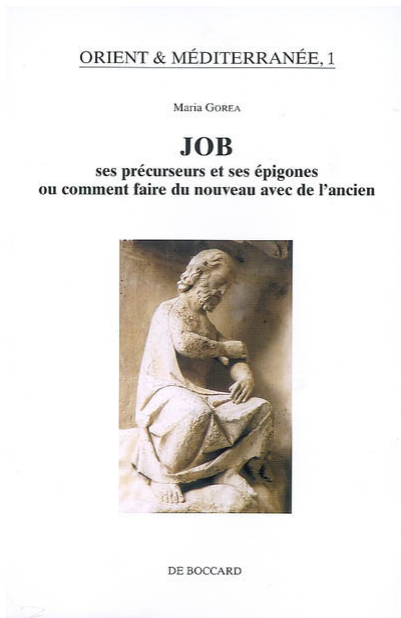


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Gorea, Maria

Job: Ses précurseurs et ses épigones ou comment faire du nouveau avec de l'ancien

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The complex relationship in ancient Near Eastern literature between the old and the new as seen in the traditions about a (just) sufferer: that is the subject of Maria Gorea's investigation. In short, how does the biblical book of Job relate to its predecessors in Mesopotamia and to its subsequent adaptations in the Septuagint and in the Testament of Job? A second issue, Job's ethnicity, is also subjected to close scrutiny.

The book unfolds in five stages: (1) an initial chapter that analyzes certain aspects of the biblical masterpiece; (2) a detailed treatment of Sumero-Akkadian literature featuring a (just) sufferer; (3) a penetrating study of the Testament of Job; (4) an examination of the historical question about ethnicity in various traditions; and (5) a brief postscript on the understanding of the character Job in the writings of selected church fathers and in Jewish midrash.

Gorea cautiously avoids the description of her work as a pursuit in intertextuality, for her interest is really the way an original author uses an ancient theme about a sufferer and creates something new that somehow achieves canonical status and is subsequently modified under Stoic influence to address Jews who reside among foreigners with a different religious value system. She draws on the results of her companion study, *Job*,

response ou trahi? Omissions et raccourcis de la Septante (Paris: Gabalda, 2007), which focuses on the way the biblical book and the character of Job are transformed in the Greek translation.

Each chapter is a scientific model of rigorous research. Gorea examines pertinent texts and attends to fundamental issues, although her interaction with biblical scholars is minimal. She rarely reaches original insights, but the questions she poses are always perceptive. Readers will appreciate her exceptional ability to read texts in light of the broader semantic field.

Many of her suggestions pique the imagination and demand further reflection, thus engaging readers after the fashion of the literature she studies. The book of Job is said to be an oral performance devoid of significant indicators for inflexion, irony, indignation, and the distancing of the speaker and subject (24). Compared to its predecessors, it is labeled more penetrating and vehement. The frame is reckoned as both protection and constraint (17). Elihu is called a buffoon; his characterization, ridicule and theatrics (19). He is not mentioned in the epilogue, for one does not proscribe a buffoon. The effect of putting Job in a foreign land is described as reducing ethnic diversity. That is, “the other” does not think differently from “us,” and genuine piety is not limited to the elect (24).

This section naturally takes up philosophical issues, especially the theme of the innocent sufferer and the problem of evil. Throughout the discussion, Gorea places “just” in parentheses, indicating the problematic nature of the concept of innocence in a worldview that includes inadvertent guilt and reasoning a posteriori, from misfortune to guilt. Her focus is sufficiently close to notice the meanings of names within the book of Job but broad enough to treat differences of characterization.

Gorea’s reading of the book of Job often introduces intriguing suggestions pertaining to the nature of orality, but one wishes she had laid out the basis for distinguishing an oral recitation from a written work, given the extensive discussion of the subject in recent decades. She highlights the nearly four hours that it would have taken an ancient reader to go through the consonantal text, and she draws psychological distinctions between the egoism of Elihu and the balanced interchange between the speaker and addressee (I-you) in Job’s discourse. Sometimes mere hints speak volumes. Gorea characterizes the treatment of Job in the Septuagint as one of attenuation in which he is transformed into a pious individual so important to Stoics. Like the brief section on justice and law, these directives leave one wishing for fuller documentation.

The chapter on Sumero-Akkadian predecessors to Job gives a resume of the seven texts often identified as treatments of an ideal sufferer: (1) the Sumerian Man and His God; (2)

Letters and Contracts; (3) AO 4462; (4) Ludlul; (5) The Babylonian Theodicy; (6) RS 25 460 and RS 25 230; and (7) a text from Tell Marsik. This discussion is introduced by comments about prayers and hymns that treat contests and indicate a “fragile equilibrium” between confession of sin and protests of innocence, confession and anticonfession. Gorea assumes that the Joban author was familiar with this tradition just as biblical prophets and the authors of the psalms of lament knew similar literature from Mari and Ur (134).

Among other things, Gorea contrasts the biblical Job and Man and His God this way: the former lacks the lyrical dimension and invitation to appease divine wrath, although Job’s “witness” echoes the Mesopotamian personal god whose function was to intercede with the great god on behalf of a sufferer. Furthermore, the biblical author does not preserve anonymity. In the book of Job, speaking replaces singing, which alters the penitential literature from Sumer. Here are some examples of Gorea’s thoughts about the remaining texts. AO 4462 seems to have been written for three voices (the sufferer, god, and a benevolent intercessor). Whereas Ludlul stresses divination, the silence of the Joban author on this topic “is nothing other than eloquent mutism” (53). Moreover, the biblical author seems to try to avoid the suspicion of autobiography, specifically that it is too good to be true (54). Job’s suffering is moral; his God appears in a theophany, whereas Ludlul has god remain unseen.

The name of the sufferer in The Babylonian Theodicy may evoke Job’s name at the very end in the letters *ebubu* (54 n. 80). The formal and stylistic similarities with the biblical work do not rule out the higher level of spontaneity in the speeches of the latter. Whereas Job searches for his God, the sufferer in The Babylonian Theodicy does not bother. The two texts from Ugarit emphasize consulting a haruspex and label suffering the lot of humans. The text from Tell Marsik abounds in divinatory practice. The paragraphs on Ugaritic intimations of a devout sufferer do not take into account the striking similarities between Job’s calamity and the misfortunes endured by Kirta that Ed Greenstein has demonstrated in “The Ugaritic Epic of Kirta in a Wisdom Perspective,” *Te’uda* 16–17 (2001): 1–13.

Some interaction with the quite different treatment of the book of Job and its precursors by Michael Chaney (*Dust, Wind and Agony: Character, Speech and Genre in Job* [ConBOT 36; Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994]) would have been productive, particularly since he uses an interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes character stylization. Cheney’s treatment of the Mesopotamian texts resembling Job, although much briefer, is filled with insights that Gorea could have developed further. For example, what would she have said about Cheney’s addition of *tensons* and the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide to the list of predecessors of Job.

The third chapter frequently cites the Testament of Job to illustrate adaptations of the original in various respects (Job rules over all Egypt; Satan can manifest a corporeal form; Job takes the initiative in the contest with Satan; Job is clairvoyant; his sickness is also one of the soul; Job's vision is the result of either a sick imagination or mysticism or allegory; nevertheless, he does not lose contact with the world of the senses). The author of this pseudepigraphic work "manipulates readers" (104). Gorea takes up the issue of Therapeutic influence on the ancient author, but like her many references to Stoicism she offers few specifics beyond attitudes about impassivity. Her textual echoes between the book of Job and similar literature are more exact.

The final chapter examines archaeological evidence of traditions about Job's ethnicity, whether in Haran or in Edom. Both sites are associated with his putative ancestry in Gen 10:23; 22:21; 36. Gorea considers the land of Utz an ethnic category rather than a toponym. Others consider it a pun on the noun 'etsah, implying counsel. Byzantine traditions link Job with Ausitis in Haran, as does the Tomb of Job. A stela of Ramesses II has the name 'Ayyub. The combined evidence, Gorea concludes, points to complex ethnic memories of nomads or seminomads coming south from Mesopotamia and of Arab tribes venturing from Arabia toward the Euphrates.

In a postscript, Gorea discusses the change in the understanding of patience. She remarks that under Stoic influence it becomes an excess of the soul and the ideal is rather *impatientia*. She also discusses the way later thinkers, Christian and Jewish, tried to put Job in company with the patriarchs, even in the celestial city. This section is more suggestive than informative, leaving one asking for more data.

For me, this book was a pleasure to read. Every student of the biblical Job should keep it close at hand, for it beautifully traces a compelling philosophical theme through three millennia.