

# The Good Word

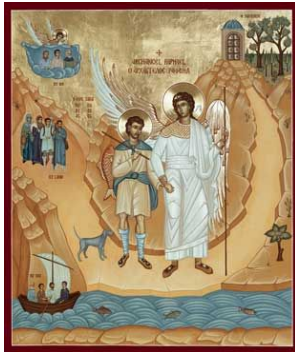
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## THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF TOBIT, PART I: THE TEXT

by Dr. Seraphim Steger

The Orthodox Old Testament *Book of Tobit* is a wonderful and amazing book in many ways. It is easy to read and understand even for the young. It is artfully written with excellent moral instruction and *aphorisms* for both parents and children. It introduces us to the angel Raphael, a guardian angel for Tobiah, Tobit's son. The book's main characters demonstrate their faith by both prayer and works of righteousness. The *Book of*



ICON OF TOBIAH AND RAPHAEL



ICON OF TOBIAH AND SARAH

*Tobit* even foreshadows the New Testament message of salvation in a typological fashion: a righteous father (Tobit), sends his son (Tobiah), accompanied by a holy spirit (the angel Raphael), to obtain a bride from a kinsman in a far-away place. The bride to be, (Sarah), a helpless and despondent young woman, had been tormented and held captive by an evil demon (Asmodeus) who killed all 7 of her husbands before any of the marriages could be consummated. But Raphael counsels Tobiah, *Have no fear; because she has been destined for you since the world came to be. So you will save her, and she will go with you.* (Tobit 6:18, G<sup>II</sup> Fitzmyer translation). Tobiah then defeats the evil demon with the help of the holy angel, successfully marries Sarah and takes her back to his father's house to further celebrate the wedding, and for all to live together in his father's house -- a powerful Old Testament foreshadowing of the future Incarnation of


Christ Jesus, sent into the world by His Father, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, to rescue fallen humanity tormented and enslaved by the Devil, and then, as Kinsman Redeemer, is destined to lawfully take His new Bride (the Church) back with Him to His Father where He will continue to celebrate the Wedding in Heaven with all the Heavenly Hosts.

Although the *Book of Tobit* is recognized as inspired Scripture by the Orthodox Church, the anti-Christian Rabbinic Jews, following the destruction of their nation and the Jewish Temple in AD 67-73 by the Romans, rejected it as Scripture. Nevertheless, *Tobit* was popular and widely read among Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria in the pre-Christian era. Even the Hebrew speaking Sadducees in Jerusalem in Jesus' day appear to be alluding to the book when they challenged Him about the resurrection:

*St. Matthew 22:23-25 (KJV) The same day came to Him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection, and asked Him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue left his wife unto his brother ...*

Not only did the Rabbinic Jews reject it as scripture, but in the modern era, the Protestant Reformers beginning with Andreas Bodenstein and Martin Luther, as well as the modern academic community, also rejected it for a number of reasons, not the least of which have been its alleged historical and geographical errors. Although the Roman Catholic Church has recognized that "certain of the historical difficulties are due to the very imperfect condition in which the text has reached us,"<sup>1</sup> that doesn't tell the whole story. The manuscript tradition of *Tobit* is extremely complicated and confusing. There were multiple different Greek and Latin versions circulating in the Jewish and Christian communities in the ancient world. In the Medieval world, because of the popularity of the story among the Jews, the Christian Greek versions were retranslated back into Hebrew and Aramaic. Then, in the 20th century, with the discovery of text fragments

1. *Tobias*, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company, New York, NY, 1907-1912, <https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=11600>



from *Tobit* in Aramaic and Hebrew among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, even more complexity has been added to the textual conundrum.

What is also amazing is that the text of the book we have in today's Greek *Septuagint* printed by the Orthodox Church of Greece<sup>2</sup> (and its English translations) is only one of the texts that were read and recognized as scripture in the earliest days of the Church. All totaled, there have been two major Greek versions, three major Old Latin versions, as well as Jerome's rather unique Latin Vulgate version (c. AD 405) that have been used by the Church. All of these are part of our Holy Tradition. However, today, only the short redaction called **G<sup>I</sup>** is currently printed by the "official" Church of Greece. Although Jerome's Vulgate version of *Tobit* has become the standard Latin translation in the Roman Catholic Church today, nevertheless, it only slowly attained parity in the Latin speaking churches with the Old Latin translations. Therefore, the goal of this first essay is to address the complicated manuscript tradition of *Tobit* and to make the best sense of it for us Orthodox who have received "the book" as inspired scripture. In Parts II and III we will address the alleged historical and geographical errors and consider interpretation of the book.

#### MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE<sup>3,4</sup>

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran the *Book of Tobit* was known from a variety of ancient translations, the most important being the Greek and Latin versions. It has also been preserved in ancient Arabic, Armenian, Coptic (Sahidic), Ethiopic, and Syrian versions -- all probably derived from either the Greek short recension (**G<sup>I</sup>**) or from the Greek long recension (**G<sup>II</sup>**).<sup>5</sup> These two early Greek versions are themselves thought to be translations of even earlier Hebrew or Aramaic texts.

The three long Old Latin (Vetus Latina) versions of *Tobit* include (1) the Vetus Africa VA, used in Africa, (2) the Vetus Italica VI, used in northern Italy, and (3) the Vetus Hispana VH, used in Spain. They also appear to have been derived from the Greek long recension.

2. [http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/bible/bible.asp?contents=old\\_testament/contents.asp&main=OldTes](http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/bible/bible.asp?contents=old_testament/contents.asp&main=OldTes)

3. Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature Series, de Gruyter, Berlin, 2003, pp.3-33. Online at <https://books.google.com/books/about/Tobit.html?id=GKcFCgAAQBAJ>

4. Di Lella, A. A., *Tobit: To the Reader*, in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)*, 2nd ed. June 2014. <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/19-tobit-nets.pdf>

5. 18. Di Lella, A. A., (translator), *Tobit*, in (*NETS*), 2nd ed., June 2014. <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/>. This contains both **G<sup>I</sup>** and **G<sup>II</sup>**.

#### THE GREEK VERSIONS OF TOBIT:

1. The *Greek Short Recension* (**G<sup>I</sup>**) is found in the 3rd-century papyrus MS 990 (= P. Oxy. 1594 containing *Tobit 12:14-19*), in the 4th-century *codex Vaticanus*<sup>6</sup> (B), in the 5th-century *codex Alexandrinus* (A), in the 8th-century *codex Venetus* (V), and in a host of minuscule manuscripts from as early as the 9th century. This form of the book seems to have been the most commonly used version in the Greek speaking Christian church. **G<sup>I</sup>** contains all the main elements of the Tobit narrative. It is written in good, idiomatic Greek. It differs from the *Long Recension* (**G<sup>II</sup>**) in many instances, which are often striking, e.g., for shortened summary statements, straightforward grammar, and conventional style, but nevertheless agrees with the *Long Recension* in the bulk of the story.


2. The *Greek Long Recension* (**G<sup>II</sup>**) is found in the 4th century *codex Sinaiticus*<sup>7</sup> (S), in a tiny fragment of the 6th-century papyrus MS 910 (= P. Oxy. 1076, which contains only *Tob 2:2, 5, 8*), and in a fragmentary 11th-century minuscule MS 319 (Vatopedi 513, dated A.D. 1021). This long forgotten version reemerged in the nineteenth century, when Constantin von Tischendorf discovered the *codex Sinaiticus* in the library of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844. He subsequently published it in 1846 and 1862. Only then was the importance of MS 319 recognized. Manuscript S contains the whole book of Tobit, except for two lacunae where *Tob 4:7-19b* and *13:6i-10b* are missing. The first lacuna is more than compensated for by MS 319 (containing *Tob 3:6-6:16*), but the second lacuna is not found in any Greek manuscript. Consequently, the missing 5 verses from chapter 13, have to be borrowed from either the Vetus Latina or **G<sup>I</sup>**.

Manuscript S also has a number of minor and usually unimportant omissions of words or phrases which sometimes makes it a little difficult to understand without recourse to the VL or **G<sup>I</sup>** texts. Nevertheless, MS (manuscript) S is generally considered to be the closest approach which can be made to the original text.

Although some interpreters of the *Book of Tobit* have regarded the Greek Short Recension **G<sup>I</sup>** as the more ancient version, most studies affirmed the idea that the Greek Short Recension is a redacted form of the earlier Greek Long Recension **G<sup>II</sup>**. It was produced to

6. Original text of *Tobit* in the codex Vaticanus from the Vatican Library's manuscript can be found at [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.gr.1209](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209) starting in the 4th column from the left.

7. Original text of *Tobit* in the codex Sinaiticus from the British Library's manuscript can be found at <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?book=10#>, in the 3rd & 4th columns.



improve the Greek phraseology and literary character of the Tobit story. It is clear that the differences between G<sup>II</sup> and G<sup>I</sup> are most easily accounted for by a process of shortening and eliminating many of the Semitisms that are found in G<sup>II</sup>. A century ago Oxford scholar David Simpson was already championing the priority of *codex Sinaiticus* and certain *Vetus Latina* manuscripts over the shorter G<sup>I</sup> recension. In his opinion G<sup>I</sup> reflected the literary milieu of a later age than that in which the *Sinaiticus* and the *Vetus Latina* manuscripts appeared.<sup>8</sup>

“Internal evidence also favors G<sup>II</sup> as the basis of G<sup>I</sup>. For example, in *Tobit* 2:3 one would be hard pressed to imagine how the fourteen Greek words of G<sup>I</sup> (*And he came and said, ‘Father, one of our race has been strangled and thrown into the marketplace.’*) could possibly have been the source of the thirty-nine Greek words found in G<sup>II</sup> (*So Tobias went to seek some poor person of our kindred. And on his return he said, ‘Father!’ And I said, ‘Here I am, my child.’ Then in reply he said, ‘Father, behold, one of our people has been murdered and thrown into the marketplace and now lies strangled there.’*). One can readily see how the translator of G<sup>I</sup> has condensed the narrative and the dialogue between Tobias and Tobit. In contrast, G<sup>II</sup> provides the expected Semitic narrative framework as well as the back and forth dialogue of son and father.

“A more dramatic example is 5:10 where G<sup>I</sup> has only eight Greek words: *Then he called him, and he went in, and they greeted each other.* It is extremely unlikely that these eight words could have been the origin of the 149 words in G<sup>II</sup> in which in detailed (typically biblical) fashion Tobit tells the angel Raphael (in disguise as a relative, Azarias) the anguish he experiences because of his blindness and the need he has for a reliable guide to accompany his son Tobias into Media: *Then Tobias went out and called him and said to him, ‘Young man, my father is calling you.’ So he went in to him, and Tobith greeted him first. And he said to him, ‘Many joyful greetings to you!’ But in reply Tobith said to him, ‘What is there for me still to be joyful about? Now I am a man with no power in my eyes, and I do not see the light of heaven, but I lie in darkness like the dead who no longer look at the light. Living, I am among the dead. I hear the voice of people, but I do not see them.’ So he said to him, ‘Take courage; the time is near for God to heal you; take courage.’ Then Tobith said to him, ‘Tobias my son wishes to go into Media. Can you go along with him and lead him? And I will give to you your wages, brother.’ And he said to him, ‘I can go with him; indeed, I know all the roads. Also I went into Media many times, and I crossed all its plains, and I know its mountains and all its roads.’*

“A close examination of chapter 9 in G<sup>I</sup> and G<sup>II</sup> provides further convincing evidence that the former is condensed from the latter. The text of G<sup>I</sup>, which omits many narrative elements, fails to convey the drama and tension found in the much more detailed form of the story in G<sup>II</sup>.

“By reading the translations of G<sup>I</sup> and G<sup>II</sup> synoptically [as formatted side by side in both the print and online copies of

the *NETS*<sup>4</sup> translation], the reader will see many other instances where G<sup>I</sup> condenses G<sup>II</sup> or omits the G<sup>II</sup> repetitions that are a hallmark of biblical narrative. Perhaps the translator of G<sup>I</sup> was writing for a more sophisticated Greek-speaking audience for whom the Semitic-type repetitions and extended dialogues could seem [superfluous or] stylistically less elegant.”<sup>4</sup>

The priority of the G<sup>II</sup> text for *Tobit* seems strongly favored in recent English Bibles. Some of these based on the long recension of *Tobit* include: the Jerusalem Bible (1966), the New American Bible (1970), the New English Bible (1970), the Good News Bible also known as Today’s English Version (1979), the New Jerusalem Bible (1985), the Revised English Bible (1989), the New Revised Standard Version (1989), and the Anchor Bible.

For Greek readers, the *Septuaginta*, edited by Alfred Rahlfs,<sup>9</sup> contains both G<sup>I</sup> (the primary text) and G<sup>II</sup> (the secondary text) below G<sup>I</sup> in a smaller font.


#### THE LATIN VERSIONS OF TOBIT:

1. *The [Latin] Long Recension* corresponds closely with the Greek Long Recension and is found in the *Vetus Latina (VL)*, the Old Latin forms of the book, and therein begins the difficulty. The *Vetus Latina* of *Tobit* is similar to that of many other books of the Old Testament in the Old Latin version -- it did not exist in one form! The churches of Africa used the *Vetus Africana (VA)*. The churches in northern Italy used the *Vetus Italica (VI)*, and the churches in Spain used the *Vetus Hispana (VH)*.

“For scholars working on a critical edition of the various books of the VL, there is no recognized critical text version of the Old Latin for *Tobit*. Consequently, one has to begin the study of the Latin Long Recension of *Tobit* with that given by Brooke-McLean-Thackery, which reproduces a form of the Latin text of P. Sabatier. This Latin text was based on two ninth-century manuscripts Q (Codex Regius, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fond. lat. 93), and P (Codex Corbeiensis, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fond. lat. 11505). In his *apparatus criticus*, Sabatier added readings from G (Codex Sangermanensis, Paris, Bibliothèque National, fond. lat. 11553), containing the text up to *Tob 13:2 (Explicit Tobit iustus)*; and from C (Codex Reginensis, Rome, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, lat.7), containing the text only as far as *Tob 6:12* (the rest being a copy of the Vulgate). Brooke-McLean-Thackery consider MS C to be the ‘nearest to that of the Sinaitic Greek Manuscript (S),’ but it is probably not the earliest form of the Old Latin Version. Yet, as they note, ‘the MSS [manuscripts] of the Old Latin Version known to us, complete or incomplete, are not all of one type. In the absence of a critical text of the VL of *Tobit*, this variety constitutes a problem, which still has to be resolved.’ Two other

8. D. C. Simpson, *The Chief Recensions of the Book of Tobit*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XIV, No. 4. July 1913, pp. 516-530.

9. Alfred Rahlfs (editor), *Septuaginta*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Strütag, Germany, pp. 1002-1039.



manuscripts of the VL of Tobit have been studied, and the differences between them amply illustrate the lack of one type of VL text. They are the ninth century MS X (Codex Complutensis 1, Madrid, Biblioteca Univers, Centr. 31), and the tenth-century MS R (Biblia de Rosas, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds lat. 6). Both of these have been published by F. Vattioni ... [who] also supplies numerous readings of the Tobit text found in the *Speculum*, a work attributed to [St.] Augustine. A. Neubauer has also published a form of the Vetus Itala, which Simpson regarded as 'a carefully corrected text of Sabatier's edition ... Finally, some patristic writers quoted verses from the VL of Tobit, and these quotations prove to be important witnesses of the Latin Long recension."<sup>10</sup>

2. *The [Latin] Short Recension*: Pope Damasus wanted to correct this confusing situation, so he asked the Blessed Jerome to revise the Latin Bible into one version around AD 382. His translation is known as the Latin *Vulgate (Vg)*. Jerome claimed that his new version for *Tobit* was based on an Aramaic text which a learned Jew had translated for him into Hebrew. He then translated this into Latin. His Latin version slowly prevailed in the Christian Church of the West and became dominant around the 8th century. However, the discovery of von Tischendorf's longer Greek MS S from Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, hit the academic world like a tsunami by pointing to the Vetus Latina as being closer to the original version of Tobit, than the short Greek recension. Furthermore, Jerome's recension had its own problems:

"because, on the one hand, Jerome often retained words and phrases from the Vetus Latina (VL), but on the other, he often paraphrased sentences and clauses, and apparently exercised great freedom in adding details to the text, which are not found in any other ancient version. Today no one can say how accurately he rendered what he understood in Hebrew of his Aramaic *Vorlage*. Jerome names both father and son *Tobias* and recounts the narrative in 1:1 - 3:6 in the third person, as opposed to the Greek Short Recension and other ancient versions; apart from 11:18, every mention of Ahikar and his nephew is omitted in the Vg. No matter what the relation of the Vg to the Greek Short Recension and other ancient versions, the Vg is certainly shorter than the Vetus Latina, and hence is regarded as the Latin Short Recension [but it is not synonymous with the Greek Short Recension, because the underlying texts from which they were translated were different and Jerome used quite a bit of freedom and paraphrase in his translation]."<sup>11</sup>

#### THE QUMRAN ARAMAIC & HEBREW VERSIONS OF TOBIT:

"(9) ... Although the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls dates from 1947, the year in which Qumran Cave 1 was found, no fragmentary text of the *Book of Tobit* turned up until the massive jigsaw puzzle of the thousands of fragments

of Qumran Cave 4 was being worked on.<sup>12</sup> Cave 4 had been discovered by Ta-amireh Bedouin in 1952, and the scouring of the cave was completed eventually by archaeologists in that year. It was not until 1956, however, that the first report was published on the work that was being done by the international team that had been assembled to study the Cave 4 fragments.. In J. T. Milik reported that the *Book of Tobit* was represented by fragments of three manuscripts, one in Hebrew and two in Aramaic. Another report was made by Milik at the Strasbourg meeting of the International Organization of Old Testament Scholars later in 1956, in which he announced that he had been able that very year to identify a third Aramaic text written in a fine semi-cursive script, which contained a small part of *Tob 14:2-6*. Subsequently, a fourth Aramaic copy of Tobit was discovered among the Cave 4 fragments.

"(10) Unfortunately, these fragmentary texts were never published by Milik. In 1991 I [Joseph A. Fitzmeyer] was asked by Emanuel Tov, the new editor-in-chief of the series, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, to see to the publication of the Tobit texts. The fragments were eventually published in 1995, and I must once again express my dependence on the remarkable pioneering work of Józef Tadeusz Milik, who did all the drudgery of identifying and piecing together the many fragments that make up the Qumran Aramaic and Hebrew texts of Tobit, which we have today (4Q196-4Q200).

"(11). No one suspected before 1952 that texts of Tobit, if they were to show up in the Qumran Scrolls, would agree normally with the long form of the book found in the Greek recension of MSS S, 319, and 910 or with the long recension of the VL. There are a few instances, however, where the Aramaic or Hebrew forms in the Qumran texts agree with G<sup>1</sup>, but it is more noteworthy that the Qumran fragments of Tobit not only support the Greek Long Recension and VL, but are at times more with the recension of the VL than of Greek MS S ...

"(12) In the five fragmentary texts of Tobit there are all told 69 fragments or groups of fragments (a group being defined as joined fragments that belong together or related fragments that cannot be physically joined).

"(13) Of the Aramaic texts, the first, 4QpapTob<sup>a</sup> ar, is written on light brown papyrus in a late semiformal Hasmonean script (ca. 50-25 BC) ... The second, 4QTob<sup>b</sup> ar, is also written on light tan skin in a late Hasmonean or early Herodian book hand (ca. 25 BC - AD 25). The third, 4QTob<sup>c</sup> ar, is also written on light tan skin in a late Hasmonean or early Herodian book hand (ca. 50 BC), and the fourth 4QTob<sup>d</sup> ar, is inscribed on brown skin in a typical Hasmonean script (dating from ca. 100 BC). The Hebrew text of Tobit 4QTob<sup>e</sup> is written on light brown skin in an early Herodian formal hand (ca. 30 BC to AD 20). It must be remembered that these dates, roughly 100 BC to AD 25, are of those of copies found in Qumran Cave 4.


"(14).The Qumran fragments of Tobit differ considerably from the medieval Aramaic and Hebrew forms of the Book of Tobit that were known prior to 1952.

"The medieval Aramaic form, found in part of a fifteenth-century MS of the Bodleian Library (Hebrew Ms. 2339), was

10. Fitzmeyer, p. 7-8.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

12. Cave 4 was the main depository of texts at Qumran containing copies of all the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible except Esther.



published in the late nineteenth century by A. Neubauer. That Aramaic form of the story agrees with the Vg in telling the story of Tobit in the third person in chaps. 1-3, but the prayer in 3:1-6 is in the first person. Otherwise it differs from the Vg in many ways ... Neubauer maintained that the medieval Aramaic form 'agrees for the greater part with the Sinaitic text, and consequently with the [Vetus] Itala.' He also admitted that 'the Chaldee [Aramaic] text has sentences which are to be found sometimes in one, sometimes in another of the above-mentioned texts; others are peculiar to the Chaldee text or the Hebrew translation ...'

“(16) The Aramaic in which the medieval form is written is not Middle Aramaic, in which Qumran texts of Tobit are composed, but rather Late Aramaic, like the language of the Babylonian Talmud or Syriac [Bible] ... the medieval Aramaic form of Tobit is a translation of a Greek *Vorlage*, probably ... of MS B [*codex Vaticanus*].

“(17) Furthermore, it is clear that the Qumran Hebrew text of Tobit has little to do with the medieval Hebrew forms of the story.<sup>13</sup>

## II. ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

“(19) In the last two centuries the original language of the Book of Tobit has been discussed and debated often. Although the book was known from ancient versions Latin, Greek, Syriac, etc, sometimes it was judged to have been composed in a Semitic language.

“There were a number of scholars, however, who argued that the Greek Short Recension was the original form, and others argued for the Greek Long Recension, as in MS S, when it became known. This was actually an inner-Greek debate about the shape of Tobit, whether the difference in recension proceeded from short to long or vice versa, involving a process of expansion or abridgment ...

“(21) Sometimes comments of writers in the patristic period about the book had been recalled and have been used in the ongoing modern discussion. In his *Letter to Africanus*, written ca. A.D. 240, Origen cited a form of *Tob 2:3*, which agreed verbatim with none of the extant Greek versions but did correspond to them in sense, telling of persons *strangled and thrown on the streets unburied*. Having thus alluded to the text of Tobit, Origen commented:

‘Concerning it, we must recognize that Jews do not use Tobit; nor do they use Judith. They do not have them even among the Apocrypha in Hebrew, as we know, having learned (this) from them. But because the churches use Tobit, one must recognize that some of the captives even in their [Assyrian] captivity became rich and well to do.’ (*Ep. ad Africanum* 19 (SC 302.562).

The Tobit texts from Qumran now show that *some* Jews at least in Christian Palestine did read the Tobit story in Hebrew, and not only in Hebrew, but also in Aramaic. The Qumran texts thus correct the ignorance of Origen and reveal that the Greek form of the story, with which he was acquainted, was a version of it produced perhaps in Alexandria, along with the rest of the Greek OT.

“(22) Nor did Jerome know of a Hebrew form of Tobit, for he seems to have regarded it only as an Aramaic composition. The Qumran Aramaic form of the Tobit story

may supply, then, a background for Jerome’s explanation of the way he produced his translation, but certainly not for his Latin translation of it, known as *Liber Tobiae* or sometimes, *Liber utriusque Tobiae*, which he produced for the Vg. In his letter to Bishop Chromatius of Aquileia and Bishop Heliodorus of Altinum, which is used in the Vg as the preface to his Latin translation, Jerome tells how Jews had excised Tobit from their collection of Sacred Scriptures and relegated the book, written in ‘chaldee,’ to what he called ‘the Hagiography’ ... Although he was not really interested in translating the Aramaic text of Tobit, he thought it wiser to yield to the episcopal demand for a new Latin translation, even though he knew that would go against the judgment of contemporary Pharisees. He wrote:


“‘Because the language of the Chaldeans is related to the Hebrew tongue and since I had found someone who was an expert speaker in both languages, I devoted the work of one day (to the translation): Whatever he rendered for me in Hebrew, I would express in Latin for an engaged secretary.’

“That is Jerome’s own account of the form of the Tobit story that one has in [the] Vg. Modern studies of the Vg, however, show that Jerome’s version was also heavily dependent on the VL, even though his rendering is a considerable abridgment of that long Latin form, for the Vg form of Tobit normally lines itself up with the Greek Short Recension. If Jerome’s version is indeed based on an Aramaic form of the story, then it must have been considerably different in places from the form now known from the Qumran fragments ... Jerome himself admitted in his preface to the Book of Judith that he had translated that book *magis sensum e sensu quam ex verbo verbum transferens*, i.e., *translating more sense for sense than word for word*. It may be that we shall have to reckon with that judgment for his version of the Book of Tobit too ...

“(24) The fact that we now have both Aramaic and Hebrew fragments of Tobit from Qumran reveals something about the book that neither Origen nor Jerome knew, and the debate is engaged anew about whether the original language was Aramaic or Hebrew. The multiple copies of the Qumran Aramaic text of Tobit might suggest that it was read more often in that language than in Hebrew. That, however, is no sign that it was originally composed in Aramaic. So little of the Qumran Aramaic and Hebrew forms overlap that one cannot derive any certain argument from the overlaps about which might have been the original language. While Milik was still joining fragments of the Tobit texts, he wrote, ‘A preliminary investigation suggests that Aramaic was the original language of the book.’ The question is to what extent Milik’s view can be substantiated.

“(25) In 1984 K. Beyer proposed that Hebrew was the original language. In that publication he collected eleven fragmentary lines or words of Aramaic Tobit that Milik had revealed at times in various publications. Even before he had seen either the Aramaic or the Hebrew fragments of Qumran Tobit Beyer spoke of them as ‘probably ... the Hebrew original and the widely used Aramaic targum [a translation with a bit of commentary], popular because of its story.’ Consequently, he classified the Qumran Aramaic story of Tobit with the targums in his book. In the *Ergänzungsband* of 1994 he repeated the same opinion and presented the Aramaic

13. Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature Series, de Gruyter, Berlin, 2003, 3-15.



Tobit texts along with other Qumran targums: ‘The original of the Book of Tobit is written in Middle Hebrew ... and the Aramaic text has been translated from Hebrew ... [Note: Fitzmyer disagrees. He adroitly counters all of Beyer’s technical arguments for the primacy of a Hebrew Tobit, then provides his own evidence to the contrary:]

“(30) These, then, are some of the reasons why I [Joseph A. Fitzmyer] prefer to echo Milik’s judgment that Tobit was an original Aramaic composition, and that the Hebrew form of it is a translation of that.

“(31) The Aramaic fragments of Tobit are good examples of Middle Aramaic and are related to other Qumran Aramaic texts such as the *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Enoch and the Targum of Job* ... My own conclusion about the Aramaic Tobit texts is that it should be dated about the same time as the *Targum of Job* [late 2nd century BC] ...

“(33) My own revered teacher, W. F. Albright, once claimed that the Aramaic of the Tobit texts was ‘in large part Imperial Aramaic, earlier than Daniel,’ but I do not find that to be so. That was a judgment made before the texts were published. Moreover, if this estimate of mine about the Aramaic in which the Tobit story is preserved in the Qumran fragments is correct, then the form of the language may bear somewhat on the date of the composition of the story, an issue that will be discussed further below, but one must remember that copyists have often modernized the spelling of words.”<sup>14</sup>

#### CANONICITY OF THE BOOK OF TOBIT

As mentioned earlier, the *Book of Tobit* is not part of the canon of the Hebrew Bible of the Rabbinic Jews. Modern Jewish scholars have based this on the fact that the marriage contract between Tobiah (Tobit’s son) and Sarah was written up by her father Raguel rather than by Tobiah himself which runs counter to rabbinic law. Others have attributed the distrust of *Tobit* to be its origin in the Israelite diaspora in Assyria. However, the actual reason may be its obvious prophetic portrayal of the salvation of mankind (from enslavement and death at the hands of Satan) effected by Christ Jesus the Son of God, the true Messiah of Israel, the Messiah they murdered to preserve their own authority and position in Judæa and in the Sanhedrin. Regardless of the reason, the *Book of Tobit* was quite popular in the Jewish diaspora in Alexandria, Egypt -- so popular in fact that they translated it into Greek from whatever Aramaic or Hebrew source documents they had for the large Greek-speaking Jewish community there.

Because *Tobit* is found in the major Greek Christian codices *Sinaiticus*, *Vaticanus*, and *Alexandrinus*, as well as in more than 30 minuscules and all the other ancient versions of the Bible, e.g., the Syriac, the Ethiopic, and the Armenian, there is not the slightest doubt that *Tobit* was widely accepted in the early Church.

Moreover, the use of *Tobit* in the Church is further

confirmed by the widespread quoting of it by the Pre- and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church. Michal Wojciechowski, from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn in northeastern Poland has recently written a very scholarly and well researched paper on the canonicity of the Book of Tobit. In it he presents numerous quotes from Christian writers and Fathers from the first four centuries of the Church. He notes that Robert Hanhart’s edition of *Tobit*<sup>15</sup> refers to 80 ancient works from more than 50 authors. Reviewing this and other sources he further notes that the greatest number of quotes come from Latin-speaking fathers of the Western Roman Empire. However, he also includes several Greek speaking fathers from the Eastern Roman world as well.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, no ancient commentary on the text from the first 7 centuries of the Church has survived. The earliest commentary we know of was written by the English Benedictine monk the Venerable Bede (AD 673-735) in the 8th century AD!

Let us now review the lists of the canon of *Holy Scripture* starting with the great biblical codices of the 4th and 5th centuries that included the *Book of Tobit*:

1. *Codex Vaticanus* placed *Tobit* after the historical and didactic books in the following sequence: *Esther*, *Judith*, *Tobit*, and then the prophets.

2. *Codex Alexandrinus* placed *Tobit* after the historical books and prophets: first *Esther*, then *Tobit*, *Judith*, 1 and 2 *Esdras*, and finally 1, 2, 3, 4 *Maccabees*.

3. *Codex Sinaiticus* placed *Tobit* after the historical books: first *Esther*, then *Tobit*, *Judith*, 1 *Maccabees*, 4 *Maccabees*, then the prophets, and the didactic books.

“Eastern [Greek] lists: The synod of Laodicea (about AD 360) in its 60th canon did not include the deuterocanonical books (except for Baruch, appended to Jeremiah). In the same ... century, the *Apostolic Constitutions* (2.57; 6.16) do not mention Tobit. The last, the 85<sup>th</sup> canon of the so-called *Apostolic Canons* ([its] present form [dates] from the sixth century, first citation by John Scholastic about AD 560), also omits Tobit, although it includes some deuterocanonical books (Sirach, III Maccabees). Tobit is lacking also on some later lists, e.g., the list of 60 books and the list of [54] Hebrew books from *Hierosolymitanus*.<sup>17</sup> This Greek tradition was clearly unfavorable to *Tobit*.


“On the other hand, Latin synods and anonymous lists did include it unanimously. Because of the content it was often

15. Hanhart, R., *Septuaginta, Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, VIII, 5, *Tobit*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, Germany, 1983, pp. 185.

16. Michal Wojciechowski, *Authority and Canonicity of the Book of Tobit*, *Biblical Annals*, Vol. 4, No 2, 2014, pp. 381-395. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273462227>

17. *Codex Hierosolymitanus*, a Greek manuscript, written by a scribe named Leo, who dated it June 11, 1056. Its list of Biblical books follows the order of St. John Chrysostom and St. Epiphanius’ *De mensuris et ponderibus* dated AD 392. <http://www.bombaxo.com/2007/05/01/codex-hierosolymitanus-canon-list/>

14. Fitzmyer, pp. 6-27.



placed next to *Job*. The Roman synod from AD 382 mentioned *Tobit* among the historical books. The Synod of Hippo (AD 393), in its 36 canons, listed, after the prophets, also *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Esther*, 1 and 2 *Esdras*; the same was done by the Carthaginian synods in AD 397 and AD 419. Perhaps this proximity to prophets explains the name of a prophetic book given to *Tobit* by Ambrose [of Milan, c. 337- 397 AD] (*De Tobia* 1). The letter of the pope Innocent I to Bishop Exsuperius (AD 405) placed first the five ‘Solomonic books’ and later *Psalms*, *Job*, *Tobit*, *Esther*, *Judith*, 1 and 2 *Maccabees*. The anonymous *Canon Mommsenianus* (before AD 367) contains *Tobit* after the historical books and *Job*, and before *Esther*, *Judith* and *Psalms*. *Canon Claromontanus* (about AD 400) places *Tobit* at the very end of the *Old Testament*, after *Esther* and *Job*. The Pseudo-Gelasian decree (fifth or sixth century) lists the prophets and later *Job*, *Tobit*, *Esdras* (two?), *Esther*, *Judith*, *Maccabees* (two). [Thus, we see that] *Tobit* is usually found [listed] among the books of the Hebrew canon.

“The lists given by individual writers have more often than not omitted *Tobit*. Melito [of Sardis, reposed 180 AD], according to Eusebius (*Church History* 4.26.13–14), had listed the Old Testament books after the Palestinian traditions, without the deuterocanonical books. Origen [of Alexandria c.184-253 AD] in his commentary to *Psalms*, written in his youth and also known through Eusebius (6.25.1–2), presented the Hebrew names of the biblical books. Did he omit the deuterocanonical ones because he did not recognize them, or because he did not have them in Hebrew? On the other hand, he quoted *Tobit* as Scripture ...

“The famous *Festal Letter* of St. Athanasius from AD 367 discerns between ‘canonical’ Old Testament books, identical with the Jewish canon, New Testament books, and the books which are to be read: *Wisdom*, *Sirach*, *Esther*, *Judith*, *Tobit*, *Didache*, *Shepherd*.<sup>18</sup> ‘Canonical’ books (*kanonizomena*) and ‘read’ books (*anaginoskomena*) are different from the apocryphal ones. Nevertheless Athanasius consistently quoted the deuterocanonical books as Scripture, especially *Wisdom*, but sometimes *Tobit*, too: *Apology against Arians* 11 (*Tob* 12.7); *Apology to Constantius* 17 (*Tob* 4.19).

“Earlier, St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catecheses* (4.35, probably from AD 348) mentioned only the Old Testament books translated from Hebrew into Greek, and indeed in his work he virtually never refers to the deuterocanonical books. Theodore of Mopsuestia [350-426 AD] rejected the deuterocanonical books; his opinions are known through the work of Paulus of Nisibis, adapted in Latin by Julius Africanus (*Instituta regularia* 1, 3–7). He mentions books of

18. “But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.”  
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxv.iii.iii.xxv.html>

*perfectae auctoritatis* and of *mediae auctoritatis*, by many added to the *divina historia*. *Tobit* is not named here, but Julius mentions it with *Daniel* in relation to the angelology (1.4).

“St. Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Panarion* 8.6.1–4 (about AD 375) and in *De mensuris et ponderibus* 4 (about AD 392) quotes the Jewish list, mentioning *Wisdom* and *Sirach* as questioned by the Jews, which leaves us in some doubt about his own opinion. Also, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, in his theological poem (*Carmen* 1.12; about AD 374–379?) presents the list of the recognized books stemming from the old Hebrew wisdom. St. Amphilochius of Iconium repeats the Hebrew list (iambic poem to Seleucus, vv. 251–319; about AD 396). St. John of Damascus [c. 675-749 AD] repeated the list of Epiphanius (*Exposition*, Bk.4, Ch.17) ...

“The position of Jerome was ambiguous. In the background we have the general opinion of Jerome on the Greek books of the Old Testament. Because of the *hebraica veritas* he considered them a lower category, called *apocrypha*, but respected their use by the Church.

“His translation of *Tobit* came into being slightly after 400 AD, when he had already finished his main translation work. In the prologue to this translation he gave the circumstances of his decision (*Praefatio in librum Tobiae*, PL 29.23–26). He was prompted by bishops Heliodorus and Chromatius who asked him to translate also a book in Chaldean (Aramaic), namely the book of Tobias, excluded by the Hebrews from the list of holy books and added to *hagiographa*. This last term is surprising: either *apocrypha* is meant (*hagiographa* would be a copyist mistake), or *ketubim* [the writings], the third group of the Hebrew canon. Jerome approved this demand, saying that it is better to follow the opinion of bishops rather than of “the Pharisees”, as he wrote, apparently meaning the Rabbinic tradition.

“However, his translation suggests a limited interest and care for this book. The work was based on the Aramaic text (perhaps a secondary one) and included paraphrases. It was done in a hurry and in addition orally. [He had a helper who translated from Aramaic to Hebrew. Jerome then dictated his new Latin translation which often depended on the Old Latin.]

“Jerome would therefore conform, at least externally, to the general judgement of the Western Church. However, when he expressed his own opinion, he questioned the canonical value of *Tobit* more than once. It happened in his earlier writings: in *Prologus Galeatus* (first of the series); in the prologue to Proverbs (and others): *Tobit* is read by the Church, but without a doctrinal authority in the *Commentary to Jonah*. On the other hand, he did quote sayings from *Tobit* as Scripture later (*Tob* 12.7 in *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 8.2–4; *Tob* 2.14 in *Commentary on Sophonias* 3.19–20). We are uncertain what his final judgment was.

“...St. Hilary of Poitiers [310-368 AD] in his treatise on the *Psalms* (*Instructio Psalmorum* 13–16) quoted the list of 22 Old Testament books, but stated that *Tobit* and *Judith* can be added to obtain the number of 24. Rufinus [340-410 AD] (*Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed* 37- 38; about AD 400) repeated the distinctions of St. Athanasius, calling the two groups *canonic* and *ecclesiastici* (with *Tobit*). St. Augustine [354-430 AD] not only quoted *Tobit* as Scripture, but also placed it in the canon, as other Greek books of the Old

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Testament, listing *Job*, ***Tobit***, *Esther* *Judith*, *Maccabees* (two) and *Esdras* (two) among the historical books (*De doctrina christiana* 2.8.13). Cassiodorus [485-585 AD] lacked consistency, either following Jerome (*Institutiones* 1.12), and omitting his “apocrypha”, or St. Augustine (1.13) and the contents of Old Latin and Septuagint version (1.14); the catalogue of books held in Vivarium placed *Tobit* between *Job* and *Esther* (1.6). Isidore of Seville [560-636 AD] followed St. Augustine, noting that the Jews did not recognize this book as canonical, whereas the Church did accept it (*In libros Veteris ac Novi Testamenti Proemia* 5–7; *Etymologiae* 6.1.19).<sup>19</sup>

As noted above, *Tobit* was listed among the canonical books by the Council of Hippo (AD 393) in Canon xxxvi and also by the Council of Carthage (AD 397).<sup>20</sup> These canons were collected and added to others to form a single document, the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae* (c. AD 419) by Dionysius Exiguus, and forwarded to Rome for final approval by Pope Boniface I (who sat as Pope from Dec 28, 418 - Sep 4, 422). This “*African Code*” contains the following:

“It was also determined that, besides the Canonical Scriptures, nothing be read in the Church under the title of divine Scriptures. The Canonical Scriptures are these: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two books of Paraleipomena, Job, the Psalter, five books of Solomon, the books of the twelve prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Daniel, **Tobit**, Judith, Esther, two books of Esdras, two books of the Maccabees. Of the New Testament: four books of the Gospels, one book of the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen

Epistles of the Apostle Paul, one epistle of the same to the Hebrews, two Epistles of the Apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, one book of the Apocalypse of John.”

These African churches were Latin speaking, and no doubt read *Tobit* in the *Vetus Africana* version of the Old Latin text. Consequently, I would presume that it was the Old Latin text of *Tobit* that they canonized in AD 393 and 397 and which was confirmed in Rome in 419. Jerome’s translation of the Vulgate was not completed before AD 402, so it played no role in the African local council’s canonical list, and consequently no role in its confirmation by Pope Boniface I in AD 419.

Thus, it would appear that *Tobit* was considered canonical by the Latin-speaking Church, and that would have been in the *Vetus Latina long Latin Recension* corresponding closely with the *long Greek Recension*. The Greek-speaking Church didn’t recognize *Tobit* as Holy Scripture in any regional synod. Nevertheless, several individual Greek Fathers of the Church did consider *Tobit* as Scripture and quoted it as such. The canonicity of *Tobit* was widely assumed following the commentary by the Venerable Bede [672-735 AD]. Bede’s private opinion, however, was that it was not of canonical authority. ❖ ❖ ❖

19. Michal Wojciechowski, *Authority and Canonicity of the Book of Tobit*, *Biblical Annals*, Vol 4, No. 2, 2014, pp. 389-94 at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273462227>

20. 3rd Carthage at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/carthage.html>

