question of the book of Ahiqar’s own composition, transmission, and reception history.”

Tawny Holm, in a recent analysis of Daniel in light of its generic parallels, writes: “The relationships between Daniel and its analogues do not necessarily fit into the narrow boundaries of intertextuality, but rather suggest the existence of common structural models of narrative and motifs, which shaped independent processes of textualization in these different literary traditions.” I could say the same of Ahiqar. Like with Daniel, there is much to be gained by a comparative analysis of Ahiqar with similar literature that in no way depends on “narrow boundaries of intertextuality.” At the same time, we can still appreciate the similarities and shared rhetorical

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364 See Chapter 1.
and/or generic formulae that are detectable across a vast body of thematically or structurally related literature. In this regard, when we speak of *Ahiqar* in terms of the Egyptian instructions genre, the issue is not one of *dependence* in any direct or exclusive sense, but rather the recognition of a shared “structural model” and a fluid set of common motifs associated with a sage transferring his wisdom. If we wish to speak of the composition, therefore, we may—more safely than speaking of texts on the desk in front of the scribe—speak of an *independent* “textualization” conditioned by a literary *awareness* that is not necessarily dependent on any extant text in particular, but instead on a basic set of parameters or expectations with which an ancient scribe began when undertaking his compositional endeavor. The same outlook applies to a more reader-oriented analysis, as well. This notion of literary awareness extends beyond even those texts which may or may not have any genealogical connection, however distant. Because literature implies a notion of “discourse”—in which author, text, and audience alike engage—comparison with external materials is “allowed” for teasing out possibilities of meaning.

Nevertheless, we must also reckon with the fact that the literary and interpretive horizon of a text is not restricted to specific genres or independent traditions. This point is particularly important for the Aramaic *Ahiqar* given that it was found with a number of otherwise unrelated documents, including a couple of literary texts. The Aramaic Bisitun text and the Hi-Hor papyrus are both of a seemingly different literary character than that of *Ahiqar*, yet, at the same time, there are some noticeable correspondences and, more importantly, due to their materiality it is reasonable to suggest that they shared audiences. Reading *Ahiqar* alongside these two texts, among a number of others from Egypt, will shed new light on how *Ahiqar* may have been received in its 5th c. Elephantine context. *Ahiqar* is not the only testament to a vibrant Aramaic tradition in Egypt during the latter half of the first millennium B.C.E. Though these other witnesses—e.g. Sheikh Fadl, Papyrus Amherst—are more chronologically and generically distant, when brought together with *Ahiqar* we can, nevertheless, observe some interesting affinities. We might also consider evidence from the Hebrew Bible, though only tentatively. The reception of *Ahiqar* in later Jewish audiences—such as readers of Tobit—would no doubt have made connections between *Ahiqar* and any number of other texts, regardless of genre. The connections are often instigated by individual elements. For example, much work has recently been done on the archetypal and symbolic function of Sennacherib, who appears in literature from Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia well after the Neo-Assyrian Empire had fallen. We will consider these “memories” of Sennacherib
in chapter 5, but Seth Richardson’s comments about how memory and associations work in readers regardless of any actual literary dependence among the sources are worth noting:

That the stories [about Sennacherib] do not directly reference one another is beside the point: these were “writerly texts,” with associations made by readers and hearers, not by writers and tellers. It would be unimaginable, for instance, that anyone of the fourth century B.C.E. would have known the words of Ahiqar, but not of Isaiah, or vice-versa … the name “Sennacherib” in one would have produced echoes of the other. The generic diversity of the story-complex, its integration at so many different levels of discourse, allowed it to attain its strength and resilience through referentiality.\textsuperscript{365}

While is difficult to tap into the power that stories and memories had in an ancient audience’s mind, an awareness on the part of the reader should also extend beyond generic conventions, even beyond the literary record itself (though, admittedly, that is mostly what we as scholars are working with). Spiegel, for example, argues:

At work in shaping a literary text is a host of unstated desires, beliefs, misunderstandings, and interests which impress themselves upon the work, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, but which arise from pressures that are social and not merely intertextual. Historians must insist, I think, on the importance of history itself as an active constituent of the elements which themselves constitute the text.

Although Spiegelformulates this in terms of a text’s “inscription”—not to be confused with “written”—her words carry equal force when weighed against an audience’s interaction with the text in light of not only their literary prowess but the various social and historical forces which weigh upon them.\textsuperscript{366}

\subsection*{2.6 Conclusion}

The above analyses have demonstrated that in terms of its literary, formal, and generic character, there is a lot going on with the \textit{Book of Ahiqar}. Limiting any reading to a single interpretive strategy, therefore, will leave one wanting and is a disservice to the text. In many ways, the 

\textsuperscript{365} Seth Richardson, “First world event,” 463.

\textsuperscript{366} I have already spoken to some of the pertinent historical factors (Chapter 1) and the theoretical basis for assessing the historical context of literature (above, section 2.3.4), and thus need not expound upon it here.
observations in this chapter have both anticipated and underlined the readings offered in the subsequent chapters. At the same time, however, the chapter can stand on its own as an expansive introduction to Ahiqar that both reveals its literary art as well as eliciting interest in the various possibilities for comparison. The contours of the narrative allow for multiple reading strategies, but two aspects become prominent nonetheless: the opposition between Nadan and Nabusumiskun and the ambiguous role of the king. The sayings demonstrate a wide variety of forms and themes, though there is also a demonstrable amount of continuity; moreover, several of the themes overlap and intersect with each other impressing upon their respective meanings. A careful reading strategy attentive to the contextual impact of each saying provides a revealing method for elucidating an often difficult text. The overall structure of Ahiqar resembles closely the ancient instruction genre, most prominently exemplified in the Egyptian record. Ahiqar’s self-presentation via a dramatic frame narrative allows for constant interplay or dialogue between the instructive messages of the sayings themselves and the circumstances of the narrative, all of which can subsequently be weighed against a handful of examples from the same genre that closely resemble our text.

Still, in taking a comparative literary approach, we are better served by a loose understanding of intertextuality—that is, without any genealogical or generic presumptions. Ahiqar’s diversity of form, theme, and ethic invokes a broad spectrum of written materials from Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia. “Wisdom” as an amorphous mode of literature, for example, is prominent among this textual universe, though Ahiqar’s association therewith should not be taken as prescriptive. Aramaic literature from Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Hebrew literature from Palestine during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods are also significant. Finally, a material concern for the Ahiqar papyri should not be forgotten when it comes to comparative textual analysis. The immediate historical context of the Ahiqar papyri and the social and political circumstances which (may have) impressed upon its readership are salient factors in offering a close reading of the text. The subsequent analyses will make frequent, though hopefully not excessive, recourse to external sources, which will serve as interpretive lenses for understanding Ahiqar. They are, however, of a secondary order as the primary goal is internal exegesis and explication. The keys questions remain: what is Ahiqar saying/doing? How is Ahiqar saying/doing this relative to comparative literary materials? What impact might these messages have had on Ahiqar’s reading audience? It is to these questions I now turn.
CHAPTER THREE

“The Ambush of the Mouth”
Virtue, Ethics, and Practical Instruction in Ahiqar

3.1 A Thematic Approach to Ahiqar

Ahiqar, 166–168a:
“A leopard happened upon a goat, and it [the goat] was naked. And the leopard answered and said to the goat, ‘Come and let me cover you with my skin.’ The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, ‘Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!’ – For [a leopard] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.”

What is the meaning of this fable? What message is it trying to convey and what are the underlying principles upon which this message rests? If we assume that the audience is sympathetic with the goat, then the immediate response is one of fear. Leopards, as the text unnecessarily makes explicit, are predators and goats are prey. If this is a truism, then why create this mini-drama? We might consider that the leopard appears to be helpful, offering assistance to the goat. But, again we remember that the leopard is dangerous. The takeaway, then, is that we should be cautious, even when someone seems friendly. Notice also the way in which the leopard is trying to consume the goat. This is no rapacious attack. Rather, the leopard is trying to trick the goat into speaking its own demise by assenting to the leopard’s suggestion. A quick, uncalculated response would spell doom for the goat. On the other hand, a careful consideration of the leopard’s exact words reveals the obvious malicious intent of the leopard’s suggestion. By offering to cover “with my skin” the leopard most certainly means that he will eat the goat, who would then be “covered” by the leopard’s skin. The goat, it seems, is wise to her natural enemy’s false pretenses. So, while the general ethic of this fable may be one of caution, a more precise and practical takeaway is possible: be careful of what you say and of what others say. We may be able to take the lesson even further. The leopard’s offer and attempt to make the goat say something foolish only works if the goat is preoccupied by his needs. The attention to the goat’s nakedness suggests that the goat is in need of something, which, incidentally, the leopard feigns to offer. Yet, the goat, in addition to cautious speech, demonstrates the virtue of contentment. Even though he is “naked” (presumably hairless),
he still has his skin, hence his retort “Do not take my hide from me!” She may not have much, but it is something. Thus, a secondary moral to the fable may be that if you try to gain too much, then you could end up losing whatever little it is you already have.

The questions posed above and their answers apply not only to this fable but to the entire Book of Ahiqar. This chapter, therefore, will discuss the basic message and underlying ethic of Ahiqar. Moreover, it will consider one of the major themes—the power of speech—as an exemplar of the message and ethic. Much of the advice in Ahiqar is preoccupied with the power and danger of one’s words, which can have unintended consequences that are often detrimental to the speaker. Discretion, then, is key. The power and danger of words are exponentialized in the person of the king, whose voice has divine backing and thus should not be challenged, at least not openly. The exhortation for careful speech speaks to the primary ethic which guides the text. A cautious attitude is paramount for avoiding conflict and disaster. Furthermore, this caution should be exercised in all aspects of daily life and around everyone, including one’s own friends and family. Finally, I will elucidate the primary virtues which the text seeks to instill in its audience. In the case of Ahiqar, contentment and the related virtue of humility are the most important.

3.2 Loyalty, Friendship, and Other Topics in Ahiqar

The Book of Ahiqar, in both its narrative and sayings, addresses a wide variety of topics, many of which are common among other instructional texts from the ancient Near East. A quick survey of the themes in Ahiqar will demonstrate its diversity in terms of content as well as its resemblances to comparative literature from Egypt and elsewhere. That nearly every saying in Ahiqar has some parallel to outside literature is, on the one hand, not unexpected given the ubiquity of several themes. The aim of these comparisons, therefore, is not to draw any connecting lines of influence, but only to comment on how Ahiqar addresses these universal themes in a fashion that is either similar or contrary to comparable materials. Nevertheless, we can discern a number of distinctive aspects and idiosyncrasies in Ahiqar. For example, we have already observed in the previous chapter that the fables in Ahiqar are a unique feature when the text is compared to other ancient instructions, despite the fact that fables were otherwise quite popular. We will now run through the text again, but this time with a content-focus, to see if we can tease out any distinguishing features.
Several of the sayings are similar to those found in other instructions in their use of contrasts. A prominent example is the opposition between the “righteous” (זדיק) and the “wicked” (רשע) or, alternatively, the “bad/good” (לָשׁוֹן/מַשֵּׁי). In 103–104 the “righteous” will be successful in defense against “his attackers” (ᑎᔅᑎNonNull); whereas “a city of wicked ones” (穰NonNull) will be “plundered” ( WINDOWS). The saying in 99–100 (cf. 171b–172a), though fragmentary, juxtaposes the “good man” (_ALLOCate) against the “bad man” (ALLOCATE). The negative/positive contrast extends to several other areas. In 80, for example, we read: “[My] son do not damn the day until you have seen the [nig]ht.” Another saying in the column juxtaposes how good and bad life can be: “In a multitude of sons let your heart not rejoice, and in their paucity [do not mourn].”¹ A similar contrast is made about the king, who can be both “soft” (רך) and “sharp” (ש ¶).² The sayings in 123 and 148, though both incomplete, contrast “bitterness” (שמר; מַר) and “sweetness” (maxLength; ש ¶). Even the fables themselves are built upon the assumed difference in natural behavior between the predatory animal and the domestic one (e.g., 166–171a).³

Ahiqar’s advice is concerned with more than just the moral, but also speaks to the mundane, day-to-day of life. Financial and economic matters, for example, are also frequent in Ahiqar. These sayings will be explored in great detail in Chapter 4 and so I will not provide any analysis or comparison here, but, briefly, the specific topics addressed are: poverty (89a; 141*); contract work (99–100; 127); loans (107–108; 129–131); wealth (137; 206); and deposits (191–192).

¹ Line 90b, following Porten and Yardeni in the lacuna.
² Line 84b; see further discussion of king below.
³ Most of these contrasts find parallels in other literature, especially Proverbs. I have opted not to provide them so as not to be repetitive since several of these passages will be given further treatment elsewhere. However, on the righteous/wicked contrast in Ahiqar vis-à-vis Proverbs see, e.g., John Day, “Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel,” in Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine (ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 55–70, esp. 63; Bryan Estelle, “Proverbs and Ahiqar: Revisited,” The Biblical Historian 1 (2004): 1–19, esp. 12; Michael V. Fox, Proverbs 10–31 (AB 18b; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. 767; and for the “righteous/wicked” contrast in Proverbs and Hebrew wisdom generally see, e.g., Sun Myung Lyu, Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs (FAW 2.55; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).
Discipline of children as well as servants is the topic of a single passage in *Ahiqar*. Notably these lines bear the closest resemblance to a similar passage in *Proverbs*. The two are worth setting side-by-side:

**Ahiqar 176–177**

Do not spare your child from the staff.  
If not, you will not be able to save him.  
If I strike you, my son, you will not die.  
But if I leave you to your own heart…

**Proverbs 23:13–14**

Do not withhold discipline from your child;  
If you beat them with a rod, they will not die.  
If you beat them with the rod,  
Then you will save their lives from Sheol.

Besides the basic thematic connection, we can witness several lexical correspondences, such that the two passages are generally considered to be different expressions of the same saying.4 Lindenberger, for example, comments: “Though parental discipline and the desirability of corporal punishment are common enough themes in wisdom literature, the close verbal similarity … is greater than could be accounted for by similarity of theme alone.”5 The following saying in *Ahiqar* (178) also encourages corporal punishment as a means of disciplining servants.

Among the more outstanding topics, however, are loyalty and friendship, and these issues are raised in both the narrative and sayings. In the previous chapter we observed how Nabusumiskun’s loyalty to Ahiqar is contrasted by Nadan’s disloyalty. Also, in an ironic manner both Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun disobey the king’s direct orders (a charge for which both had been falsely accused), but ultimately their actions prove beneficial—and incidentally loyal—to the Assyrian state. The loyalty demonstrated between Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun also raises the issue of friendship. Nabusumiskun, though never directly called Ahiqar’s friend, nevertheless remains faithful to his colleague who has suffered disgrace. His character, thus, exemplifies a fairly common trope among wisdom instructions, namely the measure of a true friend is the one who

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5 Lindenberger, “Ahiqar,” in *OTP* 2:487; he is cautious about suggesting a direct literary relationship based on this singular example, adding that “it is likely that some common oral or written tradition underlies both.”
stands by you in a time of need. Proverbs 18:24, for example, states: “Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one’s nearest kin.” This saying could hardly be more apt to the situation Ahiqar is facing, where his “nearest kin” has betrayed him and yet his “true friend” remained faithful. Ahiqar even speaks directly to the closeness of his relationship with Nabusumiskun, likening it that of brothers (49). On this, Kottsieper has made the observation: “It cannot be overlooked that the meeting between Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun is the main part of the story—it runs … nearly over two columns. In contrast to this, the plot against Ahiqar was told in only two lines.” This conclusions must, of course, be tempered against the fact that the story is incomplete, but it remains a valid point at least relative to the length of the other extant “scenes.” The friendship between Nabusumiskun and Ahiqar appears to take center stage.

However, we cannot overlook the other side of the coin, namely Nadan’s betrayal. Indeed, the sayings also speak against trusting one’s intimates, from “colleagues” (כָּל־הָאָדָם; 99–100, 185) to “friends” (רַחֲבֵּר; 141) and, as the story also makes clear, one’s own family (139–140). Friendship is not a frequent a topic in the Egyptian instructions though it is not altogether ignored. Ptahhotep, for example, encourages the addressee to seek out a friend (in private) when they are quarreling and warns against being too familiar with the women that are attached to a friend. In Amenemhet I, the pharaoh—who was assassinated by his own advisers—warns his son: “Trust not a brother, know not a friend, make no intimates, it is worthless.” Also, the “Twelfth Instruction” in the

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7 Ingo Kottsieper, “‘Look, son, what Nadab did to Ahikaros…’: The Aramaic Ahiqar Tradition and its Relationship to the Book of Tobit,” in The Dynamics of Language and Exegesis at Qumran (ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz; FAT 2.35; Göttingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 145–67, at 158.

8 The issue of friendship and reciprocity is raised in the Babylonian Counsels ll. 150–158, where faithfulness is encouraged of the addressee; interestingly there may even be a warning against trusting friends (l. 148: “With a friend and a comrade do not speak […], unfortunately the text breaks off; cf. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 105.

9 On “probing the character of a friend” see Ptahhotep maxim 33 (Lichtheim, AEL 1:72); on avoiding women see maxim 18 (p. 68).

10 Amenemhet I 1.4–5 in Lichtheim, AEL 1:136.
Demotic instruction *Papyrus Insinger* deals exhaustively with the issue of trust, and unequivocally advises against trusting other people, including one’s own friend and family.\(^{11}\)

With Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun, though, the issue extends beyond mere friendship, but concerns the notion of reciprocity. Ahiqar asks Nabusumiskun to return the favor that he had once shown him, saying: “Just as I have done for you ( ))) so also do for me ( )))” (52). Ahiqar further describes that he had previously “supported” ( )) Nabusumiskun “as a man does with his brother” ( ). Notably, among the Aramaic Egyptian documents, we find an almost exact parallel between Ahiqar’s expression to Nabusumiskun. In a letter to his sister Reia, Makkabanit claims that he had taken care of Harwodji—either a relative or friend—and claimed “as much as I am doing ( )) for Harwodji, thus may Banit do for me ( )).”\(^{12}\) Bezalel Porten first drew attention to this parallel with *Ahiqar*, saying: “As Ahiqar asked that his action be reciprocated by Nabusumiskun, so Makkabanit prayed that his good deed be rewarded by the goddess Banit.”\(^{13}\) In the letter there is an expected reciprocity among friends and family and much of the language in this correspondence is paralleled in *Ahiqar*. Makkabanit had been accused by his sister Reia of not “supporting” ( )) Harwodji, who apparently was apparently sick or incapacitated. Makkabnit responds by saying that his two servants were “supporting” him and thus he tells his sister, “as you could do for him ( )) so I am doing for him ( )).” Even more, just as Ahiqar characterized this reciprocal relationship using familial terms, so also did

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\(^{11}\) See especially *Insinger* 12.18–19: “One does not discover the heart of a friend if one has not consulted him in anxiety; One does not discover the heart of a brother if one has not begged [from him] in want” (Lichtheim, *AEL* 3:195).

\(^{12}\) The Makkabinit letters are among the so-called “Hermopolis Papyri” which, though not found at Elephantine (but Hermopolis as the name indicates) date to the early 5\(^{th}\) c. B.C.E. and were intended for delivery to neighboring Syene (= Aswan) and thus refer to Arameans with whom the Judean community at Elephantine regularly interacted. Makkabinit is the name of one of the letter-writers. They were first edited and translated by E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); translations here are from Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 98 (= TAD A2.3.4–8). It is not clear what Harwodji’s precise relationship to Makkabinit was; the name is obviously Egyptian, but that does not preclude some kind of family connection; see note below and discussion of names in Chapter 4.

Makkabanit ask his sister, “Is Harwodj not my brother?”\(^{14}\) The exchange between Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun and the expectations of friendship and reciprocity would not have been lost on the Aramaic-speaking audience.

In *Ahiqar*, we also find the negative side of reciprocity, that is, where the one who does evil has it returned upon him. Line 126, for example, reads: “[Do not stretch] your bow and do not mount your arrow at a righteous person, lest the gods come to his aid and return it [the arrow] upon you.” Interestingly, the reciprocity in this scenario is not an automatic response, but involves the divine who returns evil with evil.\(^{15}\) Unfortunately the Aramaic narrative cuts off before we find out what happens to Nadan, who had acted wickedly. However, the passage in Tobit that describes Nadan’s downfall does so using language reminiscent of this saying in *Ahiqar*:

> See, my son, what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar. Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself and was destroyed. (Tob 14:10)

The narrative preface in the Demotic *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqe* likewise deals with the issue of betrayal in response to goodwill, and it is represented in a very similar manner to Ahiqar’s story where a young man who was “brought to the palace when [he] had nothing in the world” attempts to kill the one who showed him such favor.\(^{16}\)

This brief presentation of the various topics, with special attention to friendship and loyalty, only touches the surface of *Ahiqar*’s message, and many of the individual sayings and themes mentioned here—and several that were not—will receive extensive treatment in the following chapters. However, a more critical engagement with a specific thematic thread that runs throughout the text is desirable, namely the advice concerning speech or words, which is likely the most prominent topic in *Ahiqar*.

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\(^{14}\) This kind of “brotherly” language among those who are not strictly brothers—either relatives or friends—is also found among the Demotic papyri at Elephantine, though dating later in the Ptolemaic period; see P. Berlin 13544 (text C17 in Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 323-24, esp. n. 9).

\(^{15}\) The issue of retributive justice and the gods’ role will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

\(^{16}\) *Ankhsheshonqe* 1.11–12 (Lichtheim, *AEL* 3:161); in *Ankhsheshonqe* it is the Pharaoh who had shown favor but was repaid with betrayal by both Ankhsheshonqe (3.21) and another court official Harsiese (1.9–15).
3.3 Speech

The weightiness of words is a frequent topic among ancient instructions, but for Ahiqar careful attention to one’s speech is crucial. From its opening line we find an emphasis on the importance of words and, moreover, their pedagogic intent: “[The beginning of] the words of Ahiqar by name, a wise scribe and a maher, which he taught to his son …” The remainder of text is permeated by a concern for correctness in speaking, by the contents of one’s words, as well as by a marked prominence of orolinguistic imagery. About one-third of the approximately 115 sayings relates to speech or includes terms associated with speaking such as the mouth, tongue, lips, words, speech, or lies. There are also a few sayings that do not directly mention speaking, yet their imagery and/or idiom implies such a connection. In no less than two of the sayings columns (6 and 9), speech or words function as the Leitmotif which connects nearly every other topic addressed in the respective column. In several other clusters of sayings devoted to one issue or another, we can almost always find a “wordy” preoccupation that affects the interpretation.

Moreover, one passage in particular, though fragmentary, demonstrates that for Ahiqar careful, discrete speech and discretion is extremely important. Lines 187–189a read:

Two things are beautiful, but the third is cherished by Shamash:
   one who drinks wine and shares it;¹⁷
   one who grasps wisdom and […]
   and one who may hear a word but will not make (it) known *

Behold! This is precious before Shamash!
   But the one who might drink wine and does not […]
   and whose wisdom fails
   and […] who declares […].

This saying, which is a doubled example of the graded numerical saying in the form $x/x + 1$, brings together three items: wine, wisdom, and words. Granted, the lines are fragmentary making precise interpretation difficult, but the first topic seems to deal with someone who receives wine and then shares it; the second about one who acquires wisdom and holds onto it; and the third about one

¹⁷ The Aramaic verb here וַיְכוֹנֶה is of uncertain etymology; Porten and Yardeni, for example, suggest “and pours it out as libation.” For a detailed discussion of this saying and its reconstruction, see Seth A. Bledsoe, “Can Ahiqar Tell Us Anything about Personified Wisdom?” *JBL* 132 (2013): 119–37, esp. 128–31.
who hears a word and does not share it. Based on analyses of numerical sayings of these type, the most important aspect is usually the third.\textsuperscript{18} Shamir Yona, following the work of Meir Haran, argues that “the list of three kinds of behavior in the aphorism in question is built upon the idea that the third item represents the \textit{ultimate quality}.”\textsuperscript{19} Yona also points out that this climactic structure is linguistically represented as well: “the tense-forms of the verbs in the first two members are active participles (drinks, acquires) while in the third member the tense form is an imperfect (and he will hear).”\textsuperscript{20} Finally, Yona observes that all three members are made up of two verbs, and while in the first two members the secondary verb is in the positive, with the third member the formula changes and we have a negative, concluding: “the first two members speak, respectively, of sharing wine and wisdom, which one should not keep to oneself. The final member, on the other hand, speaks of secrets, which are not to be shared.”\textsuperscript{21} With this in mind, then, the primary topic of concern are the “words.” Thus, that which pleases Shamash the most is one who hears something but keeps his/her mouth shut. This numerical proverb has concisely demonstrated that one of the most important issues in \textit{Ahiqar} is careful, controlled speech.

Generally speaking, we may say that a respect for words and their proper use is a fundamental concern of the sayings, but specifically we can divide the sayings about speech into five separate, though certainly overlapping, areas: (1) discretion; (2) the power of words and the


\textsuperscript{19} Shamir Yona “Shared Stylistic Patterns in the Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar and Hebrew Wisdom,” \textit{ANES} 44 (2007): 29–49, at 43–44, following Meir Haran, “The Model of the Incremental Number in its Various Forms and its Relationship to Formal Models of Parallelim,” \textit{Tarbiz} 39 (1970): 109–36, esp. 134–35 [Hebrew]. For a biblical example where it is reasonably clear that the final member is the most important, see, e.g., Prov 30:18–19 “Three things are too wonderful for me, four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky; the way of a snake on a rock; the way of a ship on the high seas; and the way of a man with a girl.” Cf. Fox, \textit{Proverbs 10–31}, at 870, who says of this passage: “the fourth item … is the epigram’s culmination.”

\textsuperscript{20} Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 44.

\textsuperscript{21} Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 45; this interpretation depends on thereconstruction of the second verb of the second member: “he acquires wisdom, and [he teaches it (בָּמַר)]”; Porten and Yardeni are more cautious, however, suggesting that it could go either direction, hence “one who masters wisdom and [shares/guards it].”
related (3) power of the king’s word; (4) good and/or godly words; and finally (5) lies and attacking words.

3.3.1 Discretion in Speech

Discretion in speech is a nearly ubiquitous theme among the ancient instructions. The Egyptian instructions, for example, promote a typological positive human-type called “the silent man.”22 Proverbs and Ben Sira also frequently advise one to be careful of his/her words.23 But for Ahiqar discretion of speech is of the utmost importance. Column 6 comprises several warnings and exhortations related to controlled speech. Line 82a, for instance, exclaims: “More than everything that is guarded, guard your mouth! And concerning that which you’ve heard, make your heart heavy.”24 The mouth is something that needs to be protected in order to prevent anything from escaping unintentionally. The last imperative “make your heart heavy” is particularly intriguing in its obscure imagery. The context indicates that is somehow related to speaking, and we should recall that “heart” (לב) often signifies the “mind” and, hence, one’s thoughts.25 We can arrive at a clearer understanding of this Aramaic phrase if we consider its possible dependence on the Egyptian idiom dns jb. In the Instruction of Amenemope we find the admonition: “Make heavy your own heart (dns jb.k), and fortify your heart, do not steer with your tongue.”26 Nili Shupak has paraphrased this line as: “keep your thoughts to yourself, do not blabber to one and all.” Similarly, in the Instruction of Any: “Make heavy the heart (dns {mn} jb), when someone speaks make no

22 See, e.g., Ptahhotep maxims 1, 3, 12, 13, 23, 24, and throughout the epilogue; Kagemni 1.3; Amenemope, chs. 3, 9, 12.
24 On “guarding” (טבט) one’s mouth, see the Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom 26: “Let your mouth be controlled and your speech be guarded (na-sir)”; translation from Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 101.
25 This is apparent even in the very same line which ends with the syntagm נברഅלאלבפ “a person (with) no heart” = someone lacking sense.
loose statement.” The Egyptian parallels make it clear that a “heavy-hearted” individual is one that has a firm grip on his words.

At the bottom of column 6 we find another metaphor for being discrete. Line 93 states: “A good vessel conceals a word in its heart, but the one that is broken has let it go outside.” Michael Weigl has pointed out that מילה “word” can have several meanings, including simply “a thing.” Thus, on the surface level the image of the “covered” pot against that of the “broken” one has a general application. However, Weigl continues, stating:

Die Polysemie von מילה und die voraus liegenden häufigen Wiederholungen des Nomens im Zusammenhang mit der Wahl des rechten Zeitpunkts für den Wortgebrauch insinuieren nun eine gewandelte Bedeutung, ebenso wie מילה und מילה eine ethische Konnotation erhalten: Das „gute Gefäß“ wird zur Chiffre für einen integren Menschen, der Anvertrautes bewahrt und nur zur angemessenen Zeit redet, während das „zerbrochene Gefäß“ zum Bild für den nicht Vertrauenswürdigen uminterpretiert wird, der alles ihm zur Bewahrung Überg ebene wie ein undichtes Gefäß an seine Umwelt weitergibt.

Weigl is no doubt correct in reading an ethical component into the saying, for as we observed above the term “good” (חס) is occasionally paired with negative aspects in contexts that are clearly moralistic in tone. The content of the sayings throughout column 6 strongly points to “word” as the most operative rendering of מילה, though other connotations are no doubt at play.

\[\text{27 Any 15, 6–7 (from P. Boulaq 4, Recto; Teaching of Any-Version B); translation is an emended version of Shupak’s, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 397.}\]
\[\text{28 As far as I know, no other scholar has brought Ahiqar together with these Egyptian examples. Other translators and interpreters (e.g., Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 88–92) connect it to the Hebrew idioms found in Exodus where Pharaoh’s heart is “made hard” (Heb. חם; 7:14, 8:11, 8:28, 9:7, 9:34 ; 10:1). The other more frequent term is מכת (4:21, 7:13, 7:22, 8:15, 9:12, 9:35, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:4, 14:8) and once we find חם (7:23). For full study of each manifestation of this expression in the Hebrew Bible see Shupak, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” passim. Lindenberger points to a passage in Counsels of Wisdom which says “Let your lips be precious” (the Akkadian uses the same root y-q-r as in Ahiqar); cf. Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar, 75, 236 n.167. For an alternative theory on the nuance of this Aramaic idiom, see John Zhu-En Wee, “The Meaning of חתם חתם in Ahiqar Saying 15,” VT 54 (2004): 556–60.}\]
\[\text{29 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 71.}\]
\[\text{30 A particularly telling example is in line 139 where the verb חתם “to go out” is used, just as in 93, to describe something “bad” (לאודיט).}\]

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Discretion also relates to the keeping of secrets. This, in fact, may be connoted by the saying in line 93 that we just examined. The first part of another saying in line 83—one of the more enigmatic sayings in an otherwise exceptionally pristine column—may have to do with “secrets” though the etymology is not certain. Perhaps the most telling example comes, ironically, from one of the most corrupt. Shamir Yona, in his study on stylistic patterns in *Ahigar* and their benefits for reconstruction and interpretation of obscure or corrupt lines, offers an ingenious reading of line 186b. Of the Aramaic we only have: [...] [...][...].

Most interpreters infer some sexual aspect, hence the translation in Porten and Yardeni “the ass mounted the jenny …” The mention of the birds, however, is unclear. Yona looks to other sayings which mention birds (e.g., *Ahigar* 82 and Qoh 10:20) and sees that typologically they refer to the hearing of a word and the subsequent dispersment of that word to others. How then are they connected here? Yona suggests that the verb is רכס רכס and not רכס רכס, thus we may read “to recline” or “to bend over” instead of “to mount.” Yona points out that this verb is specifically connected to the act of telling secret in a later Talmudic proverb (*b. Bava Mesia* 59a) where a man has to bend down for his short wife in order for her to whisper a secret in his ear. He translates the saying: “The donkey bent over to the jenny out of love … and the birds…” From this, Yona then argues:

Just as here the bending over is for the purpose of conveying information so that strangers will not hear so also in *Ahigar* the bending over of the donkey to the jenny may be understood as bending over to tell her how much he loves her rather than bending over to perform a sexual act … Presumably, the missing part of the *Ahigar* proverb told how the birds, who heard the secret conversation of the donkey with the jenny, delivered the information to others.

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31 Porten and Yardeni (following Sachau) suggest “bars”; hence “… bars of your mouth!” As for the missing words, there is a corruption here leaving room for about two or three letters which most likely make up a verb beginning with ל. Porten and Yardeni make no guess, but Weigl suggests: “Beseitige die Schärfen deines Mundes!” (AAS, 101–2).

32 Yona “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 29–49.


34 Only smudges of the very top stroke of the letter are extant and the relatively square hole in the papyrus thus allows for several letters.

35 Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 42.

36 Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 43.
This is a fantastically creative interpretation of what is an otherwise indiscernible message, and one which largely depends on evidence in Ahiqar itself, save for the connotation of the verb.\footnote{The specific image evoked here is also reminiscent of a Babylonian fable: “When a lusty stallion (sīšū) was mounting a jenny-ass, as he was mounting he whispers in her ear, ‘Let the foal which you bear be a swift runner, like me! Do not make it like an ass which suffers hard labor’” (translation in Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 219 among “popular sayings” no. 15–18). The meaning of the fable is somewhat unclear and seemingly has little to do with careless speech, but the image of whispering equines during intercourse is nonetheless similar.} Elsewhere in Ahiqar (82), birds are hearers and tellers of secrets, and so also are asses know for not being able to keep quiet—the saying at the top of the same column begins “What is louder than a braying ass?” (174). The lesson then would be: do not divulge secrets, \textit{even to your wife}, because giving voice to them is never safe.\footnote{Alternatively, the saying may insinuate the untrustworthiness of one’s wife, a familiar trope in other instructions; cf. Ankhsheshonge 13.16: “Do not open your heart to your wife; what you have said to her goes to the street” (Lichtheim, \textit{AEL3:169}).} There are always “little birds” about who could overhear.\footnote{The notion of spies, gossips, or snoops being connected to “little birds” is popular even today in modern fantasy literature; cf. the court spymaster Varys and his “little birds” (= spies) in George R. R. Martin’s epic \textit{A Song of Ice and Fire}.} With the verb נָשָׁר, we can even still allow what seems to be an obvious sexual connotation. Thus, giving voice to a secret, even to your lover and even in the most private, intimate occasion is still unsafe. Yona concludes by saying that the message of the proverb is that “secrets can be revealed if persons are not extremely cautious”\footnote{Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns,” 43.} though I might alter it slightly: \textit{Ahiqar} argues that \textit{even when} you are extremely cautious, secrets can be still be revealed, thus best not reveal them at all.

We might also consider a few of the sayings that are not necessarily about discrete speech, but nevertheless present their message in such a form that discourages uncritical speaking. Line 80, for example, reads: “[My] son, do not damn the day until you have seen the [night].”\footnote{The day/night language in a saying that is clearly lamenting a desperate situation recalls the well-known lament in Job 3:2–26 where Job curses the day on which he was born, saying, for example, “Let that day be darkness!” With this passage in mind, we could even read “day” and “night” in \textit{Ahiqar} as symbols for life and death; hence, we may read something like: “do not curse life—not matter how hard it gets—because it will be better than death.” I thank Matthew Goff for pointing me to this passage.} On the one hand, this saying concerns contentment and caution, two aspects we will return to below.
Hence, the message is: “stop complaining, things can always get worse.” On the other hand, it is no coincidence that this attitude is expressed by means of an admonition against pointless or perhaps even harmful speech. The text comes from column 6 where “words” and “speech” are prominent, indicating that the lesson here is not simply about a change in attitude but also a warning against indiscriminate speaking. Thus, we may read a not-so-subtle undertone that says “do not speak too soon.” Besides the dismal outlook on the future, then, the saying also warns against looking a fool by speaking before actually knowing. The negative attitude is certainly more pronounced (and we will return to it below), but the context in a series of warnings against careless speech allows for this interpretation, as well.

Finally, we may return to our familiar fable of the goat and the leopard. As I argued above, the snare that the leopard tried to set was one that hinged upon the goat speaking something unwisely. A quick and unguarded response by the goat would leave him inviting trouble on himself. A wise person according to Ahiqar is discrete; s/he maintains self-control and more often than not keeps quiet rather than offering a hasty reply. We should not overlook, though, the leopard’s motives. His attempt at trickery is also an important part of Ahiqar’s lesson, suggesting to the addressee that there are those who may seem kind but, in truth, are out to take advantage. The image of a leopard stalking a goat, brings to mind a passage in Ben Sira:

As you fence in your property with thorns, so make a door and a bolt for your mouth. As you lock up your silver and gold, so make balances and scales for your words. Take care not to err with your tongue, and fall victim to one lying in wait. (28:24-26)

The verb “lying in wait” calls to mind either predatory animals (as we have in Ahiqar; cf. line 183) or bandits looking to accost unwary travelers. In any case, Ben Sira connects the danger to one who lacks control of the tongue. Both passages, however, make it abundantly clear just what is at stake when someone lets loose a careless word. It is to this topic I now turn.

3.3.2 Power of Words
The leopard-goat fable imaginatively demonstrates that a single false step or unguarded word can lead to one’s destruction—in the case of the goat, the loss of its “skin.” Elsewhere, Ahiqar is more direct about this lesson. Reckless or dishonest speech is dangerous and leaves one susceptible to personal attack: “Keep in mind that in every place are their eyes and their ears. And concerning
your mouth: Guard yourself! Do not let it be their prey!” (81). The word “prey” (נַחַל), which is related to the verb meaning “to be torn apart,” again brings to mind a situation where the “others” (like the leopard) are predators searching for a kill.

This is the power of words. They can cause real damage, and not only to oneself, but to others as well. Ahiqar, for example, prays (to El?) in line 155: “Let my hands cause ruin but not my mouth and not …” The text breaks off, but the image that remains is startling in its juxtaposition of “hands”—which are often a symbol of one’s own strength or power—and “mouth.” The implication seems to be that one’s mouth is capable of far more destruction than one’s own person. In one of the more poignant reflections on the power of speech Ahiqar exclaims that: “mightier is the ambush of the mouth than the ambush of battle.” This sentiment is not unique to the Aramaic instruction. The Egyptian Merikare, for example, states plainly: “Speaking is stronger than all fighting.” Similarly, Ben Sira asserts: “Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not as many as have fallen because of their tongue” (28:18). Both of these examples convey a similar aspect as in Ahiqar about the dangers of the word, but they lack the Aramaic saying’s emphasis on the shock or surprise of a word, which is conveyed by the verb יָשָׂר. Perhaps a better comparison can be found in Proverbs 12:6 “The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush, but the speech of the upright delivers them.” The sense of “ambush” is likewise conveyed by the leopard-goat fable.

43 The translation follows Porten and Yardeni closely.
44 Lichtheim, AEL 1:99.
45 Cf. Prov 11:9 “With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.” In Proverbs the theme of “ambush” or “lying in wait” is often tied to the “foreign/strange” woman, e.g., Prov 7:12; 23:28; on this aspect of the negative female-type in Proverbs see Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, The Foreignness of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif (BZAW 381; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), esp. 108–9, 156–57.
46 It is worth noting that the examples from Proverbs include a reference to salvation from attack by wisdom or knowledge; whereas in Ahiqar no such escape is directly expressed—at best the leopard-goat fable (166–168a) implies escape but this is undermined immediately by the subsequent fable of the bear-lambs where the latter, though similarly “knowledgeable,” nonetheless are incapable of fleeing the bear; for a discussion of this point in terms of theodicy and suffering see Chapter 5.
What may be worse, though, is that words have this destructive, unpredictable power and yet they often cannot be controlled. Looking again at line 82 in completeness, we find that the exhortation to “guard the mouth” and “make heavy the heart” is followed with an explanation of the consequences: “For a word is a bird and the one who releases it is a person lacking sense (lit. a person of no heart).” This saying has a close parallel in Qoh 10:20

Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts, or curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice or some winged creature tell the matter.

The moral of both this passage and the one in *Ahiqar* is that once a word is let out, it is nearly impossible to recover; therefore, it is unwise to speak a word, especially (in the case of Qoheleth) if that word may be harmful.⁴⁷

3.3.3 The Power of the King’s Word

Qoheleth’s connection of the bird-is-a-word saying to the king brings up another prominent aspect in *Ahiqar*, namely the king’s word and its unfathomable power. Column 6 is united by its parallel themes of “word” (משפט) and the “king” (מלך) and these two themes are fused symbolically (or metonymically in the case of the king) through the image of the king’s “mouth” (ปาก) and the “tongue” (זח). This passage is worth presenting:

79 Moreover, to the gods it/she is precious […] to/for […] the kingdom/kingship in the skies (or: by the heavens/Shamayn) it is established, for the Lord of the Holy Ones lifted [it].
80 My son, do not curse the day until you have seen the night.
81 Also, keep in mind that in every place are their eyes and their ears are near your mouth. Guard yourself! Do not let it be th[ey] prey!
82 More than everything that is guarded, guard your mouth! And concerning that which you’ve heard, make your heart heavy; for a bird is a word, and the one who releases it is a man of no heart.
83 […] the secrets of your mouth. Afterward, take out your words in its (proper) time, for mightier is ambush of mouth than ambush of battle.

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⁴⁷ Cf. also Ben Sira 27:16–20: “Whoever betrays secrets destroys confidence and will never find a congenial friend … and as you allow a bird to escape from your hand, so you have let your neighbor go, and will not catch him again ….”
Do not cover the word of a king; let it be a healing for your heart. Soft is the speech of a king, (yet) it is sharper and mightier than a double-edged blade.

Look before you is something difficult, against the face of a king do not stand, his rage is quicker than lightning. You, guard yourself! Do not let him show it (=rage) on account of your talking lest you die early in your days.

[Obey the world of a king, if it is commanded to you, it is a burning fire. Hurry, do it! Do not cause it to burn against you, and consume your hands.

Moreover, let the word of the king be done with delight of the heart. * How can wood contest with fire, flesh with a knife, or a man with a king?

I have tasted bitter herbs and their taste is strong, but nothing is more bitter than poverty.

Soft is the tongue of a king but it will break the ribs of the sea serpent, like death which is unseen.

In an abundance of sons let not your heart rejoice and in their fewness [do not mourn].

A king is like the Merciful One, indeed his voice is lofty, who is there who can stand before him except the one with whom El is?

Beautiful is the king to see like Shamash, and precious is his glory to those who walk the earth quietly.

Moving from the top and through the rest of the column there is a discernible order to the column. The transition from “wordy” matters to the king is a smooth one, since it is the king’s words themselves that are at issue, more notably it is their power and danger. Although, some of the sayings do make mention of the possible benefits of a king’s words—which we may take as representing the royal decree—they are each quickly rebuffed by an emphatic avowal of their danger. Let’s take the parallels sayings in 84b and 89b as examples. Both begin by commenting on the “softness” (רָכָב) of the king’s word or tongue. However, in 84b the softness is contrasted sharply (pun intended) by the image of the king’s word as a “sharp” and “strong” blade. Read together with 89b we can better imagine the tongue here as resembling a sword.


The tongue-sword metaphor is quite common in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere; however, the connection between a sword and the tongue of a king specifically is not paralleled in the Hebrew Bible. There is an intriguing passage in the Greek text of Proverbs which resembles the Ahiqar sayings quite closely, Prov 24:22c (LXX) reads: For the tongue of a king is a sword and not flesh, and whoever is delivered (to it) will be shattered. Besides the Jewish instructions, we may also look to an earlier Egyptian example that bears some striking resemblance. In Merikare 32-33 we read: “The tongue is a king’s sword.” The warfare imagery in Ahiqar 84 is trumped by the mythic language in the parallel saying in 89b, where the king’s tongue, i.e., his words, are powerful enough to “break the ribs of the sea-serpent (Aram. הָעֵין).” The “sea-serpent” may recall a common mythic tradition about creation, though this is not certain since we have very little evidence about the Aramaic-speaking community in Egypt. In any case, the beast itself is presumably formidable, and thus in hyperbolic fashion we are warned about how destructive the monarch’s words can be. The specific reference to the breaking of bones recalls Prov 25:15 “With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones.” This proverb has a strong lexical connection with the one in Ahiqar. Although the lexemes for “bones” are different (Aram. נבש; Heb. עצו), the verbs for breaking (Aram. יברך; Heb. נברך) are cognates and even more telling is the fact that both tongues are “soft” (Aram. לשת; Heb. לשון). There is a dramatic contrast,

50 There are several examples in the Hebrew Bible, especially the Psalms (e.g., Ps 57:4; 64:3; Prov 25:18); on this metaphor see, e.g., Joshua Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths’ (Jud. III 16; Ps. CXLIX 6; PROV. V 4): A Metaphor and its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” VT 52 (2002): 291–303; Göran Eidevall, “Images of God, Self, and the Enemy in the Psalms: On the Role of Metaphor in Identity Construction,” in Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible (ed. P. Van Hecke; Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensum 187; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 55–65;
51 Translation from Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 753. This saying and four other couplets (Prov 24:22a-e) are only found in the LXX for Proverbs. Four of them concern the king, thus continuing the topic already present in the MT 24:22. There are several similarities here with column 6 of Ahiqar in that these additional sayings concern speech, falsehood, and the king, specifically his words and anger.
52 Lichtheim, AEL 1:99.
53 For a good survey the myth of the battle vs. the sea-monster at creation in both the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, see John Day, God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35; Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1985).
54 Ben Sira also depicts a tongue breaking bones: “The blow of a whip raises a welt, but a blow of the tongue crushes the bones” (28:17).
however, in that the king is the one whose tongue breaks bones in *Ahiqar*, while the Hebrew Proverbs, according to Fox, “speaks of the effect of quiet persuasion on one’s superiors, which is a more suprising assertion.”

Beyond the destructive power of the king’s words in *Ahiqar*, this passage also highlights the rapidity and unexpectedness of the king’s rage, which is “quicker than lightning” (85) and can come upon you without warning “like death which is unseen” (90). These images, along with several others, convey a troubling tone of insecurity and fear. In as extreme terms as possible, *Ahiqar* makes it clear that the king’s words are dangerous and can result in an “untimely death” (86). Lastly, *Ahiqar* demonstrates that the king’s power and the authority of his speech derives from the gods. Lines 79 and 91-92 directly correlate the king with the divine and, more pointedly, in 91 his “voice” is exalted by his godly association. The king, however, is not the only one whose words can have divine inspiration.

### 3.3.4 Godly and Goodly Words

In a pair of somewhat enigmatic passages in column 11 of *Ahiqar*, there is at least some correlation drawn between a person’s “good” (שֶׁם) words and the gods. Beginning with 162–163, we read:

> A person is insignificant (נָעִיר; lit. small); but he (can) increase (נָרָם; lit. “get bigger”) when his words soar upwards above him for the opening of his mouth is an utterance (עֵנֶס) of the gods; and if he is beloved by the gods, they will set (something) good in his palate to speak.

The crux of the matter rests on the reading מִשְׂנָה “utterance” whose etymology is uncertain and could be taken in a negative sense—such as “an affront” or “a groaning.” Alternatively,


56 See Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 123–27 for a discussion of the “nicht sichtbares” death, particularly in comparison with a passage in Tablet 10 of *Gilgamesh*, where the hero reflects on the unforeseeable nature of death.


58 Due to the problems with this saying (corruption, obscure terms, etc.); the translation I offer here takes its cue from Weigl and Porten and Yardeni; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 400–402; Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 101–3; Niehr, *Aramäischer Ahiqar*, 49.
Lindenberger (and others following him) have read it as מַעֲלָן, a participial form of the verb “to exalt,” thus: “when his utterance (lit. opening of his mouth) exalts the gods.” In any case, the second half of the saying indicates that a person—even if in a humble state—may speak something “good” because the gods have given these words. Whether “good” here means wise or kind or something profound is not clear. The gods, though, are the ultimate source. We might compare this saying with Ben Sira 11:1 where we find a similar image, though in this case that which lifts up a the lesser one is not the divine but rather the person’s capacity for wisdom: “The wisdom of the humble lifts their heads high and seats them among the great.” In a more general, but nonetheless related sense, we find in Prov 22:12 the following: “The eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge, but he overthrows the words of the faithless.” Fox claims that “the saying teaches that God watches over the words and counsels of the wise man to ensure that they achieve their goals.” On the one hand, we can see the same sentiment driving this saying in Ahiqar: the gods are concerned with and perhaps even the source of good, wise speech. If we look to the other saying in this column, the connection between the divine and good speech may increase. Lines 171–172 state: “If goodness proceeds from the mouth of a person … but if badness proceeds from their mouth (then) the gods will cause evil upon them.” Though the first clause is incomplete, the apparent parallelism with the latter half hints at its meaning. Thus, if the gods are on your side, then you (and your words) will succeed. This is much like the verse in Proverbs from above, where God is said to “watch over” the words of the wise. However, there is a subtle distinction in that in Ahiqar the very words themselves come from the gods (as the saying in 163 makes clear) and not necessarily from the wisdom of the one who speaks.


60 Compare also Ps 113:7–8 where God is the one who “raises the poor” and “lifts the needy”; although there is no apparent connection to words or speaking in this passage.


62 Note the repetition of the same lexeme for the negative character-type מַעֲלָן and the action taken by the gods מַעֲלָן.
We are left with the unsettled question of from where does wisdom or, more precisely, wise speech come? The question of the divine’s role in this will be adjudged in Chapter 5, but for the moment Ahiqar’s attention to words and their effectiveness seems intimately connected with the divine, whether for good or for bad. These few sayings about “good” words may still leave us wondering, but there are plenty of other sayings in Ahiqar that deal with “bad” words.

3.3.5 Lies and Slanderous Words

Lastly we should consider another aspect of the sayings about speech, namely their content. Although there are a few sayings about “good” speech as we witnessed above, there is a much larger thread of sayings that focus on “bad” speech. In particular we find a strong denunciation of dishonest or slanderous speech. In column 9 there is extended attention to deceptive words, with a core set of sayings focused on “lying” (חוכ). Line 132, though missing its beginning, pits the “trustworthy” (כ楫) person against the one whose lips are full of “lies” (חוכ). This saying is significant for it speaks to the real-life implications of lying. In particular, a person’s social standing—either one of esteem or one of disrepute—depends on how reliable their words are. The line, which is missing its first words, may even be the final part of the series of sayings that began in 129 about loans. The lesson is about one’s social standing being key when it comes to necessary financial transactions. Thus, in 130 the addressee is warned not to take out a loan from a “bad (= disreputable) person” (מא יוף). The same warning, then, is applied to the addressee himself. In 130–131 the speaker advises the addressee to make good on the loans and warns him of the consequences. Besides possibly losing your home or possessions, you may also develop a bad reputation. Thus, we can interpret 132 in a practical sense, beyond just the moral one: if you are known to be a liar, then people will not be inclined to do business with you (e.g., give a loan).

A person’s reputation can be built by his lips, but so also can it be destroyed, and it appears that this may even be the case for rulers. Line 133 is one of the more outstanding sayings since it is the only one outside of those in column 6 which appears to deal with the king; although even here it is only obliquely done by a reference to “the throne” (כיבת). Porten and Yardeni translate

63 On the internal parallelism of this line, see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 297.

64 For biblical parallels to the “throne being set up” (Aram. כיבת; cf. Heb. ישב כיבת see Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 304–6; cf. Ezra 4:12 “the foundations were established” (כיבת)).

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the saying as follows: “[Moreover, if initially the throne is set up for the liar, then finall[y]l[y] they will perceive his lies and spit in his face.” In a recent article Stefan Bojowald surveyed the various references to “spitting in someone’s face” throughout the ancient Near East—especially in Egyptian literature and the Hebrew Bible—and concluded that this act was a formal, often public, sign of contempt.65 The intriguing possibility here is that this represents a fairly open sign of disrespect toward the monarch—if indeed the “throne” symbolizes the king—contrary to the seemingly obsequious presentation of the king in column 6 (esp. 79 and 91–92), though attention to his terrible wrath notwithstanding.66 While not completely clear, this saying may allow for the possibility of a public rebuke of the king who is found out to be a liar. However, we must be attentive to the way this is framed using the third-person. The speaker tells his addressee that they may spit in the king’s face; he does not say you should do so.

There is another intriguing connection to this saying where the king and lies are brought together if we consider the Aramaic version of the famous Bisitun inscription (TAD C2.1), which was also found at Elephantine. The reissue of the old proclamation from Bisitun was likely commissioned by Darius II (r. 423–405) and thus dates to around the same time as Ahiqar. After a somewhat modified but relatively close recitation of the same battles and squelched rebellions from the actual inscription at Bisitun (DNb), the Aramaic text diverges significantly from the Old Persian in its addition of a passage that appears to come from the so-called “Testament of Darius” from the Tomb Inscription at Naqse Rostam (DNa).67 Aside from the curious splicing of otherwise disported texts in itself, this column is interesting in that it reads like a wisdom instruction, albeit of the royal testamentary-type (e.g., Amenemhet I; Merikare), from the outgoing king to his successors. Recall that the speaker in this text is Darius I not the current king Darius II. If indeed

66 On the mixed view of the king in Ahiqar see Chapter 5.4.
67 On the divergences with the Old Persian, as well as the Elamite translation (which is also on the inscription at Bisitun), and the possible reason for its reissue by Darius II, see Nicolas Sims-Williams, “The Final Paragraph of the Tomb-Inscription of Darius I (DNb, 50–60): The Old Persian Text in the Light of an Aramaic Version,” BSOAS 44 (1981): 1–7; cf. Margaret Cool Root, “Defining the Divine in Achaemenid Persian Kingship: The View from Bisitun,” in Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds (ed. Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville; Rulers and Elites 2; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 23–65.

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it was commissioned by the latter, then we have an interesting example where a king appropriated his forebears name—and in Darius II’s case quite literally—in order to “comment on” and, incidentally, shore up his own rule. In any case it is the content that interests us, for in it Darius warns his unnamed successor about one thing in particular: lying. Lines 64–65 read (according to the translation in TAD): “[Darius the King thus says: whoever you are O King who will be after me: a man who lies [. . .] aw. From great lies guard yourself. A liar who lies [. . .].]” Lies, it seems, are of great concern to the Persian monarch. The paragraph goes on to encourage the would-be ruler to be open in his decision-making, to be willing to hear both sides, to not only listen to what “one may say in your ear (i.e., privately),” and to not hide the truth. The consequences for disobeying these instructions are dire, for “Ahuramazda will curse you” (l. 73). Clearly there is much more going on here than in our saying in Ahiqar; nevertheless, the Besitun inscription constitutes contemporary evidence, that may have been from the Persian authorities themselves, which attests to a king’s potential for disrepute in the case of dishonesty. Now, how far we can read this into the Ahiqar passage remains unclear. For example, the subsequent sayings (134–135) likewise deal with “one who lies” (משיח—) and will face deadly consequences: “may his neck be cut”—but the royal context seems to disappear as quickly as it came up. Perhaps the sentiment in these lines, in a contextualized reading, therefore is: if even the king can be openly disgraced for lying, then how much worse shall it be for you if you are guilty of the same?

Those sayings in 134–135 are corrupt and include, apparently, an obscure reference to a “Yemenite virgin” (—hehal הופנה)—though I prefer to side with Weigl (contra Porten and Yardeni) who sees as being related to הופנה as “to entrust” (cf. 132). Nevertheless, the sense of these sayings is reasonably understood and fits with the gist of the column: lying is despicable and those who are found out will be punished severely. Here it seems that the punishment, i.e., having one’s neck “cut” (זיוא), far outweighs the crime and thus may be idiomatic, referring to some formal procedure. Another passage about lying, for example, also uses an imaginative illustration—tied

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68 For a brief survey of Achaemenid ideology and language regarding “the Lie”—a term that connotes something much more than simply false speech but is representative of evil and chaos against which the Persian king, with the help of Ahuramazda, is destined to combat—see Bruce Lincoln, Religion, Empire, and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with a Postscript about Abu Gharib (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17–32.

to a formal idiom—in order to illustrate reciprocal punishment. Line 156 reads: “May God twist the mouth of the twister, and tear out the tongue of [...]”70 Jonas Greenfield, among others, has connected the notion of “twisting” (נַעֲשָׂ) one’s words to a formal situation, namely oath-breaking.71 Whether or not a treaty is specifically in focus in the Ahiqar saying, it is clear by the reference to the mouth and tongue, that the “twisting” refers to an improper use of speech and, furthermore, the resulting punishment. The twister’s mouth is probably not thought to be physically twisted, but instead the punishment’s imagery is a clever way of showing the reciprocal relationship between a crime and its consequences—a similar mirroring takes place at the top of the column in 126 (see discussion of this saying below).72 Notably, like Ahuramazda in the Aramaic Bisitun text, it is El (in 156; the “gods” in 126) who carries out the sentence, at least metaphorically.73 If we return to our saying in 134–135 we unfortunately cannot determine who is carrying out the hypothetical neck-cutting, but the gods are nonetheless present. The final clause of the saying explicitly states that lies, which are unsurprisingly “bad” (לְשׁון אָלֶות), are not the

70 The translation follows, for the most part, that of Porten and Yardeni. For a detailed study of this saying and possible ANE parallels, see Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar,” in Hommages à André Dupont–Sommer (ed. A. Caquot and M. Philonenko; Paris: Librarie d’Amerique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1971), 49–60; cf. Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 370–74; Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 156–57.

71 Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel,” 51, for example, points to another early Aramaic use of the verb from a Sefire treaty ʫʩʧʬʭʱʠʥ ʠʺʡʨ ʪʴʤʠ ʥʠ, which he translates “‘I will turn the good words to bad’ that is ‘I will defy the terms of the treaty.’” Taking a cue from the “oath-breaking” aspect, Greenfield goes on to discuss the saying in the context of legal codes, especially from Babylon (pp. 53–55), with particular attention to the punishment clauses, some of which allude to the offender’s tongue being “cut off” or “torn out.” For discussion of the Sefire treaty specifically, see Greenfield, “Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” Acta Orientalia 29 (1965): 1–18, at 11. The opposition between “good” (בָּשָׁ) and “bad” (שָׁס) is also prominent here since they are frequently contrasted in Ahiqar (e.g., 99–100; 171b–172a).

72 The like-for-like image of punishment will be addressed in the discussion on retributive justice in Chapter 5, though here I would turn your attention briefly to a passage in Ben Sira 27:16–29 which describes in a variety of colorful terms the machinations of the wicked—usually involving speech—and has several similarities with Ahiqar, including one case where the wicked are said to “later twist his speech and with your own words he will trip you up” (Grk. ὑστερον δὲ διστάσῃ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου δώσει σκάνδαλον), which sounds vaguely familiar to the saying in 156.

73 On the gods as executers of justice in Ahiqar, see Chapter 5.2.
responsibility of the gods, an exclamation that directly contrasts, for example, those sayings in 162–163 and (possibly) 171a–172 which explicitly credit the gods as the source of “good” words.

The corruption in the papyrus makes it unclear how closely related 134–135 is to the critique of the ruler in 133, but the point stands that if a person is found out to be a liar then their reputation suffers. On the other hand, one’s reputation can also suffer as a result of another person’s lie. The penultimate passage in column 9 is perhaps the most recognizable in light of its connection with the narrative. Lines 139–140 read:

From out of my house went my accursedness,  
so among whom will I be found innocent?  
The son of my belly has spied on my house,  
so how will I speak to the foreigners?  
My son was a criminal witness against me,  
so who then will find me innocent?  
From out of my house went my fury,  
so with whom can I dispute and contend?

We will revisit this lament often, but for the discussion at hand we are interested in how the speaker here groans over his public shame as a result of his son’s “criminal witness” (שאיה חמתס). The rendering of חמתס as “criminal” is a double-entendre on my part, intended both to bring out the legal context invoked by the term שאיה,74 while at the same time functioning as a characterization of the accuser. Thus, the witness is both making a formal accusation but he himself is “criminal.” Porten and Yardeni translate חמתס as “malicious” and this is certainly fitting.75 חמתס, though not elsewhere

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75 See also Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 334–35 who translates “ein Zeuge der Gewalttat” and relates the syntagm שאיהهو to “den Topos vom ‘falschen Zeugen’” that is prominent in the Old Testament (Heb. שאיה; e.g., Exod 23:1; Deut 19:16; Ps 35:11).
attested among early Aramaic materials, connotes falsehood as well as an injurious intent. The connection between falsehood and a specifically verbal action can also be found in Proverbs, especially in a related set of sayings in 16:27-30—here the “violent person” (chāmās) is set aside other negative human-types (including the “slanderer”), all of which are guilty of some perverse form of speech. In the Hebrew Psalms, chāmās has a particularly strong legal function, as Haag explains: “a favorite instrument of chāmās is false accusation and unjust judgment … especially in the Psalms, chāmās appears in the context of the manifold afflictions of the unjustly persecuted psalmist who cries out to Yahweh and demands justice from him.” Like the various psalmists, the speaker in the Ahiqar passage laments a situation where someone (in this case his own son) has falsely accused him. Strangely, though, there is no plea for help or justice. Furthermore, the context of the column—as well as the narrative, to which this passage obviously alludes—indicates that the verbal assault carried out by the son/Nadan has left the father’s/Ahiqar’s public standing in shambles.

With this in mind, we may turn our attention to the beginning of column 9 which opens with a series of four interlocking lines, wherein the first and the third line are parallel and so also

76 On falsehood see Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 136–38, who translates the phrase “false witness” and notes the connection with the lexeme, meaning “lie” or “falsehood” and is attested in both Hebrew and Aramaic; cf. Targums to Deut 19:16, Ps 27:12; see also 4Q541 9 i 7 and 11Q19 61:7. For falsehood and injurious intent in Hebrew attestations of falsehood, see the discussion in H. Haag, “chāmās,” in TDOT 4:478–87. For its association with falsehood and thereby dishonest speech, see the various passages from Qumran; e.g., in a passage from the Genesis Apocryphon we do find used in parallel with falsehood, and both lexemes are set in opposition to “truth” and “verity” (4QGen ar 6:1–6; cf. 1QapGen ar 6:1–6; cf. “its place of falsehood and violence” (4Q541 9 i 7); “in which falsehood and violence will sprout forth” and “foundations of violence and works of falsehood” (4QEnoch 3:25, 4:14). For Qumran passages see Florentino García Martínez and Eibert Tigchelaar, The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997), ad loc.

77 See Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 621–22 who calls this unit “a cohesive epigram that describes three types of scoundrels”; cf. Prov 10:6 (par. 10:11) where the “mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (chāmās) (cf. 10:18); 13:2 where “good words” are contrasted with a desire for “wrongdoing” (chāmās); and 26:6 where “drinking down violence” (chāmās) is likened to a “fool’s message.”

78 Haag, “chāmās,” 483–84; he cites especially psalms 7, 11, 25, 55, and 58 among others; though, see also Job 19:7 “Even when I cry out, ‘Violence!’” (chāmās) I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice.”

79 See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the social aspects embedded in this passage.
the second and the fourth, creating an A-B-A-B pattern. This passage will be broken down elsewhere, but for the moment I want to focus on the first (126) and the third (128) sayings, which read:

[Do not stretch] your bow and do not mount your arrow at a righteous one, lest the gods come to his aid and turn it back upon you …

[My son … ] you have stretched your bow and mounted your arrow at someone more righteous than you! It is a sin against the gods

Besides their formal similarity, the lines have noticeable literary features. For example, in line 128 we have a pun between the words for arrow and sin. The addressee’s ישת (“your arrow”) is called a ישת (“the sin”) against the gods.80 Like the passage at the bottom of column 9 (139–140) these lines also carry a vindictive tone, where the speaker is accusing the son directly of his unrighteousness.81 The question is, though, what was the son’s unrighteous deed? It is difficult to imagine a context where the addressee would be literally using a bow and arrow, while at the same time being told to be selective in whom he chooses as a target. The bow and arrow belong to the realm of war or hunting, and, therefore, a chosen target’s moral standing would have little bearing in these contexts.82

80 Transliterated, the חטף that the son shoots is a חטע’. A possible way to relate this literary feature in English translation is through assonance: “Do not shoot your arrow, for it is an error against the gods.”

81 The two passages share much in common in this regard. Like the “innocent” (ךתיל/ךתיל) speaker/Ahiqar in 139–140 who as attacked by “the son of my belly,” so also is the “innocent one” (ךתיל) the target of the son’s attack in 126/128. If we read these two passages side-by-side we find an interesting irony in their dramatic presentation of who is actually involved: in both passages the “son” is the attacker, but in the first he is also the addressee of the speaker, while in the second the son is not directly addressed; similarly, in both passages the “righteous” is identified as the object of the son’s attack, but in the first the speaker does not identify himself with the “righteous,” whereas in the second the speaker explicitly mentions his “righteousness.” Thus briefly, in the first passage Ahiqar accuses his son directly, but he does not place himself as the object of the assault; in the second passage Ahiqar accuses his son indirectly (i.e., his son is not the addressee), but he does identify himself with the object of the attack.

82 Contra Kottsieper’s insinuation that the speaker is giving advice about an actual bow-and-arrow; see Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 111–12. Granted, Ahiqar’s readership—especially if we consider the military colony of Judeans at Elephantine—could certainly own weapons such as these, but the advice must surely be of a moral, practical nature and not specifically connected to battle or hunting.
The bow and arrow, therefore, are metaphors, but metaphors for what? The reference to the gods and the use of the term ʷʩʣʶ give this saying a moralistic tone, so we may simply read it as a general, albeit colorful, warning against unrighteous behavior. Lindenberger, for example, summarizes the interpretation of this saying: “Divine sanctions await the one who persecutes the righteous.”\(^{83}\) Granted, the theological principle of retributive justice is important and should not be overlooked, but what about the practical application? These sayings must be concerned with more than just the theological principle of divine retribution. In light of the column’s preoccupation with falsehood and in consideration of very similar imagery from related materials, especially the Hebrew literature, I suggest that the lines are concerned with a verbal attack, and thus the “arrows/sins” are slanderous in nature.

The image of the bow and arrow frequently appears in the Hebrew Psalms. The figure who operates these weapons is often God, but many times it is the wicked or the enemy of the supplicant. When used metaphorically, the bow and arrow can indicate oppression, or signal swift and unexpected circumstances, they can even represent a man’s virility. A prominent example, though, is the connection between the bow and arrow with the mouth, tongue, or speech.\(^{84}\) In Psalm 120, lying lips and a deceitful tongue are likened to a warrior’s sharpened arrows. Psalm 57 layers multiple metaphors together wherein the speaker portrays his enemies as lions, the teeth of which are subsequently related to arrows and spears, and their tongue to a sharp sword. Hossfeld and

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\(^{83}\) Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 117. See also Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 274–81 and 285–89, who brings in a number of biblical texts which use bow and arrow imagery (some of which I will address shortly) and comments on how the images function in their respective passages, but he offers little comment on how that informs our understanding of Ahiqar save for the philological connections, which, although interesting, do not speak directly to the text’s interpretation. Weigl refrains from making a decisive stance on how Ahiqar uses the weaponry as symbols vis-à-vis the biblical examples. His summary statement on the two sayings in light of the comparision with these passages is: “In allen genannten Texten, einschließlich [126] erfüllt die Form der negativ motivierenden ʤʮʬ-Frage dieselbe Funktion: Durch die starke negative Abgrenzung des Sinnhorizontes suggeriert sie dem Adressaten die unerwünschbar Abgrenzung des Sinnhorizontes suggeriert sie dem Adressaten die unabdingbare Notwendigkeit, der übergeordneten faktoren unbedingt und bedingungslos Folge zu leisten” (pp. 280–81). Thus, Weigl, like Lindenberger, focuses on the theological aspect. Indeed, this is clear from his title for the two sayings, which are, respectively, “God – Savior of the Righteous” and “Gods – Avengers of the Righteous.”

\(^{84}\) Hoffner, “תִּבְּרָא,” *TDOT* 5:124 points out that “Lies and slander in the mouth of the enemy are often compared to sharp and poisoned arrows.” In making this comment he cites Psalm 57:5, 64:4, Prov 25:18, 26:18; and Jeremiah 9:8. Psalm 64, for example, “depicts the slanderers as being slain with their own weapons.”
Zengler, in their commentary on this psalm, assert that: “the reference to the teeth and tongues of the enemies/animals echoes the idea that the enemies are conducting what is mainly a verbal war against their victim.”85 Similarly, John Goldingay rhetorically asks: “How are the attackers like lions or dogs? In that their teeth are extremely dangerous, like the weapons in the hands of attackers. But as human beings, their more literal weapon is their tongue … it is the means whereby the human beings go about their devouring.”86 The bow and arrow as a metaphor for improper or deceitful speech is not limited to the Psalms. In Proverbs 25:18, for example, a “pointed arrow” along with a club and a sword are compared to a person “who bears false witness against a friend.” So also in 26:18–19 where lying to a friend, even in jest, is like wildly shooting deadly arrows.

Returning to the Psalms, a couple of passages bear striking resemblance to that of Ahiqar and invite closer consideration. Psalm 11:2, for example, is very similar to the lines in Ahiqar. It reads: “For look, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.” The verse, like Ahiqar, is formulated with the complimentary verbal expressions of “bending the bow” (דֵּרֵךְ כִּשָּׁה; cf. Ahiq. 128: דֵּרֵךְ כִּשָּׁה) and “fixing/mounting the arrow” (תַּכְּבִי חָשָׁם; cf. Ahiq. 128: תַּכְּבִי חָשָׁם). The targets in both texts are similar: the “righteous” (Ahiq. 128: Animated) and the “upright of heart” (Heb. כִּשָּׁם). The psalm also never explicitly identifies what the bow and arrow symbolize. Nevertheless, in light of the similar imagery elsewhere in the Psalms—and in Jeremiah 9, see below—many commentators relate the attack of the wicked to treacherous or dishonest speech. Jack Lundbom, for example, cites Psalm 11 when stating: “The wicked are commonly said to bend the bow against the righteous and the poor, which may be more metaphorical language about lying, slandering, and other tongue-related evils.”87 Bow and arrow imagery also figures in Psalm 64, where both the enemy and God are the shooter. In 64:2 we read: “Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the scheming of evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows shooting from ambush at the blameless.” Commentators on this psalm have linked the bow and arrow directly to

85 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100 (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 74.
matters of the tongue and speech. Marvin Tate, for examples, states: “The use of destructive language is the leading characteristic of the evildoers … Undoubtedly we are to think of bitter words of slander and false charges as well as calumnious innuendo and defamation.” Ps 64 may share an added connection to the Ahiqar passage because it seems that in this psalm God, in response to the assault by the wicked, responds in kind, that is, by attacking the wicked with a bow and arrow (64:7–9). Unlike Ahiqar 126, in the psalm it is not entirely clear whose arrow God is shooting—God’s own or the one belonging to the evildoers.

A final passage worth addressing, if only briefly, is Jer 8:22–9:11. In a scathing critique of Israel that doubles as the prophet’s individual lament, Jeremiah speaks of the sins of the people of Israel using strikingly similar imagery to what we find in Ahiqar. For example, in 9:3 (Heb. 9:2) he says of the people: “they bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood and not for truth” and later in 9:8 “their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit through the mouth.” Lundbom says the following about this passage: “In the present dialogue Yahweh and the prophet speak a particularly sharp word against unbridled tongues, trafficking as they are in slander, lies, and evils of a related nature.” What is more, the perpetrators of these metaphorical verbal ambushes are one’s neighbors and relatives. In 9:4 the prophet proclaims (quote): “Beware of your neighbors (נאם), and put no trust in any of your relatives (נקול); for all your relatives are supplanters, and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer.” Those who are sending these slanderous projectiles are, in fact, the addressee’s intimates.

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88 Marvin Tate, Psalms 51–100 (WBC; Ft. Worth: Nelson, 1990), 133.
90 The translation, as all others, follows the NRSV, but these verses have a notoriously difficult syntax that allow for various renderings. In any case, both “their bows” (כשתים) and an “arrow” (ינ社会实践) are connected with “their tongue” (אמרת/שקר) and “deceit” (לזון). For discussion of the translation issues, see Lundbom, Jeremiah 1–20, 542–47.
91 Lundbom, Jeremiah 1–20, 547.
In sum, when we consider the metaphor of the bow and arrow in *Ahiqar* 126/128 in a broader literary context as well as its immediate one in column 9, the practical application becomes clearer. Like the saying in 82 where a word is a bird, in these two sayings one’s words are depicted as arrows—a fitting comparison since the words here are supposedly harmful. The speaker is first admonishing and then accusing the son about a slanderous assault of words against someone who is actually innocent. This, of course, recalls the narrative setting, as well. But both this passage’s proximate parallel in 139–140—at the bottom of the column—and the external parallel in Jeremiah 9 bring up a point that should never be underappreciated in *Ahiqar*: the perpetrator of the verbal attack can be—or in Ahiqar’s case is—someone who is supposed to be trustworthy. Lies and slander are not only weapons of one’s enemies. That *Ahiqar* dwells at length on the intimate connection between himself and the evil-doer points to a significant concern of the text, namely apprehension. In response to this apprehension or anxiety, the text evinces a strong ethic of caution.

### 3.4 Ethics of Caution

Perhaps the most prominent ethic which underlies nearly all of *Ahiqar*’s teachings is the ethic of caution. Nearly all of the practical instructions are phrased in such a way that they convey an anxiety about a life which is full of dangers both external and internal. In fact, the most common form of saying is a prohibitive, a negative imperative, that is followed by a motivational extension addressing specifically the consequences of disregarding said warning. Although advice on being cautious is not uncommon in other wisdom texts, in *Ahiqar* being on guard is paramount.

92 There may be an additional connection between the bird-as-a-word and the arrow-as-a-word metaphors if we look to line 190: “One stretched his bow (דָּרָר פְּשָׁת) and mounted his arrow (דָּרָר הָעֵינָּה) but he did not know [its] pla[ce …]” The text breaks off but the formal similarity with 126 and 128 suggests a similar metaphor, while the latter half (albeit unclear) may suggest something like the bird metaphor in that once an arrow/bird (= word) is released you cannot really know what the target will end up being, i.e., you will not know what effect your words may have.

93 To an extent, this is unparalleled except perhaps in Egyptian instructions *Amenemhet, Ankhsheshonqa, and Insinger*, and the Jewish instruction of Ben Sira. However, in contrast to Ben Sira, where one should be cautious in order to have or maintain a good life and reputation, in *Ahiqar* it is generally phrased in order to prevent suffering, disrepute, or disaster, including death.
In the survey of “speech” and its power, we have already witnessed the consequences of an indiscreet word. In column 6 one’s own words can lead to destruction, but more notably it is the king’s word that the addressee is to fear. Caution is stressed to the most extreme in those sayings which speak of the king and his fury. Yet, one must also be on guard against the words of friends and family, as the lament in 139–140 makes clear. This lesson is reaffirmed by the narrative. Could Ahiqar have been more careful about Nadan? It does appear that the king “tested” Nadan’s wisdom (10–12), but the rapidity with which Ahiqar “left the scene” (22) stands out. In any case, several sayings indicate that anyone can be a source of danger, and therefore a cautious attitude in every situation is advisable. Take line 141, for example, where the speaker tells the addressee to keep your secret from “your friends” because even they will disdain you upon hearing about it.

Beyond the danger of words specifically, however, there is a persistent worry in the sayings about interactions with others. Avoidance, especially with those who are stronger, is the best avenue (cf. 142–143). That a person must constantly be on guard is especially evident in the animal fables, all of which portray a predatory animal and an animal of prey. In each case, it becomes clear that the audience is to identify with the weaker animal. The lion-stag saying (183–184), for example, on even a superficial level makes it clear that the world and, most especially, the people in it are dangerous. Destruction and death come upon the stag who encounters a lion, and to this the speaker adds “Behold! So also is the encountering of a human!” This fable may be compared with a passage in Ben Sira 9:13: “Keep far from those who have power to kill, and you will not be haunted by the fear of death. But if you approach them, make no misstep, or they may rob you of your life.” There are several aspects which overlap both with the lion-stag saying and the leopard-goat fable (166–168a). The goat, for instance, is careful not to “make any misstep” in the presence of a leopard. There is an unfortunate lacuna here, so we do not know exactly what the shameful secret is; see discussion in Chapter 4.1.2.

There is an unfortunate lacuna here, so we do not know exactly what the shameful secret is; see discussion in Chapter 4.1.2.

95 Compare Ben Sira 6:13 “keep away from your enemies, and be on guard with your friends.”

This saying is technically not a fable since the animals do not actually speak, but it is structurally and symbolically similar to the animal fables.

97 I have altered the translation here somewhat in order to highlight the practical aspect—i.e., encountering other individuals often leads to danger since they are by nature intent on selfish gains at your expense. In Chapter 5 I will return to this fable with a more theologically-focused approach.

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of the leopard. However, Ben Sira’s advice depends partly on a person’s ability to avoid confrontation and, thereby, disaster. In Ahiqar, on the other hand, the explanatory clause in the lion-stag saying suggests that this disaster cannot be avoided. Encounters are bound to happen. The bear-lambs fable, in fact, speaks directly to humanity’s inability to direct their steps when it comes to avoiding danger, explaining that a person’s path is in the hands of the gods (who may symbolize the notion of “fate” here). That the gods are also culpable for an individual’s suffering—at least indirectly by way of their association with the ferocious bear—is also revealing. Another saying also intimates that the gods could be a source of consternation, asking: “[How] can a person protect himself against gods and how might he be on guard against his inner wickedness?” The anthropological and theological issues latent in this saying and the fables will be addressed in Chapter 5, but for now we may emphasize that the caution and anxiety expressed by Ahiqar, especially in these vivid fables, extends to all parties: enemies, friends, family, the gods, even one’s own self.

It could be argued that all instructions are inherently “cautious” since they are largely built around the assumption that ignoring such advice is bad. In Ahiqar, however, there is a pronounced emphasis on the negative implications (social and/or physical) of ignoring the advice such that the ethos of the text builds up a sense of a clear and present danger; sometimes this fear simply rests underneath the surface of the advice (as may be the case in several sayings), but there are a number of occasions at key points throughout the collection that emphasize in explicit fashion the danger that the speaker has experienced/is experiencing which he is trying to convey to his audience. The stark pessimism with regard to one’s potential for success—or even just survival—is contrasted sharply by the portrayal of the social order in other texts, especially the book of Proverbs. There we can find verses like 10:9 which claim: “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out.” In a well-ordered world, people should be confident that if they treat others respectfully and are honest in their dealings that others will respond in kind, in a sort of “you get what you give” type system (hence the many adaptations of the golden rule). Again Proverbs states: “Righteousness guards one whose way is upright, but sin overthrows the wicked” (13:6). Proverbs—and Ben Sira for that matter—is not wholly oblivious to the dangers in the world, but much of its wisdom is built upon these antithetical presentations where the wise/righteous/listener benefits from upright behavior, while the foolish/wicked/obstinate suffer. The tone of the Hebrew text is still rather positive when set against Ahiqar where we hardly find
any positive component. I am speaking in generalities, of course, and exceptions to the positivism in Proverbs can certainly be identified, but even swift readings of the two sayings collections can be revealing. On the boat which is travelling down the river of life, for which these instructions serve as the rudder, the aim for Proverbs is to find the quickest current, but for Ahiqar it is mostly just to avoid all those damn rocks.

Additionally, this assessment of Ahiqar depends to some degree on a similar study by Jack Sanders concerning Ben Sira. Sanders offers a close reading of the ancient sage’s advice, and argues that the text puts forth a strong ethic of caution. “The need for caution,” according to his reading of Ben Sira, “extends, apparently, through all of life’s relationships.” Notably, for Ben Sira this also includes one’s friends, whom Ben Sira fears have the potential for becoming one’s enemies (e.g., 6:13). This worry goes beyond that of Proverbs where the concern is primarily about friends being unreliable in a time of need (e.g., 18:24). Ben Sira’s ethic of caution is tied to a number of salient factors which also run through the text, including obedience to the Torah and fear of Yhwh, but perhaps most prominent, according to Sanders, is the concern for one’s name and reputation. He concludes:

98 Interestingly, while much of Proverbs 10–29 is comprised of these positive/negative contrasts, they are only sparingly attested in the “Words of the Wise” (22:17–24:22), a section which is predominately comprised of admonitions (as is Ahiqar) rather than proverbs and which most agree depends on the Egyptian Amenemope and which Michael Fox has recently suggested also contains several resemblances to Ahiqar; cf. Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 705–69, esp. 753–69.


100 Sanders, “Ben Sira’s Ethics of Caution,” 77.

101 See discussion above on friendship above and in Chapter 5.

102 Cf. Sanders, Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom, 17–18 and 90–97 where he argues: “One finds in [the Demotic instruction of Insigner, also known as] Phibis exactly Ben Sira’s ethics of caution based on shame and regard for one’s name, a similarity which cannot be paralleled in any other known work which Ben Sira might conceivably have used!” (emphasis original). Sanders’s comparison of Ben Sira with Phibis (i.e., Insigner) is informative, though his argument for dependence of the Hebrew author on the Egyptian may be taken too far (cf. Matthew Goff, “Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine and Egypt: Ben Sira and Papyrus Insigner,” JSJ 36 (2005): 147–72; though see also Sanders’s response to Goff: “Concerning Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom: A Response to Matthew J. Goff,” JSJ 38 (2007): 297–306). Sadly, Sanders never seems to consider Ahiqar, neither as a possible source for Ben Sira (a strong possibility, though not certain) or simply as another example of an ancient instruction that deals very directly and at length with public shame, one’s reputation, and the attendant ethic of caution.
We may say that [Ben Sira] proposes a very careful ethics of self-preservation which is for him the practice of traditional wisdom and which he merges with the keeping of the Torah to such a degree that he does not distinguish them. He who practices wisdom keeps Torah and self. He must be on guard, cautious, fearful for his good name, avoiding shame at all cost.\(^{103}\)

Claudia Camp likewise argues that “the concepts of honor and shame constitute an essential part of Ben Sira’s ideological matrix.”\(^{104}\)

Returning to Ahiqar, there is certainly a concern for one’s public reputation. The disgrace that Ahiqar faces is not only upsetting because of his near execution, he must also now live “as a ser vant” (72) in the house of Nabusumiskun, where as before he was “counselor of all Assyria” (e.g., 12). Even in retirement he apparently spent his days “strolling among the vineyards” (40). The lament in 139–140—which ties the sayings directly to the narrative situation—is similarly concerned with the public shame that comes with his son’s betrayal. Indeed, the grief and bewilderment expressed here have less to do with the shock of his son’s betrayal but seemingly more on the fact that now his word is worthless—no one will believe him, especially not an outsider.\(^{105}\) In the very next line, the sayings make clear that whoever suffers public shame, his name (= reputation) will decrease tremendously, even among cherished friends.\(^{106}\) That the text would dwell on the worthlessness of one’s name in public disgrace generates an inescapable irony of the entire project, for here we have the wise words of a sage who has been shamed publicly. The message of the instructions, in a sense, undermines their efficaciousness, though to be sure the audience is “aware” of Ahiqar’s innocence even if his “public standing” (in the story’s social world, that is) is quite low. Still, despite his innocence, lines 139–140 question that if a man’s own son would disrespect him to such an extent, why should others take him seriously? In any case, the narrative and these few sayings, among several others, speak to a pronounced ethic of caution.

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\(^{103}\) Sanders, “Ben Sira’s Ethics of Caution,” 86.

\(^{104}\) Camp, “Honor and Shame in Ben Sira,” 171.

\(^{105}\) For outsider there is actually the term “foreigner” (גזרי); I will discuss what this ethnic label might mean in Chapter 4. In any case, the point in this passage is that there is literally no one that he will listen to him or believe him since his own son is his accuser (the language presumes a formal, legal scenario where the son has publically accused his father of something heinous; cf. חזרה הָמשֶך).\(^{106}\)

\(^{106}\) The word for “friends” here is וּכֶּרֶשׁ from רְדֵּם דְּמָרִים meaning “beloved” and thus these are no mere acquaintances or colleagues.
in \textit{Ahiqar}, and much like that of Ben Sira’s, the theme of caution is “characteristic of … [its] approach to human relations.”\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ahiqar} conveys a constant and immovable anxiety when it comes to external threats which can come not only from enemies but from one’s own friends and family, and while some—such as the fables—are more drastic and ominous in their potential outcomes, others, like Ben Sira, have a more social or economic concern.

### 3.5 Virtues of Contentment and Humility

Up to this point much of \textit{Ahiqar}’s message has conveyed a fairly negative tone, either in its frequent prohibitive format or in the pervasive worry about some unexpected and unmitigated disaster. \textit{Ahiqar} does, however, offer some goal for which its readers can strive. The ethic of caution also contributes to the cultivation of a few important virtues. Friendship and reciprocity, topics which we have already discussed above, may be considered among these, and they are certainly prominent in the narrative, but the two virtues that are most outstanding and that profoundly align with the ethic of caution are that of contentment and humility.

\textit{Ahiqar}, on several occasions, encourages the addressee to be content with what s/he has. “[\textit{Eat/Enjoy}] the little thing which is your lot, and do not covet the large thing which is withheld from you.”\textsuperscript{108} The advice about being content with one’s portion is fairly common in instructional literature. Compare, for example, a similar passage in the Egyptian \textit{Teaching of a Man for his Son}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{107} Sanders, “Concerning Ben Sira,” 300.

\textsuperscript{108} Note that Porten and Yardeni have an alternative suggestion for the lacunae: “[\textit{Do not despise (אָל תָּחֹב}) …” Similarly, Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 314–18 suggests “[\textit{Nicht verachte (אָל תָּחֹב) Klein}]es, das in deinem Los ist.” There is nothing in the context which suggests that the first clause must be a negative; cf. Ingo Kottsieper, “Die Geschichte und die Sprüche des weisen Achiqar,” in \textit{TUAT III/2} (ed. Otto Kaiser; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991), 320–47, at 329, who argues that the missing portion does not allow enough room for both a negative particle and the verb and thus proposes “Freue dich an dem Wenigen.” Notably, I arrived at my conclusion—based on other factors, not the physical space—indeedependent of Kottsieper, though his observation in this regard is very helpful. On why I think my reconstruction is more likely—especially as it relates parallels with later versions—see Seth Bledsoe, “The Relationship between the Elephantine Ahiqar Sayings and Later Recensions: A Preliminary Analysis of the Development and Diffusion of the Ahiqar tradition” in \textit{Enoncés sapientiels: Traductions, traducteurs et contextes culturels} (ed. Marie-Christine Bornes-Varol and Marie-Sol Ortola; Aliento Échanges sapientiels en Méditerranée 4; Nancy, France: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2014), 223–50, esp. 241–43.
\end{footnotesize}
“Gladden your heart with what you have.” Proverbs also approaches the topic of contentment, though I have not found a parallel to this saying. Prov 13:25 may be a representative example: “The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite, but the belly of the wicked is empty.” What stands out in Ahiqar when compared with the Hebrew and Egyptian passages, is that the addressee is told to accept the little that he has compared to the much of others. Thus, the issue is not simply about contentment, but contentment in humility.

Looking to another example, we may return our attention to the leopard-goat fable and specifically the fact that the goat is said to be naked. This seemingly unnecessary ingredient to the fable—for why would a goat have to be naked for a leopard to want to eat it—may signal that the goat is in need. We will explore this question further in the next chapter, but for the moment we can appreciate the fact that despite this apparent need, the goat did not jump at the chance to get more. This “more” of course would have spelled disaster for the goat, and she would have ended up losing what she already had, however little it was to begin with. This is at least one of the morals of the fable, that is, be content with what you have, even if it is not much.

Translation from Stephen Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BCE: Questions and Readings* (GHP Egyptology 2; London: Golden House, 2004), 102–7. If we look to the Egyptian text of this line, which reads sb3k. k ḫb. k ḫr.k, we may notice that ḫr.k more precisely means “your portion”; hence a better translation “gladden your heart with your portion.” That ḫr.k probably means “portion” or that which is allotted to you, see Ptahhotep (Prisse 10,6 = Lichtheim, AEL 1:69, maxim 20.1–2): “Do not be greedy in the division, do not covet more than your share (ḫr.k). The translation is actually quite difficult in the Prisse papyrus and could be rendered in several ways, e.g., “Do not be greedy, except for your portion”; “Be not greedy not even according to your share”; or “Do not covet more than your share.” Fortunately the passage is extant in another version. In P. BM 10509 it is clear that the translation is best, i.e., “Do not be greedy, except for your own portion (ḫr.k)” (N.B. the British Museum papyrus is fragmentary, missing the word “greedy”, but given the parallel with Prisse it can be reconstructed with confidence.)

In Proverbs we do not find any parallel that precisely matches this one, probably because its implication about the financial status of the addressee (cf. Chapter 4). However, there are several sayings that contrast little and much, though usually with a moralistic flavor; see, e.g., Prov 16:8 “Better is a little with righteousness, than a large income with justice.” Cf. Ben Sira 29:21–28, esp. v. 23 “be content with little or much, and you will hear no reproach for being a guest.” The attention to “little” here is notable except the situation is explicitly tied to a meal. This could be the case for Ahiqar (especially if “Eat” is the correct reconstruction) though it is not clear. For a later example of an instruction that suggests its addressee has a little “portion,” see, e.g., 4QInstruction (4Q416 2 iii 8) where the mebin is told: “You are poor, desire nothing except your inheritance.”
As for the narrative specifically, Nadan’s character may also be emblematic of someone who was not content and whose self-aggrandizing actions led to his own downfall. This is a tenuous suggestion since the narrative’s conclusion—with Nadan’s presumed punishment—is missing and again we are frustratingly dissatisfied with the papyrus’s corruption exactly at those few lines wherein Nadan’s betrayal took place. Nevertheless, we may still speculate on his motives—and thus one of the morals of the story—based on subtle clues in the extant narrative. In the previous chapter, for instance, the literary analysis of the narrative drew attention to the fact that Ahiqar’s title—“wise scribe and counselor upon whose words the king and all Assyria relied”—is repeated ad nauseam by nearly every character in the story, with one glaring exception: Nadan. Perhaps we can hear in this omission a hint of disdain from the upcomer about his predecessor. He might have grown tired of hearing everyone else wax on about how great Ahiqar was at his job, including the king—who, curiously, could not even stop reciting Ahiqar’s greatness even after the alleged treason. Is it so strange that Nadan, who came in only on the coattails of his uncle, would seek to establish his own name, and what better way than to foil a “plot” of treason? His choice in Ahiqar as the fall guy, albeit utterly heinous, may have grown out of this resentment—for who really likes to hear from their colleagues about how great, or how much better it was when “so-and-so” (i.e., their predecessor) was here? So Nadan decided to smear his predecessor’s name and elevate his own in the process. In this regard, it is important to mention that it is not clear that Nadan had already replaced Ahiqar at the highest position. Ahiqar, as narrator, only says that he “established [Nadan] at the gate of the palace” (חָיָה הַבְּבֵל הַכֶּלֶם: 23). 

Note the difference in tense from the earlier statement where Ahiqar says “[Nadan] will succeed (והַמֶּלֶך) me (as) a [wise and skillful] scribe [counselor of Assyria, all of it] he will be (יְהֹודָה [be]ar) of the seal” (18–19). Attention to the change in tenses may, in fact, explain the seeming repetitiveness of lines 17–22. Nadan seems to have already been established “at the gate” earlier (9–12). So, the conversation between Ahiqar and Esarhaddon that begins in 17—where Ahiqar again says that he is old—is not a repetition of his attempt to install Nadan as a court official, but his wish that Nadan eventually take his place as “right-hand man” (so to speak) beside the king. Ahiqar makes this case, by the way, in order to assuage Esarhaddon’s seeming reluctance to allow Ahiqar to retire. The promise Ahiqar makes about Nadan, therefore, convinces Esarhaddon, who gives Ahiqar leave to go home (22). Ahiqar’s words here, in the future tense, are about the hopes he has for Nadan, who, therefore, must only have a position at court and has not yet achieved the
fame of his adoptive father nor has he received the signet ring which symbolizes his position of prominence. Nadan is simply “among the (other) chiefs” at the gate (23–24). The subsequent plot by Nadan may make more sense in that he is seeking to elevate his status among these other officials, in the typical style of the competitive courtier. This reading is speculative, of course, since we do not have a clear view of Nadan’s intentions, but it does account for the repetitiveness. In any case, the simple takeaway is that Nadan was simply not satisfied with where things stood. He wanted more. Thus, he was not content.

Support for this reading of the narrative, at least in its basic outline, may be found in the *Ankhsheshonqe*, which shares a similar plot structure to the one in *Ahiqar*. In the Demotic text, the protagonist Ankhsheshonqe, upon hearing of his friend Hariese’s plan to assassinate the pharaoh, begins to immediately berate his friend for not being content (2.1–15). The pharaoh, according to Ankhsheshonqe, had “brought you [Hariese] to the palace when you had nothing in the world.”

In an unfortunate coincidence the previous passage, wherein Hariese’s decision to kill the pharaoh stood, is corrupt; thus, like with Nadan we do not have a clear picture his motives. The implication in Ankhsheshonqe’s invective, nonetheless, is that Hariese is not content with that which has already been given him, and in Hariese’s case, as with Nadan’s, this beneficence was quite a large sum.

Returning to the sayings of *Ahiqar*, we find other examples where the moral is that of contentment. Line 80, though somewhat more abstract, implores the addressee not to be dismayed about the present circumstances because they could always be worse. The advice about loans in lines 129–130, for example, indicates an appeal for contentment. The addressee is told *not* to take out a “heavy loan” (חמאה כרבות), which may mean something like: “do not take out more than you need.” This understanding may be warranted when considering the previous line wherein the addressee is told to borrow “so that you may eat and be satisfied” (יהי נשפץ). In other words, borrow to survive and only until satisfaction, not to increase one’s standing. Again, the meager

112 Later, when asked by the Pharaoh about why, Hariese explains enigmatically: “My great lord! On the day on which Pre commanded to do good to me he put Pharaoh’s good fortune in my heart. On the day on which Pre commanded to do harm to me he put Pharaoh’s misfortune in my heart” (3.13–15; Lichtheim, *AEL* 3:162).
113 See the discussion of loans in *Ahiqar* in section 4.1.1.
amount of goods for which the addressee is to be content in these sayings suggests an added aspect of humility.

The humble status of the addressee is frequently implied by several of the sayings. The pair of sayings in 142 and 142, though incomplete, begin with the assumption that the addressee occupies a humbler status than those around him: “with one who is more exalted \( \text{דרי} \) than you, do not … // with one more who is bolder \( \text{ראוי} \) and more powerful \( \text{טייש} \) than you [do not …” A similar position, at least on a moral scale, takes place in 126 and 128. The lesson of humility may also lie behind the fable about the thornbush and the pomegranate, where the former oversteps his humble bounds by accusing the pomegranate, only to be “put in his place” by the better fruit.\(^{114}\) Finally, perhaps one of the more vivid exhortations for a humble disposition in terms of contentment comes in 90b where the addressee is to be content even when he lacks sons: “In an multitude of sons let your heart not rejoice and in their paucity \[do not mourn\].”\(^{115}\) Progeny is among the most important, if not the most important aspect of life. To have no sons would essentially make a life worthless.

Humility and the related virtue of contentment are essential for having the best possibility at avoiding disaster. A humble disposition before one’s superiors, especially the king, will not necessarily ensure a positive outcome, but an arrogated one will lead to swift destruction either from the king or the gods themselves. Contentment, therefore, even in one’s meager state is a key attribute. These two virtues accord well with the general ethic of caution, for they inculcate behavior that avoids conflict and risk.

3.6 Conclusion

The Aramaic Book of Ahiqar covers a wide variety of topics and themes, several of which were fairly common among similar ancient instructions. However, there is one theme that stands out, not only in its quantity but in that it affects nearly all other aspects of the sayings. The importance of speech is without equal in Ahiqar. Though a common trope in nearly every other ancient wisdom instruction, the danger of not watching out for one’s tongue is brought to an acute reality in

\(^{114}\) On the hierarchical interpretation of this fable see Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 226–30.

\(^{115}\) Translation follows Porten and Yardeni’s closely.
Discretion is generally the guideline, and this is due in part to a profound recognition of the power of words. This power becomes exponentialized in the person of the king, who, incidentally, has a divine backing when issuing decrees. Indeed, the gods seem to be intimately involved when it comes to noble speech, though how this is configured remains unclear. In any case, Ahiqar takes a clear and strong stance against deceptive speech. Lying is seemingly one of the worst things an individual can do. Even a king is not free from the guilt that comes with lying. Lies, calumny, slander, these are all things to avoid, but they are also things to fear, because despite the assumed judgment for committing such crimes they are nevertheless efficacious in their destruction. Ahiqar frequently draws on military or hunting imagery to describe how lies and slander can seriously injure an individual.

The world Ahiqar describes seems to be very dangerous, and not only because of the harmful words. Suffering and disaster can come at any time and from all angles, even from one’s own family and friends. The king and the gods are also of little help, for while they are supposedly upholders of justice, catastrophe can apparently come just as easily, and certainly more swiftly and more deadly, from their end. Thus, Ahiqar evinces a pronounced ethic of caution. The advice and instructions comprised in the sayings and exemplified by the narrative are such that this text serves more as a guidebook for avoiding catastrophe as it does for inculcating a desire to learn or accomplish something.

Still, though, there are some positive aspects for which the addressee should strive. Contentment and humility are key virtues in Ahiqar. The former can oftentimes be the very thing that saves you, for as the fables and the story of Ahiqar demonstrate, trying to gain more can ultimately lead to you having less. Humility is also an important virtue. This is not surprising given the narrative’s circumstances. Learning to accept one’s humble statues can also aid in avoiding conflict. This virtue is related to contentment because it helps to suppress any desire to climb higher on the social or financial foodchain. Furthermore, the presumed humble status of the addressee speaks to a social situation—fictional or otherwise—that stands in contrast to the imagined audience of similar instructions. Indeed, this aspect will be the primary focus in the next chapter. In sum, Ahiqar’s basic message and ethic are not unique in their theme, but they are exceptional in the degree to which they are expressed.

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116 I thank David Skelton for reflecting on this aspect with me.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE BITTER WEIGHT OF WISDOM:
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL INSTRUCTION IN AHIQAR

4.1 The Social and Political Layerings

Ahiqar, 166-168a:
“A leopard happened upon a goat, and it [the goat] was naked. And the leopard answered and said to the goat, ‘Come and let me cover you with my skin.’ The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, ‘Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!’ – For [a leopard] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.”

Why does the fable mention that the goat was naked? It seems to be more than just a colorful addition to the setting’s detail. For one, it provides the leopard with a reasonable “ice-breaker” for approaching the goat, or, from the leopard’s perspective, it serves as a possible weak point for taking advantage of the goat. The leopard, in his attempt to trick the goat, draws attention to a need of the goat. Indeed, the entire dialogue centers on the issue of the goat’s lack of covering. The topic of conversation, then, is the goat’s physical need, and moreover that need is not trivial. That the fable should be concerned with the issue of nakedness and “covering” (ップ), however, is not self-evident or even necessary. As even the text itself explicitly reminds us, the leopard is a goat’s natural enemy so there need not be a special occasion for the leopard to “happen upon” the goat. A leopard would try to “suck” a goat’s blood, whether the goat was shorn or not. We are invited, therefore, to consider the specific issue of the goat’s nakedness as carrying some significance, especially as we transpose the fable’s message onto the human and social level. Because the conversation depends on the word-play around “naked” (עָרָה), “covering” (מָכַר; אָבַטָן), and “hide/skin” (מִלָּה), the anthropological equivalent would be clothing, or metonymically “shelter” or abstractly “welfare” (שָׂלָה). To wit, the naked goat symbolizes someone who is in a position of economic distress. Nakedness—or simply attention to a lack of clothing—is often an indicator of

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1 N.B. the term עָרָה “naked” could also mean “cold.” The mention of covering and skin make “naked” (i.e. a lack of clothing/covering) the more likely nuance, although “cold” could certainly still make sense.
financial need. Such a reading is given support when we consider the fable’s literary context. *Ahiqar* dwells a great deal on misfortune both in the narrative but even more so in the sayings, several of which speak directly of economic hardship and even, on occasion, financial insolvency. We are left wondering, then, how such an “exposed” identity relates to its ancient audience.

The *Book of Ahiqar* demonstrates a strong preoccupation with correct social behavior and the dynamics of life in society. Nearly every saying imagines some type of interaction between the addresses and society, whether it be in the familial, financial, judicial/legal, or political domain. This chapter, therefore, will consider the social world espoused by the *Book of Ahiqar* by following two specific threads: financial advice and the concept of foreignness. What I am attempting to describe in this analysis is the *world of the text itself* which may or may not have a direct correspondence to the social structures in the text’s material, historical environment. The approach, at least to begin with, is a literary one, seeking to uncover a rhetorical strategy of the text as it relates to social identity. In this regard, the economic and financial advice stands out, especially when we compare it with similar external sources. *Ahiqar* and the books of Proverbs and Ben Sira, for example, deal with many of the same financial issues but in a noticeably different manner. In particular, *Ahiqar* nearly always adopts the perspective of the socially inferior which contrasts sharply with the perspective we find in Proverbs and Ben Sira. Whether or not the “humble” perspective of the speaker and the addressee directly corresponds to that of the actual, intended audience remains unclear and may simply be a product of the rhetorical strategy of the text itself.

Foreignness is another social aspect at work in *Ahiqar*, especially in the narrative. Ethnicity is a salient factor for how a person relates to his/her community. The discourse around ethnicity—which may be better understood as a socio-political thread of the text—contributes to our understanding of the social identity of “Ahiqar” and his audience. This identity mainly hinges on two mechanisms at play in the narrative. They are: (1) the ambiguous view or role of the king; and (2) the opposition drawn between Nabusumiskun and Nadan. Both of these plot devices speak to the socio-political outlook of the text and are mirrored to a certain extent in the movement of the sayings. The moral of the story blurs the boundaries between foreigner and family, loyalty and dissent, and belonging and distancing. This, in turn, results in a complicated social ethic with which the sayings must grapple. When taken together, therefore, the narrative and sayings of *Ahiqar* are attempting to renegotiate how one conceives of community and, consequently, communal identity.
Consequently, the anxiety *Ahiqar* evinces with regard to ethnicity has little to do with one’s political status, but instead with the distress that results from social isolation.

Finally, these two socio-economically and socio-politically charged literary analyses of *Ahiqar* necessarily raise questions of a historical nature. We should consider, therefore, how the social identities espoused by the text and the complexities it confronts may be translated into a historical milieu. Fortunately for *Ahiqar*, we have a palpable material context in Elephantine, and one that is rich with contextual data. For this reason, instead of trying to use the analyses above to construct some hypothetical *Sitz im Leben* in which the text supposedly “belongs,” I propose a brief reading of *Ahiqar*’s economic and political ethic *in situ*. The concerns of *Ahiqar*—particularly in financial, economic, and ethnic situations—may have had a strong resonance for the Judean community at Elephantine who faced similar scenarios and used the same language that we find in the Aramaic instruction.

**4.2 Wisdom from Below: Economic Advice in the Ahiqar Sayings**

Economic and financial advice is common among collections of sapiential instructions in the ancient world and *Ahiqar* is no exception. The specific economic and social issues raised in *Ahiqar*, such as loans or poverty, are also prominent in Proverbs and Ben Sira. In this section I will analyze several of the sayings in *Ahiqar* that deal specifically with economic issues. The pertinent questions that will be asked are: how are these financial and economic sayings presented and what does that connote about the speaker, the addressee(s), and the various third-parties? Comparison to relevant passages in Proverbs and Ben Sira will be particularly helpful in this section as they reveal a number of peculiarities. The strategic use of the first-person, the point-of-view in the more pragmatic advice, and the general outlook in several of the sayings all support the argument that in terms of the social hierarchy *Ahiqar* consistently invites its audience to adopt a position of inferiority. Thus, the economic and financial instruction in *Ahiqar* is regularly “from below.”

In offering such an analysis we are stepping into some methodologically murky waters that have troubled wisdom scholars for decades. The question of the social setting or *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom—briefly discussed already in Chapter 2—has led to tremendous debate with regard to the economic, social, and political status of the text’s authors and intended audiences. Although I will address some of this scholarship below, the primary focus of my reading has to do with the
dramatis personae in Ahiqar vis-à-vis comparative materials, especially Proverbs and Ben Sira; although, consideration of materials from Egypt and Qumran will also prove useful. To be clear, when referring to the “speaker”—whether in Ahiqar or the related texts—I do not mean the author. Instead, the speaker is merely the rhetorical persona of the “I” within the text that may or may not have anything to do with the author. The same goes for the “addressee,” who is either the explicit “you” or the implicit listener. There is a difference between the implied audience and the actual audience. I will not be trying to “locate” Ahiqar in its Sitz im Leben. Rather, I am simply investigating a phenomenon within the world of the text, that is, what the text itself explicitly states or what we can reasonably infer. Although, the point-of-view of in Ahiqar is almost ubiquitously identified with someone from a lower social status, I am not attempting to pinpoint a specific status for the actual author or reader of Ahiqar. The validity of this rhetorical analysis is observable in that even if we stay within the literary realm, Ahiqar still carries a measurable distinctiveness in its social and economic advice when compared with similar examples in Proverbs and Ben Sira.

Several of the sayings of Ahiqar are concerned with financial matters and one’s economic status. In each of the following examples we will find that the speaker and/or the addressee of Ahiqar is identified with the one in financial distress. Three areas in which Ahiqar relates its views on socio-economic issues will be discussed: (1) loans; (2) poverty; and (3) humility, wealth, and status.

4.2.1 Loans
In lines 129–131 we find a series of related sayings that deal with loans. They read:

[…] you, O my son! Borrow grain and wheat so that you may eat and be satisfied and give to your children with you.

[Do not take out] the heavy [l]oan and from a disreputable person do not borrow. However, [i]f you have taken out the loan, do not set your soul at ease until [you have paid back] the loan [because the eat]ing of the loan is sweet as/like […] but its repayment is a houseful.

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2 In Ahiqar the “you” is frequently identified as the speaker’s son. This rhetorical phenomenon occurs in Proverbs and Ben Sira as well.

3 Translation, especially of lacunae, follows Porten and Yardeni in several cases.
The saying in 129 parallels the one from two lines above, where the addressee—who is also called “my son”—is encouraged to “do any work” in order to feed his family. Thus, the message is that the addressee should do whatever needs to be done so that he and those who depend on him can survive. The encouragement to take out a loan is tempered by the following lines which stress how dangerous it can be to do so. The addressee of Ahigars is told not to borrow from a “bad man” (Aram. הַוָּלָה). The term need not convey a moral judgment, but could refer to someone who has a reputation for being ruthless in business; hence the more fluid rendering “disreputable.” In any case, the addressee is advised to exercise some discernment as to from whom you take out a loan. The discussion continues as the speaker warns his son about any delay in taking out a loan, since the repercussions can be disastrous. He could even lose his house and everything in it!

Loans, pledges, and security are frequent topics among the other instructions. Proverbs and Ben Sira also give advice about loans on several occasions. In a few examples the addressee in Proverbs is encouraged to lend money as a charitable act for one’s neighbor (3:28) or the poor, as in 19:17: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full.” Similarly, Ben Sira urges his addressee to “lend to your neighbor in his time of need; repay your neighbor when a loan falls due” (29:2; cf. 8–14). More often, though, Proverbs speaks to the negative aspects of loans and giving pledges. In 22:7, for example, we read: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.” Going surety—that is, pledging one’s belongings or money as security for another person’s loan—is especially discouraged, both for strangers (11:15) and for a neighbor (17:18). In a lengthy passage about loans and going surety (Sir 29:1–20), Ben Sira talks about how giving a pledge or a loan will generally result in loss because they are rarely repaid, thus “many regard a loan as a windfall” (29:4). The financial instructions in both Proverbs and Ben Sira the teachings often suppose an audience that has some measure of wealth and status, and,

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4 Being cautious about from whom you borrow is also brought up in 4QInstruction in another passage dealing with loans. In 4Q416 2 iii 5–6 the mebin is told, “do not receive money from any person unknown to you, lest he adds to your poverty.” This passage may not relate to borrowing; instead, the evidence suggests someone who is entrusting you with something, like making a deposit.

5 I will discuss this in more detail below, but see TAD B3.13.11, a contract for a loan of grain in which the borrower, if he defaults, could have his house seized, as well as a number of other items.
indeed, most scholars assume these texts were written by and intended for members of the economic and social elite.\(^6\)

\(Ahiqar\) shares many of the same sentiments with the biblical texts, however, there is a key difference: in \(Ahiqar\) the addressee is the one who must borrow, while in nearly every case in Proverbs and Ben Sira the addressee is the lender or the one giving the pledge. A few pointed comparisons will illustrate the significance of this difference. In \(Ahiqar\) 130 we have a caution about the person from whom one borrows as well as about the quantity. The importance of these warnings may be compared to Ben Sira 8:12–13, which reads, “Do not lend to one who is stronger than you; but if you do lend anything, count it as a loss. Do not give surety beyond your means; but if you give surety, be prepared to pay.”\(^7\) In principle there is a strong correlation: be careful with whom and for how much you are making a deal. There is a difference in perspective in that Ben Sira is speaking about lending whereas \(Ahiqar\) is talking about borrowing.\(^8\) The consequences

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\(^6\) Regardless of the precise location (school, court, etc.) there is general agreement among scholars that these texts “belong” to the upper classes. For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to discuss further the specifics of the actual audience, only that the imagined audience (and speaker, for that matter) is presumed to belong to the elite members of society. The bibliography on the social location of Proverbs, Ben Sira, and their intended audiences is voluminous and many of the studies will be referenced later in this paper. Nevertheless, I direct your attention to a few “entry points” into the scholarly conversation: Roland E. Murphy, \textit{The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature} (3d ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 3–5; Michael V. Fox, “The Social Location of the Book of Proverbs,” in \textit{Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran} (M. V. Fox, et al. ed.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 227–39, esp. 231; Fox, \textit{Proverbs 10–31} (AB 18b; New Haven.: Yale University Press, 2009), 500–506; Benjamin Wright III, “Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions Concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” \textit{SBL Seminar Papers, 1996} (SBLSP 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 133–49.

\(^7\) \(Ahiqar\) may have a closer parallel in lines 143–144. The text breaks off but one could reasonably suggest the following reconstruction: “With one who is more impudent and mightier than you do not [borrow money, for he will take] from your portion and onto that which is his will he add…”

\(^8\) In \textit{4QInstruction} there is advice about being cautious when going surety for someone, thus suggesting that the mebin could at least have something of value (see 4Q424 2 3: “One who is a [hypo]crite do not give surety for him among the poor”). Like Ben Sira the advice is about paying it back quickly and being careful for whom you go surety; but the tone is much more dire in the Qumran text, whereas in Ben Sira it’s less threatening (see Goff commentary; Ben Sira has an ethical/moral tone, hence “go surety for one in need, but count it as a loss” or “better to lose some silver than lose a friend”; in \textit{4QInstruction} the mebin is not risking a little bit of money, but his life. Ben Sira 29 dwells at length on the issue of lending money and going surety for a friend, and advises an ethical yet cautious approach.
of each situation are correspondingly opposite. For *Ahiqar* the transaction can cost the addressee everything he owns. Yet, for Ben Sira there is not that much at stake. The phrases “count it as a loss” and “be prepared to pay” are casual and suggest that the addressee is well-off. Going surety or lending is just bad business. Ben Sira can even suggest that his addressee give a loan or a pledge as a charitable act *knowing full well* that the money or item will never be returned (e.g., 29:10 “Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend …”).

Also, the exhortation not to rest until the loan is repaid in *Ahiqar* 130-131 has a close parallel to a passage in Proverbs. In 6:1-5 the biblical text presents a hypothetical scenario wherein the addressee has given a pledge for a neighbor. The speaker tells the addressee to go immediately to the neighbor, presumably to encourage him to pay back the loan quickly. The text then adds: “Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber” (v. 4). This passage is generally read together with the one that immediately follows it, concerning the diligence of the ant (6:6–11), which concludes by saying “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.” The repetition of “sleep” and “slumber” make the connection with the earlier verses likely. So, on the one hand, Proverbs does seem to indicate that going surety is dangerous and can lead to poverty. However, the instruction is connected to the familiar refrain in Proverbs about laziness; hence in its comparison with the ant the addressee is called “lazybones” (v. 6). While admitting the dangers of going surety for a neighbor, the moral of the passage is more likely about laziness. Poverty or financial distress function as a warning-device. The addressee could lose the wealth he already has and become poor—a familiar trope in Proverbs (cf. 20:30–34). Whereas in *Ahiqar*, the real-life social implications are emphasized. If you take out a loan, you better pay it back, because it is worth your entire household. Moreover, the scenario is not one in which the addressee already had something to give, rather the loan is taken out in order to eat. Although the text here is corrupt in a few spots, nowhere is the ethical concern about laziness raised.

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9 For a discussion of loans and pledges in Ben Sira, particularly as it relates to his mission of charity see Bradley C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach* (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 2; Berlin: De Gruyter: 2010), esp. 131–84.

10 In fact, laziness is never a topic in *Ahiqar*. This could be an accident of recovery, but when one considers the medieval witnesses—which are by-and-large much lengthier than the Aramaic text—the theme of laziness is
Although Ahiqar is distinctive in its advice about loans when compared with Proverbs and Ben Sira, there is an interesting passage in the Qumran wisdom text *4QInstruction* that bears a strong resemblance to the one in Ahiqar. 4Q416 2 i 18–22 reads:

And if you lack, borrow, being without the money which you lack, for the treasury of God does not lack … The nourishment which he provides you, eat. But do not take any more, lest you shorten your life. If you borrow money of men for what you need, let there be no sleep for you, day and night, and let there be no rest for your soul until you have returned to the creditor everything.\(^{11}\)

This passage, like the one in Ahiqar, is about borrowing, not lending. Both acknowledge that borrowing is at times a necessity, yet express caution in doing so. Also, in both texts the addressee is told not to give rest “to your soul” until the loan is paid off, though the phrasing is slightly different. Exactly what it is the addressees must borrow is also significant: both texts explicitly mention the need to borrow food so that they can eat. Interestingly, lack of food also seems to have been a common problem at Elephantine, where many (if not all) of the members of community, especially the soldiers and their families, depended on monthly royal rations for sustenance.\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\) Translation from Matthew J. Goff, *4QInstruction* (Wisdom Literature from the Ancient World 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 185.

\(^{12}\) This is particularly attested among the various ostraca recovered there, on which we find the more day-to-day personal notes that were exchanged among the average community members. See, e.g., André Lemaire, “Judean Identity in Elephantine: Everyday Life according to the Ostraca,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (ed. Oded Lipschitz, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 365–73, who observes (p. 366) that these ostraca are mostly brief messages between family members and friends that deal with everyday issues and “contain mainly very practical matters: problems of food are often mentioned.” Perhaps even more telling is an example cited by C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 34; he translates the ostracon KAI 270 (inverse): “If you will sell all my valuables, (then) the babies may eat. There are no more coins left!” Seow adds that this text “provides a glimpse of the economic uncertainties that many families faced...people in such dire straits were forced to sell and borrow just to get by, as the Proverbs of Ahiqar suggest”; Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” 73 suggests an alternative translation of this curious ostracon: “Now, if you wish, do not sell them. Let the children eat (them). Lo, there is no remainder of cucumbers!” (*TAD* D7.17). In any case, the text concerns a lack of food and the encouragement of a husband to his wife to do something so that their children may eat.
In sum, while *Ahiqar* is not unique in its advice about borrowing, even in the specific warning—with whom you do business, how large the loan is, and how important it is to repay the loan quickly—the Aramaic text, when compared with Proverbs and Ben Sira, stands out in the point-of-view that it appropriates. The addressee is cast as one in or at least liable to financial distress such that they need to take out a loan simply to eat. This perspective does, however, appear in *4QInstruction*, a Hebrew text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in a very similar way.\(^\text{13}\)

Another saying in *Ahiqar* is worth a brief mention here. Lines 107–108 present an interesting scenario:

If the wicked person seizes the hem of your cloak, leave it in his hand. Then, make an appeal to Shamash; he […] // will take his and give it to you.

Earlier scholars—Brauner, Greenstein, and Stephens\(^\text{14}\)—have suggested that the phrase “to grasp/seize the hem” is a technical term that applies when someone is taking a person’s property as a pledge for a loan.\(^\text{15}\) An intriguing parallel comes in Prov 20:16 (par. 27:13): “Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger; seize the pledge given as surety for strangers.” Once

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\(^\text{13}\) There are a couple of passages about loans in the two Demotic instructions, *Insinger* and *Ankhsheshonge*, that may be interesting for this discussion. *Ankhsheshonge*, on the one hand, warns his addressee against lending money, at least not without taking a pledge (17.16–17); on the other hand, he does encourage the addressee to borrow money in a demonstrably sarcastic way, telling him to do so in order to get a wife, celebrate a birthday, but *not* to “live well on it” (17:9–12); cf. Lichttheim *AEL* 3:172. In *Insinger*, however, the advice appears to be more genuine: “Do not borrow money at interest in order to provide plenty of food with it” (26.16; the next line speaks about gluttony); cf. Lichttheim, *AEL* 3:206.


\(^\text{15}\) See Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 174; e.g., Exodus 22:26–27: “If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down … And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate”; cf. Deut 24:10–13; Amos 2:8; Job 22:6. In truth, the legal (i.e., civil) connection is only one possibility. Other examples of this phrase—taken from the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 1 Sam 15:27), and several inscriptions in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Old Aramaic (e.g., *KAI* 215:11)—suggest alternative connotations, such as: a demonstration of piety or submission to a superior, to some magical effect; to symbolize a guarantee of truthful witness; cf. Brauner, “To Grasp the Hem,” 35–38.
again, the different perspectives are revealing. If the *Ahiqar* passage is indeed about a pledge being taken—whether rightfully or not—it is nevertheless clear that the text imagines the addressee as the one whose garment is being seized.\(^{16}\) Thus, the addressee has taken out a loan, or possibly given a pledge for someone else. In the biblical passage(s), on the other hand, the addressee is the one doing the seizing.

### 4.2.2 Poverty

In the midst of a series of sayings about the king and the power of his word, we find an interesting saying wherein the speaker addresses the issue of poverty. Line 89a reads:

> I have tasted bitter medlar ([גָ'גֹר] and its [*taste*] is strong ([עַמְי]) but there is nothing that is more bitter than poverty ([חָטָא])

\(^{16}\) Among the Elephantine documents we find a loan contract where “clothing” is listed among the various items that could be seized in case of default (*TAD* B3.13.11).

\(^{17}\) The lacuna in this line is unfortunate, leading to another possible reconstruction: “I have tasted even the bitter medlar, and *have eaten* endives, but nothing is more bitter than poverty”; so Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 89–90, who takes הָעָסֶר not as the simple adjective, but as the plural of עַמְי "lettuce" (cf. Jastrow, s.v.). Most other translations follow Porten and Yardeni; see, e.g., Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 157.

\(^{18}\) The translation of this proverb follows Porten and Yardeni closely, particularly in light of the lexical issues. The term [גָ'גֹר], presumably some kind of hawthorne bush that has characteristically bitter fruit, is problematic. In most of the other translations it is read it as two words: [*ר* [גָ'גֹר] and [עַמְי], hence “I have tasted even the bitter medlar”; cf. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 89; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 157; Niehr, *Aramäischen Ahiqar*, 43. The letter in question, כ, is directly beside the ב. This should not discount the reading כ as it is not uncommon for the spacing in *Ahiqar* to be inconsistent, where words are sometimes not so clearly divided. On the other hand, having looked at high-resolution images of the papyrus itself, it seems clear that the letter is, in fact, a כ as Porten and Yardeni read it. In this script, these two letters are quite similar but the upper strokes are distinct enough. The solution becomes more befuddled given the obscurity of the term. It is nowhere else attested in Old or Imperial Aramaic, and when we consider later formulations there is some disparity. Within Syriac we find one instance similar to *Ahiqar* with [כָּעַמְי] (Hasan bar Bahlul 1118:25); but there are at least four instances (Homiles of Aphraates 187:18; bar Bahlul 907:18, 1427:8) where the term appears with the [כָּעַמְי] before the [כָּעַמְי], hence כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי. This latter form of the Syriac is matched in the Mishnaic Hebrew term כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי. Although, we have in the Syriac Homilies of Aphraates a close parallel in that this lexeme is paired with the same adjective, thus we find: כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי כָּעַמְי. Still, the closest morphology to the lexeme in *Ahiqar* is probably to be found in the Arabic [כָּעַמְי] which may lend support to Porten and Yardeni’s reading. The

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We can immediately see that the notion of poverty is related to the taste-sensation of bitterness, specifically, the eating of bitter herbs. The structure of the lines is such that the first verb governs the remaining clauses. An interpretive reading would thus be: “I have tasted bitter herbs, and in tasting I have found the bitter taste to be strong, but I have not tasted anything that is more bitter than poverty.” The assumption, of course, is that a bitter taste is undesirable and unpleasant and so also is being poor.

That bitterness is connected metaphorically to a dismal situation is not unusual in the ancient Near East.19 *Ahiqar* is also not alone in the specific association of bitter taste and socio-economic status. In Proverbs 31:6-7, for example, we read: “Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.” The phrase יִרְבְּעֵהוֹן “for those bitter of soul” stands in parallel relationship with יִרְבְּעַת “his poverty” as well as “his misery.” Elsewhere in *Ahiqar* we find bitter taste linked to a situation of want. Line 123 reads: “Hunger will sweeten bitterness (OR: bitter things) and thirst [ […].” Although the line breaks off, the implication seems to be that if one is hungry then even the bitter things that one has to eat will taste sweet. This line, though incomplete, has a strong parallel in Proverbs 27:7 which says: “The sated appetite loathes honey; but to the hungry appetite, everything bitter is sweet.”

Although the connection between the unpleasantness of bitter taste with the unpleasantness of poverty is common, the particular illustration of eating bitter herbs functions on a deeper level, because the consumption of this food in particular was most likely a very real and physical aspect of a poor person’s diet. The choice of the metaphor is not arbitrary. Even a verse in Proverbs is built upon the shared assumption that vegetables are as basic as it gets: “Better a little with fear of the Lord, than great wealth with confusion; Better is a dinner of vegetables (_filled with love_) where love is meaning of the lexeme is also uncertain, at least in terms of the specific genus and species. Based on later usage, and its catalogued description in Aphraates, it most likely refers to some type of medlar or hawthorn, whose fruits are a well-known for their bitterness. Indeed, that the fruit is “bitter” is not in question given the presence of the well-known adjective עַצְרָה.

19 See, e.g., Ruth 1:13, 21; Job 7:11, 13:26; *Amenemope* 26.12–13; indeed in the Hebrew Bible the term for bitter occurs in a number of passages as a means to characterize a variety of bleak situations, especially destruction

than a *fatted ox* and hatred with it. (Pro 15:16–17). Of this verse Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, following rabbinic commentary, states that “the greens in Prov 15:17 probably refer to edible wild herbs gathered in the field … as opposed to those cultivated in gardens … this reinforces the connotation of ‘meal of greens’ as a low-status food of poor people, since anyone can gather ‘field vegetables’ freely in the wild, even in times of famine.” The uncertain etymology of the Aramaic term in *Ahiqar* prevents such a precise interpretation, but the meagerness of bitter herbs as one’s diet is discernible nonetheless.

The function of “poverty” in *Ahiqar* in its context—a litany of warnings about the terribleness of the king’s word/wrath—is most likely as a warning of what may happen when one draws the ire of the king. Poverty functioning as a warning to elicit right behavior is a common trope in Proverbs and Ben Sira, although in the biblical texts it is configured in a different way. In Proverbs and Ben Sira the topic of poverty usually functions either *rhetorically* as a warning against and thus consequence of being foolish or lazy, or *ethically* where the audience is reminded of their duty to care for the poor.

On the first point, we might consider the comments by Houston: “The role of the poor in Proverbs is to stand as a dreadful warning of the state to which the audience may be reduced if they fail to heed instruction.” The following passage is illustrative:

I passed by the field of one who was lazy, by the vineyard of a stupid person; and see, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior. (Prov 24:30–34)

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21 The parallelism of this verse demonstrates that a “dinner of vegetables” is representative of a meager financial status when weighed against the “fatted ox” of the wealthy. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 595–96, translates the phrase “provisions of greens,” noting that the term חמצה can be the technical term for one’s publicly-distributed rations.


24 Cf. the nearly exact parallel in Prov 6:9–11.
Proverbs also includes some exhortations on the ethical treatment of the poor (e.g. 14:21; 14:31; 19:17, etc.). Concern for the poor is likewise prominent in Ben Sira (e.g. Sir 4:1–5, 8; 29:9 34:25). A third category of sayings related to the poor may be identified as observations on the undesirable state of the poor, with some examples even carrying a tone of contempt rather than pity (e.g. Prov 14:20; 19:4, 7; 22:7; Sir 13:19–20, 23; 31:4). Finally, there are a few proverbs, like the one in 15:16–17 cited above, that are chiefly concerned with moral uprightness and use the assumed undesirable state of poverty for rhetorical effect. For example, Proverbs states: “Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich. (28:6; cf. 19:22; Sir 30:14).

In contrast to Proverbs and Ben Sira—especially Prov 31:6–7 where poverty and bitterness are similarly linked—line 89a in Ahiqar stands out in its use of first-person. In none of the examples above is the addressee ever assumed to be among the poor. At worst, poverty is a possibility as result of moral decay or laziness, and it is not clear if this is a real possibility or merely strong rhetoric (i.e., to “scare” the addressee into obedience). In Ahiqar, however, the speaker insinuates a personal familiarity with poverty.

This personal experience is intensified when we compare 89a with a pair of other sayings in Ahiqar that are remarkably similar in form. At the top of column 11 we find two parallel lines 159–160 which read:

I have carried sand and loaded salt but there nothing that is heavier than a for[eigner]
I have carried straw and lifted bran but there is nothing that is lighter than a resident-alien

The similar form of the two sayings here, as well as with the one in 89a, are noticeable. The interpretation of the sayings in 159–160 will be discussed in 4.3 but for the moment we can observe that the use of the first-person again links the speaker to a social status that is generally undesirable.

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25 On this point see especially Timothy Sandoval, The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs (Leiden: Brill, 2006), who states at 68: “The book [of Proverbs] also employs the language of wealth and poverty as motivational symbols in meshalim that should be understood more figuratively. The rhetoric of wealth in these instances serves to underscore the desirability of the way of wisdom generally and the values or virtues associated with that way. The rhetoric of poverty depicts the undesirability of the vices that belong to the way of folly. These sorts of sayings are not directly related to matters of literal wealth and poverty, but depend upon an implicit understanding of the value of wealth.” Cf. Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 512–13.
Being a foreigner (עִיזְרָא), as the saying indicates, can be difficult. These examples about tasting, lifting, and feeling weight create a synthesis of sensory and social experience. The speaker confesses that he can feel the burden of being a foreigner just as heavily as he has felt the weight of lifting a load of sand or salt; or in the case of 89a, he can feel the effects of being a poor person just as easily as he has tasted the bitterness of medlar.

In Ahiqar, then, the speaker identifies with a foreigner, a resident-alien, and a poor person. The intimacy of the speaker’s connection with these generally disreputable social statuses is highlighted when compared them to a strikingly similar passage in Ben Sira. In chapter 22:15 the text states: “Sand, salt, and a piece of iron are easier to bear than a stupid person.” The combination of the same elements, sand and salt, in a similarly structured saying is notable, but what is more important is the difference in perspective. Ahiqar cries, “I have tasted,” and “I have lifted.” Whereas Ben Sira’s instruction is distant, likening the “other,” i.e., the “stupid person,” to a set of proverbially heavy objects.

The appropriation of “poverty” as part of the speaker’s social identity in 89a—and possibly for the addressee also in 141—has parallels again in the Hebrew wisdom instruction from Qumran. In its various formulations, the economic advice in 4QInstruction likewise indicates that the addressee, who is called the “mebin” ( trần) is imagined to be poor. Most Qumran scholars take this to mean that the actual addressee of the text was also poor, but what interests us here is the strikingly similar rhetorical strategy, regardless of the real-life audience. We have already

26 On the implications it has for Ben Sira’s dependency on Ahiqar, see, e.g., Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 394–95, 750–51;
27 Cf. Prov 27:3 “A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool’s provocation is heavier than both.” Here, as in Ben Sira, the “fool” is not to be identified with the speaker or the implied addressee.
witnessed this in the specific example of borrowing, but elsewhere and on a number of occasions the *mebin* is told directly: “you are poor” (e.g. 4Q416 2 iii 2, 8, 12). In a few passages, the text speaks of “your poverty” when addressing the *mebin* (4Q416 2 iii 6, 15, 20). The picture in *4QInstruction* is variegated, however, in that we also find advice for the *mebin* about engaging in trade and even farmwork. The addressee may be poor, but he is not utterly destitute. Still, the economic instructions are largely concerned with situations where the *mebin* is in need or financial distress. For example, a handful of instructions begin with “if (or: when) you lack …” (4Q416 2 ii 20–21; 4Q417 2 i 17, 24; 4Q418 126 ii 13). Like *Ahiqar*, this instruction from Qumran regularly presents its wisdom, especially economic advice, as fitting for the socially inferior.

Lastly, brief mention should be made of the Egyptian *Instruction of Ptahhotep*. The text is arranged into “chapters” of sayings that form a usually coherent reflection on a particular topic. Most of the chapters begin with a conditional statement that governs the perspective for the rest of the passage. Several, for example, are specific to a particular situation and depend on how the imagined addressee relates to others involved: “If you meet a disputant in action, a powerful man, superior to you, then do such and such …” (2, 1–2); “If you meet a disputant who is your equal, on you level …” (3, 1–2); or “If you meet a disputant in action, a poor man, not your equal …” (4, 1–2). As is evident, the text allows for variation in its audience in terms of social status, though again this is only relative, as we find several chapters that present situations pertinent to the social elite—e.g., the heading “If you are a man who leads” occurs several times. Important for our discussion, however, is chapter 10, which begins: “If you are poor, serve a man of worth; That all your conduct may be well with the god …” The possibility of poverty for the addressee is not all


29 Again, the text does allow for the possibility for the address to have access to material good, for just as we find the sayings beginning with “if you lack,” we also find in 4Q417 2 i + 26 17–18 “if you have a surplus.” However, this phrase, if read in context, hardly indicates wealth. Instead, it seems to reflect the unsteady life of a tradesman, craftsman, or, more likely, a small farmer whose daily (or seasonal) yield is inconsistent and often subject to circumstances beyond control.

30 Translations from Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:64.

31 Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:70; cf. “If you are great after having been humble, have gained wealth after having been poor …” (30, 1–2).
that alarming in the text, as one of the main threads which runs throughout is the fluctuation of life’s circumstances.\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ptahhotep}, it should also be noted, is much more ancient than either \textit{Ahiqar} or \textit{4QInstruction}, though it enjoyed a lasting popularity.\textsuperscript{33} In any case, the hypothetically “poor” addressee in this classic Egyptian instruction at least begs the question if addressing instructions to a “poor” audience was not more common in the ancient world than has been otherwise assumed, even if it was only for rhetorical flourish.

4.2.3 Humility, Wealth, and Status

In Chapter 3 we observed that one of the prominent ethics of \textit{Ahiqar} is that of humility and the related value of contentment. These values become increasingly important for understanding the rhetorical strategy of \textit{Ahiqar}. They undergird the general outlook that suggests the wisdom is by and for those who are looking upwards from below in nearly every social encounter. This perspective applies to the sayings examined above about borrowing and poverty, there are still others which serve to give the reader an overall impression of humility. I list a few of them here, and will discuss each in turn:

127: […] you, O my son! Harvest any harvest and do any job. Then, you will eat and be satisfied and give to your children.
136: \textit{[Eat/Be content with a little thing that is in your lot, and do not desire for a large thing that is withheld from you.}
141: Do not reveal your \textit{poverty} before your friends; let your name not become light before them.\textsuperscript{34}
178 A stroke for a male-servant, a rebuke for a female-servant, for all your servants \textit{instruct[ion]}\textsuperscript{35}
179: The one who acquires a servant prone to running away or a thievish handmaiden […]

\textsuperscript{32} For a biblical wisdom scholar’s view on these “enigmatic” passages in \textit{Ptahhotep}, see, e.g., Whybray, \textit{Wealth and Poverty}, 95–96; Sandoval, \textit{Discourse on Wealth and Poverty}, 96–99.
\textsuperscript{33} The translation of Lichtheim is based on the P. Prisse, from the Middle Kingdom.
\textsuperscript{34} Again the lacuna is in a most unfortunate place and the reading “poverty” is far from certain. Alternative suggestions have been “secrets” or “sins.” For support of “poverty” see the nearly parallel expression in the later recensions of \textit{Ahiqar} (Armenian [resc. A] 70 and Arabic 43; on these cf. the editions and translations in F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, eds., \textit{The Story of Ahikar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions} [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913]).
\textsuperscript{35} This latter term is generally rendered “discipline”; though the Aramaic term (\textsuperscript{398}b\textsuperscript{388}) generally connotes instructive measures.
191: If your master (כָּרָם) deposits water with you to watch over …

206: Let not the wealthy (יִזְדַּע) say, “In my wealth I am glorious [ …”

Line 127 was mentioned previously in a discussion of its parallel 129. These two sayings together form a pair that is split by another set of parallel lines in 126 and 128 and thus forming neatly arraigned unit that has the form A-B-A-B. As with the saying in 129, the one in 127 suggests that the addressee—here identified as the speaker’s son—is in a difficult situation: “O my son. Harvest any harvest and work any work. Then, you will eat and be satisfied and give to your children.” The two are very close in form, with the apodoses being exactly the same. While the advice about borrowing is fairly straight-forward, it is not immediately apparent what the exhortations to “harvest any harvest” or “work any work” connote. Kottsieper, for example, suggests that the theme here is a warning against laziness. However, nothing here suggests the issue is about one who is too lazy to harvest crops, nor would this lesson make sense in the parallel line about borrowing. I suggest that the interpretation can be found if we consider the other two lines in this compositional unit. In contrast to the practical, direct language in 127 and 129, the sayings in 126 and 128, which speak of arrows, gods, and the righteous, are quite different. They appear to make a moral or theological statement and their interpretation should be metaphorical. In Chapter 3 I argued that the bow-and-arrow imagery serves as a metaphor for slanderous or vindictive speech. To speak (deceitfully) against those more righteous is both dangerous and immoral. Who exactly is meant by the “righteous one” (ךְָרַמֶּם) is still unclear, but the directional aspect—both of the arrows going up and back down in 126 and the use of the comparative “more righteous” in

36 The rest of the line is fragmentary but if combined with 192 the sense of the saying may be gleaned, as we find, for example, in the reconstruction by Lindenberger, The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1983), 191–92: “If your master entrusts you with water to keep[ and you are not trustworthy with it, how can he] leave gold in your hand?”

37 The saying, according to him, “advises one to harvest not only the crops which could easily be gathered, but also those not so easily reaped.” See, Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 112.

38 A reproach against slothfulness is a common motif in the sapiential tradition and Proverbs has many warnings against being idle. We find many examples in Proverbs and Ben Sira (e.g. Prov 12:11; Sir 7:15) where hard work is encouraged and even admired. However, Ahiqar curiously shows no concern for laziness.

39 One should avoid too literal of readings like Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition”, 111–12, who points to these sayings and assumes that the addressee(s) must own a bow and arrow.
128—suggests that basic, practical message could be: “do not challenge or speak ill of those who are above you or those who have authority over you (because ultimately that authority is backed by the divine).” Put briefly: do not aim too high. The lesson, we may surmise, is about hubris.

The moral lesson of the “arrow” sayings may, therefore, provide the key to understanding the saying in 127. Whereas 126 and 128 are admonitions against pride; we may be inclined to read 127 and 129 as exhortations for humility. We can now read both sayings in a new light. The addressee is told that for the sake of feeding his family, he should be willing to harvest any (ḥēq) harvest and do any (ḥēq) work, even if it means gleaning crops that are less desirable—perhaps the bitter herbs from 89a? The second clause would likewise imply that the addressee should even be willing to take on a job that is usually reserved for servants or field-laborers. Thus, in 129, it is not simply a directive to borrow food, but to “borrow even grain and wheat so that you may eat.” Ahiqar uses economic advice to remind the addressee that he is to act humbly. One should not reach too high, but one should not refrain from stooping down low. Pride and humility are familiar topics, but what stands out is how Ahiqar relates these otherwise universal themes to a specific economic situation. Humility is exemplified by a real-life situation of hunger, lack, and borrowing.

We find humility as a virtue elsewhere in Ahiqar, including other contexts related to food. In line 136 the addressee is given the instruction: “[Eat/Enjoy] the little thing which is your lot, and do not covet the large thing which is withheld from you.” The addressee is told to accept the little that he has compared to the much of others. Line 141 may indicate that the addressee is poor, but the impetus of the saying still suggests something that the addressee should be ashamed

40 Note the term used here is ḫēq; see discussion of this lexeme below.

41 The type of loan someone makes would communicate something about their financial status. And when someone must take out a small food loan, they are certainly facing a distressing situation. A good example comes from the Elephantine papyri where one Ananiah b. Haggai must borrow grain (TAD B3.13), and interestingly the loan contract mentions that Ananiah depends on government rations—since he is a soldier; cf. line 2—and he has run out. The vicissitudes of one’s financial status, it seems, can be completely out of one’s hands.

42 See discussion of the lacuna in section 3.4.

43 Again the lacuna is in a most unfortunate place and the reading “poverty” is far from certain. Alternative suggestions have been “secrets” or “sins.” For support of “poverty” see the nearly parallel expression in the later recensions of Ahiqar (Armenian [resc. A] 70 and Arabic 43; on these cf. the editions and translations in F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel
of something. Thus, even relative to his close friends (רעמים) the addressee may occupy a lower status.

To be sure there are a few sayings where the addressee would have a higher social status than the other parties involved. This is the case only in a series of sayings in column 12 that deal with discipline of the one’s children (175–177) and reproof for one’s servants (178–179). These sayings, however, do not diminish the overall sentiment that the addressee will more than likely occupy a lower social status in the public domain. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the only occasions where the addressee is “in charge,” so to speak, is in the private domain of the household. In any case, the fact that addressee has servants is balanced by a few other sayings wherein the addressee himself is the “servant.” In 191 we find the phrase “if your master” (עדרות). Lines 99-100 also comprise a saying about an individual who has a “boss” (בשל אפר; Porten/Yardeni: “master of wages”). Noticeably though, there is no “I” or “you” language, instead we have simply “an individual” (איש).

A final example is worth some consideration. In line 112 we find one of the last legible sayings, which reads: “Let not the rich say, ‘In my riches I am honored.” This line has the only occurrences of the term “rich(es)” (חובים/שחורים). What is immediately apparent is the third-person format. In nearly every other saying which relates to financial matters, the addressee is explicitly involved and, as we have shown, stands on the side of the meek. Based on the survey of examples above, therefore, it hardly seems a coincidence that the addressee is not identified with the “rich.”

Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, eds., The Story of Ahikar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913]).

44 Interestingly the term for “female-servant” here is נמלנה, one that appears in a number of the Elephantine documents. Most notably it occurs in among several contracts and other legal documents that belong to or are connected in some way with one Anani(ah) son of Azariah. His title is “servitor (עבדי) of YHW the God in Elephantine the fortress” and he is married to Tamet (aka Tapemt) an Egyptian “hand-maiden” who also carries the title “servitor (עבדי) of YHW” (TAD B3.12.2); cf. Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” in Semitic Papyrology in Context: A Climate of Creativity: Papers from a New York University Conference Marking the Retirement of Baruch A. Levine (ed. L. H. Schiffman; Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 14 Leiden: Brill, 2003), 51–83, at 53.

45 The rest of the line is fragmentary but if combined with 192 the circumstances of the saying can be guessed at, even if the message is still unclear; see, for example, the reconstruction by Lindenerberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 191–92: “If your master entrusts you with water to keep[ and you are not trustworthy with it, how can he] leave gold in your hand?”
Kottsieper rightly interprets the saying to mean that “a rich person deeming himself resplendent due to his wealth is likewise rejected.” In a less direct way, then, the message of this saying also relates to the virtue of humility which courses through the sayings. A revealing comparison can then be made with Ben Sira: “My son, in your riches conduct yourself humbly” (Heb. ms. A 3:17; כל תפור אתה כל נינה). Ben Sira tells his student not to be proud in his wealth. Once again, the addressees of the two texts are similar, only this time the personalized view vis-à-vis wealth differs. Whereas before, in the sayings about poverty and humility Ahiqar spoke in the first- or second-person and Ben Sira in an objective third-person; here in the singular saying in Ahiqar about riches, the Aramaic text steps back and puts some rhetorical distance between his addressee and “the rich,” while Ben Sira’s son/addressee takes on that role. Interestingly, the message in the two texts is similar; both sages advocate humility and at least implicitly separate material wealth from individual esteem. Compared with Ben Sira, however, the tone of the Ahiqar saying appears somewhat more antagonistic towards the rich. Thus, one possible way of reading this that is in direct sympathy with the poor would be: “Do not let the wealthy use the fact that they are prosperous as an example of their honor, and thereby imply that you are dishonorable.” Still a less aggressive, more generalized reading is effective: do not assume that having wealth is an indicator of righteousness. Ahiqar counters the notion that honor is equated with material success and wealth. This could have had a reassuring effect for the addressee, who, as we have seen, continuously identifies with the financially distressed.

4.2.4 Wisdom from Below: Synthesis, Story, and Rhetorical Effect

The instructions of Ahiqar that relate to financial and general economic matters paint a fairly consistent picture in terms of how both the speaker and addressee relate to the social world


47 See also a similar passage in Ptahhotep where one finds a strikingly similar expression, which, like in Ben Sira, is presented in the second person: “Do not put trust in your wealth, which came to you as a gift of god” (30.5–6; Lichtheim, AEL 1:71).

48 To be sure, I do not think Ahiqar is advocating any confrontation with those that are “higher up” than his addressee. That much seems to be clear in 126 and 128, but it also becomes increasingly evident if we apply the social hierarchical readings to the animal fables where the audience undoubtedly identifies with the weaker, prey rather than the predator one (see discussion in 5.1).
imagined in the text. The perspective that the audience is inclined to take is almost always that of the socially inferior. This rhetorical strategy in the more pragmatic advice about financial matters can affect the way we interpret the more abstract sayings, such as the fables, where the audience is always linked with the weaker animal. The fable of the leopard and the goat (166–168a) is a good example. Can we imagine a specific social or financial scenario to which this fable might apply? We have already seen that the notion of “covering” or the lack thereof is a Leitwort in the fable. If we allow “covering” to stand as a symbol for material goods, a reading supported by 107–108, then an interesting perspective on the fable develops. The goat is facing financial distress and along comes a leopard offering to “lend” it a “covering.” On the one hand, the advice about borrowing in 129 allows one, such as the goat, to take out a loan if it is necessary to survive. However, this is countered by a warning in 130 against taking loans from disreputable people. Fortunately for the goat/reader, she is wise to the leopard’s “bad” reputation—i.e., leopards only seek to destroy goats. The goat, therefore, refuses the loan because she knows what is really at stake when making such a transaction. Thus, just as line 131 warns that a loan can lead to the loss of one’s entire household, so too does the goat know that she would be risking her life. This reading, of course, is just one of many possibilities for how the leopard-goat fable can be applied to a specific situation. The unifying message about loans and leopards is the danger inherent to both. The two sayings share a specific rhetorical link in that the reader is the weaker party.

Social and economic distress does not function simply as a warning, it is an identity that the addressee, and thereby the reader, is forced to appropriate. Thus, unlike the biblical examples, poverty in Ahiqar is more than just the emblematic scare-tactic, it is an embodied experience. The sensory images related to poverty and social status (89a, 159–160), for example, are perhaps more compelling metaphors for evoking a more palatable sense of life in economic distress than the warnings against laziness that we find in Proverbs. In any case, within Ahiqar the immediate proximity of poverty undergirds the persistent ethic of caution which extends to other domains of wisdom. The perspective which takes on the socially inferior in social transactions is likewise entwined with the virtues of humility and contentment that serve as the moral guide.

Lastly, the above discussion has dealt exclusively with the sayings since that is where the financial advice occurs. However, as I have argued, the social identity of the one “from below” extends to any type of social interaction and, therefore, can be assessed against the story’s circumstances as well. The narrative, with great emphasis, reminds us that Ahiqar himself was at
the highest levels of society, second only to the king. So, on the one hand, this speaks against the “from below” perspective that is prominent among the sayings. On the other hand, we must also take into account the events of the drama. Ahiqar, through no fault of his own, has fallen from grace and then when the sayings are delivered sits (presumably) in a position of disrepute.

If we read the instructions that intimate proximity to the king in the sayings in column 6 alongside the narrative setting, then some intriguing parallels between the predicament of the “speaker” and that of Ahiqar emerge. We might begin with the saying in 89a where first-person form indicates most explicitly the personal experience of the speaker. The lexeme “poverty” (ﬠשׁנה) connotes an economic and, thus, social humility that is shared by Ahiqar, who must now rely on his colleague for material support. Thus Nabusumiskun must play the role of “master” (73: מַרְאֵהוּ) in providing “goods” (66, 74: מְצָרֵים) for Ahiqar, who now identifies with the “servants” (72: חֲשֵׁב). Notably, we also find in close proximity to the poverty saying a reference to the abundance and lack of sons (90b)—a sensitive issue for the narrator from the very first lines (1–3). It is thus probably no coincidence that the personalized laments about poverty and the dearth of sons intrude upon the lengthy deliberation about the epic dangers of the king’s decree. Ahiqar had previously felt the “softness” (84, 89b: רֶםֶר) of the king’s beneficence, but now he is facing the piercing (84: שַׂרְק) burn (87: אֲשֶׁר) of his wrath. Ahiqar, who had once basked in the sun-king’s light (92), is now faced with the bitterness (89a) of night (80: יָמָּה).

It is from this darkness that Ahiqar most likely is presenting his wisdom; and, if we take a cue from Tobit 14:10, where Ahiqar was “brought down into the earth,” then Ahiqar in a very literal sense is giving his instructions from beneath. This positional aspect may, in fact, be implied in the Elephantine text itself. Ahiqar’s movement from his exalted social status to his disgrace is paralleled nicely by the physical location of each “scene.” He moves from the palace gate (9: בּוּדַת נַחֲלַת) to his vineyard-home (22: לַבְּתֵית) and ultimately to Nabusumiskun’s house (71-72), where Ahiqar’s role as “servant” intimates his subordinate position within the household.

49 If I am right in thinking that the instructions fit into the narrative at the point where Ahiqar is (still) in disgrace, then this would not only resonate strongly with the perspective “from below” which runs throughout the sayings, but it would also find parallels in similar texts: both earlier ones such as Amenemhet I, who instructs his son and successor after being assassinated and thus from the grave!; and later examples such as Ankhsheshonge, who records his wisdom on potsherds while in prison. We might even consider Tobit who, being blind, quite literally instructs his son Tobias (4:3–19 S) from the darkness.
Indeed, contrary to the casual readings that only see the “court” setting as indicative of the purported *Sitz im Leben*, it should not be overlooked that much—if not a majority—of the story takes place outside of the palace gate. Kottsieper, for example, highlights the fact that the conversation between Nabusumiskun and Ahiqar takes center stage in the extant narrative.

A close evaluation of the narrative situation, therefore, supports the intricacies of the social discourse evident in the sayings. Social status, as the narrative exemplifies, should be seen as a dynamic aspect, not a static one. Moreover, the self-referentiality exhibited in the sayings depends on the other parties involved. The speaker, for example, will presumably always carry a sense of authority relative to the addressee; although, even here, where the father-son relationship is imagined, it is not secure, as the lament in 139–140 suggests. Regardless, in every situation the person or people with whom one interacts affects the way s/he understands his/her social status. This is also conditioned, in part, by the specific social domain (e.g., house, court, market, etc.). The financial advice, therefore, represents only one feature of this socio-economic reading of *Ahiqar*. The instructions about loans, poverty, etc. are significant, however, in that they clues us in to the social identity most often exemplified in the text. Rhetorically speaking, the social status of the speaker and the addressee is from the perspective of the economically distress.

This may, in turn, suggest that the message of *Ahiqar*, while serviceable for a variety of contexts, would resonate more strongly for a readership whose social and financial status is far from secure. That the speaker adopts the position of poor man, even foreigner and resident, may speak more profoundly to an audience that shares in that identity. These are, however, merely tendencies and possibilities evinced by the rhetoric of the text and not necessarily determinative for the actual audience. Nevertheless, the instructions are couched within a narrative wherein the speaker has been brought down from the highest levels of society all the way to the lowest, and therefore, making the “authorial” voice more relatable, even while his esteem is still maintained. That Ahiqar is in hiding, underneath as “a servant” does not change—for the audience at least—the fact that he is the wise sage, upon whose words the entire empire once relied. His wisdom remains unchallenged even if it comes from below.

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4.3 Excursus: King, Court, and the Context of Wisdom

In a discussion of social and political factors in *Ahiqar*, we cannot overlook the figure of the king. On the one hand, the king sayings, even the narrative, support the view from below because it is taken for granted that the king is the authoritative figure. Ahiqar himself bows down before him, physically demonstrating the submission to authority. Thus, the question of where the speaker or addressee situate themselves relative to the monarch are easily answered. On the other hand, the presence of the king in Ahiqar has often led to assumptions about the text’s *Sitz im Leben*. The kind of investigations which try to pinpoint a text like *Ahiqar* to a specific time, place, and social setting are, in my mind, inherently flawed. For one, much of the point of the sayings themselves is their universality, that is, their applicability to a variety of contexts. Granted, some of the sayings, such as the passage about borrowing, do point to very specific situations and thus are at least typologically different than the more general admonitions. But even if some of the sayings only have a limited function, this should not condition the entire text. As Katherine Dell neatly described about Proverbs: “The text has the nature of timeless, universal advice, which is the character of the book of Proverbs as a whole, and so to ask historical questions of it in a strict sense arguably leads down a false track.”

Any attempt to pinpoint a precise social location or *Sitz im Leben* is especially difficult for wisdom collections such as *Ahiqar* with the sheer diversity in content and settings. It is methodologically unwise to take each saying as determinative for the text’s authorship or intended audience. As Richard Clifford famously said: “one can speak of ‘cabbages and kings’ without being a cook or a courtier”\(^5\); indeed this advice has a very literal correspondence to *Ahiqar* if we consider line 89 as a whole where both the “king” and the “bitter herbs” of the poor come together. So, while, Michael Chyutin is probably correct in saying of *Ahiqar* that “from the aphorisms and parables that appear in the book [of *Ahiqar*] we can learn about the social and geographical

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\(^5\) Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Abingdon: Abingdon Press, 1998), 49. The phrase “cabbages and kings” is independently famous, tracing back to the poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter” by Lewis Carroll, who, in turn, was likely influenced by Shakespeare’s *Richard II*. 

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ambience in which they were composed,” the question remains of how strictly we are willing to take that “ambience.” For example, Kottsieper examines the various flora and fauna mentioned in Ahiqar and argues for a south-Syrian provenance for the sayings. There may be some truth behind this reading, but meanwhile we have the text in a completely different environment, namely southern Egypt. It must have had some function for its 5th c. readers.

When attempting to translate the textual world onto the actual world, therefore, we must be careful not to set such restrictive bounds on who the readership could be based on every single referent in the text. This has been one of the biggest problems with earlier approaches which often drew one-to-one correspondences between elements in the instructions and the presumed social setting. In most cases, including with Ahiqar, this kind of approach simply does not work because the sayings are set or function in a wide array of social domains. Kottsieper describes the complex situation: “Here poverty and wealth, servitude and lordship are in close proximity and they are able to encounter each other. Accordingly references are given concerning how one should conduct oneself, both as a poor man and a servant, as well as a rich man and a master. The destitution of the stranger (or resident alien) stands just as much in sight as the conduct before the king.”

Kottsieper tries to account for the diversity by extracting redactional layers: family, “erudite,” and court compilers. His method, as with many others, is to approach it from a compositional, diachronic aspect in order to link each “layer” with its “original” setting. The result, therefore, is often one which sees court scribes as “compilers” bringing in the diverse sapiential traditions from their respective realms. This has been the case with Proverbs, as well. Michael Fox, for example, states: “the most securely locatable and datable proverbs are the ‘royal proverbs,’ the sayings that deal with the king and his court.” Consequently, Fox, while acknowledging the diversity of

54 Chyutin, Tendentious Hagiographies, 29.
56 Kottsieper does not account for its presence at Elephantine. At best he insinuates, “The Aramaic Tradition,” 120, that Ahiqar appears in Elephantine as result of the native Arameans’ attempts “to prevent the loss of their own wisdom tradition” after the invasion and destruction of the Aramean states in the late 8th c. B.C.E.
58 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 500. He continues (p. 500–501): “Some proverbs are pertinent only to men who might actually find themselves working in the royal court (e.g. 25:6–7) … the possibility of proximity to the king is a real one … the reader is assumed to be a young man eager for service in the presence of the king (22:29, 14:35) … these are men who
material and complexities involved in assigning a social setting, nevertheless says: “my conclusion is that the royal proverbs are integral to the proverb collections and are therefore indicative of the date of the collections.” The conclusion Fox makes for Proverbs—which even Fox later admits is not certain—has been the operative one for Ahiqar. Thus, Ahiqar’s social setting is consistently linked to the royal court and this understanding is based primarily on the narrative’s setting and the several king-sayings sayings in column 6. Ahiqar, according to this logic, was intended as an educational guide or manual in the training of scribes who were preparing for life working in the court.

However, the mention of a king does not necessitate a royal setting nor that its addressee is from the upper-class elite preparing for life or work in the royal court. Even Kottsieper notes that: “it cannot be overlooked that nothing specific concerning such a service is mentioned. There is no statement about the different tasks of such a service—such as a scribe, counselor, commander, or something else—and no hint that those people deemed themselves to be members of a special class of courtiers in contrast to other people of the society.” Rather than specific advice for those training to be courtiers (or the like), the primary themes of this section are obedience to authority as well as exercising caution and humility. The only specific command given is to obey, respect, and (most of all) fear the word of the king. The king sayings are nearly all concerned with the power of a king’s word. The figure of the king and his wrath could be for rhetorical force, adding weight to the primary theme about the dangers of uncontrolled speech. Michael Fox, for example, suggests a similar reading for Qoheleth:

For the [Qoheleth] the monarchy is merely a source of danger. It is best to keep one’s distance from the king, or at least get out of the way quickly when he is irritated. The king’s absolute authority is not a source of encouragement to these authors, as it is in Proverbs, but only a reason for fear and submission … Moreover, Qohelet’s advice in 8:2–4, warning the reader to get away from an angry king (v 3), is a way of reminding the reader that humans stand insecurely before God like one who stands before an irritable and unpredictable human autocrat. The following verses (vv. 5–8) speak of man’s frailty and ignorance generally. Indeed, ‘king’ here may allude to God. When Qohelet warns against cursing the king and the nobility (10:20), his real message is broader: Don’t even think ill

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59 Fox, 10–31, 503.
of the king and the powerful, let alone speak ill of them, for the power of the state, like the power of God, is far-reaching and harsh. In the book of Qohelet, kingship is a fictional device.\textsuperscript{61}

Much of what Fox says about Qoheleth could apply to Ahiqar. The connection between the king and the divine is particularly outstanding (Ahiq. 79, 91–92) and will be discussed at length in the next chapter. What is important for the moment is the reasonable view that “king” can be a “fictional device” and need not be determinative for a text’s \textit{Sitz im Leben}. Column 6 in Ahiqar does not, therefore, represent advice specifically designed for a future courtier, but rather a general warning about obedience to authority—both divine and political—that could apply to all levels of society.

\subsection*{4.4 Foreigners and Family Members: Socio-Political Identity in Ahiqar}

This section will consider another social dynamic present within Ahiqar, that of ethnicity. A few of the sayings bring up the issues and challenges involved surrounding the socio-political status of one who is “foreign.” In the narrative, ethnicity seems to play a larger role, even if the term “foreigner” is never mentioned. Ahiqar himself appears to be a foreigner, serving a foreign king, living in a foreign land, interacting with foreign peoples. The moral of the narrative, when measured against the sayings, leaves us with a conflicting view of foreignness: on the one hand having the status of foreigner is a lamentable one, and yet the narrative seems to promote the foreigner over against that of a familial one. How can we reconcile these two competing views?

This section demonstrates that the narrative is attempting to renegotiate the concept of foreignness and how one conceives of community. The drama of the story leaves the boundaries between foreigner and family shattered and thus invites the reader to reconsider his/her social and political identity. This reading of the narrative emerges as result of two primary mechanisms that are at play: (1) the ambiguous view or role of the king; and more importantly (2) the opposition drawn between Nabusumiskun and Nadan. Both of these plot devices speak to the socio-political outlook of the text and are mirrored to a certain extent in the movement of the sayings. This evaluation of the story forces us to reconsider the ethic of the sayings vis-à-vis the foreigner.

\footnote{Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 501–2.}
Consequently, the anxiety *Ahiqar* evinces with regard to ethnicity has little to do with one’s political status, but instead tied to a fear of the distress which results from social isolation.

4.4.1 Foreignness in the *Ahiqar* Sayings

Among the sayings of *Ahiqar* there are two passages in which the issue of foreignness features prominently. The first passage comes at the top of column 11 in lines 159 and 160. They read:

I have carried sand and loaded salt but there nothing that is heavier than a foreign[ner]  
I have carried straw and lifted bran but there is nothing that is lighter than a resident-alien

The two lines, as is obvious, are almost completely parallel in terms of structure and imagery. Both lines draw on sensory metaphors. The kinesthetic sensation of lifting an object and the corresponding proprioceptive *awareness* of the weight or stress that the object puts on the body is likened to the experience of a specific social category, in this case a foreigner (*עִיָּן*; הָאָרֶץ) and a resident-alien (*עַדְמֵי*), respectively. Besides the association of a sensory experience with a social category, these two sayings, when taken together, are especially interesting because of their inverse relationship. That is, despite the precise parallelism in the two lines in both form and vocabulary, the comparative terms are opposites: heavy and light. While a comparison between the two social categories is no doubt being drawn, the logic behind each saying’s message may differ.

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62 It should be noted that the lexeme *עִיָּן* is largely reconstructed, with only the very bottom strokes of the initial *nun* and *kaf* visible. This has led to alternative translations. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 98–99 suggests כַּשֵּׁב “debt” based on a similar saying in the Syriac version (saying 45 in Syr. B). The initial stroke, however, would extend too far down for it to be a *zayin*. Kottsieper, *Die Sprache*, 12, 21, suggests לְחרַב “Unterdrückung” which would fit the material evidence but is otherwise an unattested lexeme in *Ahiqar*, whereas כַּשֵּׁב clearly occurs in 139. Also, Porten and Yardeni prefer the translation “stranger,” though Nieher, *Aramaischer*, 49 and Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 391–92 both have “Fremder.” Interestingly, Lindenberger translates כַּשֵּׁב as “foreigner.”

63 There is a dittography in the papyrus here, hence אָלֶה הָאָרֶץ “and there is not and there is not.” I have chosen not to represent it here.

64 On their similar structures, along with the saying in 89a, see Shamir Yona, “Shared Stylistic Patterns in the Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar and Hebrew Wisdom,” *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 44 (2007): 29–49, esp. 37–42.
Beginning with line 159, we see a connection being drawn between the difficulty of lifting two heavy objects and the difficulty one faces as a foreigner or stranger in a foreign land (נכיר). Thus, an expanded interpretive translation of the line would be something like: “I have carried sand and I have loaded salt and they were difficult to lift, but I have not lifted anything that was as difficult as being a foreigner.” The same logic, however, does not seem to work with the next line. Although the two social categories—foreigner and resident-alien—are related, the comparative adjectives are opposites. Instead of “heavy” we have “light” which, according to the logic of the previous line, would suggest something that is easy. Thus, a reading according to the same logic would be: “I have carried straw and I have lifted up bran, and they were easily lifted, but I have not lifted anything as easily as being a resident-alien.” How can life be heavy (= difficult) for the foreigner but light (= easy) for the resident-alien? We are invited then to apply a different approach to the way we read the second metaphor. The most common way to understand the saying is thus: “I have carried straw and lifted bran and they are both light, but there is nothing

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65 I prefer to render נכיר as “foreigner” though admittedly it could have an alternative connotation. What is clear, however, is that the נכיר is someone who is not a relative; see line 139 where the ר בַּשֶּׁה is set in direct opposition to נכיר; this was pointed out by Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 327. The relative/non-relative distinction is the most important, even if the precise political status which lay behind the term is uncertain. N.B. the lexeme does not occur elsewhere among the Aramaic documents from Elephantine, and it is not attested in Aramaic more broadly until Qumran (e.g., 4Q318 ii 9; esp. 4QTQah 1 i 5–7 with מ’דב, which is likewise unattested until Qumran).

66 There are a number of possible connotations behind the word נכיר. If we consider Proverbs, for example, the Hebrew cognate, often paired with יָשֵׁה, plays an important role. This is especially so in chs. 1–9 where it clearly carries a negative connotation and is connected to a disreputable female figure. For some recent treatments of this figure by scholars, see bibliographies in Camp, Wise, Strange and Holy; and the survey by Michael Fox in Proverbs 1–9, especially pages 134–140 and 376–417. For interpretations of the “foreign/strange woman” in the social context of Proverbs, see: Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Proverbs 1–9,” Biblia 72 (1991): 457–73; and Harold C. Washington, “The Strange Woman (ʾšh zrk/hkryh) of Proverbs 1–9 and Post-Exilic Judean Society,” in Second Temple Studies: Temple and Community in the Persian Period (eds. T. Eskenazi and K. H. Richards; JSOTSup. 175; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994): 217–42; and for an argument that seeks to “revive” the foreign status of the woman in Prov 1–9 see esp. Nam Hoon Tan, Nancy, The “Foreignness” of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif (BZAW, 381; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

that is taken more lightly than a resident-alien.” 68 The metaphor then is that the lightness or ease with which a person lifts a few grains of bran or straw relates to how little regard a person is given if they are a resident-alien. That the term לִבּוֹן, “light,” can have this metaphorical function is supported by another saying in Ahiqar line 141: “Your [poverty/secrets/sins?] 69 do not reveal before your [friends]; let your name not become light before them.” Although the subject is missing, it is presumably something shameful. Thus, the implication is that even if your friends finds out your shortcomings, they will no longer take you seriously (i.e., treat your name lightly).

That we must apply different reading strategies to a pair of sayings that are strikingly similar in form is not unique to Ahiqar. The well-known pair of sayings in Proverbs 26:4–5 stand out: “Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself // Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes.” This example and others demonstrate that Ahiqar is employing the familiar rhetorical technique of pairing structurally similar but superficially contrary sayings, perhaps as a means to elicit some problem-solving and creativity in its audience. 70

The use of the first-person in these sayings is also outstanding. It suggests that the speaker identifies with being a foreigner and a resident-alien. The implication, then, is the addressee, who is often called “my son,” too shares this identity. The speaker confesses that s/he can feel the burden of being a foreigner just as easily and just as strongly as s/he has felt the burden of lifting a load of sand or salt. Weigl, it should be mentioned, offers a slightly different interpretation of these two sayings: “Ein Fremder hat wenig Gewicht, und doch stellt er eine Belastung für die Gesellschaft dar.” 71 This interpretation, based on readings of several parallels with Proverbs, 68

68 Cf. Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 98, who reads “I have carried straw and lifted bran, but there is nothing taken more lightly than a foreigner.”
69 There are many suggestions for restoring the object here; cf. later versions in Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, The Story of Ahiqar, ad loc.: Armen. A 70 “Son, whenever you are among your friends, beware of revealing your poverty; for they will not listen to your words”; Arab. 43 “O my son! Do not display your condition to your friend, lest you be despised by him”; Armen. B 76 “Son, reveal not thy secret counsel to thy wife. For she is weak and small of soul, and she reveals it to the powerful, and thou art despised.”
70 Proverbs is more obvious in its intended paradox, while Ahiqar requires a little more leg-work out of its readers to figure out how the two sayings can actually complement, rather than cancel out each other.
71 Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 382.
changes the point-of-view, where the speaker is no longer identified with the foreigner/resident-alien, but instead is simultaneously complaining about the burden they have on society, even though they have little significance. In any case, the point of the sayings in 159–160 is that life for someone with a marginalized social status, either a foreigner or a resident-alien, has its obstacles.

Turning now to the second passage, in lines 139–140 we find another set of sayings that hint at the social problems that come with being a foreigner:

> [From] my [ho]use proceeded (חָטֵט) my disrepute;
> so among whom will I be found innocent (שָׁיָם)?
> The son of my belly has spied on my house;
> so what will I say to the foreigner (לְמַעַרָא)?
> [My son] was a criminal witness against me;
> so who, then, will find me innocent (רָדֵינָם)?
> From my house proceeded (חָטֵט) my fury;
> so with whom could I dispute and succeed?

The content of the passage is outstanding in that it appears to directly address the circumstances of the narrative. The laments about betrayal by one’s own son fits wonderfully on the lips of Ahiqar. This connection to the narrative is notable and will be revisited below, but for the moment what is most interesting for our discussion is the reference to the foreigner. To understand how the foreigner functions here, we have to consider the passage as a whole.

Taken together these four clauses demonstrate an obvious structural design. On the one hand, there is a chiastic structure whereby the initial clause in the first and fourth lines match (cf. "ʷʴʰ/ʺʷʴʰ"), as well as the initial lines in the second and third (son/"son"), thus creating a nice A-B-B-A pattern. Conversely, the second clauses of each line are paralleled according to an A -B-A-B pattern. This is signaled in lines 1 and 3 by the repetition of the verb "ʣʶ"; whereas the final clauses in 2 and 4 seem to have a semantic connection regarding the notion of speech. In any case, the

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72 See Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 395–97, for discussion and parallels. This interpretation, while possible for 159–160, does not really work for the structurally parallel saying in 89a, where it seems clear that the speaker is the one who has a familiarity with the humility and bitterness of poverty.

73 In 139b we find כָּעַן "say"; while in 140b כְּעַן means something like “to be firm” but I follow Porten and Yardeni’s suggestion of “dispute.” The etymology of כָּעַן is uncertain but is probably related to the idea of flourishing, hence
four lines all share the same basic structure: beginning with a statement about a bad action taken by the speaker’s son, and followed by a question related to the consequences of the situation. Based on the premise established in each statement, it becomes clear that these questions are rhetorical in nature and they are asked in a way that anticipates a negative response. Thus an interpretive reading of the first line would be: “because I have been dishonored by my own family, who could actually find me innocent? No one.” The same logic seems to apply in each section: the question suggests that not a single person will find him innocent, nor will they even listen to him. There are two possible ways to understand how the foreigner fits in here. First, by looking to the parallel in 140b we can emphasize the speaker’s worry that no one will listen to him, and thus we may render our line: “my own son has betrayed me, so how could I even face the foreigner?” In other words, the speaker’s social standing is in such shambles that he cannot even keep face with the foreigner, implying that the latter’s social status is quite low. On the other hand, we can attend to the opposition created between the son and the foreigner and infer a family/non-family social dynamic. The concomitant interpretive translation would thus be: “my own family has discarded me, how then could I possibly contest with the foreigner?” According to this logic, the emphasis of the sayings is more on the implosion that the speaker faces within his family or communal unit. In other words, if a person’s own family has turned on them, then why would strangers be inclined to help him? The foreigner, therefore, is a symbol for those outside of the family. I am inclined to this latter reading, especially in light of the expectations it builds about family vs. non-family behavior which will come into play in the narrative. Still, the former cannot be ruled out given the view of the foreigner in 159.74

Regardless, the primary point of the passage is to emphasize just how terrible it is for one’s social standing if their own family member (in this case one’s son) betrays them. The assumption is that a close relative would be the least likely person to falsely accuse someone of a crime or some other moral misgiving; therefore, in such a scenario, the accused is assumed to be guilty by every other outside party. The foreigner comes into play here because it represents either the disdain (foreigner = bad) the speaker now faces or his hopelessness (foreigner = outsider).

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“succeed”; cf. Porten and Yardeni “be wearied”; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 325 “mit wem soll ich streiten und erfolgreich sein.”

74 I thank Andrew Mein for helpful deliberations on this passage.

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From these two passages (139–140; 159–160) we can discern a few things about the concept of foreignness according to the *Ahiqar* sayings. In the first passage the assumption is that the foreigner or resident-alien has a difficult life and part of that difficulty relates to how little worth is afforded them. Their name (when read with 141) accounts for little. This could have serious social implications, especially when it comes to making contracts. The financial implications of being foreign are raised by an intriguing verse in the Hebrew of Ben Sira. In ms A 10:22 each of the categories that are found in the three parallel *Ahiqar* sayings (89a, 159–160) come together in a single proverb: “a sojourner and a stranger, a foreigner and a poor man; their glory is the fear of God” (גָּר וַתַּּֽוַּר וָּרֶשׁ הָפֶּרֶשׁ וַאֲרַואֶת אַלַּדָּה). The meaning seems to be that although these three groups cannot attain any social or financial success, they can take pride in being upright and honoring God. We might also consider Prov 20:16 (par. 27:13): “Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger; seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.” The implication is that if someone has vouched for a foreigner, then it is almost certainly a loss because the foreigner is (economically) unreliable.75 In 139–140 the disrepute that comes with being a foreigner—if indeed a negative connotation is implied—is once again connected to the idea of one’s word having little worth, particularly in a formal situation (i.e., a judgment in a legal or moral accusation).76 The foreigner is the representative example of a person with a very low social standing. The sayings, therefore, express in a relatively direct way the social attitudes and experiences that accompany the identity of being a foreigner. They represent the expectations one has about the social order and how having a specific social status therein will affect one’s experience therein.

4.4.2 Foreignness and Family in the *Ahiqar* Narrative

In turning to the narrative of *Ahiqar*, however, the expectations that undergird the sayings are put to the test. Although, the word foreigner never appears in the narrative, there are several clues

75 For interpretation see Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 669–70, who plays down the foreignness aspect but nevertheless concludes that any pledge given on behalf of strangers/outsiders will result in forfeit.

which suggest that ethnicity is a salient factor for the story.\(^7\) Perhaps the most telling feature is the opposition that the text draws between Nadan, Ahiqar’s adoptive son, against that of Nabusumiskun, whose name alone suggests an ethnic difference.\(^8\) It is clear that Nabusumiskun is not related to Ahiqar and thus we may read the opposition between him, as foreigner, and Nadan, as kin. In measuring Ahiqar’s engagement with a foreign identity, the figure of the foreign king is also significant. From Ahiqar’s perspective therefore, we can read a clear dichotomy between family and non-family. This is undergirded in light of the clear association between the narrative and the sayings in 139–140, wherein the term מַעַל figures, particularly in contrast to “my son.” We may surmise, then, that the notion “foreigner” operates at least implicitly in the story.

In the formal and narratological analyses in Chapter 2 we observed that the king plays an ambiguous role in terms of the plot, acting as both Helper and Opponent to Ahiqar. If we apply an ethnic and political layering to Ahiqar’s relationship vis-à-vis the king, then we are left with an equally complicated picture of the text’s ethic with respect to life under foreign rule. For example, we observed that both Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun disobeyed the king’s direct orders. Each of them prioritized their friendship over against their loyalty to the monarch, despite the danger of that decision. That Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun are not related makes this even stranger. We might even compare this aspect with related court tales where the various officials are generally presented in competition with each other, rather than as supportive. Haman, in Esther, is a particularly good example (I will return to the similarities between these two stories below). In Ahiqar, both Ahiqar’s and Nabusumiskun’s disobedience ultimately worked to the benefit of Assyria. As for the king himself, both Sennacherib and Esarhaddon are guilty of an “innocent killing” (46) or at least the attempt to do so. At times their decrees are unjust, and yet their authority is never openly

\(^7\) In contrast to section 4.1 above, an ethnic-politico interpretation necessarily involves some awareness of external, historical factors. For example, that Esarhaddon is called the “king of Assyria” only has meaning if we understand, at least to some extent, the historical significance of the term “Assyria.” For the most part, this interpretation does not depend on specific historical associations, although they will come into play later.

\(^8\) Nabusumiskun is a Babylonian name; cf. Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 2–3 n. 7. The geographical or national associations with names, however, should not be determinative for the text’s social setting. Nabusumiskun, which was a popular name during the Sargonid era, is widely attested, including among Egyptian-Akkadian and Aramaic documents from Egypt; cf. Michael H. Silverman, “Aramean Name-Types in the Elephantine Documents,” *JAOS* 89 (1969): 691–709.
The ambiguity of the king’s presentation, therefore, can have implications on the text’s concept of foreignness; yet the figure of the king is unique and deserves extended treatment, which I will do in the next chapter. For now, I will focus primarily on the opposition drawn between Nadan and Nabusumiskun.

There are several antithetical correspondences between Nadan and Nabusumiskun, and all of them center on how they relate to and interact with Ahiqar. Nadan, as Ahiqar’s adoptive son, is family, while Nabusumiskun, the “officer” (יָבִין), is just another court official. One is a foreigner, and the other is family. The irony, however, is that the foreigner remains faithful, while the family member is disloyal. Both of them were treated favorably by Ahiqar—Nadan was plucked from obscurity and trained to be a court official, while Nabusumiskun was saved from execution at great risk—and yet Nadan responded with treachery while Nabusumiskun responded with faithfulness. In an ironic way both Nadan and Nabusumiskun deceive the king, except the former does so to Ahiqar’s detriment while the latter does for his benefit. Nadan is symbolically brought into Ahiqar’s household via adoption; while Nabusumiskun literally brings Ahiqar into his house (71–72).

Their contrasting behaviors go against the conventional wisdom expressed in 139. In that passage the speaker laments the betrayal by his son and then asks (rhetorically) who can he then depend on. The foreigner, it appears, is the least likely candidate. And yet the foreigner Nabusumiskun, against all expectation, does in fact support the man who was accused by his own family. The issue is not so clear cut, though. The narrative does state that Nabusumiskun had a good reason to remain loyal, since Ahiqar had earlier been faithful to him. In one of the more profound statements of the narrative we hear Ahiqar plead with Nabusumiskun: “Just as I did for you, so then do for me” (52). This dramatic representation of the so-called “golden rule” provides some reasonable basis for Nabusumiskun’s behavior. On the other hand, even this outlook is overturned, again not coincidentally, by Nadan. Ahiqar raised him up and established him in the court; and in direct contrast Nadan’s brought Ahiqar down, leaving him as servant in another’s house. In sum, the diametric opposition between Nadan and Nabusumiskun demonstrates that “the moral of the story,” according to Michael Chyutin, “is that national and familial connections are no guarantee of fidelity.”

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79 Chyutin, Tendentious Hagiographies, 33.
The irony of the roles that Nabusumiskun and Nadan play in the narrative is highlighted even more when we look to comparative materials, particularly the other Jewish court tales where the typological court official acts not as the friend but rather as the enemy to the Jewish protagonist in a dramatic competition for royal favor in the foreign court. S. Talmon, for example, makes a “typological equation” between the characters in Esther and those in Ahiqar. He links Mordechai with Ahiqar, Esther with Nadan, and Haman with Nabusumiskun. Read together, Talmon sees the Ahiqar tale as a foil for the one in Esther, where the adopted child acts faithfully towards her elder kinsman. The same can be observed in the third-party court officials. In Esther, we have Haman, who is most obviously not a Jew. Unlike Haman, however, the court official in the Ahiqar narrative, namely Nabusumiskun, acts as the supporter of his fellow court-official. Thus, just as Esther takes over the role of hero from Mordechai and saves the Jewish people, so also does Nabusumiskun take over the role of hero and saves Ahiqar.

Interestingly there is even an added connection between Ahiqar and Mordechai in that both texts relate a short anecdote about a previous good deed that the two elder men. This good deed and the recollection of it by another character in the story—in Ahiqar it is Nabusumiskun, in Esther it is Xerxes—are a vital part of the plot. It is no surprise that the trope of memory and forgetting occurs in both of these texts. Just as the pharaohs of Egypt eventually forgot Joseph (cf. Exod 1:8), so also did each new king seem to forget the accomplishments—no matter how amazing—of the Jewish youths in the anthology of Daniel stories. The discourse of memory and forgetting is also prominent in Ezra (chs. 4–6), where the drama surrounding the rebuilding of the temple undergoes a constant back-and-forth which depends in part on the changing monarchs that their unreliable recollection of past events. The Jews and their enemies in competitive fashion evoke the past in order to remind King Darius of previous loyalties and promises. In several of these stories, the change in political status for the Jewish hero(es) is signaled by a change in leadership. Ahiqar likewise begins with the transition to a new king (Ahiq. 4–5). That the new king Esarhaddon must be reminded of Ahiqar’s past achievements and loyalties is tacitly suggested by the constant repetition of what Ahiqar had done for Esarhaddon’s father and for all of Assyria—a fact that Esarhaddon seemed destined to forget. Even among the Elephantine documents we can witness a similar scenario, where the group’s social standing hinges upon the foreign emperor’s memory.

a series of letters (TAD A4.5; A4.7), the leaders of the Judean community write to the Persian authorities concerning the recent destruction of their temple at the hands of the Egyptians. In these letters (which were sent via intermediaries, in one case the governor of Yehud) the Jews of Elephantine remind the Persians not only of the Egyptians past rebellions and of the Jews unwavering loyalty (A4.5.1-2) but also of the fact that the original conqueror of Egypt, Cambyses, destroyed the Egyptian temples but supported the existence of the temple to Yahu (A4.7.13–14).

A final example comes from Tobit where once again we find the protagonist’s situation deteriorate at the very same time that the kings change. Incidentally, Tobit, in his casual reference to the roads being unsafe (1:15), hints at the notion that when kings change and a new one forgets the deeds of his father, then the entire social order begins to crumble. The lesson in several of these stories about Jews working or living under the scope of a foreign monarch revolves around the king’s absolute authority but also the instability of his memory.  

Returning to Ahiqar and Esther, it is in the contrasting roles of the supporting cast that paradoxically connects these two stories. Compared with the book of Esther, then, the ethnic boundaries at play in Ahiqar are highlighted as the expected roles for each are completely overturned. In a recent article Daniel Selden draws on a similar comparison between Esther and Ahiqar, claiming (quote):

Unlike Mordechai Ahiqar’s enemies are not ‘Amalekites’—the archetypal assailants who attempt to obstruct the Hebrew people in their pilgrimage form Egypt to Sinai—but his own Aramaic kin: Assyrians of all classes, from executioner to king, prove Ahiqar’s greatest champions at court, in effect to emphasize that within the multiethnic area of the empire—be it in Egypt, Assur, or Elam—foreigners were as often as not allies, well-wishers, and friends.

81 See John Collins, “Judaism in the Book of Tobit,” esp. 26–29, who focuses on the (symbolic) role of the king as the absolute power and the resultant arbitrariness of suffering that often comes as a result in the transition of that power. For a contrary opinion that focuses on the situation of exile more generally as the source of the Jews’ suffering, see Amy-Jill Levine, “Diaspora as Metaphor” in Diaspora Jews, 1992 105–17, esp. 105.

Indeed, the moral of the narrative upends the social expectations that are generally tied to ethnic identity. This results in confusion regarding who is the foreigner and who is the relative. In its overall self-presentation as instruction, Ahiqar, the teacher, embodies the role of the implied author, signified by the first-person way in which the story is told. This means that we, as the audience, take on the role of the student-addressee. At the beginning of the narrative this role is occupied by Nadan, an identification with which we become increasingly uncomfortable as the story unfolds. Ahiqar, however, allows us to transfer our sympathies onto a new “pupil” by his telling of the anecdote to Nabusumiskun who, like us, has become the listener. We, as the audience, are therefore invited to identify with the foreigner Nabusumiskun. In the reader, then, the identity of foreigner and relative are blurred. This dual-identity persists throughout the text. The sayings, for example, make it so that we can never fully shake off the identification with Nadan. The speaker in the sayings, whom we may continue to identify with Ahiqar, frequently refers to us, the audience, as “my son”; thus forcing us—perhaps, against our will—to continue to assume the perspective of Nadan. We, therefore, must share in his guilt. This fact is poignantly demonstrated in the several accusatory sayings, such as those in lines 126 and 128. The tone of these two sayings is vindictive, accusing the “you” (the addressee) of attacking the righteous.

Thus, even the rhetorical and formal features of the sayings contribute to the confusion. The audience is both family and foreigner. In other words, by joining the two social identities together and forcing the audience to identify with both, Ahiqar is problematizing the view of foreignness as the “other.” In using the term “other” I am following Carol Newsom who defines it according to “the common anthropological use … to refer to that person or group of people symbolically constructed as foreign or alien so as to serve as a definitional boundary for the self or for one’s own group.”83 The “other” thus becomes, at least momentarily, one’s own family. A paradoxical situation that is emblemsitically represented by the constant back-and-forth in the sayings. That the boundaries between foreigner and family are blurred is explicitly signaled in the narrative by Nabusumiskun in Ahiqar’s avowal of their relationship: “I [Ahiqar] was supporting you [Nabusumiskun] as one does with his brother.” Son becomes enemy, and foreigner becomes

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family. Ethnic boundaries, and the ideological expectations embedded within those boundaries, are disrupted in *Ahiqar*. In fact, Michael Chyutin argues: “this brotherhood between the Jew and the Assyrian is the story’s principal message.”

A foreign status is clearly still a salient feature for describing a particular socio-political identity in the sayings and concomitant challenges one faces. However, the narrative problematizes the view of the foreigner as the “other.” Seth Richardson writes: “One of the delightful ironies of the Ahiqar tale is that … the ‘happy ending’ to the story is that he is restored at court in Nineveh, and not returned to some (unspecified) land of origin.” For *Ahiqar*, the boundaries between foreigner and family no longer operate on the national level. In fact, even the sayings in 159–160 already hint at this in their first-person formulation. Moreover, in appropriating the foreigner Nabusumiskun into Ahiqar’s “family,” so-to-speak, the text is broadening its understanding of community to include non-family. This inclusive outlook becomes important when we consider the text’s anthropological and theological perspectives in the next chapter. But for the moment, we can relate the importance of community for *Ahiqar* to the fear of social isolation and the attendant distress. This anxiety and distress is exemplified most pointedly by the sayings in 139–140. The speaker’s views, as expressed in the rhetorical questions, represent the older model of community, where one’s family—symbolized by the son—is presumably the only support group on which someone can rely. If that should fail, then, as the laments implore, there is no hope. It is not a coincidence that these sayings should come in the form of questions rather than direct statements. Although they are expressed in such a way as to expect (from the audience) a negative answer, the story, in ironic fashion, answers in the affirmative, thus challenging the very premise upon which its own message rests.

In light of the narrative and the problems it poses, we are invited to re-read the relevant passages in the sayings with a new appreciation for foreignness as it relates to community and isolation. I offer here new look at only one of these sayings: 159. The reimagined picture of the foreigner as one part of the community and upon whom one might depend invokes, therefore, a

84 Chyutin, *Tendentious Hagiographies*, 34.
different nuance to the key word רְבָּעִים.

This lexeme appears in several sayings where it can have two very different connotations. One is “weighty” or “heavy”; with the negative connotation of difficult or hard, as we have applied to this saying previously. The other meaning is “precious” or “rare,” having a positive aspect connoting something valuable and hard to come by. A more neutral, abstract definition which links both aspects would be something like “important” or “significant.” In 159, however, I have always attended only to the first meaning and thus inferred something negative. But in light of the narrative, where Nabumiskun’s importance for Ahiqar’s success cannot be overemphasized, we may see in 159 the other connotation, hence: “I have carried sand and loaded salt, but there is nothing that is as significant/precious as a foreigner.” I am not saying this is the right reading; however, I think that the socio-political agenda of Ahiqar in toto is such that both readings are appropriate. There is an added irony in that this very lexeme forms Ahiqar’s name (יְשָׁוֶשׁ הָאָשׁיִדְרָא: “my brother” + ישׁוֹד “weighty/precious”). Read in the context of the narrative, the meaning must surely point both directions: “my brother (Nadan) is heavy” but “my brother (Nabumiskun) is precious.”

Ahiqar’s reconsideration of the importance of the foreigner and the breaking down of ethnic boundaries could have had a very strong resonance among its Elephantine audience. The documents testify to an immense amount of interaction between the Judeans and several other people groups, especially Arameans (from Syene) and local Egyptians (mostly on Elephantine). Ethnic labels among these documents abound, but we must be clear in how we use this term for the ancient documents. Janet Johnson, in a study of ethnic identifiers in Persian period Egypt offers two definitions: (1) “as a definition of self vis-à-vis other(s), that is, a social distinction which is made and accepted by people themselves”; and (2) “the formal official use of ethnicity as a category by which to make distinctions among ‘citizens’ or ‘subjects’.”

86 I thank Andrew Mein for helping me to arrive at some of the readings I offer here.
87 The following discussion relies on primary sources that are edited and translated in the TAD volumes by Porten and Yardeni as well as in Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English (= EPE); I am also dependent upon the summaries and interpretations in Porten, Archives from Elephantine, esp. 200–234; Porten, “Elephantine and the Bible,” 51–83. Cf. E. G. Kraeling, The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).
two definitions at length and while admitting that the use of “ethnics” was relatively rare during the Persian period, it appears to be much more common in Aramaic documents specifically as those from Elephantine attest. Thus, she seems to come down on the possibility for both to be at play. At Elephantine (and Achaemenid Egypt generally) we may see both at play.

With this in mind, we may make a few observations that relate to the discussion above. On the one hand, there was a great deal of integration by the Judeans. They regularly interacted in business with Arameans and Egyptians (e.g., TAD B3.13, a loan contract between a Judean and an Aramean who, incidentally, bears an Egyptian name) and often intermarried. For example, a cache of papyri belong to (or are associated in some way with) a man named Ananiah, who had previously divorced (or at least set aside) his Judean wife and married an Egyptian slave named Tamet (TAD B3.3), he later transferred his (share of a) house—which sat directly opposite the temple to Yahu—over to Tamet (TAD B3.5), who subsequently bequeathed it to their Aramean son-in-law (TAD B3.12). This son-in-law was married to their daughter whom they gave a “Judean” name Jehoishma (cf. their marriage contract in TAD B3.8). With whom then did

89 Johnson, “Ethnic Considerations,” 215; Johnson mentions, for example, that the erased customs account from 475 B.C.E. on the Ahiqar papyri “regularly provided ethnic identification of all (ship) captains” (p. 216). This, no doubt, had to do with distinguishing from where the various shipments were arriving and thus are by no means indicative of any essentialist characteristic of the individuals thusly identified.

90 A further complication with investigating the importance of ethnicity has to do with how we, as scholars, determine them. For the most part, we must rely on the names themselves, but this can be especially problematic in trying to distinguish between Arameans and Judeans (less problematic for Egyptians). However, even if we can make such designations, there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between the names and how the individual self-identified. In one case, for example we have an individual who, in the very same document, identifies himself as both “Judean” and “Aramean”; cf. Johnson, “Ethnic Considerations,” 216–17, who comments “based on secondary sources, I wonder whether Aramean as used in Persian-period documents from Egypt is a general ethnic term, perhaps even recognized by the Persian government to categorize or describe all (Jewish and pagan) Aramaic-speaking people.” On onomastics at Elephantine see, e.g., Bezalel Porten, The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change (2d ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 85–89 and Silverman, “Aramean Name-Types in the Elephantine Documents,” passim.

91 On Tamet (who is also called Tapemet) and other female figures represented among the Aramaic Elephantine documents, see the various works by Annalisa Azzoni, e.g., “Women in Elephantine and Women in the Land of Israel,” in In the Shadow of Bezalel Porten (ed. Alejandro F. Botta; Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 60; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3–12 and The Private Lives of Women in Persian Egypt (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013).
Jehoishma identify—her Judean father, her Egyptian mother, or her Aramean husband? Perhaps even more notable is the fact that both Anani and Tamet were temple “servitors” (Aram. תַּדַּבְרָה; TAD B3.12.2)—one wonders if Tamet, the Egyptian, had the title only honorifically through her husband or if she did, in fact, work at the temple to Yahu.

In contrast to this complicated intermingling of identities, we do have evidence that suggests the Judeans self-identified as something different from their neighbors, especially the Egyptians. The drama surrounding the destruction of their temple in 415 at the hands of Egyptian priests no doubt created some animosity between the two groups and thus, accidentally or not, served to shore up some identity boundaries between them. Thus, Johnson remarks, “There is an ‘us (Jews) against them (Egyptians)’ feeling found in documents from the Jewish garrison at Elephantine.”92 That the Judeans had a community mentality—that necessarily included ideological boundaries between them and the “others,” whomever they may be—is evidenced, for example, by the letters requesting aid from the Persian leaders and the leadership in Yehud (see, e.g., TAD A4.7, 8). The language in another letter (whose addressee is missing due to corruption) is very antagonistic towards the Egyptians (TAD A4.5).

In this context how might have Ahiqar’s story about the loyal foreigner and the treacherous native played out? Michael Chyutin, for example, argues:

Ahqiqar propounds removal of the former racial and ethnic boundaries, and integration into Assyrian society, to the point of assimilation. This mood is more extreme than what may be interpreted from the other Elephantine documents, in which the old racial loyalties are preserved in the division between garrisons. Thus it is clear that Ahqiqar presents a goal that has not yet been achieved.93

Chyutin may be taking too harsh of a stance—and one too strictly based on the names (see n. 91). Anani and his family, for instance, would surely find the message of integration at least somewhat appealing. Still, for Anani himself the question is complicated since presumably his livelihood

93 Chyutin, Tendentious Hagiographies, 34.
depended on the temple.⁹⁴ For Jedaniah, one of the leaders of the community, a message of integration may have been a harder pill to swallow, since he was clearly embroiled in the conflict with the Egyptians. To that effect, I do not want to press this “egalitarian” message too far. Perhaps it was not lost on the Judean audience that Nabusumiskun has a Babylonian name, not an Egyptian one.⁹⁵ Maybe this ethic of inclusivity only extended so far. We can only speculate, but if the Egyptian episode—which pits the Aramean sage in direct conflict with the Egyptian, over whom he efficiently triumphs—were part of the Elephantine text, then we would certainly be left with a more nuanced view of which foreigners are friends and which ones are enemies. We should also not overlook the possible connection between Ahiqar himself and the Elephantine readers—especially if we consider Jedaniah or the other leaders among them. On at least two occasions Ahiqar is said to be the one “on whose counsel Sennacherib the King and the troop (חדרי) of Assyria, all of it, relied” (Ahiq. 55; par 61). The very same word that appears in Ahiqar is the one with which the Judean community most often self-identifies. In an important document recording the tithes (or taxes) collected by the heads of the families for the Judean Temple (TAD C3.15), we find the opening line begins: “[Date] these are the names of the troop of Judeans who gave silver to Yahu the god …” (Aram. תוד עמהת יהוה וינדרה י ודכ חמהת אלוהים). The importance of the term “troop” cannot be overestimated. Even if “troop” is a political designation assigned them by the Persians,⁹⁶ this is still the terminology they use for referring to themselves with any kind of group mentality, even when they are conversing with one another (e.g., TAD A4.1.1).⁹⁷ Ahiqar’s presentation as head of the “troop of Assyria, all of it” may have had at least some symbolic

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⁹⁴ Contrary to nearly every other Judean, Anani is never said to belong to a “troop” or “company” (צרועים) and thus may not have been a soldier but simply a temple-servant. Jedaniah, for example, was a “priest” (כדרות; cf. TAD A4.3) at the temple to Yahu and part of the “Judean troop” (TAD A4.1).

⁹⁵ The name “Nabusumiskun,” spelled exactly as it is in Ahiqar, even appears among the Elephantine documents; e.g., TAD B2.2, where Nabusumiskun is listed among nine total witnesses—at least three of which are Judean—in a contract between an Aramean from Syene and a Persian over a deed of land; cf. Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 158–64.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., its repeated use in the Aramaic Bisitun inscription (TAD C2.1) where Darius lists off the various “rebel troops” (חרדים) who are so labeled according to region.

⁹⁷ The other common, and official term is פלח “company” or “garrison”; see, e.g., TAD B2.1.
meaning as the text suggests indirectly that they (the Elephantine readers) too are among the “troop” who should depend upon Ahiqar’s words.

In the end we are left with only questions about how much or among whom exactly did Ahiqar’s message resonate. Regardless, attention to the Elephantine documents reveals a variety of ways that Ahiqar’s socio-political ethic could have had real-life application.

4.5 Conclusion

The Book of Ahiqar promotes various social and political messages that touch on a range of issues that include the more mundane topics of loans, food shortages, and civil (dis)obedience to the more abstract questions of self-referentiality and identity, such as what does it mean to be poor or who is part of my community. Assigning Ahiqar to a specific social setting, therefore, would be a disservice to a text that can impress upon and inspire a wide variety of communities. In fact, its lasting and widely dispersed popularity attests to this fact. However, there is some merit to evaluating the rhetorical strategies and the social and political lessons they promote. Ahiqar consistently presents the practical, financial advice from the perspective of the one in need. Whether it be in loans or financial status generally, the addressee occupies the lower economic position and is therefore the one subject to distress, even want. Moving to the political arena, Ahiqar’s narrative has blurred the boundaries between family and foreigner and thus forced its audience to reassess its view on the outsider. The word of the foreigner, especially the foreign king, becomes important, if not key, for upholding the social order. Although the focus of these two analyses has primarily rested on the rhetorical, they also demand some consideration in light of an actual reading audience, if only as a representative example of how the text might have been received. By a happy accident of preservation, the material context of the Ahiqar papyri themselves provides us with a reasonably identifiable reading audience. To be sure, not all of the topics raised in the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar are exemplified among the Elephantine documents, and conversely neither does Ahiqar provide for every issue that a Judean serving at the military garrison in Achaemenid Egypt may face. Nevertheless, even a brief survey of the economic, social, and political aspects in Ahiqar reveal that this text could have had a strong and impactful reception there.
CHAPTER FIVE

“MANY ARE THE STARS”
HUMANITY AND THE GODS IN AHIQAR

5.1 An Ideology of Anxiety

Ahiqar, 166–168a:
“A leopard happened upon a goat, and it [the goat] was naked. And the leopard answered and said to the goat, ‘Come and let me cover you with my skin.’ The goat [answered] and said to the leopard, ‘Why (give) me your covering? Do not take my hide from me!’ – For [a leopard] will not [see]k the welfare of a gazelle, but instead to suck its blood.”

In our final return to this fable, we may consider that Ahiqar’s outlook extends beyond the practical or social and into the theological. Significant portions of the text concern themselves with the cosmic order, particularly the relationship between humanity and the divine. The issue of human nature itself also arises. If the animals are simply symbols for human beings—even specific human types or social categories—what does this imply about human behavior in general? If the leopard represents a certain human-type, the correlation may imply that at least some sector of humanity is evil (or at the very least destructive) by its very nature. Theodicy, divine justice, and fate also come to the fore, most notably here (and in the narrative) because of the absence of the divine. Is the goat (the weak) fated to be devoured by the leopard (the powerful)? Will a wise and carefully articulated response always result in escape from suffering or death? Where is the divine in this scenario? Does the “natural order” intimates by the animal-dynamics also pertain to the cosmic order? These questions are, of course, more speculative in that they are not explicitly addressed by the fable. Nevertheless, when we consider this fable in light of the others (especially the one that immediately follows it) as well as the larger context of the sayings and narrative, the questions posed above become more appropriate. For example, on the one hand, there are indicators which suggest the leopard represents a negative human-type, and the gazelle a good one. On the other hand, the bear-lambs fable immediately follows this one and in that fable the bear is directly connected with the gods. Could this also shade our interpretation of the leopard? These two fables are clearly similar, though interestingly there is one aspect which stands out in its contrast. In our
fable, the implication is that the goat, by means of its cautious attitude and quick wit, *may* be able to escape its fate. Contrarily, the subsequent fable emphasizes the fact that the lambs have no say in their survival. The bear will take what it wants; those who survive, as well as the one(s) chosen to die, do so only by forces out of their control. Chance or, perhaps, fate are intriguing topics in *Ahiqar*, and this fable is not the only one that brings them up. The key word here is הֶעֱלָה “to happen upon,” and it occurs at other crucial moments that suggest a connotation of fate. There is much more unpacking to be done when it comes to the theological and anthropological tenor of this fable, but for now I will reserve this analysis to the body of the chapter.

This chapter seeks to uncover the anthropological and theological worldview of *Ahiqar*. Such an investigation can often be problematic for several reasons, not the least of which is that the nature of the sayings is often such that the most important information may be found not in what the text says explicitly, but what it *presumes*. If we recall from Chapter 2, sayings often require some work on the part of the reader to uncover both its logic and the conceptual basis upon which that logic is built. Straightforward practical and ethical advice abounds, yet their foundations rest upon presumptions about the world and the way in which it operates. Part of this operation, of course, includes humanity and the role of human nature; likewise, the role of the divine cannot be overlooked. Fortunately, *Ahiqar* also comprises a handful of sayings which are less than instructional—at least not in the sense of exhortations for or warnings against specific praxis—but instead carry an observational aspect, often commenting on human behavior, the divine, and the cosmos in general. Lifting out the “instructions” from the “speculative,” however, is not so simple, nor is it warranted on any formal level. The practical and ethical advice is grounded in and intertwined with the contemplative. Hence, a majority of the instructional sayings are supplemented by motivational extensions which give expression to a particular theological or anthropological outlook that, in turn, undergird the instruction itself. These occasions are particularly helpful in that they expose some of the logic behind the text’s transference from ideology to practical application. Consequently, we may use these examples as a hermeneutic tool for identifying or speculating on the ideology of several other sayings which do not include any such explicit clarification. Indeed, most of the pragmatic advice rests on a shared set of assumptions between text and reader, and, therefore, in order to uncover the motives behind them
we will attempt to be attuned to the presuppositions upon which the various sayings are built. So, while this chapter aims to sift out the ideological impulses and underpinnings, it is important to remember that this is done simply for the sake of exposition and should not imply any layering or typological distinction.

Another hindrance for trying to expose and explicate the ideologies hidden behind the narrative and instructions of Ahiqar has to do with the fact that the text is not a theological treatise by any means. Hence, the text is not laid out according to some well-organized scheme of linear arguments about human nature, the gods, and/or the workings of the cosmos. A holistic, synthetic approach to the material, therefore, is required. This does not mean, however, that there is no discernible flow, only that the model does not resemble an efficiently structured essay, but rather a dialogue. If read straight through, then, one will find a constant back-and-forth, where each saying (or cluster of sayings) pushes against the last and only deductively can we ascertain a relatable outlook—and even then the picture we are left with is muddled and complex. In other words, we will discover that the text conveys several ideologies that are often competing with each other. This lack of consistency—rather than being indicative of “multiple redactional hands”—actually becomes refreshing in its honest appreciation of the world and the inherent tension between the ideal order espoused by the sayings and the reality experienced, which is a great deal messier.

This chapter is divided into two large sections: “Humanity” and “The Gods.” In the first, I show that the Book of Ahiqar demonstrates a conspicuously ‘negative anthropology.’ Intimately connected with the pervasive ethic of caution, the text’s outlook on human nature is grim in its emphatic appeal for distrust, even among one’s own family. A more pointed critique, however, is aimed upward where the strong and powerful are inherently inclined to prey upon the weak. This conclusion is played out, in part, through the drama of the animal fables and the correlation between human behavior and the predatory nature of certain beasts. A significant aspect in this regard is Ahiqar’s testament to the limits of human achievement and knowledge, though in an

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1 On the notion of a shared set of assumptions see, e.g., Michael Fox’s essay on “Coherence Theory” as applied to Proverbs in his commentary, *Proverbs 10–31, 967–76*, in which, he states, at 968: “There must be an underlying system of assumptions about knowledge for the book to hold together. This system—Proverbs’ background epistemology—is best described as a *coherence theory of truth*.”
ironic way that simultaneously admires humanity’s diversity and capability—not proclivity—for goodness. This has further implications for the text’s assessment of the divine. Turning to the second section on “The Gods,” we are left with a similarly conflicted outlook. On the one hand, the gods of Ahiqar—Shamash, El/God, or generally “the gods”—are resources for justice; so also is their chosen representative on earth: the king. On the other hand, Ahiqar does not shy away from exposing suffering and at times directly relates it to the inscrutable nature of the divine. The gods are beneficent, but at least occasionally the distribution of this beneficence appears to be arbitrary. Recalling the anthropological discussion of human ability, the text measures it against that of the divine and, moreover, sprinkles in a few pointed reflections on fate. Unfortunately, Ahiqar does not give a clear answer on the escapability of one’s lot. Lastly, I return to the figure of the king and his relationship to the divine—which I call the “god-king complex.” The image of the monarch is similarly ambiguous and, moreover, has intriguing implications for how this aspect of the text was received in its Elephantine environment.

5.2 Humanity

Humanity and human nature are topics of great interest for Ahiqar. This is exemplified most poignantly in a single saying in line 164: “Many are the stars [of the heavens, whose] names no one knows. Behold, so also with humankind, which no one knows!” The trope of the innumerable array of stars is most often utilized to describe the unfathomable power of the divine and the expansive nature of the cosmos. Ahiqar, however, has adapted this expression in order to comment on humanity and its indeterminate complexity. This section, therefore, focuses on those sayings which concern human nature, its proclivities, limitations, as well as its relationship to the divine in order to illustrate more fully the anthropological outlook of the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar.

5.2.1 Of Beasts and Men: Human Nature in Ahiqar

We may take as a point of departure the findings in Chapter 3 about Ahiqar’s pronounced ethic of caution. The text encourages its audience to be on guard against nearly everything they encounter and in everything they do, especially when it comes to speaking. Reckless or dishonest speech is

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dangerous and leaves one susceptible to personal attack: “Keep in mind that their eyes and their ears are everywhere. And concerning your mouth: guard yourself! Do not let it become their prey!” (81).\(^3\) This saying, as well as many others, attests to Ahiqar’s strong urging for the listener to mistrust the people around. But noticeably Ahiqar tells the listener not only to beware the stranger or the enemy, but even the good intentions of a person’s friends and family are suspect. Line 141 says: “Do not reveal your [secrets/poverty] before your friends; let them not take your name lightly!” The story of Ahiqar and his betrayal by his nephew Nadan communicates in a dramatic fashion the dangers of trusting family members, even one’s own child—a lesson undergirded by those saying in 139–140 which recall the son’s betrayal specifically. The world is a dangerous place according to Ahiqar and one’s social standing and personal safety are uncertain, but the sayings mentioned above make it clear that the chief sources of danger are other people. A prominent assumption of the narrative, therefore, is that no one can be trusted. Indeed, the cautious advice dealing with how one should interact with other people is of such magnitude and tone that it speaks to the text’s view of humanity.

Ahiqar is not alone in its distrustful message concerning one’s own intimates. Amenemhet I provides a particularly insightful comparison. In contrast to the other royal instruction Merikare, which encourages the future king to rely on his courtiers,\(^4\) this royal instruction is preoccupied with distrust. The king was betrayed and assassinated by his own closest officials, recalling details of Ahiqar’s ordeal.\(^5\) Miriam Lichtheim describes it as follows: “The tone is one of outrage and revulsion at the treachery of man … [beginning with] a warning not to trust anyone, for treason lurks everywhere, and the king’s beneficent reign was repaid by the attack on his life.”\(^6\) Even some of the language Amenemhet I uses to describe this betrayal evokes Ahiqar. During his lament Amenemhet cries out: “But he who ate my food raised opposition; He whom I gave my hands [=

\(^3\) See discussion in Chapter 3 about the importance of careful speech, both in Ahiqar and in comparative literature.

\(^4\) See Merikare (P. Leningrad 1116A) lines 116–118 in Lichtheim, AEL 1:105.

\(^5\) A text often associated with Amenemhet I is the Prophecies of Neferti, which clearly references the reign of Amenemhet I. Among the list of dooms which precede the glorious reign of Amenemhet, Neferti adds: “Each man’s heart is for himself. Mourning is not done today, hearts have quite abandoned it. A man sits with his back turned, while one slays another. I show you the son as enemy, the brother as foe, a man slaying his father” (Lichtheim, AEL 1:142).

trust] used it to plot.”¹⁷ The intimacy between the speaker and his betrayers expressed in these lines parallels the famous passage in *Ahiqar* in a striking way: “[*From out of*] my own [ho]use came my disrepute … From out of my own house came my fury …” (139–140). *Amenemhet I* is rather distinct among Egyptian instructions in its unapologetic pessimism about humanity. *Ptahhotep*, for example, paints a more nuanced picture: for him a son who is upright is a blessing, “but an offspring can make trouble. If he strays, neglects your counsel, disobeys all that is said, his mouth spouting evil speech, (then) punish him for all his talk!”⁸ Still, the majority of *Ptahhotep*’s maxims carry a resilient optimism, asserting that proper behavior (especially careful listening) will undoubtedly result in success.⁹ Nowhere does this instruction dwell on betrayal or caution, particularly from one’s confidants, as does *Ahiqar* and *Amenemhet I*.

Among the Hebrew instructions, Ben Sira provides an interesting point of comparison. On several occasions Ben Sira brings up the topic of friendship and for the most part the sentiment is: be true to your friends, even in times of need.¹⁰ But there is one passage that stands out:

> For there are friends who are such when it suits them, but they will not stand by you in time of trouble. And there are friends who change into enemies and tell of the quarrel to your disgrace. And there are friends who sit at your table, but they will not stand by you in time of trouble. When you are prosperous, they become your second self, and lord it over your servants; but if you are brought low, they turn against you, and hide themselves from you. Keep away from your enemies, and be on guard with your friends. (Sir 6:8–13).¹¹

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¹⁷ Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:136. The phrase “he who ate my food” is most likely a technical term for a king’s nearest subordinates, i.e., those who reside (and thus eat) in the royal vicinity. A very similar turn of phrase occurs in *Ahiqar* when Esarhaddon is speaking to Nabusumiskun. In line 33, the king refers to Nabusumiskun as “one of the officiers of my father who [ate] the food of my father (i.e., King Sennacherib)”; Aram. cf. *Ankhsheshonqe* 3.21 where Pharaoh asks Ankhsheshonqe: “did you eat my bread and hear evil against me without coming to inform me of it?” (Lichtheim, *AEL* 3:163).


¹⁹ See, e.g., the opening line of the Epilogue “If you listen to my sayings, all your affairs will go forward” (Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:73).


¹¹ The topic of friendship begins in v. 5. and continues through v. 17. On “friendship” in Ben Sira, see Jeremy Corley, *Ben Sira’s Teaching on Friendship* (BJS 316; Providence: Brown University, 2002).
For Ben Sira, friends are a dime a dozen (cf. 6:6), but those who are faithful in times of distress are rare.\textsuperscript{12} This contrasts with some of the more optimistic sayings about friendship that we find in Proverbs, for example: “A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity” (17:17).\textsuperscript{13} But even more, Ben Sira portrays friends as potential enemies and, consequently, the best course of action is to guard yourself against them (יָשָׁה). As in Ahiqar 141, Ben Sira supposes that even one’s friends can intensify one’s suffering. Also, in Ben Sira’s final passage on friendship (37:1–6) he makes the following interesting transition: “Is it not a sorrow that for death itself when a dear friend turns into an enemy? O inclination to evil, why were you formed?” (37:2–3). Aside from the lament about betrayal which again recalls the famous Ahiqar passage, Ben Sira also makes a correlation between a friend’s capability of perfidy with what is seemingly an admission that humanity from creation has an innate predisposition for evil.

This brings us back to Ahiqar where the concept of friendship is also intimately related to its reflection on human nature. As we have seen, line 141 counts friends among those who are untrustworthy.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, the circumstances of the narrative make it clear that even one’s family members are suspect. Perhaps it is due to the text’s corruption, but the motivations behind Nadan’s betrayal are never fully explored, leaving the reader with an unanswered question about his character. The contrast between Nadan and Nabusumiskun highlights the problematic situation vis-à-vis Nadan’s wicked behavior with regard to Ahiqar. Nabusumiskun repaid kindness for kindness and supported his friend in a time of need (51–52); Nadan, on the other hand, was shown kindness as well, but responded with treachery. That makes two strikes against Nadan: not only is he family (and, thus, expected to be supportive), but he failed to uphold the golden rule. Nabusumiskun, however, demonstrates the benefits of faithful friendship, even if the sayings respond by emphasizing the unlikelihood of that occurring.

Nadan’s behavior and the opinion of the sayings about the scarcity of trustworthy friends and colleagues may point to a more acute, underlying issue. Because friends and family have the

\textsuperscript{12} The notion, similar to Ben Sira’s, that a person will abandon his friend in a time of need may lie behind the fragmentary saying in Ahiqar 112: “but/and you abandoned your friends and you made heavy …”

\textsuperscript{13} Though cf. Prov 18:24.

\textsuperscript{14} The lexeme for “friends” in this line (and in 111 and 222) is יָשָׁה; we also find the term בְּנֵי “colleague” in 99, 185 and in the narrative in 56 and 67; on two occasions, 161 and 221, the word בְּנֵי “neighbor” occurs.
capacity, perhaps even inclination, for dishonesty and doing harm, what does this insinuate about human nature more broadly. *Ahiqar* wrestles with this unease in a profound way, particularly in the narrative where much of the story takes place after the unsettling betrayal by the least likely person (at least relative to the characters present in the narrative, i.e., the king, colleague, other officials). The implication, then, is that human nature is malicious or, at the very least, defective. If we cannot even be sure of the motives of our friends and family, then how can begin to trust the neighbor, the acquaintance, the stranger, or anyone else with whom we come into contact? It is in this unknowing that makes humankind dangerous.

This conclusion is intensified if we consider a couple of passages which hint at the concealed nature of human motivations. On the one hand, there are sayings which testify to human nature’s mysteriousness and in doing so convey a sense of awe or wonder. The saying in 164 mentioned already (and in the title), which likens the unfathomable number of stars to the colorful palette that is humanity, is a representative example. But, there are other sayings which reference humanity’s hidden nature in a much more foreboding manner. Line 99 is particularly poignant: “[No] one [se]es what is in the heart of his colleague.” Although fragmentary, the saying goes on to contrast the typological “good person” with the “bad person,” indicating that the unknowableness with which the saying begins refers to human motivations and behavior. We might also consider that much of the column in which this saying is found (col. 7) deals with conflict and contains several allusions to warfare. The lack of knowledge is unsettling in itself. Recall that for *Ahiqar* the “heart” is the seat of the mind; thus the saying means that what a person is thinking is hidden from us.

The Egyptian *Instruction of Any* shares a similar expression: “One cannot know his fellow if the masses are beasts; One cannot know his teachings and alone possess

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15 Aram. The rendering of this lexeme as “colleague” follows Porten and Yardeni, though “companion” may suit as well. It is related to the root יִדְבֹּג ‘to be named’ hence the nominal form would be: “one whose name is known.”

16 The saying continues to the end of the line and (seemingly) onto the next by contrasting the “good man” (Aram. בָּרוֹן) with the “bad man” (Aram. לֶאֱלוֹת תַּכֹּל); unfortunately, the manuscript is fragmentary so neither the translation nor the message is clear. It appears to describe the problems that occur when a good man and a bad man come together, specifically in the context of the work-place.

17 E.g., 95 mentions a “fortified city” (קריה והריה) suggesting a siege; the line’s antithetical parallel in 104 speaks of a city being “plundered” (?>/אבות). There are several other examples from nearly every line of the column.

18 Elsewhere I opt to translate לַבְּשׁ in its idiomatic sense as “mind” or “sense”; see, e.g., 81, 82, 93, 95.
a mind if the multitudes are foolish.” Similarly, Proverbs contemplates the enigmatic intentions of people: “The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out” (20:5). Yet, the question remains: how can someone know if a person is good or bad? Sometimes a person can know after the fact, that is, based on another’s words or reputation. Line 132 reads: “[Listen …] with your ears, because a person’s esteem is his trustworthiness, but his disregard is the lies of his lips.” If someone is known to be a liar, then, naturally, you should not trust him because he is a bad person. But, as the saying in 99 reminds us, there are just as many occasions where another’s intentions are hidden.

Moving beyond the explicit concern for friends, family, and colleagues or the direct questioning of human intention, we can also find in Ahiqar further reflections on humanity that are more veiled. In particular, we ought to consider the several animal sayings and fables. Beginning with the simple animal sayings, we see that they often comprise remarks about the distinctive behaviors of animals as a means to illustrate a certain truth. For example, line 165 reads, “There is no lion in the sea, for this reason they call the tidal wave a ‘Lion.’” The crux of this saying rests on an assumption about the audience’s knowledge of nature. Specifically, a comparison between the lion and the tidal wave depends on the understanding that each one is ferocious, destructive, and has a certain roar. So, because the lion does not live in the sea people

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19 Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:145; we might also consider the similarity between Ahiqar 141 and another passage in Any: “Do not reveal your heart to a stranger; he might use your words against you” (p. 140).

20 As indicated above, the remainder of the saying is fragmentary, though the extant portions suggest that a person will eventually be able to determine if his (work-)colleague is a bad person, in which case the addressee is advised not to associate with the bad person because it could affect them economically or professionally.

21 The designation “simple” is only used to distinguish the non-fable animal sayings from the fables.

22 This translation follows Kottsieper’s reconstruction and etymological understanding of the Aramaic, which differs slightly from the TAD readings. One of the critical words is קְנֵן (TAD also suggests קְנַן), which Kottsieper suggests means “tidal-wave,” though this is uncertain. See Kottsieper, “Die alttestamentliche Weisheit im Licht aramäischer Weisheitstraditionen,” in *Weisheit außerhalb der kanonischen Weisheitsschriften* (ed. Bernd Janowski. Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 10; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 128–62, at 133. For a brief discussion of other ancient Near Eastern examples where the lion is associated with natural phenomenon, particularly the storm (and thus perhaps imagined here in the “roar” of the sea churned up by a storm), see Brent Strawn, *What is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (OBO 212; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 206–8.
found it convenient or pleasurable to name the tidal wave “Lion.” Although this saying does not directly relate to the issue at hand, it is important to demonstrate that the interpretation of the animal sayings generally pivots off the inherent nature of a particular beast. In many cases the animals and their behavior symbolize some aspect of humanity. For example, in another simple animal saying. Lines 183–184 read: “The lion will lie in wait for the stag in the concealment of his hiding-place and he […] and he will drain its blood and he will consume its flesh. Behold thus is their fate, that of humankind!” This saying appears to be drawing a comparison between the interaction of a lion and a stag with that of human interaction in general. The word “fate” (Aram. פֶּתֶן) more plainly means “meeting.” I will discuss this aspect further below, but the intriguing takeaway is the implicit correlation between a lion’s natural penchant for devouring its prey and the encounter of human beings. Hence, the assumption is that at least one of the parties is intent on harming or exploiting the other.

Such is also the case in the Ahiqar fables, but it is done in a more dramatized fashion, and allows for more possibilities of interpretation. In the fables the beasts take on human qualities—speaking, walking, etc.—making the text’s commentary on the human scene even more colorful. Our familiar fable about the leopard and the goat is a prime example. The drama need not be repeated, but connecting this fable to the topic of anthropology requires some legwork. First, the goat’s response to the leopard models the lesson learned in 132 above that knowledge about a person’s reputation affects how one should interact with them. Paying attention is crucial, and even more so here because the reputation of the speaker is in conflict with his actual words. So, once again, there is some ambiguity when it comes to knowing someone’s intentions, whether good or bad. The goat, however, is clever and sees through the trick. Indeed, the leopard too had made an attempt to be clever. If the goat has responded by saying, “sure you can cover me with your skin,”

23 The two words for “lion” in this saying are different: לֵאָו אֱוָא יַּמְסֶה and לֵאָו מַפְסֶּה respectively.
24 The first line of this translation follows TAD closely due to the obscurity of the terms סֶמֶס and סֶמֶס. The first is only attested much later where it means “to be blind,” which makes little sense here; for this reason most see it either as a scribal error for סֶמֶס (from יָמַס “to expect” or “to watch out for”) or take it as an unattested lexeme. The latter is a hapax and only through the sense of the saying is its definition supposed; cf. Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 60–61 and 229 nn. 82–86; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 479–80 nn. 129–32.
25 The lesson about caution, particularly in how one responds—in this case verbally—recalls the conclusions from Chapter 3. Also the leopard’s verbal confrontation reflects nicely the dangers of the “ambush of the mouth” in line 83.
it essentially would have given the leopard permission to eat it, because we (the audience) know that the only way the leopard’s skin was going to cover the goat was by the leopard eating it. Again we know this because it is natural for the leopard to do so, and, in fact, the motivational extension makes this abundantly clear.

But how does this fable comment on human nature? A comparison with the saying above about the lion and the stag may provide the right rubric. The key word יֶלֶשׁ in that saying also appears here, suggesting that the “happening upon” between the leopard and the goat is similar to the “happening upon” in 183–184. In other words, like a lion meeting a stag or like a goat meeting a leopard, so also is one’s encounter with another person. The intriguing question, then, is with whom should the reader identify? As we have seen throughout, the weaker party, the one under threat, is the likely answer.26 The practical lesson is that whenever you meet another person, you should assume that they are a predator, just as the goat wisely assumed the leopard is a predator and, presumably, survived the ordeal. The consequences of this reading in terms of the text’s anthropology are revealing: because these animal sayings hinge upon the inherent destructive nature of the predatory animals, it seems to suggest that some people are by nature, bad.

In the lone plant-fable, the issue of human nature also comes up. Lines 101–102 read:

The [thorn-b]ush sent a message to [the] pomegranate, it read: “The thorn-bush to the pomegranate: ‘What good are your numerous thorns [for] the one who happens upon your [fru]it?’” // [Then] the pomegranate [an]swered and said to the thorn-bush, “(What about) you? You are entirely (made up of) thorns for the one who happens upon you.

Stylistically, this fable resembles the animal fables, except that one of them is not seeking to physically destroy the other.27 Instead, the thorn-bush, i.e., “predatory” plant, is seeking to destroy the other’s reputation by focusing on the other’s negative qualities, i.e., the pomegranate’s thorns. Admittedly, the basis for this attack is weak, because, of course, the thorn-bush also has thorns;

26 In the Hebrew Bible, comparisons of one’s enemies to a wild beast, particularly a lion, are frequent, especially among the Psalms, cf. 7:2; 17:12. On lion imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East see Strawn, *What is Stronger*, esp. 50–54 for the lion as enemy metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and 134–51 in the ancient Near East.

27 There are some formal differences. Foremost is the epistolary address; cf. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 168; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche*, 227–30.
hence, the pomegranate’s reply, while sound, is really not that clever as far as I can tell. What lesson, then, are we to learn? Michael Weigl offers the following explanation:

Der Schlagabtausch der Gewächse um ihre jeweiligen Früchte kreist um das Stichwort Dornen. Im Munde des Dornbusches, von dem der Dialog überhaupt erst seinen Ausgang nimmt, stellt die Konzentration auf die Dornen des Granatapfelbaumes eine bissende Ironie dar: Ausgerechnet der fruchtlose und unproduktive Dornbusch wirft dem fruchttragenden Granatapfelbaum die Menge seiner Dornen. Der Splitter im Auge des Anderen ist größer als der eigene Balken, und ein unbedeutender Teilaspekt verstellt den Blick aufs Ganze. Der Gattung des Streitgesprächs entsprechend sollte die Bildrede auf bestimmte, typische menschliche Verhaltensweisen übertragen werden: Der Kümmerliche maß sich an, dem Nutzbringenden schon die kleinste Schwäche vorzuwerfen und verschweigt dabei dessen wesentlichen.\(^{28}\)

Weigl’s interpretation, based on an allusion to Matthew 7:3, is probably accurate for the pragmatic takeaway of this saying. Hence, one should not criticize or slander someone who is better or more righteous than you (even if you have reason to do so), because you have your own faults, which are probably more than the accused.\(^{29}\) However, Weigl misses an important anthropological aspect which underlines this fable. If we take the fable as a commentary on “typische menschliche Verhaltensweisen”, it suggests communication between peers, but, according to Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 227, “Der Niedrigere (ein fruchtloser Baum!) spricht entgegen aller Konvention den Höhergestellten (den für seine Früchte besonders geschätzten Granatapfelstrauch) zuerst an und verzichtet dabei auch noch auf die Verwendung jeglicher Titulatur.” This is an intriguing suggestion as the social dynamic may very well be at play here; see, e.g., the fable in 2 Kgs 14:9 about the thistle and the cedar tree, where Jehoash, king of Israel, likens himself to the cedar—the greatest tree—but likens Amaziah, king of Judah, to the thistle—the least plant that even wild beasts trample. However, I would hesitate to read too much into the lack of a formal greeting, as it could simply be a result of the economy of the fable format itself, especially when compared with the other fables where no such formalities occur (except perhaps the incomplete one in line 94). The brevity of the “letter,” on the other hand, can match nicely the frequent, informal correspondence that took place between family members and friends wherein formal greetings are not strictly followed. On these private letters on ostraca and Aramaic letters generally from Elephantine during this period, see James Lindenberger, Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters (ed. Kent Harold Richards; SBL Writings from the Ancient World 14; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), esp. 25–80; TAD D; cf. Paul-Eugene Dion, “Aramaic Letters,” ABD 4: 285–90.

\(^{28}\) Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 228.

\(^{29}\) Weigl’s analysis of this fable closely resembles my reading of lines 126 and 128. A (verbal) attack on the righteous is inherently flawed because whatever you may accuse them of, you too are guilty. On a related note, Weigl also suggests that there is a breach in social protocol; the epistolary format with the simple greeting—PN ⩫ PN—would suggest communication between equals, but, according to Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 227, “Der Niedrigere (ein fruchtloser Baum!) spricht entgegen aller Konvention den Höhergestellten (den für seine Früchte besonders geschätzten Granatapfelstrauch) zuerst an und verzichtet dabei auch noch auf die Verwendung jeglicher Titulatur.” This is an intriguing suggestion as the social dynamic may very well be at play here; see, e.g., the fable in 2 Kgs 14:9 about the thistle and the cedar tree, where Jehoash, king of Israel, likens himself to the cedar—the greatest tree—but likens Amaziah, king of Judah, to the thistle—the least plant that even wild beasts trample. However, I would hesitate to read too much into the lack of a formal greeting, as it could simply be a result of the economy of the fable format itself, especially when compared with the other fables where no such formalities occur (except perhaps the incomplete one in line 94). The brevity of the “letter,” on the other hand, can match nicely the frequent, informal correspondence that took place between family members and friends wherein formal greetings are not strictly followed. On these private letters on ostraca and Aramaic letters generally from Elephantine during this period, see James Lindenberger, Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters (ed. Kent Harold Richards; SBL Writings from the Ancient World 14; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), esp. 25–80; TAD D; cf. Paul-Eugene Dion, “Aramaic Letters,” ABD 4: 285–90.
Verhaltensweisen,” then the contrast is not only on the level of wisdom or morality of slanderous speech. The content of the speech rests on essential qualities. In other words, the context between the thorn-bush and the pomegranate is a context between a type of plant that only has harmful qualities, and a type of plant that has both harmful and beneficial qualities. Translated into the human sphere, we are left with two correlating types, about which we may infer that some humans (= pomegranate) have a proclivity for both goodness and wickedness, while others (= thorn-bush) only have a wicked disposition.

A final example will make it clear that Ahiqar holds humanity in relatively low esteem. Line 95 states: “A person whose standing is beautiful and whose mind is good is like a fortified city in [whose] midst there is water.” In other words, a person whose moral character is without blemish and one who is wise 30 is like a well-supplied city, impregnable to sustained attack. At first glance, this line sounds promising and seems to be an encouraging reflection on humanity’s capacity to attain a flawless, unassailable character. If we continue, however, into the next line, the situation changes dramatically: “[How] can a person protect himself against gods and how might he be on guard against his inner wickedness?” 31 The tone of this line is quite different and appears to directly challenge the confidence expressed in the previous line. 32 A paraphrastic, interpretive reading of the two lines together reveals an outlook that is much less optimistic: “A

30 Alternatively the expression “a good heart” could be an idiom meaning “to be happy” (cf. Bezalel Porten, The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change (2d ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 108 n. 8 [text B8=TAD A3.3]) or, in a legal context, “to be satisfied” (cf. Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 179 n. 14 [text B28=TAD B2.6]) and, thus, here something like “someone against whom there is no complaint.”

31 Line 96 could very well contain the most important saying on the nature of humanity in Ahiqar; unfortunately, there are some difficult lexical issues which make the reading I offer here tenuous. The critical issue revolves around the lexeme  יַעֲקה which does not appear elsewhere in Aramaic until much later. Thus, its meaning must depend on context and cognates in Hebrew. Based on the Hebrew there are two likely options which fit the consonants. The first is יַעֲקה ʾaven, “wickedness”; the second is יַעֲקה ʾōn, “strength” or “force” (perhaps even “wealth”). Both meanings would fit the context, though the impact would change significantly in terms of the anthropological consideration. I lean toward “wickedness” because it contrasts nicely with רָעָם “beautiful/upright” and since with “strength” we would be forced to awkwardly manipulate the semantic force of the preposition עֲבָר, hence the translation in TAD: “… and how can he watch himself (relying) on his inner strength.”

32 Although there is no coordinating conjunction—it could be in the lacuna—to link the two sayings directly, they are connected thematically in that both raise the issue of attack and defense.
person of upright moral standing and whose mind is keen is like an impregnable fortress; yet how could s/he stand up against the gods or how could s/he be on guard against her/his own inherent wickedness?”

That the sturdiness of one’s character (or reputation) in 95 falls short in the face of the divine is telling in itself and will be treated in the subsequent section. The final clause is more significant here. The saying appears to insinuate that the innate wickedness of a person, no matter how upright and wise, can (and perhaps will) win out. Even more intriguing is that this “battle” is played out internally. In other words, the saying testifies to the conflicting nature of the human will. Taken together with the animal sayings, we might envision this as a struggle to suppress one’s animalistic instincts. This last point hints at a prominent aspect in this anthropological discourse which requires some further unpacking, namely the limits of human achievement.

5.2.2 The Limits of Human Achievement

As the final example above makes clear, Ahiqar is not necessarily lamenting the fact that humanity has an inherent depravity, rather the concern rests on whether or not an individual can overcome it. To be sure, hardly any of the external sources that we have considered, including the relatively upbeat Proverbs, would deny humankind’s capacity for evil. As Qoheleth laments: “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind” (6:1). The more telling question, however, is what does this text say about humanity’s ability to overcome its depraved nature. How, indeed, can an individual “guard against” his/her inherent proclivity for malevolent behavior?

Michael Fox, in his commentary on Proverbs, writes of this commonplace, two-fold anthropological problem: “It is an axiom of Wisdom Literature that human wisdom has its limits both in human frailties and in God’s sometimes mysterious will.” The book of Proverbs is unabashedly optimistic when it comes to humanity’s ability to overcome these frailties. There is little hint of the toil involved in the pursuit of right living, instead the text is littered with refrains

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33 If we look further into the subsequent line 97, this reading may even be reaffirmed. Though fragmentary, the phrase “him with whom El is not” is clear and may be compared with line 91: “Who is there who can stand before him, except he with whom El is?”

34 Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 606.
about the righteous or the wise whose upstanding behavior seems a given, e.g., “wise conduct is pleasure to a person of understanding” (10:23b) or “when justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous” (21:15a). The ease with which the righteous/wise exercise goodness is highlighted by the stark contrast with the wicked/foolish—there is very little gray area between. Contrarily, Qoheleth questions the absoluteness of the wise and the righteous. In 7:19–22 we find an imaginative back-and-forth that undermines the supposed distance between the positive and negative human types: “Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers that are in a city. Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning. Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you; your heart knows that many times you yourself cursed others.” In an extensive study of the theological and anthropological aspects of Proverbs and Qoheleth, Thomas Frydrych observes that both Proverbs and Qoheleth acknowledge the exalted status of humankind in God’s creation while at the same paying attention to humanity’s inherent wickedness; and yet “the proverbial sages are optimistic about the power of wisdom and discipline to overcome this natural tendency [for wickedness]. In contrast, Qoheleth expresses explicitly the view that righteousness is merely an ideal which is unachievable.”35 Qoheleth also reminds us that while this question is ultimately of an anthropological nature, it also speaks directly to the entire instructional enterprise. Wisdom is the ideal, but it is not easily reached: “All this I have tested by wisdom: I said ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me. That which is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?” (κμ23–24). If “teaching” and “listening” cannot effect change, then what is the point?

A similar question is raised in the Egyptian Instruction of Any. This New Kingdom instruction is notable for a few peculiarities of style, but the most prominent feature is the epilogue which ends with a response by the student Khonshotep himself. The son, after having listened to his father’s instructions—most of which are fairly typical in their content and ethic—replies by challenging the efficaciousness of teaching on the mind of a young man “who does not follow the moral instructions, though the writings are on his tongue!”36 Any answers with a lengthy illustration that has several echoes in Ahiqar, stating:

35 Tomas Frydrych, Living Under the Sun: An Examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth (VTSup 90; Ledien: Brill, 2002), 220, and see p. 33 on Proverbs’ optimism in this regard.
36 Lichtheim, AEL 2:144.
The fighting bull who kills in the stable, he forgets and abandons the arena;
He conquers his nature, and remembers what he’s learned,
And becomes the like of a fattened ox.
The savage lion abandons his wrath, and comes to resemble the timid donkey.
The horse slips into its harness, obedient it goes outdoors.
The dog obeys the word, and walks behind its master …
One teaches the Nubian to speak Egyptian, the Syrian and other foreigners, too.
Say: “I shall do like all the beasts.” Listen and learn what they do.\(^{37}\)

Any defends the effectiveness of instruction in eliciting upright behavior. Although the list of beasts here is not quite fable-like, its effect rests on a number of anthropomorphisms, and therefore its anthropological schema is cast in a strikingly similar manner as that of \textit{Ahiqar}. On the one hand, humanity has an animal-side. It is wild like the bull and harmful like the lion. On the other hand, a person can learn to control these urges, so that they might become domesticated as the horse or the dog. As in \textit{Ahiqar}, there is a contrast between positive and negative animal-types. The scenario is different—none of them is trying to eat the other—but the assumptions are the same. Nevertheless, when compared with \textit{Any} the disparity and negativity in \textit{Ahiqar} become even more pronounced. The situation, according to \textit{Any}, is not hopeless, despite his son’s objections. One need only to “listen and learn.” The sayings that we have explored in \textit{Ahiqar} thus far, however, are far less hopeful, especially this last example in 95–96. Then again, any absolute claims would be taking it too far. After all, Nabusumiskun does come through for his friend. Yet \textit{Ahiqar}’s outlook resembles Khonshotep’s more so than it does \textit{Any}’s in its persistent skepticism.\(^{38}\)

Both the passage in \textit{Any}’s epilogue and line 96 in \textit{Ahiqar} (as well as the several fables) indicate that the struggle is often an internal one. This view can have intriguing ramifications when transferred to the broader anthropological discourse exemplified by the narrative over against the sayings—a view which comes to the fore when we consider the role of the reader. Specifically, the rhetorical makeup of the entire text denotes that rather than identifying with the protagonist of the story (i.e., \textit{Ahiqar}), the reader—in his/her vicarious participation in the drama—is invited to appropriate the identity of both of \textit{Ahiqar}’s “students”: \sigma\text{adan} and \sigma\text{abusumiskun}. The sayings blend the dramatic addressee “my son” (= \sigma\text{adan}) with the external addressee “you” (i.e., the

\(^{37}\) Lichtheim, \textit{AEL} 2:144, with slight emendation.

\(^{38}\) Citation from Y. V. Koh, review of Tomas Frydrych, \textit{Living Under the Sun}, \textit{VT} 56 (2006): 571; See Frydrych, \textit{Living under the Sun}, esp. 156–60.
reader/audience). Meanwhile, the same phenomenon takes place in the narrative where Ahiqar tells Nabusumiskun, and, by proxy, the audience, a story. Just as Nabusumiskun is a listener, so also is the reader. The ultimate question that the text poses then is: who will you behave like, Nadan or Nabusumiskun? The goal, of course, is to inculcate in the reader the good behavior as demonstrated by Nabusumiskun. And yet herein lies the text’s ironic effectiveness. The ease with which every reader would choose Nabusumiskun as the ideal model is contrasted sharply by both the tone of the sayings and the *dramatis personae*, which forces the reader on several explicit occasions to (re-)appropriate the identity of Nadan. As unwilling as the reader is to take on such a role, in order to accomplish the goal of edification, s/he has to “be(come) Nadan.” We, as readers and listeners to Ahiqar’s words, become the “you” of both narrative and story and thereby also become the betrayers of Ahiqar. As much as we might try to resist, we must still give in to this identification in order for the instructional drama to be complete. In symbolic fashion, our selfish desire to “finish the story” overcomes the necessary evil that must be perpetrated against Ahiqar in order to do so. We might even speculate that the identification with the despised “you” gives birth to the audience’s self-loathing or shame, which in turn might elicit better behavior. If we add to this the consistent refrains about caution and distrust, even among one’s intimates, and the rhetorical effect becomes apparent: it is easy to want to do good (i.e., to be like Nabusumiskun), but it is extremely difficult to actualize those desires. A significant hindrance to doing so, however, is that just like we (as readers) all see a little Nabusumiskun in ourselves, so (must) we see a little Nadan in ourselves as well.

Following this logic, the figures Nadan and Nabusumiskun no longer represent two separate human types, but rather they are an allegorical dramatization of an internal struggle that is being played out by each and every reader. The contest stages one’s animalistic, wicked nature against one’s idealized morality which is undergirded (or perhaps crafted) by the pedagogic pursuit exemplified by the sayings—i.e., discretion in speech, cautious behavior, content and humble disposition, etc. Indeed, a single saying, though incomplete, suggests that the teacher’s words or discipline can mediate the innate desire (ʡʡʬ) to enjoy pursuits that are ultimately self-destructive (177). The conflict, moreover, is not necessarily as polarized as one might think. While it may be gruesome, the predators’ feasting on the prey is not inherently evil. It is a natural thing for the lion to eat the stag (183), for it gives nourishment (read: benefits) to the lion. So, instead of good and evil, the conflict might better be described as one between the ideals of friendship, reciprocity, and
contentment against one’s natural desire for self-advancement and the concomitant proclivity to disregard others in pursuit of such. This is, indeed, a struggle. As Khonshotep reminds his teacher: “All your sayings are excellent, but doing them requires virtues.”

A final point about the conversation between Any and Khonshotep is revealing. Any implicitly concedes that a student may persist in his refusal to change, yet he counters by arguing that even if the student remains obstinate, the teacher can actively reprove him, as a carpenter may straighten a “crooked stick.” Allusions to the effectiveness of physical discipline are not uncommon. Indeed even Ahiqar admits that using the rod can save a disobedient son from death. Maintaining the allegorical reading of the narrative as an internalized drama of the self, we should not discount the role of Ahiqar. Is the instructor an internal, rational force that guides one’s actions as Ahiqar has guided the reader to side with Nabusumiskun? Or, does he represent an external aspect, perhaps symbolic simply of the “words” or reproof and instruction themselves—i.e., a general sense of the social order and one’s expected behavior? Consider again the image of the carpenter and a stick in Any. An allegorical reading seems less likely here—though a philosophical one is certainly warranted—and the power dynamic between the carpenter (teacher) and stick (student) insinuates a much more prevalent futility on the part of the student when it comes to trying to resist the superior’s instructive shaping of the self. The teacher Any does get the last word after all, despite his son’s protests. Further, in the Egyptian instruction the focus seems to remain on the teacher and student without any theological metaphor implied, yet when we look to Ahiqar the relevant passages, especially line 96, make it clear that the issue at hand is human will against

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39 Lichtheim, AEL 2:145.
40 Lichtheim, AEL 2:145. An interesting parallel to this passage is found in Qoheleth 7:13 “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?” Measured against the crooked-to-straight motif in Any where the superior is seeking to correct the inferior’s defectiveness, the Hebrew verse conveys a biting irony in its implication that God has made humanity crooked (= wicked) and therefore any attempt to straighten them out (= become righteous) is futile.
41 Lines 175–177; this passage bears a striking resemblance to Prov 23:13–14; on the parallel see, e.g., Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 733–34; Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 49–51; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 449–63.
42 Admittedly, I am not familiar enough with the Egyptian to be certain of such a restricted analysis.
both an *internal* force (corruption) and an *external* one: the divine.\(^ {43}\) *Ahiqar* asks “how can a person guard against the gods?”

The conflict of human interests against that of the gods’ and the assumption about the latter’s unquestioning power is a familiar sentiment. Proverbs 19:21, for example, maintains: “The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.”\(^ {44}\) In *Ahiqar* we have a cluster of sayings where the divine’s interjection is cast in very specific terms. Lines 168b–171a present another animal fable that appears to be very similar to the leopard-goat fable which immediately precedes it. Thus, a predator, in this case a bear, engages in a conversation with an animal of prey, here a group of lambs. Most of the dialogue between the bear and the lambs is, regrettably, missing, but, the lambs clearly begin their response to the bear by saying, “carry off whichever one of us that you want,” suggesting both that the bear will be successful in his endeavor to eat a lamb and moreover that there was nothing that the lambs could have done to stop the bear in the first place. Thankfully, the editorial explanation attached to the end of the fable is mostly intact allowing further clarification of the message: “For it is not in the hands of humans to pick up their feet and to put them down apart fr[om the god]s ... [...] for the picking up of your foot and the putting it down is not in your hands.” The primary message seems to be one of futility and fate, possibly even recalling the lion and the stag saying mentioned above. When a bear comes across a flock of lambs, the lambs have no choice in the matter and, moreover, are incapable of doing anything to escape the power of the bear. Hence, the lambs are left with only one response, namely, take whatever you want because we cannot stop you anyway. That the fable’s lesson is to be translated onto the human realm is without question. Kottsieper, for example, states: “Obviously this is an anthropological interpretation of the fable’s meaning. It would be nonsensical and against nature, if a bear who attacked lambs would leave it up to them to come to him. Likewise, there is no choice to act against either the will and plan of the gods or against nature.”\(^ {45}\) The explanatory extension even personalizes the lesson for the audience in its repetition of the theological principle.

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\(^{43}\) The contrast between internal and external aspects of human agency—and the subsequent discussion—is inspired, in part, by a recent article of Carol Newsom, “Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 5–25.

\(^{44}\) Cf. Prov 16:1, 9, 33; 21:30.

using the second-person. Just as the lambs’ choice is inconsequential, so also are human desires or purposes worthless.\textsuperscript{46} The important difference between this fable and the leopard-goat one is that the bear clearly represents the divine. An opposition is drawn between the will of the gods and that of an individual; the conclusion is that human choice bears little weight in this scenario.

If we turn, however, to another saying earlier in this column, we find a scenario where the question of morality and the conflict of human achievement and divine will are blended together. Lines 162–163 are fragmentary, but a workable translation is as follows:

\begin{quote}
A person is insignificant (lit. small); but he (can) increase when his words soar upwards above him for the opening of his mouth is an utterance of the gods; and if he is beloved by the gods, they will set (something) good in his palate to speak.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

If this reading is correct, then it could have serious implications for how we understand Ahiqar’s notion of moral choice, particularly in light of the strong emphasis that the text puts on a person’s speech. If good speech is only from the gods, and given that good speech is the primary barometer for a person’s goodness (see line 132), then the implication is that humanity’s capacity for choosing goodness only arises insofar as the gods have bestowed goodness upon them.\textsuperscript{48} That the power for good (and, incidentally, evil) rests in the divine is reinforced by the explanatory clauses from the bear-lambs fable. It may be further reiterated in the lines immediately following. The saying in 171b–172a, while again frustratingly fragmentary, appears to reiterate the connection between a person’s words—whether good or bad—and the gods.

\textsuperscript{46} When comparing the lambs’ response to that of the goat’s, we can also modify somewhat our fatalistic or conciliatory interpretation of the former’s outlook. For one, we can appreciate the wisdom of the lambs, who are keen enough to realize their predicament. Though they appear desperate, they are not naïve. This awareness is similar to that of the goat, who is able to discern the leopard’s true intentions.

\textsuperscript{47} Due to the problems with this saying (corruption, obscure terms, etc.); the translation I offer here takes its cue from Weigl and Porten and Yardeni; cf. Weigl, \textit{Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche}, 400–402; Lindenberger, \textit{Aramaic Proverbs}, 101–3; Niehr, \textit{Aramäischer Ahiqar}, 49.

\textsuperscript{48} See McKane, \textit{Proverbs}, 167, who interprets this saying (following Ginsberg) to mean that “there are no self-made men and that the rise of one from obscurity to prestige and power is always the action of the gods, who confer on him the power of weighty words … men cannot be more than the gods have made them or achieve more than the endowment of the gods allows”; cf. H. L. Ginsberg, “The Words of Ahiqar,” in \textit{Ancient Near Eastern Texts} (ed. J. B. Pritchard; 3d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 427–30.
To summarize, while a few sayings like the one in 164 (“Many are the stars …”) do speak to the intricacy of human nature, in the extant portions of *Ahiqar* there are hardly any which might praise or even insinuate the exalted status of humankind in the cosmos. On the contrary, we do find a strong emphasis on the limits of human ability in a pair of spheres. On one level, there is an internal struggle between the inherent wickedness which all humans share and the desire to overcome it. That human nature is frequently likened to that of wild beasts carries a strong connotation on the limits of human achievement. The words of Thomas Frydrych, who was summarizing Qoheleth’s anthropology, can rightfully be applied to the *Book of Ahiqar*: the text understands humanity to be “a mere animal whose limitations far outweigh the capabilities it possesses.”⁴⁹ In the human-divine sphere, *Ahiqar* confirms the ineffectiveness and futility of human achievement in the face of divine power. On the moral plain, this notion can have repercussions, since it may even be the case that people are only able to be good inasmuch as the gods have bestowed goodness upon them. But we have also seen that every step of human existence may be subject to the divine. This kind of appraisal can have serious implications on much broader theological issues, such as theodicy, divine determinism, and fate.

In sum, *Ahiqar* evinces a fairly negative anthropology. This conclusion rests on the following aspects:

1) The ethic of caution extends even to one’s own friends and family. That even these groups cannot be trusted (and *Ahiqar* is emphatic about this point) suggests that there is something inherently malicious about humans. Also, the fear that comes about from not being able to know another person’s true intentions—again including one’s intimates—exacerbates the discouraging outlook on human nature.

2) In their interaction with each other, humans often behave like wild beasts, seeking only their own benefit at the expense of others. Even worse, in their public formality they often feign generosity, but in truth they are, by nature, selfish.

3) Some humans have good and bad qualities; unfortunately, some only have the bad.

4) There is an inherent wickedness to humans, and even the morally upright and wise must struggle to defend against it.

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⁴⁹ Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*, 168.
5) The choice to do good is, at times, connected to a divine initiative rather than an individual one; contrarily the choice to do bad seems entirely dependent on the self.

6) There is little hint in the text (as we have it) which suggests humans have an intimate or special relationship to the divine.

This final aspect is, of course, an argument from silence but it speaks to the issue of “negative anthropology” itself and how I use it. In particular, I see three factors at play in evaluating a text’s “anthropology”: (1) humanity’s relationship to the divine, which incudes both a notion of humanity’s created status and/or in its ability to achieve its own elevation; (2) moral agency, i.e., the control (or lack thereof) that a person has in choosing to do good or evil; and (3) the origin of evil.

There are a couple of premises that need to be recalled. For one, the text itself is incomplete, we may only have one side of an otherwise balanced argument and moreover, the fact that the story is unfinished means the “concluding” thoughts—i.e., that which leaves a taste in our mouth, like Qoheleth’s dogmatic statement, or Job’s capitulation and restoration, or Khonsutep’s protestations—are lost. Secondly, this is not a theological treatise, at least not in the strictest sense. Ahiqar does not appear to have as its aim an outline of the human sphere vis-à-vis the divine, even though this is a frequent topic. Finally, theological statements are frequently contextually charged, and rarely absolute. Carol Newsom, for example, points to the several statements about the foul nature of humankind made by Job’s friends, but responds by saying, “This negative anthropology, however, is specifically generated by a contextual desire to emphasize the ontological difference between the divine and the human.”

Indeed, comparison with outside materials are necessary to provide some context for the appraisal of Ahiqar.

We might begin by looking to Genesis 1, with its “image of God” language, is often looked to for a fairly positive anthropology in the Hebrew Bible, thus sitting at one end of a broad spectrum of generally less elevated estimations in the Ancient Near East. There is hardly


anything comparable to this statement in *Ahiqar*. At no point does *Ahiqar* address the issue of creation of humanity or how its nature is constituted in relation to the divine. More pointedly, the fairly negative appraisal of human nature and the moral self must be weighed against the fact that with *Ahiqar* we have only one small sliver of an ancient society’s ideological outlook. Above and in chapter 3 I noted that humanity does have some capacity for good. When it comes to one’s words, though, this was largely dependent upon the divine initiative. Still, the person of Nabusumiskun represents a good human-type whose commitment to reciprocity exemplifies (apparently) a case of disinterested righteousness. The negative appraisal, therefore, is not absolute. Thus, considerations such as the one in 96 about humanity’s “inner wickedness,” though sweepingly profound, are perhaps more expressive of a pessimistic outlook on life rather than a specific appreciation of the moral self. Still, there may be some hints about humanity as created beings. As I have indicated previously, the analogies drawn between humans and animals in the fables or animal sayings may imply some innate, hence created, quality. For the most part, I have attended to the interpretation from the perspective of the weaker animal, thus hearing the anxiety about humanity and its voracious nature behind such analogies. This seems the more reasonable perspective to take given that the impetus of the exterior commentaries relies most often upon the knowledge, desire, and submission of the inferior element.\(^{52}\) Moreover, this dichotomy between the weaker animal and the stronger one is intensified in the bear-lambs fable where the predator is a symbol of the divine. The gulf between humanity and divine is thus wide, even if in the analogy they both share “animalistic” qualities. The implications for the bear-gods analogy has more to do with theology than anthropology (see discussion below). In any case, the issue here seems to be less about choosing evil or good, the notion of choice and humanity’s lack thereof take center stage.

\(^{52}\) For these three features—knowledge, desire, and submission—as constitutive of moral agency see Newsom, “Models of the Moral Self,” 12–14. In relating her discussion to *Ahiqar* specifically we may draw the following correspondences in light of the discussion in chapter 3: knowledge is connected to wisdom and capable speech; desire’s control is the exemplification of contentment; and submission is the recognition of one’s status—which is often inferior—in the social order.
5.3 The Gods

The anthropologically-focused discussion above has frequently brought up questions about humanity’s relationship to the divine and, moreover, the concept of the gods themselves, specifically as it relates to their role in the social order. Separating the anthropological from the theological is not easy, when we consider that Ahiqar’s theological outlook is completely and inextricably tied to human affairs. The instruction is not the occasion for speculation on the gods themselves, but on how they interact in one’s daily life. This more pragmatic theology does, however, extend to the highest level of the social order, i.e., the king, who stands at the intersection between humanity and the gods (see 5.4). In this section I will survey the gods in Ahiqar, paying particular attention to how the text conceives of their function. This will inevitably lead us back to the question above about human efforts in the face of the divine will and the attendant issues of fate, determinism, and theodicy.

5.3.1 The Gods in Ahiqar: Function and Prerogative

Among the sayings of Ahiqar, the gods figure prominently. This is in direct contrast to the narrative, wherein they are entirely absent. I will discuss this absence below, but for now the focus will be on the explicit references to the divine. Several sayings refer to “the gods” (Aram. אלהים) generically (e.g., 79, 96, 128, 135, 163, 172, 189). The singular form בכל is also well-attested (e.g., 91, 97, 109, 156), but it is not clear if we should treat the term as the common noun “god/God” or as a name “El.” Lindenberger and Niehr take it as a proper name, though I am less inclined to do so. If the proper name understanding is correct, it can have some interesting historical implications, but for the most part it does not affect the way I read the text. Whether a

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55 For Niehr and Lindenberger, among others, the historical implications have almost unanimously focused on the presumed 8th/7th c. B.C.E. Syrian context. An intriguing question, however, would be to assess this name in light of
name or a generic title, the function remains the same. Shamash (Aram. 𒆠𒆠) is the only deity we can say for certain that is mentioned by name (e.g., 107, 187–188, 197), although in a couple of instances “the sun” could also fit (92, 138). Lastly, line 79 presents an interesting case where we have one or, possibly, two epithets, “lord of the holy ones” (Aram. ܐܠܗܐ ܒܝܬܐ) and “Shamin” (Aram. [ܐ]ܠܗܐ), though the latter is probably better translated as “heavens” or “skies.”

In terms of function, the gods take part in a number of scenarios in Ahiqar. Perhaps, the most prominent is in their association with the king. Both Shamash and El (or God) are connected to the king in an intriguing passage that has attracted a great deal of attention by scholars (ll. 79, 91–92). The relationship to the king will be explored with more detail in the next section (5.4), but briefly their correlation fixes primarily on the elevated status of the king and the divine backing of his authority.

The Elephantine evidence wherein, notably, there are several references to “El,” though only in a compound divine epithet (e.g., Bethel in TAD A2.1.1) or in theophorous personal names (e.g., Bethelnathan in TAD A2.1.3). Cf. Bob Becking, “Yehudite Identity in Elephantine,” in Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns: 2011), 403–49; and Anke Joisten-Pruschke, Das religiöse Leben der Juden von Elephantine in der Achämenidenzeit (Göttinger Orientforschungen Iranica, NF 2; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2008), esp. 17–96.

For this reason, I often switch back-and-forth between God and El.

Even if “the sun” is the proper translation—and for my part I prefer “Shamash” especially since there is no definite article in either case—mention of the celestial body would no doubt bring to mind the deity as well.

According to Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 114–15, ܐܠܗܐ ܒܝܬܐ “is clearly a divine epithet, but the morphology of the second element is uncertain.” Two options are likely: the masc. pl. noun ܕܵܝܪܬܐ (“holy ones”) or ܕܵܝܪܬܵܐ either as an abstract sing. noun “holiness” or adj. “holy.” Following E. Z. Melamed, “Break-up of Stereotyped Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry,” in Studies in the Bible (ed. C. Rabin; ScrHier 8; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 115–31, Lindenberger argues that the deity being referred to is in fact Baal Shamayn by pointing to the poetic structure of the saying which is “written according to the northwest Semitic literary convention of breaking up a compound title so that one element appears in the first half of a bicolon, and the other in the second”; cf. Psalm 78:17–18. Interestingly, one of the Armenian recensions support the association of Baal Shamayn with Ahiqar; in the narrative we find a list of gods: Belshin, Shimil and Shamin; cf. Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, The Story of Ahikar, 24 (for text) and xxxvi–xxxviii (for discussion).

The missing definite article is notable though.

See, e.g., Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 167–85.
Aside from the god-king sayings, there are a few recognizable trends concerning the function of the gods in *Ahiqar*. The most prominent has to do with the meting out of justice, i.e., punishing the wicked. The most straightforward representations of the gods as upholders of justice are in the sayings of lines in 107–108 and 156. Both have to do with a specific god’s actions in response to unjust behavior. The saying in 107–108 presents an interesting case:

> If the wicked person seizes the hem of your cloak, leave it in his hand. Then, make an appeal to Shamash; he […] // will take his and give it to you.

The speaker proposes a hypothetical situation to the addressee: when someone has taken something from you. The proper response, according to *Ahiqar*, is that the wronged party should make an appeal to Shamash, rather than either resisting at that moment or, presumably, instead of seeking out at a later time the offending party personally. This last point may be supported by the immediately subsequent lines. In 109 the speaker calls out to El—notice again that El and Shamash come in a pair (cf. 91–92)—and asks to be set upon a righteous path. What can he mean here? The context suggests that this is more than just a general appeal for a goodly character, since the very next line again brings up one’s enemies. Here the speaker, still in the midst of his/her plea to El, implores: “Let my enemies die, but not by my sword …” Both the mention of enemies and the notion that vengeance rests in the gods’ hands and not the speaker’s (i.e., humanity’s) solidify the connection with lines 107–108. Justice, it seems, is the prerogative of the gods. There may be more going on in 107–108, however, than a simple nod to the “vengeance is mine saith the Lord” outlook (cf. Deut 32:35 KJV) outlook. For one, it strikes me as odd that the speaker insinuates that the addressee should *not* confront the perpetrator. Is there something about the perpetrator that we, the audience, are supposed to know? Why avoid confronting one’s offender? In light of the discussions above about the dangers of human interaction and the nearly consistent lower social position occupied by the addressee, I am tempted to see this saying as a warning against

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61 This aspect is also connected with the king in column 6 (and the narrative) but not exclusively.

62 The something in question here is a “garment” (see below); the item may carry some specific connotations (as discussed in Chapter 4), but for now the issue is simply that the addressee has been (hypothetically) wronged.

63 The same sentiment is made in the opposite scenario in 126/128, that is, when the addressee is the wrongdoer and not the wronged.
confronting the wrongdoer, not out of a sense of piety, but because it could only lead to more trouble. This also changes the way we understand line 110 where the speaker says “but not by my sword.” Again, rather than a pious handing over of the desire for retribution to god, it could be a nod to the speaker’s inability—perhaps due to social constraints—to fight back. On the other hand, there is nothing which precludes both aspects from being at play. The idea that justice is the domain of the divine and the possible limitations on personal attempts at redress are not mutually exclusive. This reading of 107–108 may even be likely given the thematic consistency of the column. Recall that the second line of the column (l. 96) questions an individual’s ability to challenge god or his own inherent moral weakness. That the same measure of futility is implied for dealing with one’s enemies is not surprising. This is also not some ethical ideal of “turn the other cheek”; 108 and 110 make it clear that the speaker wishes for the offender to be punished. The only issue is that the victim must wait upon the gods to hand out that punishment.

On a different note, the language of 107–108 could also suggest a specific context. The phrase “to grasp the hem of a cloak” (Aram. רַבָּן לֵשׁ) has often been taken as a technical, legal idiom for claiming a pledge on a (defaulted) loan.64 Lindenberger comments: “the proverb does not specify whether the ‘wicked man’ is a robber taking the garment by force or an unscrupulous creditor confiscating the [cloak] … as a pledge.”65 A garment being taking as a pledge is familiar in the Israelite tradition, as well.66 The verb דַּע “make an appeal” may reinforce

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64 For this interpretation of the saying in Ahiqar, see, e.g., Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 174, who notes: “In Mesopotamian writings, the ‘fringe of the garment’ … has a particular significance. One’s hem is often given as a deposit or pledge for a loan”; cf. Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 244–47.

65 Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 174.

66 See, e.g., Exod 22:26–27; Deut 24:10–13; Amos 2:8; Prov 20:16 par 27:13; Job 22:6. In truth, the legal (i.e., civil) connection is only one possibility. Other examples of this phrase—taken from the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 1 Sam 15:27), and several inscriptions in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Old Aramaic (e.g., KAI 215:11)—suggest alternative connotations, such as: a demonstration of piety or submission to a superior, to some magical effect; to symbolize a guarantee of truthful witness; on these possibilities with reference to specific examples, see Ronald A. Brauner, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ and 1 Samuel 15:27,” JANES 6 (1974): 35–38; Edward L. Greenstein, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ in Ugaritic Literature,” VT 32 (1983): 217–18; and J. Stephens, “The Ancient Significance of Sišīth,” JBL 50 (1931): 59–70. The remainder of the saying in Ahiqar, which indicates that Shamash will “take” something from the wicked and give it to the addressee speaks against the alternative connotations.
the notion of a formal setting. Hence the saying may be invoking a specific formal response to personal injury—either as a customary manner of speaking about the injury or perhaps a customary petition made at a temple for just such an occasion. I am not familiar with any of the extant Aramaic papyri from Elephantine that matches this situation to any significant degree, but there is a curious Demotic papyrus from Elephantine dating to the 4th or 3rd c. B.C.E. which seems to invoke just such a context. The text (P. Berlin 13538; no. C16 in Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 319–21) is a letter comprising a response to a friend’s earlier letter in which the friend complained of a certain wrongdoing done against him. The author of our letter encourages his friend that “of the matters concerning which you sent word [i.e., the wrongdoing] … take care of yourself. Perform the ritual until the god causes a favourable outcome to happen” (ll. 7–10; emphasis added). The letter-writer goes on to complain about a similar situation that he is facing, about which he concludes “Those who made strife with me (are making strife) with the gods as well” (19–20). Moreover, the text is thick with legal language (e.g., the verb smyr “to make a complaint against”). The fact that this document is in Demotic should not necessarily preclude a connection with legal traditions among the Aramaic-speaking peoples at Elephantine, for whom Ahiqar would have meaning.

If the civil dispute, possibly concerning a loan contract, is invoked by the idiom “to grasp the hem,” then taken together with ḫm—the technical term for appealing to a higher authority—the saying may instead be bringing to mind a proper judicial context. Shamash’s role as judge may be symbolic, representing the judicial system itself. The deity, at least on an abstract level, functions

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67 This verb is often used in the context of making a plea or appeal to a higher authority, as is the case here. We might also consider the similar-sounding verb ḫmr “to make a case” or “present a lawsuit” which occurs with Shamash in a similar scenario in line 197 (though in a nominal form ḫmr “lawsuit”). The line, unfortunately, is fragmentary but it seems to involve some legal dispute wherein someone did something “bad” (Aram. ṣram) against “his master” (Aram. ṣram).

68 In a magisterial study of the Aramaic legal record at Elephantine, Alejandro Botta, The Aramaic and Egyptian Legal Traditions at Elephantine: An Egyptological Approach (Library of Second Temple Studies 64; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), argues for a great deal of interaction and influence from the Egyptian legal tradition upon the Aramaic and vice-versa. It should be noted, however, that most of the strictly legal documents involve matters such as deeds, marriages, and public oaths; records of civil suits are extremely rare and, therefore, our knowledge generally comes secondarily through letters like the one above which appear to reference an oral (?) transaction; cf. Botta, “Egypt,” in The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria (ed. Herbert Niehr; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 366–78, esp. 375–76.
as the ultimate representative of legal justice, and it is not unlikely that this reflects an underlying assumption on the part of the audience about a long line of intermediaries: Shamash → king → satrap/regional official → local official/prefect. Among the Aramaic legal documents from Elephantine we find formulaic clauses (typically in the loan guarantees; e.g., Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, B34.12–13, 18–20), which stipulate that the lender or borrower cannot “bring a complaint” before a “judge” or “prefect” as long as each party, respectively, holds on to their copy of the contract and as long as each one upholds the terms of said contract. As we discussed in Chapter 4, taking a person’s cloak—whether it was literally done or not—could be a symbolic act for taking a pledge in the case of defaulting on a loan. The borrower is only allowed to appeal to the courts if he/she has fulfilled the obligations, but the lender continues to hold onto or subsequently decides to seize the pledged item(s). That 106 calls the offender “wicked” (Aram. ḥaram) is telling, implying that he/she broke the agreements of the (presumed) contract. In such a case, the addressee is then advised to appeal to Shamash, i.e., the courts. The solar deity’s association elsewhere in *Ahiqar* with punishment for wrongdoing (138, 197) as well as his close connection with the king, who is the human symbol of justice (see section 5.4) make this kind of a link probable. In the political sphere, all legal authority ultimately goes back to the king himself, and thereby also to the gods; this is true even when dealing with local officials and regional satraps because their authority rests upon this chain. While there is evidence supporting this understanding of the Persian system of government, there is no discernible “divine layering” among the Aramaic documentary evidence which might directly connect the saying in *Ahiqar* with any formula from the judicial context. To be sure, this could be because of an accident of preservation. That being said, the Demotic and Aramaic letters referenced above, nevertheless, allow for the connection in an unofficial capacity. As even *Ahiqar* makes clear, any affront on the innocent is an affront on the gods themselves (cf. line 128).

The second saying which speaks directly to the function of the gods is in line 156, which reads: “May God twist the mouth of the twister, and tear out the tongue of […].” Deceitful or

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69 Cf. *TAD* B3.13.11 where a contract on a loan of grain allows the lender to seize any number of items, including clothing.

70 The translation follows, for the most part, that of Porten and Yardeni. For a detailed study of this saying and possible ANE parallels, see Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of *Ahiqar,*” in *Hommages à André*
disingenuous speech seems to be the issue here, possibly even invoking a specific social situation, namely oath-breaking. Greenfield, for example, likens the saying to another early Aramaic use of the verb from a Sefire treaty, which he translates “‘I will turn the good words to bad’ that is ‘I will defy the terms of the treaty.’” Whether or not a treaty is specifically in focus in the Ahiqar saying, it is clear by the reference to the mouth and tongue, that the “twisting” refers to an improper use of speech. Even if the specific context is likely (and this applies to 107–108 too), the motivation behind the saying could extend to any number of scenarios.

What I want to focus on here, however, are two aspects: (1) the specific correlation between the offense and the punishment and (2) the arbiter of that punishment, i.e., God. Just as the offender is one who “twists” or “doubles-back” (Aram. רכס) on his word, so also will God do the same to him. It is not clear what it means to רכס (lit. “to turn back”) a mouth, but as the imaginative translation above suggests “it is probable that [the punishment] refers primarily to the contortion or mutilation of the mouth.” In any case, the idea is straightforward: the punishment fits (exactly) the crime. The same can be seen in 107–108 from above; just as a person took your garment, so also will Shamash take that person’s garment and give it to you. In this saying, however, El/God takes on the role as the arbiter of justice. These two points together bring up a frequent topic in

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71 Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel,” 51. Taking a cue from the “oath-breaking” aspect, Greenfield goes on to discuss the saying in the context of legal codes, especially from Babylon (pp. 53–55), with particular attention to the punishment clauses, some of which allude to the offender’s tongue being “cut off” or “torn out.” For discussion of the Sefire treaty specifically, see Greenfield, “Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” Acta Orientalia 29 (1965): 1–18, at 11. The opposition between “good” (בש) and “bad” (悪い) is also prominent here since they are frequently contrasted in Ahiqar (e.g., 99–100; 171b–172a).

72 See discussion in Chapter 3; cf., e.g., Prov 10:31; 16:28, 30; Deut 32:20.

73 Lindenberger, Aramaic Proverbs, 156.

74 On El’s role as the arbiter of justice in Ahiqar, Lindenberger, “Gods of Ahiqar,” 111, states plainly: “This is not a familiar function of the god.” Lindenberger bases this assessment by looking to earlier materials from Mari, the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 4:31; Exod 24:6; Neh 9:31), Phoenicia, and Syria, wherein the deity El figures. He argues that the attribution of “mercy” is more familiar (as, for example, we find in Ahiqar 91). What little we do have in Ahiqar suggests that El and Shamash basically share the same role as they occasionally appear together with the same
discussion of wisdom texts, especially instructions, namely the so-called Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang (or, alternatively, the “Act-Consequence Nexus”). In its most basic form, this refers to “a construct which describes human actions which have a built-in consequence.”

There has been much debate surrounding this model of retributive justice, but for now I only wish to discuss a particular aspect as it relates to Ahiqar, namely how the gods are configured within this view of the cosmic order. In Koch’s thesis, he used the metaphor of a “midwife” when discussing Yahweh’s role in this system. But, as Adams has pointed out, such an argument hinted at “the lack of divine initiative …in the context of judgment.” The implications of this theological perspective have been profound. As a result, for decades a number of wisdom scholars sought to syphon out two different ancient worldviews for retributive justice: on the one hand the Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang and on the other the idea that the gods are involved (often arbitrarily) in meting out punishment. This led to a splitting up of texts into each category—sometimes even separating out layers of the same text (especially Proverbs)—and, in some extreme cases, a broader linear model whereby a mechanistic view of just-causality in the social order (epitomized, for example, in the Egyptian tradition by Ma’at) gave way to a seemingly incomprehensible divine infiltration based presumably on personal piety and divine beneficence rather than the strictures of

or similar function. Incidentally, this may help to undermine the general assumption among Ahiqar interpreters that ʬʬ is a name and not the common noun “god.”

The seminal article by Klaus Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament,” in Theodicy in the Old Testament (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; trans. T. H. Trapp; IRT 4; Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983), 64, was the first to formulate this model [the original German article is from 1955]. The notion of a cosmic order with an inherent balance whereby certain “good” deeds are followed by blessings and certain “bad” ones are followed by disaster or suffering has led to a lively conversation among scholars of wisdom literature. A survey of this scholarship with a thesis for how this model can still be helpful as a “window” into wisdom literature—albeit in a much more nuanced form than Koch’s—is offered by Samuel Adams in his Wisdom in Transition.

Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 3.
moral behavior. This separation has come under much scrutiny of late, and *Ahiqar* stands as a prime example for challenging these older models. So, for example, we can look to numerous examples from ancient literature, especially Proverbs and the Egyptian instructions, and find sayings that concern themselves with a system of retribution and yet omit any mention of the divine. An example from Proverbs reads: “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off; the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked (know) what is perverse” (10:31–32). The choice of these examples is not arbitrary, as the same punishment—the cutting off or removal of the tongue—is invoked in *Ahiqar* 156. When compared with the saying from *Ahiqar*, however, the absence of the divine is noticeable. The implication of the divine’s absence, according to earlier models, was that the cosmic order operates according to some inherent mechanism of deeds and consequences. This activity can even extend outside of a moral framework. Proverbs 26:27 is an oft-cited example in this regard,

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77 This, in turn, reinforced similar argument about the “secular” origins of wisdom literature, onto which a “religious” layer was added. This thesis was popularly promoted by McKane, *Proverbs*, esp. 13–22 and in a slightly different manner by R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), esp. 20–39—although he later distanced himself from this model somewhat, cf. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (HBIS 1; Leiden: Brill, 1995), esp. 28–33. The secular-to-religious linear model has since been discredited as well as the notion that these two types can even be distinguished in the first place; see, e.g., Stuart Weeks’s chapter “Was Early Wisdom Secular?” in *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 57–73, on the history of scholarship and subsequent challenges to this model; notably, Weeks, in an utter dismantling of McKane’s thesis, even looks to *Ahiqar* specifically for support (p. 69): “The most important objection to McKane’s assessment of the sayings is the appearance of the righteous and wicked in Aramaic Ahikar … very similar ideas seem to underlie the sayings in this text, where the righteous again are assured of divine protection, and punishment is promised for the wicked.”


79 An added connection between the two is the shared cognate: Heb. הָ֣דְפִּ֣בַּה (הָ֣דְפִּ֣בַּה) “perverse” and Aram. Ḥ âmāʿ. (“הָ֣דְפִּ֣בַּה”)
proclaiming: “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling.” Similarly, we find in Ben Sira 27:25–26:

Whoever throws a stone straight up throws it on his own head;
And a treacherous blow opens many wounds.
Whoever digs a pit will fall into it;
And whoever sets a snare will be caught in it.

Again, in Ankhsheshonge 11.10 we read: “He who sends spittle up to the sky will have it fall on him.” These examples point to a fairly balanced view of causality, regardless of the moral implications. Yet each of them also bears a striking resemblance to Ahiqar 126: “[Do not bend] your bow and do not aim your arrow at a righteous one, lest the gods come to his aid and turn it back upon you.” The major difference remains the presence of the divine in Ahiqar.

Although the role of the gods with respect to justice is important for Ahiqar and problematizes any notion of a mechanistic Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang for our text, I do not think that the lack of the divine in the comparative examples is necessarily telling. This is in direct contrast to McKane, who assumes “that the presence of the divine name [i.e., Yahweh in Proverbs] makes a sentence fundamentally different from other sentences where it is absent, and fundamentally similar to other sentences where it is present.” Samuel Adams offers a more nuanced assessment:

The fact that judicial language is used sparingly in Proverbs and other texts does not indicate the absence of a larger retributive principle or a deity whose role in human events is removed or in any way inconsequential. A saying in which God is not mentioned does not presuppose a lack of divine agency, including the capacity for judgment.

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80 A version of this saying appears in the later versions of Ahiqar where it is directed explicitly at Nadan; see Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis, The Story of Ahikar, 80 (Syriac translation); for Hebrew parallels see, e.g., Qoh 10:8–9; Ps 7:16; 9:16–17, et al.
81 Lichtheim, AEL 3:168.
82 Citation from Weeks, Early Israelite Wisdom, 63 who summarizes the views of McKane; cf. McKane, Proverbs, 13–22.
83 Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 3.
Wisdom sayings, instructions, proverbs, etc. operate on several levels and in a variety of “contexts.” As we discussed in Chapter 2, sayings are always just a snapshot, they do not encapsulate the entirety of a worldview, nor could they. It is therefore illogical to ignore the fact that a much larger thought-world always stands behind every utterance, even if certain aspects—such as the divine—are not explicitly brought into play. For this reason, we should also not take each exemplar as absolute. Still, there must be some truth behind each statement, even if that truth is a limited one. Michael V. Fox, for example, comments: “We can hardly imagine a didactic literature without the assumption of predictability.”84 Similarly, Adams argues: “Some nexus between deed and result is essential in this type of literature: a sapiential work would be pointless (or reflect a crisis point) if it did not guarantee at least a modicum of success for adhering to specific sayings and prohibitions.”85 The onus on the interpreter—both ancient and modern—is to discern the balance between these pronouncements, which present the ideal, and weigh it against the vagaries of life. Some texts in this regard are more convincing than others, but that judgment is wholly dependent upon the reader and the variety of factors which provide input. The conversation between Any and his son Khonshotep examined above is an intriguing window into an ancient consciousness wherein this very debate was held. At stake was not just the efficaciousness for the instructions to effect change in the addressee; the text also questions just how soundly a compliance with the instructions would repercuss in the day-to-day.86

The picture of society and the cosmic order presented in the various wisdom texts, therefore, is much more variegated than the simplistic one-to-one correspondence found in the examples above, both within the respective texts themselves and when measured against each other. Even Proverbs, which gets a lot of flak from critics for its persistent optimism, is not so naïve. There are several so-called “partial utterances” which presume scenarios where a fool succeeds (e.g., 19:10) or a wicked person has wealth (10:2), and thus challenge the rigidity of the system it advances.87 Michael Fox, for example, attends to the didactic function which lies behind

84 Fox, “World Order and Maat,” 40.
86 The text allows Any himself the last word, thus affirming the importance of his instructions at least structurally, despite the ironic challenge that the text poses to the very wisdom it espouses.
each saying. Thus, the seemingly absolute way in which the sayings are cast, rather than being normative statements about the cosmic order, are a part of the “rhetorical intent of proverbial discourse.”88 In the same way, we should not lift out those sayings which allude to the divine as representing an entirely different worldview, even if they imply a certain arbitrariness in terms of retributive justice. This applies to Proverbs and its presumed compositional history as well as to the Egyptian instructions tradition upon which this dichotomous development was based. Adams, for example, argues that at no point did the Egyptian instructions assume a simple Tun-Ergebnisse Zusammentang, adding:

[This] assessment is confirmed by earlier instructions, which recognize the power of divine agency and a degree of unpredictability in human events. There is a tension in most Egyptian instructions between the advancement of a consistent principle of causality and an acceptance of the unknown. This dialectic is common to the entire corpus of ancient Near East instructions, as the ancient sages attempted to motivate pupils and acknowledge the ultimate authority of God. In most instances, the decision to privilege one model (indirect causation) over the other (divine agency) is a matter of situational ethics or simple rhetorical choice as opposed to emergent theological doctrine.89

The diachronic linear models which have tried to account for the conflicting views, either within a single text (i.e., Proverbs) or across a broad spectrum (e.g., Old and Middle Kingdom instructions vs. New Kingdom instructions)90 fail to appreciate the capacity for complexity in an ancient author of the Book of Proverbs,” JBL 126 (2007): 669–84, at 682–83, maintains that “the principle of justice is still not defeated, because it is axiomatic and inviolable, and any violation must be illusory or temporary …there are times when the wicked have the upper hand, but these are temporary disruptions.” When taken as a whole, however, the optimism that persists through much of the Solomonic and Hezekian collections (10:1–29:27) is downplayed somewhat by the more insecure outlook expressed in the “Words of Agur” (Prov 30:1–33).

89 Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 26; following, in part, Fox, “World Order and Ma’at,” esp. 43.
90 On the theory of the development of a personal piety and a concomitant dissolution of the previously understood rigid social order as witnessed by the New Kingdom instructions see briefly Adams, Wisdom in Transition, 8–10. This theory is significant for biblical wisdom studies (and, thus, for Ahiqar studies) as it has affected the way in which the biblical wisdom texts, especially Proverbs, were viewed. I am referring again to the secular-to-religious theory by McKane as well as the “crisis of religion” model more broadly. To the former, Weeks points out the ironic absurdity with which the Egyptian model was applied to the biblical. If this shift took place in the New Kingdom—at least half a millennium before the earliest date for Proverbs—then on what basis could we trace a similar shift in the biblical
or audience. To this, Adams writes that such hypotheses “rest on faulty assumptions that divine freedom and a more impersonal understanding of causality are mutually exclusive in the Wisdom texts. Egyptian instructions from all periods reflect a complicated dynamic between the ‘free will’ of the deity and a more self-regulating system.”91 This is not meant to mute the differences between, say Ptahhotep and Amenemope, because there are many. Only that, situating these texts, including Ahiqar, according to either the straightforward model of a secular-mechanistic world order or to a religious-arbitrary divine prerogative one often hinders an appreciation of the subtleties within each text itself, especially as each one contemplates retribution, theodicy, and the interaction of humanity and the divine. Ahiqar itself complicates any attempt to separate “secular” from “religious”—a division that was anachronistic and unhelpful to begin with. The sayings in 107–108, 156, 126, and several others make it clear that the gods are involved in one way or another even in the most mundane affairs—in this case a legal suit, possibly concerning an economic transaction. So, while we certainly have more profound, abstract reflections in Ahiqar on divine justice, the gods are never really far from the day-to-day business of life. Indeed, the two aspects are intertwined.

As for the question of retributive justice, we can witness in Ahiqar a similar dialectic being played out. There is an assumption that the wicked will be punished by the gods, but (as we will see shortly) there is also a pervasive apprehension revolving around the seeming arbitrariness by which this justice is meted out. Thus, there is a discernible conflict within the text itself. On the one hand, it advocates a number of pragmatic procedures (e.g., discipline of children, restrained speech, etc.) which are based on an expected outcome. On the other hand, there is at the same time concern about the possibility of a negative outcome even when no fault has been committed—a notion which, paradoxically, undermines the wisdom behind the more practical instructions. Ahiqar is not unique in this. Fox writes of the two Late Period Demotic instructions Ankhsheshonqê and Insinger (also known as Phibis): “[they] give practical advice but also

emphasize the paradoxical nature of life and man’s inability to understand it or secure success.”

A number of passages in *Insinger*, for example, directly observe that sometimes the ignorant and unrestrained are wealthy, while the thrifty are still poor; or that those who were never instructed in wisdom behave wisely, while those who were instructed act foolishly; and so on. Each passage concludes with a theologically troubling statement that God is the one who sends both good and bad, e.g., “Fate and fortune come and go when he, the god, commands them.” As Matthew Goff has put it: “Papyrus Insinger attempts to combine an assertion of divine control with a recognition of life’s unpredictability.”

The notion of success in the retributive system, coincidentally, is especially revealing when comparing *Ahiqar* with other texts, particularly the book of Proverbs. While *Ahiqar*, like Proverbs and the Egyptian materials, comprises several sayings warning of disastrous consequences for wicked behavior—whether the gods are mentioned or not—there is a noticeable absence of references to the rewards of righteous behavior. Countless examples in Proverbs contrast the wicked and the righteous or the foolish and the wise, where the positive set are consistently promised reward or at the very least avoidance of suffering. With regard to day-to-day advice, we have, for example, Prov 10:4: “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” On the moral side of things, several verses highlight the benefits of righteous behavior: “The fear of the Lord prolongs life; but the years of the wicked will be short” (10:27) or “The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life” (22:4). In *Ahiqar* by contrast, one is hard-pressed to find any saying that promises reward, honor, or life for righteous behavior. At best,

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92 Fox, “Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature,” 3. The despair expressed by *Ankhsheshonqe* in contrast to the practical advice is conditioned by the circumstances in which the speaker finds himself. Like Ahiqar, Ankhsheshonqe suffers a public disgrace, leaving him rotting away in an underground prison. Thus, the prevalent pessimistic tone in *Ankhsheshonqe* is not unexpected. As for *Insinger*, the text is only singularly attested and the papyrus is missing the first few pages leaving the setting uncertain. Nevertheless, it too exudes a recognizably negative attitude despite its appeal for a pragmatic approach to social interactions. Hence, Lichtheim, *AEL* 3:185, could write of this text: “Like all earlier Egyptian sages the author of P. Insinger believed in an all-embracing divine order which governed nature and human existence. To this basic and traditional view he added his specific notion of fate and fortune as agents of change which are part of the divine order though they confound man’s understanding.”


we may look to sayings such as the one in 12ι about “harvesting any harvest.” The reward, so to speak, for a willingness to harvest is food for you and your family. Yet, as we have seen in chapter 4, the context suggests this is about survival, not an increase of wealth. Thus, it is not on the same level as the related saying in Proverbs 10:4.

In chapter 3 we saw that one of the primary virtues in Ahiqar is contentment. In Proverbs contentment is also a virtue (e.g., 15:17; 16:8), but it usually comes in the context of not being greedy or not acting deceitfully in order to gain wealth. On the other hand, the pursuit of wealth, when done honestly, is encouraged, usually set as a contrast to laziness (e.g., 13:4; contra 23:4). Indeed, a lack of wealth is often taken as a character flaw (e.g., 14:20; 19:7; 22:7). For Ahiqar however, contentment is framed in another way altogether. Nowhere is contentment conditioned by a warning against greed or deceit. Contentment with little is the theme in sayings such as 90b and 136. The only moralistic aspect may be a subtle dismissal of jealousy. The attitude of contentment spills over onto the way the text deals with the notion of retributive justice. Being wise or righteous—which usually means keeping quiet and avoiding deceitful speech or behavior—does not lead to wealth or increase. At best, the benefit of correct behavior is maintaining one’s already-held status, but Ahiqar makes it clear that there is no guarantee. Wise living only allows for the possibility of avoiding destruction. Take the saying in 93, for example. It reads: “A good vessel conceals a word in its heart, but the one that is broken has let it go outside.” The internal parallelism sets the good/closed container over against the bad/open one. There is no hint that the good vessel will be rewarded—it is never filled up to the brim or made bigger or better in some way—its only achievement, in contrast to the bad one, is that it is not broken. An alternative way of understanding the second clause is: “but the vessel that let the word go outside is broken.” Putting the nominal clause first hints that the breaking is a result of the loose lips, not the other way around.

There is one exception to the outlook on rewards, but even there it is not as clear-cut as we might expect. This leads to the final aspect about the function of the gods in Ahiqar; a role which may be cautiously described as ‘the divine prerogative.’ These are the occasions where, for whatever reason, the gods are said to have sided with or bestowed something upon an individual. Of course, many of the sayings tend to portray the gods as the ones siding with the righteous; however, the key difference is the way the conversation is framed. Often as not, the beneficence of the gods is set as a conditional (“if… then…”), where the condition depends not on a person’s
moral stature, but rather on the divine prerogative. If we recall the saying in 162–163 about the “insignificant person” (רָזָּה יְשֵׁי) who was able to “become big” (רָזָּה יְשֵׁי), we find that the increase comes as a result of elevated (perhaps, insightful?) speech. Yet, that speech is said to come directly from the gods and only “if he is beloved by the gods, will they put something good in his palate to say.” The text is silent on how or why this “insignificant” person is favored by the gods. Notably, too, it is the gods who have agency in terms of bestowing goodness, rather than it being something initiated by the individual.⁹⁵

Consider also the repeated refrain which reads something like “he with whom El is.” Various attested in the sayings (e.g., 91, 97, 154), the phrase occurs as part of a rhetorical question, whose premise is that any challenge to an individual “on whose side God stands” has little chance of success. In 91 the refrain is connected to the king, which, as we will discuss below, seems to highlight the fact that not only does the monarch have divine backing, but that backing is absolute—rightness is not a factor for divine support, at least not according to the contextual reading. The other cases (97 and 154) are admittedly fragmentary and thus a clear reading is unattainable.⁹⁶ Still, there are other sayings in which the gods are involved, bestowing their support, but seemingly on little moral basis. Line 96 also references the gods in a similar way, although the emphasis there, as discussed above, is more on demonstrating the limits of human achievement, moral or otherwise. In these scenarios, therefore, success or increase has less to do with one’s moral standing than it does with the prerogative of the divine to favor one person over another.

In sum, the role of the gods in Ahiqar can frequently be tied to the notion of retributive justice. The speaker points his addressee to Shamash and El/God as both a resource in the midst of personal injury as well as a warning to the addressee himself against injuring others. In addition

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⁹⁵ The opposite circumstance—i.e., when someone lies or acts wickedly it does not come from the gods—may lie behind the obscure and partially fragmentary saying in 134–135. Interestingly, these two lines could be taken as a continuation of 133 (note the repetition of the lexeme שֶׁבָּה in 133 and 134), in which case the otherwise unidentifiable culprit in 134 becomes the “liar” whose “throne is/was established,” i.e., the king. This is the only passage which mentions the monarch, albeit circuitously, outside of column 6, and it may be telling that it is a critique; see discussion in 5.4.

⁹⁶ Note also that in 97 the phrase is “he with whom El is not.” The premise is the same, however, the one who does not have El on his side will (presumably, the text breaks off) lose.
to those sayings which present the gods as upholders of justice, there are several occasions in which the gods are referenced somewhat obliquely, usually in the context of two parties being pitted against each other where one has divine support (for whatever reason) and therefore the ineffectiveness of the other is highlighted. In any case, the underlying assumption—exemplified by the question “who can challenge the one who has the gods on his/her side?”—is that the divine will trumps any human endeavor. This, of course, is not a surprising assumption. What is unexpected, though, is the seeming arbitrariness by which that beneficence is allotted. Indeed, despite the depiction of the gods as punishers of evildoers, there is a discernible and pervasive current of skepticism, even frustration that runs through Ahiqar concerning the role of the divine.

5.3.2 Determinism, Fate, and the Inscrutability of the Divine Will: Ahiqar’s Response to Theodicy

In section 5.2 we discussed humanity’s limits in the context of the text’s view on human nature. A prominent passage within that discussion was line 96, which reads: “[How] can a person protect himself against gods and how might he be on guard against his inner wickedness?” Earlier the focus was on the issue of “inner wickedness.” Now, however, I wish to pick back up this conversation, but with a focus on the question about the gods and in this way fuse together the heretofore disparate foci. What is at first striking is the way in which the saying is phrased. Why does the individual need “to watch out” (Aram. ישתרר, ישתרר) for the divine? Recall that the person in question is most likely the “upright” and “sensible” figure from the previous line. In any case, the parallel structure of both clauses—in which we find the synonymous verbs ישתרר and ישתררimplicitly links אלייוור “gods” to יאוור גהונ אלוהים “inner wickedness.” The connection need not suggest anything malevolent about the nature of the gods, only that both entities have the potential for a deleterious effect on humanity. Line 95 draws on the imagery of a city prepared to endure a siege where, incidentally, the besiegers are humanity’s innate wickedness and the gods. The imagery in these lines brings together two related premises: the inexorable will of the divine and the potential for humanity’s destruction or, at the very least, suffering. This potential or, more pointedly, its inevitability even for someone who is innocent calls to mind the problem of theodicy.

The discussion above about divine retribution in several ways anticipates the question of theodicy as they are inextricably linked. The primary focus of theodicy, however, is how a text accounts for suffering, especially arbitrary or unjust suffering. The problem of suffering is
certainly a topic with which *Ahiqar* contends. Connected to this question are the competing—though not mutually exclusive—concepts of fate and divine determinism.

The most revealing and intricate conversation about theodicy in *Ahiqar* centers on the fable of the bear and the lambs (ll. 168b–171a):

A bear approached [some] lambs [… *saying* “…] I will be quiet.” The lambs answered and said to him, “Pick for yourself those whom you will pick from us. We [are but] lambs […]. For it is not in the hands of humanity to pick up their feet or to put them down apart from the gods […]. For it is not in your hands to pick up your feet or to put them down.

In the discussion above, we observed that the fable puts into conflict the will of the gods, represented by the bear, over against the will of humanity, represented by the lambs. Clearly the message is one of human futility in the face of the divine. In a sense, this is not altogether surprising, but what may be more arresting about this fable is what’s at stake, namely the destruction of the lambs. Read in this light, then, one could surmise that the gods are responsible, at least in part, for human suffering.

What, therefore, does this suggest about the nature of the divine and, more importantly, the seemingly arbitrary manner in which they inflict disaster upon humans? Consider the fable about the leopard and the goat which immediately precedes it. In the text itself they stand side-by-side and share a remarkable similarity in form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>166–168a Leopard &amp; Goat/Gazelle</th>
<th>168b–171a Bear &amp; Lambs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Leopard “happens upon” (ג峄) goat</td>
<td>1) Bear “approaches” (:view) lambs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Leopard speaks to goat; offers help but intends harm</td>
<td>2) Bear speaks to lambs; (missing; enigmatic “I will be silent”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Goat responds defiantly; “do not take from me” (עלא תלקח חיות)</td>
<td>3) Lambs respond with acquiescence; “take from us” (תח.child הלק脈)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) clause: nature of leopard to destroy not “seek welfare” (shall)</td>
<td>4) clause: humanity’s “power” (ܪܡ) vs. gods’ will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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97 For this reason, erroneous comments by previous scholars such as Lindenberger—who says, “the question of theodicy does not arise; the gods of the proverbs are never seriously challenged”—are to be dismissed; cf. Lindenberger, “Ahiqar,” in *OTP* 2:486.
When read together we are left with some troubling implications about the divine’s role in human suffering. Can we, by association, recognize similar motivations in the bear as we do the leopard? Do we have a veiled critique of the gods as inherently vindictive entities, arbitrarily perpetrating violence upon humanity? This may be taking the comparison too far, but it remains an intriguing possibility nonetheless. On the other end of the spectrum—i.e., one that keeps the nature of the gods themselves at a safe distance—we might see the gods as mere representation of the power behind the workings of the natural order. In other words, rather than a personalized assessment of the gods’ will, the fable is simply using the gods as the embodied emblem of the complexities, vicissitudes, and happenstances that take place in the cosmic word. This sort of “prime mover” interpretation may be supported by the fact that it is simply “the gods” who are likened to the bears rather than Shamash or El/God specifically. Even if we move beyond the indirect causation and assign some sort of divine determinism, the issue, from the perspective of the lambs/humanity, is one of chance or fate.

That suffering, even death, is a matter of fate brings to mind the saying in 183 about the lion and the stag:

The lion will lie in wait for the stag in the concealment of his hiding-place and he [... ] and he will drain its [the stag’s] blood and he will consume its flesh. Behold thus is their fate, that of humankind!

There are some structural differences between this animal saying and the animal-fables, but it shares a similar premise, namely that observations taken from the animal world—specifically as it relates to predatory animals attacking their prey—can be applied to the human world. The key word in 183 is הָעַמִּית from the verb עָמַּ֣ית “to happen upon,” hence Porten and Yardeni render the noun here “meeting.” However, “meeting” does not adequately convey the nuance of the term. A “chance encounter” might be best, but, in my opinion, “fate” serves the context well. The image of the two animals, both here and in the bear-lambs fable, is a powerful one. Some stags, presumably, survive; others are caught and eaten by lions. Fate or chance decides which one is which. So also, it seems, with the lambs. Although the explanatory clause centers on the inability of humanity/lambs to escape that fate, its message still rests on the premise that only fate—in this case exemplified by “the gods”—can decide.
The key term יָשָׁור also occurs in the leopard-goat fable. The leopard “happened upon” or “chanced upon” the goat. The use of the verb in this fable may be informative when we compare it with the bear-lambs fable that immediately follows it. On the one hand, we have the leopard who “happened upon” (יָשָׁור) the goat, highlighting the chance nature of their meeting. Though the leopard’s desire to devour the goat is natural, their coming together is the result of chance or fate. On the other hand, the verb used in the bear-lambs fable is לָכֵן “he went.” This suggests that the bear intentionally approached the lambs. He had a purpose; he did not just “happen upon” them. Does the fact that the leopard signifies a human opponent, while the bear signifies the divine insinuate anything about a divine determinism at play? Based on this comparison, the bear/God connection may extend beyond the simple “it’s natural for a predator to eat a prey” interpretation and connote further an intentional aspect behind the suffering. Interestingly, in the lion-stag saying both aspects are present. Beginning with a different verb, the saying describes the lion as “lying in wait” (דָּמָר) for the stag, suggesting an intentional hunt. Yet, in the interpretive commentary, the meeting between the two natural foes is likened to a “chance encounter” (יָשָׁור), thus implying an indirectness in terms of the stag’s (= human’s) suffering. In whatever way Ahiqar precisely configures the competing, though ironically complementary, views of divine determinism and fate, the importance from the human perspective is the inability for someone to “watch out for” (לָכֵן) suffering completely.

Indeed, this raises perhaps the most troubling aspect about suffering: the inscrutability of the divine. While the lion-stag saying and the leopard-goat fable may be theologically innocuous since the predatory animals presumably are metaphors for human opponents, in the bear-lambs fable, however, the direct correlation between the wild beast and the divine suggests that suffering can ultimately derive from the gods. The theological dilemma this creates is exacerbated by the fact that at no point does the choice in the bear-lambs fable appear to correspond to any moral failings on the part of the lambs/humans.\(^98\) That suffering can happen to the innocent and morally upright is explicitly dealt with in line 96, where, incidentally, the gods also feature as attackers. We should not overlook the narrative circumstances. Ahiqar, as we observed in chapter 2, is

\(^98\) Granted the lacunae could very well have something that shades this evaluation, but as it stands the lambs appear to be “innocent.”
repeatedly praised for his wisdom and yet he, too, suffers unjustly. Although the gods do not explicitly take part in the drama, the text is nevertheless concerned with the issue of an unjust sufferer and, thus, may be read as a response to theodicy (see further below).

The arbitrary manner by which the bear/gods chooses the lambs may be reaffirmed in the two sayings which follow it. On the one hand, the saying in lines 171b–172a suggests that a person has the freedom to either speak evil or good and the divine realm only responds in kind, hence: “if badness proceeds from their mouth, the gods will make it bad for them.” In a completely contrary configuration of the divine prerogative, the next saying in lines 172b–173 reads: “If the eyes of the gods are upon an indivi[dual … (then)] // a person who splits wood in the dark and cannot see is just like a person who is a thief who breaks into a house and will be spotted.” An exact rendering of this enigmatic saying is tricky, despite it being almost completely intact. McKane has offered an interpretive translation: “If the gods exercise gracious vigilance over a man, he can take risks (like chopping wood in the dark) and emerge unscathed.” This is basically how I understand it, as well. If the gods are on your side, then you could even do something as dumb or dangerous as chopping wood in the dark and still be successful. This sentiment goes against common wisdom, which says that doing something foolish will lead to disaster, yet it is built upon a consistent assumption in Ahiqar that as long as the gods are on your side, then you will be fine. The question, however, and it is one raised by the context, is: why would the gods be on the side of the foolish? The contrast with the second clause highlights this problem. The connection between the wood-chopper and the thief is that both activities are taking place at night.

99 The same can also be said of Nabušumiskun who was saved by Ahiqar from an “undeserved killing” (l. 46).
100 I follow Porten and Yardeni’s translation closely here. The verb here is יָשִׁיט from יָשִׁיט meaning “to do evil/badness.” In nearly every instance it carries a negative connotation, often being paired against יָשִׁיט “goodness” or יָשִׁיט “righteous.” It is odd, then, to find “(the) gods” (יָשִׁיט) as the subject of this verb which is in the Pael, implying they “caused evil (to befall) them.”
101 The ellipsis after “indivi[dual]” (Aram. יֵשׁ) can only contain a few letters. Kottsieper, Die Sprache, 22 proposes יֵשׁ “sie warden leben”; Weigl, Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche, 422, 430, suggests יֵשׁ, hence “Wenn die Augen der Götter über den Men[schen …] sind (dann ist es gut).” I prefer to see יֵשׁ as the end of the line, with the “then” as implied by the conditional form of the sentence beginning with “if” (Aram. יָשׁ). Another rendering, for example, is: “If the eyes of gods are on the individual, a man may chop wood in the dark and not see …” (so, Porten and Yardeni).
102 McKane, Proverbs, 169.
There is a subtle play on this correspondence by means of the visual metaphor: the wood-chopper cannot “see” (דרים), while the thief “is spotted” (Aram. שחרות lit. “he will be found”). Taken together we have a paradox: one cannot see but is successful, one should not be able to be seen, but is caught. Thus, the interpretation—in light of the preceding lines, including the bear-lambs fable—seems to be that circumstances are not necessarily a pertinent factor, it is rather up to the gods (= fate). Just as the audience’s expectations about the successful nighttime wood-chopper are not realized, so too can we not fully anticipate every outcome.

Returning to the bear-lambs fable directly, we may consider a comparative example from the Hebrew literature that also brings up the inscrutability of the divine. Antje Labahn, in a study on animal metaphors in Lamentations, discusses a passage in the biblical text that is similar to Ahiqar in its depiction of God as a bear. Lamentations 3:10–11 readsμ “He [God] is a bear lying in wait for me (Heb. תְּרַגְּשׁוֹן שֶׁאֶל יְוָתַנְתֶּנָּה, a lion in hiding; he led me off my way and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate.” The verse comes in a biting critique of God that draws on a variety of metaphors all of which point to God as the enemy of Israel, the one who is ultimately responsible for its destruction. As for the bear metaphor specifically, Labahn acknowledges that the analogy could hinge upon any number of salient factors in its comparison with the divine, but she hones in on a specific attribute raised by the text: the bear’s “habit of lying in wait” (Heb. טַרְגַּשׁוֹן).

She remarks:

The particular prey the bear might choose to eat, in case of actual multiple choices, is not determined. The potential threat is consequently thereby enlarged, because there are numerous varieties of potential targets a bear might want to attack. Therefore, no one can be sure of not being included among the potential number of victims; no one can regard himself or herself as confident to escape the bear and get away unhurt.


104 Labahn, “Wild Animals,” 87, notes that “the metaphor (of God as bear) is sparsely formulated because it does not give any detailed hints on how far God is to be compared to both animals (bear and lion).”

105 Its cognate in Aramaic (רַגֵּשׁ) dose not occur in our fable, but it does appear elsewhere in Ahiqar (line 83; cf. מַסֵּר in 183).

Although Labahn shows no awareness of the corresponding passage in *Ahiqar*, her comments have a penetrating applicability to our fable, which is quite clearly grappling with the idea of indeterminacy and the resulting sense of despair on the part of the lambs/humanity. Labahn adds further: "A bear lying in wait is, thus, a severe danger, not only because of the injuries it will cause but also because of the insecurity as to whether it might at the particular moment act hostilely at all. The mystery a bear leaves is uncertainty about the behavior to be expected." Again, these words resonate well when transferred to the context of *Ahiqar*. This, in fact, seems to be a prominent message about the relationship between humanity and the divine in *Ahiqar*, not only in the bear fable but in other instances as well.

Overall, the text conveys a strong apprehension about the divine; the gods can be a source of threat, they can also be a source of justice, but the scariest thing for *Ahiqar* is the inability to know which side of the gods one will face. The answer to theodicy, therefore, is an unsatisfying one. The bear-lambs fable is a particularly helpful locus for working through the various factors that contribute to the text’s ideology, especially as it relates to theodicy, divine determinism, and fate. The symbolic comparison between the gods and the bear and humanity and the lambs, respectively, are a testament to the text’s ideological presuppositions, namely, that the gods are powerful, humanity is limited in its capabilities (particularly in the face of the divine), and perhaps most important, is the fear-inducing unknowing with respect to the gods and suffering. The inscrutability of the divine will extends throughout the sayings and colors the way we understand its overall tone and outlook. Again reaching to Labahn, we may say of *Ahiqar* that:

[This] kind of uncertainty allows gaps in the imagination about how a threat might affect someone …*there is a latent menace that takes away any feeling of being secure* …There is not one single moment that is free from threatening danger …If that kind of threat is linked with God himself, it is amplified even more. Not only are all natural living conditions concerned, but also the entire basis for human life ordinarily guaranteed by God is taken away.\(^{107}\)

*Ahiqar* gives voice to a persistent and profound anxiety about life, and the source of that anxiety includes not only other humans—who are in a never-ending competition for limited social, financial, and physical capital—but even to the gods themselves. To be sure, *Ahiqar* responds by

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offering ways that can minimize the chances of external threat (e.g., discrete speech, cautious attitude, contentment, etc.); however, at no point does Ahiqar shy away from the reality that the threat of loss, even death, is always present. As the saying in 95–96 makes clear, there is no guarantee, even when you are righteous and wise. The security such a moral and social standing offers against any foe bears little weight in the face of the divine and, lest we forget, the corrupt nature of humankind generally.

Such a worldview stands far and away from the more optimistic outlook that we find in the book of Proverbs and may better be related to the similar worldviews expressed (or at least hinted at) in Qoheleth and the Egyptian instructions Amenemhet, Insinger, and Ankheshehonge, not to mention a whole host of other kinds of literature such as the disputations or laments.\(^\text{108}\) The contrast between Proverbs and Ahiqar is worth a brief comment since the two have been frequently brought together in past scholarship, with the biblical one probably depending on the Aramaic text. It is true that Proverbs, like Ahiqar, acknowledges the limits of human achievement and understanding, particularly in the face of the divine. A notable example is 19:21 “The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.”\(^\text{109}\) Proverbs likewise admits that humanity has a proclivity for selfish and self-destructive behavior and testifies to the hidden nature of god’s will (e.g., 20:24). However, they diverge on a couple of important points. Fox says of Proverbs: “The tone of the book, taken as a whole, is actually one of confidence …Humans may not fully understand God’s will, but they can rely on his goodness and wisdom. Indeed, enough of God’s will is known to enable humans to make their way through life quite well.”\(^\text{110}\) Our reading of Ahiqar, on the other hand, has shown a significantly bleaker outlook. The inscrutability of the divine will is not just a fact of life to be acknowledged as in Prov 25:2 (“It is the glory of God to conceal things…”), rather it is often an obstacle which cannot be overcome. For Ahiqar, hope rests, for the most part, in not being “noticed.” Whereas references to the divine’s prowess contra humanity’s in Proverbs generally evoke a sense of awe or an impulse to conformity, in Ahiqar there is a persistent apprehension in not knowing the outcome of the divine’s plan. For Ahiqar the power of the gods is not majestic, inviting speculation; it is terrible, like the jaws of a bear, inciting

\(^{108}\) E.g., Job, Dialogue of Pessimism, Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb, et al.

\(^{109}\) Cf. 16:1, 9, 33; 20:24.

\(^{110}\) Fox, Proverbs 10–31, 607.
fear and trepidation. In contrast to Proverbs, the goal or happy-ending for Ahiqar does not figure as an expectation for reward as response for wise and just behavior, but may better be described as the hope for an avoidance of suffering. Yet, the text contains sign-posts, often in the form of fables, that a person’s fate is largely inescapable. On the one hand, a careful and clever tongue, like that of the goat, can get you out of trouble. But, like with the man chopping wood in the dark or with the bear and the lambs, an individual can never know if they have the favor or are facing the wrath of the divine.

Lastly, a brief look at the narrative is needed. To be sure, the gods are never mentioned in story, at least not directly. However, just because they are absent does not mean that the narrative’s worldview has no room for the divine. Any interpretation, therefore, must take into account the fact that for a reading audience, whose symbolic universe always contains the divine, the intricacies of the narrative can invoke theological considerations even if they are not explicitly raised by the text. For a modern interpreter, of course, this becomes tricky because we are trying to tap into an ancient consciousness with very few clues in the source material on which to base this kind of approach. Three factors for Ahiqar, however, allow for such a reading.

The first is the immediate literary context. The narrative though formally distinct is part of a larger body that includes the sayings. Thus, we may use, albeit cautiously, the presuppositions of the sayings as a guide to the narrative. So, for example, we might surmise that the absence of the gods in the narrative, particularly at the point of Ahiqar’s betrayal and order of execution, is telling. Would the reading audience not inwardly protest at such an unfair treatment of the story’s protagonist? Can the unjust suffering of Ahiqar not convey something to the audience about the notion of retributive justice? Indeed, the silence of the gods on this point reinforces the lesson in the sayings that suffering can come to any individual no matter how “upright in stature” or “keen in mind” (95–96).

Secondly, we may also consider the Elephantine context as a general blueprint for how the ancient reading audience conceived of the world and the divine’s participation in it. Among the Elephantine documents there is a letter (TAD A4.3) which refers to a situation that bears striking
resemblance to the one in Ahiqar. The letter describes a situation in which Mauziah, a leader in the Judean community at Elephantine, had been arrested under suspicion of thievery, for which he was presumably innocent. Mauziah eventually secures his release “through the strenuous intercession of two servants of Anani [another leader of the community].” In the letter itself, Mauziah praises the servants for their intervention but adds that his rescue came “with the protection of the God of Heaven.” The piety that this disgraced leader expresses stands in direct contrast with the way in which the similar situation is described in Ahiqar. Granted, the conclusion is missing and there is certainly the possibility that Ahiqar eventually credits the gods for their assistance, but as it stands only the intervention of the loyal servant secured his survival. An Elephantine reader, therefore, may take notice at the lack of any pious flavoring.

Thirdly, the narrative of Ahiqar may be compared with generically similar examples. Several Hebrew examples come to mind, such as Esther, Tobit, or Daniel (Aramaic), but it is the Joseph story that stands out as a particularly intriguing comparison. If we compare some of the circumstances of this narrative to the Joseph story—a text that is often considered to be of the same genre, i.e., court-tale, at least for the narrative portion of Ahiqar—we find a great deal of similarity, specifically in the Potiphar episode (Gen chs. 39–41). Joseph, like Ahiqar, had been falsely accused of behaving disloyally to his superior, in this case Potiphar. Notably, both held lofty positions in their respective domains before the disgrace: Ahiqar was in charge of “all Assyria,” and Joseph was in charge of “all that [Potiphar] had.” The circumstances of the betrayal and its aftermath are certainly different: one comes from a family member the other from another’s wife;

111 It should be made clear here that in no way am I drawing any causal relationship between the Ahiqar narrative and the circumstances as described in the letter. I am merely pointing out the similarities between the two situations, which allows us to infer a possible way that someone at Elephantine might have responded to Ahiqar.

112 Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 131 (text B15).

113 TAD A4.3.5.

114 Most instructions do not have a lengthy narrative as in Ahiqar, but notably the one that does, Ankhsheshonqe, also omits any mention of the divine (though to be sure the gods figure prominently among the sayings). For this reason we may consider another example outside of the instruction genre that bears striking resemblance.

Ahiqar goes into hiding, while Joseph is put in prison—although there is a typological correspondence between the two scenarios (i.e., both are “underground” in a state of limbo, narratologically speaking). An important correlation, however, is that both Ahiqar’s and Joseph’s salvation comes about by means of a fellow official who remembered a kindness done to him previously by the protagonist. In Joseph’s case, he is assisted by the cupbearer who had previously shared the prison with Joseph until, with Joseph’s help, he was able to go free. The telling difference, however, is the fact that the cupbearer’s participation is almost incidental to the story. From the narrator’s perspective it is God who is ultimately pulling the strings, giving Joseph the gift of dream interpretation, and orchestrating events that led to his release from prison. In Ahiqar’s case, however, it is the support of this fellow official that is highlighted, with the absence of the divine thus being noticeable. From here, we may be able to discern something about Ahiqar’s worldview and overall ethic. Rather than simply being incidental to the narrative, Nabusumiskun’s support of Ahiqar takes center stage. Their conversation, for example, takes up nearly half of the extant narrative material. On the basis of this comparison, therefore, we could argue that for Ahiqar the guiding ethic is one of mutual support, an exaltation of the so-called “golden rule” though cast in narrative form (line 52: “Just as I did for you …”). By contrast, the support of the divine cannot be counted on, since the gods apparently had nothing to do with Ahiqar’s salvation from death. This outlook is at odds with that espoused in the Joseph story, where the reader almost certainly knows that things will work out for Joseph, despite the betrayals and trials he faces, because throughout the narrative God is clearly favoring him. More pointedly, Joseph does not necessarily idealize a “golden rule” ethic, as his interactions with his brothers—while ultimately beneficial—comprise a significant amount of (emotional) torment. It is clear that God’s role in securing one’s safety is of utmost importance in the biblical narrative.

A final point: although the gods are not active in the narrative of Ahiqar there is one locus in which their presence may be implied, namely the king. In the sayings the king and the gods are intimately related, especially as it relates to the king’s authority. Therefore, one could infer that the king in the narrative is similarly endowed with the divine backing and, consequently, any

116 The narrator in Genesis frequently attributes Joseph’s success to the fact that “the Lord was with him” (e.g., 39:2–3, 21), even the character Joseph himself gives pious tribute to God for his success (e.g., 41:16). A specific instance that is helpful for distinguishing between the two concerns the mechanisms by which they escaped their punishments.
criticism of the king can implicate the gods as well. This relationship, however, requires some further unpacking, and it is to this that I now turn.

5.4 At the Intersection of Humanity and the Gods: The King in *Ahiqar* 117

The figure of the king occupies a special place in the symbolic universe of the ancient Near East. In nearly every society, the king stands at the intersection between humanity and the divine. The *Book of Ahiqar* is no exception in this regard. Already in the previous chapters we have discussed several of the sayings which feature the king as well as the king’s role in the narrative. In the following discussion I will be paying particular attention to the king’s relationship with the divine. Briefly put, the king and the divine are intimately related, such that one may frequently see/read the one in the other. This is what I call the “God-King Complex.”

After surveying the role of the king in Ahiqar vis-à-vis the divine, I will then offer a brief interpretation of its royal ideology in light of the text’s Elephantine setting, in which I find that the ambiguous presentation of the king resonates on a number of levels with the hardships and constraints that impressed upon the Judean community in Egypt under Achaemenid rule.

5.4.1 The God-King Complex

A prominent theme in the narrative of *Ahiqar* is loyalty, particularly to one’s superior. The plot is enacted when Nadan decides to betray his uncle and adoptive-father Ahiqar. Interestingly, Nadan’s disloyal behavior comes in the form of an accusation of disloyalty to the king. In contrast to Nadan’s treachery, we find in the character Nabusumiskun a loyal friend, who returned to Ahiqar the very same kindness which the latter had shown him at an earlier time. Ironically, Ahiqar, in helping Nabusumiskun, had actually been unfaithful to the king in that he disobeyed his direct command; however, in a paradoxical twist, Ahiqar characterizes this disobedience as being beneficial to the state/king, hence he states: “moreover Sennacherib the King loved me abundantly because I let you live and did not kill you” (51). Thus, displaying loyalty to king, or to one’s superiors/parents and friends is wise and will be rewarded. Yet, even in its promotion of loyalty to

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117 Portions of this section are taken from Seth Bledsoe, “Conflicting Loyalties: King and Context in the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar,” in *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire* (forthcoming).
the monarch we see that the text is not as straightforward as we might like. The same applies to the presentation of the king himself. Indeed, that both Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun know better than the king himself with regard to executing his subjects suggests a complicated consideration of the king’s character.

The king is characterized by a noticeable flimsiness, much like the characterization of kings in the biblical narratives of Esther or Daniel, where the monarchs are quickly and easily persuaded by their advisers into handing out severe punishments. Esarhaddon acts the part of the gullible foreign king, for he, seemingly without hesitation, accepts Nada’s accusations and orders the renowned adviser “upon whose advice Sennacherib (his father) and all Assyria (depended)” to be executed. In the same breath, these stories emphasize the finality and unquestionable nature of the king’s decree, while also depicting the king issuing such decrees in a capricious almost whimsical manner. Both Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun are explicitly stated to be innocent of the crimes of which they were accused. Already in the story of Ahiqar then, we may be able to detect a hint of dissatisfaction, or at the very least, disillusionment with the office of the king in terms of upholding justice. In addition to the swiftness with which Esarhaddon turned on Ahiqar, we find other subtle clues to the king’s capricious behavior. Esarhaddon and Sennacherib were occasionally “incensed” ( paypal ) at their subjects, but they could also show them “love” (51 and 65). Esarhaddon was also “well-known” to be “merciful” ( paypal ; line 53). These words, notably, come from the

118 That the foreign king is often portrayed as easily pliable through persuasion from those courtiers surrounding him is a well-recognized topos in numerous court tales such as Esther and Daniel; see, for example, Shemaryahu Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther,” VT 13 (1963): 419–55, at 439–40, and Stephanie West, “Croesus’ Second Reprieve,” 422–23.

119 In addition to the general critique about a king who does not uphold justice which could be applied to many empires, the specific critique of a king who issues decrees without “hearing both sides,” as appears to be the case with Ahiqar and his accuser Nada may recall the “Testament of Darius” (a section of which is found attached to the Aramaic Bisitun text at Elephantine, see n. 29 above), wherein the king states in instructional form to his successor that he always listened to both sides before making judgment. I thank Christine Mitchell for pointing this text out to me.

120 The term “merciful” may, in fact, be an epithet of the king, rather than simply an adjective. Note that the term has been used as an epithet of the god El; see Lindenberger, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” at 110–11 n. 31. Thus, the term here could indirectly be relating the king to the deity. This connection is intensified when one considers the saying in line 91 where the king is directly likened to “the Merciful” (the epithet there stands in parallel to the god El). See discussion below.
lips of Ahiqar after he has been falsely accused and sentenced to death by the king. The impression then, as Stephanie West notes, is “that Ahiqar’s loyalty is unimpaired by his undeserved suffering.” The authority of the king is never challenged, at least not directly. Nevertheless, there are subtle clues in the narrative which suggest that the text’s royal ideology is not so straightforward.

When we look at the sayings of Ahiqar, we find an even more nuanced picture of kingship and what a “wise” response to this outlook entails. I turn now to Column 6 of Ahiqar where nearly all of the sayings related to the king are clustered together. The translation of the column is as follows:

79 Moreover, to the gods it/she is precious [...] to/for [...] the kingdom/kingship in the skies (or: by the heavens/Shamayn) it is established, for the Lord of the Holy Ones lifted [it].
80 My son, do not curse the day until you have seen the night.
81 Al[so], keep in mind that in every place are their eyes and their ears are near your mouth. Guard yourself! Do not let it be th[eir] prey!
82 More than everything that is guarded, guard your mouth! And concerning that which you’ve heard, make your heart heavy; for a bird is a word, and the one who releases it is a man of no heart.
83 [...] the secrets of your mouth. Afterward, take out your words in its (proper) time, for mightier is ambush of mouth than ambush of battle.
84 Do not cover the word of a king; let it be a healing for your heart. Soft is the speech of a king, (yet) it is sharper and mightier than a double-edged blade.
85 Look before you is something difficult, against the face of a king do not stand, his rage is quicker than lightning. You, guard yourself! Do not let him show it (=rage) on account of your talking lest you die early in your days.
86 [Obey the word] of a king, if it is commanded to you, it is a burning fire. Hurry, do it! Do not cause it to burn against you, and consume your hands.
87 Moreover, let the word of the king be done with delight of the heart. * How can wood contest with fire, flesh with a knife, or a man with a king?
89a I have tasted bitter herbs and their taste is strong, but nothing is more bitter than poverty
89b Soft is the tongue of a king but it will break the ribs of the sea serpent, like death which is unseen.
90 In an abundance of sons let not your heart rejoice and in their fewness do not mourn.

121 West, “Croesus’ Second Reprieve,” 426.
122 Based on translation in TAD C 1.1 with slight emendations.
A king is like the Merciful, indeed his voice is lofty, who is there who can stand before him except the one with whom El is?

Beautiful is the king to see like Shamash, and precious is his glory to those who walk the earth quietly.

Nearly every saying related to the king is concentrated here in this column, the effect of which creates a tightly-knit passage, both structurally and in terms of content, with a marked unity—perhaps signaled by the repetition of “precious” (𐤀𐤃𐤊) at the top and bottom of the column. I have underlined some of the critical terms in this column which speak to its depiction of the king.

On the one hand, we notice a great deal of overlap in the king’s depiction with the one found in the narrative. The king’s command is never to be questioned (84). His wrath is swift (85) and deadly (86). Just as Sennacherib/Esarhaddon showed love to their servants, the instructions teach that the king’s words can be kind and gentle (84b, 89b). Also, one should not stand in the face of the king (line 85), implying that one should, like Ahiqar, prostrate oneself (cf. line 14).

The various attributes of the king mentioned in lines 84 through 88—his word, anger, face (=rage), and tongue—all revolve around the central issue of obedience to the monarch and the power of the royal word or decree. Line 89b is especially telling in that it assigns to the king’s “tongue” a power of mythic proportions, capable of destroying the fabled “sea-monster” (𐤀𐤃𐤊). The force of these

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123 This may, of course, be an accident of recovery, i.e., more king sayings simply weren’t preserved. In fact, line 133 mentions the “throne” (an oblique reference to the monarch), implying that a ruler is meant, although it could just as easily be taken metaphorically for anyone who abuses authority. Nevertheless, the clustering of king sayings in column 6 is obvious. For such a rhetorically-oriented analysis of the sayings collection, I refer to Michael Weigl’s study, “Compositional Strategies in the Aramaic Sayings of Ahiqar: Columns 6–8,” in The World of the Aramaeans: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion (ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau et al.; 3 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 3:22–82, where he focuses on compositional features in Ahiqar and argues—incidentally, on the basis of this same column—that the compiler or author of Ahiqar operated with some intent in arranging his proverbs.

124 The phrase “stand in the face of the king” is probably to be interpreted metaphorically; hence, do not disagree or be haughty before the king. But it certainly is connected to the actual behavior as exemplified by Ahiqar in the narrative.

125 The mythic background of this saying is only speculation, but given the sea-monster’s near ubiquitous role in the ancient Near Easter symbolic universe, it is not unlikely that reference to it would invoke some similar myth for the Elephantine audience.
admonitions pivots on how destructive and dangerous it can be to challenge or take lightly the king’s authority. It is important to note that they not only emphasize obedience to the king’s command, but these lines also reflect upon the monarch’s inherent power, as well as that power’s inscrutability. A royal decree can be beneficial and uplifting, but like lightning and death itself, his rage can strike quickly and without warning.

Finally, in lines 91 and 92 there is a noticeable change in the tone and language. Demonstrating an arguably hymnic quality, these sayings directly relate the king to the divine. His mercy is compared to El, and so also his authority (“voice”) is said to be unassailable because of God’s support (91). Similarly, the king has an elevated stature that is likened to the solar deity (92). These lines show clearly that the concern is no longer simply prudent behavior around a king; rather, we have an acclamation of the institution of kingship itself. The effect of this lofty praise is such that one comes away with a very high regard of the royal office.

Besides being fragmentary, the uppermost line of Column 6 is most likely the second half of a two-line unit, whose subject matter was presumably mentioned in the first line of the previous (now missing) column. Because the preceding lines are not extant we can only look to the subsequent lines in the column for any context clues about its subject. The line comprises a description of something that is precious to the gods, is set in the heavens (or perhaps established by Shamayn—a possible divine epithet), and has been set up by one Baʿal Qaddašin/Qadšan (“Lord of the holy ones/holiness”). Notably, we also find the word “the kingdom” or perhaps simply “the kingship.” With this term we are invited to consider the possibility of some connection to the rest of the column where “the king” is prominent. Indeed, when we compare the terminology and syntax of line 79 we can find a number of parallels with lines 91 and 92. Most notable is the adjective “precious” (יִקרֵי) which appears in both 79 and 92, attached in the former case to “kingdom” (or perhaps “kingship”) and in the latter saying to the king himself: thus, the two sets of lines could be functioning as an inclusio to the entire section.

126 See Lindenberger, “The Gods of Ahiqar,” 105–17; alternatively, the term could be a remnant of the Assyrian epithet where the Sun-God is called Bel-Igigi, “lord of the holy ones”; see Edward Lipiński, The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion (OLA 100; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 625.

127 The correspondence between lines 79 and 92 is so great that one may reasonably assume the existence of another line at the end of the previous (now missing) column that formed a couplet with line 79 and would have had comparable language and forms to that of line 91—i.e., it probably included hymnic language about the king along
The reflection on the king and his authority appears to be interrupted by a few unrelated sayings (80–83, 89a, 90). Yet, a closer analysis reveals that these seemingly disparate sayings have been neatly woven into the larger framework of loyalty and obedience to the king, and may even implicitly evoke the royal context. For example, lines 80–83 are concerned with correct speech, with terms like “word” and “mouth” being prominent. The transition to sayings about the king in line 84, then, comes quite naturally given its focus on the king’s word and speech. The sense of line 81, of course, is about speaking a careless word that can be overheard and later used against you. But the specific mention of their “eyes” and their “ears” may be an allusion to the Persian system of spies mentioned in Xenophon and Herodotus. Thus, while the king himself is not directly mentioned in this saying, for an Elephantine audience this specific phrase may call to mind the issue of loyalty to the Achaemenid king. The very context in which this saying is found may increase the likelihood of this connection. In any case, the immediate context suggests that the

with some reference to the divine. Unfortunately, however probable this conjecture may be, the extent to which Ahiqar drew on a hymn about kingship/the king is tenuous. Kottsieper, “The Aramaic Tradition: Ahikar,” 114 and Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 24–26 have even detected a chiastic structure that hinges upon the repeated term in 79 and 92 and is reinforced by other noticeably paired sayings in the column (e.g., 84b and 89b; 90b and 80; and, probably, 85 and 87). So based on the language of the first line and the evidence of an overall structure in the column, we may tentatively suggest that the subject of line 79 is related to the king, probably being some attribute of his that, like below, is comparable to a quality of the divine. This conclusion undergirds the analysis here which treats the entire column as a well-organized thought-unit, which, incidentally, may be compared to the “chapters” we see in similar collections like the Instruction of Ptahhotep. On a side note, this line (79) was previously believed to be the second half of a hymn to wisdom, having been attached to the end of another column that ends with a description of wisdom; however, since the edition by Porten/Yardeni, the two columns are no longer joined, thus once again we are left without the subject. See Bledsoe, “Can Ahiqar Tell us Anything about Personified Wisdom?” JBL 132 (2013): 119–37.

128 For brief discussion and ancient references to the “Eyes and Ears of the King”—especially in the Greek sources, Xenophon and Herodotus—see, e.g., Pierre Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 343–44 and Josef Wiesebofer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” in The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium (ed. I. Morris and W. Scheidel; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66–98, esp. 86 and 91. C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 341 also points to another Elephantine document (TAD A4.5.9) which suggests knowledge of this post at Elephantine in listing, among other officials, the “listeners who are appointed in the provinces.”
saying is a warning against speaking a certain type of speech, namely treasonous or slanderous words about the king.

Similarly, line 82 likens a reckless word to the releasing of a bird, which cannot easily (or, perhaps, never) be captured again. This metaphor brings to mind the very close parallel found in Qoheleth: “Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts, or curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter” (10:20). The biblical author put this imaginative exhortation for discretion in speech into a royal context, specifically as a warning against disparaging authority figures. Again, though Ahiqar does not connect the bird-is-a-word image to the king explicitly, its immediate context suggests that here we may have another caution against treasonous or disloyal speech.129

Lines 89a and 90 can certainly stand on their own. Together they represent what are likely the two most important concerns for the average person: one’s social/financial standing and one’s progeny. Their presence in the midst of sayings about loyalty to the throne, therefore, can leave a dramatic impression. The rhetorical effect of which implies that disobedience (or dishonesty) to the king will result in poverty—a proverbially destitute and undesirable situation. Likewise, the threat is not only material, but familial. Though I arrived at this conclusion independently, the contextual reading was already adduced by McKane: “The transition to the theme of poverty is perhaps to be explained by supposing that it is envisaged as the consequence of falling out of favour with a king.”130 These two sayings may not reference the king directly, but in light of their context the purpose seems to be in conveying exactly what is at stake (wealth and family) if one disregards the advice about obedience to the king.

Finally, we should consider another fable that has up to now been almost entirely overlooked in this study (and others) due to its fragmentary state. Line 94, found at the bottom of this very same column about the king, begins: “The lion approached near to greet the donkey saying, ‘May you have welfare (Aram. שלם ובריאותך!’ The donkey answered and said to the lion [‘…’]…” Besides being able to recognize this as a fable, there does not, at first glance, appear to be much more one can say about it. Michael Weigl, however, offers an intriguing, though

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129 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 340–41 also connects this verse to the Persian spy system.
130 McKane, Proverbs, 163–64.
ultimately problematic, interpretation primarily based on his compositional analysis of the column.\textsuperscript{131} He writes:

Positioned as the conclusion to an extensive textual unit concerned with potential conflicts between a king and a courtier, the dialogue implicitly illustrates the latent antagonism of strength and weakness at the royal household … The interpretive relationship between the fable and its present context facilitates the dissolution of the animal metaphors and their application to the human sphere. On the other hand, the fable interprets the sayings about king and courtier by illustrating them by means of a descriptive narration which is formally distinct from any foregoing saying.\textsuperscript{132}

Weigl’s assessment is informative for two reasons. First, he connects the participants in the fable with those that dominate the column, namely the king and his subject(s). Secondly, he notes the fact that there is a formal change in how their relationship is characterized, i.e., the use of the fable. Imagining the lion as a symbol for the king is warranted by the fable’s context and finds support in comparative materials as well. Kings are metaphorically represented as lions in every ancient Near Eastern tradition, so it is no surprise to find such a comparison in Ahiqar.\textsuperscript{133} How then are we to understand this connection here? If we look to the other fables, especially the one in 183–184 which also features a lion, the message seems to be consistent: the predatory animals are always dangerous, even if they present themselves as generous. This accords well with the general tone of the column where the danger of the king’s word is a prominent topic. On the other hand, a closer comparison with the leopard-goat fable may connote something more sinister. The lion greets the donkey here in a very similar way that the leopard does the goat, with the lexeme קדש appearing in both contexts (94; 168b). Taken together we are inclined to read the greeting as disingenuous and thus hinting at an attempt for deception by the lion. Even without looking to the leopard-goat fable specifically, we can still surmise that a lion, by nature, does not have the donkey’s best interests in mind. That the text breaks off is especially frustrating because if this “peaceful” greeting proves to be a false one (as in the leopard-goat fable), then it could seriously

\textsuperscript{131} See Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 55–57; he is careful, however, to state that the fable’s “fragmentary state of preservation does not allow a final judgment about its aim … any attempt to assess compositional criteria must therefore limit itself to the extant text and remains hypothetical.”

\textsuperscript{132} Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 55.

\textsuperscript{133} See Strawn, \textit{What is Stronger}, 54–58 (in Israel) and 152–87 (in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Hatti).
undermine the “lofty” view of the king’s word in 91 and may sit more at home with the telling, albeit exceptional, reference to the “liar” who sits on the throne in the saying in 133.\textsuperscript{134} If the lion does symbolize the king—which seems certain—and if the fable does, in fact, play out like all the others, would this not at least somewhat undermine the sayings earlier in the column (84b, 89b) which suggest that a king could ever be authentic in his generosity? Weigl’s second observation concerning the formal distinction between this fable and the earlier sayings which dealt directly with the king may, therefore, be telling.\textsuperscript{135} It strikes me as no coincidence that one of the more critical sayings of the king is disguised in the form of a fable.\textsuperscript{136} Is the final lesson of this “extensive textual unit” a sarcastic, albeit concealed, disregard of the balance demonstrated throughout?

That this thought had never crossed Weigl’s mind is evident by his earlier comment on this proverb in light of the saying in line 184:

> Applied to the dialogue of 6.94 (S17) this [i.e., the motive clause from 184: “Behold, thus is their meeting—of humankind!”] translates into one essential problem: How can a powerful man express his appreciation for the powerless without regarding him at the same time as a means to increase his power and influence?\textsuperscript{137}

Weigl’s comment, in its unapologetic perspective on the side of the powerful, baffles me. For a study that is dedicated to elucidating the “delicate mutual conjunction of context and meaning,” Weigl seems completely out of touch with the speaker’s sympathies.\textsuperscript{138} The “you” throughout column 6—and in almost every line of the sayings—is identified with the weak and the servant, while the “other” is the strong and, in the case of col. 6, the king. So, rather than reading 94 (and 184) as emblematic of the powerful man’s moral dilemma, as Weigl has, the “interpretive force”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[134] See, for example, Proverbs 28:15 which similarly compares the king to a wild beast and is exceptional for its critical tone: “Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.” In thinking of the king in Ahiqar as part of a complex with the divine, we might also consider Job 10:16 where Job likens God to a lion who is out hunting him.

\item[135] Weigl unfortunately does not comment on how this formal change might affect its interpretation; although, admittedly, his focus is primarily on the editorial maneuvers of creating “interpretive relationships” and not necessarily on how those relationships affect meaning.

\item[136] We might make the same conclusion about the “hidden” critique of the divine in the bear-lambs fable.

\item[137] Weigl, “Compositional Strategies,” 57.

\end{footnotes}
behind this fable rests more comfortably in a position of the one under threat, i.e., the donkey. If we apply the lesson of fable 94 to the column as a whole, the potential for the king to be “soft” or “healing” diminishes significantly. In other words, the mythically powerful monarch, while apparently having the capacity to act beneficently, is, in fact, inherently predatory—as with the leopard whose beneficence for his subjects is really for his own benefit—and any encounter with the king will most likely end in one’s destruction despite the king’s public avowal of peace. By reaching to the lion-stag saying and bear-lambs fable, we may drive the force home: there is nothing you can do about the king’s wrath anyway. The king is awesome in his might and admirable in his just-enterprise, but frustrating in his inscrutability and terrible in his perceived proclivity for exploitation and destruction.

In sum, the survey of Ahiqar’s presentation of the king demonstrates a profound similarity with that of the gods. The royal and divine ideologies are explicitly fused in lines 79 and 91–92, but the synthesis of their character and function extends throughout. On nearly every level the text characterizes them in a similar fashion: their authority is without question; their will cannot be challenged; and both demonstrate a striking capriciousness in terms of justice. As a result, we may read the two together, such that when one is mentioned the other is also implicitly invoked. This concept can thus be labeled the “god-king complex.” That the king, at least functionally, infects the theological ideology of Ahiqar is not surprising considering that the monarch often stood as the divine representative on earth, particularly in his capacity as an upholder of the social order. Consequently, any critique of the workings of the social order, such as we find throughout Ahiqar, necessarily involve the king and, by association, the divine. In this way, the king symbolizes the way in which society configures itself with respect to the divine. Perhaps more importantly, the “god-king complex” allows the possibility of a community (or individual) to question just how well the divine is upholding the cosmic order by placing the blame, so to speak, on the king rather than on the gods directly, which would be ideologically troubling. The gods are the ultimate

\[^{139}\] Another distinctive feature that this fable brings to mind is the absence of any moral quality assigned to the king’s words throughout the column. With the sole exception of 713 “lofty” (an uncertain rendering of an obscure word to begin with), which may have more to do with the gods’ support rather than its content, none of the sayings in col. 6 speak to the goodness or badness of the king’s words. They are only conceptualized according to how they can affect his subjects.
authority and, while the arbitrariness of their will can be lamented, it is problematic to assign any deceit or malfeasance to them. The king, as a divine and human figure, serves as a more reasonable and malleable locus for expressing these kinds of doubts. In his capacity as the divine representative, he can be just as terrible and his wrath can come just as unexpectedly, but his words are “lofty” when they come from the gods. Contrariwise, in his capacity as human ruler, there is a greater possibility for deceit, and in the case that he does prove to be a “liar” (133–135), the text makes it clear that such “evilness” did “not go out from the gods” (לָוָּא אלִים אלְאָלִים) in Ahiqar’s presentation of the king, therefore, we are left with a paradoxical situation “in which the individual questioning of societal expectations is hidden, as it were, behind a formal recognition of their validity.”

This conflicted view of the king and the gods may speak to the similarly frustrating circumstances in which the Elephantine audience found themselves.

5.4.2 Conflicting Loyalties: The Ambiguous Role of the King in Ahiqar

Herbert Niehr and Bob Becking have recently argued that the function of the Book of Ahiqar for the Elephantine audience was as part of the Persian propaganda agenda, either as a text commissioned by the Achaemenids themselves or reflecting the native population’s complete acceptance of the Achaemenid authority. In both cases, the scholars take as their cue the seemingly positive depiction of the king in the Ahiqar sayings. However, as we have shown above, this estimation is hardly accurate. There are as many sayings which uphold the authority of the king as there are that critique it. Moreover, the testimony of the narrative should not be overlooked in its not-so-positive portrayal of the monarch.

Read in the context of Elephantine, then, the Book of Ahiqar would have a certain resonance among the Jewish community whose existence and prosperity was wholly dependent on the beneficence of the monarch. The drama surrounding the destruction of the temple to Yahu is a

140 The citation is from Antonio Loprieno, “Loyalistic Instructions,” 405 who was speaking about the loyalistic instructions from Egypt which, in my mind, have a number of correspondences with Ahiqar in their view of the king.

141 Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 23.


143 Niehr, Aramäischer Ahiqar, 23 also points to the presence of the Aramaic Bisitun inscription as supportive evidence that it constitutes “einen Text der politischen Propaganda und Erziehung.”
particularly useful case study. The Persian authority is understood to be absolute and thus recourse must be made there for recompense and retaliation against the Egyptian priests, who organized the temple’s destruction. Power, then, resides ultimately with the Persian king. It is no surprise then to find a draft of a petition to the Persian king Darius, by way of the Egyptian satrap Arsames, for permission to rebuild the temple. Though admittedly on a much larger, communal scale, the Jewish community represents the submission to royal (and, hence, divine) authority exhibited both by Ahiqar in the narrative (in his request to establish Nadan as his successor) and in the saying in 107–108, which encourages its audience to appeal to the divine (i.e., royal) authority for recompense. Perhaps more noteworthy is a specific claim made by the writers of the draft-petition that: “we did not leave our posts, damage was not found in us.” The language they use is key here. The term “damage” (Aram. ḫra’m) is the very same term found in Ahiqar for which Nadan apparently accuses Ahiqar. When Esarhaddon commands Nabusumiskun to kill Ahiqar he asks the rhetorical question: “Why should [Ahiqar] damage (עין) the land against us?” (l. 36). In both cases, therefore, the idiomatic meaning is “to be disloyal.” Nadan had accused Ahiqar of being disloyal to the kingdom; in a similar way the Judeans at Elephantine want to make sure that in their petition they are not being disloyal. In neither case, however, must we then make the conclusion

144 Porten, Elephantine Papyri in English, 136 (translations of Elephantine documents, save Ahiqar, come from this volume unless otherwise noted).
145 The verb used here means “to damage” (Aram. ḫra’m; here in the Pael/D-stem also meaning “to harm” or “to destroy”), and is used elsewhere in reference to the destruction or downfall of a kingdom/king in Ezra (4:22) and Daniel (2:44; 4:23; 6:27; 7:14). One might also note Daniel’s plea of innocence before King Darius (6:22), where he says: “before you, O king, I have done no wrong (ḥa’al le).” A very interesting parallel with the Sheikh Fadl inscription is also worth mentioning. In this text, the rebellion of Inaros against Esarhaddon (who controls Egypt) is described using the exact same term: one of the Egyptian pharaohs speaking to Inaros says: “let him not damage Egypt” (Aram. נָבַעל מְצַרִי); see Holm, “Sheikh Fadl,” 199. The connection between what Ahiqar was accused of doing against the king/land and what Nadan actually did against Ahiqar is further intensified by the repetition of the verb מָלַך in the words that Nabusumiskun speaks to Ahiqar concerning Nadan: “He [Nadan] damaged (חקל) you” (line 44). That Assyrian kings are featured in two 5th c. documents from Egypt (Ahiqar and Sheikh Fadl) is not unexpected given that those very kings were the ones who conquered and occupied Egypt, much like the Persians were doing for the texts’ current readership.
that the parties involved are absolute in their loyalty. They only must make it publicly clear that they are not disobeying the king’s authority.

Even the intricacies with which this discourse on loyalty in *Ahiqar* is played out has echoes in the Elephantine context. The rhetorical strategy of the draft-petition found there extends beyond the simple Judean’s defense of their own loyalty to the Persian monarch in that they draw a direct contrast between themselves and the Egyptians, whom the petition implies are being disloyal. Recall that the destruction of the temple to Yahu came at the hands of the Egyptian priests. Also recall that the 5th c. generally was plagued by rebellions by the native Egyptians against their Achaemenid occupiers. So, it is no coincidence that in an appeal for support from the Persians against the actions of the Egyptians, the letter begins by reminding the Persian authorities that the Egyptians that are now “damaging” the temple are the very same ones that were “damaging” a Persian fortress in an earlier rebellion. The rhetorical craftiness of the Judean writers is tremendous in that they are subtly reminding the Persian king that they (i.e., the Judeans) are essential to maintaining Persian control. Turning to *Ahiqar*, therefore: if Ahiqar himself represents the “Judeans” and Esarhaddon represents the Persian authority, then in light of the ambiguous presentation of the king and the ironic “loyalty through disloyal behavior” the application to the Judean audience’s self-referentiality in terms of its relationship to the Persian state is intriguing. Put more directly, because Ahiqar and Nabusumiskun ultimately work toward the benefit of the Assyrian kings, even as it is self-serving and ostensibly disloyal, then at least one message is that—in the Judean audience’s conception of itself—the Persian empire depends in part on the “wise” deeds of the Judeans. In a very literal way they (the Judeans) are guarding the borders of the social order, the point at which, in Achaemenid ideology, the realms of “truth” and “the lie” come together. There is a symbolic significance to the conflict played out in *Ahiqar* between the deceitful Nadan and the upright Ahiqar, which translates well into the Elephantine setting where

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147 Note also the use of a Persian loan-wordarranty of “evil” (as in “the evil act” which the Egyptian priest of Khnum did; A4.5.3), when they could just as easily have used a common Aramaic one.

the Judeans were integral to maintaining the borders of the Persian empire and thus integral to the maintenance of the social order.\textsuperscript{149}

In contrast to the appeals about loyalty, there does not appear to be any hint of dissatisfaction with the Persian governance among the documentary evidence from Elephantine. This, of course, is not surprising for any of the official documents and even for the private letters as well—for as Ahiqar reminds us “their eyes and their ears are everywhere” and “a word is a bird.” Based on my analysis it seems that with respect to the king, \textit{Ahiqar} promotes loyalty, but the text only seems to foster such obedience out of a concern for self-preservation. This does not mean, however, that the Judeans were uncritical in their support of Persian rule. They were subjugated peoples, after all. I do not mean to suggest that their loyalty was disingenuous either. As indicated above (and exemplified in the narrative) support of the Persian rule is self-serving, particularly so for the Elephantine community. It is probably no coincidence that evidence of the community’s existence disappears around the time that the Achaemenids lost control of Egypt. Then again, this could be simply an accident of preservation.

That the foreign king ever came to occupy such an elevated role in the consciousness of the Elephantine community is no surprise when we consider passages like Ezra 1 or Isaiah 44:24–45:7. The view of a foreign king being blended with the localized theology of a subjugated people is not unusual. In an insightful article about the foreign king with respect to a community’s identity and self-referentiality, Carol Newsom explains: “If revolt in the name of one’s own kingship was not possible, then there were strong ideological pressures to envision the imperial ruler as divinely authorized by one’s own god. Otherwise the world simply did not make sense.”\textsuperscript{150} Thus at some point in a subjugated community’s history they had to “make room” in their worldview for the foreign king and his concomitant relationship to the divine. For the Elephantine audience, a (near) complete assimilation of a “foreign, divinized king” into their symbolic universe probably took place well before the production of the \textit{Ahiqar} papyri that we have (ca. 425 B.C.E.). Though there is not much evidence, we may surmise that in the Elephantine consciousness the Persian king was

\textsuperscript{149} About this, Bezalel Porten, \textit{Archives from Elephantine}, 295, writes: “It is likely that Artaxerxes decided in favor of the Jews to assure their loyalty in the face of the rebellion of the rest of Egypt … and [likewise] the garrison there maintained its loyalty to the Persians at least down through the beginning of 401.”

\textsuperscript{150} Carol Newsom, “The ‘Other,’” 46.
the king, thus matching the ideology of the “god-king complex” in *Ahiqar*, at least generally. The references to the “God of Heaven” in the public records rather than simply “Yahu” supports this view; indeed the former is directly identified with the latter in one instance.¹⁵¹ Perhaps the most famous document from Elephantine is the letter from Jedaniah (a local leader) to one “ψagavahya” (בגאיה; cf. Ezra 2:2 and Neh 7:7), the governor of Judah concerning the destruction of the temple to Yahu at Elephantine (*TAD* A4.7).¹⁵² The letter has a historical significance for several reasons, but the one that is pertinent here is the reference to the antiquity of the Elephantine Temple; “And from the days of the king(s) of Egypt our fathers had built that Temple in Elephantine, and when Cambyses entered Egypt …he found it [the Temple]. And the temples of the gods of Egypt, all (of them), they overthrew, but anything in that Temple one did not damage.” At some point it became clear (to at least a few) that the foreign king was not going anywhere and there was little hope of restoring the ancient local dynasty, thus the royal ideology had to find a way of incorporating the foreign king into the cosmological scheme. That the letter here, in referencing the distant past and the community’s origins, associates their “ancestors” with the Egyptian king suggests that this ideological transition had already taken place in the minds of the fifth-century leadership.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the perspective of the occupied and insecure, the assimilation of the foreign king into their ideology does not necessitate unflinching loyalty or complete satisfaction. In *Ahiqar*, for example, the god-king complex indicates that a similar ideological merger has taken place. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the uplifting lines about the beauty and beneficence of the monarch are contrasted starkly by the pitiful expressions of helplessness and despair. While the absolute power of the king in the sayings is certainly acknowledged, it is done so in terms of the threat and dangers it poses. Thus, at least in column 6, one is hard-pressed to come away with an unadulterated feeling of encouragement about the person of the king. We are left, instead, with a conflicting view expressed poignantly and pointedly in the saying found in line 89b–90a which demonstrates the dynamic power of the king, one that is soft while at the same time having a power and viciousness of mythic proportions. A

¹⁵¹ E.g., *TAD* A4.7.v27–28; earlier in the document Yahu is called “the Lord of Heaven” (A4.7.r15); see discussion by Porten, *Elephantine Papyri in English*, 130.
similar contrast is evident in the extant portions of the narrative. *Ahiqar* owes his prominent position to the king and is granted permission to have a family member become his successor. Yet, at a whim the second most powerful person in the Persian Empire can be sentenced to death by the command of the king, seemingly without any chance of protest.

In Chapter 2, the actantial analysis brought the ambiguity of the king to light, specifically in how he *acts* upon the narrative’s plot, that is, as both a Helper and opponent to the subject’s attempt to deliver the Object to the Receiver. This is especially true if we consider the Object Ahiqar’s wisdom. The literary analysis offered in that chapter, therefore, accords well with the more theologically-focused survey here. Taken together we can see how some of the social and theo-political complications are highlighted in that they are meted out on the level of the narrative’s action-sequences. Thus, it is not hard to imagine an ancient audience reading or listening to this narrative and having mixed feelings about the king as the story progresses, which in turn can also have serious implications for the ancient audience conceives of the actual king as a social institution and one’s relationship thereto. In this respect, David Clines’s comments about the king in Esther are equally valid for *Ahiqar*: “This ambiguity in the role of the Persian king, which the actantial analysis reflects, corresponds with the ambiguity of the book’s stance towards the Persian government, which is experienced by the Jews both as threat and as protection—an experience consequently inscribed in the book.”

So, while loyalty is, of course, promoted in *Ahiqar* as well as in the Elephantine documents, the political and ideological circumstances were such that it would be unlikely to find any suggestion for a drastic recalibration of the social order vis-à-vis the king. Yet, despite the ideological transformation there was still a need to express the dissatisfaction and inherent problems of a system where the divine-human intermediary stands outside one’s individual ethnic identity. This is why *Ahiqar* is so important and should not be cast aside in Elephantine studies. Where else could the Elephantine audience have grappled with any insecurities or dissatisfactions they had with the current system? Of a similar situation in the book of Daniel—dated to a time of

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153 Clines, “Reading Esther,” 6 emphasis added. Though Sennacherib and Esarhaddon are obviously Assyrian, when taking into account the Elephantine audience it is not unreasonable to see them as a cipher for the foreign power at the time of its reading, i.e. the Persians; cf. Seth Bledsoe, “Conflicting Loyalties: King and Context in the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar,” in *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire* (ed. J. Silverman; forthcoming).
Seleucid hegemony—Newsom writes that we can “recognize in this narrative cycle a clear example of the use of narrative to invent formal and imaginary solutions to unresolvable social contradictions.” Literature provides a medium for which a discourse of dissent—a conversation that is otherwise publicly forbidden—can take place. Outright disobedience or dissent is dangerous and ultimately pointless. As I noted above, it may be no coincidence that the more biting critiques of the king-god nexus come in the veiled and often enigmatic form of the fable. Even the not-so-critical sayings about the king’s wrath are couched within a hymnic praise that almost oversells the point. The same can be said of the narrative, where its “ancient” setting provides a literary “safe space” in which one can criticize the king. Ahiqar, therefore, could have played an extremely important role at Elephantine, giving voice to the complaints and anxieties about life, social turmoil, and the insecurity that comes in a system where the king is both an oppressor and a source of justice. Story and literature can function as a coping mechanism by allowing some avenue for venting these frustrations. Nevertheless, assessing tone and applying it to an ancient community’s ethos is very difficult and any conclusion is at best tenuous without clear evidence.

This kind of reading—one that especially pays attention to the tone—creates a much more sobering view of kingship than one would expect in a wisdom collection of an indigenous population or even a state-sanctioned piece of literature as suggested by Niehr and Becking, respectively. Instead, the conflicting presentation of the king fits nicely into the situation faced by the Judean community at Elephantine. On the one hand, loyalty to the monarch cannot be questioned openly, after all the residents at Elephantine have seen the Persians time and time again.

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154 Newsom, “‘Other,’” 48.

155 For example, Susan Niditch, Underdogs and Tricksters, 145, writes of the Esther narrative: “The plot of the folktale, in which one knows all will turn out well for the heroes whether via their wisdom or ‘some other source,’ thus makes real suffering bearable and helps bridge the gap between the way things are and the way they should be.” A similar appraisal can be made of Ahiqar’s function vis-à-vis the Elephantine community (or any reading community for that matter). Stories such as Ahiqar, Esther, Joseph, et al., whose plots are built upon anticipatory suspense—where the audience knows the ending already, and it is just a matter of how it gets there—provide the audience with a cathartic movement which begins by touching upon the feeling of injustice and helplessness that is symptomatic of the circumstances of diaspora or simply oppressive rule. The hero, and his eventual success, thus represent a remedy to the situation, even if only rhetorically; they, in Niditch’s words (p. 48) “alleviate social anxiety about the status quo” even as they, at times, uphold it. Despite the dissatisfaction, the king is still the king in Ahiqar.
put down the revolts by the Egyptians. Yet, the text may also attest to a subjugated community’s need to express the frustrations and fears of a society under the hegemony of a strong foreign power.

5.5 Conclusion

Together the narrative and sayings of Ahiqar present a complicated, indeed, conflicting view of humanity and the gods. The text evinces a seemingly negative anthropology, partially in response to the observation that even one’s own friends and family cannot be trusted. Moreover, the text recognizes the limitations of human achievement, whether against one’s own innate proclivity for evil or against the divine will. The gods themselves are active in the meting out of justice and, therefore, can be a resource. However, much more attention is given to the notion that the gods, too, are a threat. This is exemplified most profoundly in the animal proverbs. The terrible potential of the divine is exacerbated by the frustrating inscrutability in terms of how or when disaster may strike. Similar to the divine, the king seemingly has absolute power of even mythic proportions that is apparently divinely ordained. Yet, the text also makes some effort to demonstrate that while this king can function as a source of justice, he can also be a bitter and harsh source of oppression and destruction. The view of the king is, thus, intimately mixed with that of the divine, resulting in what I have labeled as the “god-king complex.” Ahiqar’s royal ideology, when read against the Elephantine backdrop, is one that both accepts the political reality of Persian authority, while at the same time questions the merits of this system by giving voice to the relatively dismal realities experienced by the individual under a foreign imperial hegemony. The audience is one that sympathizes with a socially-vulnerable identity and one that lives in a diverse and unstable context where access to power is limited and justice is wholly dependent upon the seemingly unpredictable beneficence of one’s own oppressors. A poignant summation of Ahiqar’s ideology of humanity and the gods can be found in the remarks by Egyptologist Richard Parkinson: “What we have here is not a simple matter of state propaganda or individual dissent, but an interplay between the ideal
of ideology and the untoward of actuality, between ideal life and the vagaries of individual experience.”

156 See Richard B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London/New York: Continuum, 2002), 155, who was speaking of Egyptian instructions but the words apply equally as well (in my opinion) to *Ahiqar*. 
CONCLUSION

Aḥī-yəqār, “my brother is precious” … or is it “my brother is strenuous”? This question seems to plague the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar. It is not simply that someone close can be a threat, rather it is the unknowableness and the attendant insecurity that troubles this text the most. The anxiety that comes from recognizing humanity’s inscrutable nature—a mystery that extends to the royal and divine planes as well—pervades both the narrative and sayings of Ahiqar. Even the wise and well-spoken sage himself could not avoid disaster. Still, help did arrive, even if it came from an unexpected source. The seed of Ahiqar’s success was sown by the sage himself by being loyal to a friend in a time of need. Yet any hope in the goodwill of one’s friends, particularly in a time of need, is substantially downplayed when viewed against the fact that Ahiqar’s betrayal came by his very own nephew. It seems in this case the good deed did not go unpunished. Similarly, the sayings, especially the fables, lament humanity’s unavoidable encounter with threat and destruction. Humanity is primarily to blame: no one is reliable, not even one’s own self. But for that matter, neither are the gods. Instability seems to be the guiding force that binds the narrative and sayings together, and this seems to be the crucial problem that the text is trying to comprehend. What message, then, does Ahiqar offer in response? What purpose is it attempting to accomplish?

First of all, the Book of Ahiqar is not about creating the sage; not about achieving some end goal of perfection and knowledge. Nothing in the extant text appears to praise the life of a professional sage or scribe, and hardly any of the financial or practical instructions speak directly to such a life-style. Instead, the wisdom of Ahiqar is about survival. Yes, this does involve the achievement of some skill or mode of thinking, but the virtues extolled—contentment, humility, moderation, and friendship—are rarely, if ever, connected to life at court or even life as a scribe or among the elite. The above virtues, on the other hand, are conditioned by a consistent ethic of caution with a concomitant recognition of danger and distress from every angle, including the financial, collegial, political, even familial and the divine. The wisdom of Ahiqar, as exemplified by the narrative and conditioned by the instructions, is about cultivating ways of survival as well as ways of coping with such distress. Suffering, betrayal, poverty, these are all realities that a person will probably encounter at some point and often at no fault of their own. There are ways of decreasing the likelihood, though, and therein lies some efficaciousness behind the instructions besides simply conveying an awareness. The text encourages avoidance and restraint as a way of
diminishing the chance of misfortune. Careful speech is the primary way. *Ahīqar* places a tremendous amount of significance on the power of the spoken word. The fable of the leopard and the goat is a clear demonstration of how a person’s own words can lead to either one’s own demise or salvation. Yet, as avoidable as some hardships may be, *Ahīqar* also makes it clear that sometimes (perhaps often) there is literally nothing a person can do to avoid danger. The fable of the bear and the lambs, though fragmentary, seems to be founded upon this presupposition. The reason for this unpredictability, on the one hand, is to be rooted in the arbitrary and indiscernible nature of the divine and their earthly representative the king. Like the gods, the king has absolute authority and his words can be terrible, capricious, and incomprehensible. Together, the king and the gods form a “god-king complex,” exemplified by the presentation of the king in the narrative as well as in column 6 of the sayings, that frustrates the workings of the social order even while they are supposed to uphold it. The worst scenario, it seems, is to invoke the wrath of the king. The narrative makes it abundantly clear that even the most prominent official “in all the land” can still be snuffed out by a single command from the monarch. A series of sayings dwell on the incredible yet terrible potential behind a king’s decree. That the king has divine backing exponentially increases this power as well as its seeming inscrutability. What is worse, however, is that the wrath of the king is not always tied to rightness. Ahīqar himself as well as Nabusumiskun were both unjustly “executed.” Thus, the book of *Ahīqar* expresses a biting irony—evinced both in the narrative and the sayings—concerning the king and, by implication, the gods in that they also stand as the only resource for justice.

The unpredictability and unavoidability of suffering, on the other hand, also derives from the relatively base nature of humankind. This notion hardly needs affirming given the narrative circumstances where the “good” and “wise” Ahīqar is betrayed by his own family, and not by one he wronged, but by the same person for whom he had shown great favor. This magnanimity, however, was treated with disdain. The negative anthropology espoused in *Ahīqar* is buttressed by the predominant ethic of caution, and not simply for one’s enemies or for one’s own carelessness, but also for one’s friends and family. In the narrative, the figure of Nabusumiskun paradoxically represents both of these conflicting viewpoints. On the one hand, he represents the optimistic, conservative viewpoint that a person who does good will be rewarded with goodness. In him the virtue of reciprocity and the so-called *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang* are upheld, although the character of Nadan simultaneously stands as the foil to any mechanistic notion of retribution. On
another level, however, Ahiqar’s salvation from Nabusumiskun disrupts the conventional wisdom found later in the sayings. In contrast to Nadan, Nabusumiskun is a foreigner, an outsider, unrelated to Ahiqar. The underlying assumption, as the lament in 129–130 evokes, is that if someone’s family is not even faithful, then why would should anyone else be so? Yet against all expectations, the foreigner Nabusumiskun—who is also a fellow court official and thus typologically speaking might stand to gain from Ahiqar’s downfall—remains faithful to his colleague. The narrative thus confronts the presupposed ideology of community. By blurring the lines between family and foreigner, the text renegotiates the boundaries of one’s circle of support and dismantles the assumption that an ethnic identity is fundamental to the social order, forcing its audience to ask in earnest: “who is my brother?”—a question raised by the very name of the protagonist himself.

In assessing Ahiqar’s message, ethic, and general outlook against its literary context, we have found that it straddles two traditions that may generally be labeled Egyptian and Semitic. The overall structure indicates a participation in the Egyptian instructions genre and its impact thereupon is profoundly exemplified not only in the Demotic translation of Ahiqar but in a pronounced sharing—whether directly borrowed or not—of motifs and overall structure by Ankheshonqet. In Ahiqar we have a clear illustration of the direct interaction between Egyptian and Aramaic traditions, and one that is so intimate it can hardly be paralleled save by the uniquely attested Papyrus Amherst 63 (which is Demotic in script but Aramaic in language).¹ The implications of the interplay between these traditions should not be underestimated, as there is increasing evidence pointing to a cultural—and in this case, literary—back-and-forth between native Egyptians and the various Aramaic-speaking peoples that either resided or sojourned in Egypt. More expansive investigations of this literary phenomenon that perhaps began around 500 B.C.E. and continued well into the Common Era are needed. This recognition becomes increasingly important alongside the mostly concurrent rise of Greek literature from Egypt, including the Jewish texts. Hopefully the reading I have offered in this dissertation will provide a solid entry point for the kind of analysis that situates Ahiqar with the several other Aramaic, Demotic, and Greek texts that engaged past traditions—especially the Neo-Assyrian and

concurrent Cushite and Saite periods in Egypt—in order to conceptualize the current political and social circumstances that their readers faced. If anything, Ahiqar at least signals that the scholarly demarcations between seemingly distinct traditions are much more blurry than we would like. This, of course, has serious implications for our understanding of the so-called ancient wisdom tradition, a phenomenon that scholars have long assumed to be an “international” one, even though how that label is configured remains ambiguous. Could the Elephantine Ahiqar be a remnant of an earlier, distinct Syrian wisdom tradition? Of course, but that presumption—which has guided most readers of Ahiqar to date—belie the more likely scenario that for an Elephantine audience Ahiqar was a participant in a long line of instructional literature, whose generic and, thus, intertextual delimitations did not necessarily match the ethnic or geographic ones imposed by scholars. A simpler solution, therefore, is to eschew these rigid taxonomies, both literary and national. In the combining factors of an Aramaic language, an Assyrian setting, an Egyptian genre, and West-Semitic representative forms, Ahiqar truly represents an “international” literary phenomenon. Yet, this expansive cultural matrix is intimately shared by its 5th c. Elephantine audience, where all these worlds collide under the hegemony of the Achaemenids. Thus, we can appreciate Ahiqar’s very broad intertextuality, while at the same time hold in very sharp focus a specific reading audience.

For this reason, the presence of Ahiqar at Elephantine must be fully appreciated. I have tried to do so in this study, but primarily from the side of Ahiqar itself; that is, I have explored how the Elephantine documents can help us better understand our text. In doing so, I have discovered a significant number of linguistic, cultural, and thematic overlaps that suggests strong connection to its material environment. Persian and Egyptian linguistic influences aside, the very topics and concerns of the text—such as loans, lack of food, complexities of identity (especially foreigner and neighbor), situation relative to royal authority, and several others—are reflected in the private and public records of the Aramaic-speaking Judeans at Elephantine. The message and overall ethic of Ahiqar is one that would resonate well among the Judean audience. The king, for example, is an exalted figure, whose furious anger testifies to his near-divine status. The Judeans themselves have the Cambyses’s wrath on the rebellious Egyptians etched in their memories. Still, there is a recognition in Ahiqar that the king is not altogether just in his anger, a sentiment that at least some of its readers must have shared. Besides the king, Ahiqar paints a vivid economic picture, wherein the addressee is far from secure in his financial situation. Even the more practical advice about
loans and getting by with enough to eat would have struck a chord with many of the Elephantine readers, many of whom depended on government rations and inconsistent yields. These are but a couple of examples of how a text, that is otherwise relatively universal in theme, can have a connection to a very specific audience. Assigning a particular function is at best tenuous, but hopefully this study has shown that relegating Ahiqar to propaganda-inspired, scribal training falls quite short. It is of course possible that the text had some formal, educational function; however, the resonances with the specific needs of the Elephantine community demonstrate that Ahiqar satisfied some need beyond rote copying. Indeed, if we are truly to view the text as literature then we must be willing to allow it to have some meaning outside itself, for literature is not simply practical in its application but instead reflective and critical in its contemplation on life beyond the borders of its pages. Perhaps its message held some import for a temple servant like Anani, who had some place of prominence but was far from elite. Or it served a need for Jediniah and his family who were forced to balance political realities that bred distrust from outsiders and despair in the face of the distant and arbitrary sovereign power with a daily life that constantly forced them to reassess who is part of their community and how can it continue to survive. In whatever manner we choose to articulate its function, a broader consideration of the Elephantine community and its ideologies is needed, especially one that considers Ahiqar and the other literary documents Bisitun and Hi-Hor as informative—though not necessarily determinative—of an ancient society’s capacity for self-reflection, even if the reality it encounters is challenging.

Perhaps one of the most important implications of this study is the impact it can have on wisdom studies. This fresh reading of Ahiqar has challenged some of the notions about “traditional wisdom,” at least in the way it is primarily understood. On the one hand, there is much in Ahiqar that resembles the book of Proverbs, especially the formal features of its sayings as well as several topics. Yet, on the other hand, in nearly every facet with which they align superficially, the two texts—Ahiqar and Proverbs—disagree on some fundamental aspect. Proverbs (and Ben Sira) employ financial instructions as either exhortations for charity or lessons in unwise investments. For Ahiqar, however, wealth seems out of reach and any unwise dealings will have dire consequences. In evaluating the workings of the social order and extolling a certain social cohesion, the two texts are of a similar mind. However, the biblical text is strikingly upbeat, whereas there is an anxiety and uncertainty about life and the gods which pervades Ahiqar’s wisdom. If Ahiqar’s place in the Jewish wisdom tradition were elevated—a notion that is becoming increasingly
clear—then the view of wisdom that puts Proverbs at the center and all the rest as critical responses will begin to crumble. Though its form may more closely resemble Proverbs, its tone, imagery, and outlook is more reminiscent of Qoheleth or Job. Indeed we have seen some glaring similarities between Ahiqar and Qoheleth. Yet the two texts also disagree, perhaps not in their willful acknowledgment of the inscrutable gods and the unknowable vicissitudes of life, but in their response to this recognition. Qoheleth may be pessimistic, even angry at times, about the fleetingness of life, but he does expect some joy, some benefit to having a particular lifestyle. For Ahiqar, though, any expectation of reward is tucked away deep, hidden well beneath the open laments about humanity’s propensity for destruction, both from external threats and those that are self-afflicted. The narrative of Ahiqar, of course, brings to mind Job in its depiction of a “righteous sufferer” who, at long last, is restored. Indeed, several scholars have made this casual observation. This study has shown, however, that even among the sayings, Ahiqar is preoccupied with the divine’s role in human affairs, particularly in their suffering. So, while Job’s formal and practical dissimilarities have for the most part precluded close analysis in this study, the new appreciation I have offered for Ahiqar’s theological questioning will hopefully invite more pointed comparisons.

Ahiqar should sufficiently put to rest any notion that there is a theological divide between instructional and sentence or disputational literature. This, coincidentally, is one of the main reasons that comparison with the Egyptian instructions is important. Besides being a corrective to previous scholarship, the view of wisdom from the side of Egypt is one that no longer (in most circles) associates a specific outlook with the instructional form. The several Middle and New Kingdom texts, as well as those before and after, demonstrate several formal similarities and yet their topic and outlook differ wildly. Nevertheless, Ahiqar’s place among the Egyptian tradition is still overshadowed—though only slightly—by its relationship to the Hebrew corpus. Ahiqar clearly has a profound connection to the Hebrew wisdom texts, but the conclusions that this study has drawn about the what and how of Ahiqar’s message has forced us to recalibrate our notions of the wisdom enterprise.

To conclude, then, and reiterate: the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar exhibits a dynamic ideology of morality and causality. Certain behavior, especially careless speech, will undoubtedly result in disaster. On the other hand, in the text’s outlook the gods have a significant role to play, both in responding to wicked behavior, but also in bestowing their beneficence. Unfortunately, there is a frustrating arbitrariness by which this favor is given. Indeed, Ahiqar advances a tragically tenuous
assessment of human existence. Retribution from the gods, however, is but one threat. Enemies abound in *Ahiqar*, but the problem stems not from their existence or even one’s near inability to defend against them—though this last point does come into play. Instead, the more salient factor which troubles *Ahiqar*’s demeanor is *who* these enemies may be. As the circumstances of the narrative make clear and several of the sayings reaffirm, threat to one’s person can come from one’s closest intimates, even one’s own family. Ahiqar’s advice, consequently, is one of distrust of everyone. Indeed, the narrative and the sayings exhibit a continuous instability. This results, as we have observed, in a persistent irony, but it also points to the most prominent message that pervades perhaps every single line of the text: *uncertainty* is a constant. The *Book of Ahiqar*, therefore, expresses a seemingly insufferable anxiety for which it recommends a practice in avoidance and restraint but in the end offers only a demurred wisdom for those in distress.


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Seth A. Bledsoe graduated from Carson-Newman College in 2005 *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Biblical Language. He then went on to Wake Forest University where he completed a Master of Divinity degree at the The Divinity School in 2008. Afterwards he began his doctoral studies in Religion at The Florida State University. While at Florida State he taught several courses including Introduction to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Introduction to the New Testament, and Introduction to World Religions. In 2012 he move to Munich, Germany and in 2013 received a dissertation research grant from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). In 2014 he acquired a position at the Ludwig-Maximilians Universität (LMU) in Munich as a Wissenschaftler-Mitarbeiter (Research Assistant) to Prof. Dr. Loren T. Stuckenbruck in the Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät. He is currently under contract to teach courses in Judaistik at LMU beginning in the Winter Semester 2015. Seth is also published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the premier international journal for the field of biblical studies. He also has several other publications on ancient Judaism and wisdom literature in collections, book reviews, and encyclopedia entries.