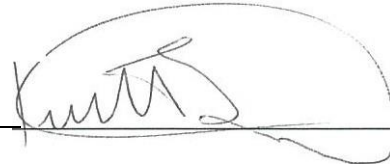


SURVIVAL OR 'SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES'?:
A SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DIALOGICAL READING OF QOHELET'S WISDOM

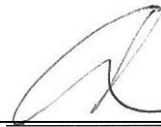
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SURVIVAL OR ‘SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES’?:
A SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DIALOGICAL READING OF QOHELET’S WISDOM

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Presented to the Faculty of the

Brite Divinity School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Interpretation

Fort Worth, TX

March 2023

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Bibliographical Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BARIS	BAR (British Archaeological Reports) International Series
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by J.A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993-2014.
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . Edited by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum. 2nd ed. 22 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E.J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>

<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEH	Lust, Johan, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, eds. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003.
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-2004.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
<i>OEANE</i>	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . Edited by Eric M. Meyers. 5 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OTL	The Old Testament Library
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHAJ	Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan
SymS	Symposium Series
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006.

TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Chapter I. Introduction

Section 1.01 Thesis on Qohelet's Wisdom

Within this dissertation I intend to study how Qohelet's discourse on wisdom is a product of larger socio-economic realities and webs of intertextuality. This project will attempt to work out these central questions: How is wisdom conceptualized within Qohelet, and more precisely, how is this conceptualization 1. related to the socio-economic factors of the Ptolemaic imperial regime in third century BCE Judea—the proposed time and place of Qohelet's composition (see below); and 2. a function of an intertextual dialogue (see below) amongst other cotemporaneous societal perspectives and textual traditions—in particular the book of Proverbs and the *Tobiad Romance*, a text preserved within Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (Ant. 12.4.1-11 §154-236)?

I propose that within Qohelet wisdom (חכמה) plays an important, yet limited, role in the text's attempt to describe an adequate way to negotiate the socio-economic realities of Ptolemaic Palestine characterized by the exploitation of agricultural extraction, debt slavery, and bureaucratic hierarchies. In the earlier and “paradigmatic” wisdom book of Proverbs, although there is clearly value placed on a person being “practically wise” in their navigation of the world, the text's “traditional” conception of wisdom most fundamentally represents an ethical quality; wisdom for Proverbs is centered around forming virtuous persons who through their wisdom are able to pursue and achieve a measure of flourishing and well-being. Conversely, the *Tobiad Romance* suggests that the exercise of a kind of “wisdom,” conceived primarily as cleverness and wit in relation to the Ptolemaic royal court, ensures the survival of the Judean polity, even as it authorizes elite participation within the extractive and unjust Ptolemaic political and economic structures. Put otherwise, this tale frames participation in the Ptolemaic extractive regime as necessary for the well-being of the Judean community, even though such participation functions to ensure the economic prospering of only elite figures like the Tobiads, often at the expense of non-elite producers (tenant farmers, slaves, small scale landowners, etc.).

Qohelet, in a way that is similar to but also distinct from both Proverbs and the *Tobiad Romance*, represents a narrowly pragmatic view of wisdom as knowledge and a set of practical skills.¹ However, Qohelet also perceives much more fully and critically than does the *Tobiad*

¹ The idea also draws upon a broader notion of חכמה in the Hebrew Bible that associates it with a type of skillful expertise. Textual examples include: the skillful work on Aaron's vestments (Ex 28:3); Bezalel and

Romance the ephemerality and instability of successful participation in the Ptolemaic economic and social structures, as well as the persistent injustice that pervades the imperium's social and economic hierarchies. As a result, Qohelet sees wisdom neither as a moral practice of the virtues that enables a life of flourishing—when/if there is access to material resources (as in Proverbs)—nor as that which guarantees a substantial political and economic payoff (as in the *Tobiad Romance*); Qohelet, rather, believes that wisdom can be possessed by those who neither flourish nor have much hope for flourishing, given that they likely won't be able to enjoy sufficient political and economic resources to do so (e.g., Qoh 4:13; 9:11, 15). Instead, wisdom for Qohelet represents a kind of shrewd knowledge and practical skill that helps one to survive in the daily struggle of living in a world fraught with economic exploitation and a lack of moral retribution; it makes possible survival as one negotiates the Ptolemaic imperial objective of economic extraction. Arising from this socio-economic and dialogical context, Qohelet values wisdom for its ability to offer a profit (יתרון) that amounts not to flourishing as with Proverbs, nor extravagant elite success (which if obtained is always fleeting) as with the *Tobiad Romance*, but to survival, an occasional bit of shade for those “living under the sun” (Qoh 7:12).

Section 1.02 Review of Scholarship on Qohelet, Wisdom, and the *Tobiad Romance*

Building upon scholarly and exegetical precedents, my reading of Qohelet will begin and operate from the materialist assumption that “social being shapes consciousness.”² This approach will historicize Qohelet by foregrounding the Ptolemaic political and economic context out of which the text emerges as a primary factor for how Qohelet rhetorically presents a conception of wisdom. Further, this will also allow an analysis of how Qohelet's view on wisdom is participating in an intertextual relationship with other texts—both from analogous socio-historical contexts (the *Tobiad Romance*), and similar, but distinct milieus (the book of Proverbs).

Oholiab's metal work in furnishing the tent of meeting (Ex 31:3, 6); metal, masonry and carpentry work in the construction of the Temple (1 Kgs 7:14; 1 Chr 22:14; 2 Chr 2:7); the professional women mourners (Jer. 9:16 [17]); and the interpretation of dreams (Gen 41:8). According to Thomas Krüger, Qohelet responds to excessive claims of wisdom by rooting it in this “elementary meaning” as a useful expertise that assists persons in avoiding “dangers and unnecessary exertions without being able to guarantee them the success of their work...” (*Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 24).

² Barbara Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 4.

I will situate my study of Qohelet at the intersection of two prominent issues contemplated by Qohelet scholarship: a consideration of the nature and role of wisdom in Qohelet, and the book's relation to other ancient texts. Qohelet often gets labeled as a perplexing text in part due to its inherent contradictions regarding its evaluation of "wisdom." Qohelet contains a number of negative or ambivalent statements about the value of wisdom (1:13; 2:12-17; 7:7:16, 23-26; 8:16-17; 9:11-12), while deploying wisdom forms (2:14; 4:5-6; 7:1-12; 9:17-18; 10:1-20; 11:1-4), and articulating several statements that promote wisdom over folly (2:13; 4:13; 10:2, 12;), or assert the value of wisdom (7:11-12, 8:1, 9:13-18, 10:12-13). These contradictions within Qohelet often are interpreted in light of the other major wisdom texts of the Hebrew Bible, most notably how the text relates to Proverbs' confidence in the worth of wisdom, or what it has in common with Job's "skeptical wisdom."³ I intend to argue that Qohelet values wisdom for its ability to engender survival, and that the book's ambivalent statements on wisdom do not indicate that wisdom is ineffective for Qohelet. However, the author's observations of economic exploitation, agricultural extraction, and debt slavery taking place in the third century BCE lead to a questioning of whether one's life and labor "under the sun" are able to achieve any sense of profit and/or future security. I will argue that these factors cause Qohelet to reconfigure and reevaluate wisdom vis-à-vis other works that deploy a concept of wisdom. This reconfiguration and reevaluation leads to a deviation from perspectives—like that which many believe is evident in Proverbs—where wisdom discourse appears to promote conceptions of strict moral retribution, where good and bad deeds are repaid appropriately (see below). Yet neither does Qohelet's understanding of wisdom move in a sharply skeptical direction regarding the value of wisdom as some believe the book of Job does.⁴

Although scholars have attempted to make sense of Qohelet's contradictory statements regarding the value of wisdom by examining how Qohelet relates to other ancient texts such as Proverbs and Job, there remains no scholarly consensus for understanding Qohelet's rhetoric of wisdom. Scholarly discussion surrounding Qohelet's status as a "wisdom" book is highly

³ Qohelet has also been read comparatively with many other ancient Near Eastern wisdom and instruction texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Most notable are the Egyptian pessimistic text *The Dispute Between A Man His Ba*, and the ancient Sumerian and widely distributed tale of the *Gilgamesh Epic*. For a thorough overview see Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 60-65.

⁴ For example, Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, BZAW 197 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991).

contested. Positions on Qohelet's status as "wisdom" literature may be generalized into three broad perspectives: 1) Qohelet represents "wisdom in crisis" or revolt; 2) Qohelet is not actually a "wisdom" work; 3) Qohelet is rooted in a wisdom with its skepticism and critique accepted as a valid part of the tradition. This dissertation will rely upon insights from each these perspectives but will primarily be situated within the third scholarly view that is presented.

Qohelet as "wisdom in crisis" is a popular view shared by many scholars, and non-academic readers alike. Taken up in one or another form by noteworthy commenters such as Gerhard von Rad, James Crenshaw, Frank Crüsemann, Elsa Tamez, and Leo Perdue, this view states that much of the content within Qohelet contradicts the teachings presented in Proverbs, and functions as a type of corrective to this older wisdom.⁵ The basis for such a corrective appears to be an experience of the author that does not conform to the outlook of conventional wisdom. For example, Crenshaw posits that the earlier wisdom of Proverbs taught that fear of God and adherence to wisdom would guarantee "long life, prosperity, progeny, and honor." Though certain texts within Proverbs may deviate from this deed-consequence model, overall Proverbs presents a resounding confidence in the efficacy of moral retribution whereby positive and negative effects follow almost automatically from good and bad deeds.⁶ In response, Qohelet presents an alternative view, discerning that there is no moral order at all: chance determines everything, the future is mysterious, and the fate of death affects all (i.e., Qoh 3:11, 19; 6:12; 8:14-17; 9:11-12). Within this view "wisdom" is broadly equated with a doctrine of moral retribution that is believed to permeate the teaching in Proverbs. Such a posture is expressed in the work of Mark Sneed, who writes that a deed/consequence connection "forms the ethical matrix of the aphoristic material in the book of Proverbs," with Qohelet effectively

⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 226-238; James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 23-28; Frank Crüsemann, "The Unchangeable World: The 'Crisis of Wisdom' in Koheleth," in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 57-77; Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 14. Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 202-203.

⁶ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 23. This view of moral retribution is typically based in Klaus Koch's oft-cited essay "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1-42. In English, Klaus Koch, "Is there a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James Crenshaw (London: SPCK, 1983), 57-87. For a critical response to Koch's reception in Proverbs scholarship, see Peter Hatton, "A Cautionary Tale: The Acts-Consequence 'Construct,'" *JSOT* 35.3 (2011): 375-384; Anne W. Stewart, "Wisdom's Imagination: Moral Reasoning and the Book of Proverbs," *JSOT* 40.3 (2016): 351-372.

deconstructing this notion through the text's "questioning of the contemporary formulation of retribution."⁷

Because Qohelet appears to resist this scholarly construct of moral retribution, the text is then viewed as unequivocally resisting the essence of wisdom. According to Crenshaw this "radical view" expressed by Qohelet is indicative of "an intellectual crisis in the circle of the wise."⁸ Crüsemann attributes this intellectual crisis to a shift in the social landscape, wherein Qohelet represents an elite aristocratic perspective of an indigenous Judean under Hellenistic rule whose social experience within the Ptolemaic economy has left Qohelet isolated from the beliefs, traditions, and kinship structures of Israel.⁹ Much like this perspective, I intend to consider how Qohelet's evaluation of wisdom is influenced by social factors. However, I do find the "wisdom in crisis" view to be a bit restrictive in how it defines wisdom.

Another view taken up by scholars such as R.N. Whybray, Mark Sneed, and Will Kynes, interrogates the labeling of Qohelet as "wisdom" literature by questioning the validity of designating texts interested in wisdom as a literary genre.¹⁰ The argument from this perspective is that the approach of viewing Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as a part of a wisdom tradition has subsequently engendered a narrow conception of how these texts are related to other literature within the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East. Specifically, Whybray has proposed that the author of Qohelet was not a "wisdom writer" rooted in a particular tradition designated as wisdom, but rather represents an "independent thinker" who examines and proposes revisions for the whole of the Jewish religious tradition.¹¹ Though my research will assume Qohelet is participating in an ancient discourse and worldview centered around the concept of wisdom, I will employ scholarship that considers Qohelet's broader intertextual relationships, extending to works outside of those typically designated as wisdom literature.

⁷ Mark Sneed, "(Dis)closure in Qohelet: Qohelet Deconstructed," *JSOT* 27.1 (2002): 117.

⁸ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28.

⁹ Crüsemann, "The Unchangeable World," 59-64. Similarly, Leo Perdue attributes this perceived crisis to Qohelet's encounter with Hellenism and its intellectual tradition of Skepticism (*The Sword and the Stylus*, 199).

¹⁰ R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989); Mark Sneed, "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2011): 50-71; Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 8.

A third perspective of Qohelet's status as wisdom views the text as firmly a part of the larger wisdom tradition of the ancient Near East and ancient Israel. This dissertation will be undertaken from this third perspective, emphasizing how Qohelet readily uses wisdom forms, employs wisdom's vocabulary, and continually identifies value in wisdom (e.g., Qoh 7-8, 10-11). Notable scholars who take this view, such as Michael Fox, C.L. Seow, and Thomas Krüger, do not deny the inherent contradictions and critiques of wisdom present within Qohelet, nor the differences between Qohelet and the paradigmatic wisdom book of Proverbs. What this perspective rests on is a more comprehensive defining of what wisdom is, both as a literary genre and a worldview.¹² This view acknowledges that Qohelet is participating in a long tradition of incorporating earlier conceptions of wisdom, reshaping them, and going beyond them. As Seow points out, commentators who view Qohelet as a heterodox work within the wisdom tradition define sapiential orthodoxy solely based on what is in Proverbs. According to Seow this is too narrow of an understanding of wisdom, and it neglects what is known from wisdom texts in the larger ANE corpus.¹³ Further, not only is wisdom too narrowly equated with Proverbs, there is a tendency within biblical scholarship to identify the central tenant of traditional wisdom within Proverbs as a "doctrine of retribution."¹⁴ Thus, when Qohelet appears to resist ideas of retribution (e.g., 1:9-11; 3:16-22; 6:10-12; 8:14), it is an easy move to then identify Qohelet as a revolt or crisis of wisdom. However, this is only tenable if one holds to as narrow understanding of Proverbs. By understanding how wisdom is extensively conceived in Proverbs and the ancient Near East, it becomes apparent that Qohelet is drawing upon and reimagining wisdom, not merely deconstructing it.

Historical critical work has added perspective on Qohelet's complex conception of wisdom by dating the text to a time of shifting intellectual and economic realities, suggesting

¹² Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear down and a Time to Build up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 87-96; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 65-69; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 22-24.

¹³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 68.

¹⁴ Proverbs scholars have noted that the doctrine of retribution, though certainly present, is only a piece of the overall presentation of wisdom within Proverbs. Sandoval explains that Proverbs is ultimately concerned with human flourishing and achieving that which will enable it. The presence of cause-and-effect language is only one part of the larger discursive work used to promote and form a moral and virtuous person. As Fox clarifies "[Wisdom] is an ethical quality, never merely instrumental. It is also a quality of character, for it entails not only the knowledge of the right ends but also the will to pursue them" (Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000], 29) In other words, conventional wisdom as expressed in Proverbs is to be defined not in terms of retribution, but in terms of character formation and the promotion of virtue.

that this generated an epistemological crisis that gets reflected in Qohelet. Like most wisdom literature, Qohelet does not contain overt historical references.¹⁵ Yet several textual indicators have led scholars to generally agree that the text emerges from the third century BCE, when Judea was under Ptolemaic rule. In this study I will follow the recent trend of biblical scholarship that situates Qohelet in Jerusalem in the second half of the third century BCE and emphasizes the importance of understanding the Ptolemaic social and economic realities for interpreting the book.¹⁶

By the third century BCE the Ptolemies, a Greek dynasty ruling their empire from and through Egypt, had laid claim to Jerusalem and Judea by incorporating it into the Ptolemaic province of Syria and Phoenicia. Following both historians and biblical scholars, I argue that the Ptolemies governed Judea by enlisting and authorizing indigenous elites to serve in a stratified bureaucratic government (Qoh 5:7).¹⁷ In this agrarian society, the Ptolemies accomplished their governing objective of generating and maximizing revenue through the harvesting of the land's natural resources. The Ptolemies increased efforts at monetizing the economy and enacted arduous policies of taxation and land extraction in order to funnel resources into their own treasury. The Ptolemaic bureaucracy efficiently conducted these policies by employing local scribes to survey the land and assess its potential for taxation and reallocation. The economic policies of taxation and land extraction engendered economic hardship for indigenous tenant farmers and small-scale landowners, leading to an increase of debt-slavery and dispossession.¹⁸

¹⁵ I follow the trend in contemporary scholarship that asserts that the allusions to Solomon in 1:1 and 1:12-2:11 are rhetorical devices, and Qohelet was not written by or during the time of Solomon.

¹⁶ For an assessment and overview on the third century dating of Qohelet see Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 3-9; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 19-21; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 49-52. A noteworthy variance is Seow who proposes an earlier date during the Persian period in the late fifth or early fourth century BCE (*Ecclesiastes*, 21). For works that explicitly center the Ptolemaic economy in interpreting Qohelet see Crüsemann, "The Unchangeable World", 57-77; Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 14-17; C. Robert Harrison, "Qoheleth Among the Sociologists," *BI* 5.2 (1997): 160-80.

¹⁷ Roger S. Bagnall, *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions Outside Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 11-24; J. G. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 129-181; Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 58-63; Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM, 1991) 18-32; Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 59-75; Jack Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 21-40; Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 145-155.

¹⁸ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 34, 39-40; Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 147-148.

My study will focus upon how these realities give rise to Qohelet's textual emphasis upon the value of wisdom as a means of practical knowledge and skill that aids one in surviving these harsh circumstances.

The *Tobiad Romance* represents a text that is also concerned with Ptolemaic control of Judea and has provided enlightening details regarding the social and political climate of this era. Present within Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (Ant. 12.4.1-11 §154-236), The *Tobiad Romance* narrates the tale of a wealthy father and son from Judea who win the favor of the Ptolemaic king and queen and establish themselves as tax farmers collecting tribute within the area of Palestine and the Transjordan. It is generally believed that Josephus incorporated The *Tobiad Romance* from an earlier source into his Jewish history, with most scholars agreeing that it represents a literary narrative and not a mere historical recount. However, it is believed that details contained within this text are reflective of the socio-economic context of the third century BCE—when the Ptolemies governed Judea.¹⁹ Further, evidence for the existence and activity of the Tobiad family is attested within multiple texts and exists within the archaeological record.²⁰ Commenters on Qohelet, following the lead of Second Temple historians, will often engage the *Tobiad Romance* to illustrate the social and political realities of Judea under Ptolemaic rule, emphasizing the heavy taxation and the participation of local elites in Ptolemaic extraction. However there has been little consideration of how the *Tobiad Romance* itself—as a literary work and ideological text—constitutes a full and genuine intertext of Qohelet.

Avenues for exploring Qohelet's intertextual relation with the *Tobiad Romance* are made possible by the work of scholars who have analyzed the literary and rhetorical features of the *Tobiad Romance*. Jonathan A. Goldstein and Sara Raup Johnson have asserted that the *Tobiad Romance*—with its uncritical view of Ptolemaic rule, affirmation of the Tobiad's participation within it, and the tragic suicide of Hyrcanus—rhetorically functions as pro-Ptolemaic/anti-

¹⁹ Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context*, HCS 43 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 81. Jonathan A. Goldstein, "The Tales of the Tobiads," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Morton Smith and Jacob Neusner (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 123. Both these works explore the chronological issues present within the *Tobiad Romance*—of which there are many—but ultimately affirm the historical likelihood of the characters, and the tale's reflection of actual political circumstance. Though the actual source may be dated to the late second century, Johnson's source-critical work concludes that Josephus' original source was based on oral traditions arising around the figure of Joseph who operated during the mid-late third century BCE (*Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity*, 79-82)

²⁰ B. Mazar, "The Tobiads," *IEJ* 7 (1957): 137-45; C.C. McCown, "The 'Araq El-Emir and the Tobiads," *BA* 20 (1957): 63-76.

Seleucid propaganda.²¹ Lawrence Wills has classified this work as an ancient Jewish historical novel that depicts Joseph and Hyrcanus as protectors and heroes of the Jewish people who utilize their cleverness and wit to endear themselves to the Ptolemaic royalty in order to participate in the ancient patronage system.²² Susan Niditch offers an especially enlightening overview by identifying various ancient folktale patterns and motifs within text, concluding that the tales of Joseph and Hyrcanus employ a father-son folktale pattern that is interlaced with court wisdom and tyrant typologies.²³ Drawing upon this scholarship I intend to read the *Tobiad Romance* as representative of a wisdom discourse that emphasizes shrewdness and wit in navigating imperial structures (court wisdom), while also justifying the participation of elite figures within these oppressive structures as communally necessary.²⁴ The emphasis upon shrewd action within the *Tobiad Romance* has similarities to the wisdom discourse presented within Qohelet; yet the two works vary in their views on how one should interact with royalty, their perception of injustice, and the possible payoff of shrewd action. Within this dissertation I intend to engage in a thorough analysis of the *Tobiad Romance* in order to demonstrate how Qohelet's conception of wisdom can be read in an intertextual relationship with the discourse of wisdom present within not only the paradigmatic wisdom text Proverbs, but the Hellenistic work of the *Tobiad Romance*.

In order to adequately discern this relationship, consideration will need to be given to issues of authorship, voice, and the social location of Qohelet. Rooted within historical research, I presuppose the text of Qohelet to be a scribal work wherein the author(s) would have been aware of and reacting to the economic hardships of taxation and extraction.²⁵ I will base my reading of Qohelet within previous scholarship that has discerned multiple voices and personas

²¹ Goldstein, "The Tales of the Tobiads," 104. Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity*, 89-90.

²² Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 187-193.

²³ Susan Niditch, "Father-Son Folktale Patterns and Tyrant Typologies in Josephus' Ant. 12:160-222," *JJS* 32.1 (1981): 47-55.

²⁴ A similar motif of a wise person participating in a foreign royal court is present within the biblical accounts of Joseph (Gen 37-50), Esther, and Daniel (Dan 1-6).

²⁵ According to Günther Hölbl indigenous scribes were employed as retainers by Ptolemaic bureaucrats for assessing, registering, and recording land in order to account for its taxation potential (*A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59). This indicates that the members of the scribal class would have likely been firsthand witnesses to and participating within—whether by choice or coercion—Ptolemaic objectives of extraction and the subsequent oppression of indigenous landowners. Also: Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 149-150.

within the text when considering issues of authorship and perspective. I will argue that the book of Qohelet contains at least two distinct voices: the epilogist who introduces the book in 1:1, and then concludes it in 12:9-14,²⁶ and Qohelet, whose words and perspective make up the majority of the text in 1:3-12:7. My reading will follow the view notably put forth by Michael Fox and Tremper Longman,²⁷ who read the epilogist not as a mere editor, but as the primary author of the text, including the words of Qohelet. The primarily first-person account of Qohelet then represents a persona utilized as a literary device by the author(s) to accomplish their rhetorical goals. Though the persona of Qohelet appears to be maintained from 1:3 through 12:7,²⁸ I recognize and read a shift in perspective of the persona at the end of chapter two and beginning with chapter three.

This split persona of Qohelet may be identified by the varying titles provided by the epilogist. Qohelet is described as both a king who rules in Jerusalem (1:1, 1:12) and a sage/wise person who teaches the people (12:9-10). I intend to argue for and demonstrate the validity of a reading that recognizes a distinction between “King Qohelet” (1:12-2:26) and “Sage Qohelet” (3:1-12:8). Though the persona of Qohelet may shift in perspective, both King and Sage Qohelet work together to accomplish the author’s rhetorical aim.²⁹ In regard to the book’s presentation of wisdom, King Qohelet represents a satirical portrayal and undermining of one who uses the rhetoric of wisdom in justifying an elite status engendered by exploitation (1:16-17; 2:4-10). Here I follow the work of Carolyn Sharp, Timothy Sandoval, and Lisa M. Wolfe who read this section as a satirical “royal fiction”—a text that is evoking an image of Solomon in order to offer a subtle (or, not-so-subtle) mocking of elite figures.³⁰ Sage Qohelet, on the other hand,

²⁶ Fox and others have discerned 12:13 to represent another, distinct voice from that of the epilogist (*A Time to Tear Down*, 373-375). In this view, 12:13-14 represents a late postscript by an editor, which sought to associate Qohelet with broader trends of Second Temple Judaism. Though this view certainly has merit, at this point my project would not benefit from parsing out yet another perspective in the text.

²⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 363-375; Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 4-9.

²⁸ As Fox explains, this block of text represents a long quotation, mostly from the first-person perspective. One exception is 7:27, where the authorial voice appears referencing Qohelet in the third person, much like the “motto” verses of 1:2 and 12:8 (*A Time to Tear Down*, 365).

²⁹ Some scholars have attempted to deal with this shift by discerning a moral transformation by the royal figure. For example, the Targum interprets Ecclesiastes as the story of Solomon’s apostasy during his life and return to orthodoxy in his old age (Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 3). Elsa Tamez distinguishes between Qohelet and an author, but proposes that both represent “renegade aristocrats” who protest the creation of poverty and oppression (*When the Horizons Close*, 15). While these may be creative attempts to smooth out the oft-noted transition by the speaker Qohelet, neither is made apparent by the text. For my purposes, I will not attempt to elucidate any explanatory continuation, but simply note the shift in perspective and consider how it is functioning literarily.

³⁰ Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature

represents a perspective that is attempting to discern how one lives in a world of “King Qohelets,” positing wisdom not as an elite virtue, but as a source of knowledge and practical skill that provides a means for survival (4:13; 7:11-12; 8:1-9; 9:11-18; 10:8-10).³¹

Section 1.03 Approach and Methodology

My approach to the study of Qohelet in this dissertation cannot be characterized by a single methodology but will draw upon multiple modes of inquiry in order to offer exegetical insight into my central question regarding the status of wisdom in Qohelet. My reading strategy will follow a primary assumption put forth by literary approaches such as New Historicism, ideological criticism, and socio-economic/materialist criticism that “literature is viewed as integrally tied to and identified with other material realities that make up a social context.”³² This dissertation will incorporate insights from historical critical work and economic analyses of Judea under Ptolemaic rule in order to elucidate these material realities that impacted the production of Qohelet. I will utilize various theoretical concepts drawn from Marxist literary criticism (e.g., materialism, modes of production, dialectics, class³³) and postcolonial criticism (e.g., the notion of hybridity and liminality³⁴) as instruments for analyzing how both the texts of

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 196-219; Timothy J. Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon in the Royal Fiction of Ecclesiastes,” in *On Prophets, Warriors, and Kings: Former Prophets through the Eyes of Their Interpreters*, ed. George J. Brooke and Ariel Feldman, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 13–40; Lisa Michele Wolfe, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, Wisdom Commentary 24 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020), 19-28.

³¹ For similar claims in the recent study of Qohelet, see the dissertation of Lydia Hernández-Marcial, “Life Under the Sun: Contradictions and Resistance in Ecclesiastes from a Puerto Rican Perspective” (PhD diss., The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2020).

³² Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 6.

³³ For the use of Marxist concepts within biblical interpretation as a means for interpreting texts as a reflex of their economic base and situated within real-life power relations, see Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Norman K. Gottwald, “Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies,” *JBL* 112.1 (1993): 3-22; Gale A. Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body” in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 138-160. Tamez utilizes such concepts in her work on Ecclesiastes, emphasizing concepts such as labor, utopia, and materiality (*When the Horizons Close*, 24-30).

³⁴ For the use of the postcolonial concept of hybridity in biblical studies see Jin Hee Han, “Homi K. Bhabha and the Mixed Blessing of Hybridity in Biblical Hermeneutics,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1.4 (2005): 37.1-37.12. For a more thorough introduction to Postcolonial criticism in biblical studies see Uriah Y. Kim, “Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?” in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 161-182; Fernando F. Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R. S Sugirtharajah (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 33–44.

Qohelet and the *Tobaid Romance* are interacting with their socio-economic and imperial environment.

In addition to sketching the social-economic and political context of Qohelet, I will primarily be conducting an investigation of Qohelet's intertextual relations with Proverbs and the *Tobaid Romance* based on the work and insight of Mikhail Bakhtin in order to read Qohelet as a text rooted in a specific social situation and to discern how its concept of wisdom is a product of participating in a broader dialogical environment. A Bakhtinian approach to intertextuality emphasizes that language embodies "the stratifications, unfinalized interpretations, ideological positions, and class conflicts" of any society in any epoch of history.³⁵ Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia suggests that every text represents an utterance, and every utterance enters into a "rhetorical environment" wherein it is a response to a broader societal question.³⁶ Important for Bakhtin is that words, utterances, and languages are consistently interacting and overlapping with other words, utterances, and languages as they exist in particular societies and in the consciousness of real people.³⁷ As an utterance, a text does not exist in monological isolation, but rather it "enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group..."³⁸ This interaction and overlapping of utterances are "historically and socially significant" and generate meaning through this linguistic interaction amongst individuals or groups within specific social contexts.³⁹

While Bakhtinian insights into intertextuality may be found in various writings across Bakhtin's career, my analysis will primarily draw upon Bakhtin's late essay "The Problem of Speech Genres."⁴⁰ Though dense in its presentation, Bakhtin's work on speech genres provides a

³⁵ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2nd ed., (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 29. For a review of the complex interactions between biblical studies and the literary/philosophical notions of intertextuality, see David I. Yoon, "The Ideological Inception of Intertextuality and its Dissonance in Current Biblical Studies," *CurBR* 12.1 (2012): 58-76.

³⁶ Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, eds. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Hayes. Rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 166-167.

³⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 291-292.

³⁸ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 276.

³⁹ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 17.

⁴⁰ M.M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60-102.

multi-faceted social and linguistic theory for analyzing the complex relationship between Qohelet and “traditional wisdom,” on the one hand, and other inflections of wisdom discourse in the *Tobiad Romance* on the other; this will involve giving consideration to how a text is at once specifically contextualized and dialogically engaged. Bakhtin identifies speech genres as “relatively stable” forms of language and communication that are drawn upon to construct unique utterances.⁴¹ While speech genres may be generic, they are utilized to construct utterances that are always unique and contextual. When this occurs, the utilized speech genre has the capability to become “re-accented” as it enters into a dialogue surrounding whatever object or topic the utterance is directed toward. Within this new “dialogical environment,” the speech genre—including the typical words it may use—is imbued with varying evaluations and emphases that may alter its meaning from prior uses, albeit an alteration that has already existed as a possibility within its rhetorical trajectory.

To theorize how Qohelet is dialogically engaged with other texts surrounding the concept of wisdom, I propose that the language and rhetoric of wisdom be analyzed as a type of Bakhtinian speech genre; that is, a way of speaking that reflects a certain understanding of reality, and that carries within it a potentiality for being taken up and used in different circumstances, with the possibility of varying evaluations. Reading the language and perspectives of wisdom as a speech genre, I argue that Qohelet draws upon traditional language, ideas, and rhetorics of wisdom (, and “re-accent” these with varying evaluations that are related and directed to a specific socio-historical context, that of Ptolemaic Palestine in the third century BCE.

In order to frame how Qohelet is implementing and re-accenting “traditional” wisdom rhetorics in light of the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine, consideration will be given to how wisdom is framed and developed within the book of Proverbs, and Qohelet’s subsequent relationship to it. Recognizing that Qohelet was not the only utterance to make use of a wisdom speech genre within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine, but was engaging in a broader dialogical environment surrounding this particular context, I will also analyze the *Tobiad Romance* as a varying perspective of how the concept of wisdom is used to navigate this social context. Consideration will be given to how the *Tobiad Romance*, like Qohelet, is re-accenting

⁴¹ As will be demonstrated, speech genres can represent both simple acts of speech and more complex works of literature. For Bakhtin, both are considered to be “utterances,” and understood as acts of communication.

“traditional” wisdom constructs, which in this work is represented by the book of Proverbs. Though both texts draw upon wisdom, they each maintain a nuanced emphasis of the function of wisdom, presenting varied evaluations for its purpose in navigating the socio-economic realities of Ptolemaic Palestine. Thus, they each “re-accentuate” the speech genre of wisdom from their own perspective.

To fully grasp Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres, I will discuss the purpose it serves within Bakhtin’s overall project of a “dialogic conception of language.”⁴² This will necessarily involve delineating key Bakhtinian concepts, including the utterance and dialogue. I will demonstrate how the consideration of speech genres can provide theoretical insight into textual relations that takes into account the larger socio-historical environment from which the text arose. Since this approach may be broadly identified as an intertextual approach within literary studies, attention will first be given to the concept of intertextuality.

Throughout, my study of Qohelet’s intertextual relations will also require a literary analysis of Qohelet’s language and rhetoric in order to discern the text’s accented ideological response to the socio-economic moment and dialogical context it is historically situated in. My inquiry into Qohelet’s response will involve the text’s use of socio-economic terminology (e.g., מִסְכָּן עֵמֶל, יִתְרוֹן), and discerning how this language intersects with the text’s broader discourse on wisdom. Through this exegetical process I intend to work out how Qohelet’s discourse of wisdom is a production of and response to the material realities and intertextual environments of Judea in the third century BCE.

(a) Bakhtin in Biblical Studies and the Interpretation of Qohelet

Before divulging into the theorization of intertextuality and Bakhtinian thought, I will first situate my use of Bakhtin in this project by acknowledging major works in biblical scholarship that employ Bakhtinian concepts as a guiding hermeneutic.

Two noteworthy overviews on Bakhtin and biblical studies are Barbara Green’s monograph *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*,⁴³ and *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, a volume of essays edited by Roland Boer.⁴⁴ Green’s work provides an

⁴² Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 123.

⁴³ Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

⁴⁴ Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

overview and introduction to Bakhtinian concepts with suggestions on how they can be appropriated for biblical scholarship. Boer's volume contains the work of various scholars who bring Bakhtin to bear on the question of genre within various corners of biblical scholarship. Boer explains in the introduction that, while Bakhtin has become increasingly influential upon biblical studies under what may be classified as "literary approaches" or "postmodern approaches," what had not been fully explored (up until this publication) was how "Bakhtin's thought and critical practice intersect with longer traditions within biblical studies such as form criticism," namely in how it connects with genre.⁴⁵

Particularly influential in the use of Bakhtin for biblical interpretation is Carol Newsom, who was a contributor to Boer's edited volume. In an early essay "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," Newsom, like Green, theorized in broad terms the ways in which Bakhtin could be applicable to biblical interpretation, specifically in its theological assertions;⁴⁶ this was consideration also taken up by L. Juliana M. Claassens, who attempted to build on Newsom's initial insights.⁴⁷ Newsom's work on utilizing Bakhtin in biblical studies continued in her sophisticated monograph *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, which interprets Job through Bakhtin's conception of polyphony.⁴⁸

The use of Bakhtin in intertextual approaches to biblical interpretation has been particularly prevalent in the work of Patricia K. Tull. In her published dissertation *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah*, Tull uses Bakhtin to discern how other Hebrew Bible texts come to be taken up and re-read in Isaiah 40-55.⁴⁹ Tull has also contributed two essays to collected volumes that advocate for the use of Bakhtin in the rhetorical and intertextual analysis of texts, and has published an article interpreting psalms of lament through Bakhtinian concepts.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Boer, *Bakhtin and Genre Theory*, 3.

⁴⁶ Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *JR* 76.2 (1996): 290-306.

⁴⁷ L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology," *JBL* 122.1 (2003): 127-144.

⁴⁸ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Patricia Tull Wiley, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah*, SBLDS 161 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," 156-180; Patricia K. Tull, "Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Dialogical Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," in *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, RBS 93 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 175-189; Patricia K. Tull, "Bakhtin's Confessional Self-Accounting and Psalms of Lament," *BibInt* 13 (2005): 41-55.

The use of Bakhtin in discerning intertextual connections within wisdom literature has been notably broached by Timothy J. Sandoval and Matthew Goff. Sandoval has recently published essays discerning a dialogical relationship between the prophecy of Amos and the book of Proverbs, and has added a Bakhtinian flavor to the scholarly debate on the relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism.⁵¹ Similarly, Goff uses Bakhtin to theorize a connection between wisdom and apocalypticism, specifically discerning a relationship between Qohelet and the texts of 4QInstruction and the book of Mysteries within the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁵²

As evidenced by Goff's article, the use of Bakhtin to interpret Qohelet has been broached in various articles. Particularly noteworthy for Qohelet scholarship is the revised dissertation of Jimyung Kim in *Reanimating Qohelet's Contradictory Voices: Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*. Kim's work provides a reading of Qohelet that explores aspects of dialogism present with the text of Qohelet itself, particularly attending to the various "contradictions" within the text.⁵³ The use of Bakhtin in biblical studies, intertextual approaches, and Qohelet scholarship is well established, and this project will attempt to add to this growing body of scholarship.

(b) Bakhtinian Concepts and Intertextuality

The use of Bakhtinian concepts in approaches to intertextuality within Biblical studies is symptomatic of Bakhtin being considered one of the concept's primary theorists. Broadly speaking, the idea of "intertextuality" within literary theory, as Graham Allen explains, is a postmodern concept that moves away from signifying the "originality" of a work, and instead recognizes how it is formed from preexisting ideas and materials. Accordingly, intertextuality foregrounds "notions of relationality, interconnectedness, and interdependence,"⁵⁴ and centers the teasing out these relations as a foundational goal of interpretation. Intertextual theory has primarily been associated with work of Julia Kristeva, who is believed to have coined the term

⁵¹ Timothy J. Sandoval, "Prophetic and Proverbial Justice: Amos, Proverbs, and Intertextuality," in *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, RBS 93 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 131-151; Timothy J. Sandoval, "The Relationship of Wisdom in Apocalyptic in von Rad and Beyond," in *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature*, eds. Timothy J. Sandoval and Bernd U. Schipper, AIL 46 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022), 377-410.

⁵² Matthew Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, eds. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 587 (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 214-225.

⁵³ Jimyung Kim, *Reanimating Qohelet's Contradictory Voices: Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*, BibInt 166 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018).

⁵⁴ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 5.

and has provided an oft-cited “definition” of intertextuality: “any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”⁵⁵ Kristeva based her work, in part, on the concept of dialogism she gleaned from Bakhtin and her engagement with, and critiques of, Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist concept of a *signifier* and *signified*.⁵⁶ Although Kristeva is commonly credited with introducing Bakhtin’s work to the philosophical schools of the Western world, her access to Bakhtin and the expanse of his work was quite limited at the time, thus constricting her ability to explore the depths of Bakhtinian concepts in her formulation of intertextuality.⁵⁷

Having now gained a fuller access to Bakhtin’s works, we can more fully understand Bakhtin’s unique contributions to the idea of intertextuality. Specifically, Bakhtin adds an important layer to how we can conceive of intertextual relations between words, thoughts, and texts by placing an emphasis on the social aspects and social interactions of linguistic communication. Though he does not define it in a systemic way, much of Bakhtin’s work was an attempt to work out a dialogical conception of language that emphasized how entities interact and communicate. For Bakhtin, language’s primary purpose was communicative, as it always exists within specific social contexts, and is necessarily overlain with specific social evaluations.⁵⁸ In this sense language is at no point neutral, but rather its social dimension embodies “the stratifications, unfinalized interpretations, ideological positions, and class conflicts” of any society in any epoch of history.⁵⁹ In Saussurean terms, Bakhtin places more emphasis upon the *parole* (the individual speech act) than the *langue* (the system)—the primary

⁵⁵ Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37. For a thorough and critical discussion of Kristeva’s early conception of intertextuality, see Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), 20-24.

⁵⁶ William Irwin, “Against Intertextuality,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28.2 (2004): 228. For Saussure, notions of intertextuality arise from the idea that language represents a generalized and abstract system consisting of non-referential linguistic signs whose meaning primarily comes from their differentiation with one another. This system of signs exists outside of and above any speaker, and prior to any act of communication. Kristeva adopted aspects of Saussure’s structuralist thought, but by synthesizing Saussure with Bakhtin Kristeva “points to the post-structuralist position that there is no ‘transcendental signified,’ no signified behind the signifier. Signifiers do not refer to anything beyond, to anything outside the system of signifiers.” Kristeva’s move into poststructuralism involved a critique of structuralist thought as being “too objective—hence, restrictive,” and advocated for “a more subjective method that encourages liberty and creativity for the reader” (Yoon, “The Ideological Inception of Intertextuality,” 64).

⁵⁷ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 16.

⁵⁸ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 15-16.

⁵⁹ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 29.

focus of Saussure's linguistics, though Bakhtin objects to such a distinction. Bakhtin's focus is not necessarily upon linguistics, but rather human communication, which cannot be reduced to the mechanical use of a linguistic system, and certainly involves extralinguistic elements.⁶⁰

(i) *Utterance*

The crucial idea for Bakhtin is his notion of an "utterance," which he identifies as the basic unit of human speech. Utterances are unique units of "speech communication" that occur within humanity's myriad of lived contexts and maintain a particular aim within a dialogic setting.⁶¹ Bakhtin explains that language and speech are always cast, and only exist, in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking subjects.⁶² As Bakhtin writes "language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (*oral* and *written*) by participants in various areas of human activity."⁶³

With the emphasis upon human communication, complete utterances are not determined by any length or grammatical standards, but rather are marked off by a beginning and an end as it occurs within a dialogue: "its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others."⁶⁴ Such open-ended criteria for an utterance allows for a broad understanding of the forms utterances may take. Utterances may occur as spoken, written, or any other act of human communication. Emerson and Morson explain that utterances can "be as short as a grunt and as long as *War and Peace*," with the defining characteristic not being its length, but its ability to respond and be responded to.⁶⁵ Thus, unlike structuralist conceptions of language, Bakhtin's concept of the utterance rejects the idea that language primarily exists above or outside of human activity. As Bakhtin argues "language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest in language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well."⁶⁶

(ii) *Heteroglossia*

The master trope of Bakhtin's work, and of how he conceives the relationship between utterances, is his concept of heteroglossia. Heteroglossia refers to the stratification of a unitary,

⁶⁰ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 125.

⁶¹ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 125-127.

⁶² Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 71.

⁶³ See Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 60. Italics added.

⁶⁴ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 71.

⁶⁵ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 125-126.

⁶⁶ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 63.

or national language into various vernaculars that include “social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, languages of generations and age groups” and, “languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purpose of the day.”⁶⁷ It must be understood that the various languages and dialects of heteroglossia are not wholly differentiated, but are rooted in a common, linguistic system that is officially recognized as a literary language. This is a “more or less fixed system” with repeatable features that make communication possible.⁶⁸ The fixed, literary language then undergoes a process of stratification and diversification into languages that are bound to socio-ideological contexts. Bakhtin explains that “Every utterance participates in the unitary language” and at the same time partakes of “social and historical heteroglossia.”⁶⁹

The concept of heteroglossia, therefore, is an attempt to articulate the immense plurality of experience as it is reflected in language. Bakhtin recognizes that speech is diverse according to factors such as class, profession, geography, or gender.⁷⁰ This social stratification of language is often marked by differences in forms that are used to convey various meanings. These languages are not simply words or expressions, but are “specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values.”⁷¹ According to Ken Hirschkop, the various languages that make up Bakhtin’s idea of heteroglossia are best termed as “socio-ideological languages,” and should not be merely understood as “different ways of speaking,” but more fully are “different ways of seeing the world and acting within it.”⁷² From Bakhtin’s perspective, then, heteroglossia exists within society as “a welter of intersecting groups and different ideologies,” with language representing a “point of view” that “is also described as an *interested* point of view: it embodies not just a perspective but a set of values or desires.”⁷³

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 262.

⁶⁸ Michael Holquist, Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, by M.M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xix.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 272.

⁷⁰ Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*, 53. Gender is the addition of Green, as Bakhtin does not ever reference gender as a participant in heteroglossia. However, I agree with Green in that even though Bakhtin does not mention it, gender as social factor in constructing languages fits within Bakhtin’s model.

⁷¹ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 291-2.

⁷² Ken Hirschkop, *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 93.

⁷³ Ken Hirschkop, “Introduction: Bakhtin and Cultural Theory,” in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 20.

(iii) Dialogism and the Relationships among Utterances

It is out of the concept of heteroglossia that Bakhtin develops the notion of dialogism, and specifically the dialogic orientation of utterances. Important for Bakhtin is that “socio-ideological languages” of heteroglossia do not exist in isolation, but are consistently interacting and overlapping with one another as they exist in society and in the consciousness of real people.⁷⁴ They may be juxtaposed, mutually supportive, contradictory, or interrelated. However they encounter, heteroglot languages encounter one another dialogically. Each utterance formed within these languages is therefore contextualized to dialogical environments arising from human activity that is situated within particular social circumstances. Each utterance is then understood to exist in dialogue, as they are directed toward a particular topic or object of speech. Yet this is not a singular event, as utterances will enter into an environment of other utterances regarding the topic it is directed toward, and they will subsequently become shaped and influenced by these other utterances.

A Bakhtinian concept of intertextuality recognizes that all utterances depend on these other utterances within a dialogized heteroglossia, as every word becomes a response to previous words, and elicits further responses.⁷⁵ Bakhtin explains that the words directed toward its object or topic enters “an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme,” and necessarily interacts with this environment in an individualized way. While in this “dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements, and accents,” the word will weave “in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group...”⁷⁶ In other words, utterances are both shaped by, and responding to, the previous utterances and pre-existent patterns of meaning surrounding the given topic, theme, or object of speech. Further, utterances are also shaped by the anticipation of the utterances that will follow in response to it, as it functions as a link in the broader dialogical environment it has entered into.⁷⁷

In addition to their participation in dialogized environments with other utterances, utterances will also be shaped by the specific historical and social contexts that produce them. Bakhtin argues that features of an utterance, such as content, style, and compositional structure,

⁷⁴ Hirschkop, “Introduction,” 20.

⁷⁵ Graham, *Intertextuality*, 27.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 276.

⁷⁷ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 137; Allen, *Intertextuality*, 18-19.

are determined by “the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication” that they exist in, as they reflect the environment and objectives of a particular instance of human activity.⁷⁸ For Bakhtin this makes each utterance unique and ultimately unrepeatable, even if it is word-for-word identical to another utterance. It’s “reason for being,” or its occurrence, is specific to the context that produces it; this context will influence how it is communicated by a speaker and received by a listener. As Morson and Emerson aptly put it, “context is never the same.”⁷⁹ Thus, utterances cannot be reduced to a particular system or structure, but are embodied and subjective acts that are “specifically social, historical, concrete, and dialogized.”⁸⁰

Consequently, if a text—or a piece of writing—is to be considered an utterance, then it’s form, content, and overall message are going to be affected by the broader dialogue surrounding the topic being spoken to. Inherent within the act of generating an utterance that is both responding and capable of being responded to, is developing an evaluative judgement or stance “toward a referential object”—a particular theme, topic, or object that the utterance is speaking about. Utterances are always evaluating the topic or object that they are directed at, and are never neutral.⁸¹ As V.N. Voloshinov, a contemporary who worked closely with Bakhtin, explains, “no utterance can be put together without value judgement. Every utterance is above all an *evaluative orientation*.”⁸² The position, or “evaluative attitude,” adduced by the speaker will further determine how the utterance is presented and stylized.

In this dialogic environment, utterances are heavily influenced by the other utterances surrounding a topic or object, relying upon them while also presenting a unique position that may be refuting, affirming and/or supplementing the utterances it is responding to. As Bakhtin notes, no speaker is “the biblical Adam,” the first to speak on any given topic. Every utterance is always engaging in topics that have “already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways.”⁸³ Bakhtin explains that an utterance will occupy “a particular

⁷⁸ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 60.

⁷⁹ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 126.

⁸⁰ Michael Holquist, Glossary to *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, by M.M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 433-434.

⁸¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 184; Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 134. Voloshinov: “no utterance can be put together without value judgement. Every utterance is above all an *evaluative orientation*.” Quoted in Morson and Emerson

⁸² V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York: Seminary, 1973), 105. Italics original to the quotation in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 134.

⁸³ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 93.

definite position in a given sphere of communication” regarding the specific question or topic that the utterance is directed at; but this position is impossible to determine without correlating it to other positions surrounding the given question, topic, or object.⁸⁴ As a result, the evaluative position of an utterance is not solely determined by the speaker’s attitude toward the referential object or topic, but the utterance is also expressing “the speaker’s attitude toward others’ utterances.”⁸⁵

In terms of intertextuality, this means that utterances are not isolated or indifferent from other utterances, but “are aware of and mutually reflect one another.” Since this awareness occurs within the context of dialogue (responding and being responded to), Bakhtin explains that “each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of the sphere of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication.”⁸⁶ Bakhtin explains that each utterance “is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.”⁸⁷ Utterances are filled with “dialogic overtones,” and no matter how philosophical or scientific they may be, or how focused they are on an object, each one is in some measure responding to what has already been said on the given topic or issue.⁸⁸ Morson and Emerson summarize Bakhtin’s thought by noting that in every act of communication “we respond to something spoken before and we take a stand in relation to earlier utterances about the topic.” Each utterance is shaped by a perception of the prior utterances “as hostile or sympathetic, authoritative or feeble, socially and temporally close or distant.”⁸⁹

Thus, while each utterance is unique, existing in an unrepeatable moment and circumstance, its participation in a dialogized environment surrounding a particular topic means that it will be constructed from “already established patterns of meaning recognizable by the addressee and adapted by the addresser.”⁹⁰ Bakhtin explains that “each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types*” of utterances, which Bakhtin terms “speech genres.”⁹¹ I will now turn to specifically delineating Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres in order

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 91.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 92.

⁸⁶ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 91.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 69.

⁸⁸ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 92. Thus, texts that represent contextualized acts of communicating a particular message, such as the *Tobiad Romance*, may themselves be considered utterances.

⁸⁹ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 137.

⁹⁰ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 18.

⁹¹ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 60. Italics original.

to set up how the various languages and rhetorics surrounding wisdom may be considered a type of speech genre that texts draw upon and make use of for their own unique utterance.

(c) Bakhtinian Speech Genres

Bakhtin develops the notion of speech genres to more fully argue how language is primarily situated within human activity and based in human communication.⁹² Speech genres are types of utterances, specifically the generic forms in which speakers cast their speech. They represent specific ways of speaking within various human activities, and are utilized by speakers to communicate an utterance in a known and recognizable form. For example, a military command may be considered a speech genre, as it uses standard forms of language and a recognizable intonation to present an expression that is rooted in a particular human activity that usually involves distinct social relations between the persons involved: the command that a higher-ranking officer would give to a soldier. The use and importance of speech genres lies in their ability to make communication possible and easier. Because these generic forms are generally known, the use of speech genres allows both the speaker and listener to develop appropriate expectations for the communication that is delivered through the utterance.⁹³ One of the ways that utterances become interrelated in the dialogical sphere surrounding a referential object is through the use of shared speech genres.

(i) *Genre and Speech Genre*

To further understand speech genres, it is probably best to place it within Bakhtin's overall theory of genre. Within Bakhtin's dialogic conception of language that centers the historically and socially bound utterance, genres represent "a specific way of visualizing a given part of reality."⁹⁴ Pavel Medvedev—who like Volshinov was a contemporary with Bakhtin and whose work is often used to further understand Bakhtin—conceived of genre not merely in terms of literature, but as forms that govern daily speech and thought. For Medvedev, utterances are formulated according to generic principles that "establish ways of seeing" within given circumstances. Because humans encounter a myriad of experience and social situations, Medvedev notes that a "human consciousness possesses a series of inner genres for seeing and

⁹² Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 65.

⁹³ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 291.

⁹⁴ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 275.

conceptualizing reality.”⁹⁵ For example, as Medvedev explains, the difference between a short story and a novel is not the mere quantity of words, but a difference in vision: short stories capture anecdotal aspects of life, while novels attempt to describe “the fundamental character of an epoch or other large social phenomenon.”⁹⁶

This idea of genre implies that individuals and/or societies are continually needing to learn new genres and develop their repertoire of genres as they encounter new experiences and social circumstances. Morson and Emerson explain that Medvedev and Bakhtin conceived of genres as “combinations of specific blindnesses and insights,” explaining that each genre is “adapted to conceptualizing some aspects of reality better than others.”⁹⁷ Authors who contribute to a genre learn to experience the world in the genre’s way, while each reader or hearer is invited to view the world in the genre’s specific way. According to Morson and Emerson, genre in this sense is neither a form nor an ideology, but is best understood as what they term “form-shaping ideology.” That is, the use of a genre represents “a specific kind of creative activity embodying a specific sense of experience.”⁹⁸

This act of communicative creativity arising from experience is further explicated in how Bakhtin conceives of what he terms a “speech genre.” Bakhtin explains that when an individual intends to communicate, or to form an utterance, the speaker will implement a “speech plan,” wherein they choose a known speech genre that appropriately fits “the specific nature of the given sphere of communication.” In doing so, the intentions of the speaker are applied and adapted “with all its individuality and subjectivity” to the chosen speech genre where it is then “shaped and developed within a certain generic form.”⁹⁹ This use of a generic form does not, however, diminish the uniqueness of each utterance. Rather, the utterance draws upon a genre that carries “the generalizable resources of particular events” and uses “those resources to accomplish new purposes in each unrepeatable milieu.” Otherwise stated, “beginning with the given, something different must be created.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 134. Quoted in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 275.

⁹⁶ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 277. Quote and cite Medvedev in *The Formal Method*, 134-135.

⁹⁷ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 276.

⁹⁸ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 282-283.

⁹⁹ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 78.

¹⁰⁰ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 291.

While it is nearly impossible to categorically distinguish various speech genres due to their “extreme heterogeneity,” Bakhtin nonetheless differentiates between primary and secondary speech genres.¹⁰¹ Primary speech genres are more simple acts of everyday speech communication. This may include rejoinders in everyday dialogue and/or other acts of private communication among humans that tend to represent more basic uses of language. Secondary speech genres, on the other hand, “arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on.”¹⁰² Secondary speech genres are primarily written, and may take the form of novels, dramas, scientific research, or “major genres of commentary.” While secondary speech genres may “absorb and digest” primary genres in their formation, both primary and secondary speech genres are considered to be utterances, or acts of speech communication. As utterances, secondary speech genres—no matter their complexity—can be analyzed as language subject to the process of historical formation and “belonging to various spheres of human activity and communication.”¹⁰³

The role of speech genres not only matters for the author or speaker who constructs an utterance, they allow hearers or readers to pick up on a known form and develop appropriate expectations and understandings of the utterance. When a listener is able to generate an understanding of the utterance through a known speech genre, they are then able to take “an active, responsive attitude toward it” through actions that may include: agreeing or disagreeing with it, augmenting it, applying it, or preparing for its execution.¹⁰⁴ Though the degree of the response may vary, Bakhtin emphasizes, as has been said, how the understanding of a speech or utterance elicits a response wherein “the listener becomes the speaker.”¹⁰⁵

By emphasizing the communicative purpose of language, Bakhtin argues that humans are “given” speech genres in the same way that one is “given” their native language. Because of their practical and communicative use, speech genres are mastered “fluently long before we begin to study grammar.”¹⁰⁶ As Morson and Emerson explain, whenever we attempt to speak or communicate, we “do so in one or another speech genre.” Because each genre carries within it a

¹⁰¹ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 61.

¹⁰² Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 62.

¹⁰³ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 62.

¹⁰⁴ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 68.

¹⁰⁵ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 68.

¹⁰⁶ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 78.

set of values and ways conceiving various kinds of experiences, their applicability is often more appropriate in some contexts than others. Thus, to “know a language is to command a repertoire of its speech genres,” and to apply them skillfully.¹⁰⁷ In the process of applying speech genres to utterances, speakers will assimilate them into the new and varying contexts that emerge, possibly allowing for their modification. This process allows speech genres to “accumulate experience” as their continued use within new contexts makes them liable to evolve and be re-accented. I will now focus upon how Bakhtin’s envisions the evolving nature of speech genres, giving ultimate consideration to the process of re-accentuation.

(ii) *The Evolution of Speech Genres, their typical words, and Reaccentuation*

For Bakhtin (speech) genres are not merely static templates applied to one’s speech; rather they are more appropriately organisms that are constantly evolving with every new and distinct utterance that takes them up. This means that the present use of a genre may significantly vary from past usages due to a life of constantly being utilized and adapted for new and varying contexts. Though every genre, to some degree, is an external template applied to the formation of an utterance, it is always possible that creative and new uses of a genre can awaken “the semantic possibilities that lie within it.” This allows for a genre’s continued use within new circumstances, but may result in a fluctuating of its emphases and evaluations.¹⁰⁸ Since genres represent ways of seeing and conceiving of reality, their continued use over time within varying contexts does not eradicate prior conceptions, but rather allows for an accumulation of “forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world” that remain with the genre.

As Morson and Emerson explain, “Genres are the residue of past behavior, an accretion that shapes, guides, and constrains future behavior.”¹⁰⁹ A genre’s history becomes a record of shifts in daily practices and values, reflecting changes that may have resulted from their being taken up in new social realms. In the present, we encounter (speech) genres that are available to us as language that has “traversed the long and complicated path of generic stylistic testing and modification.”¹¹⁰ Bakhtin stresses that genres continue, even if subtly, to carry their history of past usages and former ways of conceiving reality. This past journey and its “archaic” elements

¹⁰⁷ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 293-294.

¹⁰⁸ M.M. Bakhtin, “Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff,” in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 290.

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 65.

are preserved within the genre “thanks to their constant renewal, which is to say, their contemporization.”¹¹¹ This “remembrance” of past uses allows for new possibilities of a (speech) genre to be taken up, adapted, and assimilated into a present and different context.¹¹² When this occurs, there is always the possibility that within a new context there might be a revival of prior evaluations, emphases, and conceptions.

Genres and speech genres will also preserve and remember certain words that are characteristic of that genre. Because speech genres are typical forms of utterances, they will include within them a “certain typical kind of expressions that inheres in it,” wherein certain words will acquire “a particular typical expression.”¹¹³ But of course, Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of context by reiterating that the utterance gives the word a “specific sense” that is related “to a particular actual reality and particular real conditions of speech communication.”¹¹⁴ As such, the use of various speech genres tends to correspond to typical situations as well as “particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances.”¹¹⁵ The meaning or connotations of a word are related to what Bakhtin terms its “stylistic aura,” which is based in its “typical (generic) expression” and related to the “genre in which the given word usually functions.”¹¹⁶ This means that speech genres, and the typical words that they use, while ultimately determined by the specific context in which they occur, will gain and carry with them meanings related to the typical or similar situations of reality that they have a history of occurring in.

Accordingly, when one constructs an utterance, the words chosen for the utterance are not chosen because of their “neutral, dictionary form.” Rather, they are gleaned from other *utterances of similar genres*, specifically with those similarities in theme, composition, and style.¹¹⁷ While each utterance is unique, it is formed and constructed through a “continuous and constant interaction” with other individual utterances. This formation occurs through a dynamic interaction between a speaker’s unique expression and the typical words of a speech genre that have been made known through other utterances. The words drawn from other utterances are

¹¹¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 106.

¹¹² Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 297.

¹¹³ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 87.

¹¹⁴ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 86.

¹¹⁵ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 87.

¹¹⁶ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 88. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 294.

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 87.

chosen not merely because of what they have meant in other utterances, but more precisely because of how their past usages can generate a specific meaning within a particular context. This is done to accommodate the speaker's expressive goals within their unique context. These words come to the speaker already imbued with a certain expression or evaluative tone, but then get assimilated and re-worked according to the expressive purposes of the new speaker. This represents a process of what Bakhtin terms "re-accentuation."¹¹⁸

Both speech genres, and their typical words—the materials used to construct an utterance—"submit fairly easily to reaccentuation."¹¹⁹ Reaccentuation happens when speech genres and words are drawn from a prior utterance and adopted into in an utterance occurring within a new or different context, thus generating a shift or modification in the emphasis and evaluation carried by the adopted words or genre. As stated earlier, every utterance is evaluative, as the words that make it up are overlain with the speaker's emotion, evaluation, and expression. This puts a particular stress or emphasis upon the material of the utterance, but such evaluations and emphases change over time as the words and genres come to be picked up in new and varying contexts.¹²⁰ It is through these unique uses in new contexts that genres and words gain a "new accent," which subsequently effects what words mean and how they are understood within the process of communication. Bakhtin explains that within different contexts typical meanings may be shifted wherein, for example, "the sad can be made jocular and gay." Thus, the use of the word in a new act of speech communication can result in a new or altered meaning for the word.¹²¹

An alteration in the meaning of a word can occur because, as Bakhtin explains, words are *living*. Words utilized by a speaker to construct an utterance are not to be thought of as "dead material" in the hands of an artist who is shaping it into a creation. Rather, they are entities that are consistently traversing through time and space, occurring under new circumstances and within new dialogical environments; yet they continue to carry within them their past meanings and evaluations—which may have been altered, but have never been completely extinguished.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 89.

¹¹⁹ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 89. While Bakhtin distinguishes between a word and a genre, throughout various writings both are discussed in how they become re-accentuated. I take this as Bakhtin speaking about the "raw material" used to generate an utterance, and while different writings may focus on the word or speech genre, the idea of reaccentuation appears to be applicable to both concepts.

¹²⁰ Holquist, Glossary, 423.

¹²¹ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 87.

¹²² Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 419.

According to Bakhtin the conditions for reaccentuation are new and changing dialogues that emerge in new eras. The possibilities for re-accentuation are not endless, but are extensively possible through potentials that are embedded within the word or genre—potentials based in either “semantic possibilities,”¹²³ or in past usages that may be rediscovered and renewed in an effort to redefine a present experience.¹²⁴ As Simon Dentith explains, reaccentuation is Bakhtin’s way of explaining how meaning can be located within a historical process, acknowledging that the historical distance between a text and reader (or, between utterances) provides new contexts in which a word may be dialogized, allowing for recognition of its unrealized possibilities.¹²⁵ This fits within Bakhtin’s overall schema that speech genres and their typical words belong to nobody, but continue to occur within particular utterances that are individual expressions determined by an unrepeatable context.

(d) Wisdom as a Speech Genre

Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres and his theorization on how they can be re-accented is a valuable insight for interpreting wisdom texts and discerning their relation to one another. Concepts of wisdom, and how they are invoked in various texts, can be more fully understood by considering a dialogical relationship between these texts, and understanding them as Bakhtinian utterances. The Bakhtinian concept of dialogism claims that there is constant interaction between meanings of utterances, and these have the potential of conditioning each other as they are consistently linked through a variety of factors, or in this case, the common yet unique uses of wisdom concepts.¹²⁶ Thus, it is important that these texts be read in relation to one another. As Bakhtin wrote:

There can be no such thing as an isolated utterance. It always presupposes utterances that precede and follow it. No one utterance can be either first or the last. Each is only a link in the chain, and none can be studied outside this chain. Among utterances there exist relations that cannot be defined in either mechanistic or linguistic categories.¹²⁷

¹²³ Bakhtin, “Response to a Question,” 5.

¹²⁴ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 293. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 419-422.

¹²⁵ Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 99.

¹²⁶ Holquist, Glossary, 426.

¹²⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, “From Notes Made in 1970-71,” in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 136.

In other words, wisdom texts may be best understood when read in relation with one another, and considering the role that each plays in a larger dialogue based in the struggle to make meaning from the broad and varied concept that is “wisdom.” While it is impossible to formulate a study of every link in this chain, the study of wisdom within Qohelet is enhanced through considering a few of its dialogical relations. This will include the wisdom of Proverbs—a fellow within the canon of the Hebrew Bible that specifically aims at teaching “wisdom and instruction”—and the *Tobiad Romance*, a novella that utilizes wisdom concepts and emerges from a similar socio-historical context as that of Qohelet.

Section 1.04 Chapter Overview

To demonstrate how Qohelet’s specific accentuation of wisdom is formed through its socio-economic contextualization and its intertextual, dialogical relationships, this project will unfold in five primary parts, with an additional conclusion that will critically reflect upon what has been discerned in prior chapters.

Chapter II will attempt to frame a “general pattern of meaning” for wisdom by providing a broad overview of biblical concepts of wisdom, specifically analyzing how wisdom is presented within the older, “traditional” wisdom text of Proverbs. This framing will allow for a consideration of how Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* are dialogically related to traditional concepts of wisdom, and subsequently to one another.

Chapter III will determine and delineate the particular social, political, and economic dimensions that gave rise to the utterance of Qohelet (and the *Tobiad Romance*). Following scholarly consensus, Qohelet will be situated in Jerusalem during the third century BCE, a period when Judea was under the rule of the Ptolemaic Empire. This chapter will specifically attend to economic factors, describing in detail how Ptolemaic rule of Judea was marked by an extractive economy and hierarchical rule. Attention will also be given to the social location of the text’s author(s) by considering the role of scribes during this era and their social location as “retainers.”

Chapter IV will focus on the text of the *Tobiad Romance* while also providing insight into what is known from a myriad of sources of the Tobiad family during the Second Temple era. Primary consideration will be given to how the *Tobiad Romance* utilizes rhetoric and concepts prevalent within the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible in its presentation of the figures of Joseph and Hyrcanus to construct a perspective for how Judean society can flourish under imperial rule. The work in this chapter will allow for an examination of how the *Tobiad*

Romance is possibly maintaining an intertextual relationship with other texts classified as “wisdom,” specifically here the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs delineated in chapter II, and the wisdom of Qohelet in succeeding chapters.

Chapter V will analyze the text of Qohelet itself, specifically attending to how the text uniquely conceptualizes wisdom as a kind of shrewd knowledge and practical skill that helps one to survive in the daily struggle of living in a context marked by economic exploitation (as described in Ch. III) and a lack of moral retribution. This analysis will involve an exegesis that offers a detailed rhetorical and grammatical study of the text’s language surrounding wisdom and wise behavior, while also considering how the text is reflecting its specific historical and socio-economic context. This chapter will ultimately discern how Qohelet’s statements on wisdom are making use of an “established pattern of meaning” surrounding concepts of wisdom, while also determining how Qohelet is uniquely imbuing the concept of wisdom with Qohelet’s own emphases and evaluations, which are understood to be shaped by the text’s particular historical circumstance and dialogical environment.

Having established in Chapters IV and V that the *Tobiad Romance* and Qohelet are utterances that are each uniquely adopting and re-accenting aspects of “traditional” wisdom within the context of Ptolemaic rule of Judea, Chapter VI will examine the intertextual and dialogical relationship between these two texts. This chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis that juxtaposes the general discourses surrounding wisdom within each text, acknowledging both their similarities and differences. This broad overview will be supplemented by then focusing on select passages within Qohelet that I read as being particularly representative of how Qohelet’s wisdom is dialogically engaged with the framing of wise behavior in the *Tobiad Romance*.

I will conclude this study in Chapter VII by critically engaging Qohelet’s thesis of wisdom that was established in chapters V and VI in light of Qohelet’s “carpe diem” statements. This critical analysis will revisit the social location of scribal retainers as the position from which the author(s) of the text would have generated this utterance. Further consideration will be given to how the text of Qohelet may be placed in a broader dialogical environment with more contemporary hermeneutical insights and perspectives. I will demonstrate that, although the text may not be able to provide an adequate perspective of human flourishing for suffering peoples, its wisdom nonetheless offers ethical value in its willingness to observe, name, and

inquire about social inequalities and injustices while advocating for survival in these contexts. Finally, I conclude by noting that these perceived oversights by Qohelet may be supplemented by placing Qohelet in a dialogical environment with the hermeneutical insights of contemporary readers, specifically utilizing the insights of womanist interpreters and their shared emphasis on survival.

Chapter II. Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs

In order to fully situate an intertextual reading of Qohelet's conception of wisdom, this chapter will provide a broad overview delineating biblical concepts of wisdom, and then consider how wisdom can be analyzed as a Bakhtinian speech genre. I will then specifically analyze how wisdom is presented within the older, "traditional" wisdom text of Proverbs.

My analysis will unfold in two parts. First, I will sketch a broad definition of the concept of wisdom that takes into account how the term חכמה is used and referenced throughout the corpus of the Hebrew Bible. I will then apply Bakhtinian concepts to consider how wisdom represents a "speech genre"—a relatively stable form and pattern of meaning that texts can take up and then re-accent for their own specific purpose. This discussion will allow for a consideration of how wisdom represents a complex and dynamic concept that can evolve and be modified, depending upon the needs and circumstances of the varying (con)texts that utilize the wisdom concept.

Second, I will draw upon previous scholarship to offer a general overview of how wisdom is conceived in the book of Proverbs, emphasizing its didactic role in the formation of moral subjects.¹ Wisdom within Proverbs most fundamentally represents an ethical quality that is centered around forming virtuous persons, who through their wisdom are able to pursue and achieve a measure of flourishing and well-being for both the individual and broader community.

The goal of this chapter is to adequately frame a "general pattern of meaning" for the concept of wisdom, and how wisdom is specifically conceived of in the "traditional" text of Proverbs. This will allow for a consideration of how Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* are dialogically related to traditional concepts of wisdom, and subsequently to one another. By analyzing the concept of wisdom as a speech genre, this chapter will emphasize wisdom's ability to be rooted in a sense of common understanding, yet also open to evolving and having its meaning contextualized.

Section 2.01 Defining Wisdom

Before delineating the character of wisdom within the book of Proverbs, and subsequently within Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*, it is imperative to establish a basic

¹ For an overview on how recent Proverbs' scholarship has shifted to moral and ethical concerns see Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, Hermeneia, ed. Thomas Krüger, trans. Stephen Germany (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 5-6.

overview of what is referenced by the term “wisdom” (חכמה/σοφία). This term resists easy definition, as “wisdom” has multiple functions within varying literary contexts, with no static or singular meaning. Specifically, biblical scholarship, as well as the larger study of ancient Near Eastern literature, uses “wisdom” to refer to both a concept present within literature, and a category of texts typically classified as “wisdom literature.”²

These nuanced understandings of the term are to be distinguished, yet they are certainly interrelated within the broader study of wisdom within ancient literature. Concepts of wisdom are a significant attribute and primary focus of texts categorized as “wisdom literature”; however, wisdom concepts are not limited to “wisdom” works, as concepts of wisdom can permeate and be operative within various types and categories of ancient and biblical literature.³ Thus, the attempt to delineate wisdom must consider how wisdom is conceived within “wisdom literature” (e.g., Proverbs, Qohelet, Sirach, etc.), as well as how the term is used within the larger corpus of ancient Israelite and Jewish literature.

In order to consider a literary and socio-historical relationship among texts that maintain a concept of wisdom, this section will define the broad contours of the concept “wisdom,” and what it is capable of representing, by analyzing its use within representative texts throughout the Hebrew Bible. I will then draw upon Bakhtin to explain how the concept of wisdom can function as “speech genre” taken up and utilized by different utterances (here, “texts”). As such, texts can utilize a “relatively stable” understanding and form of wisdom for communicative purposes, while at the same time re-accenting wisdom with a varied conceptualization in order to accomplish communicative goals within the context from which the utterance/text arises.

(a) The Concept, Goal, and Efficacy of Wisdom,

Although the concept of wisdom can be fluid and distinct within varying texts, there are basic parameters and characteristics that allow for a very broad and general definition of what is

² This helpful distinction is identified in the editor’s introductions of two recent handbooks regarding “wisdom” and the bible: Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2020), 2-6; Will Kynes, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2-3.

³ Kynes writes “with a semantic sleight of hand, the broader biblical conception of wisdom is swallowed up in a narrower scholarly conception of Wisdom Literature imposed upon it, and the wisdom concept is primarily defined by the traits associated with that collection of texts” (“Wisdom and Wisdom Literature: Past, Present, Future” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes [New York: Oxford University Press, 2021], 3.) For a fuller argument of Kynes’ perspective see *An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature”: The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

represented by “wisdom.” When defining the concept behind the term, consideration must be given to not only texts that are classically categorized as “wisdom,” but also to how the word gets used throughout Hebrew Bible. Although different facets of wisdom predominate in different contexts, a broad, integrative concept of wisdom entails acquired knowledge, skill (both physical and social), morals, instruction, and advice; wisdom is believed to have a divine origin, but is transmitted from generation to generation, and is often based in an accumulative lived experience and perception of the world. The intent of transmitting and receiving wisdom is to empower persons with the ability to navigate and cope with the “myriad experiences which surround a person”⁴—within life and in society—to ensure survival and promote the well-being of both the individual and the larger community.

When purveying how the concept is used within ancient texts, “Wisdom” does not have an apparent or rigid meaning, but is a flexible concept that can have varying emphases within different texts. Wise instruction, conduct, and behavior are fluid and adaptable to the context in which they appear, as they are flexible to the various situations of lived reality. This means that a text may take up this concept and emphasize certain aspects of what has been represented by “wisdom” in other texts, while possibly deemphasizing others, in order to adequately communicate how wisdom’s overarching goal of life can be achieved within a particular context and setting. As William Brown explains, the phenomenon of wisdom occurs across ancient cultures and is passed from generation to generation, giving it a somewhat “universal appeal.” Yet “its advice can be highly contextual” as a “judicious course of action in one context can be sheer folly in another.”⁵

Despite “wisdom” being characteristically “highly contextual,” it’s various manifestations generally maintain the same overarching goal of achieving and/or sustaining life.⁶ Depending upon the context, the nature of the life that is aimed for may vary, as wise behavior can function in desperate circumstances to preserve life and ensure survival (e.g., 2 Sam 20:14-22), while other contexts may advocate for a practice of wisdom that ensures a sustained life of flourishing. Markus Witte explains that wisdom can be understood as a “life skill” aimed at achieving a successful life, and is often rooted in a belief that there is a consequential connection

⁴ Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” *ABD* VI: 920.

⁵ William P. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 24.

⁶ Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” 927-928.

between a person's actions and how they fare.⁷ The connection between wisdom and success, particularly in regards to material wealth, is portrayed within the depictions of King Solomon, the "great patron of wisdom in ancient Israel and in ancient Judaism."⁸ Solomon sought out and received a "wise and discerning mind" from God, and in addition was granted "riches, possessions, and honor" that the text claims exceeded kings both before and after him (1 Kgs 3:3-14; 2 Chr 1:7-13, 9:22). Likewise, the figure of Joseph is described as one who uses his wisdom and skill to gain Pharaoh's favor, and be appointed by Pharaoh "over all the land of Egypt." The text claims that there was no one as wise as Joseph, and when he entered Pharaoh's service the land produced abundantly for seven years, allowing him to acquire an abundance of grain that was stored up to be sold during a time of famine (Gen 41:37-57).

Not all texts agree that the acquisition of wisdom automatically enables one's well-being, as there are varying perspectives within the Hebrew Bible regarding the extent of wisdom's efficacy. Prophetic texts critique those who are considered wise, yet have not maintained a favorable disposition toward YHWH. While these wise persons—notably from other nations—have gained wealth, it is proclaimed that their wisdom and wealth will not insulate them from impending harm and tragedy (Isa 29:13-14; Jer 8:8-12; Ezek 28; Obad 8). Psalm 49 acknowledges that wisdom and wealth can only achieve so much, since ultimately the wise will die like the fool and their wealth will be passed on to someone else (49:10; c.f. Qoh 2:14-19). The association of wisdom with life and material well-being, and the subsequent indictments regarding various wise persons, indicates that the nature, benefits, and viability of wisdom was an ongoing subject of debate.⁹

(i) *What Wisdom Consists Of*

While (חכמה) is typically and traditionally translated as "wisdom," Fox argues that the nearest English equivalent that encompasses the term's semantic range is "expertise."¹⁰ Fox explains that (חכמה) refers to "a high degree of knowledge and skill in any domain," and it

⁷ Markus Witte, "Literary Genres of Old Testament Wisdom," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 359.

⁸ Timothy J. Sandoval, "Introduction to Wisdom and Worship: Themes and Perspectives in the Poetic Writings," in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*, eds., Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page, and Matthew J.M. Coomber (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 499.

⁹ See Adams and Goff, "Editors' Introduction," 3—who discuss this in relation to the tree of life imagery in Proverbs and the critiques put forth by Job and Ecclesiastes.

¹⁰ While this is worth noting, I will continue to use the phrase "wisdom" as I have previously defined it.

“combines a broad faculty (including the powers of reason, discernment, cleverness) and knowledge (communicable information, that is known and can be learned).”¹¹ An example of wisdom indicating extensive knowledge occurs in a description of Solomon’s “great wisdom.” Not only is it claimed that Solomon composed three thousand proverbs and a thousand songs, he also demonstrated an extensive knowledge of subjects such as trees, animals, birds, reptiles, and fish (1Kgs 4:29-34).

Wisdom as a high degree of skill can represent valuable craftsmanship, as well as social skills that assist a person and/or the community in navigating life and social relations. For example, חכמה is used to describe skillful work that involves one’s hands, such as: making Aaron’s vestments (Ex 28:3), Bezalel and Oholiab’s metal work in furnishing the tent of meeting (Ex 31:3, 6), women spinning goat hair into linen (Ex 35:25-26), and metal, masonry and carpentry work in the construction of the Temple (1 Kgs 7:14; 1 Chr 22:14; 2 Chr 2:7). Wisdom as a craftsman’s skill is also represented in metaphorical descriptions of wisdom as an attribute of God and used by God in the act of creation (Ps 104:24; Jer 51:15).¹² Wisdom is also used to refer to professional skills that are utilized within a society’s ritual and communal life, and those that involve efficacious interactions with other people. This includes the skill of professional women mourners (Jer. 9:16 [17]), the interpretation of dreams (Gen 41:8; Dan 1:17), and being successful in business and trade (Ezek 28:4-5).

Beyond professional skills, wisdom also encompasses the ability to assess and successfully navigate the contours of human interactions within society by either minimizing threat or increasing one’s influence. In this sense, wisdom can denote a mental aptitude for understanding the world of human relations, and subsequently making appropriate decisions based on this understanding. This is typically based in the idea that there is a rational order and structure to the world, and if one is able to figure it out they are capable of acting in a way can further and enhance their life (e.g., Jer 9:11; Hos 14:10; Ps 107:43).¹³ This includes knowing how and when to use one’s speech, and the appropriate way to relate to and influence persons of

¹¹ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 32.

¹² See Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Cosmo, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 67-90.

¹³ Goff and Adams, “Editors’ Introduction,” 2.

great power.¹⁴ A narrative example of this is the wise woman of Beth-maacah who acts with wisdom to save her city while it is under siege by Joab’s army in 2 Sam 20:14-22. The wise woman offers a convincing speech to Joab wherein she successfully negotiates an agreement to keep Joab from destroying the city, and she then leads the people of the city in carrying out a “wise plan” to deliver to Joab the head of Sheba—a leader of a rebellion against David who Joab was hunting (2 Sam 20:1-2). Once this is complete, Joab orders a stop to the siege, returns to Jerusalem, and the wise woman’s city is seemingly left intact. In this instance, the woman’s wisdom functions to ensure the survival of an entire city.

As this story communicates, wisdom not only focuses on the well-being and survival of the wise individual, but also maintains a larger concern for the life and well-being of the community. The practice of wisdom is often tied to moral conduct, and as William Brown notes, is more than knowledge or “know how.” While wisdom may be inclusive of knowledge, Brown distinguishes knowledge and intelligence as knowing *how* something should be done, from wisdom which is knowing *what* should be done. This “*what*” includes a moral conduct that maintains both an awareness of the self and an outwardly awareness of others.¹⁵

While this is essential to the conception of wisdom within Proverbs, other texts within the Hebrew Bible emphasize wisdom’s morality as well. For example, Ps 37:30 associates’ wisdom with the righteous (צַדִּיק) and those who speak justice (מִשְׁפָּט). Witte explains justice and righteousness to be a benchmark on how to act so that persons can live in “a harmonious and beneficial social sphere.” That is, the one who “acts appropriately in relation to the community” in which one lives is experiencing justice.¹⁶ Within Deuteronomy wisdom represents the proper and steadfast observance of the statutes and ordinances taught by Moses (Deut 4:6). These include not only legal and cultic regulations, but also teachings on how to manage social relations with imperatives to seek justice for the socially and economically vulnerable (e.g., Deut 15; 16:18-20; 24:17-22).

Wisdom’s relation to justice is also apparent in the way that wisdom is valued as an important attribute for how kings and leaders should govern people under their influence. The “wise and just king” is exemplified in the narrative of Solomon judging a dispute between two

¹⁴ This is persistent theme throughout Proverbs, and is elaborated below in section 2.02.

¹⁵ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 25-26.

¹⁶ Witte, “Literary Genres,” 359.

women over who was the rightful mother to a living child (2 Kgs 3:16-27). After issuing a ruling that returns the child to its rightful mother, the text notes that “all Israel” was in awe Solomon for his judgement because “the wisdom of God was in his midst to do justice” (2 Kgs 3:28). In light of the Assyrian crisis of the eighth century BCE, Isaiah 11 describes an ideal ruler emerging from the Davidic line who is endowed with the “spirit of YHWH,” which includes “the spirit of wisdom and understanding.”¹⁷ This ideal ruler is portrayed as utilizing this spirit of wisdom to engage in proper judgement, which includes judging the poor with righteousness and equity (Isa 11:2-4). Additionally, within Deuteronomy Moses instructs the people to choose wise leaders who are capable of fairly judging all persons and situations—“the small and great alike”—within their jurisdiction (Deut 1:13-17). These textual examples demonstrate that wisdom aims at a just and non-exploitative society, and wise leaders are to be responsible for assuring the enactment of justice.

Though wisdom is portrayed as having its origin in the divine, and is given to humans by God (1 Kgs 4:29; Dan 2:20-21), it is also understood to be acquired through pedagogy. Wisdom is to be taught and learned (Ps 51:8, 90:12), as the knowledge, skill, and morals that encompass wisdom are transmitted, in some manifestation, from a teacher to a student (e.g., Prov 1:1-8; Qoh 12:9-11; Sir Prologue). The transmission through an educational process presupposes that wisdom instruction is intended to be passed from the elder generation to the younger generation. Jacqueline Vayntrub explains that wisdom represents a process of knowledge production that gets framed through the trope of father-to-son instruction, as this is a persistent feature of wisdom texts within the Hebrew Bible and broader ANE. The instruction functions a medium for imparting a blueprint for successful living “in which one generation can assure survival of the next.”¹⁸

This necessarily assumes that wisdom will often be practical, and the knowledge, skill, and morals contained within wisdom are not merely innate, but are intended to be acted upon and carried out. Wisdom instruction has a goal of influencing behavior by orienting its students toward “proper action.”¹⁹ This sentiment is acknowledged by Gerhard von Rad, who begins his

¹⁷ For an extensive elaboration of the historical context of the Assyrian expansion in 8th century Judah behind Isaiah 11 see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 65-110.

¹⁸ Jacqueline Vayntrub, “Advice: Wisdom, Skill, and Success,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 17.

¹⁹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 33.

seminal work *Wisdom in Israel* by stating: “No one would be able to live even for a single day without incurring appreciable harm if he could not be guided by wide practical experience.”²⁰ While the specific nature of wisdom within literary contexts may vary, at its core it represents teaching and instruction gleaned from an accumulated experience and discernment of reality, curated by a community and/or sages, and then passed on and taught from one generation to the next in order to promote life and ensure survival.

While wisdom instruction is rooted in the collected and gathered experiences of a community’s ancestors, representing a transmission of what prior generations have observed, learned, and valued, it is also the cultivation of a disposition that is open to continually observing one’s world and context to continually learn how to successfully navigate the “myriad of lived experiences.” The process of observing an environment continues with each new manifestation of wisdom so that the “wise” may find ways to achieve wisdom’s goal of survival. This means that specific wisdom teachings may shift depending upon how a particular context dictates the ways in which one is able to achieve life and/or communal well-being. For example, much of the teaching within the Hebrew Bible conceives of bribes (שֹׁחָד) as morally wrong, with Deut 16:19 associating bribes with a distortion of justice and claiming that they “blind the eyes of the wise.”²¹ Yet Proverbs contains three verses (17:8; 18:16; 21:14) that speak favorably of the bribe’s ability to achieve a desired outcome. According to Roger Nam, the moral aversion to bribes may have been rooted in an older economic system based in patrimonialism, while the three verses in Proverbs reflect the shifting socio-economic circumstances that occurred during the post-exilic period while Judah was under Persian rule.²² The Persian economy was a centralized and bureaucratic system where Judah increasingly experienced the burden of heavy taxation. Nam argues that that this economy created “distribution inefficiencies” wherein certain persons lacked adequate access to resources, and the moral acceptance of the bribe allowed for flexibility in creating an “informal economy” that could care for disenfranchised persons within this highly bureaucratic economy.²³

Thus, shifting contexts, particularly those based in social and economic organization, may alter how one who is wise socially operates, yet there remains with wisdom and wise

²⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM Press, 1972), 3.

²¹ See also Ex 23:8; Isa 5:23; Amos 5:12; Mic 7:3.

²² Roger Nam, “Bribery and the Informal Economy in Proverbs,” *BI* 29 (2021): 49-66.

²³ Nam, “Bribery,” 60-66.

behavior the overarching goal of assuring and promoting life. As Witte sums up, being wise involves one's ability "to observe oneself and one's environment precisely, to be open to new experiences, to listen to the instructions of one's forefathers and to align one's life and behavior with the just world order."²⁴

(b) The Concept of Wisdom and Bakhtinian Speech Genres

In order to adequately sketch a relationship among texts that utilize wisdom concepts, forms, and rhetoric, I propose that the concept of wisdom within Biblical and ancient Jewish literature—specifically the texts of Proverbs, Qohelet, and the *Tobiad Romance*—be analyzed as a Bakhtinian speech genre, and more specifically a secondary speech genre. As has been noted, speech genres are "relatively stable" forms in which utterances are cast, carrying an established pattern of meaning that can be recognized and adapted. Speech genres allow utterances to be constructed with recognizable forms, vocabulary, and concepts, thus engendering familiarity, and making communication possible. It has been observed that Bakhtin's idea of speech genres correlates to biblical form criticism and the seminal work of Hermann Gunkel.²⁵ While form criticism may lack the dialogical concepts central to Bakhtin's work, it may provide a point of entry for adopting this concept into biblical studies, specifically for the study of wisdom and wisdom literature.

Witte begins this process by utilizing Gunkel's form-critical criteria in consideration with more recent literary scholarship to identify the general and basic characteristics of a wisdom genre. First, Witte outlines three general parameters for determining an oral or written genre. These include: 1. communication level, 2. morphological, syntactic, and morpho-syntactic phenomena, and 3. function.²⁶ With this criteria, Witte identifies a "wisdom genre" as having three broad and general characteristics: 1. horizontal communication (between people); 2. formulations in the imperative, adhortative, deliberative, or questions; and 3. a function that is instructive, incites reflection, or combines these, "which focuses on the act of persuasion and motivates one to a particular action or is directive."²⁷

²⁴ Witte, "Literary Genres," 359.

²⁵ See the discussion by Roland Boer in "Introduction: Bakhtin, Genre and Biblical Studies," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 3.

²⁶ Witte, "Literary Genres," 357.

²⁷ Witte, "Literary Genres," 358.

Witte's identification of the general characteristics of a wisdom genre are insightful for identifying the "relative stability" and general patterns of meaning necessary for clarifying wisdom as a speech genre. Wisdom represents a genre or concept that attempts to persuade, instruct, and motivate its listeners to appropriate action that ensures life and survival at the most basic level, and in certain "traditional" conceptions, well-being and flourishing. This includes texts that are explicitly didactical in purpose, such as Proverbs, or a more reflective text like Qohelet, which poses questions and observations to offer a more reflective perspective on navigating a particular lived reality.²⁸ Narratives are also capable of maintaining wisdom features, using narrative devices and "wise" characterization to communicate a particular didactic point, as will be argued with the *Tobiad Romance*.²⁹

Since the concept of wisdom occurs in texts that are reflective, artistic, and in a sense philosophical, wisdom may represent what Bakhtin identifies as "secondary speech genre." As was noted in Chapter I, secondary speech genres are more complex in nature than primary speech genres, which represent basic uses of language for everyday communication and dialogue among humans. Even though more complex, secondary speech genres are still classified as "utterances" in the Bakhtinian sense; as such, they are understood as arising from human activity and representing an act of communication. Each text is thus drawing upon the "relative stability" and general characteristics of the wisdom speech genre within their own socio-historical context, and imbuing it with a unique perspective that is shaped by that specific context. While each text is unique in how it makes use of the concept of wisdom, part of the "relative stability" of the wisdom speech genre is its overarching goal for communicating a perspective on how life can be preserved, sustained, or advanced. For example, as will be explored in the succeeding chapters, Proverbs urges the acceptance of its instruction in wisdom so that the years of one's life will be many (Prov 4:10); Qohelet instructs on the value of wisdom by claiming that it will keep its possessor alive (Qoh 7:12); and the *Tobiad Romance* frames the activity of its wise protagonists as enabling "more splendid opportunities of life" (*Ant* 12:220)

Typical of all utterances, these wisdom texts should be understood as highly contextualized, with each representing a subjectivity that is "specifically social, historical,

²⁸ See Witte, "Literary Genres," 361-362.

²⁹ See the discussion of "The Didactic Story," in Witte, "Literary Genres," 367-368.

concrete, and dialogized.”³⁰ Texts that make use of a wisdom concept will inevitably glean this concept from other utterances/texts, but will adopt it and make it specific for their own purpose. This means that wisdom is an evolving concept, and when taken up in varying (con)texts, certain attributes prominent in prior usages are open to being emphasized and evaluated differently. The common vocabulary, literary forms, and/or tropes and motifs that are characteristic of wisdom are thus open to being “re-accented,” wherein they are taken up and employed to communicate a unique and specific message within a varying unrepeatable context. This process of re-accentuation is generated by the subjectivity of its author(s), the broader context from which each text arises, and the forces of heteroglossia surrounding it.

For example, the process of the reaccentuation of the wisdom concept can be observed with how Proverbs, Qohelet, and the *Tobiad Romance* emphasize and evaluate the relationship between the practice of moral virtues and the quality of life one is able to achieve. As this dissertation will argue, Proverbs envisions wisdom as, in part, the practice of moral virtues that participate in enabling persons to ethically pursue a long, sustained life accompanied by material well-being. This is particularly demonstrated in Proverbs 4:4-9, which instructs that if one accepts the teaching of their ancestors, which involves acquiring wisdom, then one will be able to live (Prov 4:4), and receive the various benefits that come with having wisdom (Prov 4:6-8). Grammatically, this passage accents the relationship between life and wisdom by using the Hebrew verb *חיה* (“to live”) in the simple qal stem as a secondary imperative following the primary imperative to keep the wisdom teacher’s instruction. One can fulfill the urging to “live” if one can accept these instructions and thus acquire “wisdom” (*חכמה*) and “understanding” (*בינה*) (Prov 4:4-5). If one does accept instruction and acquire wisdom, then they can live and receive wisdom’s benefits that include protection and honor (Prov 4:6, 8), and elsewhere long life and riches (Prov 3:16).

Qohelet will similarly emphasize a connection between wisdom and life, but will notably re-accent these words and concepts to communicate a particular message for that text’s context. Qohelet, like Proverbs, assumes moral virtues that are often characteristic of wisdom, but observes an overall lack of the practice of these virtues within a socio-economic context marked

³⁰ Quotation taken from the glossary of terms in M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 433-434.

by injustice, inequality, and economic extraction. This leads Qohelet to question the extent to which material well-being can be achieved, and instead wisdom comes to represent practices that simply enable one's survival. This is most clearly demonstrated in Qoh 7:12, where the text states the relationship between חכמה (wisdom) and חיה (to live/living), but intensifies the qal of חיה used in Proverbs 4:4 to the piel stem, thus shifting the meaning from "to live" to "to keep alive" or "survive." For Qohelet, wisdom is valued not necessarily for the material or social benefits it can provide, but because it "keeps its possessor alive" (Qoh: 7:12). Qohelet will observe how this "survival" wisdom is practiced by persons who are considered poor and of low socio-economic status (Qoh 4:13; 9:13-16), persons who are not experiencing the benefits described with Proverbs.

The *Tobiad Romance*, arising from a context similar to Qohelet, also promotes a wisdom that seeks survival in these difficult circumstances. However, this text believes that the wise leadership of its wealthy and relatively powerful protagonists are capable of bringing the community "more splendid opportunities of life," that like Proverbs, include protection from outside threats and a measure of economic flourishing. However, notably absent within the *Tobiad Romance* is the presence of the moral virtues advocated by Proverbs and assumed by Qohelet, as the "more splendid opportunities" come about through brutal and unethical means, and the material flourishing is attributed to only a few individuals.

Context is not limited to a historical era, but is also inclusive of other factors such as the social location from which the utterance arises. This will necessarily shape the perspective of the utterance and the particular emphases and evaluations that get refracted through a speech genre. This can be demonstrated by considering how each text conceives of wise behavior in relation to persons of societal power (e.g., monarchs, rulers). Within the "wise instruction" of Proverbs, students are taught the value of good and persuasive speech for accomplishing the objective of influencing persons of power (e.g., Prov 16:13-15; 22:11). The wise characters within the *Tobiad Romance* act as a narrative demonstration of this teaching, employing witty and persuasive speech that puts them in positions of influence and good standing with the Ptolemaic monarchs (e.g., *Ant.* 12:172-178, 205-209). This seemingly implies that both texts have roots in social situations where contact with a monarch was available, and a possible source for accomplishing objectives. Qohelet, on the other hand, shifts the emphasis of wise behavior from appropriate speech while in close contact with a king, to emphasizing maintaining a safe distance from the

king (8:2) and not saying too much so as to avoid harm (10:20). For Qohelet, the king is not a source of opportunity, but a source of danger.³¹ It is likely that Qohelet reflects a nuanced social location from that of Proverbs and the *Tobiad Romance*, thus resulting in a different emphasis and evaluation of what wise behavior consists of in relation to persons of power.

This process of reaccentuation implies that the utterances/texts are dialogically engaged with the other utterances/texts that invoke the same speech genre of wisdom. As Bakhtin explains, each utterance is directed toward a particular topic or object of speech. The texts that utilize a wisdom speech genre are doing so to form an utterance that addresses this specific topic or object. As a result, wisdom texts enter into a dialogue with the other utterances surrounding the particular topic/object that is being addressed (this will be particularly relevant when considering the dialogical relationship between Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*). But because of the heteroglot nature of language, each utterance that adopts and re-accentuates a wisdom speech genre will inevitably be in dialogue with other utterances that also take up and re-accentuate the concept of wisdom. This means that the evaluative position of a text vis-à-vis wisdom is not only influenced by its context and the speaker's subjectivity, but also its relation and attitude toward the other wisdom utterances/texts. Therefore, to fully understand how a text conceptualizes wisdom it will need to be set in dialogical context with other texts that utilize the concept and speech genre of wisdom. Here consideration can be given to how each text carries over certain qualities of wisdom that are present in other utterances, while also determining how each text is uniquely presenting the concept of wisdom.

Section 2.02 Wisdom within Proverbs

Bakhtin's view that utterances are not isolated events but best understood as "links in a chain" of dialogue speaks to the intertextual relations of texts, and in this instance, texts classified as "wisdom." While Proverbs is certainly not the first link in the wisdom text "chain," as it has been demonstrated to be dialogically related to ANE wisdom texts both in Egypt and Mesopotamia,³² it is nonetheless imperative that this project begin somewhere in an attempt to map Qohelet's dialogical relations surrounding wisdom. Since Proverbs explicitly identifies its

³¹ See the discussion in Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 501-503.

³² For a thorough overview of the relationship between Proverbs and the ANE wisdom corpus, see Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 11-24.

objective as teaching “wisdom and instruction” (see Prov 1:2-8), and is believed to contain older strands of wisdom material,³³ this text will be used as representative of what may be tenuously termed “traditional” wisdom. By seeing Proverbs as representative of “traditional” wisdom, I do not mean to imply that Proverbs be understood as some sort of norm or standard for what wisdom is; such a view is susceptible to furthering a misguided scholarly notion that texts that vary from Proverbs, such as Qohelet, represent at worst a “crisis” of wisdom, or at least a deviant from the norm.³⁴ Nonetheless, because Proverbs is most explicit in centering the concept of wisdom and wise instruction within the Hebrew Bible, and its compilation is dated to the Persian or early Hellenistic era, it provides an appropriate point of entry into the linked chain of wisdom texts.³⁵ An analysis of Proverbs as representative of a “traditional” wisdom will allow for an analysis of how Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* both uniquely adopt and accentuate the concept of wisdom.

In order to define how wisdom is conceived of and presented within Proverbs, I will analyze how wisdom is envisioned through the book’s final or received form. Scholars have consistently noted how the book of Proverbs represents an anthology of collections that likely emerged from various times and contexts. The division of Proverbs into smaller subunits is based on the identification of seven superscriptions that function to introduce different sections that can vary in style, length, and concerns.³⁶ These sections include: 1:1-9:18, 10:1-22:16, 22:17-24:22, 25:1-29:27, 30:1-33, and 31:1-31. While distinct collections of instruction may be parsed out from the whole of the text, a coherence among them and their structuring can be discerned from Proverbs’ final form. It will be assumed that the scribes who compiled, shaped, and edited the various sections of Proverbs into its present form did so with an overarching and guiding

³³ As Jacqueline Vayntrub explains, the book of Proverbs represents a “collection of collections” that are brought together in one work. These collections are marked off by introductory headings, demarcating eight sections within the book of Proverbs: ch. 1-9, 10-22:16, 22:17-24:22, 24:23-34, 25-29, 30, 31:1-9, and 31:10-31 (“Proverbs” in Adams and Goff, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, 14-15, 20-27).

³⁴ For a critique of this common scholarly construct, see Peter Hatton, “A Cautionary Tale: The Acts-Consequence ‘Construct,’” *JSOT* 35.3 (2011): 375-384.

³⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 6. Also, according to David M. Carr, it is possible that early versions of some of the material contained within Proverbs were used in the “education and enculturation” processes of ancient Israel during the pre-exilic monarchy (*Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 126-134.)

³⁶ See Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 8-11.

objective. In other words, though Proverbs is a “collection of collections,” the structure of the text is not arbitrary, and can be read as a meaningful whole.³⁷

As a complete text, Proverbs represents a didactic text with the aim of not only communicating wise sayings and thoughts to its students, but of also shaping them into moral subjects who desire, seek out, and practice wisdom. Wisdom is conceived primarily as an ethical quality that forms the character and practices of its students as they navigate their life in society. This formation of an ethical subject is accomplished by developing particular virtues within persons, who through the practice of wisdom’s virtues can not only avoid destructive behaviors and deathly circumstances, but are more fully able to pursue and achieve a measure of lively flourishing and well-being in a just and ethical manner. Wisdom’s pursuit of well-being involves both the life of the individual student, and that of the broader community.

The notion that the final form of Proverbs contains a unified goal of developing virtuous persons is expressed at the outset of the book in Prov 1:2-7. These verses have been typically identified as not only introducing the subsection of chs. 1-9, but as also functioning as an introduction and prologue to the book as a whole.³⁸ Scholars such as William Brown and Timothy Sandoval have furthered this assertion by identifying the prologue as the “hermeneutical key” to the rest of the book.³⁹ According to Brown, the prologue sets forth the book’s objective as the development of a “coherent profile of estimable character” wherein the wisdom student who engages the instruction of Proverbs comes to embody “all the virtues and values” that are featured in the prologue.⁴⁰

Sandoval delineates how this objective is laid forth by analyzing the prologue’s grammatical structure, and distinguishing v. 2-4 from v. 5-6. Within Sandoval’s analysis v. 2-4 present the book’s educational and moral purpose, while v. 5-6 serve as an invitation to the reader/student to engage the proceeding text in light of the purposes outlined in v. 2-4.⁴¹ By noting that each half verse in v. 2-4 is introduced with a prefixed lamed—apart from the second

³⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 967. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 5.

³⁸ Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 61.

³⁹ Timothy Sandoval, “Revisiting the Prologue of Proverbs,” *JBL* 126.3 (2007): 456; William Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 30. See also Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 16.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 31.

⁴¹ Sandoval, “Revisiting the Prologue,” 262-263. Brown varies from this distinction, and instead sees the whole of Prov 1:2-6 as “both invitation and purpose filled.” (*Wisdom’s Wonder*, 30 fn. 9).

stich of v. 3—Sandoval argues this aesthetic defines these three verses as a unit where each verse presents a set of virtues that are promoted by the study of the wisdom teachings throughout the rest of the book: intellectual virtues (1:2), practical virtues (1:4), and social virtues (1:3).⁴²

As Brown notes, these virtues are not a haphazard listing of random values, but are to be understood as “systematically arranged to highlight their distinctions and interrelations.”⁴³ Collectively, the learning and practicing of these three sets of virtues in concert with one another works to form moral agents who are able to ethically pursue a measure of personal and communal well-being in their life and society. The interplay of social and personal virtues is vital to the concept of wisdom in Proverbs, as it promotes an awareness of communal well-being alongside of practical skills needed for survival and social navigation. As Bernd Schipper notes, the acquisition of wisdom’s virtues “produces a meaningful combination of a person’s responsibility within the community and a person’s acquisition of skill that are used on a more individual level.”⁴⁴

The recognition of Proverbs’ concern for communal well-being is vital when considering the role that wealth and riches play within the book. For Proverbs, material wealth should not be one’s highest desire—it should be wisdom—though wealth is certainly valued for its ability to achieve well-being and enable flourishing. Brown points out that a goal and benefit of wisdom within Proverbs is achieving “happiness” and a fulfilled life.⁴⁵ Within the purview of Proverbs, this is accomplished, in part, by having access to sufficient material resources that can allow one to prolong their life and flourish within it. This is expounded in Prov 3:13-18⁴⁶:

- 3:13 Happy (אשרי) is the one who finds wisdom,
the one obtains understanding.
- 3:14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver
and her yield better than that of gold.
- 3:15 She is more precious than rubies
and all your delights cannot compare to her.
- 3:16 Long life in in her right hand,
in her left is riches and honor.
- 3:17 Her ways are ways pleasantness

⁴² Sandoval, “Revisiting the Prologue,” 457-461. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 30. Brown uses slightly different, yet similar, terminology, identifying the prologue as maintaining intellectual values and virtues, instrumental virtues, and moral, communal virtues (32).

⁴³ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 32.

⁴⁴ Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 67.

⁴⁵ See the discussion in William P. Brown, “Virtue and its Limits in the Wisdom Corpus,” in Kynes, *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, 45-64 (50-51).

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

and all her paths are well-being (שְׁלוֹם).
 3:18 She is a tree of life for those who take hold of her,
 and the one who hold onto her are considered fortunate.

As this text demonstrates, wisdom is closely associated with riches (עֶשֶׂר), as personified Wisdom holds them in one hand and “long life” in the other. Elsewhere, Wisdom claims to have possession of riches and wealth, and rewards wealth to those who love wisdom (Prov 8:18, 21). Yet not all wealth is judged equally by Proverbs, as the text condemns the acquisition of wealth by unjust means (e.g., 1:10-19; 15:27a; 28:16), signaling that wealth obtained outside of the scope of wisdom’s moral virtues is not the result of wisdom. As such, unjust wealth fails to contribute to a fulfilled or “happy” life since the wealth obtained through greed threatens life (1:19), a sentiment expressed in Prov 28:6: “Better to be poor and walk in one’s integrity, than one who is rich with crooked ways” (see also 11:28; 22:1).⁴⁷ In line with the ethical vision lined out by the prologue, Proverbs sees wealth as means for contributing to the common good by promoting a care and concern for the poor (e.g., 14:31; 16:19; 19:17), claiming that those who show favor to the poor are “happy” (אֲשֵׁרִי). Despite these claims, the common good advocated by Proverbs remains somewhat limited, as the text assumes and upholds social hierarchies and reinforces an androcentric, patriarchal worldview.⁴⁸

Proverbs is thus not a manual on prosperity, but is more consistently occupied with how wisdom can contribute to the continuance of life and the avoidance of death (e.g., 3:18; 4:10-17, 22-23). The life envisioned by Proverbs is a life that is best lived through the pursuit and practice of wisdom, which 3:14-15 claims generates more of a profit and yield than artifacts of wealth like silver, gold, rubies, and other precious materials (see also 8:10-11). Accordingly, Proverbs’ vision for a life of flourishing and well-being resulting from the acquisition and practice of wisdom is to be viewed within the overall structure and well-being of society. Proverbs aims to develop astute, skilled, and moral persons who use wisdom to navigate the numerous social contexts that they encounter in order to further life and achieve well-being. Using the outline

⁴⁷ Brown, “Virtue and its Limits,” 51.

⁴⁸ For example, see Prov 2:16-22, 5:1-23, 6:20-35, and 7:1-27. These passages repeatedly use the sexualized imagery of a “strange/foreign woman” (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) who is placed in contrast to the desirable wisdom—also described with feminine imagery—to symbolize that which can be destructive “to patriarchal control of family, property, and society” (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 257). As Claudia Camp explains, “Because control of women’s sexuality is a sine qua non of the patriarchal family, it is no accident that forces of ‘chaos’ are embodied in a woman who takes control of her on sexuality” (“What’s so Strange about the Strange Woman,” in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, eds. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991), 27.

provided by Sandoval and Brown, I will delineate each of the three virtues promoted by the prologue (intellectual, practical, and social), demonstrating how they become refracted within the teachings of Proverbs. This approach will demonstrate how Proverbs cultivates each of these virtues within students of wisdom as it forms subjects who promote life and well-being for themselves and their broader community. Though my presentation will parse out each virtue, I intended to demonstrate how they work together to promote a right and good way for furthering life and achieving well-being.

(a) Intellectual Virtues

Prov 1:2 identifies intellectual virtues that will be advanced and developed through the study of the book of Proverbs. The intellectual virtues are “knowledge of wisdom and instruction” (לדעת חכמה ומוסר) and “understanding words of understanding” (להבין אמרי בינה). Because a primary medium of wisdom is instruction—particularly through the collection of wise sayings and teachings within the book—the intellectual virtues refer to the process of actually learning, taking in, and thinking through the insights communicated through wisdom teachings. The promotion of intellectual virtue is based in the assumption that to live wisely one must learn what wisdom is about, and be open to absorbing instruction from those who are wise. Further, those who attempt to know and understand wisdom must be able to develop a mental acuity that enables them to discern how the teachings of wisdom are applicable to various contexts and situations. Wisdom is thus an educational pursuit that develops “the sense of rational, intellectual understanding.”⁴⁹

The importance of the intellectual virtues promoted by Prov 1:2 are more fully developed within Prov 2:1-22. This chapter aims at cultivating a desire within the student of wisdom, where their ears are attentive to wisdom and their heart is directed toward understanding (תבונה) (2:2). The chapter focuses on the need and value of wise instruction, preparing the reader to receive the ensuing instructions and “words of understanding” that will follow. The instruction within this chapter is framed through the speech of a parent⁵⁰ instructing their child (1:8), urging them to accept their teachings, a rhetorical device that is persistent throughout Prov 1-9. The goal of the

⁴⁹ Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 65.

⁵⁰ Though the dominant voice in offering the instruction appears to be a father (1:8; 4:1-3) who is speaking to a son, the parental instructions also included the mother’s teachings (תורת) (1:8; 6:20; c.f. 31:1; 31:26). In order to recognize the contributions of both the father and mother as offering wise instruction, I interpret the speaker as the inclusive parent.

parent appears to be communicating the possible benefits for the child if they “receive,” “treasure up within [them],” “pay attention with their ear,” and “incline [their] heart,” (2:1-2) to the wise teachings of the parent; the student is also urged to use their voice to call out for insight and understanding (2:3). This rhetoric lays the groundwork to cultivate the student’s receptivity and desire for learning, a key first step for obtaining wisdom.

Receptivity and desire are imperative for learning wisdom, as the intellectual process of wisdom is not simple. Alice Ogden Bellis points out that the use of multiple verbs, various body parts, and several synonyms for wisdom in Prov 2:1-4 “gives the impression that the acquisition of wisdom is an arduous, complex, all-consuming affair. It involves the senses, the intelligence, and the depths of one’s being.”⁵¹ This difficult process is identified by Sandoval in the prologue, specifically in Prov 1:5-6. Sandoval argues that these verses function as an “invitation” to the reader to engage in the book’s purposes. According to Sandoval, the terms used in 1:6 (להבין משל) (ומליצה דברי הצמים והידתם) indicate that the instruction that follows is a part of a complex literary text that comprises various types of figurative speech. A full understanding of Proverbs and its teachings will require the reader to hone the skill of being able to “read beneath the surface” and engage in a challenging interpretive process that is guided by the virtues outlined in book’s prologue.⁵² Those who will engage the instruction within the book and who are attempting to count themselves among the wise are alerted that Proverbs “will require a significant interpretative effort.”⁵³ Brown adds that this difficult process of reading and working through obscure language and riddles will lead the student toward discernment.⁵⁴ The comprehensive and arduous project outlined in 1:5-6 and 2:1-4 underscore how wisdom within Proverbs necessarily includes a difficult process of intellectual understanding.

The emphasis within 2:1-2 is that the student cultivates the correct disposition for receiving instruction by making sure they are attentive and open to receiving it. The parent emphasizes how the student should value and seek out wisdom by encouraging the student’s verbal expression of their desire for wisdom (2:3), and emphasizing that wisdom be cherished as if it were money and hidden treasures (2:4). Thus, the astute wisdom student is not merely taking in instructions passively or learning them whenever it is convenient. Rather, wisdom instruction

⁵¹ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Proverbs, Wisdom Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 20.

⁵² Sandoval, “Revisiting the Prologue,” 466-471.

⁵³ Sandoval, “Revisiting the Prologue,” 457.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 33.

is of such worth that the student must actively search it out because of its incredible value. This value is relayed by the parent at the conclusion of the chapter, wherein the student is urged to “go in the way of good and to keep the paths of righteousness” (2:20) so that they will be able to live and remain on the earth (2:21)—presumably maintaining a long life by benefiting from the resources the land has to offer and establishing progeny.⁵⁵

The instruction from the parent to child within Proverbs 2 also frames the need for the intellectual virtues of instruction and understanding as being directly related to the development of the social and practical virtues also advanced by the prologue. If the student can receive and store up within them the treasure that is wise teaching, then they will be able to understand “the fear of the YHWH” (2:5-7). The “fear of YHWH” is portrayed as the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (1:7; 9:10), and is the theological grounding of ethical behavior.⁵⁶ It is from this theological position that ethical instruction and virtue is manifest, according to Proverbs 28:5 which states that “An evil man does not understand justice (משפט), but those who seek YHWH understand it all.” Prov 2:9 affirms that the seeking out and receiving of wisdom that is given by YHWH, but also communicated by the parent, enables the student of wisdom to understand “righteousness and justice and equity,” the social virtues communicated in 1:3 (see below). This indicates that the development of intellectual virtues is also primarily a moral action.⁵⁷ Further, those who seek out and receive wise instruction will be watched over by shrewdness (מזמה) (2:11), a practical virtue amplified in 1:4. This passage demonstrates how the intellectual process of seeking out and receiving wise instruction can generate an understanding of what the other virtues entail.

(i) *Intellectual Virtues and Life and Well-Being*

The urging of Proverbs 2 to be receptive and eager to receive instruction assumes that the understanding of wisdom will influence one’s behavior, which will subsequently factor into the student’s pursuit of well-being. This primarily gets communicated within Proverbs through a discourse on “the two ways”; though the terminology may vary throughout the book, Proverbs 2 identifies the “way of evil” (דרך רע) (2:12) with those who seemingly reject instruction, and the “way of good” (דרך טובים) (2:20) with those who receiving and adopt their instruction. According

⁵⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 123.

⁵⁶ See Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 37-38.

⁵⁷ Bellis, *Proverbs*, 20.

to Fox the idea of a “way” (דרך) in Hebrew expresses a connection between the actions one takes in life and their result, signifying “what happens along one’s life course as a concomitant of behavior.”⁵⁸ By framing wise and evil behavior as the journey along distinct ways, Proverbs communicates how one’s disposition results in behaviors that will be consequential to one’s quality of life.

According to Proverbs the one who goes in the way of evil “rejoices in doing evil” (2:18), and acting wickedly is equal to the joy of laughter (10:23). Conversely, those who walk in the way of good are considered to be righteous persons (11:5, 13:6, 15:9) who act with integrity (10:9; 28:6). In a more practical sense, Proverbs also associates the less desirable way with laziness (15:19), and the better, wise way with preparedness and hard work (6:6-11).⁵⁹ The behavior chosen by the student ultimately has consequences within Proverbs, as the less desirable way of evil will ultimately lead to destruction and death (1:18-19, 31-32; 2:18, 22; 11:5; 13:15; 21:16), whereas the way of good is associated with a secure life (1:33; 2:20-12; 8:35), its preservation (19:16; 28:18), and even the possibility of prospering (19:8). Cultivating intellectual virtues does not merely help one to bank knowledge, but rather Proverbs aims at empowering students of wisdom to use the obtained understanding and insights in a way that allows them to act appropriately and in accord with what promotes life and well-being (i.e., the social-moral virtues of wisdom); by influencing behavior, Proverbs envisions that students of wisdom might participate in what is good and right, thereby avoiding destructive behaviors. Of course, the behavioral aspect of wisdom is further elucidated by the other set of virtues promoted by the prologue.

(b) Practical Virtues

Proverbs also promotes practical virtues that emphasize behaviors aimed at accomplishing one’s objectives, specifically emphasizing a student’s capacity for learning how to be “crafty” and “shrewd.” Prov 1:4 delineates the book’s purpose of cultivating practical virtues by giving the “simple craftiness” (לתת לפתאים ערמה) and the “youth knowledge of shrewdness”⁶⁰ (לנער דעת ומזמה). The paralleled terms ערמה and מזמה generally refer to the ability

⁵⁸ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 90.

⁵⁹ Occurs within a broader discussion of one who is lazy.

⁶⁰ Here I mostly follow Fox’s translation in *Proverbs 1-9*, 61. However, I translate ערמה as “crafty/craftiness”, favoring this synonym of Fox’s translation of “cunning.” The *DCH* offers both as possibilities for translation, with both terms fitting within the semantic range. Within the second clause, Fox appropriately

one has to “devise clever, even wily, tactics for attaining one’s goals, whatever these may be.”⁶¹ These practical virtues demonstrate how a major part of wisdom within Proverbs is the ability to be practical, ingenious, and clever in how one maneuvers and operates within their place in society and in their effort to prolong their life, or achieve any other desired end.

Accordingly, the semantics of these terms are morally neutral, as they may take on either positive or negative connotations within Proverbs and the Hebrew Bible. Prov 1:4 is echoed in the poem of Lady Wisdom in Prov 8, where Lady Wisdom calls on the simple to learn ערמה (8:5), and even associates herself with ערמה and מזמה (8:12).⁶² However, מזמה can also be associated with evil intent in Proverbs (12:2; 14:17; 24:8), while ערמה is associated with hostile and devious actions elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ex 21:14; Josh 9:4). This leads Fox to translate מזמה as “shrewdness” due to the “amoral tone of the word,” and its implication of “the ability to plan privately and secretly for one’s own benefit.”⁶³ McKane also interprets of Prov 1:4 as promoting shrewdness, and translates ערמה as “shrewdness,” and מזמה as “resourcefulness.” McKane explains that this verse demonstrates Proverbs’ concern with imparting practical skill and sound judgement, emphasizing that wisdom students were not educated to change the world, but “to make their way successfully in the world as it was.”⁶⁴

The association of shrewdness and craftiness with wisdom may be drawing upon a broader notion of חכמה in the Hebrew Bible that associates it with a type of skillful expertise. While this expertise certainly involves a high degree of knowledge and intellect, it is knowledge that becomes manifest within particular skills of various crafts that enable a person to perform a needed task.⁶⁵ Such tasks can range from the need for handiwork to the navigation and handling of various social situations. This notion of wisdom is not mere intellect or knowledge, but includes the expertise and effective application of dexterous, artistic, and social skills to accomplish a myriad of objectives.

interprets דעת ומזמה as a hendiadys—knowledge of shrewdness—that is equivalent to the similar construct of דעת מזמה in Prov 8:12.

⁶¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 35, 61.

⁶² See also Prov 2:11, 3:21 5:2, and 19:25.

⁶³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 61.

⁶⁴ William McKane, *Proverbs*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 265. While McKane seemingly downplays, and thus neglects, the emphasis upon morality in the educational framework of Proverbs, his point regarding the terms and their practical connotations holds up.

⁶⁵ For a fuller explanation, see Section 2.01 of this chapter.

This notion of חכמה as shrewd and crafty skill is also present within the book Proverbs, particularly in various parts of the sentence literature of 10-29. These chapters contain a myriad of practical instruction and encouragement for cultivating laborious skills that can allow one to survive and prosper. This includes various skills needed in and around one's home in order to meet one's most basic needs. For example, Proverbs teaches how a house is built by wisdom (24:3), and that a wise woman builds her house (14:1)—references that are possibly referring to the actual planning, craftsmanship, and skills needed in the development, construction, and maintenance of a home.⁶⁶

Additionally, Proverbs emphasizes a practicality for meeting one's basic needs by providing instruction on how to adequately maintain and gain value from one's homestead. Prov 27:23-27 teaches that one needs to know well their flocks and give attention to their herds, since the sheep and goats will provide clothing, milk, and food that can sustain the life of those within one's household (also, 12:10). In this same vein, Prov 12:11 instructs that "the one who works their soil will be satisfied with bread," further emphasizing the value of engaging in agricultural work and labor (also, 14:4; 24:27, 30-34). Underscoring these instructions is the belief that being attentive to and diligent with one's resources, including one's labor, will allow for a measure of material success (14:23; 21:20a; 27:26-27; c.f., 21:25). However, Proverbs does maintain an awareness that the presence of unjust behaviors and actions can affect a person's well-being and leave them in a state of poverty (13:23; 22:16; 28:3).

Proverbs' emphasis on wisdom as craftiness and shrewdness further includes the ability to manipulate circumstances by using particular social skills. Principally valued is the ability to adapt one's speech to the need of any situation.⁶⁷ Proverbs instructs that wise speech maintains the ability to choose the right words that can influence and, if needed, diffuse difficult social situations (12:6; 12:18; 16:21, 23-24). While the words of the wicked may result in deadly consequences, Proverbs instructs that the "mouth of the upright delivers them" (12:6) and "the tongue of the wise are like a remedy" (12:18). Wise speech can also be persuasive (16:21, 23-24), even enabling a person to gain access to, and possibly be influential upon, those in power (22:11). While shrewd speech is certainly a part of wisdom in Proverbs, it also needs to be directed toward good and moral purposes for it to be "wisdom." This is evidenced in instructions

⁶⁶ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 926.

⁶⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 925-926.

on being restrained in speech: “One who scorns their neighbor lacks a mind, but a person of understanding remains silent” (11:12; also, 10:19; 12:23; 17:27-28).

Beyond knowing what to say and when to say it, shrewd, practical wisdom also involves the ability to navigate social conflict by utilizing available resources in order to avoid harm. Proverbs teaches that wisdom is to be valued over brute strength in conflict, claiming that wise warriors are greater than strong warriors (24:5-6; also, 21:22); the implication seems to be that wisdom and knowledge can provide a greater advantage through strategizing and out-maneuvering one’s opponent. Proverbs also advocates for the appropriate use of gifts and bribes to obtain social favor and circumvent conflict, claiming that “a gift in secret can subdue anger” (21:14; also 17:8; 18:16).

As the above examples indicate, Proverbs conceives of these practical virtues as being intertwined with the appropriate intellect needed for the pursuit of wisdom. Whether it be the practical aspects of adequately using one’s craftiness and resources for achieving material gains, or the appropriate use of speech in manipulating social circumstances, Proverbs’ conception of wisdom includes a know-how, native intelligence and craft that allows a person to be effective in whatever activity is taken on.⁶⁸ The practical virtues espoused do require a measure of intellect, as planning, forethought, and being perspicacious of one’s environment and human behavior are necessary. Further, the practical virtues are imperative for one who desires to go in the “good way” and reap its benefits, as Prov 14:8 states “The wisdom of the crafty/shrewd one (עֲרָמָה) discerns their way.” Proverbs does not merely advance “book smarts,” but also advocates that the wise acquire “street smarts” as well.

(c) Social Virtues

As a book focused primarily upon moral development, it may seem odd that Proverbs advocates for a set of morally neutral attributes. The practical virtues promoted by the book could be employed, at worst, with malicious intent, or more simply used for an individual’s personal advancement irrespective of any possible collateral damage. However, the teaching of practical skills was often integrated with moral teachings within ancient Near Eastern wisdom

⁶⁸ Carole R. Fontaine, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 112.

literature,⁶⁹ as ancient sages believed that obtaining intellectual and pragmatic capabilities were conducive to moral conduct.⁷⁰ The book of Proverbs adopts this view, as it strives to impart a wisdom that integrates intellectual and practical virtues with social virtues aimed at producing right and just relations within society. These sets of virtues are not to be regarded as mutually exclusive, as Proverbs intends that they operate in concert with one another to produce the character of a wise person.

This pedagogical aim is set out in Prov 1:3, situated between the intellectual virtues of 1:2 and the practical virtues of 1:4. The first line of 1:3, like those in 1:2 and 1:4, begins with an infinitive construct, and typical common wisdom terminology: “To receive instruction that effects insight” (לקהת מוסר השכל).⁷¹ The second line breaks from the standard line form of 1:2-4, as it does not begin with an infinitive construct—or any verb, but simply lists three nouns: righteousness, justice, and equity (צדק ומשפט ומישרים). While the second line of 1:3 breaks with prevailing form of 1:2-4—thereby signaling its significance—the three nouns can be read in apposition to the “instruction that effects insight.” Accordingly, the verse may be interpreted as communicating how the student of wisdom in Proverbs will “receive instruction that effects insight, [particularly in] righteousness, justice, and equity.”⁷²

The prologue’s emphasis upon righteousness, justice, and equity indicates how Proverbs maintains ethical behavior and just social relations as a central tenant in the practice of wisdom. These terms frequently appear together in the Hebrew Bible, and while each maintains a distinct meaning, they together communicate “a single concept that embraces the entire range of honest and equitable behavior in personal and social relations.”⁷³ Ellen Davis rightly explains how righteousness, justice, and equity “are all relational virtues,” that make up the “the elements of healthy community life.”⁷⁴ All three of these virtues, as Brown notes, are explicitly indicative of “the way social relations are to be structured and justice is to be executed.”⁷⁵

⁶⁹ For example, the Egyptian text *Amenemope* instructs on fostering moral and personal virtues. It has long been assumed that the instructions of Prov 22:17-23-11 were based on and adapted from *Amenemope* (Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 705-707).

⁷⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 61.

⁷¹ Here I follow Schipper who translates the hiphil infinitive of השכל as modifying מוסר in the sense of an attributive genitive (*Proverbs 1-15*, 65).

⁷² Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 60.

⁷³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 60.

⁷⁴ Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Son of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 26.

⁷⁵ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 34

Proverb's teaching of social virtues is not only focused upon how individuals treat each other, but also concerns fair and ethical relations among governing structures and within social hierarchies. In addition to instructing and cultivating good and right behaviors among those who seek wisdom, teachings within Proverbs also advocate for resisting exploitation and oppression when power differentials are present. This claim can be demonstrated by briefly defining each term and surveying its usage within Proverbs.

(i) *Righteousness*

צדק, or "righteousness" refers to acting in conformity with an ethical standard by participating in social relations that are just, lawful, or right.⁷⁶ Righteousness, or being a righteous person (צדיק), is nearly synonymous with wisdom (Prov 9:9), and is characteristic of going on the good and right way (8:20). This involves demonstrating certain behaviors and attitudes that uphold the ethical standards of being wise. For example, the righteous are careful with their speech, using it to speak truth, instruct in wisdom, and affirm life (8:8;10:11, 21, 31; 12:26; 15:28; 16:13).

Righteousness also values just and healthy socially relations, as this often gets communicated by contrasting it with destructive social actions such as violence (10:11; 24:15), and exploitative economic gain (10:2; 12:12; 16:8; 21:26). The righteous are to not merely avoid bad behaviors and unjust actions, but must be proactive in cultivating right social relations by being intentional in participating in justice (12:5; 21:15), knowing the rights of the poor (29:7), and being generous with their resources (21:26). Proverbs envisions the presence and practice of righteousness as not only of importance for individuals, but as also having widespread social implications; it is believed to exalt a nation (14:34) and is characteristic of an established and lasting king (20:28; 25:5). Righteousness becomes the responsibility of kings and leaders, who are charged with maintaining the well-being of society by implementing social institutions that are just.⁷⁷ A king's rule is firmly established by enacting righteousness and expelling wickedness (16:12, 25:5), as the righteous rule of a king promotes life and regeneration (16:15)

⁷⁶ Bellis, *Proverbs*, 8; Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder*, 34. Bellis argues that the better translation of צדק would be "integrity" or "honesty." See also B. Johnson, "צדק צדק צדק צדק צדק," *TDOT*, 12:243-244.

⁷⁷ Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 102.

Proverbs consistently places a high value upon righteousness, seeing it as a quality or desire that works toward hopeful and good futures (10:28; 11:9, 11:23, 28). Accordingly, Proverbs indicates that it can be more valuable than wealth in securing long-term survival (11:4 see also 16:8), and claims that those who are persistent in righteousness will gain reward, life, honor (11:18-19; 21:21). Righteousness is valued by YHWH, who looks after the righteous (3:33; 10:3), and finds righteous action more desirable than a sacrifice (21:3).

(ii) *Justice*

משפט, or “justice,” has a wide semantic range and can refer to aspects of proper legal proceedings, but may be generally regarded as referring to a condition that honors and upholds the rights of each person in society, and an ideal to which individuals and society are obliged to conform.⁷⁸ Justice cannot be grasped by those who are evil, but is properly understood by those who seek YHWH (2:9; 28:5). Within Proverbs, and in much of the Hebrew Bible, justice is closely related with righteousness: the way of Lady Wisdom is the way of righteousness and justice (8:20); the righteous are mindful of justice (12:5) and its enactment brings them joy (21:15); along with righteousness, justice is more valuable to YHWH than a sacrifice (21:3).⁷⁹

As a moral virtue that affects all society, Proverbs teaches the importance and value of justice for a king’s rule. According to Prov 29:4 “with justice a king stabilizes the land,” and Prov 16:12 states that the king’s throne is established “with righteousness.” This king’s role in ensuring social justice occurs through ensuring equitable social practices, such as “just (משפט) balance and scales” (16:11) within the realm of commerce, since false balances are an abomination to YHWH (11:1). While a king may enact justice, Proverbs insists that YHWH is the ultimate source of justice: “Many seek the presence of a ruler, but one’s justice is from YHWH” (29:26).

Much like righteousness, Proverbs teaches the value of justice by noting what occurs when it is lacking. For example, the king who stabilizes the land with justice in 29:4a is contrasted in the parallel line by one who ruins it by making “heavy extractions” (29:4b; NRSV). This verse indicates that the opposite of justice is the unnecessary economic exploitation by

⁷⁸ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 60; Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 34.

⁷⁹ While parsed out in this work, Fox points out that צדק and משפט frequently combine in hendiadys. Commenting on their use in Prov 1:3, Fox writes that the terms “have distinguishable, if overlapping, meanings, though here they combine to convey a single concept that embraces the entire range of honest and equitable behavior in personal and social relations” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 60).

kings (29:4). Similarly, Prov 13:23 states “The field (גֵּר) of the poor [has] much food, but it is swept away with injustice (בלא משפט).” Bellis notes that the term גֵּר translated as “field,” has connotations of tillable, untilled, or fallow ground, and it can be presumed that the poor are working this land because it is not particularly desirable. However, even working this minimal land can result in the poor having the food they work to produce “swept away” by forces of injustice. The verse, as Bellis summarizes, communicates an awareness that injustice “sometimes leaves people poor through no fault of their own.”⁸⁰

Proverbs also consistently recognizes that wealth can be obtained through exploitative practices, and judges it negatively considering its discourse on social justice. Prov 16:8 states that “Better is a little with righteousness (בצדקה), than much yield with injustice (בלא משפט).” In other words, a large income obtained through unjust actions is believed to be of lesser value than obtaining a little with righteous behavior and actions (16:8). More positively, Prov 28:16 contrasts rulers who “lack understanding” (חסר תבונה) with those who “hate unjust gain” (בצע), stating that the former brings about many oppressions, yet the rulers who resist exploitative economic practices will prolong life. While wisdom within Proverbs does value material wealth (e.g., 8:21), some possession of which is mostly recognized as necessary for flourishing, it persistently favors the pursuit of wisdom consisting of righteousness and justice more than wealth obtained through unjust acts (28:6).

(iii) Equity

מישרים, or “equity,” consists of the root ישר meaning “straight” or “upright.” The term indicates a quality of honest, fair, and impartial judgement that is rooted in justice. מישרים is closely bound up with judicious activity attributed to God, particularly in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 9:9; 58:2; 75:3; 96:10; 98:9).⁸¹ While equity is listed as one of the social virtues advocated by Proverbs in 1:3 and 2:9, the term is scarcely used within Proverbs, particularly in comparison with the other social virtues of righteousness and justice. Nonetheless, Proverbs does teach that מישרים is characteristic of wise behavior, and best understood by those who seek out wisdom.

Proverbs further conceptualizes of מישרים as indicating the proper use of speech to communicate what is right, fair, and just, as indicated by Prov 8:6 and 23:16. Within Prov 8, Lady Wisdom brings forth מישרים from her lips, with her speech also containing truth and

⁸⁰ Bellis, *Proverbs*, 137.

⁸¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 60.

righteousness; her speech is not wicked or crooked but contains a sense of “uprightness” and is straight (8:6-9). Her speech is contrasted with the speech of the strange woman in Prov 7, whose words, while seductive and enticing, ultimately lead to entrapment and the way of death (7:21-27). Lady Wisdom’s speech consists of instruction, knowledge, and wisdom, which is further described as being rooted in the social virtues of righteousness and justice (8:20). This has a particular social consequence, as kings and rulers who receive the instruction of her equitable speech will judge and govern with righteousness (8:15-16). While Lady Wisdom does associate her way with riches, honor, and wealth (8:18), her equitable instruction is believed to be more valuable than silver and gold (8:10-11, 19).

Right and equitable speech can also be practiced by the student of wisdom, as doing so brings joy to the instructing parent, and is subsequently the result of the student being wise (23:15-16). The association מִיִּשְׂרָיִם with speaking connects it to a larger discourse within Proverbs on proper speech. Proverbs teaches that the wise know when and how to use their words to be instructive, persuasive, and to build social relations (e.g., 10:19; 12:6; 16:21, 23; 22:11). Conversely, “crooked speech” (6:12) ultimately works against wisdom’s values leading to evil and violence (8:13; 12:6; 16:27). While the use of wise speech can serve practical and pragmatic purposes, Proverbs’ intention of forming virtuous persons must factor into how the speech is used if it is to be considered “wise.” Wise speech is not primarily concerned with personal gain, but it must also be used to promote just and equitable relations within society. Thus, the virtuous, wise person who is persuasive in their speech (16:21, 23) will be persuading for purposes that serve the social values of righteousness, justice, and equity.

(iv) Conclusion

When juxtaposed to the morally neutral virtues within 1:2 and 1:4, the social virtues clarify how the intellectual and practical virtues are to be utilized by the wise. While Proverbs advances wisdom as a means for securing a future of well-being, it does so within the context of a broader communal life (e.g., Prov 8:20-21 and 11:4). The student of wisdom who receives instruction effecting insight into righteousness, justice, and equity, may not, as Davis concludes, be guaranteed personal advancement; instead, Davis argues that Proverbs teaches “that those who would be wise must aim, not at power, but at goodness.”⁸² While Davis’ assessment may be

⁸² Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Son of Songs*, 27.

a bit overstated—as Proverbs seemingly upholds and authorizes social hierarchies—it nonetheless recognizes how a central concern of wisdom is the desire for communal justice and well-being.

(d) The Fear of YHWH

The prologue concludes with a theological statement in 1:7 that “the fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge.” This phrase is commonly identified as book’s “motto,” as a similar statement occurs in 9:10, forming an *inclusio* around ch. 1-9, where it states that “the fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom.”⁸³ Both 1:7 and 9:10 parallel knowledge (דעת) and wisdom (חכמה) with each other, as these terms are used near synonymously within Proverbs. The emphasis made by this “motto” is a theological claim about how wisdom, and its practice, is only possible from one’s appropriate disposition toward YHWH.

The appropriate disposition is marked by the noun יראת, or “fear.” While there has been some scholarly debate regarding the exact nature of this noun—whether it’s use means a softened sense of reverence or a more serious state of dread—it nonetheless communicates a state of being that motivates someone into specific actions or behaviors. This motivation may be linked to the idea that the fear of YHWH contributes to, or is needed for, one’s survival. The phrase “fear of YHWH” occurs 14 times within the book of Proverbs, with multiple citations linking this disposition with notions of life and survival; the fear of YHWH is said to prolong life (10:27; 14:27; 22:4), help in avoiding death (14:27; 19:23), and protect future progeny (14:26). Prov 14:27 specifically parallels the life generated by the “fear of YHWH” to the avoidance of deadly snares, indicating how one’s appropriate disposition toward YHWH generates the necessary emotions, attitudes, and awareness needed for surviving and living well.⁸⁴

With this emphasis upon how the fear of YHWH contributes to life and survival, it is appropriate that it functions as the necessary prerequisite for engaging in the wisdom project of Proverbs. It must be noted that the “fear of YHWH” is not equated with wisdom in Proverbs, but is drawn into close relation with it. Because wisdom represents an ethical quality that forms a virtuous person, “the fear of YHWH” becomes the necessary precondition for one to engage in

⁸³ Prov 1:7 is slightly different: “The fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge (דעת)”

⁸⁴ See the discussion in Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 70, who notes the motivation arising from dread and not reverence. Fox goes on to note that the term “fear” allows for a range of emotions, and 1:7 is not specific regarding the quality of one’s fear.

ethical behavior that generally promotes life and well-being. As Fox explains, the Hebrew Bible presents the “fear of God” as a motivation for right behavior, “even when socially enforced sanctions do not exist or cannot be effective.”⁸⁵ For example, the Hebrew midwives—Shiphrah and Puah—spared the lives of the Hebrew males because they were said to have feared God (Ex 1:15-17). Also, Abraham claims to have lied to king Abimelech about the nature of his relationship with Sarah because he feared violence in Gerar, stating “There is no fear of God in this place” (Gen 20:11; NRSV).

Both these examples highlight the belief that one’s status as a fearer of God affects ethical decisions, particularly in how they preserve or do not preserve life. While Proverbs does often advance an idea of moral retribution, the retribution is, as Fox, writes “usually delayed or far from obvious.” Further, Proverbs does not simply equate material success with the fear of YHWH, claiming that it is better to have a little with the fear of YHWH than to have a great treasure with a panic (15:16). Thus, the “fear of YHWH” becomes the necessary “motivation prior to and deeper than the promised retribution,” and is the basis for all learning and ethical behavior.⁸⁶

In addition to enabling the wisdom student to navigate life and survive in an ethical manner, the “fear of YHWH” also participates in the prologue’s hermeneutical project of shaping how one will engage in the study of wisdom in Proverbs. As noted above, while certain aspects of wisdom may be construed as morally or theologically neutral, the student of Proverbs must now reframe all knowledge and learned behavior in terms of one’s relationship to God.⁸⁷ As Brown notes, the fear of YHWH “mobilizes the self” to adequately and appropriately pursue wisdom.⁸⁸ This involves the wisdom student maintaining a measure of humility, which Proverbs also associates with the fear of YHWH (15:33; 22:4). Prov 8:13 draws this language into the discourse of the two ways, stating that pride and arrogances are the way of evil, and the fear of YHWH is the hatred of evil. The fear of YHWH acknowledges the limits of human knowledge and understanding with the recognition that one is a creature and not God (e.g., 3:5-7; 19-20). Humility is necessary in maintaining the awareness that there are limitations upon the capacities

⁸⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 70-71

⁸⁶ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 71.

⁸⁷ Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 70-71.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 37.

and knowledge of those who are wise.⁸⁹ Thus, human wisdom cannot be all encompassing, but will need to be sought out with the awareness of its limitations, and wisdom's need to be accommodated to new and various contexts.

(e) Conclusion in Bakhtinian Terms

Proverbs thus represents an utterance that is accenting the speech genre of wisdom in its own way. Wisdom within this utterance represents the cultivation of various virtues that help to form the character of an individual. These include intellectual, practical, and social-moral virtues that work together to promote the survival and continuance of life of the wisdom student. Proverbs also envisions wisdom as contributing to one's ability to achieve well-being and flourish in one's prolonged life. Yet this well-being and flourishing is not solely focused on individual achievement, but also aims how individuals can sustain a social environment that allows for communal well-being. As a "traditional" utterance of wisdom, Proverbs will be used comparatively to see how Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* both uniquely re-accent the speech genre of wisdom.

⁸⁹ Christine Roy Yoder, "Forming 'Fearers of Yahweh': Repetition and Contradiction as Pedagogy in Proverbs," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 182-183.

Chapter III. The Dating of Qohelet, The Socio-Economic Context of Ptolemaic Palestine, and the Role of Scribes

Historical concerns have been a persistent tenant of critical biblical scholarship in general, and the study of Qohelet in particular. Having established a broad definition of wisdom that will allow for a consideration of how the text of Qohelet may be dialogically engaged with the concept of wisdom, it is now necessary that I attend to historical concerns in order to theorize Qohelet—and subsequently the *Tobiad Romance*—as an utterance of wisdom that is contextualized to, and situated within particular historical and social circumstances. This will be accomplished by determining and delineating the historical, political, and economic factors that surrounded and influenced the production of the text of Qohelet. While the exact historical context of Qohelet has been a matter of dispute, I will follow the growing consensus to place Qohelet within Jerusalem during the third century BCE, a period when Judea was under the rule of the Ptolemaic Empire.

This chapter will advance this proposal by specifically attending to the socio-economic environment that would impact the text’s production and overall discourse. This chapter will unfold in three parts: First, I will initially review and analyze scholarly attempts to date, situate, and analyze Qohelet in light of its historical and socio-economic context; second, after establishing a scholarly precedent that allows for a dating during the Ptolemaic era, I will draw upon a variety of scholarship on this era—scholarship based in the history of Ptolemaic rule, archaeological studies, sociological models, and economic overviews—in order to sketch the socio-economic context out of which Qohelet emerges; Finally, I will give consideration to the social location of the text’s authorship by considering the role and social location of scribes during this era.

Section 3.01 Part One: Scholarly Attempts for Dating and Historically Situating Qohelet

(a) Solomonic Authorship and its Rejection by Critical Scholarship

The book of Qohelet begins by stating “The words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Although the text explicitly associates the content of the book to the descriptor “Qohelet” in this preface, the noted “son of David” coupled with the tale of an extravagant king in Qoh 1:12-2:11, and the book’s association with the broader biblical wisdom corpus has allowed for an ancient tradition of attributing the text’s authorship to King Solomon—the

“patron” of ancient Israelite wisdom.¹ The association with Solomon was particularly strong among pre-modern interpreters, such as with the author(s) of the Jewish Targum who expanded and rewrote much of the book so as to explicitly include references to Solomon.²

Despite the tradition that identifies Qohelet with Solomon, there is much within the text that has provoked a near unanimous rejection of it by critical biblical scholars in the last two centuries. The text never actually mentions Solomon, but only uses the name or appellation Qohelet (קהלת), a feminine noun that in two instances is accompanied with the definite article (Qoh 7:27; 12:8). This has led some scholars to suggest that Qohelet may be more of a title drawn from the root קהל (“to gather”), with a possible understanding that the term is referencing one who gathers an assembly together or collects proverbs.³ While there is debate on the validity of these interpretations, they do align with the description of Qohelet as a sage and teacher in Qoh 12:9-10.

Further support against Solomonic authorship can be discerned within various parts of the text’s rhetoric. For example, the statement in Qoh 1:16 that the king has increased his wisdom over “all who were before me in Jerusalem,” sounds a bit awkward being that Solomon would have only been the second generation of royalty in Jerusalem. Also, passages such as Qoh 5:7-8, 8:2-4, and 10:20 imply distance from the king or a ruler, and not words that would be coming directly from a king. As Tremper Longman aptly states, the book “while encouraging an association between Qohelet and Solomon, discourages a reader from identifying Qohelet and Solomon.”⁴ Issues surrounding the text’s presentation of a royal figure will be dealt with more thoroughly in chapter V.

The release of the text from Solomonic authorship has resulted in the overwhelming consensus among biblical scholars that the text is to be dated in the post-exilic era, with the most

¹ Timothy J. Sandoval, “Introduction to Wisdom and Worship: Themes and Perspectives in the Poetic Writings,” in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*, eds., Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page, and Matthew J.M. Coomber (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 499.

² Tremper Longman III, “Determining the Historical Context of Ecclesiastes,” in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Cristian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 91; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (Garden City, NY; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 10.

³ See the discussion of various interpretations in Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 31-34.

⁴ Longman, “Determining the Historical Context,” 91.

decisive arguments advocating for a date of composition in the third century BCE, when Judea was under the rule of Ptolemaic Empire.

- (b) Three ways scholars have dated Qoh to the Third Century (Longman): Language, Thought, and Socio-historical context

Because the text does not provide content that is explicit for its dating, scholars have analyzed several details that have pointed toward a third century BCE dating. Longman has helpfully noted how biblical scholarship on Qohelet has utilized three primary categories in an attempt to date the book: language, the book's "thought world", and the socio-economic context it reflects.⁵

(i) *Qohelet's Language*

Primarily, the text's linguistic character has been attested to as the key for dating Qohelet. Scholars have widely recognized that the language of Qohelet is representative of a late manifestation of Biblical Hebrew, containing features that make it close to Mishnaic Hebrew. A few of the most commonly cited "late" characteristics include: the frequent use of the particle ׀ as the relative pronoun (e.g., Qoh 1:9; fifty-four occurrences); the extensive use of the first-person independent pronoun אני (e.g., Qoh 2:15; twenty-five occurrences); the use of nouns ending in ׀—similar to Aramaic; and the absence of the imperfect waw consecutive in specific instances (e.g., Qoh 4:1, 7).⁶

These linguistic features have firmly situated Qohelet as post-exilic; still, scholars have debated as to where specifically Qohelet should be dated in this period. Several scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries settled on a dating from the Persian period,⁷ with the most robust recent argument coming from Choon-Leong Seow. Assessing Qohelet's "typology of language," Seow notes that the significant number of Aramaisms lends itself to a postexilic date, while the text's use of Persian loanwords (פרדס in 2:5; פתגם in 8:11), along with an array of economic terms that have cognates in Persian-period Aramaic documents (e.g., יתרון, שלט),

⁵ Longman, "Determining the Historical Context," 93-102.

⁶ A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth; Part I*, 2 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 221-222; Longman, "Determining the Historical Context of Ecclesiastes," 94.

⁷ For a list of the critical works that argued for a Persian dating, the extensive citations in Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 3. A more recent argument for a Persian dating, other than Seow, is James L. Kugel "Qohelet and Money," *CBQ* 51:1 (1989): 32-49.

situate Qohelet within the Persian period.⁸ Seow further argues that the text cannot be dated later than the first half of the fourth century BCE because of the text's use of שלט in a legal sense (e.g., Qoh 2:19, 5:18, 6:2, 8:9), a sense that he believes is not maintained in the use of this term past the Persian period. Seow further supports the Persian dating by pointing out that Qohelet does not contain any apparent Greek loanwords, as might be expected from a text arising from the Hellenistic era. All that being said, Seow does acknowledge that "a Hellenistic date cannot be precluded on linguistic grounds alone," but he finds "no reasons to follow scholars who privilege" a Hellenistic dating.⁹

While Seow argues for a relative early post-exilic date on linguistic grounds, the other end of this spectrum is represented by the assertion that Qohelet be dated much later in the second century BCE. The most notable proponent of this view is C.F. Whitley, who noted similarities between Qohelet's Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, and argued that the linguistic features of Qohelet represent a period of transition from "biblical to Mishnaic Hebrew."¹⁰ Whitley narrows the time frame of the text's composition to 152-145 BCE during the era of Seleucid rule. Whitley's thesis has not been widely accepted, primarily because the "terminus ad quem" for dating the text has been set by the discovery of a fragment of a Qohelet manuscript found at Qumran (4QQoh^a) that is believed to have been written between 175 and 150 BCE. Additionally, it has been assumed that the book of Sirach, which is dated to approximately 175 BCE, presupposes Qohelet, "even if no direct literary references to Qoheleth can be demonstrated in Sirach."¹¹

Seow's contributions, as erudite and enlightening as they are on Qohelet's language and grammar, have not been convincing for many scholars regarding a strict Persian dating. Robert Gordis, in similar fashion to Whitley, argued that Qohelet stands midway between Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic idiom, though it is generally closer to Biblical Hebrew.¹² Antoon Schoors offers a similar assessment, claiming that Qohelet's Hebrew was similar to the Mishnah and

⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 20-21; Choon-Leong Seow, "The Social World of Ecclesiastes," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 193.

⁹ Seow, "The Social World of Ecclesiastes," 193.

¹⁰ C.F. Whitley, *Koheleth. His Language and Thought*, BZAW 145 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 148.

¹¹ Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 19.

¹² Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 19 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), 8.

contained Mishnaic traits. This perceived relationship between Qohelet and Mishnaic Hebrew, as well as the text's closeness to other biblical books from the post-exilic period, have led scholars to associate the language of Qohelet with Late Biblical Hebrew.¹³ Both Gordis and Schoors thus argue for a third century BCE dating of Qohelet, concluding that the text's language most appropriately fits this era.

While most arguments to date Qohelet to the third century have been based on extra-linguistic factors, the recent work of Nili Samet has proved to be insightful for a third century dating of Qohelet on linguistic grounds. Samet, like Seow, recognizes the several Aramaisms within the text, and attempts to date the text based on its use of phrases that appear to be Hebrew translations of phrases loaned from Aramaic dialects. Samet describes her method as identifying "Aramaic calques in Qohelet's Hebrew that reflect original Aramaic phrases of uneven distribution—i.e., phrases that occur only in Aramaic dialects of a given period," and then attempts to determine the historical point at which these calques "developed in, or were introduced into, Aramaic."¹⁴ Samet identifies two Aramaic calques as test cases: the conjunctions of *בשל אשר* used in Qoh 8:17 and *כצל אשר* used in Qoh 8:13. Samet argues that each phrase represents a translation of an Aramaic dialect, supporting her work with various citations and quotations from Aramaic texts. Samet concludes that these calques "evolved in Aramaic during the Hellenistic period, thus excluding a Persian period dating of the Hebrew phrases."¹⁵

If Samet's arguments are to be accepted, then her work, coupled with the "terminus ad quem" of the Qohelet manuscript at Qumran (4QQoh^a), provides support for the dating of Qohelet to the third century BCE, when Palestine was under Ptolemaic rule, on linguistic grounds.¹⁶

(ii) *Qohelet's "Thought World"*

In addition to linguistic factors, arguments for dating Qohelet have also been drawn from the content of the text itself. Specifically, scholars have focused upon the "thought world" of Qohelet, and how the text may be reflecting, or aligned with, epistemological and philosophical movements occurring in the broader Hellenistic world. Samet acknowledges how this makes

¹³ Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 5. On Late Biblical Hebrew, see Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward a Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, HSM 12 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Nili Samet, "Linguistic Dating of the Book of Qohelet: A New Angle," *VT* 71 (2021): 433.

¹⁵ Samet, "Linguistic Dating of the Book of Qohelet," 441.

¹⁶ Of course, Samet's work could also indicate that Qohelet was composed very late in the fourth century or very early in the second century BCE.

Qohelet unique within the canon of the Hebrew Bible, stating that Qohelet “is the only biblical book that is essentially philosophical.” Lohfink adds that Qohelet “is the most transparent place, within the Bible, where Israel meets with Greek philosophy.”¹⁷ This connection is discerned by how the book maintains concerns with “abstract, contemplative issues such as the purpose of life, the essence of death, and the problem of free will.”¹⁸

Though argued by earlier scholars, Gordis set the tone for 20th century scholarship on a third century dating of Qohelet based on extra-linguistic factors that would include a possible Greek influence. Gordis’ arguments included identifying theological doctrines such as a “thoroughgoing monotheism,” and a familiarity with a post-mortem judgement that would situate Qohelet within the Second Temple period. Additionally, Gordis perceived the penetration of Greek ideas into Qohelet, and noted how the text reflects Greek political and economic realities after the death of Alexander. According to Gordis, this could indicate either a Seleucid or Ptolemaic setting, but Gordis believes that Qohelet could not have ignored, nor have not been affected by, the upheavals surrounding the Maccabean revolt if these were occurring during the author’s lifetime. Thus, taking into consideration all the evidence put forth, Gordis concludes that a mid-third century BCE dating is the likeliest for the text’s composition.¹⁹

Gordis’ argument considering factors beyond linguistics has been taken up by several scholars, many of whom will emphasize one factor or another in determining the date and setting for Qohelet. Particularly, Qohelet scholarship has continually wrestled with the extent to which Qohelet may have been influenced by Hellenistic thought and philosophy, and the particular school of thought that Qohelet should be associated with.²⁰ The most commonly accepted argument in Qohelet scholarship is that, while it is difficult to determine any type of direct influence, Qohelet does maintain a shared way of thinking with Greek sources.

This view was championed by Martin Hengel, who rejected any arguments for Qohelet’s direct dependence on Greek sources, but maintained that Qohelet did have points of contact with “the spirit Hellenism.” Hengel draws primary attention to Qohelet’s wisdom teaching as being “personally engaged,” and the “*critical individuality* of an acute observer and independent

¹⁷ Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 14.

¹⁸ Nili Samet, “Qoheleth’s Idiolect and Its Cultural Context,” *HTR* 114.4 (2021): 454.

¹⁹ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 8-9.

²⁰ Notable works in this area include H. Ranston, *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature* (London: Epworth, 1925); R. Braun, *Kohelet und die frühhellenistische Popular-philosophie*, BZAW 130 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); John G. Gammie, “Stoicism and Anti-Stoicism in Qoheleth,” *HAR* 9 (1985): 169-180.

thinker.”²¹ Similarly, Michael V. Fox has acknowledged the importance that Qohelet gives to “I” in the text’s argumentation. Fox notes how Qohelet presents experience and observation as a source of knowledge, and argues that this epistemology is foreign to the ancient Near East; such an individual focus is, however, paralleled in the Hellenistic environment. Fox concludes that Qohelet “does share the fundamental tenant of Greek philosophy: the autonomy of individual reason.”²²

Samet adds to this discussion by highlighting that, not only does Qohelet appear to think as an individual, but Qohelet also generalizes issues of life’s worth and meaning.²³ For example, Qohelet makes broad statements with the repeated use of the term *הכל* (“everything” or “all”), as in “*everything is hevel*” (Qoh 1:2), and “*all* are from the dust and *all* return to the dust” (Qoh 3:20); as Samet notes, *כל* is the most frequent term used in Qohelet. Qohelet’s statements have correlations with Greek philosophy, particularly with that of Aristotle who attempted to generalize phenomena and define “the principle of all things.”²⁴ Samet summarizes that “there is no other biblical book whose plot, so to speak, takes place solely within the speaker’s mind,” with Qohelet’s philosophical discussion requiring “the use of abstract terminology.”²⁵

While many scholars have argued for some sort of Greek influence, there remains questions as to how exactly this influence has occurred. Thomas Krüger aptly states that scholars should probably concede that “concrete influences” by Greek literature or philosophy “are not demonstratable,” a position notably argued by Robert Harrison.²⁶ However, it can be agreed—as evidenced by arguments made by scholars such as Hengel, Fox, and Samet—that the author, or scribe(s), who produced the book of Qohelet were familiar with the realm of Greek literature, with possible contacts between scribes in Jerusalem with the Jewish community in Alexandria

²¹ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM, 1991), 116. See pp. 116-127 for Hengel’s fuller argument.

²² Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 81.

²³ Samet, “Qoheleth’s Idiolect,” 455.

²⁴ Samet, “Qoheleth’s Idiolect,” 455; Cites Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. John H. McMahon (Amherst: Prometheus, 1991), 8-9.

²⁵ Samet, “Qoheleth’s Idiolect,” 456.

²⁶ Robert Harrison, “Hellenization in Syria-Palestine: The Case of Judea in the Third Century BCE,” *BA* 57.2 (1994): 160-82; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 21-22. Longman similarly cautions, noting that themes and motifs within Qohelet are similar to other extrabiblical texts from earlier and different places, most notably the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (“Determining the Historical Context of Ecclesiastes,” 100).

(see section 3.03 of this chapter for a thorough exploration of scribes in the Hellenistic era).²⁷ Krüger goes on to say that the similarities seen between Qohelet and Greek literature may have been “analogous approaches toward coping with analogous challenges in the world of experience.”²⁸

(iii) *Qohelet’s Socio-economic Context*

In addition to linguistic and philosophical details, scholars have noted textual details that appear to reflect this third century Hellenistic setting. Longman notes that there are three significant features highlighted by scholars to date the book according to its socio-economic background: 1. Relative stability—as in a calmness regarding external threats, ruling out a dating surrounding the Maccabean revolt; 2. Increased trade and the introduction of coinage (e.g., Qoh 5:10-11; 7:12; 10:19); 3. A heightened socioeconomic hierarchy with intensified divisions between the rich and poor and injustice (3:16; 4:1; 5:7-8).²⁹ Scholars such as Seow and Kugel argue that these factors situate Qohelet best in the Persian era,³⁰ while others see these as more characteristic of the Hellenistic era in the third century.³¹ This study will present its own arguments for associating Qohelet with the socioeconomic context of Palestine in the third century BCE, but I will briefly note some of the scholarly trends that have impacted how this context has been framed.

Many scholarly attempts to reconstruct Ptolemaic Palestine, and the wider Hellenistic world, have been heavily influenced by the paradigmatic work of historian Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff, drawing upon his seminal study *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*.³² As Roland Boer explains, Rostovtzeff reconstructed the ancient Greek economies in terms that were familiar to twentieth century scholars, terms gleaned from capitalism and neoclassical economic theory: “a bourgeoisie and proletariat, a market economy operating in

²⁷ Similarly, Shannon Burkes and Leo Perdue have argued for the similarities between Qohelet and Egyptian grave autobiographies: Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* SBLDS 170 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); Leo Perdue, “The Book of Qohelet ‘Has the Smell of the Tomb about It’: Mortality in Qohelet and Hellenistic Skepticism,” in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Cristian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 103-116.

²⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 22.

²⁹ Longman, “Determining the Historical Context,” 96-97.

³⁰ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 21; Kugel “Qohelet and Money,” 32-49.

³¹ E.g., Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 115; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 20-21.

³² M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social & Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941).

terms of banking, industrial innovation, agricultural progress, boom and bust.”³³ More specifically, Rostovtzeff argued that the Greek economic system was based on “freedom and private initiative,” explaining that Greek economic success was directly related to a thriving bourgeoisie class.³⁴

This framework was applied by Rostovtzeff in a depiction of the Ptolemaic economy in Egypt, which ruled over Palestine in the third century BCE. As J.G. Manning explains, Rostovtzeff’s view of the Ptolemaic economy is summed up as “a single, interdependent economic system characterized by sustained economic growth that was driven above all by long-distance inter-regional trade conducted by agents of a rising urban bourgeoisie.” Rostovtzeff based this assessment on a model of Ptolemaic state power that was “marked by economic planning and coercive force,” thus presenting a picture of “an age of experiment, experiments with a new articulation of political institutions, nascent capitalism, a rising bourgeoisie, and economic development and growth.”³⁵

Rostovtzeff’s work has been widely cited and influential among biblical scholarship attempting to construct the economic context of Qohelet; even in works where Rostovtzeff may not explicitly mentioned, his presentation of a Hellenistic economy with its “rising bourgeoisie” is often discernable. Notably, Hengel argues that Qohelet maintains a “bourgeois ethic”; the bourgeois represent “the well-to-do stratum” of society, of which Hengel notes that Rostovtzeff gave “a brilliant description of.”³⁶ Hengel was also, in part, influenced by Elias Bickerman, who argued in similar terms that Qohelet was addressing a rising class of persons concerned with the acquisition of wealth and the fear of losing it.³⁷ Similarly, Crüsemann reads Qohelet as reflective of an intellectual crisis generated by a shift in the social landscape, wherein Qohelet represents an elite aristocratic perspective of an indigenous Judean under Hellenistic rule whose social experience within the Ptolemaic economy has left Qohelet isolated from the beliefs, traditions, and kinship structures of Israel.³⁸ Norbert Lohfink proposed that Qohelet represents the teachings

³³ Roland Boer, “Mikhail Rostovtzeff: Capitalism Writ Small in the Ancient World,” *Political Theology Network*, 3 July 2013, <https://politicaltheology.com/mikhail-rostovtzeff-capitalism-writ-small-in-the-ancient-world/>.

³⁴ Rostovtzeff, *The Social & Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 2:1131.

³⁵ J. G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt under the Ptolemies, 305 - 30 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 12.

³⁶ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 126-127.

³⁷ Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 165.

³⁸ Frank Crüsemann, “The Unchangeable World: The ‘Crisis of Wisdom’ in Koheleth,” in *God of the*

from a scribal school in Jerusalem that was attempting to hold onto to Israelite wisdom traditions, while at the same time incorporating Hellenistic thought and culture so as to help students from a “specific social class” prosper in the new Hellenistic economy.³⁹

Traces of Rostovtzeff’s proto-capitalist framing of Hellenistic society can be identified in each of these influential works. Yet, recent works on the economic history of Ptolemaic Egypt and Ancient Israel have critiqued the way that Rostovtzeff frames this ancient economy. Manning, while acknowledging the significant contributions made by Rostovtzeff, argues that Rostovtzeff’s belief in the “efficiency and rationality of the Ptolemaic system, run by a large and professional bureaucracy” was limited in its scope by both a modern, and capitalist, conception of economic theory and available papyri. Rostovtzeff’s view of the political economy as “state-planned” with the overall objective of “economic growth” did not take into consideration or distinguish Ptolemaic objectives from rural and local realities.⁴⁰

Similarly, Boer has critiqued what he claims is the dominant model of economic analysis of the ancient world as “neoclassical economics.” Boer essentially sees this practice as imposing capitalist concepts upon the ancient world, and claims that these anachronistic impositions are an act of “economic imperialism” because they attempt to apply a “false universal” to ancient economies.⁴¹ Boer has specifically critiqued Rostovtzeff for reconstructing the ancient Greek economy in neoclassical terms, terms that are familiar from market-driven capitalism. Boer claims that Rostovtzeff’s emphasis upon the role of the bourgeoisie within a market economy contributing to society’s economic success and decline, is in part influenced by Rostovtzeff’s personal history and anti-communist sentiments that get transposed onto the ancient world.⁴² To paraphrase Boer, Rostovtzeff’s groundbreaking and paradigmatic work on the ancient Greek economy is in large part an anachronistic analysis unaware of a bias that extends beyond methodological control.

Rostovtzeff, and subsequently those who have followed his work, have rightly emphasized how Hellenistic political and economic structures imposed themselves upon Judea.

Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible, ed. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 59-64.

³⁹ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 3-14.

⁴⁰ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 13-14.

⁴¹ Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015),

18.

⁴² Boer, “Mikhail Rostovtzeff.”

However, they begin their analysis at the center of power and perceive all economic structures as being mediated from above without much consideration of the economic implications and activity of the majority of the population. Yet as Manning has noted, Hellenism was a two-way street, and Ptolemaic economic imperatives incorporated and utilized indigenous and existing structures into their bureaucratic framework for the purpose of extracting resources.⁴³

In other words, Ptolemaic economic policy was not the establishment of a market economy enacted for the purposes of economic growth and mobility. It was a shrewd approach aimed at both introducing new structures as well as using existing ones all for the purpose of generating a sustained and reliable flow of income into the royal coffers. It was flexible and adaptable, making use of existing social structures at the local levels without always imposing new and different ones, all for the purpose of being able to extract resources. Thus, most of the population had to navigate an economic context in which they were heavily extracted from wherein they lived with the constant threat or reality of losing land, being impoverished, and/or slipping into debt-slavery. This context will be more thoroughly spelled in out the following section in an attempt to adequately frame the environment from which the utterance Qohelet arose.

Section 3.02 Part Two: Political and Economic Context of Qohelet

The previous discussion has made the case for a consensus among scholars to historically contextualize Qohelet to Jerusalem in approximately the middle of the third century BCE. During that time the Ptolemies, a Greek dynasty ruling their empire from Egypt, laid claim to Jerusalem and Judea by incorporating it into the Ptolemaic province of Syria and Phoenicia, also referred to as “Coele-Syria.” Following both historians and biblical scholars, I argue that the Ptolemies governed Judea by working through previously established social and economic structures, while also increasingly implementing new ones. This included enlisting and authorizing native elites to serve in their hierarchical, bureaucratic government (c.f., Qoh 5:7; *Ant.* 12:168-171; 180-185).

In this agrarian society, the Ptolemies accomplished their governing objective of generating revenue through the harvesting of the land’s natural resources, primarily through the development of agricultural estates that cultivated desired commodities. The Ptolemies enacted

⁴³ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 4.

arduous policies of taxation that were encouraged by ideologies justifying their claims upon desired lands. Ptolemaic taxation worked to monetize agricultural produce which allowed for it to be funneled into their wealth and used for their imperial objectives, while also subsequently creating a system of indebtedness with the agrarian population that allowed the Ptolemies, and their beneficiaries, to reallocate labor into their revenue generating estates. This system engendered economic hardship for indigenous laborers, including small-scale landowners and their kin, leading to an increase of tenant farming, dispossession, and slavery. The Ptolemaic bureaucracy efficiently conducted their revenue generating objectives by employing local scribes for administrative purposes within their tax system. I contend that the text of Qohelet is the work of a scribe(s) whom would have been aware of and influenced by these economic hardships.

(a) Ptolemaic Rule of Palestine and Judea

(i) *History of Greek and Ptolemaic Rule*

Ancient Palestine came under Hellenistic rule with Alexander the Great's defeat of Darius III of Persia in 333 BCE, and his subsequent subjugation of Palestine in 332 BCE. Alexander continued to move southward, eventually taking control of Egypt and assuming (or, receiving conferral of) pharaonic rule, thus obtaining ideological and religious justification for his rule in Egypt.⁴⁴ Following the sudden death of Alexander in 323 BCE, the lack of an apparent heir led to a period of conflict among those close to Alexander and his military leaders. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's most loyal companions, proposed that the kingdom be divided "into loosely united satrap-states."⁴⁵ A modified proposal was eventually accepted by the Greek military and various regions were divided among high-ranking officials inaugurating an era commonly referred to as the period of the *Diadochi* (Greek for "successors"). The transition of power did not go over smoothly, as the four decades after Alexander's death "were ones of continual fighting and frequent change in territory and political situations."⁴⁶

The wars of the *Diadochi* resulted in the fracturing of the Greek kingdom, with Greek rulers establishing ruling dynasties over various geographical areas once ruled by Alexander: Greece and Macedonia under the Antigonids, Syria and Mesopotamia under the Seleucids, and

⁴⁴ Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 10-11; Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 2: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335-175 BCE)*, LSTS 68 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 270

⁴⁵ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 12.

⁴⁶ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 271. See the brief, but thorough, overview in Peter Thonemann, *The Hellenistic Age: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 18-28.

Egypt under the Ptolemies.⁴⁷ Ptolemy established a reigning dynasty in Egypt by adopting Alexander's strategy of gaining and maintaining power through Egypt's ancient institutional forms, namely pharaonic rule.⁴⁸ Though Ptolemaic rule was firm within Egypt, the control of Palestine was a matter of dispute and struggle, as it would change hands between Ptolemy and the Macedonian ruler Antigonos multiple times between 320 and 301 BCE. Yet Antigonos was defeated at the battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE—a battle which Ptolemy did not participate in—and as a result Ptolemy I assumed control over the southern region of Syria, which included Judea and Jerusalem.⁴⁹

However, Ptolemaic control of this region was not without conflict. After the battle of Ipsus the region including Palestine was assigned to Seleucus—a member of the coalition that defeated Antigonos—yet Ptolemy refused to cede Syria and Phoenicia when Seleucus attempted to claim the territory.⁵⁰ These contested claims engendered a century long struggle resulting in multiple wars between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids and a sustained military presence in the area. Each empire sought control of Syria and Phoenicia, which included Palestine, because of its value as a “military buffer-zone” from neighboring empires. Additionally, the area was considered to be rich in agricultural resources, particularly grain, oil, and wine.⁵¹ Despite the constant struggle, the Ptolemies were able to maintain control of the region from 301 BCE to 200/198 BCE.⁵²

(ii) *Ptolemaic Governance of Palestine and Judea*

While the Ptolemaic dynasty was an ethnically Greek Empire, they accommodated Egyptian forms of pharaonic kingship and acclimated their rule by gaining legitimacy from the Egyptian priesthods. This was primarily a strategic move, as J.G. Manning explains that the Ptolemies knew the best and most efficient way to govern an empire of their size was “to honor local customs and practices in so far as possible.”⁵³ According to Hölbl, the Ptolemaic kings “both in theory and practice” assumed and enacted “the ancient Egyptian model of sovereignty in which the pharaoh was the sole proprietor in Egypt and correspondingly all land and its products

⁴⁷ Thonemann, *The Hellenistic Age*, 22.

⁴⁸ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 20-21. Thonemann, *The Hellenistic Age*, 24.

⁴⁹ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 22.

⁵⁰ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 281

⁵¹ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 23

⁵² Roger S. Bagnall, *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions Outside Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1976),

⁵³ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 28.

were said to belong to him.”⁵⁴ Pharaonic legitimacy was bestowed upon the Ptolemies through a relationship of mutual support with the Egyptian priests and temples, which were not only religious institutions but also “coordinators of economic land management, record keeping, and storage.”⁵⁵ This relationship allowed the Ptolemies to have an authoritative claim upon the land and its resources, enabling them to extract a reliable stream of revenue based in agricultural production without consistently applying or threatening brute force, and thus spending a portion of the revenue they were bringing in.

Manning has elucidated how the Ptolemies supplemented this Pharaonic ideology by implementing a hierarchical, bureaucratic system that relied on the allegiance of local elites, who functioned as a buffer between the Ptolemies and agricultural producers.⁵⁶ This bureaucratic administration was put in place to govern the empire’s provinces adequately and efficiently, and was primarily organized around the empire’s economic objectives. The intent of the bureaucracy was to efficiently manage the agricultural production throughout the empire, with the primary goal of maximizing revenue that could be extracted from the land’s resources.

Roger S. Bagnall has provided a summary of the Ptolemaic administration as it was constructed in Egypt.⁵⁷ The empire was divided into what were called nomes, which were administrative districts that were essentially held over from the period of Persian rule. Initially, nomes were governed by three primary officials: the nomarch who was in charge of agricultural production; the *oikonomos*, who supervised finances; and the *basilikos grammateus*, a royal scribe who kept the necessary records of the land and its production. Hölbl explains that the royal scribe was supported by a staff of persons who were responsible for the administration and registration of agricultural estates.⁵⁸ Each of these officials were under the supervision of, and reported to, the *dioketes*—the chief financial officer and interior minister of the Ptolemaic

⁵⁴ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 61; See also Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 146-147. As Manning points out, though this may have been “official ideology”, it is likely that the Ptolemies did not disturb local and rural land claims so long as they were able to benefit from taxing them. This process of extraction ultimately led to them taking control of large tracts of land to be used for the purposes of agricultural estates and granting to bureaucratic officials and/or military officers and soldiers.

⁵⁵ Manning, 83.

⁵⁶ J. G. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137-140.

⁵⁷ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 3-10.

⁵⁸ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59.

kingdom.⁵⁹ There was also an operative office of a “nome-*strategos*,” who appears to be a military troop commander, and was probably located within a military garrison. The *strategos* were likely to have been directly appointed by the king, and seem to have acquired greater influence in civil matters within the nome throughout the third century, eventually replacing the office of the nomarch.⁶⁰ Manning surmises that the Ptolemaic state effectively functioned “by stressing the vertical ties to the ruler through a bureaucratic hierarchy that connected the villages to the nome capitals, and these in turn to the capital at Alexandria.”⁶¹

While this summary represents the nomes located within Egypt, it is unclear as to what extent this structure existed within Syria and Phoenicia. Bagnall cites the Vienna papyrus of 261 BCE as outlining the basic governing structure within Syria and Phoenicia since it contains a royal ordinance of Ptolemy II regarding the proper reporting and administration of taxes on livestock and slaves (*C.Ord.Ptol.* 21-22).⁶² According to the papyrus, the primary administrative unit was a *hyparchia*, and each *hyparchia* had an officer termed an *oikonomos*, whose primary function was to oversee economic matters. At a lower level were the komarchs, who functioned as administrative officers at the village level, and according to Hölbl, oversaw agricultural production within their assigned village.⁶³ The ordinance claims that it was the responsibility of these royal officials, at the *hyparchia* and village level, to collect taxes that were imposed upon the people.⁶⁴

While it may have occurred in a slightly different structure, these references nonetheless demonstrate how the Ptolemies likely imposed and utilized a bureaucratic structure upon the province of Syria and Phoenicia, which included Palestine and Jerusalem. The purpose of these officials was to ensure an efficient administration in governing and, ultimately, in collecting revenue for the Ptolemaic monarchs in Egypt.⁶⁵ After reviewing the extant data, Bagnall concludes that the province of Syria and Phoenicia maintains “a close resemblance” to the

⁵⁹ Manning, *Land and Power*, 137.

⁶⁰ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 4-5. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59.

⁶¹ Manning, *Land and Power*, 131.

⁶² Bagnall, *The Administration*, 18-19. Reproduced and translated in Roger S. Bagnall and Peter Derow, eds., *The Hellenistic Period: Historical Sources in Translation* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 111-113.

⁶³ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59.

⁶⁴ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 19.

⁶⁵ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 57. According to Manning the ruler and elites within the ruling bureaucracy have a goal of remaining in power to accomplish two goals: 1. Fend off rivals, defend territory. 2 Raise revenue.

administration within Egypt.⁶⁶ Additionally, Robert Harrison convincingly argues that the archaeological evidence from third century Palestine, primarily the presence of Hellenistic coins, indicates that the Ptolemies “took thorough control of the region’s economy” in a similar way to the areas along the Nile.⁶⁷

In addition to the presence of bureaucratic officials, Ptolemaic rule appears to have allowed local communities to maintain a measure of religious and legal autonomy. Manning has argued that the Ptolemaic state was “institutionally heterogenous” as it governed its territories “by exercising power not over society but rather through it” to achieve their main governing objective of “revenue capture.”⁶⁸ The Ptolemies did this through a strategy of maintaining relationships with local institutions so that they could extract taxes and tributes from agricultural producers through the local religion and aristocracy in an efficient and relatively diplomatic manner. This was necessary for an empire that had far reaching geographical locations where rulers had to “manage a variety of social groups with different interests and different degrees of loyalty.”⁶⁹

One way in which this occurred was the adoption of temple systems into the Ptolemaic ruling hierarchy. For the Ptolemies, temples and their priests functioned as centralized structures and ideological justifiers of Ptolemaic extraction. The Ptolemies maintained that in order to maximize extraction while minimizing risk local institutions must not be interfered with, and there needed to be a measure of flexibility in applying their policies.⁷⁰ Manning explains that while on paper the Ptolemaic economy seemed “rigid, hierarchical, and planned,” the Ptolemies were ultimately “flexible” in that they utilized existing structures and social networks “in so far as possible.”⁷¹ For Jerusalem, this meant that the temple and high priesthood functioned as a type of theocracy—under Ptolemaic authority—that maintained a measure of local governance, and likely participated in the collection of taxes that were used to pay an allotted tribute to the Ptolemaic crown.⁷² Thus, although the Jerusalem temple did not appear to explicitly authorize Ptolemaic rule or adhere to Pharaonic authority, the priestly aristocracy likely legitimized their

⁶⁶ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 24

⁶⁷ Robert Harrison, “Hellenization in Syria-Palestine: The Case of Judea in the Third Century BCE,” *BA* 57.2 (1994): 106.

⁶⁸ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 3.

⁶⁹ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 75.

⁷⁰ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 9

⁷¹ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 120.

⁷² Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 185-191, 225-229.

own efforts to extract and collect produce in order maintain local power and participate in the Ptolemaic extractive regime.

Ultimately, the primary intention of this “heterogenous” bureaucratic administration was to efficiently manage the agricultural production of the land with a view for how it could be transferred into an ever-increasing revenue for the Ptolemaic monarchy. For the Ptolemies, the primary economic objective was to adequately balance maximizing their incoming revenue while minimizing risk. Manning summarizes the five main practices of Ptolemaic economic policy for achieving this objective: 1. Extend and maximize cultivation where possible; 2. Maintain old land tenure patterns (land associated with Temples, local wealthy figures) while collecting taxes on agricultural produce; 3. Tax production in the main industries (production of various commodities); 4. Tax transactions (sales); 5. Extend royal sale licenses in key industries (i.e., establish royal monopolies in certain industries of production). Tribute was paid to the monarchy through established Temple systems, and the Ptolemies increasingly auctioned off the right to collect taxes in various areas to tax farmers.⁷³ The purpose of maintaining a steady stream of revenue through processes of extraction was to fund Ptolemaic imperial ambitions, such as military expeditions and imported goods.⁷⁴

This imperial and administrative focus on generating revenue led W.W. Tarn to quip that the Ptolemaic Empire became “a money making machine.”⁷⁵ Because this was accomplished through a bureaucratic hierarchy of both Ptolemaic officials and local leaders, Bagnall adds to Tarn’s observation that “Wherever there is money to be made, a royal official is found.”⁷⁶ These economic objectives increasingly impacted the Ptolemaic provinces outside of Egypt, as they became a key source for revenue and economic support. According to Hölbl, the bureaucratic system within the foreign territories gained increasing importance as the third century BCE went on, because it became necessary for the Ptolemies to “ensure an optimal exploitation of resources... especially in view of the abundant primary and secondary goods which Egypt lacked.”⁷⁷ This bureaucratic structure that enforced heavy taxation and extraction of agricultural

⁷³ Manning, *Land and Power*, 141. See also the summary in Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 209.

⁷⁴ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 61-62; Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 72.

⁷⁵ W.W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927), 179. Quoted in Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 35.

⁷⁶ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 24.

⁷⁷ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59-60.

produce, as well as the military presence and involvement within Palestine, certainly generated a heavy-handed Ptolemaic influence within the region.

(b) The Socio-economic Landscape of Ptolemaic Judea

(i) *Operative Modes of Production and Socio-economic Trends within Ancient Israel and Judea*

Because the Ptolemies emphasized working through traditional structures in their extractive strategy, the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple and the significant role played by the High Priest and other officials within the Temple system must be taken into account when considering the political and economic structure within Judea.⁷⁸ This does not necessarily mean that the Temple structure replaced Ptolemaic officials within the area. Archaeological and epigraphical evidence from this era has noted a proliferation in large estates that were used to produce exportable commodities, indicating some direct control over the land by those within, or closely tied to, the Ptolemaic bureaucracy. It seems likely that the socio-political and economic structure within Ptolemaic Judea operated through both indigenous and external structures, thereby representing a complex operation ultimately under Ptolemaic control.

In order to frame a discussion of this complex socio-political economy, I will draw upon archaeological and historical studies to construct and articulate operative modes of production that existed in Palestine and Judea during this era. This will be accomplished by utilizing scholarship that has theoretically analyzed the multiple modes of production that were operative throughout the history of ancient Israel and Judea to interpret the historical, archaeological, and epigraphical data from Ptolemaic Palestine. This will include the seminal work of Norman Gottwald,⁷⁹ as well as the more recent contributions by Gale A. Yee⁸⁰ and Roland Boer,⁸¹ among others. The goal of this analysis will be to gain an understanding of Judean society through its economic structures, disparities, and struggles experienced by the majority of the area's population. This will allow for exegetical insight into the environment that surrounded the production of utterances such as Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*.

⁷⁸ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 168

⁷⁹ Norman K. Gottwald, "Sociology," *ABD* 6: 79-89.

⁸⁰ Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); "The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Religion and Society* Supplement 10 (2014): 4-19.

⁸¹ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.

1) Defining “Mode of Production”

“Mode of production” is a “broadly encompassing” Marxist analytical category that Barbara A. Foley defines as signifying “the entire social complex constituted by the conjunction of the forces and relations of production.”⁸² Specifically, this has to do with the ways in which human communities organize their labor, technology, and raw materials for the purpose of producing materials that can meet human needs and/or be allocated for economic purposes.⁸³ Of particular interest to any analysis of a mode of production is what is referred to as the “relations of production.” This is a consideration of the social and economic relationships between those who have a sense of ownership over property and raw materials (i.e, the “means of production”: various tools and other implements), with those who use their labor to convert the raw materials into product.⁸⁴ To analyze a society’s mode of production involves studying the various intersections of a society’s economic dimensions—who produces what, by what technical means, and with what organization of labor—with its political dimensions—who determines what will be produced, who benefits from what is produced, and by what mechanisms.⁸⁵

This analysis will also include how the organization and allocation of human labor for the purposes of production results in social divisions such as: class and status, political organization, and family structure. Because these social divisions exist, it is also important to understand “the ideological ramifications” that hold together this process by giving “socially organized laborers” meaning to “their common projects.”⁸⁶ With this sort of analysis Boer adds that the overarching and structural modes of production are able to achieve relative stability by being socially reinforced through modes of *régulation* —that is, human behavioral patterns and institutions that include cultural norms, ideologies, societal compromises, and religion.⁸⁷ All this is rooted in a Marxist understanding of political economy in which a society’s organization of labor is central to “what it means to be human” within said society.⁸⁸ Thus, an analysis of a “mode of

⁸² Barbara Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 6.

⁸³ See the similar definitions in Gottwald, “Sociology,” 83, and Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 21.

⁸⁴ Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism*, 5-6.

⁸⁵ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 83.

⁸⁶ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 83.

⁸⁷ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 31-41; Concise definition of “modes of regulation” drawn from Boer’s glossary of key terms in *The Sacred Economy*, 236. Boer’s analysis is based on an adaptation of *Régulation* theory, which Boer defines: “given the normal state of economic instability and crisis, a *régulation* approach is interested in how specific economic systems stabilize crises in order to gain some continuity for certain periods” (31-32).

⁸⁸ Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism*, 8.

production” will coordinate and encompass the economic, political, social, and ideological dimensions through which humans live and operate.

Specifically, this study will identify and analyze various modes of production that not only occurred throughout ancient Israel, but were specifically operative in the third century BCE. These include: a familial mode of production based in subsistence survival agriculture; a foreign tributary mode of production that encouraged the production of exportable commodities through the development of estates; and a slave-based mode of production. While certain modes of production may achieve dominance during one period or another, Gottwald explains that various modes of production are capable of existing alongside of a dominant one “either as remnants of former times or as forerunners of what is to come.”⁸⁹ Additionally, because modes of production are consistently undergoing development and change, Boer explains that multiple forms of economic extraction by the politically and economically elite coexist in order to offset and provide solutions to the limits and crises generated by other extractive forms.⁹⁰ In other words, those who have access to societal and economic power will find new ways to continue and further their power, even if it means shifting and adjusting the primary mode of production. As a result, a consideration of the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine must account for these overlapping and often clashing productive relations, paying specific attention to how labor and resources are allocated.

2) Familial Mode of Production and the Practice of Subsistence Agriculture

A primary economic objective within Ptolemaic Palestine was the development of large agricultural estates that produced desired and exportable commodities. Because large estates were owned by a wealthy few, it was imperative that they acquired a significant labor force to ensure optimal production. To understand how estates operated and coopted labor, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the consistent and persistent familial mode of production

⁸⁹ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 83. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 31. The idea that multiple modes of production could coexist as “dominant,” “residual,” and “emergent” is based in the work of cultural historian Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-127. See the discussion of Williams’ ideas in Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*, 7-8.

⁹⁰ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 147-149. Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*, 7. It should be noted that Boer is here describing “institutional forms,” by which he is referring to the fundamental social relations in an existing economy. For Boer, it is not a shift in the “mode of production,” but a reconfiguration of the existing institutional forms. Nonetheless, Boer reiterates that idea that there can be the coexistence of different relations of productions, even if the concept is slightly nuanced. Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*, 7.

based in the practice of subsistence agriculture, as it provided a necessary labor pool from which estates could extract.

Most of the population within ancient Israel and Judea resided in rural areas and was engaged in the core economic activity of agriculture, which consisted of growing crops and the practice of animal husbandry. Boer identifies this agricultural practice as “subsistence survival.” Subsistence survival represents not merely the acts needed to survive each day, but more specifically the “carefully honed, risk-reducing strategies that sought to ensure long-term survival,”⁹¹ that was carried out through the allocation and reallocation of labor and the produce of labor toward the survival of the family and/or village.⁹² Ideally, participants within subsistence agriculture would operate with the intent of consuming and/or utilizing what was produced from their agricultural activities without having to offer tribute or payment to a more powerful entity.

Yee explains that the practice of subsistence agriculture operated under a “familial mode of production,” as it was anchored within a kinship and a village-based mode of life marked by mutual aid and common interests.⁹³ It was practiced within the context of small social units who held a common bond through the practice of subsistence farming, which was their primary economic activity. The central resource for subsistence farming was the consistent access to adequate land, and landholdings were passed down within family units from generation to generation. The family and household were the most basic social unit within ancient Israel and Judea, with the *בית אב* (“household of the father”) representing a continuing ancestral and patriarchal family compound based on a landed inheritance that could contain up to three generations of blood relatives, and those joined through marriage.⁹⁴ The labor of the household was divided among all its residents—men, women, and children—for the purpose of utilizing the land and what it could produce to ensure the continued survival and livelihood of every member of the household.⁹⁵ If a household or village was in need and became impoverished, then they

⁹¹ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 54.

⁹² Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 1.

⁹³ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 31-32. See also Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 4-9.

⁹⁴ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 4-5, 36-40.

⁹⁵ For a thorough exploration of the role of women in ancient Israelite households, see Carol Myers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103-124.

could rely on larger networks of kinship, such as their clan (משפחה) or even a tribe (שבט), to assist them in managing their crisis.⁹⁶

David C. Hopkins has noted that within familial based agriculture, the primary productive unit—the village or household—was the locus of agricultural decision making. It was at this level where decisions were made on what to produce, and how to utilize land and resources for advancing their common interest of survival.⁹⁷ This was conducted with a strategy of growing and producing multiple crops throughout the year, along with raising and tending to herds. The decision on what crops to produce, and when to plant, would have been influenced by an intimate knowledge of the land’s physical geography and climate. This included a necessary understanding of the seasons, particularly in regards to the timing of the rains.⁹⁸

The crops raised by subsistence farmers within this context were primarily an array of cereals, specifically wheats and barley used for making bread and beer.⁹⁹ However, the practice of having diversified crops, along with herds, was an attempt to spread out and minimize the overall risks that were a part of the farmer’s unstable environment.¹⁰⁰ Because external factors such as drought, disease, insects, or plunder were capable of wiping out certain crops, subsistence farmers attempted to control this by producing various crops that could be harvested in different seasons. The implementation of palaeobotanical studies into the archaeological record has revealed that subsistence farmers were also producing protein-rich crops such as of broad beans, lentils, bitter vetch, and chick-peas. Additionally, various fruit trees and vines were also cultivated, including grapes, olives, figs, pomegranates, dates, and nuts.¹⁰¹

Oded Borowski has concluded that “the major contribution to agricultural methodology” by subsistence farmers within ancient Israel was the practice of crop rotation, which “together with organic fertilizing and fallowing” was able to engender a larger crop yield and create a surplus of produce.¹⁰² The practice of crop rotation is further evidenced by the discovery of the Gezer calendar, one of the oldest Hebrew inscriptions that lists annual farming responsibilities by

⁹⁶ Yee, “The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel,” 5-6; Gottwald, “Sociology,” 85.

⁹⁷ David C. Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1983 Seminary Papers*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 177.

⁹⁸ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 86-87.

⁹⁹ See the overview in Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 67-75.

¹⁰⁰ Hopkins, “Life in Ancient Palestine,” *NIB* 1:219.

¹⁰¹ Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 5-9.

¹⁰² Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 7-8.

subdividing them into their appropriate seasonal time. For example, the calendar begins by attributing two months for harvesting olives, then two months for planting grain, and goes on to list other activities such as hoeing flax, harvesting barley, and vine-tending.¹⁰³ This evidences the necessary skill and knowledge maintained by subsistence farmers, who understood their environment and applied skills that were honed over time to ensure their family's survival within an often uncertain and risk-filled environment.

3) Tributary Mode of Production and the Development of Estates

Within ancient Israel and Judah, the familial mode of production was economically impinged upon by urban areas and monarchical institutions that sought to extract agricultural surpluses and labor from rural villages. This led to the emergence of a tributary mode of production that often existed alongside of and in relationship with the familial mode of production. A tributary mode of production represents the development of an organized political entity—a state—and its imposition upon a peasant class through the extraction of the peasants' surplus produce and labor in the form of taxes and tribute offered to the ruling powers. This extraction occurs in two cycles: a tax cycle and a debt cycle.¹⁰⁴ During the tax cycle the state extracted surplus from the producers by imposing heavy taxes upon them. The trade-off for the rural villagers practicing subsistence agriculture was that the monarchies would provide those within their sphere of influence a measure of security from invading threats, which on the surface functioned to reduce one of the risks of familial subsistence agriculture.¹⁰⁵

In return for this protection, monarchies and other elite non-producers used the mechanism of taxation and tribute not only for their own sustenance, but also for their economic expansion; this consisted of participation within networks of trade that involved importing luxury goods that were paid for by exporting valued foodstuffs from the region.¹⁰⁶ Thus, monarchies taxed and demanded from village-based producers agricultural products that were storable,

¹⁰³ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 87-88 (English translation on 88).

¹⁰⁴ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 32-34; Gottwald, "Sociology," 84-86.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the so-called "Philistine threat" described in 1 Sam 4-8 is portrayed as the primary reason for the Israelite tribes desiring centralized political leadership in the form of a king who organize military efforts against this threat. As Yee points out, it was unlikely that this was the only motivating factor in the formation of the monarchy, as successful landowner saw the monarchy as means by which they could continue to advance their own interests (*Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 32-33).

¹⁰⁶ Marvin L. Chaney, "The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty: What the Eight-Century Prophets Presumed but Did Not State," *Journal of Religion and Society* Supplement 10 (2014): 36. Hopkins, "The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel," 195.

transportable, and exchangeable. According to Hopkins the “literary, epigraphic, and artifactual evidence converges on oil, wine, and wheat as the commodities of choice in the monarchical economic network.”¹⁰⁷ As a result of the demands by powerful non-producers, the economic and agricultural decision-making of rural villagers was significantly reduced.¹⁰⁸

This agricultural and economic environment inevitably favored the few producers who had greater access to resources of capital, and could have survived and flourished within this environment.¹⁰⁹ Yee further explains that this situation of extraction from villages resulted in the “expropriation, exploitation, and oppression” of subsistence producers, generating a social stratification between extracting elites and an impoverished peasant class.¹¹⁰ Yee broadly generalizes the class differentials in this stratification as the “productive members”—the vast majority of the population—and the “non-productive” members—an upper-class minority. The “productive members” labored on the land to “transform the raw materials of the land or herd into food, clothing, shelter, and whatever else was needed for living.” The “non-productive members” were the ones who “came to own the means of production (the land) and lived off the agricultural and pastoral efforts of the productive group by extracting its surpluses as tribute, taxes, or rents.” While the ruling class extracted the surpluses from the peasant class, Yee notes that they “usually allowed the producing class just enough surplus to keep it at subsistence level.”¹¹¹

However, the demand for the intensive production of a few desired commodities generated new and increasing difficulties for village-based subsistence farmers, who not only

¹⁰⁷ Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” 196. Hopkins cites a myriad of data that points to the eighth century BCE as a decisive time in which the monarchy’s demands upon village-based agriculture necessitated the heightened production of these commodities. Specifically, the Samaria ostraca evidence the flow of wine and oil from “an agriculturally productive zone” surrounding the city to the royal officials, and archeological surveys of the Samarian hills reveal the extensive use of rock-cut olive processing installations that contain and larger and improved beam press that allowed for the increased production of olive oil during the eighth century (199). Further, royally stamped jar handles containing the *lmlk* seal have been uncovered from towns within Judah and surrounding Jerusalem. Hopkins believes that that these stamps also appear to contain inscriptions place names of apparent royal vineyards, demonstrating a centralized administration of wine production (200). Chaney adds that these seals represent standardization of the jars to a uniform size for efficient trading purposes (“The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 36). The direct involvement of powerful entities into the production of wine possibly resulted in the claiming of fertile land, previously held in common by villagers for the purpose of livestock grazing or occasional cropping, and converting it into vineyards or orchards (i.e., Amos 5:11; 41-42).

¹⁰⁸ Chaney, “The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 39. Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” 193-194.

¹⁰⁹ Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” 201.

¹¹⁰ Yee, “The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel,” 9.

¹¹¹ Yee, “The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel,” 9-10.

needed to meet the demands of the monarchy and other non-producers, but also had to maintain their own subsistence. Producers would have needed to address this challenge by increasing the production of the desired commodities while subsequently decreasing the production of other crops. For example, Hopkins claims that this likely meant that since sheep and goats were not seen as “integral to the taxation apparatus,” a significant amount of grazing lands were converted to the cultivation of the preferred commodities.¹¹² The maintaining of herds not only provided needed products such as meat and wool, they also functioned as a fertilizing source for field crops. Their minimization, as well as any other crops that were neglected, meant that the risk of catastrophe for producers was greatly heightened since the herds provided a type of food “insurance” during crop failure. Chaney aptly summarizes this challenge by noting how the foodstuffs produced by subsistence farmers for tribute and export competed with their own efforts for subsistence: “Peasant producers could not consume what was exported; what they consumed, conversely, could not be exported. The supply of exportable commodities was finite and varied with erratic growing conditions, but the elite’s appetite for luxury, military, and monumental imports was virtually limitless.”¹¹³

The external demand for exportable commodities could be met, ideally, by reallocating the labor of some peasant producers from subsistence production to the intensified production of commodities. However, this was unlikely to be a desirable option for rural villagers since their available labor was limited, and needed to be engaged in ensuring the family and village’s survival. As Chaney’s assessment demonstrates, the surplus of subsistence producers was ultimately limited in its ability to meet the goals of non-producing elites. Thus, what came to valued more than the subsistence producer’s surplus was the potential to reallocate their labor to agricultural estates that were established, controlled, and directed by the non-productive class. Taxation ultimately functioned to generate debt, which could then be utilized as a mechanism for acquiring the land and labor of subsistence farmers for large-scale estates focused on the primary production of valued commodities.

As Boer simply puts it, the main function of an estate is to enable a nonproducer to extract something from a producer at higher yield and with more direct control than otherwise

¹¹² Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” 197.

¹¹³ Chaney, “The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 37.

possible.¹¹⁴ The laborers on the estate had little to no control over the means of agricultural production (i.e., the crops that were grown), as this was directed by the class of wealthy elites who had control of the estates and thus determined what would be produced for both their own subsistence and economic pursuits in trade.¹¹⁵ Boer concludes that the interests of the ruling class was better served by dragging subsistence laborers into the estate system rather than extracting from subsistence operations, not only because yields were higher, but because labor for estates was always in short supply. But even more to the point is that estates were more economically beneficial than the taxes imposed upon village communities: the yields gained from taxing the surplus of rural villages would have been “no more than 10 percent and were always unreliable, since farmers were fickle and resistant; the yields from estates were around 50 percent.”¹¹⁶

While functioning estates were more valuable than taxes, the creation of estates did not eliminate the imposition of taxes and tribute upon villagers. Ultimately, taxation and estates worked together within the economic strategy of the ruling class, as the imposition of taxes enabled the acquisition of land and the reallocation of labor by producing situations of indebtedness. The persistent and specialized demands of the state coupled with the ever-present risk of crop failure often impoverished the peasantry and weakened their ability to meet the taxation demands, inevitably leading an “endless circle of debt.”¹¹⁷

For example, if subsistence farmers encountered difficult years, they could take out a “survival loan” from a wealthy landowner who had access to surplus produce in order to pay their taxes and meet their subsistence needs. Because the loans would have been provided with “onerous interest rates,” this would inevitably lead to indebtedness, with the surety for these loans typically being the farmer’s land holding and/or the indentured labor of one or more family members.¹¹⁸ According to Chaney, foreclosure was at the discretion of the creditor, and wealthy landlords may choose to “squeeze every last drop from a peasant family’s labor, and then foreclose, thereby creating a growing pool of landless day laborers and debt-slaves.”¹¹⁹ Boer aptly states that debt “provides the necessary lubricant for the mechanism of extraction,” as it

¹¹⁴ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 110-111.

¹¹⁵ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 119.

¹¹⁶ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 120-121.

¹¹⁷ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 32.

¹¹⁸ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 119-120. Gottwald, “Sociology,” 84.

¹¹⁹ Chaney, “The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 43.

was used to extract goods, labor, and land with the primary goal being the increase of the lender's own wealth.¹²⁰

The situation of indebtedness and foreclosure led to the consolidation of land within the hands of those who had access to wealth, resulting in the most productive lands being controlled by fewer and more powerful entities. This subsequently had the effect of expanding large-scale agricultural estates owned by absentee landlords, who singularly desired that their peasant tenants and indentured slaves produce “an ever-increasing flow of oil and wine.”¹²¹ These tenants and slaves provided the necessary labor for estates, where they were expected to supply a significant portion of their produce to the estate owner and survive on what was left over. Boer estimates that the tenants would have been expected to supply between one-third and one-half of what they produced in return for their tenure.¹²²

This manipulation of the agricultural economy had the effect of shifting a significant portion of labor away from subsistence farming and toward the economic objectives of the wealthy, non-producing elite. While the practice of free, subsistence agriculture within a familial context did not cease to exist, its viability was affected. Many rural, subsistence farmers became alienated from the most productive lands and were forced onto lands of poorer quality as they sought to provide for themselves and their family. In an effort to survive, these farmers (and their families) were forced to labor part-time, for low wages, on larger estates—estates that possibly included the land that their family had previously owned for generations.¹²³ This allowed for the cycle of indebtedness, foreclosure, and tenancy to continue.

4) Operative Modes of Production under Ptolemaic Rule

While ancient Israel initially experienced a native-tributary mode of production headed by local elites and the Israelite/Judahite monarchy, the emergence and dominance of imperial powers such as the Neo-Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians, and the subsequent exile and return, led to Judea being a colonial outpost under the rule of foreign empires. During the post-exilic period this was manifested during Persian rule and remained throughout the Hellenistic era until the Maccabean revolt. Judea and Palestine continued under a tributary mode of production, but

¹²⁰ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 156-158 (156).

¹²¹ Chaney, “The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 43.

¹²² Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 117.

¹²³ Hopkins, “The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel,” 201; Chaney, “The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty,” 43.

the ultimate controllers and beneficiaries were the foreign empires who held political control over Palestine. Because the Persians and the Ptolemies (and later the Seleucids) allowed a measure of local rule—primarily through the temple—as indigenous elite were also able to maintain a native-tributary mode of production by imposing their own taxes and tribute. This created a “double tax-burden” upon the peasant classes who were “forced to render tribute to both native and foreign ruling aristocracies.”¹²⁴

While scholars such as Yee, Hopkins, and Gottwald see the familial mode of production as dominant during the period prior to the rise of the monarchy, the emergence of powerful, extractive regimes, such as local monarchies and foreign imperial powers, did not eradicate it from ancient Israel and Judea. In fact, its very existence was necessary to support the extractive practices of taxation and tribute imposed by these regimes. Boer has argued that since “subsistence survival” was geared toward long-term survival through practices of “diversity, risk aversion, and optimal usage,” it was resilient through times of economic crisis—which included the political impositions of heavy extraction.¹²⁵ King and Stager add that the “resilience and restorative power of the familial organization” allowed for the survival and continuance of these communities through the exile and well into the post-exilic period. They estimate that approximately 90 percent of the population resided in rural areas during the Persian period, indicating that much of this population would have continued to practice a familial form of subsistence agriculture.¹²⁶

Boer further explains that familial based forms subsistence survival functioned best when they existed further from the locales of extractive economies.¹²⁷ Thus, subsistence agriculture becomes more prevalent within politically marginal zones, which ancient Palestine was: a “peripheral” and “minor concern of the centers of political and economic power” that existed in places such as Syria and Egypt.¹²⁸ The familial mode of production was resilient and existed throughout the third century BCE when Judea was under Ptolemaic control. Still, subsistence farmers would have been forced to manage multiple and prevailing economic crises exacerbated

¹²⁴ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 33.

¹²⁵ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 78.

¹²⁶ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 390.

¹²⁷ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 80.

¹²⁸ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 81.

by the mechanisms of taxation and indebtedness and the reallocation of peasant labor toward the developing agricultural estate.

(ii) *Textual and Archaeological Evidence for the Development of Estates in the Second Temple Era and Ptolemaic Palestine*

1) Biblical Reflections of the Socio-Economic Climate Post-Exile

Estates and the practice of specialized agriculture, which are important for understanding Qohelet's unique accentuation of wisdom within the third century BCE, began to emerge during the pre-exilic, First Temple era when Israel and Judea came under the influence of foreign empires. Yet their development within Palestine would also be an economic objective of the Persians post-exile, and ultimately a marker of Ptolemaic economy in the third century BCE. These estates were owned by a wealthy few who were typically aligned with political powers and who used large swaths of land under their control to focus on producing desired exportable commodities that would primarily be consumed outside of the geographical area in which they were produced.

It is likely that the exile caused in a disruption of landownership in Syria-Palestine, as wealthy landowners were likely exiled following the fall of Jerusalem to the neo-Babylonian Empire in 587 BCE. Scholars have debated what exactly occurred in regards to landownership when the aristocracy returned from exile, but archaeological and textual evidence testifies that the land continued to be inhabited by "the poorest people of the land... vinedressers and tillers of the soil" (2 Kgs 25:11-12; Jer 39:9-10).¹²⁹ Jack Pastor suggests that the returnees found their lands redistributed to and settled by residents from a lower-socio-economic class who had not been exiled from Judah. The returnees, who consisted of the social elite within the First Temple Period, came back to Judah endowed with money, position, and royal support (Ezra 1:2-11). This allowed them to reinstate their claims upon the land, forcing the existing residents to pay rents as tenants, or pushing them to inhabit more marginal farming areas.¹³⁰

This inevitably resulted in social stratifications that created a tenant farmer class, and may have contributed to the social conflict and crisis reflected in Nehemiah 5:1-13. This passage narrates the complaint of a group of people who were lacking food and had to leverage their landholdings to borrow money in order to obtain grain and pay their taxes. Pastor argues that it

¹²⁹ Jack Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 13-14.

¹³⁰ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 14.

was unlikely that the shortage of food was due to famine, but rather the hunger expressed in 5:2 may have been the result of a population that had been increasing since the return from exile.¹³¹ This led to intensified cultivation and new settlements, which subsequently required capital to pay for seeds, fertilizer, and necessary labor. As was often the case, small-scale farmers had to borrow from more wealthy landowners who had greater access to this necessary capital. These loans were taken out against future crops with their own landholdings and their family's labor being provided as surety (Neh 5:3-5). This situation inevitably worked toward the interests of the wealthy landowners, as it is reflective of a vicious cycle that functioned to reallocate the land and labor of subsistence farmers into the estates of the wealthy and elite landowning class.

The compounding financial demands of Persian taxation (Neh 5:4), coupled with the climate's instability, led to the high possibility of crop failure which would inevitably result in foreclosures, and a growing class of hungry day laborers and slaves (Neh 5:5). Further, Nehemiah 5 refers to a class of wealthy nobles (הררים) who appear to be the large-scale landowners providing these exploitative loans and issuing the foreclosures upon the peasant class (Neh 5:7). Pastor uses comparative data to conclude that these nobles would have seen their loans as possible "investments" that could expand their landholdings and increase the labor pool from which they could draw.¹³² Thus, while the existence of small-scale landowners continued into the Second Temple era, the economic mechanisms of taxation and indebtedness enabled the concentration of the most fertile lands within the hands of an elite minority, allowing for the increasing development of large-scale, agricultural estates.¹³³

Archaeological and epigraphical evidence demonstrates that the much of the productive land continued to be under the control of the wealthy few during the third century under Ptolemaic rule. The Ptolemies, and those involved in their bureaucracy, as we have said, progressed the impingement upon the familial mode of production by advancing an agricultural economy based on large estates—whether controlled by the crown, a bureaucratic official such as Apollonius, or indigenous elites such as the Tobiads. While the production on these estates involved food staples such as grain, they were also used to increase the development of vines and

¹³¹ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 16.

¹³² Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 18

¹³³ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 11, 21-40; John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, WUNT 195 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 289.

the production of wine. This would have been particularly valued by the Ptolemies within Egypt since the climate there did not allow for many local vineyards to flourish, and if they did the wine was believed to be of lesser quality than what was produced within Palestine and Syria.¹³⁴

2) Zenon Papyri

A significant source of information regarding the presence of large estates within Palestine comes from the Zenon Papyri—a series of documents that primarily contain correspondences directed to Apollonius, the *dioiketes* (finance minister) within the bureaucracy of Ptolemy II. These correspondences were collected and preserved by Zenon, an *oikonomos* appointed by Apollonius to manage his estates. According to the papyri Zenon was sent on a tour of Palestine and southern Syria in 259 BCE to take care of business matters for Apollonius.¹³⁵ During this trip Zenon toured an estate at Beth Anath in Galilee that belonged to Apollonius with the aim of advising Apollonius about the land and its potential value for production.

The papyri provide significant insight into the larger economic objectives of the Ptolemies. While the Ptolemies did extract from their provinces through forced taxation and tribute, this was only one piece of the complex web of extraction that was Ptolemaic economic policy. A primary goal of the Ptolemies was to obtain a measure of control of as much land as possible, so that its resources could be directed for their own objectives. The Ptolemies emphasized that they were the ultimate proprietors of land that fell under their rule, allowing them an ideological justification for their claim upon the land, and subsequently justifying their status as the primary decision makers for how the land's resources were to be used.¹³⁶ This practice—known as “crown” or “royal” land—was a continuation of Persian policy within Palestine, and the Ptolemies “inherited” the crown property and estates that were previously owned by the Persian kings.¹³⁷

While the papyri do not specifically state how Apollonius acquired the estate at Beth Anath, it is likely that it was “royal land” conferred upon Apollonius by the Ptolemaic monarchy. This may be assumed since the papyri describe another large estate that was granted to Apollonius near Philadelphia within the Fayum. As a recipient of “royal land,” Apollonius was

¹³⁴ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, 216. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 98.

¹³⁵ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 59; Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 60.

¹³⁶ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 61.

¹³⁷ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 22-23; Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 146-147.

able to use the land as a personal stream of revenue to generate and increase his own wealth. However, the “royal land” ceded to Apollonius could not be held in perpetuity by Apollonius or his family; upon his death, or discharge from office, the land would revert back to the crown.¹³⁸ Regardless of the specifics of control, the estate at Beth Anath was clearly controlled by an absentee landlord whose main objective was to utilize the land to produce a major exportable commodity capable of generating wealth.¹³⁹

This is evidenced by letters sent to Apollonius regarding the development of the estate. Initially, in a letter sent in 258 BCE, the estate is described as being worked by local tenants who primarily produced several crops: grapes for wine, figs, and grains (*PSI VI 554*¹⁴⁰). Within a second letter (*PLond VII 1948*¹⁴¹) dated to 257 BCE, it appears as though a significant portion of the land was being converted to more wine production, as the supervisor Glaukias informs Apollonius that 80,000 vines had been planted, along with the building of a cistern and additional housing (presumably for tenants). Glaukias states that after tasting the wine he could not tell if it was “Chain or local,” with “Chain” referring to one of the most valued and high-quality wines in antiquity.¹⁴² The letter concludes by Glaukias informing Apollonius that Apollonius is fortunate, as his apparent wine “business” is flourishing. Kloppenborg confirms this statement by estimating that 80,000 vines would have annually produced “in the range of 1500 hectolitres (150,000 liters)” of wine.¹⁴³ All this suggests that the increased production of wine was for the purpose of exporting for imperial desire and maximal profit rather than for local consumption.

The production of this large amount of wine would have required an extensive amount of labor, which seems to have been carried out by tenant farmers. Evidence for the presence of tenant farmers occurs within *PSI VI 554*, which reports to Apollonius that the tenant laborers were complaining because they had not received their full payment. The papyri contain other documents that attest to the hiring of day laborers on Apollonius’ other estates for the purpose of

¹³⁸ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 162; Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 58-61; Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 67.

¹³⁹ Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Reproduced and translated within Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 359-364.

¹⁴¹ Reproduced and translated within Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 367-370.

¹⁴² Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 285. See also Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, 216. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 67.

¹⁴³ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 285.

fulfilling tasks such as “clearing brushwood, weeding, burning weeds, hoeing, and pruning.”¹⁴⁴ Kloppenborg uses the calculus from ancient Roman agronomic writers to estimate that the estate of Beth Anath would have required at least 30 full-time laborers, as well as numerous day and temporary laborers during intensive harvest seasons.¹⁴⁵

In addition to these estates, the papyri also testify to the Ptolemaic practice of claiming and granting land for the purpose of establishing military colonies known as *cleruchies*.¹⁴⁶ Military officials, with the authority of the king, were empowered to claim tracts of land that would be farmed and used to support their troops. It is likely that this system of allotting land to military settlers was, according to Hölbl “spread over all the grain-producing lands of the Ptolemaic empire.”¹⁴⁷ This allowed the Ptolemies to have soldiers settled throughout their empire, and ready to be called to service when needed. The Zenon papyri indicate that this practice occurred in, or around Judea by often referencing the presence of military personnel.¹⁴⁸

These details emerge from a receipt over the sale of a slave girl, Sphragis, to Zenon wherein the seller and several witnesses are described with, according to Bagnall, “various phrases as cleruchic calvary under the command of Toubias” (P.Cair.Zen I 59003).¹⁴⁹ It is believed that “Toubias” refers to a member of the Tobiad family, a wealthy and powerful indigenous family of Jews who were influential throughout the Second-Temple era.¹⁵⁰ The wealth of Toubias is reflected in two other letters where he sends a eunuch and four slaves to Apollonius (P.Cair.Zen 1 59076), as well as a plethora of horses, donkeys, mules, and dogs to King Ptolemy (P.Cair.Zen 1 5907). These letters also suggest that wealthy indigenous elites were incorporated into the service of the Ptolemaic ruling bureaucracy, and participated in the Ptolemaic extraction of Palestine.¹⁵¹

3) Archaeological Surveys

Further evidence for the large-scale organization of agricultural estates dedicated to wine production comes from the archaeological surveys of farmsteads in western Samaria conducted

¹⁴⁴ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 288. E.g. PLond VII 1957, P.Cair.Zen IV 59748 and 59827.

¹⁴⁵ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 288.-289.

¹⁴⁶ Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, 72-73. Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 61.

¹⁴⁸ Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 152.

¹⁴⁹ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 17. For an English translation, see Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, eds. *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 118-121.

¹⁵⁰ For a more thorough exploration of the Tobiad Family see Ch. IV of this work.

¹⁵¹ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 20-21.

by Shimon Dar. According to Dar, these surveys demonstrate how “the practice of agriculture was perfected and operated on something like an industrial basis in the colonies and regions of Greek settlement and influence.”¹⁵² This assessment is based on how the archaeology reveals a pattern of similar field towers throughout the region. Through an analysis of the pottery discovered within these towers, Dar concludes that they were built and used primarily during the Hellenistic era of the third and second centuries BCE.¹⁵³

These field towers, as Dar explains, were in all probability erected to advance vine cultivation and the wine industry, as they functioned to store large amounts of wine and grapes under relatively temperature-controlled conditions that would allow for fermentation.¹⁵⁴ Shimon Applebaum—assessing Dar’s survey—adds that the uniformity of the tower’s construction and function “are likely to have been the work of one organising agency.”¹⁵⁵ Dar compares these findings with written sources, such as the Zenon papyri, to conclude that vine growing and wine production were “organized by governmental methods on an unprecedented scale” for the export of wine from Palestine to Egypt.¹⁵⁶ In addition to wine, both Dar and Applebaum agree that the towers were also utilized for storing other exportable crops, specifically olives and olive oil.¹⁵⁷

The plots surrounding the field towers contained other agricultural installations necessary for processing exportable commodities. These included: wine presses, oil-presses, threshing floors, and cisterns.¹⁵⁸ Kloppenborg, analyzing Dar’s survey, notes the acknowledgeable shift within the archaeological record from small, communal winepresses dated to the early Iron Age, to the use of a larger beam press capable of processing large amounts of oil and wine beginning in Iron II, and continuing into the Hellenistic era.¹⁵⁹ The survey also discovered large reception tanks with the winepresses—one holding 13,000 liters and another 35,000 liters—that appear to have also been in use during the Hellenistic era.¹⁶⁰ These farmsteads in all likelihood grew “the

¹⁵² Shim’on Dar, *Landscape and Pattern: An Archaeological Survey of Samaria 800 B.C.E.-636 C.E.*, BARIS (Oxford: B.A.R., 1986), 118.

¹⁵³ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 108-109.

¹⁵⁴ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 110-111. Dar explains that the towers would have been unlikely to have been utilized for habitation

¹⁵⁵ Shimon Applebaum, Historical Commentary in *Landscape and Pattern: An Archaeological Survey of Samaria 800 B.C.E.-636 C.E.*, by Shim’on Dar, 258.

¹⁵⁶ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 158. See also 118-120

¹⁵⁷ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 164; Applebaum, Historical Commentary, 258.

¹⁵⁸ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 111.

¹⁵⁹ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 284; Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 147-153; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 101.

¹⁶⁰ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 149, 151.

standard triad of Mediterranean crops,” producing grain in addition to grapes and olives, and were located near major roads to permit the easy transport of these commodities.¹⁶¹

The field towers, beam presses, and cisterns were no minor implements, and their construction would have been expensive and labor intensive. While it was expected that the large-scale practice of viticulture would have eventually been profitable, the initial capital needed for construction and preparation would have been provided by an entity that had enough disposable wealth to invest in this venture, indicating that these were not the work of small-scale village farmers. According to Dar’s survey of the farmsteads, these “larger agricultural installations” contained a central, fortified farmhouse with smaller houses located on the fringe of the property. This evidence suggests a settlement controlled by a wealthy settler—possibly a military official—but cultivated and worked by tenants.¹⁶²

Because it took vineyards several years to produce a significant yield of high quality grapes, the owner of the farmstead would have relied upon other streams of income to provide for themselves and those who worked on their estate.¹⁶³ This leads Dar to conclude that their implementation was undertaken with the necessary belief “that the final aim was thought to justify the weight of expenditure.”¹⁶⁴ Once established, those who had access to the necessary capital to fund an estate based on viticulture could greatly profit, with average yields producing profits of 7-10% annually, better than estimates from other crops.¹⁶⁵

In summary, enough archeological evidence has emerged from Samaria, the Sharon Plain, and Judea to reveal the existence of large farms that included large pressing installations, storerooms, and workshops that would have likely been used to process large amounts of oil and wine.¹⁶⁶ Kloppenborg, noting both the archaeological surveys and the descriptions in the Zenon papyri, concludes that there was a “general tendency towards larger agricultural installations during the Second Temple Period,” observing that the creation of large estates “was in full

¹⁶¹ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 287; Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 12

¹⁶² Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 287. Also, Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 10-12, 20-21.

¹⁶³ See King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 98-101

¹⁶⁴ Dar, *Landscape and Pattern*, 109-110.

¹⁶⁵ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 301. Kloppenborg believes this is why ancient Mediterranean agronomic writers such as Cato, Columella and both Plinys place viticulture as first in their list of desirable agricultural pursuits.

¹⁶⁶ While the primary surveys of the field towers were located in Samaria, Dar believes that there is enough evidence to suggest that the widespread cultivation of vines occurred within Judea (*Landscape and Pattern*, 120-122).

swing” in the Hellenistic period.¹⁶⁷ The archaeological and epigraphical data suggests that there a demonstrable effort to up-scale the production of a few exportable commodities upon land that was seemingly controlled by a large, organized entity. The data overwhelmingly suggests that the Ptolemaic bureaucracy was heavily involved in developing and controlling these agricultural estates.

(iii) *Ptolemaic Tribute and Taxation*

The emphasis upon developing estates was, as noted, aided by a program of extensive taxation that not only generated direct revenue, but also functioned to reallocate labor to the estates through indebtedness. A primary aim of the Ptolemaic economy was to maximize the incoming revenue while minimizing risks that could prohibit or significantly reduce their extraction. As a result, the Ptolemies actively incorporated local institutions and indigenous elites into their process of taxation in an attempt to insulate “themselves from the risks associated with agricultural production,” mitigating resistance from agricultural producers. The Ptolemies utilized existing economic structures and slowly implemented new ones in the process of taxation so that they could “collect revenue while shifting risks to the producers and tax-farmers.”¹⁶⁸

While the Ptolemies were the utmost authority, the imposition of foreign tribute did not eliminate the social power of the Judean elites. Whether it be through the Temple system or the practice of tax farming, the Ptolemies empowered indigenous elites with a measure of local authority. This enabled the practice of an economic operation that functioned much like a native tributary mode of production, wherein indigenous elites could impose and collect taxes that would be passed on in tribute to the Ptolemaic rulers.¹⁶⁹ Taxes and tributes paid to the Ptolemies included agricultural produce that was both stored and monetized into coinage. As has been indicated, the area of Galilee and Palestine provided valued products such as grain, olive oil, wine/grapes, and human labor that were exported to Egypt.

This mode of production may have at times appeared as native tributary, but ultimately the operative mode of production was a foreign-tributary that was imposed and directed by the Ptolemies. This process was beneficial for both the Ptolemaic imperial regime, who received a

¹⁶⁷ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 284-287.

¹⁶⁸ Manning, *Land and Power*, 142.

¹⁶⁹ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 85. Gottwald described this practice as primarily occurring during Persian rule, but as will be delineated a similar operation existed under Ptolemaic rule.

steady stream of revenue with minimal conflict, and the indigenous elites, who were allowed to maintain local power and enhance their own wealth. Of course, it was the peasant class—including small scale landholders and tenant farmers—who bore the brunt of this economic system by having a “double tax-debt burden” imposed upon them.¹⁷⁰

1) The Temple

Following the exile, the Temple in Jerusalem became a significant source of economic extraction within Judea, as imperial powers used the Temple to impose indirect taxes upon agricultural producers. Joseph Blenkinsopp analyzes comparative data and textual sources to conclude that the rebuilding and re-establishment of the Temple system during the Persian period was not merely conducted with religious and pietistic sentiments.¹⁷¹ In addition to cultic functions, temples were important economic institutions that were at once supported and exploited by Achaemenid imperial policy. While a primary role of the priesthood within the Temple would have been the stewardship of Jewish religious and legal traditions, they were also answerable to imperial officials, and maintained the responsibility of guaranteeing a paid tribute to the Persian overlords.¹⁷² The economic facets of the Temple appear to have been administered by a Persian appointed governor, as evidenced by the actions of Nehemiah. According to Nehemiah 13:12-13, Nehemiah oversaw the collection and managing of the Temple’s tithes and storehouses by appointing priests and temple functionaries as those who oversaw the collection of resources. After the dispute with Tobiah, Nehemiah in all likelihood appointed priests who “reflected his own interests.”¹⁷³

The purpose of working through temples to extract resources was an ingenious concept for imperial powers, as it enabled a steady stream of revenue while minimizing resistance. As Boer explains, for any system or regime to effectively function they need a “mode of *regulation*”; that is, “a specific collection of institutions, cultural assumptions, and compromises, shared beliefs in what is required to maintain at least semblance of stability and continuity.”¹⁷⁴ Agricultural producers, subsistence farmers, and rural villages would naturally resist extraction,

¹⁷⁰ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 33. Adams, *Social and Economic Life*, 138.

¹⁷¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah,” in *Essays on Judaism in the Pre-Hellenistic Period*, BZAW 495 (Berlin: de Gruyter 2017), 61-83.

¹⁷² Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 62, 72-75.

¹⁷³ Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 80. The controversy with Tobiah storing resources in the Temple is narrated in Neh 13:4-9.

¹⁷⁴ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 141.

unless it was enforced. This could be accomplished through overt violence, but Boer explains that it is more effective to covertly employ “internalized ideological justifications for extraction” so that those who are ruled internalize the ideas of the ruling class.¹⁷⁵

Religious institutions, such as the priesthood and temple, provided this ideological justification and ensured economic extraction from agricultural producers through their collection of tithes. Tithes were offerings collected by priests and brought into the temple that included, according to Nehemiah, the desired commodities of grain, wine, and oil (Neh 10:37-39, 13:12). The ideological underpinning of the tithe is that it couched extraction in theological and re-allocative language. Through the tithe, produce was being understood as being redistributed “to the most important locus: the temple and its workers.”¹⁷⁶ The theological rationale was that the tithes passed on to the temple would appease the deity and ensure goodwill upon the producers (e.g., Mal 3:8-12). Yet, Boer concludes that the tithe was a basic form of tax, “regardless of circumstances; it inevitably required religious sanction to justify its imposition.”¹⁷⁷ The tithes would then subsequently be used by the priesthood to pay tribute to the ultimate authority—Judea’s imperial rulers.

The trade-off for the priesthood was that the Achaemenid policy allowed “a fair measure” of local autonomy to the temple system once the Persian rulers had “identified, or put in place, a dominant elite whose loyalty could be counted on.” Through this governing system, the temple functioned for the Persians as a catalyst “of economic exchange and promoters of social cohesion.”¹⁷⁸ This imperial policy and economic strategy was in all likelihood continued by the Ptolemies, who upon gaining control of the area continued the Persian state structure; this likely enabled a smoother transfer of power with minimal need to exert violence in their newly gained territories.¹⁷⁹

Initially, extracting through local temples was an important economic strategy for the Ptolemies. Manning writes that Alexander and Ptolemy were keen students of the Persian Empire, learning that “the best way to govern an empire of that size was to honor local customs and practices in so far as possible.”¹⁸⁰ The Ptolemaic regime sought political and ruling

¹⁷⁵ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 142.

¹⁷⁶ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 142.

¹⁷⁷ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 152.

¹⁷⁸ Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 64.

¹⁷⁹ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 75. Blenkinsopp, “Temple and Society,” 63-64.

¹⁸⁰ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 28.

legitimacy by empowering the Egyptian temples and priests, and upholding their religious, cultural, and economic significance. This allowed the Ptolemies to successfully penetrate and work through the existing temple institutions to exert economic control in a diplomatic manner within areas in which the temples maintained cultural and religious influence.¹⁸¹ While the temple in Jerusalem is distinguished from its Egyptian counterparts, it seems likely that a similar approach took place in Judea. According to Grabbe, because the Jerusalem Temple maintained a centralized influence over the area, the Ptolemaic bureaucracy “would have been inclined to deal with Judah as they dealt with other temples.”¹⁸²

This view is, in part, supported by the textual silence regarding Ptolemaic officers within the area, specifically an *oikonomos* (overseer of economic matters) within Judea. As noted above, the ordinance of Ptolemy II within the Vienna Papyrus (*C.Ord.Ptol.* 21-22) identifies the primary administrative unit within the province of Syria and Phoenicia as a *hyparchia*. Grabbe surmises that Judea would have likely been its own *hyparchy*, functioning primarily as a “temple-state” that would have operated with a measure of self-governance and religious autonomy. Because the Ptolemies, like the Persians, were interested in absorbing local administrative units and elites into their bureaucracy, it has been surmised that the High Priest would have filled the necessary administrative role of overseeing the local collection of revenue for Ptolemaic tribute.¹⁸³

Direct references to the status of the High Priest within Jerusalem and the function of the Temple during Ptolemaic rule are sparse. However, there are a few textual instances that provide insight. Notable is the account of Hecataeus of Abdera, a Greek historian who wrote extensively on the history of the Jews at the beginning of the third century BCE. According to Grabbe, Hecataeus wrote that the priests maintained a dual role as both religious and cultic leaders, as well as acting as judges in major disputes who were entrusted with overseeing traditional laws and customs.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ See the overview in Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 96-102

¹⁸² Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 170.

¹⁸³ See the discussion in Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 185-192. It is possible that while there were operative *oikonomos* throughout the province of Syria and Phoenicia, while also being likely that the high priest within Jerusalem functioned as one for the area of Judea.

¹⁸⁴ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 225; For an overview of Hecataeus of Abdera, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 113-118. Also, Ben Zion Wacholder, “Hecataeus of Abdera,” *EncJud* 8:749.

The local power of the high priest and its responsibilities to the ruling empire is depicted within the *Tobiad Romance* too. Within this section of Josephus' *Antiquities* (see chapter IV), the high priest Onias appears to be the one who is responsible for paying tribute to king Ptolemy (*Ant* 12:157-159). Onias' local power within the Temple institution is underscored as the text presents him as the primary and sole decision-maker who refuses to pass along the required tribute to Ptolemy. Additionally, Ben Sira writes about the high priest Simon II, son of Onias, who was in office from 219-196 BCE (*Sir* 50:1-24).¹⁸⁵ As a conclusion to his eulogy to Israel's ancestors (*Sir* 44:1-50:24), Ben Sira lavishes the high priest with praise, but notably describes the high priest as functioning both as a cultic leader who oversees temple rituals and sacrifices (*Sir* 50:12-21), as well the governing entity who oversees extensive public works aimed at fortifying the temple and city against invasion (*Sir* 50:1-4).

Together, these textual references indicate that the High Priest, and the temple, maintained functions and responsibilities within various realms of social life. The Temple was not only the center of religious and cultic practice, but also a governing and economic center that collected a substantial income from tithes contributed by the agricultural producers within Judea. The religious aspects, however, should not be minimized, as they functioned to ideologically enable the temple's participation in forms extraction. It is from this collection that the temple and priesthood would then kick up to the Ptolemies in the form of a paid tribute. The native priesthood was allowed and empowered to maintain their local status and authority, so long as they "delivered the required tribute."¹⁸⁶ Of course, it was the subsistence, village, and tenant farmers had to endure this economic burden as they were required to produce and contribute.

2) Tax Farming

While the Ptolemies initially extracted resources through the established Temple institutions, their economic strategy pivoted toward a "hybrid state" that combined "ancient social structures with new fiscal institutions" operating under their ruling bureaucracy.¹⁸⁷ This involved processes of direct taxation upon agricultural producers by utilizing "Hellenistic" economic features, such as coinage, banks, and tax farming. By implementing extensive and direct taxation, the Ptolemies were able to sustain their objective of maintaining a steady revenue

¹⁸⁵ See Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 550-555.

¹⁸⁶ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 187.

¹⁸⁷ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 202

stream, while the agricultural producers within areas such as Judea were expected to contribute a “double tax” payable through both the temple and Ptolemaic tax farmers. Understanding the extensive and complex Ptolemaic tax apparatus will inform the interpretation of various passages within Qohelet (e.g., Qoh 2:21; 5:7; 6:2), which themselves will be explored more in depth in chapter V.

The Ptolemies maintained a strenuous and complex taxing policy, taxing everything from grain and produce to livestock and property transfers. The Ptolemies demanded the collection of taxes both in produce collected into state granaries, and in coins that were introduced into the economy.¹⁸⁸ One of the primary sources for Ptolemaic revenue was the “salt tax,” which represented a “symbolic” tax on all persons and professions, that could be exempted for those who were considered “Hellenes.” Important for this system of taxation was census taking, detailed inventories, and records that required the skills of both royal and local scribes.¹⁸⁹

According to Bagnall, all “grain lands, vineyards, orchards, and other producing lands were subject to taxes.”¹⁹⁰ This inevitably included Palestine, which was a significant source of grain, wine, oil, and livestock. Evidence for the heavy taxation within Palestine is found within ordinance of Ptolemy II from 260 BCE (*C.Ord.Ptol.* 21-22). This ordinance declares that livestock within the province of Syria and Phoenicia must be registered annually and within sixty days of the ordinance for the purpose of accurate taxing, and “those holding the tax contracts” are to register the livestock within their villages. The ordinance claims that failure to correctly register the livestock will incur penalties (presumably additional fines) and a possible confiscation of one’s livestock. The ordinance refers to a “pasture tax and crown tax”—two seemingly distinct taxes that were to be paid by those who are registering their livestock.¹⁹¹

Multiple references within this ordinance to those with tax farming contracts also testifies to the presence of tax farmers within this province, and in all likelihood Palestine. The Ptolemies employed tax farmers within their bureaucracy to ensure the collection of a set amount from the various parts of their empire, thus ensuring a steady and continued stream of revenue. A tax farmer within the Ptolemaic system was a wealthy individual who had a great deal of capital at their disposal and functioned as an intermediary between the taxpayer and the Ptolemaic

¹⁸⁸ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 132.

¹⁸⁹ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 141-143.

¹⁹⁰ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 6.

¹⁹¹ Reproduced and translated in Bagnall and Derow, *The Hellenistic Period*, 111-113.

bureaucracy. Tax farmers bid for annual contracts to collect taxes in a particular area of the empire, and if their bid was accepted they were to guarantee that set amount of revenue to be paid to the king. If a surplus amount was collected then it was credited to the tax farmer, but any less would have to come from their own capital.¹⁹²

From the perspective of the Ptolemies, the use of tax farmers sacrificed maximal gains for stable and reliable streams of revenue, but ultimately paid off by mitigating disruptions to their extraction. Manning argues that this practice created an incentive for wealthy individuals throughout the empire to align their interests with the monarch's. The use of tax farming made the most sense in areas that the Ptolemies would have had difficulty monitoring due to poor communication conditions and the scarcity of reliable record keeping.¹⁹³ The province of Syria and Phoenicia would have met these criteria, as the papyrological and textual evidence testify to the practice of tax farming within this province.

The most notable textual reference is the near-accurate description of Ptolemaic tax farming within the *Tobiad Romance* (*Ant* 12:175-185), which locates the practice more specifically in Palestine and Judea. Though more will be said regarding this text in chapter IV, it will suffice to mention here that this text narrates a situation wherein the Ptolemies initially worked through an existing structure to collect taxes and tribute—the Temple and the High Priest Onias—but then increasingly utilized tax farming contracts from indigenous elites in order to generate a stable, efficient, and diplomatic stream of revenue from this area. The co-opting of indigenous elites into the business of tax farming also generated a “structural tension” between the wealthy tax farmers and the temple institutions and their priesthoods, which were also being utilized by the Ptolemies for extraction. As Manning explains, the Ptolemaic system intentionally set up these competitions among various agents of collection, consequently mitigating any chance of locally coordinated resistance.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, the use of indigenous elites would have focused the disgruntled attention of agricultural laborers upon their local tax farmer and away from the monarchy as a central taxing authority, thereby minimizing the opportunities for collective resistance of the Ptolemies by the farmers and producers.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 63; Bangall, *The Administration*, 6.

¹⁹³ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 155.

¹⁹⁴ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 86.

¹⁹⁵ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 142.

(iv) Land Tenure and Labor in Ptolemaic Palestine

The increased development of estates focused on producing a few exportable commodities and the heavy imposition of taxes would have significantly impacted how labor was organized and controlled within the overall economy of Ptolemaic Palestine. This agrarian context appears to have continued the economic cycle described by Hopkins, Chaney, and Yee, and reflected within the crisis narrated in Nehemiah 5. That is, the Ptolemaic era continued a centuries long dynamic relationship between small-scale landholders practicing subsistence agriculture within a familial context, and large estates owned by wealthy landlords who used the land for the large-scale production of commodities that could be exported and used to generate wealth. The third century, in particular, demonstrates a time in which the control of quality land continually shifted away from subsistence farmers to estates owned by wealthy elites associated with the Ptolemaic bureaucracy.

This inevitably had substantial effects upon the practice and nature of labor. Specifically, the emphasis upon large, commodity producing estates had the effect of creating and exploiting a class of underemployed non-slave laborers.¹⁹⁶ The imposition of heavy taxes engendered situations of indebtedness among familial and peasant producers, subsequently leading to the displacement of small-scale landowners and the reallocation of their labor toward estates. Small scale landholders who practiced subsistence agriculture did not completely disappear, but the constant conversion of quality land into estate-based agriculture would have forced many to take up residence upon marginal lands, or be incorporated into the estates as tenant laborers.¹⁹⁷ While it is certainly possible, that such indebtedness could lead to slavery, it is more likely that the ruling class favored utilizing the indebted labor in terms of tenancy.

This observation correlates with Boer's assertion that the estate owners and the wealthy elite needed the existence of small-scale landowners and familial and village-based peasant farmers from which they could draw laborers, which was always in short supply for estates.¹⁹⁸ Large estates and familial subsistence farmers did not exist independently of one another within this economic context, but rather they maintained a symbiotic relationship wherein large estates were in need of a labor force, and the smallholders—whose holdings became too small or

¹⁹⁶ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 289.

¹⁹⁷ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 290; Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 160-161.

¹⁹⁸ Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 119-120. See also Hopkins, "The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Agriculture," 200-201.

unproductive to support a family—needed to supplement their income either by assuming a tenancy or working as a day laborer on the large estate. This often involved the division of the estates into subunits to be managed by tenants who would maintain the vineyards and care for the fields within their unit.¹⁹⁹

This situation is evidenced in the letter to Apollonius contained in *PSI VI 554*. The letter references apparent tenants laboring on the estate of Beth Anat, noting that the workers who did not own their own vineyard would be provided wine but “most of (the tenants) owned their own vineyards from which they could get pressings.”²⁰⁰ Kloppenborg concludes that this reflects an instance of “smallholders who also leased vineyards from a large landowner for which they would be paid crop shares, or who ‘leased’ viticulture labour in exchange for wages or a portion of the harvest.”²⁰¹

Boer estimates that within ancient tenant-estate relations, produce generated from the tenant’s plot would be divided between the landowner and the tenant, with the landowner obtaining anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of the crop.²⁰² The remaining crop would be maintained by the tenant, who was also expected to pay taxes and tithes from their share. The practice of tenant farming was beneficial to landowners because it prevented them from having to manage and oversee large swaths of land with a servant labor force who was not invested in the economic outcome of the estate. Instead, tenant farming based on situations of indebtedness that created social dependency incentivized laborers to work hard and be committed to the land’s production as their livelihood depended on it. Landowners were thus able to exploit subsistence and peasant laborers through the “whip of hunger.”²⁰³

This reallocation of labor toward estates was the result, and a consequence of, the operative foreign tributary mode of production that dominated most of third century BCE. However, its dominance was only possible through the vestiges of a familial mode of production that continued to exist and provided the labor necessary for tribute and estates. The emphasis upon tribute, taxation, and the development of estates demonstrates how the Ptolemies were

¹⁹⁹ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 292, 308-309.

²⁰⁰ Translation in Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 360.

²⁰¹ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 363.

²⁰² Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 116.

²⁰³ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 307.

interested in exploiting labor for their imperial objecting of maintaining an incoming stream of revenue and increasing their wealth.

(v) *Extraction of Bodies and Labor: Slaves as a Ptolemaic Commodity*

In addition to the familial and tributary modes of production, Yee and Gottwald identify a “slave-based mode of production” as being operative during ancient Israel and Judea’s economic history.²⁰⁴ The slave-based mode of production emerges when “the labor-intensive work of slaves in agriculture, industry, and commerce” build up a “critical mass of taxable wealth” that allows an imperial force “to extend its conquest and control so thoroughly over vast territories.”²⁰⁵ This does not necessarily mean that places such as Palestine primarily employed slave labor for the production of commodities, but rather that a heavy exploitation of slave labor throughout out an empire enabled the imperial government to intensify their extractive practices.

This inevitably increased the burdens of tax and debt upon peasants and wage laborers who primarily “bore the brunt of the extraction policies.”²⁰⁶ The intensified taxation and extraction is the result of slave labor increasing the incoming revenue and wealth of the imperial elite, subsequently allowing them to fund expensive endeavors; namely, a larger and more active military. By funding an active military, the ruling empire can impose heavy extractions and enforce them via violent force, or the threat thereof. This allows the ruling empire more opportunities to physically, and successfully, impose their will, and if needed, violently put down any resistance and revolts by communities of agricultural producers.²⁰⁷

The slave-based mode of production is identified as being particularly dominant during the era of Roman rule over Palestine. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that the slave-based mode of production began to emerge in its early stages during the Hellenistic era, as there is ample documentation testifying to the extraction and trade of slave labor from Ptolemaic Palestine. As noted above, it is believed that estates rarely employed slave labor, preferring instead to exploit non-Greek indigenous peoples as tenant farmers who could be charged rent and taxes, and their labor used to produce desired foodstuffs.²⁰⁸ While it may be true that estates and tribute seekers preferred to exploit a “freed” peasant class, this should not dismiss how the

²⁰⁴ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 86-87; Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 34.

²⁰⁵ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 86. While I put this in general terms, Gottwald is defining the slave-based mode of production by explicitly referring to the era of the Roman Empire.

²⁰⁶ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 86.

²⁰⁷ Gottwald, “Sociology,” 87.

²⁰⁸ See the overview of *C.Ord.Ptol.* 21-22 in Bagnall and Derow, *The Hellenistic Period*, 111.

Ptolemaic economy extracted human labor via slavery, using human bodies from Palestine as a tradeable commodity alongside the staples of grain, wine, and oil.

Slaves were often acquired by the ruling elite through the extraction-debt cycle. When a family or clan becomes indebted as the result of heavy extraction, to ease the family's debt burden it provides a family member(s) as a debt-slave for payment.²⁰⁹ Slaves were also seized in military conquests as spoils of war, particularly women and children who were taken as captives for sex trafficking and forced marriages (e.g., Num 31:15-35; Deut 21:10-14; 2 Kgs 5:2; Amos 1:6; Joel 3:2-3).²¹⁰ According to Grabbe, slaves were one of the most important exportable commodities from Syria to Egypt for the Ptolemies, as there was a "short supply" of available slaves in Egypt due to their high price.²¹¹ Tcherikover adds that slave trafficking "was evidently freer than any other" trade network since the "export of slaves from Egypt was prohibited, but not their import into the country." Because of this restriction, Ptolemaic government control over the trafficking of slaves from Syria "was not particularly burdensome," though the Ptolemies did assure that human trafficking worked toward their overall economic objectives.²¹²

1) Ordinance of Ptolemy II regarding the registration of slaves in Syrian and Phoenicia
An important source for understanding the nature of the slave trade within Syria and Phoenicia comes from the Vienna Papyrus and the Ordinance of Ptolemy II from 261 BCE (*C.Ord.Ptol.* 21-22). This ordinance is concerned with the proper registration of slaves, in a similar manner to how the ordinance also deals with the proper registration of livestock. The ordinance commands that persons within Syrian and Phoenicia are required to report to the bureaucracy when they "acquire" a native person as a slave. If the slaves are not reported the owner will receive a heavy fine from the crown and have their slaves confiscated. Additionally, the use of slaves as collateral for loans is prohibited, unless if it is explicitly allowed by the "superintendent of the revenues in Syria and Phoenicia" within their tax farming contracts. The ordinance adds that these fines do not apply when one's slaves can be proven to be "already slaves when bought," or were "purchased in a royal auction." Further, soldiers and military

²⁰⁹ Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 158-159. Chaney, "The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty," 42-43.

²¹⁰ Yee, "The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel," 12. For an exploration of how the Hebrew Bible preserves this practice in Numbers 31 and Deuteronomy 21, see Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 150-154, 172-174.

²¹¹ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 216-217.

²¹² Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 68.

settlers in the region who have “native wives whom they have captured” are not required to register them. The requirements within this ordinance suggest that a significant number of slaves were not necessarily seized for agricultural labor (as it may be discouraging this), but to serve as sex slaves, or within the households of the owners/wealthy elite.²¹³

The mention of “royal auctions” and captives taken by Ptolemaic soldiers indicates that the acquisition of slaves was allowed and encouraged so long as it went through Ptolemaic channels and benefited Ptolemaic objectives. In other words, slaves were traded like all other commodities. Bagnall concludes that the enslavement of native persons in Syria and Phoenicia was limited to crown officials (including soldiers), and tax farmers “for the execution of debts to the crown.”²¹⁴ The acquisition of indigenous peoples as slaves was heavily regulated by the Ptolemaic bureaucracy, and it possibly limited the extent to which debt slaves could be obtained. This, of course, doesn’t seem to be out of benevolence, but rather to not deplete the labor pool of tenant farmers so as to protect the ability to generate mass produced commodities upon estates. The limitations for acquiring and owning of slaves seem to be set up to monopolize the use of slave labor by those who controlled the land and maintained the most capital.

2) Zenon Papyri

The commodification of slaves is further evidenced by two mentions within the Zenon papyri of a tax imposed on the export of slaves from the province of Syrian and Phoenicia. *P.Cair.Zen. 59804* is a letter from 258 BCE that describes the escape and re-capture of a group of slaves being imported into Egypt, that also references an applicable tax that was placed on the export of slaves from the empire’s provinces into Egypt.²¹⁵ *P.Cair.Zen 59093* is a letter from the following year in 257 that describes a dispute between a tax farmer and an exporter regarding the proper exporting of slaves and other goods from the harbor of Tyre.²¹⁶ The tax farmer confiscates the slaves because the exporter did not appropriately register the slaves, and does not have the appropriate license for them; however, the slaves were returned and allowed to be exported once it was demonstrated that they belonged to Zenon—indicating that the laws were flexible for those closest to important figures within the ruling bureaucracy. The letter also indicates, along

²¹³ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, 217.

²¹⁴ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 19.

²¹⁵ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 20.

²¹⁶ Bagnall, *The Administration*, 20.

with Ptolemy II's ordinance, that tax farmers acted to collect taxes upon slaves, thereby functioning as agents who ensured and advanced Ptolemaic objectives within the slave trade.

The papyri reveal that slave trafficking did occur within Palestine, and was participated in by local elites. *P.Cair.Zen.* 59003 contains the deed of the sale of a female slave child—Sphragis—who is sold to Zenon by soldiers under the command of Toubias. *P.Cair.Zen.* 59076 contains a letter from Toubias to Apollonios that accompanied the gift of a eunuch and four young male slaves—Haimos, Okaimos, Atikos, Audomos. The physical features of the boys are described in detail, and Toubias claims that they are all “alert and of good breeding, two of whom are uncircumcised.”²¹⁷ The evidence of the papyri make clear that the exportation of human labor, along with material goods, was an imperial objective of Ptolemaic rule in this area.

(c) Summary

The Ptolemaic economy in Palestine can be distinguished as a tributary mode of production wherein the Ptolemies extracted agricultural produce via tribute, taxation, and direct control over large swaths of land. This was accomplished by utilizing the pre-existent Temple complex, as well as implementing new taxation and extractive practices that included the monetization of agricultural produce and the collection of taxes by tax farmers—indigenous elites who were incorporated into and benefitted from the Ptolemaic system by participating in the oppressive Ptolemaic taxation system. The Ptolemies furthered their extractive objectives by seizing control of large tracts of productive land for themselves, while also granting land to high-ranking officials and allowing indigenous elites to control land they laid claim to without dispute. This led to large swaths of land to be in the control of a few, with the few ultimately in allegiance to and participating within the Ptolemaic economic objectives. A primary motive in the control of land was to develop large estates, worked by tenant farmers, that would produce taxable and tradeable commodities such as grain, wine and oil.

While this economy generated significant wealth for the Ptolemies and the elites participating in their bureaucratic hierarchy, it exploited the peasant class of laborers who were traditionally involved in a familial mode of production. The extensive economic extraction through tribute and taxation created a “double-tax burden” that, not only depleted their own available resources, but created a system of indebtedness that drew them away from the practice

²¹⁷ Translation from Bagnall and Derow, *The Hellenistic Period*, 113-114. For more discussion on this letter and the Tobiads role within the Ptolemaic bureaucracy, see chapter IV.

of subsistence agricultural on ancestral landholdings and redirected their labor to the production of commodities on estates controlled by the Ptolemaic bureaucracy. The Ptolemies were able to further their wealth and exert their dominance by also extracting human bodies and labor as a commodity from Palestine in the form of slavery.

Section 3.03 The Use of Scribes in the Ptolemaic Economy and Locating Qohelet's Authorship

In order to consider the relationship between the socio-economic context of Judea in the third century BCE and the book of Qohelet, consideration must be given to the social location of Qohelet's authorship. As a written text the book of Qohelet represents the work of a scribe(s), or one(s) with scribal abilities. In this ancient society literacy was restricted to a small class of people who gained their literary abilities through extensive training, and often used their scribal abilities to serve elite purposes. The required education, skilled ability, and social need for scribes within ancient cultures allowed them to occupy a unique position within society: a retainer of the social elites who governed society. This meant that scribes were employed by, sustained through, and participated within the governing and administrative structures of the ruling elite. The participation within elite circles was typically based solely in their scribal abilities, however, and was not the result of their own wealth. This socially complex position as a retainer enabled scribes to maintain a unique perspective that would be reflected within the texts they wrote.

Within Ptolemaic Palestine persons with scribal abilities would have been used extensively for administrative purposes at various bureaucratic levels. Because the extensive Ptolemaic taxation apparatus required detailed registers of the empire's population, property, and transactions, scribes with administrative duties would have engaged both with the elite who employed them, and the peasant class whom they were charged with registering. It is also possible that local scribes would have been to varying degrees associated with the Temple, being shaped by and participating within the tradition's religious and moral formation. By having experience and training with both the Ptolemaic administration and the tradition's moral formation, I argue that the authorship of Qohelet—arising from the position of a scribal retainer(s)—provided the author(s) with a unique, yet complex perspective on life within Judea under Ptolemaic rule.

In order to adequately frame the perspective and social location of scribes, this section will 1. provide a broad understanding of scribes within the Hebrew Bible and in the Second-Temple era; 2. delineate scribes' specific status and roles during Hellenistic rule in general and Ptolemaic rule in particular; and 3. sketch the possible social location of Qohelet's author(s).

(a) Overview of "Scribe"

"Scribe" is the common translation of the Hebrew סֹפֵר, an office that is frequently mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible. Yet as Anthony Saldarini explains, the closest English equivalent for סֹפֵר may be the term "secretary," as it appears to consistently refer to a "record-keeper" or cabinet officer within the governing structures.²¹⁸ Regardless of translation semantics, the term "at its most basic level denotes someone who can write."²¹⁹

Scribes were thus persons trained in literacy and writing, and these skills made them valuable to centers of societal power, specifically the royal court and temple. The skill of reading and writing required an extensive training and pedagogy that typically began when one was young, and was primarily passed down through familial relations, though not exclusively so.²²⁰ Because scribal abilities were obtained through an extensive pedagogical process, writing and literacy were not widespread since the majority of the population was engaged in subsistence agriculture. The persistent agricultural demands of producing sustenance and tribute did not afford rural and village peasants the opportunity to learn to read and write.²²¹

Prior to the exile, scribes appear to have been employed by the monarchies of Israel and Judah for royal purposes of writing and literacy, recording, and diplomacy (e.g., 2 Sam 20:25; 1 Kgs 4:3; 2 Kgs 18:18, 22:3-8, etc.). This is supported by comparative data from Egypt and Mesopotamia, wherein scribes are described as being situated within the royal courts and the temples, keeping records of tax collection, forced labor, military activities, commodities and building projects.²²² Yet, as Matthew Goff explains, the designation of one as a "scribe" came to

²¹⁸ Anthony J. Saldarini, "Scribes," *ABD* 5: 1012.

²¹⁹ Matthew Goff, "Scribes and Pedagogy in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, eds. Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2020), 196.

²²⁰ Samuel L. Adams, "The Social Location of the Scribe in the Second Temple Period," in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, eds. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 27. Goff, "Scribes and Pedagogy," 197-200.

²²¹ Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 169-170.

²²² Saldarini, "Scribes," 1012.

represent a wide semantic range, signifying “officials who were low-level bureaucrats as well as individuals who had a great deal of political power” (see Ezra 7:6; Neh 8:9, 12:26). Further, Goff notes that in a broader sense a “scribe” refers to those who participated in the scholarly culture of producing the ancient writings of Israel and Judah.

The complex and varied roles of scribes continued and proliferated within the Second Temple period, making any general assessment of scribes difficult and in need of much nuance. Christine Schams warns that the evidence for understanding scribes “is inconclusive,” and in many instances is open to “several interpretations.” This leads to a measure of uncertainty “about the functions and status of Jewish scribes during the Second-Temple period.”²²³ Samuel L. Adams explains that “the developing sacred traditions of Second Temple Judaism, the increasingly complex imperial economy of this period, and the interaction with a host of foreign powers speaking different languages necessitated an array of literate figures with specific skill sets.”²²⁴ This recognition has led Adams to push against scholarly proposals that have emphasized the social prestige of scribes by purporting them as elite, powerful persons who primarily worked to codify Jewish traditions.²²⁵ Both Adams and Schams survey a range of textual evidence, and caution against any certain and sweeping claims regarding the social location of scribes within the Second Temple period, particularly pushing against the notion of an elite “scribal class.” Instead, they attempt to sketch scribes as those who used their literacy to perform various roles within society, thus operating at various social locations.

(b) Scribes under Ptolemaic Rule

(i) *Administrative*

The intensified bureaucracy and heavy taxation of Ptolemaic rule required extensive written records, meaning that a number of scribes were needed for efficient taxation. As noted above, the Ptolemaic bureaucracy utilized scribes at both the nome and village levels. This meant that scribes would have been established throughout the villages and rural areas of Palestine, and

²²³ Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period*, JSOTSup 291 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 309.

²²⁴ Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 24

²²⁵ Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 25. Adams is primarily pushing against the influential work of Emil Schürer, and those who followed, who argued that scribes were primarily Torah “scholars” who shaped the sacred traditions of Second Temple Judaism, enabling them to have and maintain social prominence (Emil Schürer, *Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte* [Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1874]).

not just in cities like Jerusalem.²²⁶ These scribes were often labelled as “clerks” or “village magistrates” and would have served an indispensable role within this “advanced agrarian economy.”²²⁷ It is possible that the extensive need for scribes throughout rural areas would have led the Ptolemaic administration to recruit scribes from the local population(s), and train them in the uniform practices of the administration. This administrative training would have in all probability occurred outside the context of household education.²²⁸

The primary role of these scribes was to conduct administrative tasks such as writing contracts, keeping records, facilitating transactions, and other matters relating to taxation. Scribes were particularly important for the role they played in surveying land and registering its productivity, so that it could be taxed accordingly by the Ptolemies. As Manning explains, in remote areas at a distance from the center of power in Alexandria it was difficult for the Ptolemaic governing body to maintain accurate taxing information. Thus, loyalty and accurate reporting were highly valued among village scribes; in return for this loyalty, local scribes were able to achieve a sense of power, influence, and prestige from their position as government officials.²²⁹ Goff notes that those referred to as “scribes” could have ranged from “low level bureaucrats” to officials who wielded a measure of political power, specifically citing and Zenon’s apparent position as a government official who conducted business on behalf of Apollonius.²³⁰

While scribes were employed by the Ptolemaic administration, the pervasiveness of Ptolemaic taxation meant that scribes became an integral part of the life of the general population within Palestine. Schams points out these scribes would have often functioned as mediators, acting “on behalf of villagers in their dealings with higher authorities,” essentially becoming

²²⁶ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 292, 312-313. Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 28-29. Schams cites *P.Cair.Zen* 59006 and *P.Lond.* 7.1930 from the Zenon papyri as evidence that attests to the function of scribes in the Ptolemaic administration of Palestine in the middle of the third century BCE, though it cannot be determined with certainty if the scribes were Ptolemaic officials working in Palestine, or indigenous scribes employed by the Ptolemaic administration (87-88).

²²⁷ Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 29.

²²⁸ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 291. Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 28. See also the discussion in David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187-193.

²²⁹ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, 160. Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 292.

²³⁰ Goff “Scribes and Pedagogy,” 208. Though Zenon is not referred to called a scribe, Goff argues he can be designated as one, or at least one with scribal abilities who wrote texts and participated within the governing bureaucracy.

their representatives to the ruling power.²³¹ In a similar vein, Manning briefly notes that there are examples of apparent scribal inaccuracies within records, where taxation figures are carried over from older records, and land registrations are misclassified. The reasonings behind these botches are not fully understood, but it can be assumed that scribes with administrative experience were both keenly aware of the taxes that were imposed, and the local population's ability to meet the payment. It may be speculated that such inaccuracies, which would have seemingly worked in the favor of the villagers, may be an instance of the scribe "mediating" to ease the villager's tax burden.

Since the Temple system was a locus for collecting Ptolemaic tribute, temple scribes would have also been familiar with, and participated within, Ptolemaic administration and taxation. These scribes would have also carried out administrative tasks in addition to the more "religious" scribal tasks of copying sacred writings, instructions, lists of regulations, and priestly genealogies. The result of Hellenistic rule meant that Greek became a necessary language for these scribes, along with Hebrew and Aramaic.²³² This was imperative for the Temple, as the High Priest—and those who functioned as provincial governors—would have required scribal services for conducting official business and communication with the Ptolemaic rulers.²³³ While Temple scribes may have also been engaged in other "religious" scribal activities that would have led to one being considered a "sage" (see below), these titles were not rigid, and it is possible that those with scribal abilities were engaged in a variety of functions. Schams points out that "an official scribe may have had the reputation of a scholar," and "a sage with independent means may or may not have chosen to work for the government and administration."²³⁴

(ii) *Sages*

In addition to their administrative tasks, certain scribes also participated in the composition of intellectual and religious texts within Judea. These persons, as Leo Perdue has explained, were often identified as "sages" (חכמים) and were concerned with issues such as

²³¹ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 313.

²³² Adams, "The Social Location of the Scribe," 28.

²³³ Leo G. Perdue, "Sages, Scribes, and Seers in Israel and the Ancient Near East: An Introduction," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 4.

²³⁴ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 313. See also Grabbe, "Scribes and Synagogues" in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, 363.

creation, justice, cosmic order, and retribution; they used their scribal abilities to compose, shape, and preserve intellectual traditions in textual form.²³⁵ Sages are typically associated with, or adjacent to, texts within the wisdom tradition, but are also believed to be responsible for shaping and editing the “canonical, deuterocanonical, and pseudepigraphal literature of ancient Israel and early Judaism.”²³⁶ These intellectual pursuits involved a pedagogical aspect where sages both received instruction, and then would eventually pass instruction along to students of their own, who in all likelihood would assume a career that involved scribal activities (e.g., Prov. 1:2-8; Qoh 12:9-10; Sir Prologue).

It should be noted that while the use of חכם as a noun within the Hebrew Bible reflects a sage/wise person, and possibly one with scribal abilities, the term can also be used as an adjective in a more generic form. The term does not necessarily reference a particular profession, but one who possesses a particular skill or intellectual ability.²³⁷ More specifically, חכם may refer to those who are astute in their judgment and have gained a mastery of wisdom (חכמה). Schams argues it is likely that scribes would have attained a measure of knowledge and relevant expertise from their experience of copying and producing various sacred writings, which were understood to be a source of wisdom.²³⁸ Thus, the scribal engagement with sacred texts would have provided scribes an opportunity to be considered among “the wise.”

The connection between scribes and wisdom may be seen in the book of Proverbs, which employs the scribal metaphor of writing wise teachings (תורה) and commandments (מצות) “on the tablet” of one’s heart (Prov 3:1-3; 7:1-3) to convey the pedagogical aim of scribal training. David Carr has convincingly argued that such statements are illustrative of an educational process that included memorization and recitation of cultural traditions intended to shape the minds of the students.²³⁹ Carr argues for designating this process as “education-enculturation” wherein cultural traditions and desired virtues are inscribed and reinscribed “on the hearts/minds of members of cultures or subgroups in them.”²⁴⁰ As was discussed in chapter II, the wisdom instruction of Proverbs begins by articulating and defining a series of virtues that that would shape and define the ideology and behavior of wise persons (Prov 1:2-6). This appears to have

²³⁵ Perdue, “Sages, Scribes, and Seers,” 3.

²³⁶ Perdue, “Sages, Scribes, and Seers,” 4.

²³⁷ Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages*, 176. Perdue, “Sages, Scribes, and Seers,” .

²³⁸ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 102.

²³⁹ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 9. Goff, “Scribes and Pedagogy,” 198.

²⁴⁰ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 12.

also included proper dispositions toward those in authority (e.g., Prov 23:1-3; 25:2-7; Sir 8:8), indicating that one aspect of wisdom instruction and scribal training was the formation of persons who could assume various positions within the governing bureaucracy.

The instruction of Ben Sira remains an important source for discerning the status, education, and enculturation of scribes during the Hellenistic era. Dated to the early second century BCE while Jerusalem was under Seleucid rule, this text provides a penetrating insight into the intellectual status of scribes while Judea was under Hellenistic rule.²⁴¹ Specifically, Sir 38:24-39:11 attempts to articulate the value and need for “the wisdom of the scribe” (38:24) within society by comparing scribes to other trades that use their hands, namely farmers, artisans, smiths, and potters (Sir 38:25-34).

Written from the perspective of the scribe, the text comes off as a self-aggrandizing declaration of scribal superiority. However, it does offer insight into the pedagogical needs required for scribal tasks. Ben Sira explains that it was necessary for scribes to devote a significant portion of their time to not only their tasks, but also the training necessary to complete them: “The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; only the one who has little business can become wise” (Sir 38:24 NRSV). This in all likelihood meant that scribes would have not actively participated in the cultivation of crops, meaning that they were non-producers. Ben Sira makes this point explicit by subsequently describing how the demands of various laborers and artisans, while necessary for a functioning society, inhibit these persons from attaining positions that would involve intellectual discernment (Sir 38:25-34). Because they were probably not producing their subsistence needs for themselves, a scribes livelihood would have been supported through what was extracted from the agricultural producers, indicating that scribes were in some form tied to the elite circles of society (e.g., Sir 39:4—“He serves among the great and appears before rulers;”). Ben Sira seems to reference this economic structure by mentioning that although laborers are not sought out for governing positions, they are nonetheless necessary for providing for the basic needs of a functioning city (Sir 38:32).

While this passage initially sets out to uplift the “wisdom of the scribe,” Schams cautions that the distinction between a “sage” and a “scribe” is unclear when analyzing the use of these terms within this passage. In fact, “scribe” is only referenced at the beginning (Sir 38:24), while

²⁴¹ For a discussion of the dating of Sirach, see Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 8-10.

the rest of the passage focuses on “wise men in general.”²⁴² Schams notes that there may have also been those within Judea who are more appropriately identified as “sages with independent means rather than professional scribes”; this probably included learned individuals who studied written texts and held influential and powerful positions, such as “officials and advisors to the high priest and governor,” but were not actively engaged in scribal activities.²⁴³ It may be concluded that within Ben Sira—and possibly the broader Judean society—there is, as noted, “no clear distinction” between these two groups. But this “does not imply that all wise men were scribes or *vice versa*.”²⁴⁴

(iii) *Scribes as Retainers*

Ben Sira’s explanation of the scribe’s need for “leisure,” and the subsequent need of scribal services by the ruling elite meant that scribes in all likelihood were sustained and provided for through the wealth of the elite. This meant that, since scribes were non-producers, they would have been supported with resources that were extracted from village and peasant laborers—the agricultural producers within society. While scribes were in service of, and reliant upon, the ruling bureaucracy, they were not necessarily members of the ruling elite in that they did not exert societal power through their own extensive wealth and control over the land and its resources.

The best descriptor of the nuanced social position of a scribe would be that of a “retainer.” The status of a “retainer” has been classically defined by Gerhard Lenski in his assessment of agrarian societies within his oft-cited work *Power and Privilege*. Lenski uses comparative data from a broad range of ancient societies to analyze the various levels of social stratification and organization. Lenski notes that within every agrarian society the ruling and governing class maintained a group of retainers who served them “in a variety of more or less specialized capacities.”²⁴⁵ While the retainer class included an assortment of offices, such as soldiers and household servants, all retainers ultimately share the same function and characteristic: service to and dependence upon the political elite.²⁴⁶ The office of a scribe who

²⁴² Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 101-102.

²⁴³ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 103.

²⁴⁴ Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 102.

²⁴⁵ Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 243.

²⁴⁶ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 243.

was needed to read communications, keep records, and write necessary texts certainly qualifies as a retainer.

The retainer's relationship to the elite allowed them to share in the extracted surplus from agricultural producers, elevating them socially and separating them from the majority of the population. However, Lenski observes that the boundaries between retainers, the elite, and peasant classes are "fuzzy" and not overly rigid.²⁴⁷ Members of the retainer class who were able to serve high-ranking elites often enjoyed a greater measure of power and privilege than even lower-ranking members of the governing class. On the flip side, many retainers were also bound to the peasant class, and when they were not functioning in their retainer role they tended to live as peasants.²⁴⁸ Further, most retainers were individually expendable, weakening their ability to bargain or demand greater wages, and constantly susceptible to being disposed of and slipping into a peasant life.²⁴⁹ Positions that required extensive training, such as scribes, did have more leverage for obtaining greater rewards due to the difficulty in mastering their skillset; yet at the end of the day most could still be disposed of and replaced if their employer was motivated to do so.

Richard Horsley and Patrick Tiller have adapted Lenski's model to analyze Judean scribes during Seleucid rule, elucidating patterns of organization that may have largely continued from the Ptolemaic age. Horsley and Tiller begin by analyzing Ben Sira as a member of the retainer class connected both to the priestly aristocracy and governing entities, who had "scribal-legal-cultural-religious functions."²⁵⁰ Within this role, scribes would have served a variety of functions, including working as diplomats, religious educators, keeping economic records, and "as guardians of Judean culture in general" (Sir 37:23; 38:34-39:4).²⁵¹ The scribes role as a retainer meant that they were economically dependent upon the aristocracy that employed their services.

The relationship of social and economic dependence between the scribal retainer and the aristocracy that employed them would have undoubtedly affected the perspective and ideological

²⁴⁷ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 244.

²⁴⁸ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 245.

²⁴⁹ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 246.

²⁵⁰ Richard A. Horsley and Patrick A. Tiller, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom: Rethinking Texts in Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 49; See also Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 53-70 (67).

²⁵¹ Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics*, 67.

outlook within the works produced by the scribe. Horsley and Tiller go on to explore Ben Sira's relationship with emerging apocalyptic texts, and come to see these textual variants as reflective of competing factions among the local aristocracy that get textually expressed through the work of their retainers.²⁵² What Horsley and Tiller demonstrate through this analysis is that the various scribes during this era, though they may be of a similar social location, do not necessarily share the same social outlook. Just because scribes belong to the same socio-economic class—that of retainers—“does not mean that they would agree on ideology.”²⁵³ Rather, each scribe, and the texts that they produce, are going to be heavily influenced by the aristocratic elites that are employing their services and providing for their needs.

That being said, Horsley and Tiller also importantly acknowledge that these scribes maintained a sense of independent authority that was grounded within their role as “custodians of divine revelation,” and nurtured by their study of ancient wisdom, torah, and religious traditions.²⁵⁴ This allowed the scribes some measure of freedom and a justification in being able to critique the aristocracy, particularly in their treatment of the poor and lower classes. As Adams explains, the scribe's role as a retainer, coupled with the virtues they cultivated through the study of wisdom and Torah, created a tension of having to both serve wealthy elites while also embracing the virtuous and equitable behavior promoted by the received tradition.²⁵⁵

This tension gets played out in Ben Sira who, as Horsley points out, maintains an ambivalent attitude toward both “social-political superiors” and “social-cultural inferiors.”²⁵⁶ While Ben Sira does offer a conceited perspective on manual laborers who do not have the “leisure” and subsequent “wisdom” of a scribe (Sir 38:24-34), Sir 4:1-10 does advocate for protecting those who are vulnerable to exploitation, and strongly encourages generosity to the poor (see also Sir 29:1-20). However, Ben Sira stops short of any full out condemnation of elites who contribute to this exploitation, seemingly reinforcing class distinctions: “Riches are good if they are free from sin; poverty is evil only in the opinion of the ungodly” (Sir 13:24; NRSV). If wealth can be good if “free from sin,” Ben Sira does question if there is a rich person to be found who has not been compromised by greedy pursuits of wealth (Sir 31:1-10). When instructing

²⁵² Horsley and Tiller, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom*, 145.

²⁵³ Horsley and Tiller, *After Apocalyptic & Wisdom*, 96.

²⁵⁴ Horsley and Tiller, *After Apocalyptic & Wisdom*, 50.

²⁵⁵ Adams, “The Social Location of the Scribe,” 31.

²⁵⁶ Horsely, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea*, 57.

students on how to encounter such persons, Ben Sira insists that a sage must bow to a powerful person (Sir 4:7) and cautionins about the potential dangers of dealing with the powerful (Sir 13:3-11). As Adams explains, Ben Sira’s rhetoric is “a delicate balance” of a retainer trying to navigate elite circles with questionable economic practices, while also upholding the “social-justice expectations of his tradition.”²⁵⁷

It seems likely that scribal retainers would have had to work out this delicate balance within lived, empirical circumstances. Not only were the boundaries between retainers and the peasant class “fuzzy,” scribes would have also been directly involved in the governing taxation apparatus, with their administrative tasks giving them a first-hand account of the hardships imposed upon peasants and agricultural producers. As noted above, scribes often functioned as a mediator between peasants and the ruling authorities, and would have approached this seemingly exploitive situation as ones who were also ethically trained in their religious traditions. Thus, the example of scribal opposition to exploitation seen within Ben Sira may not have been merely philosophical, but was supplemented with the scribe’s direct experience of encountering and witnessing this exploitation within their administrative scribal tasks.

Of course, experiencing the exploitation of the poor and critiquing it through the scribes’ received tradition could have engendered conflicts between these retainers and the rulers and aristocracy who employed them. This is certainly true, though the extent to which any particular scribe would have embodied the ancient paternalistic traditions of Israel and Judah would have varied. Indeed, Horsley and Tiller maintain that the semi-independent role of the scribes could also function to further elite interests by confirming the sages’ divine authority, an authority that could then be employed by at least some scribes to provide an ideological basis for the rule of the aristocracy (e.g., Sir 50:1-11). Further, a class of authoritative individuals who defended the interests of poor could indirectly provide “a legitimate (but non-threatening) outlet for the anger and frustration of the poor and oppressed” but without fundamentally destabilizing the system as a whole.²⁵⁸

(c) Qohelet’s Authorship as a Scribal Retainer under Ptolemaic Rule

²⁵⁷ Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, 193.

²⁵⁸ Horsley and Tiller, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom*, 50.

While an understanding of scribes as retainers has tended to focus on the text of Ben Sira, Ben Sira can be read as informative for understanding authorship issues surrounding Qohelet since Ben Sira would have been writing and teaching within two generations of Qohelet under a similar Hellenistic context. This close historical connection would make it reasonable to assume that the analysis of Ben Sira's position as a retainer would also be applicable to the scribal authorship of Qohelet.²⁵⁹ Accordingly, this dissertation will proceed with an understanding that the utterance of Qohelet arises from the context of a scribal retainer(s) within Ptolemaic Palestine.

Understood in this way, Qohelet's authorship was likely rooted in a complex social location that would have been associated with varying groups of people. This would have included being employed by, and indebted to, the social elites who provided for the retainers from resources that were extracted from the surpluses of the peasant class. It is also possible that the author(s) of Qohelet was linked to the peasantry since he/they were not obviously established members of the ruling class; despite the royal fiction of Qohelet 1-2, the text of Qohelet signals its author's distance from political elites (see chapter V). What is more, like the peasant class, scribal retainers were susceptible to having their labor exploited by the aristocracy and used for their economic and social objectives. It is also likely that as a scribe, the author(s) of Qohelet would have been trained and enculturated within the local religious and moral tradition, allowing them to maintain a "semi-autonomous" position—similar to that of Ben Sira—from which they could level a certain measure of social critique that arises from their ethical commitments (e.g., Qoh 4:1-3, 13; 7:7; 8:9). Yet as a scribal retainer, they would have had maintain the delicate balance of adhering to the objectives of the elite who provided their livelihood, while also displaying an ethical concern for the peasant classes they were bounded to, and the social injustices that they witnessed.

Understanding Qohelet as a scribal product begins with the obvious fact that it is a written text, and would have necessarily come from one with scribal abilities. Further, the text's reflections upon the cosmos (e.g. Qoh 1:2-11) and wisdom (Qoh 2:10-24; 7:11-20; 8:1; 9:13-18) allow for it to be broadly categorized as a "wisdom text" that would have been written by one associated with "the wise." While the text does purport to be the words of "Qohelet, Son of

²⁵⁹ On the closeness and comparison of the texts, see Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 240.

David, king in Jerusalem” (Qoh 1:2), the perspective of a king seems to be limited to chapters 1-2, as other parts of the text reflect the views of one who is in service of, and distanced from, a ruling figure (e.g., Qoh 8:2-4; 10:20). Ch. 1-2 may be more appropriately read as a “royal persona,” or a “royal fiction,” that is employed by a scribe/sage for a rhetorical purposes.²⁶⁰ More appropriately, the epilogue of the book identifies the primary voice in the text as Qohelet, who was a “sage” (חכם) that was involved in various tasks, including: teaching “knowledge to the people;” listening, studying, and arranging proverbs; seeking out “pleasing words”; and writing “upright words of truth” (Qoh 12:9-10). The epilogue associates the text’s dominant voice with a scribal sage who was involved in some form of pedagogy.

While Qohelet is described as one who “taught knowledge to the people” (Qoh 12:9), the exact nature of Qohelet’s role as a teacher is difficult to ascertain. Carr—who is describing the instruction of Ben Sira in a manner apropos for Qohelet—describes the role of the teacher as one who imparts wisdom “for the small minority who had the time to master higher instruction,” specifically that of a “literate elite.”²⁶¹ Perdue provides insight into the nature of Qohelet’s teaching by citing Ben Sira’s reference to a “house of instruction” (Sir 51:23) to presume that the primary voice within the text of Qohelet represents a teacher within a similar structure that was influenced by a Hellenistic paideia.²⁶² Perdue sees it likely that “sage Qohelet” would have been a scribal teacher who studied Jewish literature written in Hebrew and Greek, as well as other Greek texts, and would have taught aristocratic youth intent on becoming “government officials and administrators, accountants, scribes, lawyers, and clerks.”²⁶³

In addition to pedagogical responsibilities, the available data from the Ptolemaic era paints a picture of scribes as being heavily involved in the administration of the ruling bureaucracy, and utilized within their taxation apparatus. While it cannot be known if, or the extent to which, the authorship was involved in these scribal tasks, it seems reasonable to conclude that any ancient Judean with the ability to produce a complex text like Qohelet would

²⁶⁰ See chapter V of this work for a fuller discussion of this issue.

²⁶¹ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 208. Ben Sira specifically presents himself a teacher of “all who seek instruction,” the “great among the people,” and “leaders of the congregation” (33:18-19).

²⁶² Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 240. Carr does note that the overall text of Ben Sira does not attest to a public school, but presupposes parents as the primary teachers of their children. However, Ben Sira does present himself as an “advanced teacher” and “reflects a “small scale, writing-supported, oral education of a literate elite” that “was intended for the small minority who had the time to master higher instruction” (*Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 208).

²⁶³ Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 246.

have had some measure of scribal experience, either through personal involvement at the village level, within the temple, or merely through their scribal training. This experience may be seen in a couple of vague, yet possible references to the Ptolemaic administration and taxation in the book of Ecclesiastes. Qoh 5:7, speaking on the “robbery of justice and righteousness” observed “in a province,” claims it is the result of “a high one” who is “keeping watch above [another] high one, and higher ones above them.” While ambiguous, this may be a possible reference to the hierarchical bureaucracy that operated in the Ptolemaic administration (see chapter V). Also, Qoh 6:2 presents an observation about a man not enjoying his wealth because it gets consumed by a foreign entity: “A man whom God gives riches and wealth and honor, and there is nothing his soul is lacking from all that he desires; And God does not authorize him to consume from it, for a foreign man will consume it.”

Understanding the authorship as having experience in the Ptolemaic governing administration may be further supported when one recognizes how the text of Qohelet encountered, or was influenced by, Greek forms, language, and culture. Noting the various themes and literary sayings that have parallels within Greek literature (and was explored in section 3.01 of this chapter), Perdue sees it as “plausible” that the author(s) of Qohelet “came to know the Greek world through some sort of scholastic or tutorial environment.”²⁶⁴ Carr contends that within the Hellenistic world some non-Greeks were educated within the Greek tradition in order to socialize them “into lower- and mid-level administrative roles in ruling systems dominated by Greeks.”²⁶⁵ Because Greek was the “lingua franca for official, literary, and commercial writings” it can be assumed that the author possibly knew Greek and read Greek texts.²⁶⁶ Thus, the authorship’s possible engagement with Greek ideas and language could have resulted from the author’s scribal training for administrative tasks.

If the authorship and dominant voice within the text of Qohelet signifies a scribal-teacher who also had administrative scribal experience, this begs the question: does the text of Qohelet arise from an elite social position? While much scholarship has tended to associate Qohelet with the aristocracy, the identification of the author of Qohelet as a scribal retainer should merit some

²⁶⁴ Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 243.

²⁶⁵ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 188-189.

²⁶⁶ Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 246.

caution in purporting strict social labels.²⁶⁷ By understanding the author(s) as a retainer, it then becomes unlikely that the authors were elite figures in that they had immediate access to material wealth; however, as retainers, they were interacting closely with the elite, and often serving their interests. Mark Sneed explains that since the text of Qohelet arises from the position of a retainer, it maintains an ambiguity as it “reflects both elitism and less-than-aristocratic concerns.”²⁶⁸ As a retainer, the authorship of Qohelet would have certainly relied upon the ruling class who employed them, serving the elite and sharing in a somewhat privileged lifestyle, though as Sneed remarks “not to the same degree” as the actual aristocratic class. An elite experience can be discerned at various points within the text: its identification as a king (Qoh 1:1, 12), its description of a wealthy estate (Qoh 2:4-8), a knowledge of the instability of riches (Qoh 5:12-13), and the insistence that one has the ability to “eat and drink” as one desires (Qoh 5:17-18; 8:15; 9:7-8). However, these references do not necessarily demand an identification with elite figures, but rather only an understanding of the political and economic elite, something that scribal retainers would have been very well familiar with.

While a measure of social privilege may be ascertained in scribal retainers, Leniski’s model demonstrates how the social boundaries of the retainer class are “fuzzy” in their relation to other segments of society. Scribal retainers during the Ptolemaic era were employed by, and associated with the ruling elite, allowing them achieve high-ranking positions; yet, Lenski explains that they were also “bounded by the peasant class,” and could possibly slip into the peasantry if the elite determined that their services were no longer needed.²⁶⁹ This threat may be evidenced by how Qohelet emphasizes obedience to ruling figures. Qoh, 8:2-5 stresses that one obey a king’s command so that the one who keeps the commandment will “not experience an evil thing.” Similarly, 10:20 cautions against cursing the king or the rich, and the danger of doing so even in private, because the powerful have a way of finding things out. Though not explicit, these passages seem to imply that mis-stepping with elite figures can lead to a less than adequate situation with difficult circumstances. This suggests that the authorship understands themselves, and others like them, to be disposable to ruling figures.

²⁶⁷ The influential works assigning Qohelet an aristocratic background include Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 19 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951); and Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 115-130.

²⁶⁸ Mark R. Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective*, AIL (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 132.

²⁶⁹ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 245.

The delicate and complex social position that scribal retainers resided in would have necessarily shaped the perspective within the text, as the authorship of Qohelet would have attempted to mediate various commitments while making sense of reality. As a sage, the authorship of Qohelet would have likely been trained in the wisdom traditions that included a strong moral and ethical component. Like Ben Sira, this would have given Qohelet's authorship a sense of "semi-autonomy," from which they could level a measure of critique when social practices did not align with wisdom's morals.

It is possible that a scribe who has taught in elite circles and used their abilities for administrative functions would have witnessed and experienced the economic difficulty imposed upon the peasant class by the Ptolemies and their extensive taxation. The text of Qohelet is characteristically empirical, with the text repeatedly providing personal observations that were seen or experienced "under the sun." This includes a recognition that sometimes people don't receive "rewards" commensurate with their assumed moral character, as Qohelet witnesses "wicked" persons being buried in a holy place, while those who do what is right are forgotten (Qoh 8:10); additionally, Qohelet perceives "righteous ones who [things have happened to them] as if they did wicked acts," and "wicked ones who [have things happened to them] as if they did righteous acts" (Qoh 8:14). Qohelet also observes that there are oppressions occurring as a result of clear power differentials between those with power, and those who are oppressed, and the oppressed do not have any relief (Qoh 4:1). Seemingly recognizing the difficulty of Ptolemaic taxation, Qohelet observes that there are those who labor for goods and have a measure of wealth, only to have it extracted from them and enjoyed by someone else (Qoh 2:21,6:2). While this is the nature of Ptolemaic extraction, the text unequivocally labels this practice as "evil." It may be presumed that the text of Qohelet reflects the social perspective of one who observes, but did not keenly experience the difficulty caused by Ptolemaic rule, and who judges it negatively from an ethical stance rooted in "traditional" wisdom.

(d) Summary

In summary, it may be posited that the authorship of Qohelet resided within Jerusalem during the third century BCE as a scribal retainer. This position provided him a unique status and perspective within Ptolemaic Judea. As demonstrated above, the Ptolemaic bureaucracy made extensive use of those with scribal abilities for administrative purposes at various bureaucratic levels. This means that scribes not only witnessed but participated in—through their recording

and surveying—the Ptolemaic economic system of taxation and estate development. Scribes would have witnessed, surveyed, and recorded how subsistence farmers in local villages continually had their produce extracted and their labor eappropriated for royal and elite objectives. While the scribes would have certainly benefited from this economy, in that their livelihood was sustained from elite extraction, it is also the case that scribes who functioned as sages would have been trained within intellectual traditions that enculturated them with an ethic regarding appropriate social relations including the ethical treatment of the poor. While it is unclear as to the exact relationship or function between scribes who performed administrative tasks versus those who shaped and transmitted literary and religious traditions, the basic literacy of even low-level functionaries suggests that among scribes there would have been at least some overlap in their training and so potentially in their ideological positions. As a result, the authorship of Qohelet was in a unique position to witness, and critically assess, the economic difficulties experienced by a majority of the population, much of which was generated by Ptolemaic structures that sought to control the land in order to generate a steady stream of revenue for the ruling bureaucracy. Thus, the text can be read as a complex interaction with the authorship's socio-economic context, representing a unique perspective that attempts to convey an appropriate way to navigate these lived realities.

Chapter IV. The Tobiad Romance: Jewish Elite Wisdom among the Ptolemies

Besides Qohelet, there are relatively few texts from Judea that are confidently dated to the Ptolemaic era. While textual resources are relatively sparse, a common source utilized for discerning the social landscape of this era is the *Tobiad Romance* or the “Tales of the Tobiads”—a narrative preserved within Josephus’ *Antiquities* (*Ant* 12:154-236). Accordingly, commentators on Qohelet have often cited the *Tobiad Romance* as evidence for understanding the broader historical and social landscape surrounding the production of Qohelet.¹ Little consideration has been given, however, to how the *Tobiad Romance* constructs its protagonists as figures who embody characteristics of wisdom, and thus how it might maintain a literary relationship with other texts classified as “wisdom,” beyond that of merely delineating a broader social context.²

This chapter will analyze how the *Tobiad Romance* utilizes rhetoric and concepts prevalent within the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible to construct a perspective for how Judean society can flourish under imperial rule. Specifically, I argue that the *Tobiad Romance* represents a piece of Jewish propaganda that promotes the communal benefits that accrue to Jews/Judeans when local elites maintain amicable and beneficial relations with imperial rulers. Utilizing an established, wealthy, landowning elite family—who persistently used their wealth to maintain mutually beneficial relations with Judea’s various imperial overlords during the Second Temple era—the *Romance* communicates how the Tobiads, specifically Joseph and Hyrcanus, manipulate Ptolemaic rule to deliver the Jewish people “from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life” (*Ant* 12:224).³ To support these claims, the *Romance* draws upon language, motifs, and concepts present within wisdom literature (i.e., “court wisdom”, good speech, shrewdness), and re-accentuates them for the text’s own purpose of justifying Jewish

¹ For example, Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014) 145-154; Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O. C. Dean, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 19-21; Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 226-232.

² As will be discussed in more detail below, works that offer a literary analysis of the *Tobiad Romance* include Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, Hellenistic Culture and Society 30 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Susan Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns and Tyrant Typologies in Josephus’ *Ant.* 12:160-222,” *JJS* 32, no. 1 (1981): 47–55; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

³ Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are that of Ralph Marcus in Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books 12-13, trans. Ralph Marcus, LCL, vol. VII of IX (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942).

participation within the Ptolemaic (or, imperial) governing structures as a strategy for navigating and benefiting from the political and socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine.

Close examination of the *Romance*, however, reveals how the Tobiad's manipulation of Ptolemaic structures inevitably results in mimicking Ptolemaic practices of economic extraction and brutality. This is evidenced by the traces of an anti-Tobiad sentiment that are persevered within the text, as well as how the *Romance* singularly presents the economic prospering of the Tobiads and not a broader segment of Jews/Judeans. In this way, the *Romance's* use of wisdom concepts de-emphasizes certain ethical mandates within wisdom literature, notably those in the book of Proverbs. The *Romance* instead focuses upon how cleverness, witty speech, and shrewd maneuvering within structures of power can generate economic well-being and societal power. When placed in dialogical relation to the virtues of wisdom promoted within Proverbs, such "traditional" wisdom appears to validate the critiques of the Tobiads, rather than affirming their brutal and extractive practices.

Within this chapter I will support this argument by 1. providing an overview and summary of the narrative within the *Tobiad Romance*; 2. discerning how the archaeological and textual references to the Tobiad family present them as wealthy, landowning elite figures who utilized their wealth and local power to maintain mutually beneficial relations with Palestine's imperial rulers during the Second Temple period; 3. Provide an overview of the issues surrounding the text's historicity, particularly attending to how it has been viewed as a piece of Jewish propaganda; and 4. Highlight both the elements of wisdom and the voices of critique that contribute to the characterization of Joseph and Hyrcanus within the *Tobiad Romance*.

Section 4.01 The Tobiad Romance: Narrative Summary

The *Tobiad Romance* is a tale within Josephus' *Antiquities* that narrates the stories of a father and son—Joseph and Hyrcanus—who exhibit a shrewd cleverness and wit that endears them to the Ptolemaic monarchy. With the Ptolemaic monarchy functioning as their benefactor, the Tobiads act to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people, and in the process can advance their own power, wealth, and status. The narrative describes both Joseph and Hyrcanus as persons of great character who use their witty and clever speech to gain the admiration of the Ptolemaic rulers. This allows them opportunity to collect taxes and tribute in their native province of Coele-Syria on behalf of the Ptolemaic throne. As Ptolemaic tax farmers Joseph and Hyrcanus utilize violence—or the threat thereof—to collect the tribute that is both sent to Ptolemy and used to

grow their own wealth. While there are many similarities between the figures of Joseph and Hyrcanus, one major difference is in the presentation of the motive for their actions. Whereas the narrative extolls Joseph as one who intercedes for and advances the status of the Jewish people, Hyrcanus is presented as one who is more self-serving. Hyrcanus' story is marked by family strife that comes to a tragic end when, after Ptolemaic hegemony of Syria-Palestine has waned, he commits suicide and has his property seized by Antiochus Epiphanes, the ruler of the Seleucid Empire.

The story of the Tobiads begins, and is situated within, a social and political crisis occurring within Jerusalem. The narrative opens with Judea under Seleucid rule. The political landscape, however, quickly shifts when the province is peacefully transferred to the Ptolemies as a dowry gift when Antiochus' daughter Cleopatra is given in marriage to Ptolemy (*Ant* 12:154-155). The native Jewish population within Jerusalem is described as suffering at the hands of the neighboring Samaritans, who were doing "much mischief to the Jews by laying waste their land and carrying off slaves" (12:156). Further, the high priest Onias decided to withhold tribute owed to King Ptolemy, causing Ptolemy to send an envoy to Jerusalem to "denounce" Onias if the tribute was not received. Additionally, King Ptolemy threatened to seize Jewish land and parcel it out to the empire's soldiers (12:158-159).

It is within this context that we are introduced to the well-connected Joseph, whose father was Tobiah and whose mother was the sister of Onias. At this point Joseph is described as being young, but having "dignity and foresight"⁴ (σεμνότητι δὲ καὶ προνοίᾳ) with "a reputation for uprightness" (δικαιοσύνης δόξαν ἔχων) (12:160) Joseph rebukes Onias for not considering the welfare of the people, and attempts to take charge of the situation by interceding with Ptolemy's envoy (12:161-164). Ptolemy's envoy is impressed with the dignity of Joseph's character, and proceeds to return to Egypt where they heap praises upon Joseph to the king, enabling Joseph to secure a welcome within the king's presence (12:167).

As the tale proceeds, Joseph decides to travel to Egypt while "chief men and magistrates" within the province are going to bid for the right to collect taxes for Ptolemy (12:168-171). Despite Joseph's apparent family connections, the chiefs and magistrates mock Joseph for his poverty, and deride him with slurs that could be interpreted as the equivalent of "country

bumpkin.”⁵ Despite their teasing, Joseph outwits his fellow travelers by learning that Ptolemy is not in Alexandria but in Memphis; subsequently, he is able to travel there to procure a meeting with the king. Upon arriving, Ptolemy invites Joseph into his chariot where Joseph can quell Ptolemy’s complaint against Onias by blaming Onias’ actions on his old age and presumed ignorance. Joseph entertains and endears himself to Ptolemy by making a witty remark about how infants and the elderly have the same level of intelligence (12:172).

When the time comes for bids to be made for the right to farm the taxes of Coele-Syria, Joseph accuses all the bidders of conspiring together to “offer the king a low price for the taxes” (12:176). Joseph then proceeds to double the bid and agrees to hand over to the king the property of those who are indebted to the throne. When the king asks Joseph who will provide surety for this ambitious bid, Joseph initiates his charm and wit and responds that he will offer “the persons of the very best character.” When the king inquires as to who this is, Joseph responds with “you yourself and your wife.” Ptolemy responds in laughter and grants Joseph the tax farming rights without guarantors (12:177-178).

After securing the right to farm taxes, Joseph returns to his home province with two-thousand foot soldiers granted to him by Ptolemy as a show of force for those who might refuse to pay (12:180). Predictably, Joseph’s tax farming enterprise is met with resistance. When he comes to the city of Ascalon, for example, the city refuses to give him tribute and “even insulted him to book.” Subsequently he takes the town by force, arresting and killing leading citizens and turning over their property to the king. Ascalon becomes an example to the rest of the province, and other cities readily pay Joseph the tribute they owe (12:181-183). Through his tax farming Joseph amasses wealth and secures power within the region, while also maintaining good relations with Ptolemy and Cleopatra (12:184-185). Finally, when noting Joseph’s death, the tale describes him as “an excellent and high-minded man” (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γενόμενος καὶ μεγαλόφρων) whose career as a tax farmer of Syria, Phoenicia, and Samaria “brought the Jewish people from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life” (12:224).

The narrative then shifts the focus from Joseph to his son Hyrcanus by narrating the bizarre and disturbing story of Hyrcanus’ conception (12:186-189). While Joseph is attending a banquet in Alexandria, he becomes infatuated with a dancing girl. Joseph, knowing that it was

⁵ Translation of Lawrence M. Wills in *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 203.

against Jewish law for a Jewish man to sleep with a foreign woman, asks his brother Solymius to help him conceal his sin. Solymius attempts to keep Joseph from such dishonor by dressing up his own daughter—Joseph’s niece—and taking her to Joseph at night when he became too drunk to notice who she was (or, who she was not). Joseph, unaware this was his niece, had intercourse with her “several times” and fell “violently in love with her.” When Joseph learns this was his brother’s daughter, he is relieved and marries his niece who gives birth to Hyrcanus.

Joseph had seven other sons, but Hyrcanus quickly becomes his favored child. Hyrcanus’ brothers are described as lazy, foolish, and ignorant, while Hyrcanus is described as one having “natural courage and intelligence” (φυσικὴν ἀνδρείαν καὶ σύνεσιν) (12:190). This is demonstrated by a story where Joseph decides to test his virtue by sending him on a two-day journey into the wilderness with three hundred yoke of oxen to till the ground, but withholds sending the yoke straps. Hyrcanus, not wanting to waste the time it would take to travel back to his father, responds by slaughtering ten yoke of oxen and cutting up their hides to make straps, thus being able to return to his father having tilled the ground. Joseph is pleased with Hyrcanus’ “good sense” (φρονήματος), commends his intelligence, and loves him more—furthering a rift between Hyrcanus and his brothers (12:192-195).

Similar to Joseph, Hyrcanus demonstrates the ability to bind himself to Ptolemy. When Joseph sends him to Alexandria to celebrate the birth of Ptolemy’s son (12:197), Joseph, Hyrcanus’ prompting, writes a letter to his steward in Alexandria (where Joseph apparently had a measure of wealth stored) to provide Hyrcanus with money to buy a gift for Ptolemy, thinking Hyrcanus would spend no more than ten talents. On the contrary, Hyrcanus delivers the letter to the steward and requests 1,000 talents, causing the steward to strongly rebuke Hyrcanus for not displaying the modesty and restraint of his father (12:203); when the steward refuses to give the money to Hyrcanus, Hyrcanus has him imprisoned. Ptolemy then inquires as to why Hyrcanus took such action, and Hyrcanus explains that he punished the “slave” for not obeying orders, and supports his action by stating “if we do not punish such fellows, even you may expect to be held in contempt by your subjects.” Ptolemy—in a similar reaction to Joseph’s wit—responds with laughter and admiration for Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus ultimately gains access to the thousand talents, from which he purchases slaves that he eventually gifts to the king and queen (12:205-209).

As the tale proceeds, Hyrcanus continues to display his wit and increase Ptolemy's admiration of him. Hyrcanus is invited to a banquet of Ptolemy's that consists of "leading men of the country" to whom Hyrcanus' brothers had written asking that they kill Hyrcanus (12:202, 210). In an attempt to intimidate and diminish Hyrcanus, the others eat their meat and heap the bones upon Hyrcanus' place at the table, creating a pile of bones. They then encourage the court jester to tease Hyrcanus, who does so by drawing attention to the pile of bones and comparing the stripped bones at Hyrcanus' seat to Joseph's actions of (financially) stripping "all Syria in the same way" (12:212). Hyrcanus then employs the familiar family wit in addressing Ptolemy, noting that dogs eat meat and bones together, but a man consumes meat and throws the bones away—referencing the bones at his place and the bare places of the others reclining at the table. Ptolemy is once again impressed, and after receiving Hyrcanus' gift agrees to write a letter of support of Hyrcanus to his father and brothers (12:213-214, 220).

However, Hyrcanus' brothers remain angry about his favored status, and upon his return they conspire to kill him. Joseph, also angry with Hyrcanus due to the amount of money he spent, feels "no concern for [Hyrcanus'] safety," but chooses to conceal his anger because he "feared of the king" (12:221). When his brothers engage him in battle, Hyrcanus ends up killing many of their men and two of his brothers, but does not receive a welcome in Jerusalem, the city in which Joseph is apparently dwelling. Hyrcanus ultimately retreats across the Jordan river where he settles and collects tribute from the population there (12:222). Upon the death of Joseph, the dispute between Hyrcanus and his brothers continues, as the elder brothers continue to wage war on Hyrcanus. This obligates other leading Judean figures to choose sides in this family dispute; Simon the high priest, sides with the elder brothers "because of kinship with them" (12:229). Hyrcanus then gives up the idea of returning to Jerusalem and remains in the Transjordan area where he "continually warred on the Arabs until he killed many of them and took many captive" (12:230).

The narrative concludes by describing in detail a great fortress built by Hyrcanus, noting that he ruled over the area for seven years (12:231-234). But when Ptolemy died and Antiochus Epiphanes came to power in Syria, Hyrcanus feared that he would be captured by the Syrian monarch and punished for "what he had done to the Arabs." The narrative ends with Hyrcanus killing himself and Antiochus seizing all his property (12:236).

Section 4.02 Tobiads in Texts and Archaeology

The narrative within Josephus' *Antiquities* is not an isolated account of the wealthy and elite Tobiad family, but is one of many ancient attestations to this family, and the subsequent power that they wielded in and around Palestine. Within the *Romance* Joseph is identified as the son of Tobiah (*Ant* 12:160), a name that—in some form—is well-attested in the Second Temple era. Variations in the name of Tobiah appear in multiple texts and various languages, and is evidenced by archaeological findings. These multiple attestations appear to document the existence of a well-known, elite family dynasty who wielded considerable political and economic influence within Palestine from the time of the return from exile to the Hasmonean revolt.⁶

In addition to the *Tobiad Romance*, the Hebrew Bible, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence together paint the picture of the Tobiad family as wealthy estate owners in the Transjordan and Ammon area, who maintained connections and influence with the Jerusalem aristocracy and priesthood. The evidence also demonstrates how the Tobiad family consistently used their wealth and resources to maintain cordial relations with the imperial rulers of Palestine, even participating in their governing structures.⁷ Such an assessment of the textual and archaeological data bears remarkable similarity to the social and political standing of both Joseph and Hyrcanus. A review of the extant evidence will demonstrate how the stories of Joseph and Hyrcanus not only connect them to the Tobiad family by the name of their listed ancestor, but also depicts socially, materially, and morally in ways that correspond to the characteristics of the family as these emerge in other sources.

(a) The Lachish Letters

While the overwhelming majority of textual and epigraphic material documenting the name “Tobiah” is post-exilic, the earliest reference to a Tobiah comes from the ostraca known as the Lachish Letters. These letters, dated just before the fall of Judea to the Babylonians in 587 BCE, represent a correspondence between an army commander stationed at Lachish and his subordinate stationed at a garrison between Lachish and Jerusalem.⁸ The letters mention a

⁶ Stephen G. Rosenberg, “Tobiads,” *EncJud* 20:8–10

⁷ B. Mazar, “The Tobiads,” *IEJ* 7 (1957): 145.

⁸ For an overview see Joseph Naveh, “Lacish Ostraca,” *EncJud*, 12:421-422. Also, Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, 3rd ed. (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2006), 201-203.

“Tobiah” who is identified as “a servant of the King,” and elsewhere referred to as “the arm of the king.”⁹ According to Mazar these references suggest that Tobiah was an important person who carried out the king’s objectives right before the destruction of the Judean Kingdom.¹⁰ Though it is unclear, and nearly impossible to determine, if there is any ancestral relationship between the person mentioned in the ostraca and the Tobiads of the Second Temple era, the allusion to a Tobiah who is an important person that maintains close relations with the ruling powers is characteristic of the social posture of later Tobiads. Thus, despite the tenuousness of connecting all these persons, the inscription may suggest a long history of the family’s high political status and association with the area’s ruling powers.¹¹

(b) Archaeological Site of ‘Iraq El-Amir

The most notable reference to the Tobiad family within the archaeological record comes from the site known as ‘Iraq El-Amir (roughly translated as “Cliff of the Prince”). This site is a seventy-five acre estate that consists of rocky cliffs with two tiers of caves hewn out in the side of a mountain, village settlements, and the ruins of a monumental building known as “Qasr el-‘Abd” (“Castle of the Slave”).¹² Located in the western Transjordan, ‘Iraq El-Amir is believed to be the ancestral home of the Tobiad family. This is suggested primarily by an inscription of the name “Tobyah” that is engraved into the entrance of two caves, likely indicating a family burial plot. Archaeologists have varied in their dating of the inscriptions, but the more recent consensus dates it no earlier than the fourth century BCE.¹³ Mazar, however, has argued that the inscription

⁹ Quotation and Translation taken from Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 234.

¹⁰ Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 234-5. See Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 203, who translate Tobiah’s designation in letter 3 as “a royal official.”

¹¹ See Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 235-238, who attempts to lay out all the attested Tobiads within a genealogical lineage, and even goes on to identify other possible figures of this family within pre-exilic texts. Tcherikover also noted the Tobiad family was of ancient origin, citing the possibility that the Tobiah within the ostraca was an ancestor of Toubias within the Zenon papyri (Victor A. Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 5 vols. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957], 117). Though Mazar’s argument is compelling, Tamara C. Eskenzai notes that while there does seem to be a likely connection between Nehemiah’s Tobiah and the later Tobiads, most scholars hesitate to connect the Tobiah mentioned in the ostraca with this latter family, rightly cautioning that “The two hundred years’ gap in our sources precludes certain identification” (“Tobiah,” *ABD* 6:585).

¹² Fawzi Zayadine, “‘Iraq El-Amir,” *OEANE*, 3:177-180; Stephen Rosenberg, “Castle of the Slave’—Mystery Solved,” *BAR* 38.3 (2012): 45-51.

¹³ F.M. Cross (“The Development of Jewish Scripts,” in *The Bible and the ancient Near East*, ed. G.E. Wright [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961], 191) and Dov Gera date the inscription to the fourth century BCE (“On the Credibility of the History of the Tobiads [Josephus, *Antiquities* 12, 156-222, 228-236],” in *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel: Collected Essays*, eds. Aryeh Kasher, Uriel Rappaport, and Gideon Fuks [Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1990], 25). W.F. Albright dated the inscription to the fifth century BCE (*The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* [New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1932], 222). See the discussion C.C. Ji “A New Look at

should be dated to the late sixth or early fifth century, as it represents one of the earliest examples of official Aramaic script.¹⁴

In addition to the inscription, which associates ‘Iraq El-Amir with the Tobiads, scholars and archaeologists have noted the striking correspondences between the site and Josephus’s description of the fortress built by Hyrcanus in the *Tobiad Romance* (*Ant.* 12:230-233). Josephus locates the site “between Arabia and Judea, across the Jordan, not far from Essebonitis.”¹⁵ This is a relatively accurate location, as the site is located 15 mi./24 km west of present day Amman, Jordan, within the valley of Wadi es-Sir.¹⁶ Located in the Transjordan, this site would have been situated within the geographical area associated with Ammon during the Iron Age; this area would be later be governed by a figure named Tobiah during the period of Persian rule according to Nehemiah (Neh 2:10).

Josephus also provides an accurate description of the palace at ‘Iraq El-Amir, describing it as having “beasts of gigantic size carved on it,” while being enclosed “with a wide and deep moat” (*Ant* 12:230); the structure also had “an abundance of running water” described as “both a delight and an ornament to [Hyrcanus’] country estate” (*Ant* 12:231). The large structure identified as the Qasr el-‘Abd¹⁷ matches this description, with each corner of the palace containing a frieze of lions being followed by a lioness with cubs; there is also what appears to be a water conduit that would have allowed water to flow from the wadi down to the Qasr, irrigating the entire site and eventually forming a body of water surrounding the Qasr and filling two water basins that released an overflow through fountains decorated as panthers.¹⁸ Though it is difficult to ascertain any type of direct symbolism, Rosenberg has noted how the panther—a

the Tobiads in ‘Iraq Al-Amir,” *Liber Annuus* XLVIII (1998), 425; Ji simply notes the dating of the inscription likely occurred before the third century BCE, and sees it as one piece of evidence for continuous Tobiad habitation during the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods.

¹⁴ Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 141; C.C. McCowan, “The ‘Araq el-Emir and the Tobiads,” *BA* 20 (1957): 63-66.

¹⁵ Greek: Ἐσσεβωνίτιδος, i.e., Heshbon.

¹⁶ Zayadine, “Iraq El-Amir,” 177.

¹⁷ This is a modern Arabic name meaning “Castle of the Slave.” Josephus claims that Hyrcanus named the place *Tyros*, the Greek form of “Tyre.” According to McCowan this is “a transliteration of Aramaic *tura*, Hebrew *sur*, meaning “rock, fortress” Thus, “the fortress gave its name to Wadi Sir, by which it stands” (“The ‘Araq el-Emir,” 73).

¹⁸ Zayadine, “Iraq El-Amir,” 178; McCowan, “The ‘Araq el-Emir,” 68; Rosenberg, “Tobiads,” 9; Rosenberg, “Castle of the Slave,” 46-47.

wild animal that would have roamed the area at that time—is a symbol of “power, courage, danger, and royalty,” attributes that the Tobiads may have intended to display.¹⁹

Josephus attributes Hyrcanus with developing the entire estate during the seven years prior to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, which would have dated its establishment to the early second century BCE. However, archaeological excavations have discovered a number of coins and other artifacts on a lower floor of the site dating to the third century BCE, indicating that it was inhabited during this period.²⁰ Further, the analysis of Ji and Lee has demonstrated how the presence of Hellenistic pottery and coins at ‘Iraq al-Amir and in surrounding sites dated to the third century can be linked to a proliferation of settlements that were likely the result of the “political and economic stability under the Tobiad reign over the region.”²¹ Though Rosenberg has argued that the design of the Qasr represents a Hellenistic style that began to emerge in structures during the second century,²² Zayadine has noted pre-Hellenistic antecedents of the Qasr in Ammonite towers and fortified residences dated as early as the seventh century and into the early Hellenistic era.²³ Further, the early dating of the “Tobyah” inscription, as well as a possible reference to a fortified structure on the site in the Zenon papyri (see below), indicate that the site of ‘Iraq El-Amir represents a longstanding settlement of the Tobiad family. It is thus possible that Hyrcanus, during the late third century and early second century, “renewed and redecored” the Qasr, building on work his ancestors had begun.²⁴

The detailed architectural wonder that is the Qasr el ‘Abd offers a visual representation of the extravagant wealth maintained by the Tobiad family and their estate at ‘Iraq El-Amir. There has been debate among scholars and archaeologists as to the exact function of this structure, with the most recent excavators concluding that it was a “fortified residence.”²⁵ Rosenberg, on the other hand, has argued that the Qasr was intended to function as a family mausoleum, and though this view is disputed by many of those who have excavated the site, Rosenberg nonetheless

¹⁹ Stephen G. Rosenberg, “Felicien de Saulcy and the Rediscovery of Tyros in Jordan,” *PEQ* 138:1 (2006): 40. Elsewhere Rosenberg notes that the fountains and the friezes may reflect the Hellenistic ideal of “taming wild animals in the service of mankind” (“Castle of the Slave,” 53)

²⁰ Gera, “Credibility,” 25-26.

²¹ Chang-Ho Ji and Jong Keun Lee, “From the Tobiads to the Hasmoneans : the Hellenistic pottery, coins, and history in the regions of `Irāq al-Amīr and the Wādī Ḥisbān,” *SHAJ* 8 (2004): 177-187 (187).

²² Rosenberg, “Tobiads,” 9.

²³ Zayadine, “‘Iraq El-Amir,” 178.

²⁴ Zayadine, “‘Iraq El-Amir,” 179-180; Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 141.

²⁵ Zayadine, “‘Iraq El-Amir,” 180. Contra Rosenberg, who argues that the structure represents a mausoleum (“Castle of the Slave,” 51).

seems to appropriately capture the intent of a wealthy ancestral family building, surmising that it was built as “a monument to memorialize the everlasting glory of the Tobiad family.”²⁶

Additionally, the landscape surrounding the Qsar indicates that the Tobiads were longstanding wealthy landowners who were able to build their wealth, in part, from the agricultural commodities produced on and around the site of ‘Iraq El Amir. Josephus’ describes the landscape as that of a *paradeisos* (παράδεισος) (12:233), or what may be interpreted as a “Hellenistic garden city.”²⁷ Such a description correlates with the site’s topography, since according to Mazar the land surrounding the site “was rich in water and fertile soil, which could be cultivated intensively.”²⁸ Rosenberg further elucidates the site’s value by describing it “as a kind of oasis in the desert-like landscape of the Amman mountains...”²⁹ Mazar’s assessment not only speaks to the site’s potential for natural beauty, but also its economic potential as an estate that produced valued commodities. Mazar subsequently identifies the Tobiads as wealthy, large-scale landowners who maintained a measure of local power and autonomy within the various empires who ruled over the area.

Mazar’s conclusions in this regard appear to be supported by the excavations led by Dentzer, Villeneuve, and Larche, who reported that during the Hellenistic period the site of ‘Iraq al-Amir would have been utilized for “animal breeding and agricultural exploitation.”³⁰ C.C. Ji has also suggested how archeological findings indicate “the administration of grape plantations at the farmsteads near ‘Iraq el-Amir,” with the surrounding vicinity constituting an “agricultural heartland” for the broader geographical area.³¹ Ji supports this claim by noting how archaeological excavations along the Wadi es-Sir have revealed a large number of rock-cut wine presses that are in close proximity to the settlement of ‘Iraq el-Amir. These wine presses appear to be associated with settlements that date to the Iron II and Persian periods, with indications that there were farmsteads in use during the Hellenistic era. The noted fertility and size of the settlement of ‘Iraq el-Amir indicates that the site was likely an estate utilized for large-scale

²⁶ Rosenberg, “Castle of the Slave,” 51. See 49-50 for an overview of the various hypotheses regarding the Qsar’s function.

²⁷ Rosenberg, “Tobiads,” 9.

²⁸ Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 142.

²⁹ Rosenberg, “Felicien de Saulcy,” 35.

³⁰ Jean-Marie Dentzer, François Villeneuve, François Larché. “Iraq El Amir: Excavations at the Monumental Gateway,” SHAJ 1 (1982): 201-207. Cited in Ji, “A New Look at the Tobiads in ‘Iraq Al-Amir,” 426 n.40.

³¹ Ji, “A New Look at the Tobiads,” 431.

agricultural production of tradeable commodities that could be translated into wealth for the Tobiad family.

(c) Zenon Papyri

Further evidence for the Tobiads as a wealthy and well-connected family who controlled a significant amount of land and resources exists within the Zenon papyri. As discussed in chapter III, the papyri document the journeys of Zenon, an agent of the Ptolemaic finance minister Apollonius. The papyri contain documentation of Zenon's trip into Palestine, with the frequent mention a figure by the name of Toubias.³² The papyri indicate that Toubias is a very influential person within Palestine, with a residence located in the Transjordan in an area designated as both the "Birta of Ammanitis" (P.Cair.Zen.59003) and "the Land of Toubias" (P.Cair.Zen.59004). According Tcherikover, this area can be identified by mapping the documented locations that were visited by Zenon's traveling party and linking them to archaeological and textual data.³³

According to the papyri, Toubias functioned as a local military commander over a cleruchy of military settlers. P.Cair.Zen.59003 documents the sale of the slave girl Sphragis at the "Birta of Ammanitis," and the sellers, guarantors, and witnesses are listed as being troops or calvary of the cleruchy of Toubias. The Greek word *baris* (βάρις), here transliterated as "Birta," refers to a fortified site, and is also used by Josephus to describe the estate built by Hyrcanus (*Ant* 12:230). Further, the archaeological record at 'Iraq el-Amir, the site believed to referenced within the *Romance* as Hyrcanus' estate, has demonstrated that the site was fortified by defensive walls during the Hellenistic period.³⁴ It can be deduced that the location for the "Birta of Ammanitis" is the site of 'Iraq el-Amir, as this location fits within the geographical markers identified by the papyri.³⁵ Because this site has been associated with the Tobiads, it makes sense

³² The papyri emerging from Zenon's journey into Palestine are documented and translated within Tcherikover and Fuks, *Corpus*, 115-130.

³³ Tcherikover and Fuks, *Corpus*, 115-116.

³⁴ Zayadine, "'Iraq El-Amir," 178; Mazar, "The Tobiads," 140; Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 116. Tcherikover—along with early excavators of the site—associates the *birta* with the Qasr, but Rosenberg disputes this notion, believing that the Qasr was built later. According to Rosenberg, the reference in Josephus and the papyri refers to the entire site, which itself was a fortified estate ("Castle of the Slave," 50). Similarly, Gera has noted the findings of Ptolemaic coins within a mound that appears to be strategically located, overlooking the cliffs at 'Iraq El-Amir and flanking the routes that lead into the site. Noting that this mound was fortified by defensive walls during the Hellenistic period, Gera argues that the mound representing the *baris* described by Josephus is distinguished from the Qasr (*Judea and Mediterranean Politics 219 to 161 B.C.E.*, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 43-44).

³⁵ Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 116.

to locate the “land of Toubias” mentioned in P.Cair.Zen.59004 as being located at or around this site. This would situate Toubias, and the land under his control, within the geographical space that would have been governed by the Tobiah in Nehemiah and Hyrcanus within the *Tobiad Romance*, further evidencing how the Tobiads controlled and presided over this area.³⁶

According to Tcherikover, Toubias’ role as a military commander reflects the “political wisdom” exerted by the Ptolemies in their rule over the area. By incorporating Toubias and his resources into their governing structure, the Ptolemies were able to gain the sympathy and cooperation of indigenous powerbrokers in the area. Tcherikover claims that the location of Toubias’ stronghold was strategically important for the Ptolemies, as it was located on the border of the desert, and functioned to ward off Arab tribes who desired to invade the cultivated land.³⁷ Because Toubias was a member of a powerful family that had apparently been situated in the area for centuries, he was able to benefit from this arrangement by maintaining a measure of local control while also functioning as an official of the Ptolemaic bureaucracy by serving as the head of a military cleruchy.

The wealth of Toubias in the Zenon Papyri is further reflected in his apparent access to resources and commodities, as he provides Zenon’s travelers with wheat, flour, donkeys, and horses (P.Cair.Zen.59004). Toubias also appears to have a relationship with Apollonius and the king, as he sends Apollonius four slaves—Haimos, Atikos, Audomos, and Okaimos—and a eunuch (P.Cair.Zen.59076), as well as animals—“probably rare ones”³⁸—that were requested by the king (P.Cair.Zen.59075). The letters that accompany the gifts of slaves and animals were both dated to the same day, docketed on the same day in Alexandria, and appear to be written by the same scribe. Krautbauer et al. have argued that these letters represent the “special type of shrewdness” displayed by the Tobiads in their political maneuvering with the Ptolemaic rulers, as the gifts of a eunuch and slaves were intended as a gesture of “courting favor” with Apollonius and the king.³⁹

³⁶ Tcherikover and others have posited that Toubias and Tobiah, the father of Joseph, were the same person. Others have suggested that the timeline likely doesn’t work, and Toubias would have likely been the father of Tobiah, the grandfather of Joseph. While these assertions offer fascinating possibilities for discerning continuity among generations of Tobiads, they are difficult to maintain based on the debates surrounding the dating of the *Tobiad Romance* (see below). Based on the available data, it is easier to demonstrate a common landholding and political behavior rather than reconstruct a precise lineage.

³⁷ Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 117

³⁸ Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 128.

³⁹ Anna Krautbauer, Stephen Llewelyn, and Blake Wassell, “A Gift of One Eunuch and Four Slave Boys: P.Cair.Zen I 59076 and Historical Construction,” *JSJ* 45 (2014): 320.

Discerning what can be known from the letter, and the wider Hellenistic context, Krautbauer et al. argue for the possibility that Apollonius, requested eunuchs from Toubias. Eunuchs were valued as the “perfect servant,” who were thought to be trustworthy enough to serve as personal attendants within the households of elite figures.⁴⁰ While Toubias does send one eunuch, who would supposedly be sent directly to Apollonios, the gift of prepubescent slave boys were given as “prospective eunuchs,” and likely would not have been sent directly to Apollonios.⁴¹ The detailed descriptions of each boy within the letter was intended to show Toubias’ sensitivity “to the boys’ future value as eunuchs” so that he “could himself be considered a capable and trustworthy associate.”⁴² This letter evidences how the family’s shrewd maneuverings involved the act of trafficking slaves, a strategy also employed by Hyrcanus in the *Tobiad Romance* (*Ant* 12:217).

It is also worth noting that within the letter of P.Cair.Zen.59075 the animals being sent as a gift to the king are referred to as being “all tame.” Rosenberg has suggested that the panther fountains of the Qsar may have been symbolic of the Hellenistic ideal of “taming wild animals in the service of mankind [sic].”⁴³ Toubias’ ability and willingness to send slaves and tamed animals to high-ranking Ptolemaic officials not only demonstrates his shrewdness in courting the support of the imperial rulers, but it also appears to reinforce the self-aggrandizing behavior and elevated sense of self of the Tobiads. The Zenon papyri, in other words, provide further evidence on how the Tobiads maintained cordial relations with the ruling imperial powers by exporting local resources and commodities to Egypt, specifically human and animal labor, in an effort to promote themselves as desirable, powerful allies.

(d) Zechariah 6: Tobiah among the Exiles

Within the Hebrew Bible the name “Tobiah” is mentioned among members of the exiled community returning from Babylon. Zechariah 6:9-15 narrates the crowning of the high priest in

⁴⁰ Krautbauer, Llewelyn, Wassell, “A Gift of One Eunuch,” 315-319.

⁴¹ Krautbauer, Llewelyn, Wassell, “A Gift of One Eunuch,” 323-324.

⁴² Krautbauer, Llewelyn, Wassell, “A Gift of One Eunuch,” 324. See 313-314 where the authors argue against common assumptions for the descriptions, such as legal identifications for identifying the slaves in instances of flight, theft, or misconduct. The descriptions within the letter do not match the standard and usual form, and these notices are almost exclusively applied to older slaves.

⁴³ Rosenberg, “Castle of the Slave,” 53.

a restored temple, and Tobiah⁴⁴ is included in a list of returned exiles who can provide silver and gold to construct a crown (6:9), and who will continually be associated with the crown in the temple (6:14).⁴⁵ An assessment of the text demonstrates how the characteristics of this Tobiah aligns with the depiction of the Tobiad family from the Second Temple era, as Tobiah appears to be a wealthy individual who uses his wealth to maintain connections with the Jerusalem Temple.

According to Eric Myers and Carol Meyers, it is “certainly within the realm of possibility” that the Tobiah mentioned in this passage is from the same family that bears this name in postexilic literature. This notion is supported by the lack of any patronymics for Tobiah and the other returnees within this passage, indicating that they were all well-known persons whose names would have been recognized.⁴⁶ Meyers and Meyers, who rely heavily on the work of Mazar, conclude that Tobiah in Zechariah, like the other Tobiads, was likely a powerful landowner in the Transjordan. They argue that the list of returned exiles in Zech 6:9 likely represents three factions of returnees, with Tobiah being representative of a Yahwist faction that was not located within the confines of the small province of Yehud.⁴⁷ In summary, this passage concisely depicts Tobiah as a well-resourced and connected individual who had access to precious metals. The silver and gold provided by Tobiah and the other returnees “represents the fiscal and ideological support of those factions in the enterprise of reestablishing the temple.”⁴⁸

While the passage in Zechariah depicts Tobiah as a well-resourced and connected individual, the mention of Tobiah within the lists of returnees from Ezra and Nehemiah is not as flattering. Ezra 2:60 and Neh 7:62 list Tobiah as the head of a family in the list of returnees from exile who could not prove their ancestral house or linkages to Israel.⁴⁹ Though it is unclear, and probably unlikely, that Zechariah and the Ezra-Nehemiah genealogical record are referring to the same person, it can still be assumed that the persons belong to the same family and land.⁵⁰ Ezra-

⁴⁴ The MT in Zech 6:10 maintains the spelling טוביה, which is the same as in Ezra-Nehemiah. The NRSV translates the name in Zechariah as “Tobijah”, while translating it in Ezra-Nehemiah as “Tobiah”. According to Eskenazi the RSV translation of Zechariah was intended to reflect the Hebrew name of *tobiyahu* (“Tobiah,” 584).

⁴⁵ The crown will be a memorial, but it is unclear if it is a memorial to YHWH in the temple, or to the list of returned exiles.

⁴⁶ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 341.

⁴⁷ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1-8*, 342-343; Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 229.

⁴⁸ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1-8*, 369.

⁴⁹ Also, 1 Esd 5:37.

⁵⁰ See Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 230-233. Mazar argues that Zechariah’s Tobiah was the head of a noble family, whereas the “children of Tobiah” mentioned in Neh 7:62 may have been returnees whose ancestors lived on the Tobiad estates and were exiled by Tiglath-Pileser III (232-233).

Nehemiah is not explicit in identifying the consequences of Tobiah's unproven genealogy, but as Tamara Eskenazi points out, "it is conceivable that the uncertain genealogy of these families forms the backdrop for the later tensions" between Tobiah the Ammonite and Nehemiah.⁵¹

(e) Nehemiah: Tobiah the Ammonite

These tensions are played out within the book of Nehemiah as a figure named Tobiah becomes one of the primary opponents to Nehemiah's project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Frequently aligned with Sanballat of Samaria, Tobiah is introduced in Neh 2:10 as a slave/servant and an Ammonite (העמני העבד). Though interpreters vary on whether the Hebrew phrase is an attributive construction (the Ammonite servant), or separate descriptors (the Ammonite, the slave/servant), most interpreters assume that the use of עבד is implying Tobiah's relation to the ruling monarchy—"servant of the king."⁵² While this descriptor is used to describe the status of Tobiah in Nehemiah, it may also be emblematic of how the various figures within the Tobiad family relate to ruling authorities. As noted above, a similar descriptor was given to a Tobiah mentioned within the Lachish Letters. Additionally, while the phrase is not used in the *Tobiad Romance*, Joseph certainly acts within the Ptolemaic king's interest as a tax farmer of the province.

The notion of being an elite figure in the service of the ruling authority, and not an actual enslaved person, is supported by Tobiah's apparent social status, which includes close and influential ties with the Judean nobility (Neh 6:17) and the Jerusalem priesthood (Neh 13:4-5). Tobiah's identification as an Ammonite may not necessarily be describing Tobiah as a native of Ammon (i.e., a non-Judean); instead, by being described as an Ammonite who is the "servant of the king," the text may be communicating that Tobiah is the Persian appointed governor of

⁵¹ Eskenazi, "Tobiah," 584. Eskenazi later adds that this uncertain status could explain Tobiah's appointment over Ammon and the ensuing conflict with Nehemiah. However, the converse "is also plausible: the later conflict between this Tobiah and Nehemiah may have led to casting doubt on the earlier genealogy."

⁵² Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, AB14 (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1965), 98. Myers reads this phrase not as literal but more descriptive of Tobiah's status: "Ammonite official." Joseph Blenkinsopp holds on to the possibility that, like Myers, it reflects his relation to the Monarch. However, Blenkinsopp also suggests that such a term may be a double-entendre and be used as negative remark about Tobiah since the text is written from the perspective of Nehemiah (*Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988], 218). Also consider Eskenazi, who reads the Ammonite label as referring to Tobiah's ancestry as it is contrasted with the "children of Israel". Eskenazi reads the text of Nehemiah as attempting to portray Tobiah as foreigner, and supplements by noting how the text prefaces Tobiah's expulsion from the temple from with a remark on the need to separate from Ammonites and other foreigners ("Tobiah," 284).

Ammon.⁵³ It can be deduced that Tobiah was the governor of the Ammonite region, while Sanballat governed Samaria, and Geshem governed the Kedarite region (Neh 2:19). Joseph Blenkinsopp assumes that Nehemiah's principal opponents—Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem—had distinct territorial jurisdictions, and may have planned on invading Judah with the intent of incorporating it into their territories.⁵⁴

As a character, Nehemiah's Tobiah seems to reflect a wit and shrewdness within his political machinations that was demonstrated by Joseph and Hyrcanus of the *Tobiad Romance*. When Tobiah and Sanballat are told of Nehemiah's progress in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, both offer scornful comments with Tobiah doubting the strength of the walls by exclaiming that if a fox were to go up on the walls they would crumble (Neh 3:35 [4:3]). Tobiah also maintains close connections with the nobility of Jerusalem (6:17-18), including a relationship with the priest Eliashib who allowed Tobiah to have his own space within the Temple (13:4-5). Though it is unclear as to why Tobiah needed space within the Temple or how he used it, the text does note that the space assigned for Tobiah had been used to store commodities such as grain, wine, and oil, as well as rations for priests and other temple workers (13:5). The nature of this space, and its use for storing known commodities, leads Blenkinsopp to speculate that Tobiah was using it for some sort of commercial activity.⁵⁵

Tobiah's Jerusalem connections also come into play with Tobiah's attempts to intimidate Nehemiah and diminish the work he carries out. In Neh 6:10-14 Tobiah and Sanballat conspire against Nehemiah by ostensibly employing the prophet Shemaiah who urges Nehemiah to meet him in the Temple, with the doors closed, because Nehemiah's life is in danger. Nehemiah

⁵³ Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, AB14 (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1965), 99. It is likely that Tobiah—or his family—were native to Israel and/or Judah, as the name appears to be an Israelite name meaning “YHWH is good” (Bob Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, HCOT [Leuven: Peeters, 2018], 187). See H.G.M. Williamson, (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, WBC [Waco: Baylor University Press, 1992], 183-184), who argues that there is no evidence for presuming a separate province of Ammon during the time of Nehemiah, and Tobiah should instead be viewed as a “junior colleague” of Sanballat. Williamson's proposition is disputed by Ji (“A New Look at the Tobiads in ‘Iraq Al-Amir,” 430) who notes how Tobiah alone became the chief opponent to Nehemiah after the walls were completed, indicating he had more vested interests in the situation than merely following the lead of Sanballat. Further, Ji notes the discovery of Aramaic seals dated to 5th and 6th century at Tell el-'Umeiri that are like the *ywh* seals found in Jerusalem. For Ji, this seems to evidence organized wine production, which may indicate that there were separate Persian provinces in and around this area (431).

⁵⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 218.

⁵⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 354. Blenkinsopp argues that the room was more likely a storeroom than a residence for Tobiah, and it was needed for his activity as a commercial supplier or middleman. Blenkinsopp goes on to suggest that Eliashib was likely profiting from this arrangement, and that it would've had to at least tacitly been approved by the high priest.

suspects something afoot, and refuses to go to the Temple, discerning a plot schemed by Tobiah and Sanballat, who are making use of prophets such as Shemaiah and Noadiah (6:14). The exact nature of how this plan would have affected Nehemiah is not clear, but Meyer has suggested that it would have led to Nehemiah committing a “religious tabu” by entering into a sacred space that he was ritually not allowed to be in.⁵⁶ Blenkinsopp, on the other hand, reads the situation as a bit more malevolent and suggests that because the plan involved Tobiah and the Temple—with which he had strong connections—the expectation may have been to lure Nehemiah in wherein he “was not expected to leave it alive.”⁵⁷ After this plan seemingly fails, Tobiah continued to work his connections with the Jerusalem nobility who would speak to Nehemiah (6:17, 19), and he would send “intimidating” letters to Nehemiah, engaging in what Blenkinsopp deems “psychological warfare” (6:19).⁵⁸ Though the book of Nehemiah is clearly biased to Nehemiah’s perspective, it nonetheless paints a picture of Tobiah as one who is well connected to certain factions of the Jerusalem priesthood and aristocracy, using such connections to possibly promote his own economic objectives. And much like Joseph and Hyrcanus, Tobiah seemingly utilizes violence, or the threat of thereof, in order to advance his own interests.

Thus, Blenkinsopp concludes and summarizes that the Tobiah in the book of Nehemiah was the ancestor of the Tobiads mentioned elsewhere, and that “Tobiah belonged to a distinguished Jerusalemite family with close ties to the high priesthood and the aristocracy, and that at the time of Nehemiah’s mission he was the Persian-appointed governor of the Ammonite region.”⁵⁹ Tobiah’s interactions with Nehemiah in the book of Nehemiah thus represent another example of a Tobiad who politically operates within the imperial governing structures in order to maintain a measure of local power. Centering Tobiah as a political and economic force within this area aligns with what is depicted of the Tobiads from the excavations at ‘Iraq el-Amir, the Zenon Papyri, and the *Tobiad Romance*.

(f) 2 Maccabees: Hyrcanus, Son of Tobias

References to the wealth and influence of the Tobiads in the post-exilic period continue up to the Hasmonean revolt as evidenced by the appearance in 2 Maccabees of Hyrcanus “son of

⁵⁶ Myers, *Ezra Nehemiah*, 139. Myers views Nehemiah as a layperson and a eunuch, based on his role of cupbearer to the king (1:11), and claims that Nehemiah would have been forbidden to enter the inner part of the temple due to his status.

⁵⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 270.

⁵⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 274.

⁵⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 219.

Tobias” who deposited a significant amount of money within the temple (2 Macc 3:11). The mention of Hyrcanus occurs almost as an aside during Heliodorus’ visit to the temple. Heliodorus was an official sent by King Seleucus to inspect the finances of the Jerusalem temple after Simon—a “captain of the temple”—complained to the ruling authorities about the temple’s finances. Simon leveled an accusation that the temple and high priest were withholding excessive funds that could have been claimed by the king in taxes or tribute (2 Macc 3:4-6). During Heliodorus’ inspection monetary deposits are found, which the High Priest claims belongs to orphans, widows, and Hyrcanus (2 Macc 3:10-11).

Hyrcanus is described as “a man of very prominent position,” and though the mention is brief, this is evidenced by his deposit of “four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold” (2 Macc 3:11). Hyrcanus’ deposit within the Temple appears to contradict the split that Hyrcanus had with his brothers in Jerusalem, who were supported by the High Priest Simon according to Josephus (*Ant* 12:229). It obviously would not make sense for the name of a supposed anti-Seleucid and pro-Ptolemaic rebel to be evoked with high praise during this inspection, which leads Robert Doran to warn against importing the political categories of the *Tobiad Romance* into an interpretation of 2 Maccabees.⁶⁰ For Doran, because the High Priest is attempting to convince Heliodorus that the accusations are false, it is better to read the name “Hyrcanus the Tobiad” not as being specifically identified with the Hyrcanus of the *Romance*, but as carrying “a certain aura of richness and power even if the details of his history were not known.”⁶¹ Similarly, Gera, who argues against any strict historical reliability of the *Tobiad Romance*, reads this passage as evidencing Hyrcanus as a person of high standing and respectability, whose name was invoked so as to deter a Seleucid official from causing harm.⁶²

Even if there is difficulty in directly relating the Hyrcanus of 2 Maccabees to the Hyrcanus of the *Tobiad Romance*, this passage further affirms the connection that the Tobiad family had with the Temple institution, and fits with the broader characteristics of the Tobiad family we have been discerning in a range of sources. Much like Zechariah’s Tobiah,

⁶⁰ Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 83. Doran notes scholarship that argues that the deposits of Hyrcanus represent a pro-Ptolemaic bias by the High Priest, but concludes that this view distorts the interpretation of the whole chapter, which represents a narrative that tells of an epiphanic deliverance of a city by its tutelary deity.

⁶¹ Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 83. For comparison, Doran suggests that the name Hyrcanus might be evocative and associative like Midas for gold.

⁶² Gera, “Credibility,” 27.

Nehemiah's Tobiah, and Joseph within the *Tobiad Romance*, Hyrcanus the son of Tobiah in 2 Maccabees maintains a financial connection and interest with the Temple which seemingly would have served the family's own economic objectives.

According to Grabbe the Tobiads' connection with the Jerusalem temple may have been a mutually beneficial relationship, as the "Tobiad family enterprises" may have economically benefited the High Priest and the city of Jerusalem as it became increasingly Hellenized. Noting that the "Hellenistic reform" of 2 Macc 4 occurs shortly after the mention of Hyrcanus' deposits in 2 Macc 3, Grabbe suggests the Tobiads used their surplus wealth to in essence fund Jerusalem institutions, allowing the city to "move into the wider Hellenistic world."⁶³ Grabbe argues that within this ancient context "it was often the few wealthy and powerful individuals who were able to make things happen," and suggests that the Tobiads should not be vilified.⁶⁴ While Grabbe's suggestion is compelling and a possible explanation of the economic mechanisms at play in 2 Maccabees, it is also worth noting that Joseph within the *Tobiad Romance* was celebrated for what he did for the Jews of Jerusalem, yet this "liberation" was accomplished through acts of violence, manipulation, and the economic exploitation of the province's population. Accordingly, Grabbe does not specify who in particular would have benefited from the influx of Tobiad resources other than the High Priest.

(g) Conclusion

After reviewing the archaeological and textual evidence, it appears that the members of the Tobiad family are connected by more than their genealogy and patrimony. The attested Tobiads appear to share a common set of characteristics that include: attempts to maintain influence within the Temple institution, relationships with the ruling powers, shrewdness and wit in their political machinations, and the use and expansion of their wealth generated primarily from an estate within the Transjordan. These characteristics seem to weave all these figures together forming a family portrait of sorts, one that certainly resonates with the depictions of Joseph and Hyrcanus in the *Tobiad Romance*. Understanding the defining characteristics of the

⁶³ See the assessment of Lester L. Grabbe, who suggests that the surplus wealth of the Tobiads in the second century was able to generate a measure of prosperity in Jerusalem that allowed the city to "move into the wider Hellenistic world." Grabbe claims that the city may have economically benefited from the "Tobiad family enterprises", though does not specify who particularly would have benefited other than the High Priest (*A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 2: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period [335-175 BCE]*, LSTS 68 [London; New York: T&T Clark, 2008], 222-223).

⁶⁴ Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, 223.

Tobiad family, I will now return to the details of the Tobiad Romance to demonstrate how this tale made use of the Tobiad “family tradition” in order to promote the cleverness and wit of the Tobiads in the Ptolemaic court as crucial for Jewish survival under imperial rule.

Section 4.03 The Purpose of the Text: Elite Propaganda for Navigating Ptolemaic Rule

When comparing the *Tobiad Romance* with what is known of the Tobiad family from other sources, the text seems to have a general familiarity with this family in the way that the characters are presented. But this begs the question, is the *Tobiad Romance* a mere family history recounting this wealthy family’s relationship with the Ptolemies? Or does it have other communicative goals? Based on the extant evidence and a Bakhtinian textual analysis, I argue that the text is participating in, and the result of, a broader societal discourse aimed at promoting mutually beneficial socio-economic relations between the Judean elites and the ruling empire, of which the Tobiad family becomes central actors. In this sense, the *Romance* represents propaganda that encourages the cooperation of wealthy, indigenous elites to utilize their resources and skill in maintaining amicable and beneficial relations with Judea’s imperial rulers for the articulated purpose of advancing the status of the Jewish people. When read in this way, the *Tobiad Romance* becomes more than mere historical data for the Ptolemaic era; instead, the text signifies an utterance communicating a social perspective within a dialogical environment surrounding the discernment of a Jewish strategy for navigating imperial rule. Supporting this claim will require some unpacking, not only of the text itself, but also with the history of scholarship surrounding it.

(a) Historical and Textual Concerns within the Scholarship

Since the *Tobiad Romance* is preserved within Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*, the overwhelming consensus among scholars has been that, along with most of *Antiquities*, the tale was not original to Josephus. Situated within Rome, Josephus experienced prejudice and slander directed towards Jews, so he wrote *Antiquities* with the objective of enlightening gentiles to the virtues of the Jews with a complete Jewish history that demonstrated the Roman ideal of their antiquity as a people.⁶⁵ In offering this history, Josephus incorporated summaries and paraphrases of Jewish works, including those that would be canonized within the Hebrew Bible. It is generally believed that the *Tobiad Romance*, as it occurs in *Antiquities*, was taken from

⁶⁵ Abraham Schalit, “Josephus Flavius,” *EncJud*, 11:438.

another source and fitted into Josephus' overall project, much like the other texts that Josephus drew upon.⁶⁶ Because the narrative involves interactions with Ptolemaic power, it fits for Josephus as a narration of Jewish history under Ptolemaic control and reflects the transition from Ptolemaic to Seleucid rule.

One of the central questions debated within the scholarship on the *Tobiad Romance* is its reliability as a historical representation of reality. Scholars have consistently recognized the problematic beginning, with the province being controlled by the Seleucids and then granted back to Ptolemy by Antiochus as part of Cleopatra's dowry (*Ant* 12:154). Historically speaking, Antiochus took control of this province during the fifth Syrian war in 200/199 BCE, and there is no verifiable indication that the Seleucids relinquished control of their right to collect taxes from the province to the Ptolemies.⁶⁷ While the dowry is referenced in other ancient sources, the ancient Greek historian Polybius unequivocally asserted that after the battle of Paneion in 200 BCE the province of Coele Syria "yielded obedience to the kings of Syrian."⁶⁸ As Tcherikover points out, the account within Josephus contradicts itself in that it claims that the province remains under the rule of Antiochus with Ptolemy and Cleopatra simply granted the right to collect revenue. However, this is negated when the tale "depicts Ptolemy as ruling the country with unlimited power and threatening to drive Jews from their land."⁶⁹

In spite of this inexact chronology, the *Romance* does corroborate with what is known of the Ptolemaic practice of tax farming, in that wealthy and leading citizens bid in an auction for the right to farm the taxes of a particular area.⁷⁰ Also, as mentioned above, the Zenon papyri evidence Tobiad involvement with the Ptolemies, and the description of Hyrcanus' estate

⁶⁶ Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context*, HCS 43 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 56; Schalit, "Josephus Flavius," 11:438. For example, Josephus made apparent use of the Book of Daniel, Esther, and the *Letter of Aristeas*.

⁶⁷ See Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, 319-329; Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 128-129; Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 82.

⁶⁸ Polybius, 28:1, 4-5. Quoted and cited in Gideon Fuks, "Josephus' Tobiads Again: A Cautionary Note," *JJS* 52:2 (2001): 354.

⁶⁹ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 128.

⁷⁰ Gera, "Credibility," 34-35. One detail noted by Gera that does not appear to be historical is Joseph collecting the money from inhabitants of the province himself, and using an army to enforce collections (*Ant* 12:180). Gera rightly notes that Ptolemaic documents indicate that tax farmers simply set the tax rate while the actual collections were carried out by Ptolemaic bureaucratic officials acting under the local *oikonomi*. Further, papyrus have indicated that an *oikonomoi* and *dioketes* served in the Ptolemaic province of Syria and Phoenicia, meaning they would have collected the taxes. Gera proposes that this detail may have been skewed in an intentional attempt by the author to glorify Joseph (35). Cf. Roger S. Bagnall, *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions Outside Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 19-21; and J.G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt under the Ptolemies, 305 - 30 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 155-157.

accurately portrays the verifiable archaeological site ‘Iraq el-Amir. Because of the text’s familiarity with Ptolemaic administration, scholars generally believe that the *Romance* is at least broadly reflective of the context of the second half of the third century BCE while Judea was under Ptolemaic control.⁷¹ Still, the question remains if the text reflects actual historical occurrences, or if it is simply making use of historical data to construct a narrative, or if it is somewhere in between. Besides deliberating questions about the text’s historical accuracy, scholars have debated the intended function of the text vis-à-vis its historical setting.

Of note are the arguments presented by Jonathan A. Goldstein and Dov Gera.⁷² Goldstein argues that outside of the noted chronological issues, the text is essentially a trustworthy document regarding its account of historical details. Goldstein believes that the original author was a “pro-Ptolemaic Jewish propagandist” situated within Egypt in the second century BCE;⁷³ this author, per Goldstein, sought to convey the message that “it pays for a Jew to cooperate with the Ptolemies.”⁷⁴ Gera disagrees within Goldstein’s claim of historical reliability, but reaches a similar conclusion regarding the intention of the text. Gera ultimately concludes that, although the text contains data affirmed by archaeological and other textual sources, it is a narrative that is making use of historical data to narrate fictional events.⁷⁵ Gera, like Goldstein, believes that the tale is a piece of propaganda written by a Jew living in Ptolemaic Egypt during the first or second century BCE. According to Gera the propagandist intended to stimulate the self-confidence of Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt by demonstrating how Jews could, and did, play an important role in the service of Ptolemaic kings and queens.⁷⁶

After assessing the data and the subsequent scholarship, Sara Raup Johnson makes a compelling argument that provides a more nuanced outlook on the text’s historicity. Analyzing the *Romance* by considering what is known of Josephus’ other sources for *Antiquities*, Johnson

⁷¹ For a counter proposal see Daniel R. Schwartz, “Josephus’ Tobiads: Back to the Second Century?” in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47-61.

⁷² Jonathan A. Goldstein, “The Tales of the Tobiads,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Morton Smith and Jacob Neusner (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 97-104; Dov Gera, “Credibility,” 36-38; Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 87-91.

⁷³ Goldstein, “Tales of the Tobiads,” 97.

⁷⁴ Goldstein, “Tales of the Tobiads,” 104. Goldstein goes as far to propose that the author was Onias IV, the son of Onias III, a military commander for Ptolemy VI.

⁷⁵ Gera, “Credibility,” 36. Gera does not deny the existence of the Tobiad family, but sees details such as the High Priests refusal to pay taxes and Joseph’s use of force to collect taxes as fabricated stories intended to advance the character of Joseph

⁷⁶ Gera, “Credibility,” 38.

argues that there is likely “some slender historical basis” for the narrative, which was likely composed from a cycle of legends surrounding the famed Tobiad family during the era of Ptolemaic rule over Judea. Johnson concedes that Joseph, the Ptolemaic tax farmer, seems likely to have existed and his career likely occurred prior to 200 BCE. The text that Josephus drew upon reshaped these legends into a didactic historical fiction that manipulated “historical elements in the service of a particular didactic point.”⁷⁷ Johnson, like Goldstein and Gera, believes that the text was likely written by a Jew living in Ptolemaic Egypt who was loyal to the Ptolemies and concerned with the relationship of the Ptolemies to the Jews in Palestine after the Hasmonean revolt.⁷⁸

Johnson’s assessment draws out an important aspect of the text as a piece of literature and an act of communication. Despite the different conclusions regarding the text’s historical accuracy, these scholars generally agree that the *Tobiad Romance* was meant to function as a type of pro-Ptolemaic propaganda. In this view, the *Romance* was authored by a Jew who was loyal to Ptolemaic rule and intended to communicate how relations with the Ptolemies could be beneficial to Jews during the second century when Jerusalem was under Seleucid, and then Hasmonean rule. However, a close examination of the portrayal of the Ptolemies within the *Tobiad Romance* might caution against labelling the text as “pro-Ptolemaic.” The text is not overly generous in its presentation of the Ptolemaic rulers, as they are consistently portrayed as being easily manipulated by the arrogant wit of Joseph and Hyrcanus. As Erich Gruen observes, “No monarch of Egypt could ever have heard the tales of the Tobiads with pleasure.”⁷⁹ This was likely because the text was not intended to be heard by the Ptolemies, nor to simply propagate Ptolemaic rule uncritically. The focus, rather, is upon Joseph and Hyrcanus, and the dynamic relationship they held with both the Ptolemies and the Judean people.

(b) Tobiad Propaganda

Lawrence Wills explains that these relationships—between the Ptolemies, the Tobiads, and Jews—are best understood within the context of patron and client relationships in the Greco-Roman world.⁸⁰ According to Wills these relationships exist within a social world marked by a

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 81. Johnson concedes that Joseph the tax farmer seems likely to have existed, with his career taking place prior to 200 BCE.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 91

⁷⁹ Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 240.

⁸⁰ Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 187-193.

“larger hierarchical network of ownership and indebtedness” where almost every individual was a client to some more powerful patron, and a patron to someone less powerful. Within this social pyramid Ptolemy is the greatest and utmost patron while the mass of occupied peoples, such as the Jews in Judea, are bottom dwellers and clients indebted to those with societal power. This structure allows for the emergence of brokers who go between the patrons and their myriad of clients, mediating the patron-client relationships. Within the *Tobiad Romance*, Joseph and Hyrcanus function as brokers who become a patron to the clients on whose behalf they are mediating, and a client to the patron that they are interceding with.⁸¹

As the narrative unfolds, both Tobiads successfully bind themselves to the Ptolemies as influential clients who, in the process, are presented as ‘protectors’ brokering for the Jews. This role is deemed necessary due to Onias’ refusal to pay tribute, an action described as “not regarding the safety of his fellow-citizens,” and one that places “the nation in danger” (12:161).⁸² Thus, Joseph and Hyrcanus are the central actors while the Ptolemies are merely supporting characters—albeit those who wield a considerable amount of power. The Ptolemies are presented as being easily assuaged and persuaded, and it is their power that moves the narrative forward as they continually authorize the maneuverings of Joseph and Hyrcanus. As Wills notes the Ptolemies “serve merely as a backdrop to the real drama” of the “relation of the Jews in Judea to Joseph and Hyrcanus.”⁸³

Reading the *Romance* as centering upon the Tobiads as benefactors becomes apparent within the text when Joseph’s death is noted and his career as a Ptolemaic tax farmer is celebrated. In what may be the thesis of the text, Joseph is eulogized as “an excellent and high-minded man” whose career as a tax farmer of Syria, Phoenicia, and Samaria “brought the Jewish people from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life” (*Ant* 12:224). This line appears to summarize the propagating emphasis within the text: The Tobiads, specifically Joseph, offer an excellent example of wealthy Jews who utilize their wealth and wit to procure good and beneficial relations with imperial rulers, which subsequently benefit the broader Judean polis.

⁸¹ Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 190-191. Wills explains that this patronage system is supported by “the bloated terminology of generosity, loyalty, and benevolence” that is used for the Tobiads, and that the Tobiads use toward the Ptolemies.

⁸² Lawrence M. Wills, ed., *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 199.

⁸³ Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 192.

Though Hyrcanus doesn't receive this same praise, his rejection and expulsion from Jerusalem may be read as more an indictment upon the brothers who led the efforts to reject Hyrcanus, attempting to have him killed (*Ant* 12:202, 221-222). The text describes the brothers as lazy, foolish, and ignorant—unable to take advantage of the best instruction that Joseph provided for them (12:191); they despise and are jealous of Hyrcanus because Joseph favors him and praises the “quickness of his intelligence” (12:195). The negative portrayal of the brothers may possibly indicate that their actions were unwarranted, prohibiting Joseph's protection of the Judeans to continue through Hyrcanus.⁸⁴

Thus, the emphasis within the narrative on Joseph and Hyrcanus, while situated within and favorable to Ptolemaic rule, may be more broadly construed as a symbolic negotiation of ancient political relations. Specifically, the text can be read as representative of a broader societal discourse among colonized Jews on how to navigate imperial rule. The *Tobiad Romance* represents propaganda, though not necessarily for the Ptolemies. More precisely, it is propaganda that encourages the cooperation of wealthy, indigenous elites to utilize their resources and skill in maintaining amicable and beneficial relations with Judea's imperial rulers for the purpose of advancing the status of the Jewish people.

The argument that the *Tobiad Romance* represents a particular strategy for navigating imperial rule may be supported by the existence of similar claims for subsequent generations of wealthy Jews within their own propagandizing texts. In attempting to discern the social and political standing of the Hasmoneans, Seth Schwartz has argued that they be understood as “village strongmen,” a specific type of social class discerned through an analysis of the Tobiad family.⁸⁵ According to Schwartz, the Tobiads may have functioned as a prototype for the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty as they became the “Seleucid counterparts of the late third-century Tobiads.” Schwartz draws comparisons between the presentation of the Tobiads within the Zenon papyri and *Tobiad Romance* with that of the Hasmoneans within 1 and 2 Maccabees, concluding that each family is presented as wealthy and influential landowners “who exploited the disorder in Jerusalem” with political ambitions to establish and expand their influence. While

⁸⁴ Wills notes that in the shifting of power, Hyrcanus became a broker without a patron and effectually stripped of his role. The negative descriptions of the brothers indicate that they are to be detested, while Hyrcanus' positive attributes present him as one who is admirable (*The Jewish Novel*, 191).

⁸⁵ Seth Schwartz, “A Note on the Social Type and Political Ideology of the Hasmonean Family,” *JBL* 112:2 (1993): 305-309. Schwartz adopts the concept of “village strongmen” from V. Tcherikover in “Palestine under the Ptolemies,” *Mizraim* 4:5 (1937), 48-51.

both the Tobiads and the Hasmoneans are presented as preserving local interests, Schwartz notes how both families are “powerful local politicians who have been integrated into the administration of the empire” (1 Macc 7:26-32; 2 Macc 14:23-27), and who use their positions to seize “control in Jerusalem” and participate in acts of plundering (1 Macc 11:60-74).⁸⁶ Schwartz concludes that, despite what the texts may claim, the Tobiads and Hasmoneans “main concern at all periods was their own advancement.”⁸⁷

While the Tobiads primary ambition was their own advancement within the Ptolemaic empire, the *Tobiad Romance* nonetheless justifies Joseph’s actions by framing his intervention with Ptolemy as saving Jerusalem and bringing about “more splendid opportunities of life” for the entire Jewish population. The text attempts to strengthen and justify this propagating claim by establishing the Tobiads as characters who embody wisdom—as their activity allows them to navigate danger, thus enabling the continuance of life and a state of well-being (ostensibly) experienced by the broader community.

Section 4.04 The *Tobiad Romance* and Wisdom

One of the few scholars to provide an in-depth literary-critical analysis of the *Tobiad Romance* is Susan Niditch, who explores how the narrative makes use of folktale patterns and typologies in the construction of the characters of Joseph and Hyrcanus. In this analysis Niditch diverges from the dominant question regarding the text’s historical accuracy, and instead focuses on how the text constructs the characterization of Joseph and Hyrcanus. Niditch observes that the *Romance* maintains a strong wisdom component, with the characters of Joseph and Hyrcanus following a number of “detailed prescriptions of wisdom.”⁸⁸ Building upon Niditch’s initial observation, I will offer a robust exploration of the relationship between ancient wisdom concepts and the *Tobiad Romance*. This will be accomplished by placing the actions and descriptions of Joseph and Hyrcanus in a dialogical relationship with the aspects of wisdom found in the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs. This study will demonstrate how the *Tobiad Romance* is uniquely adopting and accenting the speech genre of wisdom for its own didactic

⁸⁶ Schwartz, “A Note on the Social Type,” 309. Schwartz notes how the Hasmoneans continued fighting after the restoration, and reads Judas’ interactions with the Seleucid governor Nicanor in 2 Macc 14:23-27 as Judas behaving “more like an ambitious courtier than a zealous freedom fighter” who was probably not attempting to “overthrow the existing system but advance within it”.

⁸⁷ Schwartz, “A Note on the Social Type,” 309.

⁸⁸ Susan Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns and Tyrant Typologies in Josephus’ Ant. 12:160-222,” *JJS* 32:1 (1981): 51.

and propagating purpose, presenting a “wisdom” conceived primarily of cleverness, wit, and good speech in relation to the imperial royal court, and embodied by both Joseph and Hyrcanus.

In Bakhtinian terms, the *Tobiad Romance* can be read as an utterance that is adopting and re-accenting wisdom concepts to articulate a strategy for navigating and surviving Ptolemaic imperial rule. As both characters exhibit aspects of wisdom, they are presented as reaping wisdom’s rewards by achieving a measure of success and well-being—both for themselves and the larger community. As defined in chapter II, “wisdom” broadly represents knowledge, skill, and behaviors that enable one to adequately navigate a myriad of lived experiences and achieve a sense of well-being.⁸⁹ In this sense, the *Tobiad Romance* emphasizes a shrewd “court wisdom” practiced by Joseph and Hyrcanus as a practical means for ensuring the survival and flourishing of the Judean polity, even as it authorizes their participation within the extractive and unjust Ptolemaic political and economic structures.

Yet, a close reading of the *Tobiad Romance* uncovers dissenting perspectives regarding the actions of the Tobiads preserved within the text. These counter-perspectives expose the actions of the Tobiads not as providing life and opportunities, but as exploitative and gutting to those who are not members of the Tobiad family. Put otherwise, this tale frames participation in the Ptolemaic extractive regime as necessary for the well-being of the Judean community, even though such participation functions to ensure the economic prospering of only elite figures like the Tobiads, often at the expense of much of the broader population. In this way, the re-accenting of wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance* is demonstrating an elision of the social-moral virtues of Proverbial wisdom, as the “wise characters” stray from ethical concerns and instead mimic the extractive imperial court that they operate within.

(a) A Novella Making Use of the Biblical Joseph and the Biblical Theme of Wisdom

While “wisdom” most notably occurs in instructional literature, scholars have long noticed how wisdom features can be exhibited within ancient narratives.⁹⁰ Specifically, the *Tobiad Romance* has been classified as an ancient novella, a type of writing that flourished

⁸⁹ Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3. Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” *ABD* VI:920-921. A similar definition is provided by Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns,” 51.

⁹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM Press, 1972), 46-47; For more recent discussions Suzanna R. Millar, “History and Wisdom Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 441-458; Markus Witte, “Literary Genres of Old Testament Wisdom,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, 367-368

during the Hellenistic era when Jewish writers were influenced by Graeco-Roman culture. The novella—a text that is shorter than a novel, yet longer than a short story—is tentatively defined by Gruen as “prose fiction narrating the experiences of individuals or groups, composed for entertainment but also communicating values, ideas, or guidance.”⁹¹ Wills offers a similar definition, emphasizing the increased literacy of the era and how the novels were offered through “a written medium and read primarily for entertainment.”⁹² Because the *Romance* appears to make use of raw historical data, Wills has nuanced the classification of the text to the subgenre of a “Jewish Historical Novel.” Other Jewish historical novels identified by Wills are *The Royal Family of Adianene* (Ant. 20:17-96)—another text preserved by Josephus—and *Second* and *Third Maccabees*.⁹³

While certainly influenced by the broader Hellenistic environment, ancient Jewish novellas were also engaging with biblical themes, traditional folktales, legends, and “edifying stories of admirable figures caught in perilous situations and emerging triumphant.”⁹⁴ The *Tobiad Romance*’s engagement with biblical themes, traditional folktales, and “admirable figures” can be discerned in the ways the text maintains wisdom motifs and echoes of the biblical figure of Joseph from Genesis 37-50—a figure that is identified as a “discerning and wise man” (אִישׁ נְבוֹן וְחָכָם; Gen 41:33).⁹⁵ Like the Joseph from the *Tobiad Romance*, the biblical Joseph is able to impress an Egyptian monarch (Gen 41:1-37), which enables him to integrate himself into Pharaoh’s ruling administration (Gen 41:46-49) and provide for his family during a time of impending disaster (Gen 42:1-5; 45:16-28). Like Hyrcanus, the biblical Joseph is portrayed as his father’s favorite, gaining the ire of his elder brothers who desire to harm him (Gen 37:3-28); despite this common tension, both the biblical Joseph and Hyrcanus use their gifts and abilities to outwit their brothers and gain the support of Pharaoh. Once in power, both the biblical Joseph and the Tobiads engage in cruel and ruthless acts that function to extract resources from residents

⁹¹ Erich S. Gruen, “Novella,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, eds. J.W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 420. The range of texts that fit within this category include Esther, Daniel 1-6, Tobit, Judith, and 3 Maccabees—among others.

⁹² Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 5.

⁹³ Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 185-211. Wills also mentions the *Acts of the Apostles* as fitting with these texts as a “Christian historical novel” (185).

⁹⁴ Gruen, “Novella,” 421.

⁹⁵ For a fuller comparison of the story of Joseph with the *Tobiad Romance*, see Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 99-109.

and increase the wealth of their Egyptian leaders (Gen 47:13-26; *Ant* 12:180-184), while their actions are also framed as benefiting a broader populace (Gen 47:1-12; *Ant* 12:224).⁹⁶

Beyond the narrative similarities, it is noticeable that particular themes and motifs of wisdom are significant for how each character navigates conflict, deals with adversity, and advances in their social standing.⁹⁷ However, this does not mean that Joseph and the Tobiads represent perfect ideals of wise persons constructed from the instructions of Proverbs. As Suzanna R. Millar observes, the biblical Joseph maintains an “ambiguous relationship with the ideal of Proverbs” in that while Joseph exhibits wise characteristics such as eloquent and restrained speech, the avoidance of “foreign women,” and foresight and prudence in his governance, he nonetheless engages in cruel and exploitative behavior from a position of power.⁹⁸ Similarly, Fox notes how Joseph engages in a type of wisdom that values foresight and prudence in how he manages the collection and distribution of grain, but neglects the ethical mandates of wisdom prominent within Proverbs when he exploits the needs of the famine to acquire more property and resources for Pharaoh (c.f. Gen 47:26; Prov 11:26a; 29:4).⁹⁹

In a similar fashion, both Joseph and Hyrcanus maintain an “ambiguous relationship” with the wisdom ideals found in Proverbs. This novella picks up on theme of wisdom, but uniquely accents it with its specific emphases so as to communicate its intended values and ideas, and to offer a perspective on how to navigate the imperial rule of Judea. In this process, certain aspects of wisdom are specifically emphasized, while others are de-emphasized due to the text’s socio-economic context and subsequent communicative goals. This relationship will be fleshed out by specifically identifying how wisdom is uniquely adopted and accented within the *Tobiad Romance*.

(b) The accent of Wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance*

Any comparison of terminology between texts written and preserved in different languages is difficult to ascertain. The Greek text of the *Tobiad Romance* may provisionally be compared with the book of Proverbs within the LXX, though with caution since the LXX

⁹⁶ See the comparisons in Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 105.

⁹⁷ For consideration of the role that wisdom plays in the Joseph narrative, see Michael V. Fox, “Wisdom in the Joseph Story,” *VT* 51:1 (2001): 26-41; Millar, “History and Wisdom Literature,” 446-448; Also, the seminal work of Gerhard von Rad in “The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

⁹⁸ Millar, “History and Wisdom Literature,” 448.

⁹⁹ Fox, “Wisdom in the Joseph Story,” 34-35.

“contains a variety of divergences from the MT.”¹⁰⁰ Still, the *Tobiad Romance* does not contain a significant overlap in vocabulary with the wisdom language found in LXX Proverbs. Noticeably absent within the *Tobiad Romance* is the use of the common Greek term σοφία, which in the LXX is used primarily as the Greek translation for the Hebrew word חכמה, indicating wisdom. However, while the presentation of wisdom within *Tobiad Romance* is primarily conceptual, there are a few important overlaps. When Joseph is introduced into the narrative, for instance, he is described as one with “a reputation for uprightness (δικαιοσύνης) among the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (*Ant* 12:160). The term δικαιοσύνη is the common Greek translation of צדק, a term that is frequently associated with wisdom/the wise in Proverbs, and is one of the listed social-moral virtues of wisdom within Prov 1:3. While it can be debated as to how much Joseph embodies Proverbs’ moral virtues, the text nonetheless describes Joseph with terminology that is at home in wisdom instruction.

Beyond the use of vocabulary, comparisons can be drawn between various discourses in terms of the concepts that their rhetorics construct—a procedure especially useful when considering works preserved in varying languages. Despite a limited overlap in terminology with traditional wisdom, the *Tobiad Romance* intends to construct its protagonists as characters who conceptually embody certain characteristics advocated for within wisdom instruction. Particularly relevant to this construction of wise behavior are the practical virtues promoted within Proverbs. These virtues emphasize behaviors aimed at accomplishing one’s objectives by specifically highlighting the capacity to learn how to be “crafty” and “shrewd.” Prov 1:4 delineates the book’s purpose of cultivating practical virtues by giving the “simple craftiness” (לחח לפתאים ערמה) and the “youth knowledge of shrewdness”¹⁰¹ (לנוער דעת ומזמה). The ability to manipulate circumstances by using certain social and practical skills that enable one to achieve a particular end is a prevalent aspect of wisdom within Proverbs (cf. Ch. II). In making use of the wisdom’s known “pattern of meaning,” the *Tobiad Romance* specifically emphasizes wisdom’s practical component for its re-accentuation of the wisdom concept.

¹⁰⁰ Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, Hermeneia, ed. Thomas Krüger, trans. Stephen Germany (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 42.

¹⁰¹ Here I mostly Michael V. Fox in *Proverbs 1 - 9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 61. However, I translate ערמה as “crafty/craftiness”, favoring this synonym of Fox’s translation of “cunning.”

The clearest expression of how the *Romance* conceives of wise behavior—utilizing the practical virtues promoted within Proverbs—occurs when Joseph attempts “to learn which of his sons was naturally well disposed to virtue”¹⁰² (*Ant.* 12:191). Joseph’s elder sons seemingly did not “incline their heart to understanding” (Prov 2:2), as they return from their education under famed teachers “foolish (ἀνόητοι) and ignorant” because of their laziness (a vice Proverbs repeatedly condemns, e.g., Prov 19:24, 20:4). The term ἀνόητος used to describe the brother’s foolishness is similarly used in LXX Prov 15:21 and 17:28 to refer to persons who are lacking wisdom and understanding.

Conversely, Hyrcanus is naturally disposed to “courage and intelligence” (*Ant* 12:190). When the brothers fail to develop virtue through classic education, Joseph—as the instructing father (c.f., Prov 1:8, 4:1)—takes matters into his own hands by actively developing Hyrcanus’ character (*Ant* 12:190-195). Joseph sends Hyrcanus on a two-day journey into the wilderness to sow the ground by using “three hundred yoke of oxen,” but he withholds the yoke straps. When Hyrcanus solves his problem by slaughtering some oxen to extract their hides for straps, thus saving the time of journeying back home, Joseph becomes very pleased with his “quickness of intelligence (διανοίας)” and loves him more “as if he were his only genuine son.” The term διάνοια indicates one’s “mind,” or thinking faculty and understanding, and is used in LXX Proverbs to render כֶּלֶם, indicating the place wherein one is capable of containing wisdom (2:10), and knowing the law (9:10a). Hyrcanus demonstrates the ability to analyze a problem, discern a practical solution, and act on it so that the desired objective can be accomplished.

The virtue emphasized in Hyrcanus’ story is not morally, nor particularly intellectually centered—at least not in terms of abstract or theoretical intelligence. After all, Hyrcanus is not sent to study under famed teachers as his brothers were. Rather, Hyrcanus is tested and excels in a form of practical intellectual reasoning, shrewd and clever problem solving where he uses what is available to accomplish a desired objective. This brief narrative draws upon the wise/fool dichotomy prevalent within Proverbs by portraying Hyrcanus as the one who acts with wisdom and the brothers as fools. Hyrcanus thus becomes the “wise child” who “makes a father glad”

¹⁰² While the Greek term ἀρετή, translated here as “virtue,” does not appear in LXX Proverbs, the term does maintain connotations of moral excellence according to LEH and *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Additionally, it is also used in Wisdom of Solomon 4:1 as a desirable quality.

(Prov 10:1), while his lazy and ignorant brothers play the role of the “foolish children” who are “a grief to their father” (Prov 17:25).

Proverbs’ promotion of practical wisdom also involves one’s ability to navigate social conflict and utilize available resources to resolve conflict and avoid harm. Wisdom is to be valued over brute strength in conflict, as wisdom and knowledge provide a greater advantage through strategizing and out-maneuvering one’s opponent (Prov 21:22; 24:5-6). Proverbs also advocates for the appropriate use of gifts and bribes to obtain social favor and circumvent conflict with socially influential persons (Prov 17:8; 18:16)—something that the Tobiads excelled in. The Tobiads gain favor by generously providing gifts to those in power, generating a situation that allows for their own prospering. For example, when Ptolemy’s envoy arrives in Jerusalem after Onias refuses to pay the tribute, Joseph impresses the envoy and gains their support by lavishing them with gifts. This results in the envoy speaking favorably of Joseph to the king, allowing Joseph an opportunity to meet directly with king Ptolemy and “obtain... whatever he desired” (*Ant* 12:165-166). Once Joseph obtains the right to farm the taxes within the province and gains a measure of wealth, he holds on to his status by maintaining good relations with the royal court, sending “many gifts” to Ptolemy, Cleopatra, and all other powerbrokers (12:184-185). Similarly, Hyrcanus gains Ptolemy’s admiration by presenting him and Cleopatra with the “lavish” gift of young boys and girls, while also giving expensive gifts to the king’s friends “so as to escape any danger from them” (*Ant* 12:217-218).

Wise behavior manifested through speech permeates the narratives of Joseph and Hyrcanus within the *Romance*, as both characters utilize witty and persuasive rhetoric in their encounters with Ptolemy. This correlates with an emphasis within Proverbs, where the ability to adapt one’s speech to the need of any situation is particularly valued, as wise speech and perceptivity enable one to choose the right words that can influence social situations in one’s favor.¹⁰³ Good and persuasive speech is particularly valued in instructions that direct students on how to behave and gain favor with a monarch. This “court wisdom” teaches that good speech can allow a person to have access to, and possibly be influential upon those in power: “Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech will have the king as a friend” (Prov 22:11);

¹⁰³ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 925-926. E.g., Prov 12:6; 12:18; 16:21, 23-24; Wise speech and perceptivity enable one to choose the right words that can influence social situations in one’s favor.

further, appropriate speech and correct demeanor can persuade a ruler: “With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones” (Prov 25:15). Proverbs teaches the value of gaining the king’s favor by associating it with life while equating a king’s anger with calamity: “A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, and whoever is wise will appease it. In the light of a king’s face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.” (Prov 16:14-15; also, 19:12, 20:2)

The *Romance* seemingly draws upon similar aspects of court wisdom in its construction of the characters of Joseph and Hyrcanus.¹⁰⁴ Joseph is keenly aware of the consequences that result from one’s relationship with the king when he intercedes for Onias and gains the favor of Ptolemy (see *Ant.* 12:160-165). Characteristic of both Joseph and Hyrcanus is their use of speech to bring laughter to Ptolemy, which results in opportunities for persuasion and having influence upon the king (see *Ant.* 12:170-179, 206-214). Joseph and Hyrcanus work their wit into obtaining a measure of power within the Ptolemaic governing structure when they talk their way into the tax-farming rights of their province (*Ant.* 12:177-178, 219-222). Their successful employment of court wisdom engenders Ptolemy’s admiration and support for the Tobiads, as they are granted local power within the Ptolemaic bureaucracy. Notably, Ptolemy permits Joseph to “do whatever he wished” within his home province of Syria and Phoenicia (12:182); and after directing Hyrcanus to take whatever present he wishes from the royal coffers, Ptolemy sends a letter of support for Hyrcanus to his brothers and father (12:219-220). The witty speech and clever use of “court wisdom” are used by Joseph and Hyrcanus to navigate Ptolemaic structures of power in order achieve their desired end: the king’s favor, and subsequently a local manifestation of power.

The wisdom concepts of clever and shrewd maneuvering, gift giving, and effective speech enable the success of both Joseph and Hyrcanus. While this type of “court wisdom” may, according to Niditch, “sound rather Machiavellian,” Niditch surmises that the essence of this instruction is “to use the means at hand pragmatically—one’s own talents as well as one’s contacts—as step-ladders to success.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Gruen argues that it is this aspect of the

¹⁰⁴ See Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 236-240, who reads the narrative of Joseph and Hyrcanus as participating in a common motif in Second Temple literature: the Jew in the foreign court. Gruen places the *Tobiad Romance* alongside of texts like Daniel 1-6, Esther, and Judith, among others, while also juxtaposing it with the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50.

¹⁰⁵ Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns,” 52.

biblical Joseph that was appealing to the authors of the *Tobiad Romance*. In an era where Ptolemy maintained “absolute and unquestioned authority,” to be a “successful Jew” meant that one must use “wit and resourcefulness” to achieve any sense of relative power and position.¹⁰⁶

Joseph and Hyrcanus certainly achieve a success that comes in the form of local power and material wealth, but the narrative goes a step further in framing Joseph’s success as enabling the success of the Jewish people as a whole (Prov 12:224). The communal framing of a leader’s success echoes a teaching in Proverbs that envisions the justice of the king as bringing stability to the entire land (Prov. 29:4a). Though not a king, Joseph’s leadership certainly gets portrayed within a royal context, as he is the one who marches through the province as the head of a Ptolemaic military unit, demanding tribute and collecting taxes that increase his own wealth, subsequently making his newfound power “permanent” (*Ant.* 12:180-184). Yet as Michael Fox notes, the “royalist ideology” promulgated within Proverbs envisions a ruler who provides social stability, justice, and peace (i.e., Prov 16:12), not merely an enforcer and collector of taxes.¹⁰⁷ This begs the question: despite the statement of *Ant.* 12:224, are Joseph and Hyrcanus portrayed as virtuous characters whose actions are working for communal well-being? Or should the observations made by Niditch and Gruen of the Tobiads climbing the “step ladder to success” necessarily involve a recognition of how they step on the throats of their fellow colonial subjects as they ascend?

The text seems to singularly conceive of wise behavior as practical, clever, and shrewd maneuvering. In fact, Gruen concludes that the *Romance* “honored no spiritual or moral values, just practical success through superior Jewish shrewdness.”¹⁰⁸ While this idea of wisdom draws upon concepts presented in the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs, as noted within chapter II, Proverbs presents its “practical virtues” as being interrelated with intellectual and communal virtues. Proverbs intends to form socially responsible persons who can achieve a measure of *both* personal *and* communal well-being. An awareness of communal well-being is cultivated alongside of, and intertwined with, practical skills needed for individual survival and social navigation. While Proverbs does associate wisdom with riches, wealth, and full storehouses (Prov 8:18-21), it also condemns the acquisition of wealth by unjust means (e.g., 15:27a; 28:16),

¹⁰⁶ Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 237-238.

¹⁰⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 501.

¹⁰⁸ Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 238.

and promotes a care and concern for the poor (e.g., 14:31, 16:19). In this sense, the re-accenting of a “traditional” wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance* is made apparent in that the text singularly emphasizes a “Machiavellian” court wisdom and “superior Jewish shrewdness,” while minimizing ethical virtues that encourage communal well-being in the presentation of Joseph and Hyrcanus as “wise” actors.

Section 4.05 Tobiad Mimicry and the Subtle Voice of Resistance

In fact, the “wise” characters of Joseph and Hyrcanus act more like the brutal and extractive imperial powers they are working with than the virtuous and socially responsible wise persons that Proverbs intends to form. While Joseph’s career as tax farmer is claimed to have led the Jewish people into “more splendid opportunities of life,” the nature of these opportunities are not delineated other than not having their land parceled out to Ptolemy’s soldiers (*Ant* 12:159). Further, the shift in the narrative from Joseph to Hyrcanus moves the story away from its explicit implications for the well-being of the Jewish people, which was a primary concern in the opening paragraphs.¹⁰⁹ A cursory reading of text demonstrates that the Tobiad efforts to advance within the Ptolemaic bureaucracy often included ruthless actions that disregard the humanity and well-being of their fellow colonial subjects, and simply functioned to increase their own wealth and status.

For example, Joseph leads a Ptolemaic army on a campaign through his own province, demanding tribute and violently extracting wealth and produce from those who refused to submit to his authority (*Ant* 12:180-185). Joseph’s predatory behavior is on display in his intoxicated lust for an Egyptian “dancing-girl,” a scene that narrates Hyrcanus’ conception as Joseph ends up having intercourse with his niece “several times” as he “violently” fell in love with her (*Ant*. 12:187-188)—an act that goes against Proverbs’ instruction on avoiding foreign women (e.g., Prov 5:1-14).¹¹⁰ Hyrcanus continues Tobiad participation in abuse and human exploitation by having his father’s steward—a slave—imprisoned when the steward refuses to give Hyrcanus the exorbitant amount of money he requested (*Ant*. 12:203). Hyrcanus then engages in an immense display of human trafficking by gifting Ptolemy and Cleopatra hundreds of slaves to win their

¹⁰⁹ Though, the summary of Joseph’s activity as tax farmer as bringing opportunities to the Jewish people in 12:224 comes after much of the Hyrcanus material.

¹¹⁰ This is precipitated by Joseph’s brother who, to keep Joseph from sinning by having intercourse with a “foreign” girl, brings him his daughter—Joseph’s niece—to sleep with Joseph in his drunken state.

favor (*Ant.* 12:209, 217-218). When Hyrcanus settles across the Jordan after his expulsion from Jerusalem he levies a heavy tribute upon the area's residents, enforcing their payment through acts of violence and taking residents captive (*Ant.* 12:222, 229).

These brutal and extractive practices stray far from the construct of the wise and just, even if paternalistic and patriarchal, leader advocated for within Proverbs. Conversely, Joseph and Hyrcanus appear to value the interests of the imperial powers they are operating under rather than the those of their fellow colonial subjects.¹¹¹ The actions taken by Joseph and the rhetoric used by Hyrcanus demonstrate that the Tobiads did not merely maintain working relations with the imperial rulers, they mimicked them by participating in Ptolemaic practices of economic extraction and rhetorically asserting their dominance over fellow colonial subjects.¹¹²

(a) Tobiad Mimicry

Within postcolonial analysis mimicry occurs when colonial discourse directs the colonized to be “almost the same, *but not quite*” in their relation to the colonizer.¹¹³ Mimicry is a strategy of “exclusion through inclusion that purports to accept the ‘good native’ all the better to exclude and denounce the majority ‘bad natives.’”¹¹⁴ The success of mimicry for the colonizer is, as Homi Bhabha notes, in its “slippage.” If there is equality or sameness between the two, then domination and colonial rule is not justified. Thus, it relies on the colonized becoming like the colonizer, but always remaining different; the colonized wear their mimicry like a camouflage, a resemblance that occurs in part “metonymically.”¹¹⁵ As Peter Childs and Patrick Williams explain, mimicry is an “ambivalent (re)assertion of similarity and difference,” posing a challenge to “the normalized knowledges of colonized and colonizer.” The colonized is made

¹¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the Ptolemaic economy and their extensive taxation see J.G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt under the Ptolemies, 305 - 30 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 117-164. The Ptolemaic economy and its manifestation in Palestine is also elaborated upon in chapter III of this dissertation.

¹¹² This was first proposed in Yoon Kyung Lee, “A Postcolonial Reading of the Tobiad Story (*Ant.* 12.154-236),” *한국기독교신학논총* (*Korean Journal of Christian Studies*) 69 (2010): 52-53. Lee’s analysis centers on the type of colonial identity Josephus advocates for by including this story within *Antiquities*. According to Lee “Josephus seems to have proposed his idea of ‘an ideal colonial subjectivity,’ that is, to side with and mimic the colonizer and to oppress the colonized peoples.”

¹¹³ Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology*, ed. Pramod K. Nayar (Malden, MA; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 54. Italics original.

¹¹⁴ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 1997), 129.

¹¹⁵ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 57.

into an imitation of the colonizer, yet they are not made equal in that the colonizer maintains certain social inequalities, preserving “liberty, status, and rights” for themselves.¹¹⁶

The growth of the Tobiad mimicry can be seen by juxtaposing the rhetoric of Joseph and Hyrcanus. In many ways, the story of Hyrcanus mirrors that of Joseph, yet Hyrcanus takes the wit and shrewd activity displayed by Joseph to another level, demonstrating an increased bravado and a heightened extravagance in his use of wealth (i.e., the extravagance of gifts given to Ptolemy and Cleopatra, building a large, elaborate estate). This heightened activity engenders the feud with his brothers that results in Hyrcanus’ expulsion from Jerusalem (12:222). While this distances Hyrcanus from the broader Judean polis, his tale emphasizes a strengthened bond with the Ptolemies.

Niditch argues that the *Romance* maintains a folktale pattern known as the “trait of increasing fabulosity,” where an elder figure of authority is displaced by a younger son or equivalent.¹¹⁷ As Niditch observes, the pattern of Joseph’s and Hyrcanus’ story closely mirror each other, yet Hyrcanus’ career represents an exaggerated and intensified re-run of the Joseph narrative, with his character and story becoming “more fantastic and grandiose.”¹¹⁸

The “increasing fabulosity” of Hyrcanus can be observed within many instances, but one of the more interesting comparisons is how Joseph and Hyrcanus use their speech to gain the king’s favor. Joseph gains Ptolemy’s favor primarily through speech that brings laughter and flattery. Joseph makes the king laugh by explaining Onias’ actions as the result of old age, equating Onias’ elderly faculties with that of an infant (*Ant* 12:172). Joseph then charms the king and queen by proclaiming them as “the persons of the very best character” when offering them as his own surety for his tax bid of the province (*Ant* 12:177-178). In both instances Ptolemy responds with laughter and is persuaded by Joseph’s wit and charm.

Hyrcanus is also able to make Ptolemy laugh, but does not engage in this type of fawning. When Ptolemy inquires as to why Hyrcanus imprisoned his father’s steward, Hyrcanus insists that the steward deserved punishment for disobeying his commands, telling Ptolemy that such action was necessary for a master: “if we do not punish such fellows, even you may expect to be held in contempt by your subjects” (*Ant* 12:207). Later, when Hyrcanus is being mocked at

¹¹⁶ Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, 131.

¹¹⁷ Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns,” 47.

¹¹⁸ Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns,” 49.

the banquet because the king's friends have piled their bones upon his place at the table, Hyrcanus impresses Ptolemy through a witty demonstration that not only affirms himself but dehumanizes his mockers. Hyrcanus responds to the teasing by stating that dogs eat the meat and the bones (leaving their place empty), but "men eat the meat and throw the bones away, which is just what I, being a man, have now done" (*Ant.* 12:213).

Rather than approaching Ptolemy with flattery, Hyrcanus appeals to Ptolemy's authority by relating himself to Ptolemy. Hyrcanus even goes so far as to place himself on the same plane of power as the king when discussing the imprisoned steward through his use of the collective pronoun: "if *we* do not punish..." Conversely, Joseph's rhetoric appropriately operates within the power differentials of himself and Ptolemy by keeping his self in the background as he belittles Onias and the other magistrates while inflating the character of Ptolemy. Hyrcanus's rhetoric, on the other hand, eschews the differences of power in a risky display of bravado that suggests that even Ptolemy could be undermined if he does not act in accord with Hyrcanus. Much like Joseph, but with different strategies, Hyrcanus impresses Ptolemy and gains his favor.

While the difference between Joseph's and Hyrcanus' rhetoric toward Ptolemy is striking, it must be noted that Joseph engages in his own mimicry. He follows up his display of cute wit and impressive charm by leading a faction of Ptolemy's army into his own province to ruthlessly arrest, kill, and seize the property of those who refuse to pay tribute (*Ant.* 12:180-185).¹¹⁹ Joseph's use of brutal military force generated a fear of him in other cities that allowed him to extract the tribute he desired without resistance (*Ant.* 12:182). Further, his actions gained admiration and praise from Ptolemy, who "permitted [Joseph] to do whatever he wished" (12:181-182). These actions show how Joseph did not merely operate within the structures of Ptolemaic imperial rule to save the people of Jerusalem; he also functioned as an active agent of the Ptolemaic Empire by carrying out and enforcing the Ptolemaic objective of economic extraction, and in turn increasing the wealth of those in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy. Joseph wore the Ptolemaic camouflage well.

Thus, the rhetorical bravado of Hyrcanus when compared with his father's words and actions may not be that different from Joseph's. With Niditch's father-son folktale pattern in

¹¹⁹ Though some argue Joseph's actions may be viewed as acting against possible enemies, or note that Joseph did not enslave Jews because Ascalon and Scythopolis were not Jewish cities, Joseph nonetheless pillages his fellow colonial subjects.

mind, it too can be understood as a furthering of the Tobiad mimicry of the Ptolemies. After all, Joseph does become actively involved in developing Hyrcanus' character through his own "test of virtue." This "virtue" comes to represent clever and shrewd problem solving that, if given the chance, will employ force and exploitation to accomplish one's objectives; in other words, it is a virtue necessary for being successful at extracting wealth and goods from one's subjects, a core concern of the Ptolemies. When Hyrcanus then seems to place himself alongside Ptolemy as an object of power, it may be the natural progression of Joseph mimicking Ptolemy, and Hyrcanus subsequently learning to mimic his father.

Yet both Joseph and Hyrcanus, as powerful as they may project themselves to be, remain colonial and imperial subjects; their mimicry begins to slip as they are shown to be almost *but not quite* like the Ptolemies. This is evidenced once Hyrcanus returns to Jerusalem after gaining the support of Ptolemy. The text reports that Joseph was angry with Hyrcanus for spending a large sum of his money, but due to Hyrcanus' bond with Ptolemy Joseph had to conceal his anger because he "feared the king" (*Ant* 12:221). Hyrcanus does not find welcome in Jerusalem, so he leaves and settles "across the river Jordan" where he continued to mimic the Ptolemies by "raiding" the residents, extracting taxes from them (*Ant* 12:222), and building an elaborate estate (*Ant* 12:230-233). Hyrcanus "ruled over" his very minor imperium for seven years, but his status as a Ptolemaic colonial subject is made clear when he realizes the growing power of Antiochus Epiphanes. Knowing that he may not have the same status with Antiochus that he had with the Ptolemies, and that he may even be subject to capture and punishment instead of having wealth and power, Hyrcanus ends his life "by his own hand" (*Ant* 12:236).

The *Tobiad Romance* advocates a message of cultivating and using virtue—defined as shrewd court wisdom—for generating influence and opportunity with the imperial rulers, which it purports will "trickle down" to the broader polis. In advocating for this type of wisdom, the *Romance* subsequently reveals how the Tobiad virtue forms persons who mimic the Ptolemies by valuing and enforcing economic extraction, yet subsequently lack the absolute power maintained by the monarchs. Such virtue comes with unavoidable "collateral damage" both to those who practice it, and to the larger community. As a result, it is unlikely that all Judeans would have uncritically accepted this propaganda, especially those who were keenly aware of the inequity generated by the Tobiads' increasing their own wealth. In fact, it is possible that the *Romance* even preserves the vestiges of an anti-Tobiad sentiment.

(b) Echoes of Resistance

Despite the propagating message put forth within the *Romance* (e.g., *Ant* 12224), the recognition that the Tobiads were brutal characters and actors of imperial extraction may have been a widely held perception among at least some Judeans that the *Romance* is attempting counter. A subtle anti-Tobiad sentiment lurks throughout the text and surfaces at certain points, demonstrating the selective way in which the Tobiads display their wise characteristics. Not only do they not fully embody the virtues promoted by “traditional” wisdom, but their actions often put them in direct opposition with the ethical mandates advocated within Proverbs and other important texts that would eventually come to form the Hebrew Bible. In order to examine any varying perspective preserved within the *Romance*, I will utilize Bakhtinian concepts to conceive of how literature may propagate a certain message, yet contain and preserve within it varying social perspectives.

Analyzing the *Tobiad Romance* as Bakhtinian utterance, the text can be understood as being directed toward a particular topic and in dialogue with other utterances. As was delineated in the introduction, utterances enter an environment of other utterances surrounding their topic or object of communication, and subsequently become shaped and influenced by these other utterances. As Bakhtin explains, no utterance is the first to speak toward a topic. Rather, the object of speech “has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways. Various viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge, and diverge into it.”¹²⁰ Each utterance—what is said and how it is said—is undoubtedly shaped by the perception of these other utterances “as hostile or sympathetic, authoritative or feeble, socially and temporally close or distant.”¹²¹

As an utterance the *Tobiad Romance* is directed toward a topic wherein it exists alongside of, in dialogue with, and emerging from other utterances and words about the topic. The topic at hand may be provisionally identified as how Jews and Judeans should operate while living under foreign imperial rule, and the appropriate role and relationship they should maintain with their rulers. We have considered how the *Tobiad Romance* exists in a dialogical relationship with

¹²⁰ M.M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 93. See a similar discussion in M.M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 276.

¹²¹ Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 137.

Qohelet surrounding this topic and how each text utilizes and accents the speech genre of wisdom, a discourse already at hand for both the *Tobiad Romance* and Qohelet via “traditional” wisdom works like Proverbs. In summary, the *Tobiad Romance* participates in this dialogical environment by asserting that opportunities for the flourishing of the broader population can be achieved if local elite figures participate in imperial governing structures by employing a shrewd and witty “court wisdom” that will endear them to the monarchs.

This assertion, however, does not appear to be universally accepted, as the text itself contains the trace of an utterance that does not see the actions of the Tobiads as beneficial to the province, but rather sees it as exploitative and gutting. The *Romance* acknowledges this “hostile” counter-utterance by taking it over and inserting it into the dialogue of an obscure character who opposes Hyrcanus. Similar to how the text adopts the speech genre of wisdom, the *Romance* reaccentuates this counter-utterance so that Hyrcanus can swiftly dismiss it with a macho display of wit. By excavating these words, traces of the original utterance may be discerned, and we can gain a fuller understanding of the broader dialogical context and the varying discourses in which the *Tobiad Romance* was a participant.

The “hostile” counter-utterance to the Tobiad propaganda is preserved in the banquet scene where Hyrcanus is being ridiculed by Ptolemy’s friends. Tryphon—the court jester—is encouraged to mock Hyrcanus, so he draws attention to the bones that have been piled upon Hyrcanus’ place, saying: “From all this you may guess that his father has stripped all Syria in the same way as Hyrcanus has left these bones bare of meat” (*Ant.* 12:212). While the king laughs at Tryphon’s joke, it ultimately functions as a foil for the response of Hyrcanus, who is able to respond with his keen wit and turn the tables by belittling his mockers. The banquet scene ends with Ptolemy admiring Hyrcanus’ witty reply and ordering all those who had mocked him to then applaud Hyrcanus. This builds Hyrcanus’ bond with Ptolemy, eventually leading to Ptolemy to give Hyrcanus “the highest honor” (*Ant.* 12:220).

While the narrative emphasizes Hyrcanus’ response and his ultimate bonding with Ptolemy, the claim that the empty bones are a metaphor for how Joseph “stripped all Syria” represents a varying perspective on the Tobiad’s activity; one that certainly is to be distinguished fundamentally from the propaganda that the “excellent and high-minded” Joseph “brought the

Jewish people from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life.”¹²² This claim appears to have been disputed, so the tale attempts to dismiss the negative claims levied against the Tobiads by placing them in the speech of the court jester. The text takes over and re-accentuates this counter-utterance by devaluing it through Hyrcanus’ demonstration of wit, which gains the admiration of Ptolemy—the one who the Tobiads are attempting to mimic.

While clearly minimized by the *Romance*, enough of the anti-Tobiad sentiment is preserved. Though the *Tobiad Romance* wants to present the actions of the Tobiads as ultimately being beneficial to Jerusalem and the broader province, the tale itself contains within it a counter-perspective. The jester’s statement is substantiated by the narration of Joseph’s extractive campaign through the province, where he goes from city to city demanding tribute and raiding those who do not pay. Interestingly, the text notes that those who refused to pay “insulted” Joseph (*Ant* 12:181, 183). Though we are not told the nature of the insults, one wonders if this is echoing the mocking of the court jester. It may be surmised that opposition to the Tobiads was sufficiently prevalent that the text had to address the negative claims and dismiss them as unsubstantiated mockery.

But if the words are excavated from their use in the narrative, there exists a belief that the Tobiad strategy of involving shrewd “court wisdom” with Judea’s foreign rulers was ultimately harmful to the province. This belief may have been rooted in a perception that the Tobiad strategy did not make life better for much of the population, but exacerbated the aggressive taxation and economic extraction of the Ptolemies. Maybe it was the case that Tobiad intervention prevented Judean land from being parceled out to Ptolemaic soldiers (at least initially); but this ease may have been voided by the heavy tribute demanded by Joseph—a tribute enforced through brutality and the actual confiscation of property (*Ant.* 12:181-183). The societal dialogue surrounding the Tobiads may have included utterances that claimed they were “strippers of Syria” rather than leaders who brought “more splendid opportunities.”

(c) Revisiting the Ethics of Proverbs’ “Traditional” Wisdom

In conclusion, I want to revisit the discourse of court wisdom that provided a basis and/or justification for the actions of the Tobiads by drawing it further into dialogue with the virtue based “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs. In addition to the courtly wisdom espoused by the

¹²² While these two claims could be distinguished in that one is focused on the entire province and the other focuses on “the Jewish people,” the province nonetheless incorporates Judea and Jerusalem.

Tobiad Romance, I noted how text affirms the leadership of Joseph by echoing a sentiment expressed in Prov 29:4a: “By justice the king gives stability to the land...” While the *Tobiad Romance* would essentially make the same claim regarding the leadership of Joseph, the sentiment is not upheld if the aphorism of the verse’s parallel statement is considered: “but one who makes heavy exactions ruins it” (Prov 29:4b). This bit of wisdom is reflected in the words of the jester. Joseph’s act of stripping the land correlates with the making of “heavy exactions,” and instead of providing “more splendid opportunities for life,” those within the province may have felt that the Tobiads were causing more ruin than help.

Even as the propaganda of the Tobiads builds upon a particular wisdom discourse, resistance to the Tobiads could also find its home within the ethics of wisdom. While the Tobiads sought to gain admiration of the Ptolemies by mimicking their imperial practices, the residents of the province who were stripped of their sustenance may have resisted the Tobiads with a wisdom that emphasized communal and societal well-being. Disputing Tobiad mimicry of the Ptolemies, “traditional” wisdom could warn against desiring “the ruler’s delicacies, for they are deceptive food” (Prov 23:3) and assert that “Many seek the favor of a ruler, but it is from the LORD that one gets justice” (Prov 29:30). Finally, wisdom centered around communal virtues would note that “A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor; but one who hates unjust gain will enjoy a long life” (Prov 28:16)—and that sort of secure existence is something that Hyrcanus was unable to extract for himself.

While elements of the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs may overlap with the conceptualization of wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance*, the *Romance* seemingly does not place a high value upon Proverbs’ moral virtues as being necessary for successfully navigating Ptolemaic imperial rule. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the book of Qohelet is not only an additional utterance in the dialogical environment surrounding the concept of wisdom, but also represents a variant utterance from the *Tobiad Romance* on the specific role that wisdom can play in navigating the socio-economic climate of Ptolemaic imperial rule.

Chapter V. Wisdom within Qohelet

Section 5.01 Introduction

(a) Chapter Aims and Goals

In this chapter I will analyze the text of Qohelet by specifically attending to how the text uniquely conceptualizes wisdom. This analysis will involve a dynamic exegesis consisting of: 1. a detailed rhetorical and grammatical study of the text's language surrounding wisdom and wise behavior; 2. a consideration of how the text is a reflection and product of its specific historical and socio-economic context—that of Ptolemaic Palestine in the third century BCE; and 3. discern how Qohelet's statements on wisdom are making use of an established pattern of meaning surrounding the concept of wisdom, while also determining how Qohelet is uniquely framing wisdom through a comparison with the "traditional" wisdom of Proverbs. The analysis in this chapter will lay the groundwork for placing Qohelet's conception of wisdom into a dialogical relationship with the *Tobiad Romance* in chapter VI—a text that the previous chapter determined is also uniquely conceptualizing the value and use of wise behavior within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine.

(b) Thesis on Qohelet's Conception of Wisdom

Interpreting Qohelet through a Bakhtinian lens, I understand the text to be a unique utterance situated within an "unrepeatable" real-life context, and participating in a broader dialogized environment surrounding the topic it is directed toward and addressing. The context for this utterance has been identified as Ptolemaic Palestine in the third century BCE, and Qohelet represents an utterance engaged in a dialogue around the topic of how to adequately navigate, cope, and operate under Ptolemaic imperial rule. Within this dialogized environment, varying perspectives and/or social discourses also emerge with similar considerations; namely, to conceptualize the most appropriate way to survive and navigate a Ptolemaic socio-economic context characterized by the concentration of social power within bureaucratic hierarchies and the heavy extraction of agricultural resources from local communities.

To adequately communicate a specific point of view within this dialogized setting and sphere of communication, the text of Qohelet utilizes a "wisdom speech genre" in order to discuss proper behavior and instructions for survival within this context.¹ In drawing upon this

¹ See Chapter II where I argue for understanding the concept of wisdom within these texts as a type of Bakhtinian speech genre.

speech genre, Qohelet takes on what may be termed a “traditional” concept of wisdom, and “re-accent” wisdom with varying evaluations and emphases arising from the text’s specific socio-historical context and dialogical environment. Qohelet’s concept of wisdom represents a dynamic interaction between the text’s unique expression and varying understandings of wisdom made known through other utterances—in particular, a “traditional” wisdom like that preserved within the book of Proverbs, and as will be delineated in chapter VI, the *Tobiad Romance*. Within Qohelet, wisdom does not take on a wholly new or different meaning; rather, Qohelet draws upon wisdom’s (חכמה) “semantic possibilities,” and imbues this concept with Qohelet’s own emphases and evaluations which are rooted in its particular historical circumstance.

As was outlined in chapter two, the primary goal of obtaining wisdom (חכמה) and practicing wise behavior is to empower persons with the ability to navigate a “myriad of experiences” within life and in society in order to ensure survival and promote the well-being of both the individual and the larger community. In a broad sense, wisdom generally consists of acquired knowledge, skill (both physical and social), morals, instruction, and advice that can be utilized to achieve wisdom’s goal of life. I propose that within Qohelet, wisdom (חכמה) takes on an important, yet limited, role in the text’s attempt to navigate the extractive and exploitative socio-economic realities of Ptolemaic Palestine. In this way, Qohelet’s conception of wisdom shares similarities with how wise behavior is presented within the *Tobiad Romance*. Though complex and multi-faceted, wisdom within Qohelet maintains a pervasive pragmatic component that emphasizes knowledge, skill, and shrewdness that are intended to contribute to wisdom’s overall goal of surviving the difficult and harsh context that was Ptolemaic imperial rule over Judea.

Qohelet’s primary emphasis on wisdom is in how it can enable the survival of its practitioners. However, the text’s socio-economic context prevents Qohelet from associating wisdom with a life of success and well-being because Ptolemaic extraction has limited most of the population’s ability to fully access the area’s material resources, resources which they themselves have cultivated and labored to produce. This consistent extraction of resources by hierarchical powers does not enable a situation of flourishing and well-being for a significant portion of the population, not even for those who hold to a full and integrated set of wisdom’s virtues (cf. Chapter II). Qohelet seemingly assumes the validity of moral virtues promoted within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs, as the text recognizes and laments persistent injustices that

pervade the imperium's social and economic hierarchies. However, this is not a primary focus within Qohelet; yet neither does the text elide a concern for the social moral and values of Proverbs, as we saw in the *Tobiad Romance*.

For Qohelet, wisdom can be possessed and practiced by those who neither flourish, nor gain ample political and economic resources (Qoh 4:13; 9:11, 15). Accordingly, Qohelet deemphasizes the practice of wisdom as an enactment of virtues that, as in the “traditional wisdom” of Proverbs, enables genuine flourishing (assuming there is access to adequate material resources, for which some enjoyment is typically necessary for full flourishing). Qohelet also deemphasizes how wisdom, understood as a practice of intellectual and social shrewdness, can result in a substantial political and economic payoff—an emphasis of what wise behavior can engender within the *Tobiad Romance*.

Instead, wisdom within Qohelet constitutes a kind of shrewd knowledge and practical skill that helps one to survive in the daily struggle of living in a world fraught with economic exploitation and a lack of moral retribution; it makes possible survival as one negotiates living under the Ptolemaic imperial objective of economic extraction. While this context prohibits most persons from generating any type of economic profit (see the discussion on Qoh 1:3 below), Qohelet does value wisdom for its ability to generate a profit that may be perceived as either limited in its nature, or as an alternative to the lack of a substantial economic payoff. Qohelet values wisdom within this socio-economic and dialogical context for its ability to offer a profit (יתרון) that amounts not to flourishing as with Proverbs, nor extravagant elite success (which if obtained is always fleeting) as with the *Tobiad Romance*, but to survival, an occasional bit of shade for those “living under the sun” (Qoh 7:12).

Supporting this thesis of Qohelet's unique conception of wisdom will require an argument that unfolds in four parts. I will begin with a brief analysis of the term הבל, a prevalent and important term used throughout Qohelet to evaluate the text's context, subsequently intersecting with and impacting Qohelet's specific accenting of wisdom. Next, I will situate Qohelet as a text of wisdom, and consider how the text introduces the concept of wisdom through a satirical portrayal of a royal persona. Third, I will draw out and analyze the passages that delineate how Qohelet emphasizes survival as the goal of wisdom. And finally, I will exegete select passages within the text that communicate what survival wisdom consists of and how it should be practiced within Qohelet.

Section 5.02 *Hevel* in Qohelet

הבל הבלים אמר קהלת
הבל הבלים הכל הבל

“*Hevel, hevelim!*” says Qohelet; “*Hevel, hevelim. Everything [is] hevel.*” (Qoh 1:3)

This statement bookends the body of the main text in 1:2 and 12:8, leading scholars to read this as a type of “thesis” for the book of Qohelet. Additionally, the term הבל occurs 38 times within the book, over one half of all its occurrences within the Hebrew Bible.² This signifies that, while not an overly common term within the canon of the Hebrew Bible, it carries great significance within Qohelet. Despite the term’s prevalence and significance within the text, an appropriate translation into English has been a persistent topic of debate, indicating that a precise meaning for the term’s use in Qohelet is difficult to determine.³ For this reason, I will not translate the term, and simply transliterate it as *hevel* throughout my exegesis of Qohelet. While I do not offer a singular translation, I do interpret Qohelet as using *hevel* evaluatively; more specifically I read *hevel* as the text’s primarily way of expressing a negative and frustrating evaluation of the circumstances and lived realities that are reflected upon throughout Qohelet.

While Qohelet uses the term evaluatively, הבל carries a literal meaning of “breath” and/or “vapor,” and as K. Seybold explains, the term was likely “a special onomatopoeic word formation of Hebrew.”⁴ The term appears often with the comparative prepositions of מן and ל, and is used to express a value judgement upon people or things by communicating abstract ideas of transitoriness or fleetingness drawn from the term’s literal meaning (e.g., Ps. 62:10; Ps 144:4; Prov 13:11). According to Seybold this allows הבל to be used for “emotional embellishment” as it contains “a broad emotional-laden stratum with strong evocative possibilities.” This makes the term difficult to translate and “open to a range of meaning,” but also carrying the potential to be used as “keyword or catchword,” as it is in Qohelet.⁵

² Seybold, “הַבֵּל הַבֵּל,” *TDOT* 3:314. There are 73 total occurrences within the Hebrew Bible.

³ For a thorough overview of the recent scholarly proposals for interpreting הבל, see Russell L. Meek, “Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Readings of *Hebel* (הַבֵּל) in Ecclesiastes,” *CBR* 14 (2016): 279-297. See also Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 27-29.

⁴ Seybold, “הַבֵּל,” 3:314.

⁵ Seybold, “הַבֵּל,” 3:315.

English translations of Qohelet have popularly rendered הבל as “vanity,” a translation that can trace its origin to Jerome who translated with the Latin term *vanitas* in the *Vulgate*.⁶ Although still popular and prevalent, the English translation of “vanity” is antiquated and possibly misleading since “vanity” can also carry connotations of narcissism and excessive pride. That being said, Seow prefers the “vanity” translation, but does acknowledge the complexity of meaning contained within הבל. Seow interprets הבל with its literal meaning of breath/vapor in mind and sees הבל as communicating something that is incomprehensible and “beyond the grasp of mortals—both physically and intellectually.”⁷ Both Thomas Krüger and Norbert Lohfink offer similar interpretations based on the term’s literal meaning, but use more precise language of “futile,” “fleeting,”⁸ and “a puff of breath.”⁹

Michael Fox’s translation of הבל as “absurdity” has gained traction in more recent Qohelet scholarship. Fox pushes against the notion of consistently translating the term with connotations of its literal meaning of breath/vapor since, although ephemerality might be applicable in some verses (e.g., 3:19; 11:8), “no quality of actual vapors can be directly transferred to the facts and scenarios that [Qohelet] judges to be *hebel*.”¹⁰ Fox rightly insists that the meaning of the term must be derived from the context of the text, particularly in how the term is consistently used to evaluate occurrences that are observed by Qohelet. Fox understands הבל in the sense of Albert Camus’ description of the “absurd” in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. As Fox explains, absurdity “is a relational concept” existing in a disjointed “contradiction between two undeniable realities.” Absurdity resides “in the tension between a certain reality and a framework of expectations,” and the realization that this reality is not operating within these expectations. Fox notes that for Qohelet life is “saturated with absurdity: it is humanity’s condition of existence.”¹¹

⁶ Meek, “Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Readings of *Hebel*,” 283.

⁷ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (Garden City, NY; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 102.

⁸ Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 42-43

⁹ Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 36.

¹⁰ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 30. See also A. Schoors, who accepts and adopts Fox’s translation in *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth; Part II*, 2 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 119-129; also, Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 43-44.

¹¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 31.

While I do not use the Fox's translation of "absurd," I do concur with Fox's approach to translate הבל contextually, specifically as a phrase being used to evaluate lived realities. Seybold explains that the dominant use of הבל in nominal statements within Qohelet shows that "the word serves the purpose of evaluation, or more accurately, devaluation, with a critico-polemic intention."¹² Qohelet's primarily use of הבל is as a negative judgement upon observations and circumstances that are described within the text. This is notably discerned by phrases that are consistently attached to הבל to amplify its meaning. For example, Qohelet describes various observations and circumstances, proclaims "this is *hevel*," and will then add the additional phrases of "and a great evil" (רעה רבה; 2:21), "and a terrible business" (ענין רע; 4:8), and "and an evil sickness" (חלי רע; 6:2). Qohelet also attaches the phrase "a striving of the wind" (רעות רוח; 1:14; 2:26; 4:4; 6:9) to הבל statements, which as Schoors explains, is expressing frustration at a senseless situation. Schoors supports this reading by citing the ancient commenters Rashi and Ibn Ezra, who read this phrase as expressing a "state of heartache" (Rashi) and an expression of failing to reach neither "profit nor satisfaction" (Ibn Ezra).¹³

The negative evaluation and sense of frustration that הבל seems to carry within Qohelet is picked up by Tamez, who interprets the term by considering both the text's rhetoric and how it is engaging the political and economic situation of Ptolemaic Palestine. Tamez concurs with Fox's analysis, but reads the term as expressing a "frustration that comes from the pit of the stomach," and as such, believes that it is better translated with "less elegant words" drawn from everyday life, such as "rubbish," "garbage," or more precisely: "shit."¹⁴ According to Tamez these terms better express "the malaise produced by a situation of impotence before a crushing reality." Tamez's suggestion that the term be understood as an explicative seems to grasp the complex emotional and evaluative feelings of frustration, helplessness, and disgust that term carries in Qohelet. In this sense, the opening and closing statements of Qohelet could be interpreted and translated as "Bullshit. Everything is a pile of bullshit."

There is a significant scholarly and interpretive precedent for reading the opening and closing *hevel* statements of Qohelet as a statement of the futility and transitoriness of life, a statement that the text of Qohelet can be read as supporting. Yet, because of the evaluative

¹² Seybold, "הֶבֶל," 3:319.

¹³ Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 118. Quoted are Schoors' English translations.

¹⁴ Elsa Tamez, "Ecclesiastes: A Reading from the Periphery," *Int* 55 (2001): 251. See also Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 2-3.

phrases that Qohelet quite often attaches to הבל, I interpret it as a statement expressing a negative evaluation carrying emotions of frustration and disgust at the observed situations and circumstances described within the text. This makes הבל difficult to appropriately render, and as Tamez suggests, it may represent a frustrated explicative. For this reason, I choose to simply transliterate the term and not render it into English.¹⁵

Section 5.03 The Wise Figure of Qohelet: Sage and Royal Persona

In addition to הבל, the term חכמה, or “wisdom,” is also significant within Qohelet. The term חכמה occurs twenty-eight times within Qohelet, contributing to the text’s traditional classification as “wisdom literature.” Wisdom represents a central theme within the book, and plays a vital role in supporting the text’s overall rhetorical aim. A cursory overview demonstrates how vital wisdom is: Qohelet, the primary voice within the text (1:1), is described in the book’s epilogue (12:9-14) as a “wise person” or “sage” (חכם) who “taught knowledge to the people,” was a collector and organizer of “many proverbs (משלים)” and a writer of “words of truth” (12:9-10). The text maintains the reflective stance of a sage by presenting many first-person observations regarding the nature, value, and efficacy of wisdom (e.g., 2:12-21; 7:15-29; 9:11-10:3). As was delineated in chapter III, this indicates that the text was likely the product of a scribal sage who lived and functioned as a retainer of the socially elite. Additionally, the text contains several proverbs and pithy sayings—a typical form utilized in wisdom instruction (e.g., 7:1-9; 8:1-5; 11:1-7).

Despite these scribal identifiers, the text initially introduces Qohelet as a “king/ruler in Jerusalem” (1:2; also, 1:12). Later in the text, however, Qohelet will offer instructions that seemingly communicate a subordinate relationship to monarchs and other powerful persons (4:1; 5:7-8; 8:2-5; 10:20); still, the literary figure of Qohelet initially assumes a royal persona who introduces the concept of wisdom into the book as a means for investigating “all that has been done under the heavens” (1:13). Under this royal persona, “King Qohelet” states that he has increased his wisdom and knowledge, and claims to be wiser than those who have come before him (1:16). The king sets his heart upon knowing wisdom, madness, and folly, but explains the experience as a “striving of the wind” (1:17), claiming that “in much wisdom is much vexation,

¹⁵ For a similar perspective, see Lisa Michele Wolfe, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, Wisdom Commentary 24 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020), xlix-lii. Wolfe also chooses to not translate הבל and use a transliteration, yet does so to not restrict its meaning and maintain the potential of its full semantic range.

and as knowledge increases, pain increases” (1:18). King Qohelet then undertakes a test to see what is pleasurable and good for humans, using wisdom as a guide (2:1-3). This “test” ultimately amounts to the building and establishing of an elaborate estate (2:4-8), resulting in King Qohelet offering a grand self-proclamation that he “became great,” surpassing all who were before him in Jerusalem. King Qohelet adds that in his ascension to greatness “his wisdom remained” with him throughout his exploration (2:9).

Despite the claims to royal authority as the “Son of David” (1:2), it is likely that Qohelet’s “royal persona” is, as scholars have noted, a “royal fiction.” The presentation of King Qohelet resembles royal autobiographies and inscriptions that were prevalent in ancient Near Eastern literature.¹⁶ While the grand claims of self-glorification are typical of boasts in royal inscriptions, Michael Fox reads their use here ironically, evidenced by the pessimistic turn that begins in 2:11-18. Moreover, as Thomas Krüger aptly states, the book of Qohelet overall maintains “an astonishingly critical view of power and dominion”¹⁷ (see below). If Qohelet’s royal persona is read and understood as an ironic depiction of a “wise king,” then it can be deduced that the persona of King Qohelet is contributing to this critical view and not contradicting it. Read in this way, the royal persona can be understood as a satirical critique of an “elite” wisdom, as well as a “double-voiced discourse” that will also introduce and contribute to emphases of wisdom that get picked up and carried on later in the text by the “sage Qohelet.”

(a) Satire, Parody, and Bakhtin’s Double-Voiced Discourse

Understanding Qohelet’s royal persona as satire is somewhat tenuous, as recent theorists have noted how the use of satire resists any broad or easy definition.¹⁸ Rather than a literary genre that maintains rigid boundaries, satire is better understood as a “mode” or practice that can take diverse forms through varying mediums. As a result, John T. Gilmore explains that when describing something as satire it is more appropriate to use the adjective “satiric,” than to classify with the noun “satire.”¹⁹ This is because satiric acts (and texts) can be diverse in content and

¹⁶See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 153-155; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 119.

¹⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 4.

¹⁸ For recent discussions on the nature, history, and use of satire see John T. Gilmore, *Satire, The New Critical Idiom* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018); Jonathan Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). For a technical overview, see Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

¹⁹ Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*, 10.

presentation, yet function to send “distinct signals” to the audience that a satiric act is taking place.

In spite of this diversity and resisting of easy definition, at its core satire is dependent on having a target and an audience, and can “only be effective if it is perceived by persons other than its author to be such.”²⁰ As a result, satire is understood to be highly contextual to current events surrounding its production; satiric acts will primarily target real-world situations, specific individuals, or common types of human behavior within that moment of history. This can lead to difficulty in identifying satire within different and past contexts, since “extremely successful topical satires can fail to last as the situations which gave rise to them fade from public consciousness.”²¹

This undoubtedly complicates the interpretation of Qohelet’s royal persona as satire. However, the extreme rhetoric of grand claims of wisdom may suggest that the text is providing a satiric portrayal of elite and powerful figures who claim to embody wisdom. While it cannot be known for certain if the author(s) were targeting a specific individual or a typical figure within society, Qohelet’s attempt at satire may be enlightened by drawing it into a dialogical relationship with the *Tobiad Romance* and the figures of Joseph and Hyrcanus—local wealthy figures who narratively embody a certain type of wisdom, as was explored in chapter III. More will be said about this specific dialogic relationship in the following chapter.

Beyond attempts at identifying possible targets, consideration of Qohelet’s initial chapters in terms of satire must entail an understanding of how the text’s rhetoric invites satiric interpretations. Satire can take different forms, but Greenberg explains that at minimum satiric content “requires a *fantasy* (specified as grotesque), and a *moral standard* (possibly implicit).”²² Put otherwise, satire will embellish the reprehensible aspects of its target to underscore their failure as moral subjects. Satire can include many different techniques, such as irony, exaggeration, obscenity, humor, mockery, judgement, etc.; the common thread of these techniques is that when they are employed within satire they are utilized “to persuade an audience to take a particular view of the target.”²³ For the royal persona in Qohelet, particular

²⁰ Gilmore, *Satire*, 2-3.

²¹ Gilmore, *Satire*, 5. See also Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*, 21-22.

²² Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*, 12.

²³ Gilmore, *Satire*, 13. However, depending upon the nature of the audience, this can lead to unintended results.

techniques may include irony and exaggeration (or, hyperbole) that invite the audience to recognize a parody of a king who claims to be wise, yet whose actions demonstrate him as overtly pretentious and exploitative.

Parody is a common technique of satire, and understood in a Bakhtinian sense it represents a specific type of “double-voiced discourse” within a dialogic and heteroglot conception of language.²⁴ According to Bakhtin, all types of double-voiced discourse have a twofold direction; that is, words are “directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech*.”²⁵ Within double-voiced discourse there is the recognition of a second context within the words of a speaker or author, wherein they adopt and take over another’s utterance that itself becomes “a referential object toward which something is directed” by the author/speaker.²⁶

For Bakhtin parody as double-voiced discourse occurs when the author speaks in someone else’s discourse, and in effect “introduces into that [original] discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one.”²⁷ This means that use of parody by an author/speaker acts to intentionally treat the discourse of another critically and hostilely, forcing the other’s discourse to serve “directly opposing aims” from what was intended by the original speaker. In this sense, the discourse of the other “has been tested, and found not only wanting, but necessary to dispute” by the present speaker through their utterance.²⁸ In this sense the other’s discourse is used ironically in that its use is meant to convey “aspirations that are hostile to it.”²⁹

Parodistic double-voiced discourse, like all satire, can be diverse in its content and presentation. One may parody another’s specific style, or the parody may target “another’s socially typical or individually characterological manner of seeing, thinking, and speaking.” As

²⁴See specifically Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 185-203. For key secondary analysis, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 142-159; Ken Hirschkop, *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 81-83, 88-98. For an overview on Bakhtin’s contribution to the discourse surrounding satire and the novel, see Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*, 160-161; Griffin, *Satire*, 41-42.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 185. Italics original.

²⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 186-187.

²⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 193. Bakhtin specifically identifies parody as an example of “passive double-voiced words.”

²⁸ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 152.

²⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 193.

Bakhtin notes, each act will maintain varying depths of parody: a speaker may simply parody another's superficial use of speech, or the parody may strike at "the very deepest principles governing another's discourse."³⁰ In whatever form or depth, the parodist will indicate the grounds of disagreement with the other by making the objectionable aspect of the target's discourse deliberately "palpable."

One way this palpability is accomplished is by exaggerating the target's typical stylistic features that the parodist finds objectionable.³¹ For Qohelet's royal persona, the scribe(s) who produced it appears to employ satire through an act of parody by taking over the discourse of a socially elite figure for "critical and hostile purposes." The objectional aspects of the royal figure appear palpable through the figure's conception of wisdom, which appears to represent an intellectual and practical ability to achieve the king's own individual goals of status and wealth. However, this wisdom can come across as reprehensible and morally void since it does not demonstrate any type of moral or social virtue characteristic of traditional wisdom, especially those which kings were expected to embody (Prov 16:12; 20:28; 28:16; 29:4). The satire overtly exaggerates the discourse of "elite" wisdom through the king's self-aggrandizing claims that underscore his lack of moral virtue.

(b) The Pretentiousness of King Qohelet

The satiric parody becomes palpable in how King Qohelet makes grand and exaggerated claims of his actions, possessions, and wisdom. The king claims to search "with wisdom...*all* that has been done under the heavens" (1:13), has *more* wisdom than any predecessors (1:16), furthers his greatness by surpassing "*all* who were before [him] in Jerusalem," and did not withhold from himself "*all* that he desired" (2:9-10). Further, the parody can be most fully discerned through the overt imperial pretentiousness that is demonstrated in the king's effort to build and establish an elaborate estate in Qoh 2:1-10.

King Qohelet initially proclaims that he is going to "test" his heart with pleasure (2:1), a process that is elaborated upon in 2:3: "I explored with my heart (תרתי בלבי), to stimulate³² my body with wine, and my heart guided by wisdom and to hold with folly, until I might see [what

³⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 194.

³¹ Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 153.

³² Hebrew verb גָּשַׁח. *DCH* suggests the translation of "stimulate" or "sustain" within this context since the object is one's body/flesh and the accusative is wine. Typical translations of this term are "to drag, haul, pull along." I follow the suggestion of the *DCH*, as it seems to be the most appropriate considering the nature of the verb and the context within which it is used.

is] good (אִי־זָה טוֹב) for a human—what they will do under the heavens the number of days of their life.” The initial verb of תּוֹר in this verse carries connotations of exploring, studying, and investigating, indicating that King Qohelet is undergoing an epistemological process of attempting to gain some knowledge or perspective.³³ This verb is similarly used two other times within Qohelet and is closely associated with wisdom, as a process that occurs either “with wisdom” (1:13), or with wisdom as the object of inquiry (7:25). In this instance, the king’s heart is guided by wisdom as he is “exploring” the basic ethical inquiry of determining what is “good” for humanity.³⁴

As was delineated in chapter II, ethical concerns were of central importance to the “traditional” conception of wisdom contained within Proverbs, notably in how Proverbs advocates for the social-moral virtues of “justice, righteousness, and equity” (Prov 1:3). While King Qohelet’s discourse on wisdom appears to also engage in an ethical exploration of what is “good” for humanity, it appears to significantly vary from the ethical mandates within the wisdom of Proverbs. As Krüger points out, the ethical inquiry of determining “the good” for humans was also a concern in the prophecy of Micah: “It is told to you, human, what is good (מִה־טוֹב): and what does YHWH require of you, but to do justice (מִשְׁפָּט), and to love faithfulness, and to go humbly with your god?” (Mic 6:8). Micah’s emphasis on “justice” as central to the “good” for humans appears to be reflecting, or at least coinciding with, Proverbs’ emphasis on justice as a social virtue of wisdom.³⁵ Yet King Qohelet’s use of wisdom does not enact any sense of Proverbs’ social-moral virtue when determining the “good” for humans. Krüger explains that the “good” for King Qohelet, in opposition to its description in Micah, demonstrates a noticeable shift away from the “well-being of the community” toward “only what is good for the individual.”

For King Qohelet, this “good” is believed to be discovered through the enactment of a particular conception of wisdom that involves one taking action “in accordance with their *own*

³³ תּוֹר is also the verb is also used to in Numbers 13:2 do describe what the Israelite spies did when they were sent into Canaan. Seow observes that the ancient sources interpreted this act as “some sort of mental activity” (*Ecclesiastes*, 126). Fox offers a similar observation by noting that the heart (לֵב) “is the area *within which* Qohelet pursues his exploration...” (*A Time to Tear Down*, 177).

³⁴ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 65.

³⁵ For a recent overview of the scholarship on the relationship between wisdom and the prophetic, and a Bakhtinian analysis on the relationship between these two traditions, see Timothy J. Sandoval, “Propohetic and Proverbial Justice: Amos, Proverbs, and Intertextuality,” in *Second Wave Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 131-151.

goals.”³⁶ In the following verses of 2:4-9, King Qohelet’s process of exploring “the good” for humans will be conducted through the individual acts of increasing his *own* “works”³⁷ (2:4)—actions that will primarily involve building and establishing a large, wealthy estate. The goals and actions for King Qohelet can only be accomplished using an extensive amount of wealth that would have been only available to a few individuals or families. The variation from wisdom’s emphasis on social-moral virtues to the hyper-focus on the individual exploitations of a wealthy individual illustrates the “grotesque” in relation to wisdom’s moral standard for communal well-being, thus inviting satiric interpretations of this figure.

The satiric and ironic caricature of a great king who neglects wisdom’s social-moral virtues can be additionally discerned in how the self-centeredness of King Qohelet deviates from the content of actual reports, inscriptions, and texts of rulers in the ancient Near East, and those of Hellenistic era kings. As Krüger explains, these texts often contained boasting “not only of [the king’s] wisdom and wealth but also about the promotion of religious cults and the welfare of their subjects.”³⁸ For example, Y.V. Koh has surveyed various inscriptions from West Semitic kings and argues that Qohelet may have adopted this literary convention, though with “notable differences.”³⁹ Koh observes that, similar to Qohelet, these West Semitic royal inscription contain boasting of the king’s wealth and reports of their building projects. However, these inscriptions often include statements of how the king has been beneficial to their subjects, particularly describing the king’s role in bringing peace to their land and economic prosperity consisting of abundant harvests with “filled granaries.” Descriptions of any wide-spread benefit are absent in the boasting of King Qohelet since, as Koh summarizes, King Qohelet’s boast centers on his “self-indulgent merry-making activities.”

The satiric element is particularly highlighted when King Qohelet’s boasts are juxtaposed with a Hellenistic poem written in praise of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, a text written in the early third century for the purpose of glorifying the Ptolemy and propagating his “self-image.”⁴⁰ The

³⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 65. Italics added.

³⁷ Hebrew noun מַעֲשֵׂה. Fox notes this term could refer to either “actions” or “property,” but is probably best translated ambiguously here. The verbal form of עָשָׂה used in 2:5, 6, 7, 8 carry the sense of “to earn” or “to acquire” (*A Time to tear Down*, 179).

³⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 65.

³⁹ Y.V. Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth*, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 79. See especially pages 78-81.

⁴⁰ Text and translation are from Michael Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 448-450 (448).

two texts are similar in that they boast of the incredible wealth obtained by each royal figure. Whereas King Qohelet is said to have amassed “silver and gold and the possessions of kings and the provinces” (Qoh 2:8), becoming “great” and surpassing “all who were before [King Qohelet] in Jerusalem,” Ptolemy II’s poem of praise similarly states that “In wealth [Ptolemy] could outweigh all the kings, so great are the riches that come daily from everywhere to his opulent home...” While these statements on their excessive wealth have similarities, the results of the wealth differ. Ptolemy’s wealth is celebrated because “his people go about their occupations in security,” with the poem claiming that no enemy has “crossed the teeming Nile” or come from “a swift ship with hostile intent” to steal from villagers or “seize the herds of Egypt.” There is no such benefit noted in King Qohelet’s boast, and conversely King Qohelet will eventually lament having to leaving what he has obtained to one who will come after him (Qoh 2:18). Beyond the royal autobiography, the book of Qohelet further laments how wealth is being extracted from those who labor by other entities (Qoh 2:21; 6:1-2).⁴¹

Koh also notes how a major feature in the royal boasting of West Semitic inscriptions is the pivotal role that kings play in building and repairing temples, a feature that is also absent in Qohelet. While Koh does state that this absence in Qohelet may be due a king in Jerusalem not feeling the need to supplement the already established temple, none of Qohelet’s wealth or action is said to be dedicated to any “religious” endeavor. This absence is glaring when compared with the poem praising Ptolemy II, who is particularly extolled for his dedication to the gods. In addition to providing ample security, Ptolemy is said to spend his wealth on extravagant offerings made to the gods: “in [Ptolemy’s] wealthy house the gold does not lie useless in piles like the wealth of the ever-toiling ants. Much of it is received by the glorious homes of the gods, where he always offers first fruits together with other offerings...” The poem also describes beautiful statues that Ptolemy had built for the temples, and how at the appropriate times he burns on the alters “many fat thighs of oxen,” which can be assumed to be some type of sacrifice. Within this ancient context, such actions would have been believed to have been done to appease the gods so that they would provide favorable conditions of security, well-being, and prosperity to the king’s population.

King Qohelet provides no offerings and is in no way associated with the temple in his autobiography; instead, the text repeatedly states that his silver, gold, cattle, flocks, possessions,

⁴¹ A fuller analysis of these passages will be offered in Section 5.04.

and all other parts of his elaborate estate were established and acquired “for myself” (יָלֵךְ). This repetition signals a hyperbolic tone emphasizing that none of this king’s actions are being done for the people living under the king’s rule. Ptolemy’s wealth is celebrated for what it provides for the well-being of the people and how a significant portion is dedicated to the gods. Within the royal autobiography of King Qohelet any altruistic action or concern with the broader population seems to be outside of his purview. This sharpens the text’s satiric critique of Ptolemaic era royal figures, and functions to expose the self-centeredness of these figures in contrast to the poems of celebration.

The individual emphasis of King Qohelet also occurs in the repeated use of the first-person when describing the building activity: “*I* built houses and planted vineyards for myself” (2:4) and “*I* made for myself...” (2:5-6). However, it is probably a safe, and somewhat obvious, assumption that a single king or elite figure would not be engaged in the difficult and arduous labor that included: building houses; planting vineyards, gardens, and orchards; digging out irrigation channels to sustain a forest; or overseeing and managing a large flock and herd of cattle (2:5-7). It could also be assumed that the silver, gold, and possessions acquired by the king (2:8) were likely obtained through purchase or trade with the crops and herds that were produced on the estate—again, the result of labor that was not done by the king’s hands.

Yet, the description of the establishment of this estate is not far from reality, as it coincides with the increasing shift in agricultural production in the Hellenistic age described in chapter III where small-scale, subsistence farmers were continually being uprooted by estates owned by wealthy elites. These estates were used for the large-scale production of a few commodities, particularly vines for the production of wine. The cultivation of vines appears to be a focus for King Qohelet in 2:4, not to mention the king’s stated desire to “stimulate” his body with wine in 2:3. The estate’s cultivation and production of wine would have been dependent upon the labor of tenant farmers and day laborers, whose labor would have been reallocated to estates through the economic mechanisms of taxation and indebtedness. Additionally, possible labor on the estate could have come from slaves who were themselves commodified and trafficked. While the use of day laborers and tenant farmers may be assumed within the text, the king’s participation in commodifying, trafficking, and breeding slaves is made explicit in Qoh

2:7. Thus, despite the king's first-person claims, the literal labor and production of this elaborate estate would have come off the backs of peasants and slaves.⁴²

The assumed use of peasant labor and the trafficking of slaves for establishing and tending to the estate indicate that King Qohelet is actively involved in abusing and exploiting the poor, actions that directly violate instructions within Proverbs on how the poor should be treated (Prov 14:31; 17:5; 22:16, 22-23; 28:3; 28:15). King Qohelet offers no indication that he is concerned with enacting wisdom's social-moral virtues of justice, righteousness, and equity—a primary responsibility of a king according to Proverbs (Prov 16:12; 20:28; 25:5; 29:4; 31:8-9). King Qohelet claims that his actions are done through wisdom, yet his “works” repeatedly turn out to be self-serving and exploitative.⁴³ In this way, the King's “wisdom” and way of life are actually impeding the material flourishing and well-being of most of the population.

King Qohelet's lack of social-moral virtue is made more obvious in how he summarizes his actions by stating “all that my eyes desired, I did not withhold from them” (Qoh 2:10). This statement demonstrates the king's inability to regulate his desires and shows a neglect of the wise practice of self-control. For example, the book of Proverbs emphasizes self-control and moderation, teaching the value of moderation (e.g., Prov 25:27) as the one who lacks self-control is as vulnerable as a breached city without walls (Prov 25:28). Such teachings about moderation extend to the excessive consumption of wine, which Proverbs believes can lead one away from wisdom and riches (Prov 20:1 and 21:17; see also 23:30-31). Yet King Qohelet claims to have “stimulated” himself “with wine” (Qoh 2:3), while Proverbs explicitly instructs that kings should not drink wine or any fermented drink because it could impair their ability to rule justly. Instead, such drinks are to be offered to those who are suffering and impoverished to alleviate their misery (Prov 31:4-7).

King Qohelet maintains that throughout his supposed “labor” in establishing this wealthy estate, his “wisdom” remained with him (Qoh 2:9). Sandoval describes the King's “wisdom” as representing “kind of practical shrewdness and intellectual acuity deployed to accumulate and control knowledge.”⁴⁴ This practical “wisdom” is used to guide the king in planning and

⁴² Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 66.

⁴³ For an overview of the royal persona and the moral virtue of wisdom, see the fuller discussion in Timothy J. Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon in the Royal Fiction of Ecclesiastes,” in *On Prophets, Warriors, and Kings: Former Prophets through the Eyes of Their Interpreters*, eds. George J. Brooke and Ariel Feldman, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 35-39.

⁴⁴ Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon,” 34.

executing the development of his great estate, which would have included obtaining the appropriate labor needed to build and sustain the estate. Yet, the parody of the royal figure indicates that this conception of an elite “wisdom” was also enabling and contributing to a process of exploitation. While King Qohelet purports to be the greatest king who maintains wisdom (Qoh 2:9), he is also violating the moral virtues that are maintained and advocated within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs, and will be assumed by “sage” Qohelet later in the text. This self-proclaimed “wise” king, is thus better understood as a self-aggrandizing, satiric parody of an elite persona, whose typical way of speaking and conceiving of wisdom has been taken over and re-accented within this text for “critical and hostile purposes.”

(c) Royal Frustration with Wisdom and the Slipping Persona in 2:11-12

While the royal persona maintains an arrogance in 2:1-10, the persona begins to slip, or fade, in 2:11. In Qoh 2:11 the tone of King Qohelet shifts from pride in personal achievement to despair over a lack of control regarding the king’s unavoidable death. This begins a discourse that functions to both undermine the satiric portrayal of the royal figure, while also beginning a shift in the text’s rhetoric and perspective from a “King Qohelet” to an observation on the context in which King Qohelet’s live.

In 2:10 the speaker claims their heart is “joyful”⁴⁵ from all “my labor,” which is the king’s portion (חלק).⁴⁶ But the mood and tone of the speaker shift significantly in 2:11. Both 2:11 and 2:12 begin with the idiom of “I turned” (פניתי), followed by a consideration of an idea or an accomplishment. According to Seow, this phrasing represents a shift in perspective where the speaker pivots to do “something new.”⁴⁷ Within 2:11 the speaker is considering the labor of “all the work that my hands did,” and concludes that there is “no profit (יתרון) under the sun.” While still maintaining the voice of a king, the speaker’s perspective may be subtly turning away from its satiric royal portrayal with this notable shift in tone and the third-person reference to “the king” in 2:12; additionally, the consideration of the work of one’s hands may also represent the beginning of a perspectival shift, as it is unlikely that the king would have been engaged in the

⁴⁵ Hebrew adjective שמח: here the term is used as an adjective describing the state of their heart; This verse also uses the noun form שמחה (“pleasure” or “joy”) which the speaker’s heart is said to be tested with or experiencing.

⁴⁶ This term and its use in Qohelet will be analyzed in Chapter VII.

⁴⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 137. Many scholars see 2:12 as a transition to the king’s reflections, but Schoors points out that the use of the same phrase in 2:11 and 2:12 indicates that 2:12 is a continuation of a discourse began in 2:11 (*Ecclesiastes*, 174).

manual labor of constructing his estate. Here the “double-voiced” discourse can be read as more apparent, as the persona stays, yet begins to fade away the self-aggrandizing arrogance while also merging in a sapiential perspective that will be maintained throughout the rest of the text.

The speaker moves from a sense of satisfaction regarding the completion of a great building project to the assertion there is not a profit for one’s labor. The first-person voice continues to articulate its frustration by claiming that while the wise person does have an advantage over the fool, they will both ultimately meet the same fate of death (2:15-17); additionally, one will not have control regarding the allocation of their resources, which the earlier passage reveals the speaker has taken great pride in. Qohelet judges both of these realities as *hevel*—a phrase that was not uttered in the king’s discourse of 1:12-2:10. It is in this *hevel* assessment that Carolyn Sharp discerns the king’s “self-aggrandizing reflection” to be intended ironically. Sharp explains that by judging everything as *hevel*, the text is both undermining and delegitimizing any sense of authority that the royal persona carried. For Sharp these statements should lead the reader to either conclude that Qohelet’s royal stature is still significant despite the *hevel* claim, “or we must acknowledge that it does mean nothing, and he speaks to us not as a king but as a wretch, proclaiming his edicts not from his opulent palace but from atop the ash heap of his illusions.”⁴⁸

Qoh 2:11-19 introduces themes that will continue through the text once the royal persona is left behind: the relative value of wisdom, limitations of control, the lack of profit for labor, and the only equality found “under the sun” is that each person dies. Here the frustration of the sage Qohelet over life under Ptolemaic rule comes through in the double-voiced discourse of a frustrated, caricatured king who is irritated that he can’t maintain any real profit or advantage in and beyond his life, despite having ample resources and the apparent “wisdom” that should enable him to do so. The king has “profited” and spectacularly so in social-economic terms; yet the irony is that the king is frustrated from a future loss of his profit through death, a loss that is currently being threatened upon and experienced by the majority of the population who find that “there is no profit under the sun” (2:11). Within this royal autobiography, the claims over wisdom function to support the king’s self-aggrandizing, while at the same time introducing a

⁴⁸ Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2008), 204-205.

frustration over wisdom's lack of ability to deliver lasting goods, a frustration that will manifest itself throughout the rest of the text (e.g., 1:18; 7:16; 9:18; 10:1; see also 8:10-14).

However, the speaker does acknowledge that wisdom is not completely void of value, as it maintains a “profit” (יתרון) over foolishness despite the realization that both the wise and fool will die (2:13-14). This statement sets up an emphasis that will be worked out throughout the rest of the text by “sage” Qohelet: wisdom maintains value within the book, though external factors may limit its efficacy for producing certain desired results.

In summary, “wisdom” within Qohelet's royal person represents the individualized act of discerning the “good” in life through the practical acts of planning and accomplishing one's individual goals, regardless of any broader social or moral concerns. This is not a wisdom that the text is endorsing, as it is merely a satiric parody of a self-aggrandizing elite figure. Having established how wisdom is accented within the parody of King Qohelet, I will now turn to consider how the rest of text—from the perspective of a scribal sage—uniquely accents the concept of wisdom.

Section 5.04 Wisdom's Goal in Qohelet

Beyond the royal fiction, the text of Qohelet emphasizes wisdom's ability to assist its practitioners in surviving the socio-economic and political climate of Ptolemaic Palestine. In this sense, Qohelet is emphasizing an established goal of wisdom within other “traditional” wisdom utterances. Yet, Qohelet is nuanced from these other utterances in the extent to which wisdom can determine the quality of life for those who do survive by wisdom. Whereas “traditional” conceptions emphasized how wisdom could enable a life of flourishing and well-being, Qohelet's unique re-accenting of wisdom frames its goal of life in terms of mere survival.

To understand how Qohelet is both adopting an established pattern of meaning surrounding the concept, and uniquely accenting wisdom for the text's unrepeatable context, we must begin with how Qohelet incorporates wisdom into the book's overall rhetoric.

(a) Surviving with Wisdom and its Shadowy Protection

Qohelet's expression of the value of wisdom fits within the overall rhetorical aim of the book, an aim that begins with a question posed over the profitability of labor. Following a

prologue in 1:1, and the declaration that “Everything is *hevel* (הבל)” (1:2), Qohelet poses a rhetorical and “programmatically” question that guides the text’s subsequent reflections⁴⁹:

מה־יתרון לאדם בכל־עמלו
שׁיעמל תחת השמשׁ

Qoh 1:3 What profit is there for a human in all their labor, which they will labor under the sun?

This programmatic question contains two terms that signify economic concepts, and considers the relationship between the two: “profit” (יתרון) and “labor” (עמל). The term יתרון is a *hapax legomenon* unique to Qohelet in the Hebrew Bible, yet is used ten times within the book.⁵⁰ Dahood, arguing for a Phoenician influence, notably included יתרון within a list of Qohelet’s “key words” that maintain a “distinctly commercial character.”⁵¹ While most scholars typically acknowledge the term’s economic connotation, this sense often gets downplayed both in interpretation and translation.

For example, Seow concurs with Dahood, even citing its use within an Aramaic papyrus as a reference to a “surplus” of silver. While Seow acknowledges that some uses may have “economic overtones,” he insists the term “is certainly not limited to economics” and cites 2:11, 13, 10:10-11 as instances where the term more abstractly means “something additional.”⁵² Similarly, Fox argues that when יתרון is used in comparative constructions (for example, 2:13; 6:8; 7:11, 12), it is better translated as “advantage”; however, Fox does concede that the commercial meaning “is inherent in the comparative usage: the margin of value or benefit of one thing over another.”⁵³

Since the term maintains an economic connotation, particularly within the opening question of 1:3, I will emphasize its commercial value by consistently translating יתרון as “profit.” Having argued that the text is rooted in the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine, I interpret the question of 1:3 as addressing the economic conditions that would have

⁴⁹Jennie Grillo, “Ecclesiastes,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, eds. Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 58.

⁵⁰Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 54. Occurrences in Qoh 1:3; 2:11, 13; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10, 11. The term is related to the root יתר, which means “to remain, be left over.”

⁵¹Mitchell J. Dahood, “Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth,” *Biblica* 33 (1952), 220-221.

⁵²Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 103. Similarly, see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 54-55.

⁵³Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 112. Fox argues that when the term is used absolutely it means profit “probably in the commercial sense.”

made it incredibly difficult for laborers to generate any lasting profit or wealth. As a “programmatic question” that opens the text, I read all subsequent uses of יתרון as referring back to, and providing commentary for, this opening question. Subsequently, my reading will consistently emphasize how the use of יתרון maintains economic implications.

Similarly, the term עמל also carries economic connotations and is often placed in relation to יתרון within Qohelet. As a verb, the root means “to work,” with its nominal usage similarly meaning “work”; more precisely, the term seems to indicate “painful work,” as in “toil, trouble, misery.”⁵⁴ The NRSV accurately renders עמל as “toil,” yet this translation seems a bit antiquated in contemporary usage. Additionally, the term “labor” is more common in economic jargon, representing not only the process of labor but also its function for producing within the overall economic structure.⁵⁵ I will consistently translate עמל, both in its verbal and noun form, as “labor” to emphasize how the text is reflecting upon its broader socio-economic context.

As was described in chapter III, the Ptolemaic economic system in Judea engendered economic hardship for indigenous laborers, including small-scale landowners and their kin, leading to an increase of tenant farming, slavery, and dispossession. This occurred as the result of the Ptolemies demanding heavy tribute and taxation, wherein the extraction of agricultural produce could be efficiently monetized and funneled into the wealth of the Ptolemaic Empire and its bureaucratic hierarchy. This economic process subsequently created a system of indebtedness with the agrarian population, which allowed the Ptolemies and their beneficiaries to reallocate the labor of these peasant laborers into their own revenue generating estates.

By understanding the text as a product of this socio-economic context, one can comprehend why Qohelet explicitly states that there is no economic profit (יתרון) for those engaged in manual labor (עמל) (e.g., 2:11; 5:9-10; 6:7-9). While the text will have much to say about the profitability of labor and the lack thereof, the text does associate יתרון with חכמה, indicating that wisdom may have something to offer for persons who are navigating difficulties generated by the Ptolemaic economy. Though labor on its own may not be able to generate a profit, Qohelet does assert that there is a relative profit to be gained through the appropriate use of wisdom, namely that it will enable the survival of those who practice wisdom. The connection

⁵⁴ Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 55. The term can also, as Fox, clarifies refer to “the unmentioned but implicit product of the toil.” (*A Time to Tear Down*, 98-99).

⁵⁵ See Barbara Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 39-41; The translation of “labor” is used within the NIV and the NKJV translations.

between this relative profitability and wisdom is articulated across three statements in Qohelet that connect יתרון with חכמה: 2:13, 10:10b, and 7:12.

(i) *Qoh 2:13*

וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן-הסכלות כיתרון האור מן-החשך

“And I saw that there is a **profit** for **wisdom** over foolishness, like a **profit** of light over dark.”

This statement is situated within the double-voiced discourse of Qohelet’s royal persona, but after v. 11 where, as noted, the self-aggrandizing caricature begins to slip away and themes and concerns that will be carried on throughout the rest of the text creep in. In one of Qohelet’s oft-noted “contradictions,” the statement on wisdom’s profitability over foolishness in 2:13 occurs just two verses after the declaration that “there is no profit (יתרון) under the sun”—a statement given after a consideration of what one can achieve with their labor (Qoh 2:11). The realization that labor cannot produce a profit leads into a reflection on the relationship between wisdom and foolishness in 2:12-16. Ultimately, King Qohelet will bemoan the fact that the wise and fool share “one fate” (מקרה אחד); that is, both will die without gaining an eternal remembrance (2:14-16).⁵⁶

While there is an overall pessimistic tone in this passage, the text does not go so far as to completely dismiss wisdom as meaningless and ineffectual. Rather, wisdom maintains a relative value in that it is more “profitable” to be wise than to be a fool. In this sense, Qohelet’s evaluation of wisdom’s relationship to foolishness is not unlike the “traditional” notion that being wise is more beneficial to a person than being a fool. Qohelet expresses this by comparing the profit of wisdom over foolishness to the profit of light over darkness, and offers a bit of further explanation in 2:14a by stating that “The wise have eyes in their head and the fool walks in darkness.” The association of wisdom with light and foolishness with darkness is something that Qohelet appears to adopt from “traditional” wisdom, invoking the idea that wisdom, like light, allows one to adequately see the path that one is going down (i.e., having “eyes in their head”).⁵⁷ Conversely, foolishness, like darkness, blinds one to seeing the correct path and the obstacles laid before them, making one more susceptible to being tripped up and experiencing

⁵⁶ Similarly, Qohelet will state there is “one fate” for the humans and beasts in 3:19-20.

⁵⁷ For more on the trope of “two paths” within the book of Proverbs, see chapter II of this dissertation.

devastating consequences (see Prov 4:18-19; 6:23; 13:9; 24:20; also, Qoh 10:15). Hence, as Krüger comments, Qohelet is drawing upon “the idea that wisdom improves one’s ability to orient oneself in the experience of reality,” which “is a fundamental conviction of the wisdom tradition.”⁵⁸

Of course, the pericope of Qoh 2:11-19 vehemently emphasizes wisdom’s limits—an emphasis that is not absent within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs. Proverbs acknowledges that the future is unpredictable (e.g., Prov 27:1), and human action that may seem to be right can have unexpected and undesired consequences (e.g., Prov 14:12; 16:25). Qohelet’s conception of wisdom appears to be drawing upon these “traditional” notions, but is uniquely placing a sharper and heavier emphasis upon the limits of wisdom by claiming that wisdom offers no real prospect of any lasting profit; the wise will ultimately share the same fate as the fool, and all that the great “wise” king established in 2:1-10 will be passed off to someone else without the king having any control (Qoh 2:18-19).

For Qohelet, wisdom does not hold out “enduring wealth” the way it does for Proverbs (Prov 8:18). Though the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs does not guarantee that the full acceptance of wisdom will prohibit one from experiencing any difficulties in life—as the experience of difficulties is often assumed within the instructions of Proverbs (for example, Prov 11:8; 18:10; 28:1)—the embrace of a wisdom that rightly integrates practical, social/moral, and intellectual virtues communicates a way in which a person can succeed in various contexts of life. Qohelet, conversely, is less optimistic about the wise persons’ ability to find success.

Qohelet’s evaluation of wisdom is that it maintains a relative profitability over foolishness in that it allows the wise to be better oriented in navigating the “myriad of experiences” that can occur within lived reality. Yet, the wise person is ultimately not “reliably protected from the vagaries of fate,” a sentiment Qohelet will elaborate upon in 9:11-12.⁵⁹ The emphasis upon a common “fate” (מקרה) carries, as Fox explains, the sense of what happens to someone, whether by predetermination or chance, as opposed to what one is able to do to oneself or achieve for oneself.⁶⁰ This can indicate an occurrence that is unexpected and unforeseeable, and thus what is seemingly out of one’s control no matter how wise they are, how beneficial their

⁵⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 69.

⁵⁹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 69. For a more thorough discussion of this passage, see below in Section 5.05.

⁶⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 183.

choices are, or the paths that they take. This emphasis within Qohelet may, as Krüger suggests, reflect a “defining basic trait” of existing within the context of the Hellenistic culture of Ptolemaic Palestine, where one constantly feels themselves to be “at the mercy of forces and events beyond one’s control.”⁶¹

(ii) *Qoh 10:10b*

ויתרון הכשר הכמה

“But [there is] a **profit** in the proper use of **wisdom**”

Like 2:13, Qoh 10:10b similarly draws “profit” into relation with “wisdom,” and is situated amid a list of occupational hazards and their possible consequences in Qoh 10:8-11. The clause is difficult to translate and somewhat problematic.⁶² There is some scholarly dispute as to whether it is better to read the hifil infinitive construct with the *ketiv* (הכשיר), or to follow the *qere* and understand the word as an infinitive absolute (הכשר). The verb כשר generally means “to be suitable, fit to use” (*HALOT*), but this is the only instance where this verb is used in the hifil in the Hebrew Bible. Some interpreters will emend the verb to form a noun based on an Aramaic term meaning “the able, successful man”⁶³; for example, Fox translates: “But the skilled man has the advantage of wisdom,” and Krüger: “But wisdom is the advantage of the expert.” Sandoval and Akoto offer an interesting and compelling argument that the *ketiv* is the result of the common scribal error metathesis where the ש and כ are transposed. They suggest emending הכשיר to the more common term of השכיר, and translate the phrase as “But the advantage of the hired laborer is wisdom.”⁶⁴

While this translation fits within the overall rhetoric of Qohelet’s wisdom, there is an interpretive solution that can be offered without emending the text. Seow follows the *ketiv* and translates the term as an infinitive construct, noting its common usage in Postbiblical Hebrew meaning “to permit, adapt, make appropriate, make fit” (“It is an advantage to appropriate wisdom”).⁶⁵ I follow Seow’s lead in my translation, and accept the term’s lexical definition within *HALOT*, which defines the hifil infinitive of כשר as “to use properly.” I understand this

⁶¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 69.

⁶² For a thorough overview of the various scholarly attempts at translating this line, see Timothy J. Sandoval and Dorothy BEA Akoto, “A Note on Qohelet 10,10b,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 90-95.

⁶³ see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 730; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 176-177; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 306

⁶⁴ Sandoval and Akoto, “A Note on Qohelet 10,10b,” 94.

⁶⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 318.

phrase to be the primary conditional clause of the list of occupational hazards in 10:8-11,⁶⁶ emphasizing, as Seow notes, that “one should apply wisdom properly.”⁶⁷ This is, of course, qualified by the economic term *יתרון*, indicating that some type of profit can be found when wisdom is used and applied properly.

(iii) *Qoh 7:12*

כי בצל החכמה בצל הכסף
ויתרון דעת החכמה תחיה בעליה

[To be] in the shadow of **wisdom** [is like being]⁶⁸ in a shadow of money;
and the **profit** of the knowledge of **wisdom** is it will allow its possessor to survive.

The statement in *Qoh 10:10b* may be clarified by *Qoh 7:12*, where the protection of wisdom is compared to the protection that is offered by wealth, something Proverbs also knows well (e.g., *Prov 10:15; 14:20; 18:11*). The first clause (*7:12a*) indicates that wisdom, like money, provides a shielding protection for a life that is lived “under the sun”—a common phrase used in the text (e.g., *1:3, 9* and *passim*) to denote the totality of human life, existence, and reality⁶⁹; the phrase could also be referencing life under the rule of an Egyptian foreign regime since “the Sun” was a common epithet for Egyptian Pharaohs.⁷⁰ It has been widely documented and acknowledge that, although they were Hellenistic monarchs, the Ptolemies coopted Egyptian Pharaonic status and imagery to authorize their rule of Egypt.⁷¹

Although verse 12a compares the protection of wisdom to that of wealth, wisdom is not said to lead to wealth as certain passages within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs may suggest—when read literally (*Prov 3:16; 8:18; 22:4*). Rather, the text of *Qohelet* remains somewhat ambiguous regarding the relationship between wisdom and access to material resources. In the previous verse, *Qohelet* does acknowledge a benefit of pairing wisdom with an inheritance, but does not indicate that one necessarily engenders the other (*7:11*). Riches are

⁶⁶ For a fuller exegetical discussion of this passage and the hazards it lists, see below in Section 5.05.

⁶⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 318.

⁶⁸ The MT lacks this preposition, though it is present in the LXX. According to Fox the MT “implies causality, meaning that wisdom brings with it the protection of wealth” (compare with *Prov 3:16; 8:18; 24:3*) (*A Time to Tear Down*, 256).

⁶⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 165.

⁷⁰ Knut Martin Heim, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC (Downers Grove ILL: IVP Academic: 2019), 6.

⁷¹ See J.G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt Under the Ptolemies, 305-30 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 29-54. Peter Thonemann, *The Hellenistic Age: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 24-26.

recognized as gifts that are given by God to humans, capable of producing enjoyment (5:18), and Qohelet does encourage the enjoyment of bread, wine, white clothes and oil—an imperative that would require one have access to these products (9:7-8). However, Qohelet will remain a bit nuanced from some suggestions of “traditional” wisdom in the text’s claim that being wise—or any attribute closely associated with wisdom—does not guarantee access to material resources or the achievement of desired outcomes due to the vagaries of lived experience.

The statement on wisdom’s shadowy protection in 7:12a is clarified in the verse’s following aphorism where Qohelet directly expresses the aim and value of wisdom: “the profit (יתרון) of the knowledge of wisdom (הכמה) is it will allow its possessor to survive.” The final verb of חיה is in the piel form, intensifying its meaning from “to live” in the qal to “to keep alive.” According to Fox, this statement is not intended to communicate that wisdom bestows immortality, but that it can “give protection in danger and allow a full lifespan.”⁷²

This use in Qohelet is nuanced from the verb’s use within the wisdom instruction of Proverbs. Proverbs invokes this verb four times, all in the qal form (Prov 4:4; 7:2; 9:6; 15:27). Three of its uses occur as a second imperative following a primary imperative to either accept the instruction of a wise teacher (Prov 4:4; 7:2), or to avoiding naivety (9:6); its other use is to claim that a person will live if they do not accept bribes (Prov 15:27). Of particular interest is the imperative within Prov 4:4, which occurs within a larger passage that is urging sons/students to accept and embrace their father’s instruction (Prov 4:1). The father, who is quoting and relaying the instruction that was received from his own father, instructs the student to “keep my commandments and live” (שמר מצותי וחיה). In keeping the father’s commandments, the student is also commanded to “acquire wisdom” (4:5), which the father says will bring the student the benefits of protection (4:6), exaltation and honor (4:8), and even a crown (4:9). The father relays these benefits of wisdom to motivate the son/student toward the proper action of acquiring it.

In Qohelet, however, wisdom is not communicated as providing these sorts of benefits (outside, of course, of how it is conceived within the royal parody). Understood in light of the socio-economic hardships of Ptolemaic Palestine, the emphasis within Qoh 7:12, and subsequently throughout the text, is that wisdom can empower persons with the ability to navigate and survive the exploitative circumstances experienced under Ptolemaic rule. While there is an emphasis placed upon survival, the text seems to notably stop short of communicating

⁷² Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 256. For example, see Ps. 33:19; Deut 6:24; Ezek 3:18, 13:19.

that wisdom within this context can also engender the flourishing or well-being of those who practice it.

(b) Survival in the Ptolemaic Context

Several passages within Qohelet reflect the difficult circumstances imposed by the context of Ptolemaic rule. These circumstances inevitably affect how wisdom is conceived by Qohelet, particularly in that wisdom is valued for its ability to assist persons in surviving this oppressive and exploitative reality.

As was outlined in chapter II, the virtuous wisdom taught within Proverbs is believed to contribute to the well-being and flourishing of both the individual and larger community who practice it; yet imperative to this flourishing is the ability to have adequate access to the resources that are necessary for engendering such flourishing. For Qohelet, the constant and persistent economic extraction by the Ptolemaic government generated a situation where access to adequate material resources would have, for many, been tentative at best, and engendered a context that would have made the widespread achievement of flourishing and well-being difficult. As a result, Qohelet stops short of advocating for wisdom's ability to engender flourishing, as is suggested within certain passages of the "traditional" wisdom of Proverbs (Prov 3:16; 8:18; 22:4).

While Qohelet does value wisdom over the alternative of foolishness—which ultimately leads to one's destruction—the context that the text is operating from leads Qohelet to primarily emphasize wisdom's ability to contribute to one's survival. In fact, as will be explored below, Qohelet will associate wisdom with persons who are either poor or of low social status (Qoh 4:13; 6:8; 9:9:15-16)—the ones who are seemingly experiencing the brunt of the Ptolemaic socio-economic machine. For Qohelet the lack of "profit," and subsequent exploitation of these wise persons is not a failure of wisdom, but rather of a society that robs them of the opportunity to economically prosper and so experience genuine well-being void of oppressive circumstances.

Qohelet's framing of wisdom as survival for an oppressive and extractive context includes observations regarding the difficulties and injustices of this context. These include possible references to Ptolemaic economic extraction (2:20-21; 6:1-2), the oppression caused by a ruling bureaucratic hierarchy (4:1; 5:7; 8:8), and the subsequent limited efficacy of wisdom (9:11; 10:1).

(i) *Ptolemaic Extraction: Qoh 2:20-23 and 6:1-2*

The text of Qohelet maintains a keen awareness that resources are constantly being extracted and slipping out of the hands of those who have labored for them—a marker of the Ptolemaic economy. The inability of labor and wisdom to produce any lasting profit due to constant extraction is explicated in Qoh 2:20-23:

2:20-23: And I went around, causing my heart despair upon all the labor that I labored under the sun. For there is one whose labor (עמל) is with wisdom (חכמה) and knowledge (דעת) and skill (כשרון); And to another who did not labor with the one he will give it—his portion (הלק); This is also *hevel* and a great evil. For what happens to a human in all his labor and in [the] striving of his heart that he labors under the sun? For all his days are sorrow, and his business is frustration; at night there is no rest for his heart. This is also *hevel*.

Many interpreters understand this passage as part of the King Qohelet utterance, existing as part of a longer discussion surrounding the king's anxiety about death that begins in 2:14, and a subsequent concern regarding the uncertainty of who will inherit the king's possessions after death (see 2:18-19). While this reading fits with the text's rhetoric up to this point, it also exists as part of the "double-voiced" discourse occurring around the King Qohelet figure. As was observed, this passage occurs as the speaker merges in a sapiential perspective that undermines the over-confident and self-aggrandizing wisdom displayed in 2:1-10, while also introducing concepts that will be carried on throughout the text.

Consequently, this passage can also be read as speaking to realities that are affecting a much broader population than wealthy, elite figures like King Qohelet—a reading supported by subtle shifts in the text's rhetoric. Lohfink points out that while the reflections in 2:14-19 occur in the first person, this passage represents a third person observation regarding ones who labor with "wisdom and knowledge and skill." Further, 2:22-23 seem to describe the miserable existence of one who *lives* "while one's possessions have passed to another," and thus "losing one's possessions during one's life time must be intended here."⁷³ Within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine this passage can be understood as an observation about the excruciating circumstances of subsistence farmers who do their work "with wisdom and knowledge and skill," only to have the produce of their labor consistently extracted by more powerful forces and social structures. A similar sentiment exists within Qoh 6:1-2:

⁷³ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 55.

6:1-2: There is an evil that I saw under the sun and it is great upon humans: A man whom God gives riches and wealth and honor, and there is nothing his soul is lacking from all that he desires. But God does not authorize⁷⁴ him to consume from it, for a foreigner/stranger (אִישׁ נָכְרִי) will consume it. This is *hevel* and it is an evil sickness.

In this passage Qohelet identifies those responsible for extracting the wealth from Judea: a foreign or strange man (אִישׁ נָכְרִי). Lohfink explains that this term usually refers to a foreigner, namely “non-Jews from neighboring areas,” which would include Ptolemaic rulers within Egypt.⁷⁵ Krüger explicitly links the extractive situation described in 6:2 to “the conditions of the Ptolemaic tax system in Judea,” where the ultimate beneficiary consuming from the man’s wealth is the Ptolemaic king in Alexandria.⁷⁶

While the identification of the “foreign man” may seem apparent, the identity of the one who is not able to consume from their wealth can be matter of interpretation. On one level, this figure could represent figures like King Qohelet: indigenous elite figures located in and around Jerusalem who have to kick up a significant portion of their wealth to the imperial powers so that they can continue to maintain their local high status. Read differently, it could also be referencing subsistence farmers who may in any year or season experience a bumper crop with significant yields, a situation that would have been believed to have occurred from ample rains and favorable conditions “given” by God. The crops produced in this abundant harvest would have, at least provisionally, provided the farmers with a bit of profit. However, any gain or profit achieved while under Ptolemaic rule would be minimized, if not negated, for subsistence farmers due to the heavy extraction occurring from Ptolemaic taxation. Here Qohelet could be re-emphasizing a similar observance contained within the wisdom of instruction of Proverbs: “There is much food in the tilled field of the poor, but it is swept away with no justice” (Prov 13:23).

As with 2:20-23, Qohelet does not mince words in a negative assessment of, and expression of frustration with, Ptolemaic extraction. Both passages identify these conditions as *hevel*, and the situation is further described as a “great evil” and an “evil sickness.”

⁷⁴ Hebrew שָׁלַט in 3 m. sg. Hifil form. Contains a semantic meaning of inequity, “cause to dominate” or “dominate over.” The *DCH* lists this verse as the only instance with a meaning of to “enable/empower.” The verb and its use here seem to carry the notion of God’s superiority and dominance that is manifested in what God allows or does not allow the human to do. Seow’s use of “authorize” seems most appropriate, i.e., “God does not give the right of disposal in this case.” (*Ecclesiastes*, 210).

⁷⁵ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 86.

⁷⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 125

(ii) *An Oppressive Bureaucratic Hierarchy: Qoh 4:1, 5:7, 8:8*

In addition to noting the effects of Ptolemaic extraction, Qohelet also seems to recognize that this exploitative economy operated and functioned through the cooperation of a bureaucratic hierarchy, consisting of various local officials who oversaw the enactment of Ptolemaic taxation within their jurisdictions. Qohelet not only recognizes how this structure operates, but also observes that it generates a situation of oppression and harm for the persons who are at the bottom of the hierarchy:

4:1 And again I saw all the oppressions (עשקים) that are being done under the sun. And look! [The] tears of the oppressed (עשקים), and there is not comfort for them. And from the hand of their oppressors is power (כה), but there is not comfort for them.

5:7 If (there is) oppression (עשק) of the poor and a robbery of justice and righteousness that you see in a province (מדוינה), do not be astounded about the matter. For a high one (גבה) is keeping watch above [another] high one, and higher ones above them.

8:9 All this I saw, and I gave my heart to all the work that was being done under the sun, a time when one person domineers over another, causing evil for them.

These verses indicate that “sage” Qohelet is speaking “from the standpoint of a provincial subject of an empire,” and not as the royal persona that was undertaken in 1:12-2:19.⁷⁷ As a subject of the Ptolemaic empire, the scribal sage observes and communicates the lived experience of their fellow imperial subjects.

In 4:1 Qohelet describes observing עשקים, or “oppressions”—a term parsed as a passive participle that would typically be translated as “those who are oppressed,” as it is later in the verse. However, because this is followed by another passive verb—the nifal participle of עשה—עשקים is usually understood to not be functioning as passive. According to Seow this term is best translated as an abstract noun of what is observed by the speaker as being done.⁷⁸ Included in this observation is that those who experience “all the oppressions”—the oppressed—have no comfort or relief from this brutality, while those who do the oppressing have כה, or “power.” The Hebrew term כה is commonly translated as “power” or “strength,” but its semantic range also includes “property” or “land” as indicated by its use in Prov 5:10 and Gen 4:12. Thus, while power or strength may be thought of as abstract, the use of this term in Qoh 4:1 could be read as more

⁷⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 234.

⁷⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 177. See also Job 35:9 and Amos 3:9.

directly indicating how the oppressors are deriving and maintaining their power through the control of the property and land they have amassed. In the Ptolemaic system this property was unlikely to have reverted back into the control of small-scale farmers, leaving the oppressed, peasant class with “no comfort” in this socio-economic context.

The nature of this societal oppression is further stated in Qoh 5:7, which identifies the place in which oppressions are taking place: a מדינה or a “province.” Seow explains that the etymological meaning of this term is “a place of jurisdiction,”⁷⁹ a definition similarly shared by the *DCH* which interprets it as a “place of judgment.” Fox further clarifies that the term is likely indicating whatever jurisdictional unit would have been known: an administrative unit, a province of an empire, or a city state.⁸⁰

While this should have been a space where justice was administered (c.f., Qoh 3:16), Qohelet observes a “robbery” of justice because of the hierarchy of גבה, or “high ones,” who are looking after one another. The term גבה is an adjective meaning “high” or “tall,” and is used to describe objects such as mountains (Gen 7:19), trees (Ezek 17:24), and a tower (Isa 2:15). Yet scholars such as Krüger, Fox, and Lohfink interpret this term as referring to “high-ranking” persons, namely officials integrated within the Ptolemaic ruling bureaucracy.⁸¹ Similarly, James L. Kugel has proposed that the term should be understood in relation to taxation and indebtedness due to the term’s use in Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew as a verb meaning to “take payment.” In this sense, the גבה generating oppression are “opportunistic” collectors of debt and taxes.⁸² While Kugel’s proposal has not garnered wide acceptance, it nonetheless adds to scholarly interpretations that read the גבה as persons integrated with the Ptolemaic hierarchy—persons who would have participated in the Ptolemaic objective of extracting wealth and taxes from the population and funneling it up the hierarchical ladder.

To paraphrase, Qohelet observes the existence of a group of oppressed people who are not experiencing justice because apparent corruption exists among those operating within the empire’s bureaucratic hierarchy—those whose primary objective was to efficiently extract resources from the land and tax the people who worked the land.⁸³ Those who operate in a

⁷⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 202.

⁸⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 234.

⁸¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 113-114; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 233-234; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 78-80.

⁸² James L. Kugel, “Qohelet and Money,” *CBQ* 51:1 (1989): 32-49.

⁸³ See the discussions on 5:7 in Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 234; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 79-80.

“high” place in the bureaucracy have power over the mass of people underneath them in the social ladder. Their participation within this extractive economy is, as Qoh 8:9 describes, causing an “evil” situation for the poor and socially subordinate (the majority of the population), creating an oppression for which they cannot find relief or comfort. These verses communicate Qohelet’s empirical evidence on how those who labor cannot achieve a lasting economic profit, as they are consistently being subjected to extraction, exploitation and oppression.

(iii) *The Limits of Wisdom: Qoh 9:11 and 10:1*

While wisdom assists its possessor in surviving, for Qohelet the oppressive and extractive context of Ptolemaic Palestine curtails the extent to which wisdom can enable beneficial circumstances. Qohelet’s view that wisdom itself may not produce desired results can be observed in 9:11:

9:11 Again I saw under the sun that the race⁸⁴ is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the strong; also, bread does not belong to the wise (חכמים); also, riches do not belong to the intelligent (נבנים); and, favor does not belong to those with knowledge (ידעים); for a timely misfortune (עת ופגע) happens to all.

This verse emphasizes that expected results are not guaranteed based on the abilities of persons and how they may be socially categorized. The verse begins by noting how one’s physical capabilities do not automatically engender success: the race isn’t won by the swift and the battle is not delivered to the strong. Qohelet then makes an interesting shift to consider intellectual and/or character traits, claiming that outcomes of (obtaining) bread for the wise (חכמים), riches to the intelligent (נבנים), and favor for the knowledgeable (ידעים) are also not guaranteed. While it seems obvious that the swift and the strong would expect to be able to physically overcome, the list of outcomes connected to intellectual and character traits are not as apparent. Krüger explains that Qohelet is likely presupposing a prevalent conception wherein the wise, intelligent, and knowledgeable expect their skillsets to deliver them goods such as bread, riches, and favor—an idea presented within certain teachings of “traditional” wisdom (c.f., Prov 8:18-21, 35; Sir 51:23-24, 28-29). Within this verse Qohelet de-emphasizes this

⁸⁴ Hebrew מרוץ; this term is a biblical *hapax*, and does not occur anywhere else in classical Hebrew. It has been argued that this clause corresponds to Greek uses, providing a late date for Qoh (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 684). Seow, among others, objects to this notion by noting the comparisons between מרוץ and an Ethiopic term meaning “race, course, contest”; Further, Seow states that “swift” (קלים) is not necessarily referring to an athletic achievement in a Hellenistic athletic event, but is used to describe horses in battle (Isa 30:16; Jer 46:6) or people in deadly pursuit (2 Sam 2:18-19; Amos 2:14-16) (*Ecclesiastes*, 307). Seow’s statement does make sense with the following clause describing battle, however the two clauses do not have to be read as both describing military or battle situations, but rather juxtaposing two areas of competition.

“prevalent” notion of wisdom, and states that the goods of sustenance, wealth, and favor cannot be guaranteed.⁸⁵

Qohelet supports this position by claiming that a “timely misfortune” can fall upon all such persons, irrespective of their physical and mental capabilities. Both Fox and Seow read the construction of עת ופגע (lit “time and occurrence”) as a hendiadys that connotes misfortune.⁸⁶ Fox comments that even if the phrase is semantically neutral, “the occurrences Qohelet has in mind in this verse are unfortunate and deprive people their due.” As has been noted, Qohelet perceives a context of living “under the sun,” with its subsequent vagaries, as effecting the access that persons will have to resources (bread, riches), and prohibiting one from achieving a desired result (victory, favor). Qohelet sees it more likely, in this context, that persons will encounter a “timely misfortune” beyond their control.

As has been delineated, Qohelet’s claims of the limited efficacy of wisdom do not void wisdom of all value, nor generate a crisis regarding some perceived impoverishment of wisdom. As Fox astutely observes, Qohelet operates out of a perspective of wisdom but acknowledges that it “cannot guarantee the advantages that it *should* produce and that it *deserves* to produce.”⁸⁷ It can be added that this acknowledgement may be rooted in the experience of living under oppressive Ptolemaic rule. The sentiment of disappointment for a context that inhibits wisdom’s ability to produce desired results is expressed through a proverb in Qoh 10:1:

Dead flies cause a bowl (יביע)⁸⁸ of perfumed oil to spoil;
A little folly is weightier than wisdom and honor.

Fox summarizes that Qohelet sees the efficacy of wisdom as being vulnerable to human folly and the vicissitudes of life, a belief that is not unlike the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 22:3; 27:12). However, Qohelet seems to experience this more sharply, placing a greater emphasis upon wisdom’s vulnerability due to the context in which this utterance is being produced. To put it more bluntly, a socio-historical context manipulated by oppressive power

⁸⁵ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 175.

⁸⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 296. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 308. According to Seow the only other occurrence of term פגע is in 1 Kgs 5:18 where it refers to a misfortune, and the term is probably bested rendered as “incident” or “accident.”

⁸⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 89. Italics original.

⁸⁸ This phrase is parsed as a 3.m.sg. hifil imperfect of נבע. However, both Fox and Seow note how this verb is problematic. The verb can mean “to bubble” or “to be poured out” which doesn’t make much sense. Both argue that if the yod is emended to a gimmel, then it can mean “bowl” or “chalice,” which fits better. Either a “bowl of perfumed oil” or “poured out perfumed oil.” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 312; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 301).

structures inevitably limits for Qohelet what the practice of wisdom can accomplish; specifically, within the Ptolemaic context Qohelet perceives that a heightened chance of survival is as much as wisdom can contribute during this *hevel* and “evil” time marked by “timely misfortunes.”

(c) The Wise and the Fool

Although the Ptolemaic context limits what the practice of wisdom can accomplish, Qohelet does not void wisdom of all value. The emphasis upon survival articulated in Qoh 7:12 can be read as responding to a question raised in Qoh 6:8a: “what profit (יתרון) is there for the wise over the fool?” Much like “traditional” wisdom, Qohelet emphasizes the binary of wisdom and foolishness. Within this constructed binary the wise can adequately navigate their circumstances and advance in life, while fools are said to reject instruction, act impulsively, and inevitably meet an undesired fate (e.g., Prov 10:8; 14:3, 16; 21:20).

Qohelet unequivocally insists that there is a profit (יתרון) for wisdom in relation to foolishness, like there is a “profit of light over dark” (Qoh 2:13). Qohelet reasons that that the wise have a benefit over fools because they “eyes in their head and the fool walks in darkness” (2:14), indicating that wise persons can perceive and adequately navigate their existence. By contrast, Qohelet claims that fools “fold their hands” and cause their own deterioration (4:5), are often worn out and lose their way (10:14), and speak evil and ignorant words (4:5 10:12-13). In two different instances Qohelet speaks of the fool as consuming themselves (4:5; 10:12), possibly indicating—similar to that of Proverbs—that foolish behavior is a danger to its practitioner and can lead to an untimely death (e.g., Prov 1:32; 10:21). This view is affirmed in Qoh 7:17 where the text instructs its hearers to not be a fool, and rhetorically asks: “Why should you die when it is not your time?”

While foolish behavior may lead to an untimely death—thereby inhibiting survival—Qohelet does insist that the wise and fool each have the same fate, seemingly indicating that an untimely death could await anyone regardless of their intellectual or moral status. The speaker in the text, as one who is presumably wise, proclaims that the fate of the fool “will also befall me!” (2:15). The fate that Qohelet is referring to is death, and a subsequent lack of remembrance: “The days that already have come, they are all forgotten. How can the wise person die alongside of the fool?” (2:16; see also 9:15). “Traditional” wisdom is aware that wise and righteous

persons do eventually experience death,⁸⁹ but does maintain that wisdom advances life and brings honor to those who practice it (Prov 3:35; 13:18; 21:21). Qohelet seems to vary from this “traditional” concept that emphasizes positive outcomes for wisdom, and instead is much more constrained in promoting the benefits of wisdom and righteousness, particularly in their relation to the binary opposites of foolishness and wickedness.

While Qohelet’s grief regarding the fate of the wise may seem to temper Qohelet’s emphasis upon wisdom’s ability to enable survival, this ambivalence may be expressing the frustration of living through the brutal context of Ptolemaic Palestine. For Qohelet, a wise person is better prepared to navigate whatever difficult and oppressive circumstances they may experience; however, the text also acknowledges that life “under the sun” is unpredictable and harsh, as “a timely misfortune” is capable of befalling anyone and robbing them of the life and survival that they are striving for (Qoh 9:11-12). While the text observes and advocates for the relative benefits of wisdom over foolishness, nothing is guaranteed for Qohelet.

(d) The Poor and the Wise

Qohelet’s persistent emphasis upon wisdom’s limited efficacy within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine may be indicative of where Qohelet is socially locating the practice of wisdom. While Qohelet does begin with a satiric “royal fiction,” much of the text seemingly operates from a perspective that lacks any significant sense of social power. For example, following the question posed in 6:8a regarding the profitability of the wise over the fool, Qohelet asks: “What profit (יתרון) is [there] for the poor who knows to go before the living?” (6:8b) In addition to depicting a dialectical relationship between wisdom and foolishness, Qohelet parallels a question regarding the wise with a question regarding the poor, suggesting that wisdom can be located with persons of low socio-economic status—the majority of the population in Ptolemaic Palestine.

The association of wisdom with persons of low socio-economic status may be alluded to in the text’s emphasis upon survival (7:12), but is made explicit in the mentions of a wise peasant in 4:13 and 9:14-16. Qoh 4:13 not only contrasts the wise and the fool, but additionally contrasts the social status of each figure. Within this verse Qohelet claims it is better to be a “youth [who is] a peasant and wise” (ילד מסכן וחכם) than a king who is “an elder and a fool” and does not know

⁸⁹ See the prayer of Agur in Prov 30:7. The unjust death of the righteous was also a theological issue for early apocalyptic texts and their emerging view of resurrection—See also 1 Enoch 22-25 and Dan 12:1-3.

to heed warnings anymore. The wise peasant appears again in 9:14-16 (אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכֵם) where it is indirectly contrasted with a besieging king, emphasizing wisdom's value for overcoming impositions of power.

Significant within these references is the term מִסְכֵּן, which I translate as “peasant,” and interpret as referring to a poor laborer within an agrarian society. This term is a *hapax legomenon* within the Hebrew Bible, only occurring in these two instances in Qohelet. Grammatically, the term functions in both places as an adjective that is paired with חָכֵם to qualify a youth (יָלֵד) (4:13), and a man (אִישׁ) (9:15). While many translations render מִסְכֵּן simply as “poor,”⁹⁰ there is ample reason to believe that the term may have a more specific and nuanced referent. Both Seow and Schoors connect the term to an Akkadian cognate that represents persons of “ordinary status.”⁹¹ Schoors adds that the Akkadian word more specifically refers to “a plebian”—i.e., the class in between nobles and slaves, but still understood as “underprivileged.”⁹²

Further clarification may be gleaned from the LXX, which translates מִסְכֵּן with the Greek πένης (*penēs*). Greek lexicons will gloss πένης as “poor,” and note that it refers to one who has to work for one's living and sustenance.⁹³ In this sense, the term is not only referring to an abstract economic status, but is more specifically referring to a worker of low economic status who can be subjected to, and contrasted with, the upper classes in society.⁹⁴ This interpretation of the term is supported by its other uses in the LXX, notably within in Deut. 24:14. Here the noun πένης is paired with the adjective ἐνδεοῦς (“needy, destitute”) to translate the Hebrew construction שְׂכִיר עָנִי וְאֲבִיּוֹן (“the poor and needy hired worker”). Since no apparent Greek term is

⁹⁰ For example: NRSV, JPS, and CEB.

⁹¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 183, 310. Seow thus translates אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכֵם as “the wise commoner” in 9:15 and downplays how the term refers to economic status, arguing that the issue “is not economics but social status” (183). However, as has been argued throughout this dissertation, economic and social status are inextricably linked within the Ptolemaic environment. While Seow may be correct in acknowledging how the term references an “ordinary” person, it can also be presumed that an “ordinary” person would have been socially located within the peasant class in Ptolemaic Palestine.

⁹² Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 444.

⁹³ “πένης,” *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 499-500; C.f., its use in NT 2 Cor 9:9.

⁹⁴ A fairly common term within the LXX—76 occurrences (searched with Accordance Bible Software). The term is often used as a broad reference poor or lower class persons who are susceptible to oppression or being taken advantage of (e.g., Amos 2:6, 4:1, 8:4), and often in need of assistance—either by direct action from the Divine (e.g., Jer 20:13; Ps 9:10, 11:6, 69:6), or through legal and moral teachings that protect their rights/well-being (e.g., Ex 23:6; Deut 15:11; Prov 22:22, 31:9; Zech 7:10; Sir 29:9). As such, πένης often occurs as the Greek translation for the Hebrew terms אֲבִיּוֹן (“poor, needy”) and דָּל (“poor, weak”).

used to translate שכיר, it seems likely that πένης is functioning to translate the construction of שכיר עני, thus referencing not only one who is poor (עני), but also a “hired worker” (שכיר).⁹⁵

This connotation can easily be assumed within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine, where מסכן may be referring to a tenant farmer or day laborer on a large estate, or a subsistence farmer eking out their existence on marginal land. These laborers were heavily taxed and, consequently, were constantly living under the threat of indebtedness. Significantly, Qohelet uses this peasant figure as emblematic of a wise person, and in each instance the מסכן is juxtaposed with a foolish king or brutal ruler, highlighting the lack of societal power by the מסכן. But as Schoors explains, Qohelet’s combining of מסכן with חכם “enhances the idea that the wise must be heeded irrespective of social class.”⁹⁶

It is here where we begin to glimpse the crux of Qohelet’s concept of survival wisdom. Writing from the perspective of a scribal retainer, the authorship of Qohelet perceives a reality of inequality occurring “under the sun,” where “one person domineers over another, causing evil” (8:9), and wisdom is not able to overcome these inequalities; however, while neither labor nor wisdom can deliver a lasting material profit, persons who are lacking in wealth are not necessarily lacking in wisdom—a sentiment present within “traditional” wisdom (e.g., Prov 16:19; 19:1, 22; 28:6, 11) but re-accented and uniquely emphasized by Qohelet. Qohelet perceives an operative wisdom among those who labor without profit, and it is this wisdom that enables their survival in what Qohelet perceives as an extractive and unjust social context.

Section 5.05 What Wisdom Consists Of

By emphasizing wisdom’s ability to engender survival, Qohelet will more specifically conceive of wisdom as the utilization of practical skills, knowledge, and shrewdness that enable persons to survive the oppressive structures and extractive economy of Ptolemaic imperial rule, as has been noted. Wisdom empowers its practitioners to navigate difficult and dangerous circumstances so that they may continue in life and have the best chance at avoiding an untimely death. These dangerous circumstances may include threats by more powerful figures and hazardous working conditions, and wisdom provides adequate knowledge and skills for negotiating these situations. For Qohelet this specifically includes: shrewd social maneuvering,

⁹⁵ This verse is instructing that wages not be withheld from any hired worker/day laborer, whether they be Israelite or a resident alien. Because they are a laborer in need (Hb: עני; Gk: πένης), Deut 24:15 instructs that they be paid wages before sunset.

⁹⁶ Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 444.

the appropriate use of skilled labor, maintaining an awareness of when and how to act, and navigating social situations of powerlessness; it also entails maintaining communal solidarity—though Qohelet’s focus on social virtue is not as sharp as it is in “traditional” wisdom like Proverbs. This type of wisdom constructs the shade that allows its possessor to survive (7:12) the onslaught of *hevel* occurring under the sun of Ptolemaic rule.

(a) Qoh 9:10-18 and the מסכן חכם

Qohelet’s specific accentuation of the evaluation and emphases of wisdom is perhaps most thoroughly delineated in 9:10-18, a passage that speaks to the limitations of wisdom, but also promotes the example of a wise peasant (איש מסכן חכם) who helped save the city.

(i) 9:10-12

While the brief narrative involving the מסכן חכם is not introduced until 9:13, the statements leading up to the illustration, some of which were already briefly discussed, clarify and elucidate how Qohelet is conceiving of wisdom:

Qoh 9:10 All that your hand finds to do, do it with strength because there is not work or thought or knowledge (דעת) or wisdom (חכמה) in sheol, which is where you are going. (11) Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the strong; also, bread does not belong to the wise persons (חכמים); also, riches do not belong to the intelligent ones; and also, favor does not belong to those with knowledge; for a timely misfortune (כי־עת ופגע)⁹⁷ happens to all. (12) For humans do not know their time; like fish who have been caught in a bad net, and like the birds caught in a snare, humans are trapped for an evil time (לעת רעה), which fall upon them suddenly.

Following a recognition on the common fate of death and a call to enjoyment as the portion of one’s labor (9:1-9), Qohelet circles back to death’s finality by emphasizing that the work of one’s hands be done with strength since there “is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in sheol” (9:10). Qohelet links knowledge and wisdom with the work of one’s hands by emphasizing the importance of present activity.

The link between wisdom and the work of one’s hands here varies from other concepts of wisdom, namely that maintained by Ben Sira. Sirach 38:24-39:4 is a discourse elevating the “wisdom of scribe” by drawing sharp distinction between those with wisdom and those who labor with the hand—specifically naming farmers, artisans, smiths, and potters (Sir 38:25-30). Ben Sira recognizes, and even applauds the contributions of these labors who “rely on their

⁹⁷ See section 5.04 for a fuller discussion of this phrase and its translation.

hands, and are all skillful in their own work” (Sir 38:31; NRSV). While these persons “maintain the fabric of the world,” Ben Sira stops short of recognizing their work as the work of “wisdom.” For Ben Sira, wisdom is associated with the work of scribes, who require an “opportunity of leisure” (Sir 38:24; NRSV) that allows them to acquire a comprehensive education (Sir 38:33-39:3) so that they can provide council and assistance to the ruling class (Sir 38:32; 39:4).

From Qohelet’s perspective it is death that will ultimately rob someone of knowledge and wisdom (Qoh 9:10), and not a lack of leisure. Qohelet seems to be implying that if one is alive and can find something to do with their hands (i.e. farmers, smiths, potters, etc.), they are capable of utilizing wisdom, though conceived differently. Qohelet thus encourages persons to do all that has to be done with “strength,” implying that the appropriate and continued activity of their hands is a function of wisdom. According to Krüger, this statement encourages persons to do whatever “is necessary and possible,” as wise human action should not be “oriented toward the expectation of future benefits” but more appropriately “toward the exigencies of the present.”⁹⁸

For Qohelet, then, how one acts with wisdom—specifically through the work of their hands—is imperative for keeping one alive in the present, but will not necessarily ensure future gains or any achieved status. This sentiment is carried forth in the following verses where Qohelet states that those who live with wisdom, knowledge, and strength are not guaranteed favorable outcomes such as victory, food, riches, or favor because a “timely misfortune” can fall suddenly upon anyone and rob that person of any gain or desired outcome (9:11). Because “humans are trapped for an evil time,” like a bird caught in a snare, social and moral categories cannot be relied upon to produce a desired or expected outcome due to the vagaries of life that occur when living “under the sun” (9:11-12).

The entrapment of an “evil time” mentioned in 9:12 may be referencing the era of Ptolemaic rule and having to live through its oppressive and arduous economic policies that are seemingly referred to as a “great evil” and an “evil sickness” within 2:21 and 6:2. More precisely, the entrapment may be referencing the extensive taxation levied upon the agricultural producers who are laboring with their hands. As described in chapter III, when heavy taxation by non-producers is coupled with seasons of poor yields, agricultural producers find themselves in situations of indebtedness that can ultimately lead to the loss of their inherited land, and the

⁹⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 172.

reallocation of their labor toward large estates. Within this system, peasants and laborers are “trapped” in situations where any sense of prospering materially is minimal or nonexistent. However, this does not mean that laborers are incapable of acting with wisdom, as the following narration will further emphasize.

(ii) 9:13-18

After Qoh 9:10-12 emphasizes wisdom’s present value in light of the ever-present threat of “timely misfortunes” that can occur “under the sun,” Qohelet then illustrates both the value and limits of wisdom during this “evil time” through a brief narration in 9:13-18:

(13) This too I have seen regarding wisdom (חכמה)⁹⁹ under the sun, and it is important (גדולה) to me:

(14) [There was] a small city with few men in it, and a great king (מלך גדול) came upon it, surrounded it, and built great siegeworks upon it. (15) And there was found in it a wise peasant man (איש מסכן חכם). He saved the city with his wisdom (בחכמתו). But no one remembered this wise peasant. (16) And I said “Better is wisdom than strength”

(טובה חכמה מגבורה) but the peasant’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

(17) The words of the wise with calmness (בנהח) are heard, more than the cry of a ruler among fools.

(18) Better is wisdom than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

This passage is introduced as an observation “regarding wisdom under the sun” and a statement that this observation is of importance to the speaker, and thus not an insignificant detail (9:13). What follows is terse and lacking in detail, but involves a small city that is under siege by a great king. Within the city is a wise peasant (מסכן חכם), who is able to save the city from the siege “with his wisdom” (9:15). The reader is not given the exact details of how the wise peasant saved the city, or told what actions were taken; the emphasis in this brief story is that the city survives the onslaught of the siege through the wise peasant’s use of wisdom. Qohelet uses this story to emphasize that wisdom is better than strength (9:16) and weapons of war (9:18) for navigating and surviving conflict.

Qohelet’s illustration of the מסכן חכם may be elucidated by comparing it to similar passages found within 2 Samuel 20:14-22 and book of Proverbs. 2 Samuel 20 contains the story

⁹⁹ The word order in the first clause of 9:13 is odd, with חכמה seemingly occurring out of place and without a particle. Seow believes that חכמה is to be taken as “the accusative of specification” (*Ecclesiastes*, 309), and Fox regards it as “a predicative complement... [that] defines the state in which the first accusative is perceived to be” (*A Time to Tear Down*, 298). There have been suggested emendations, but the MT is supported word for word by LXX and other ancient manuscripts (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 692).

of a wise woman (אִשָּׁה חַכְמָה) from Abel of Beth-maacah who acts with wisdom to save her city while it is under siege by Joab's army. According to the narrative, the wise woman negotiates with Joab, determines what it will take to get him to stop the siege, and then "with her wisdom" (בְּחַכְמָתָהּ) leads the people in getting Joab what he wants—the head of Sheba (2 Sam 20:22). Qohelet 9:13-16 similarly values this shrewd aspect of wisdom that consists of an "expertise in solving problems and attaining one's goals"—namely the survival of the city.¹⁰⁰

The story of the אִשָּׁה חַכְמָה in 2 Samuel and the מַסְכֵּן חָכָם in Qohelet seemingly narrate similar instructions contained within Proverbs:

Prov 21:22 A wise person went up against a city of mighty warriors
And brought down its trusted strength.

Prov 24:5 A wise person [is better than] one who is strong
And one with knowledge than one with great strength.

Prov 24:6 For with counsel you can wage war
And victory comes with many counselors.

These passages teach that wisdom and knowledge can be utilized for achieving military success, and likewise are to be valued more than strength and might. Much like Qohelet 9:14-18 wisdom is valued for its practical ability in strategically navigating conflict. However, Proverbs distinctly frames this use of wisdom from the perspective of military officers who are attempting to take the city, and not those who are resisting military force imposed upon them. Conversely, Qohelet locates the practice of this shrewd wisdom not with military officials, but with one who lacks social power and apparent access to material resources—the מַסְכֵּן חָכָם.

Based on the saving actions of the wise peasant, it could be assumed that they would be lauded as heroic and worthy of celebration (c.f. Prov 3:35). Yet, paradoxically, no one remembers the saving actions of the peasant (Qoh 9:15), and no one cares to listen to the wise peasant's words (Qoh 9:16). Fox rightly notes that the point of the statement in 9:16 that "his words are not heard" is not that the wise person *could* have saved the city but didn't. Rather, the text claims that the wise peasant did save the city and the complaints in 9:15-16 are that, despite this fact, "people tend to forget a wise man if he is poor."¹⁰¹ This observation by Qohelet is "an

¹⁰⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73. Though Fox does not use the term "shrewdness," Fox similarly states that wisdom for Qohelet includes "ingenuity."

¹⁰¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 300.

affront to wisdom,” at least as it is “traditionally” conceived, and Qohelet is expressing that this wise peasant deserves better.

Qohelet elaborates upon the observation of the *מסכן חכם* with two succeeding proverbs in 9:17-18. The phrasing of verse 17 can be confusing, particularly in how to understand the prepositional phrase of *בנהח* (“with calmness”). Seow explains that since the proverb is drawing into contrast the words of the wise with the “loud rantings of the ruler among fools,” the “calmness” should be translated as referring to “the delivery of the words (e.g., NJPS, NRSV), rather than their reception (e.g., RSV, KJV).”¹⁰² This proverb is reaffirming the notion that the words of the wise, even when spoken quietly and received with contempt—as was the case with the *מסכן חכם*—are more effective than the words loudly cried out by a ruler who is in the presence of fools.

Qohelet supplements this idea in the first line of 9:18, claiming that wisdom is even better than weapons of war, a sentiment expressed in Proverbs and in the brief narration of the *מסכן חכם*. However, lest there be too much confidence in what wisdom can accomplish, Qohelet concludes by claiming that “one sinner destroys much good.” Fox reads 9:18 as a restatement of the complaint issued in 9:16, and interprets this passage as communicating that “in spite of wisdom’s power, its benefit can easily be nullified.” The status of the “one sinner” (*חוטא*) who “destroys much good” does not necessarily have to be understood in moral terms, according to Fox, but may more precisely be one who acts with “incompetence and obtuseness,” thus working to undo “the efficacy of wisdom.”¹⁰³

Within this passage Qohelet reaffirms the value of wisdom in offering the relative advantage of survival. However, Qohelet observes social situations where wisdom is ignored and the loud, foolish words of powerful persons are heard, thus undoing wisdom’s attempt at securing any lasting profit, reward, or well-being. As Krüger points out, the effectiveness of wisdom “depends not only on the wise man,” but also if the wisdom can get a hearing from the public.¹⁰⁴ Otherwise, this wisdom may be ignored and society is at the mercy of the whims of the loud rantings of the powerful, who may or may not be enacting wisdom. Within the Ptolemaic context, wise peasants may act with wisdom and shrewdness to ensure their survival and that of

¹⁰² Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 311.

¹⁰³ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 300.

¹⁰⁴ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 180.

their community's from a particular onslaught; however, the extractive economy that they exist in does not allow them to gain any profit or social standing, but functions to funnel resources up the Ptolemaic hierarchical ladder, resulting in a lack of social justice and an ignoring of wisdom's virtue. The lack of wisdom among the powerful figures in this passage contributes to the limitations placed upon wisdom's efficacy.

To summarize, Qohelet's "important" observation communicates that wisdom can engender survival during desperate circumstances and the imposition of power, thus giving it value. However, the vagaries of life under the sun do not ensure that wisdom can produce a lasting sense of resources, honor, or well-being—the sorts of things "traditional" wisdom will often pair with being wise (Prov 3:16; 8:18; 22:4). Qohelet observes the present context to be an "evil time" that can impose itself suddenly upon persons (9:12), and a time where "one sinner" can destroy much good (9:18) with "a little folly" that is "weightier than wisdom and honor" (10:1).

(b) Instructions for Navigating Relationships with the Powerful

Qohelet's wisdom instruction that emphasizes survival includes perspectives on how to appropriately navigate social relationships with powerful persons—a practical aspect of wisdom that is present within the "traditional" wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 16:13-15; 20:1-2). While the narrations of the *מסכן חכם* locate the practice of wisdom with persons of low social status, the instructions for appropriately relating to persons of power seem to be aimed at those who regularly encounter socially elite figures; specifically, this involves those socially situated in the retainer class—persons employed to serve the political elite in various capacities, including scribes.

Though both Qohelet and Proverbs emphasize a wise instruction for navigating relationships with the powerful, they are nuanced in how they specifically accent these instructions. The book of Proverbs promotes a court wisdom that assumes a relatively close position to the king, indicating that it was possible to gain the king's ear and exert influence (e.g., Prov 16:13; 25:15). Fox observes that one of the objectives of Proverbs was that it was likely written *for* the king and other elite figures, instructing them on what type of person they should be, and the ethical responsibilities of their power.¹⁰⁵ While Proverbs does caution against

¹⁰⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 502-505. For example, see Prov 20:28, 29:4, 14.

the dangers of provoking a king's anger (Prov 16:14; 20:2), the text as a whole maintains a more hopeful outlook on the positive possibilities for a righteous and wise king.

Qohelet's advice, on the other hand, seems to reflect a greater distance between those in power, the text, and the intended recipients of this instruction. Qohelet does not offer instructions on how to govern, or provide any explicit expectations of a just ruler, but observes and acknowledges the oppression by powerful figures as a matter of fact (Qoh 4:1; 5:7; 8:9). The emphasis within Qohelet's instruction is that persons of elite status—whether a king or someone within the ruling bureaucracy—are to be viewed with caution, and possibly dangerous if one does not behave appropriately. The danger for those receiving Qohelet's instruction is that they are perceived as “disposable” by the elite, and thus must do what they can to avoid upsetting those with power.

(i) *Qoh 8:1-5*

(1) Who is like the wise? Who knows the interpretation of a word? One's wisdom enlightens one's presence, and the hardness of their face changes. (2)¹⁰⁶ Obey the mouth of the king, on account of an oath to God. (3) Do not feel panic (אל־תבהל) in his presence, you [should] leave (תלך)! Do not stand in an evil affair, for all the he desires he will do. (4) For the word of the king [is] authoritative; Who will say to him “what are you doing?” (5) The one who keeps a commandment will not experience an evil thing. A wise heart will know the time and judgement...

Recognizing the king's absolute authority, Qohelet offers instructions on how to navigate interactions with the king. But this begs the question: who is this king for those located in Judea and Jerusalem, and to which Qohelet is referring? As a text that is adopting a “wisdom speech genre” for communicative goals, and thus part of a much larger discourse of wisdom instruction, Qohelet may be taking on prior teachings and re-accenting their words with varying meanings. Contextually, “the king” would have been the Ptolemaic monarch in Alexandria, yet it seems unlikely that this text would be emphasizing appropriate interactions with this distant figure. Fox appropriately comments that “for practical purposes the author could not have expected the readers to have face-to-face dealings with an actual monarch.”¹⁰⁷ Though, while unlikely, such a

¹⁰⁶ The verse begins with the first-person pronoun אֲנִי, yet the presence of this pronoun does not fit with the grammar or intent of the rest of the verse. I follow translation of Seow, who takes this as “a corruption of the object suffix in the preceding form,” and drops it from the translation (*Ecclesiastes*, 279).

¹⁰⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 304.

situation may not have been impossible for scribes, and the instruction may be an attempt to prepare for any situation that *could* be encountered.¹⁰⁸

What seems more likely is that Qohelet using the “traditional” rhetoric, but conflating into “king” any local elite and powerful figure who is connected to the Ptolemaic ruling bureaucracy. In fact, throughout the text Qohelet identifies other figures who wield societal power, identifying them by terms other than מלך גבה (5:7), משל (9:17; 10:4), שליט (10:5). This may indicate an awareness of powerful figures outside of the supreme office of the Ptolemaic monarch, but who are ultimately subservient to the authority and rule of Alexandria.¹⁰⁹

Following a statement about the exceptionality of a wise person (8:1), Qohelet ventures into a series of instructions regarding how one relates to the king. These instructions assume a distance from the king, advise that this distance be maintained, and that one should not garner the king’s attention. The text instructs that the king’s decrees be absolutely obeyed (8:2), as the king wields complete authority that should not be questioned (8:4). Qoh 8:3 instructs that if a person finds themselves in the presence of king, they should “not feel panic (אל־תבהל);” here Qohelet uses the verb בהל in the nifal form, which as Seow explains, is used similarly in Gen 45:3 and Job 23:15 to describe a “crippling stupor before someone who is powerful.”¹¹⁰ Qohelet instructs that in this situation one must maintain their mental acuity, so that they can take the quick and essential action of leaving the king’s presence without exacerbating the situation. While the instruction to leave the king’s presence does not occur as an imperative, it is an imperfect verb that can be interpreted as what one *should* do in this possible future situation that will occur.

If the recipient of this instruction was a scribe, then it is likely that encounters with local elite figures would have been common, if not necessary, due to the need by elites for their scribal abilities. Qohelet may be advising that scribes not linger for too long around the king because the king will act however he desires, a situation Qohelet perceives as “an evil affair.” Qohelet seemingly recognizes and communicates the danger of being present with these powerful figures (8:3). Lohfink raises the question, does the passage’s expression of fear and insistence on obeying the king indicate that “insubordination could entail confiscation of all goods and the

¹⁰⁸ See the discussions in Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 103-104 and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ For a fuller discussion of these figures, see the dialogical analysis of the possible targets of the satirical King Qohelet in chapter VI.

¹¹⁰ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 280. In Gen 45:3 the referent is Joseph as an official of Pharaoh and in Job 23:15 it is God.

death penalty?”¹¹¹ While this is not made explicit, it would certainly be a motivating factor for Qohelet’s instruction, particularly if Qohelet is emphasizing a wisdom aimed at survival within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine. This passage communicates that survival can be best achieved if one obeys the king and keeps their distance from the elite figures by not drawing unnecessary attention to themselves.

(ii) *Qoh 10:4, 20*

(4) If the temper (רוח) of the ruler (המושל) rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness (מרפא) can alleviate great offenses.

(20) Also, do not curse a king (מלך) in your thoughts; And in [the privacy of] your bedroom you shall not curse the rich (עשיר); for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and a winged creature will tell of it.

Qohelet continues in chapter 10 with bits of instruction on how to behave in the presence of the powerful. In a verse that seemingly contradicts the instruction of Qoh 8:2-4 to not linger in the presence of a king, Qohelet advises in 10:4 that one should *not* leave the presence of a ruler if they are angry. Fox sees this variation as possibly a nuance between encountering a king (מלך) in 8:2, versus a ruler (מושל) in 10:4 who Fox interprets as “probably being a local or provincial authority.”¹¹² Yet the difference is not only in the designation of the authority, but also in the context of the circumstances. Whereas Qoh 8:2-3 instruct that one should not linger too long in king’s presence and draw attention to themselves, Qoh 10:4 is advice for when one has been noticed by a ruler, and the ruler’s רוח has risen against them. While רוח is typically rendered as “breath” or “spirit,” it semantically can also refer to a disposition or temperament (e.g., Prov 16:32; Judg 8:3). Qohelet instructs that if one does find themselves in a situation where a powerful person has been angered, they should not panic or act impulsively but maintain מרפא—a disposition of calmness or gentleness that “can alleviate great offences.”¹¹³ Here Qohelet may be utilizing an emphasis in traditional wisdom that a wise person should use their shrewd abilities to assuage and influence persons more powerful than they (e.g., Prov 16:14; 25:15).

While a person may find themselves in the presence of an angry ruler and then have to act accordingly, Qohelet continues to emphasize that one should conduct themselves in a way that avoids such situations. Qoh 10:20 instructs that one not be so bold as to curse the king, or

¹¹¹ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 104.

¹¹² Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 304.

¹¹³ For similar uses of מרפא see Prov 14:30 and Prov 15:4.

even the rich, and goes so far as to say that this should not even be done in the privacy of one's bedroom or in one's own thoughts. One cannot know who is listening and what "winged creature" may overhear and snitch, indicating that the powerful and rich have an extensive reach into the private lives of their subjects. This concurs with other instructions in Qohelet regarding the appropriate use of speech, where Qohelet warns that a fool has "many words," either by saying too much or saying evil and wrong things (Qoh 5:2; 10:13-14). Such foolish words could include thoughtlessly cursing the king or the rich and thus incurring their wrath. These instructions continue Qohelet's emphasis that one should avoid upsetting powerful persons, and if necessary, act to mitigate their anger. This contributes to Qohelet's overall emphasis upon a wisdom of survival, as Qohelet believes that persons with power and authority are dangerous and too much involvement with them can result in devastating consequences.

(c) Qoh 10:8-11 and the Proper Use of Skill

In addition to the ability to shrewdly navigate social conflict and power differentials, Qohelet's conception of wisdom includes the appropriate use of skilled labor for mitigating occupational and labor-intensive risks. Qohelet 10:8-11 contains a series of practical, skilled acts of labor and their subsequent dangers:

(8) One who digs a pit, in it they will fall, and one who breaks open a wall (גדר) a snake will bite him. (9) One who quarries stones will be hurt by them; One who splits wood can be endangered by them. (10) If the iron (ברזל) is blunt, and it is not sharpened, one will exert much strength; But [there is] a profit (יתרון) in the proper use of wisdom (הכמה). (11) If the snake bites, with it not [being] charmed, there is not a profit (יתרון) for the charmer.¹¹⁴

This passage lists "occupational hazards" that may be referencing dangers posed to agricultural producers, particularly those tenant farmers or day labors who worked on large estates during the Ptolemaic era. For example, the wall (גדר) being broken down in 10:8 likely refers to the wall or fence surrounding a vineyard (c.f. Num 22:24; Prov 24:31; Isa 5:5). It's possible that this would have been a stone fence constructed of unhewn stone that was capable of being built up and broken down as needed. Snakes could lurk in between stones, making the one removing the stones vulnerable to being bitten.¹¹⁵ The blunt iron (ברזל) likely refers to an implement such as an ax or hatchet used for chopping or cutting wood, specifically for the

¹¹⁴ Hebrew בעל הלשון. Literally, "master of the tongue."

¹¹⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 316.

purpose of clearing out brush in a forested area (c.f. Deut 19:5; Isa 10:34).¹¹⁶ The final verse of this passage seems to deviate from acts of manual labor by focusing on snake charming, which Seow believes is a reference to one who is an expert in snake incantations, and possibly incantations against snakebites.¹¹⁷ While not necessarily reflecting the labor of an agricultural producer, snake charming could have been seen as valuable for those who risked getting snake bitten, such as the ones breaking down vineyard walls in 10:8.

In listing these occupational hazards, Qohelet inserts the claim that there is “a profit (יתרון) in the proper use of wisdom (חכמה)” (10:10b).¹¹⁸ By placing this statement among a commentary on various acts of labor, Krüger argues that the wisdom referred to in 10:10 is nuanced from other “elite” Jewish conceptions of wisdom, notably the status of the wise described in Sir 38:24-39:11.¹¹⁹ As noted, this passage from Ben Sira draws a sharp distinction between the wisdom of the scribe, which requires an “opportunity of leisure” (Sir 38:24; NRSV), and those who labor with the hand—specifically farmers, artisans, smiths, and potters (Sir 38:25-30). Conversely, Qoh 10:8-11, like Qoh 9:10, is not discussing the “professional knowledge” of “wise men” (i.e., sages or scribes), but is referring to the practical knowledge and skills of the expert worker.¹²⁰ This passage is thus drawing upon a broader notion of wisdom (חכמה) that is associated with skillful expertise—a common use of חכמה within the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ex 28:3, 31:3, 6; 1 Kgs 7:14; 1 Chr 22:14; 2 Chr 2:7) and consistent with various instructions for practical virtues that are contained within Proverbs (Prov 12:10-14; 14:4; 24:27, 30-34).

If יתרון is translated with economic connotations, then the passage is communicating that the proper use of the wisdom, in the form of practical knowledge and expert skill, will allow for an economic profit in that hazards and risks will be reduced. Reducing avoidable risk by honing necessary skills certainly enables one’s survival, and presumably this type of wisdom would be of value to laborers within the agrarian society of third century Palestine. Qohelet recognizes that within this context such a wisdom could be found among small-scale and tenant farmers—persons of the peasant (מסכן) class—whose labor was heavily extracted through Ptolemaic taxation and tribute. As has been noted, this context made it unlikely that a laborer would have

¹¹⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 317.

¹¹⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 318-319.

¹¹⁸ See Section 5.04 for a fuller analysis of the grammatical issues of this line.

¹¹⁹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 186.

¹²⁰ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 185

generated any sense of lasting material profit (c.f., 2:11), yet their wisdom is empowering them with the necessary skill and shrewdness to survive this brutal context. As Krüger explains, Qohelet’s nuanced conception of wisdom includes useful expertise that assists persons in avoiding “dangers and unnecessary exertions without being able to guarantee them the success of their work...”¹²¹

Qohelet’s advice regarding skilled labor is not limited to 10:8-11, but also occurs throughout the text in various sayings and instructions—typical rhetorical forms used to convey wise teaching. Similar to Proverbs, Qohelet emphasizes that one keeps their hands active by attending to necessary tasks, and warns about the dangers of laziness (e.g., Prov 20:4; 21:25 24:30-34). Whatever one finds to do with their hands, they are to do it with strength while they are alive, because once one dies they cannot work and utilize their knowledge and wisdom (Qoh 9:10). Qohelet, like other wisdom instruction, draws upon the wise/fool binary to associate foolishness with laziness, believing that laziness should be avoided as it can bring extra challenges. The fool is described as one who “folds their hands,” a description of being inactive and not engaging in labor or necessary tasks (Qoh 4:5),¹²² which subsequently could result in the perishing of one’s home: “Laziness will sink the roof; and when the hands do nothing the house leaks” (Qoh 10:18). Beyond being lazy, when the fool does engage in labor they are quick to wear themselves out because they lack the appropriate knowledge needed to complete their task (Qoh 10:15).

It is imperative that a laborer be attentive to their work, knowing not only what to do but when to do it (Qoh 3:1-9). While knowing the appropriate time is important, Qohelet also emphasizes that the farmer cannot spend all their time watching the ways of the wind or staring at the clouds (Qoh 11:4), as “the attempt to plan too meticulously for the future can paralyze initiative.”¹²³ Qohelet further clarifies by encouraging persons to sow their seed in the morning, but in the evening “do not give rest to your hand” because one cannot know if the morning or the evening will be the most opportune time to act (Qoh 11:6). The worker who is able to survive will attend to what needs to be attended to, but will still be ready to manage and navigate the arrival of new circumstances. Qohelet repeatedly claims that persons cannot have knowledge of

¹²¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 24.

¹²² Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 179.

¹²³ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 314.

what the future may bring (Qoh 3:11; 6:12; 8:17; 10:14), therefore wise persons must always be ready to manage new dangers and threats that may “fall upon them suddenly” (Qoh 9:12). In this regard, Qohelet’s instruction aligns with wisdom’s broad goal of enabling persons to navigate a “myriad of experiences.”¹²⁴

(d) Qoh 4:9-12 Surviving Through Communal Solidarity

Qohelet’s wisdom of survival not only involves social and practical skills, but also instructions on the value and need for communal solidarity. Such solidarity is necessary because Qohelet has observed stark inequality (8:9), injustice (3:16; 5:7), oppression (4:1-2) and a lack of profitability for one’s labor (2:11). As a result, Qohelet offers instructions in 4:9-12 that encourage bonding together in mutuality and support in order survive this oppressive context:

(9) Better are two than one, for there is for them good wages (שכר) in their labor (בעמלם). (10) For if they fall, the one will lift up his companion. Woe to him—the one who falls and there is not another to lift him up. (11) Also, if the two lie down they will be warm. How will one become warm? (12) And if one overpowers the two, they will withstand the one¹²⁵. The cord of three will not be quickly snapped.

Leading into these instructions, Qohelet observes that there are persons laboring without a companion and “there is no end to their labor” as their life is deprived of any good; Qohelet judges this situation as *hevel* and qualifies it as an “evil business” (ענין רע) (4:8). In response to this tragic observation, Qohelet provides these reflections on the value of companionship for “purely practical motives.”¹²⁶

Qohelet believes that the difficulty of endless labor without profit (1:3; 2:11) can be assuaged by persons pooling resources together, since two have a better שכר, or “wages,” than one (4:9). The term שכר is a noun typically understood as wages paid to a worker, and more specifically the verb with this same root means to hire or be hired, indicating that the noun is used to reference the situation of hired laborers and the payment that they expect to receive (c.f, Deut 15:18).¹²⁷ Within the context of Qoh 4:9, these “wages” (שכר) are unlikely to result in a significant “profit” (יתרון), and were likely meager at best. Qohelet advises that one’s wages are

¹²⁴ Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” *ABD* VI: 920. See also Chapter II of this work.

¹²⁵ The Hebrew is literally “him” or the third person singular male pronoun. Since this pronoun is in the singular, it is clearly referring to the one attempting to overpower.

¹²⁶ Wolfe, *Qoheleth*, 68.

¹²⁷ See Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 98.

better when joined and shared with another, beginning a discourse that emphasizes practical, communal support.

The following verses highlight the value for “laborers” in working and living together by explaining how they can take care of one another and help each other in times of need. Qohelet believes that it is best for people to live in close companionship, as they can be present to pick each other up when they fall, and provide warmth for one another during cold nights (4:10-11). This solidarity among those who labor even enables persons to resist the threat of an imposition of power. Qohelet claims that “if one overpowers the two, they will withstand the one”; but even better is if more join together to protect one another: “The cord of three will not be quickly snapped” (4:12). Qohelet is emphasizing within this wise teaching the value of communal solidarity for surviving the threats imposed by the Ptolemaic economy. While Qohelet hardly envisions an overturning of the social order, the text does assert that survival for a laborer is unlikely to occur alone, and therefore advocates for the formation of a community based upon the sharing of resources, mutual care, and collective protection.

(e) Wisdom and Moral Virtue

Qohelet’s instruction regarding communal solidarity coincides with an underlying theme regarding wisdom’s connection to social-moral virtues, a common emphasis within wisdom texts. As was explored in chapter II, the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs strongly emphasizes the development of social-moral virtues, namely righteousness, justice, and equity (צדק ומשפט ומישרים, Prov 1:3). While Qohelet does not contain a significant amount of moral teaching and instruction, the text does assume a morality in statements that observe and judge the condition of the present context. Qohelet observes the existence of an oppressive economic system that exploits and oppresses the poor, in effect robbing society of a robust social justice (c.f., “Survival in the Ptolemaic Context” in Section 5.04). This system, in effect, negates opportunities for those who are exploited to achieve any sense of flourishing or well-being; put otherwise: “a little folly is weightier than wisdom and honor” (Qoh 10:1).

Consequently, it may be presumed that while Qohelet lacks any significant amount of moral teaching, the text is operating from of a perspective formed by the social-moral virtues of wisdom. The scribe(s) who composed Qohelet, though accenting wisdom in ways they deemed necessary for their unrepeatably historical moment in Ptolemaic Palestine, were likely formed by

“traditional” wisdom through their scribal education.¹²⁸ It may be assumed that the tradition’s concern for social justice was written “on the tablet of [their] hearts” (Prov 7:3) as they were being shaped into moral agents. So, unsurprisingly, the concern for social justice can be discerned in Qohelet, even if only occurs indirectly through disappointment and the lamenting of injustice. Qohelet’s assuming of social-moral virtues can be perceived within the text’s reflections on the lack of social justice and moral retribution within society, particularly in 3:16, 5:7-9, and 8:9-14.

(i) *Qoh 3:16*

Since a significant component of wisdom is the enactment of righteousness, justice, and equity, Qohelet, as text of wisdom, is frustrated at the perceived prevalence of injustices and the mistreatment of those considered to be righteous. This is poignantly expressed in Qoh 3:16:

And again I saw under the sun [in] the place justice (המשפט), wickedness (הרשע) was there; and in the place of righteousness (הצדק), wickedness (הרשע) was there.

Throughout, the text relays a sense of consternation where, as Jennie Grillo states, Qohelet displays more of the “anger of a prophet” than the “equanimity of a sage.”¹²⁹ In this verse Qohelet laments that the spaces where the virtues of righteousness and justice *should* reside, they apparently do not. It is possible that Qohelet could be referring to corruption in the courts and legal system, as these would be places where justice would be expected, or hoped, to be administered. However, the places of justice and righteousness have been infected with that which they should work against: הרשע, or “wickedness.” Krüger explains that Qohelet is speaking to “the failure of society’s judicial venue, thorough which wickedness could be eliminated or at least kept in check.” Instead, this failure has allowed wickedness to “spread unhindered.”¹³⁰

(ii) *Qoh 8:9-14*

This situation of injustice is elaborated upon in Qoh 8:9-14:

(9) All this I saw, and I gave my heart to all the work that was being done under the sun, a time when one person domineers over another, causing evil for him.¹³¹ (10) Thereupon I saw that the wicked were buried, and they came and went out of a holy place. But those

¹²⁸ See Chapter III, Section 3.03 for a more detailed analysis of scribes.

¹²⁹ Grillo, “Ecclesiastes,” 59.

¹³⁰ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 90.

¹³¹ The Hebrew is unclear of the pronoun’s antecedent, as it could be the one dominating or the one dominated. Contextually, it makes the most sense to assume that the one being dominated is the antecedent, with the one who is domineering causing “evil” for the one the domineering over.

who did what was morally right (כִּן־עֲשׂוּ) were forgotten in the city. This too was *hevel*. (11) Because a sentence for an evil work is not carried out quickly, the heart of humans within them is set upon doing evil. (12) A sinner does evil a hundred [times] and prolongs his [life]. However, I know (יֹדַע אֲנִי) that it will be good for those who fear God, those who will be fearful before [God]. (13) And it will not be good for the wicked one, as he will not prolong his days like a shadow, because he is not fearful before God. (14) There is a *hevel* that is done upon the earth: There are righteous ones who [things have happened to them]¹³² as if they [did] wicked acts. And there are wicked ones who [things have happened to them] as if they [did] righteous acts. I said, “This is also *hevel*.”

Qohelet observes the lack of appropriate honor and retribution for morally upstanding persons by noting that in death those who were “wicked” are honored in “holy places,” but “those who did what was morally right (כִּן־עֲשׂוּ) were forgotten in the city” (8:10). The “morally right” is translated from the difficult Hebrew construction of the adjective כִּן with the perfect verb עָשָׂה (“to do”) in the qal third common plural form. While כִּן can be translated as an adverb meaning “thus” or “so,” and is interpreted in this way in various translations (e.g., NRSV), it can also be translated as an adjective or noun of that which is right, correct, and true. Per the *DCH*, כִּן can more specifically refer to that which is morally correct, as in 2 Kgs 7:9 and 17:9, or to an honest person as in Gen 42:11. For these reasons, Seow similarly translates the (כִּן־עֲשׂוּ) as “those who acted justly.”¹³³

Qohelet perceives a social situation where these honest and just persons, ones who we may assume are acting in accord with wisdom’s social-moral virtues, are not honored and are even forgotten—a situation similar to that of the מַסְכֵּן הַכֶּם in Qoh 9:15. Qohelet believes that persons are motivated to do evil because there is no immediate consequence for acting in such a way (8:11); these evil acts may even prolong the life of “a sinner” and allow them to be treated as if they were morally upstanding persons (8:12, 14). Qohelet’s observation on a lack of appropriate retribution is fully expressed in 8:14, where Qohelet claims that persons who are doing what is right are treated as if they did something evil, while those who do what is evil apparently receive good things.

Despite the delay in retribution, Qohelet does express a belief that God will eventually mete out the appropriate justice in 8:12-13. Yet this belief is stated against the evidence of the present reality. Seow makes an interesting observation by noting that Qoh 8:12 contains the only

¹³² Hifil masc. sg. participle of נָגַע that can mean “befall, happen to.”

¹³³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 285. Similarly, the NJPS: “those who acted righteously.”

construction within the text of the qal participle with the first-person independent pronoun (יודע אני) as a way of expressing of Qohelet’s own knowledge: “I know...”. Other instances within the text that speak of Qohelet’s own knowledge use the perfect form of ידעתי—as in 1:17, 2:14, 3:12, 14. As Seow explains, this difference could be due to the source of the knowledge: the perfect form is used with reference to what the figure of Qohelet has come to know, while the participle may be used to express what Qohelet knows from traditional knowledge and common sense.¹³⁴ Put bluntly, Qohelet is here “agreeing with common knowledge, as it were.”

While Qohelet may be affirming “traditional” knowledge and/or wisdom in 8:12-13, the observation and experience of the present context isn’t quite living up to this standard. By describing the present situation as what is being “done upon the earth” (8:14), Qohelet may be indicating that the lack of moral retribution is not the action of God, but is a “deplorable situation” that human beings are responsible for.¹³⁵ These perceived injustices are situated as occurring within a period marked by stark social inequality, where “one person domineers over another, causing evil for [them]” (8:9). Predictably, Qohelet repeatedly claims that the mistreatment of the righteous and the lack of guilt for the wicked is “*hevel*.”

(iii) *Qoh 5:7-9*

Social inequality and a lack of justice is explicitly addressed in 5:7-9:

(7) If (there is) oppression of the poor and a robbery of justice (משפט) and righteousness (צדק) that you see in a province, do not be astounded about the matter. For a high one is keeping watch above [another] high one, and higher ones above them.

(8) And a profit (יתרון) of land [is] in all of it, A king for a cultivated field.

(9) One who loves money is not satisfied with money; and who loves an abundance with no yield? This is also *hevel*.

As has been delineated, 5:7 seems to be an allusion to the operative Ptolemaic bureaucracy, and according to Qohelet the cause of the “oppression of the poor and a robbery of justice and righteousness.”¹³⁶ According to Krüger this verse “forms a radical critique of the Ptolemaic governance” by suggesting that corrupt administrators are going to protect one another and their mutual interests.¹³⁷ These mutual interests would certainly include the ability to benefit

¹³⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 288. Credits and cites this argument from B. Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qohelet: With Special Emphasis on the Verbal System*, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 10 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 67.

¹³⁵ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 161.

¹³⁶ For a fuller discussion of the exegetical issues in Qoh 5:7, see Section 5.04.

¹³⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 114.

from Ptolemaic economic policies that were continuously extracting resources and labor from the agrarian population.

This observation is followed in 5:8 by a syntactically difficult verse that has been labeled “hopelessly corrupt,”¹³⁸ making it subject to varying interpretations, and multiple emendations¹³⁹:

ויתרון ארץ בכל היא מלך לשדה נעבד

While the apparent meaning of the verse is at best opaque, insight may be gleaned from the preceding statement in 5:7, and interpreting the verse’s agricultural references through what is known of the Ptolemaic economy. A straightforward reading of the verse suggests that agriculture can be more profitable when it is associated with, or properly managed, by a king (“And a profit of land [is] in all of it, a king for a cultivated field”).¹⁴⁰ This interpretation could garner support from other wisdom texts, such as Proverbs, where a good king is portrayed as one who establishes a society based in justice and righteousness (e.g., Prov 29:2, 4). However, such an interpretation seems to clash with the perspective maintained in 5:7 regarding a lack of justice and righteousness resulting from the “high ones,” and Qohelet’s broad conclusion of the lack of profitability for labor (2:11). Krüger addresses this conundrum by suggesting that the verse is an intentionally ambiguous statement that represents “an ironic ‘quotation’ of ‘official’ Ptolemaic power ideology.”¹⁴¹ Many of the cultivated fields would have been either directly under Ptolemaic control, or liable to Ptolemaic taxation. This taxation of the land’s agricultural produce and the development of commodified estates were primary sources for Ptolemaic revenue from Palestine. Hence, the verse can be read as simply stating a well-known fact that the actual “profit” for the Ptolemaic king is in the cultivated fields of the land under his control.

Yet when the verse is considered in light of the critique of 5:7, the king may represent the culmination of the system of “higher ones.” In this sense, the verse may subtly be, as Tamez suggests, critiquing the king’s role in a system where “everyone—the officials and the king—

¹³⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 204.

¹³⁹ For an overview of the various attempts to emend this verse, see Max Rogland, “The Profit of a Land and the Purpose of a King: The Translation and Interpretation of Ecclesiastes 5:8,” *VT* (2022): 1-11.

¹⁴⁰ For example, see Rogland who claims that 5:8 “focuses on the big picture of the benefit that [kings] bring: By establishing national security and domestic order, kings create an environment which generally allows the common farmer to cultivate his fields in relative peace.” (“The Profit of a Land,” 9).

¹⁴¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 115.

takes advantage of the peasants' land."¹⁴² Knut Martin Heim concurs with Krüger's assessment, and argues that the multivalence of the verse is a deliberate attempt at "hyper-ambiguity." The intended ambiguity would function to protect the speaker (or scribe) by giving them plausible deniability regarding any perceived critique of the king, while at the same time allowing readers/hearers to encounter a social critique of the empire's most powerful figure (see Qoh 10:20).¹⁴³

Understanding this passage as a somewhat veiled critique fits within the text's overall rhetoric and the socio-economic climate that it is rooted in. As 5:7 implies, the hierarchy of extraction will ultimately leave those on the bottom—the ones who are laboring to cultivate the fields—with very little for themselves. Thus, the awkward phrasing may be suggesting that the land can provide a profit; however, once it is cultivated any generated profit will be funneled up the bureaucratic ladder all the way to the king, wherein those in power will never be sated and will demand that the land's yield be continually be maximized for their profit (5:9), often at the expense of those who labor to bring about the harvest. This social circumstance is unsurprisingly judged by the text as *hevel*.

Qohelet's frustration over this lack of justice and the unmitigated oppression of the poor engenders a sense of hopelessness and despair that is further explicated in Qoh 4:1-3. In this passage Qohelet observes many situations of oppressions occurring "under the sun," where the oppressed are "full of tears" and without comfort from the unrelenting pressure of their oppressors (4:1). Because this situation is so prevalent, with a seemingly lack of hope for any social change, Qohelet believes that the dead—or better yet those who have not been born—are better off than the living, who have to see and experience this "evil work" that is continually occurring (4:2-3).

Section 5.06 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated how "sage" Qohelet conceives of wisdom as shrewd knowledge and practical skill that helps persons to survive the struggle of living in the oppressive socio-economic context that was Ptolemaic Palestine. Qohelet's use of wisdom specifically emphasizes how wisdom can enable the survival of its practitioners, but the observed lack of social just within society leads Qohelet to limit wisdom's efficacy since oppression,

¹⁴² Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 80.

¹⁴³ Heim, *Ecclesiastes*, 95-96.

extraction, and power-differentials prohibit laborers from generating a profit from their labor. Having established how Qohelet is uniquely accenting the concept of wisdom, the next chapter will place Qohelet's wisdom into a dialogical relationship with the *Tobiad Romance*, a text that was determined in Chapter IV to also be uniquely conceptualizing the value and use of wise behavior within the context of Ptolemaic Palestine.

Chapter VI. The Dialogical Context of Qohelet's Wisdom: Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*

Section 6.01 Introduction: The Bakhtinian Relationship of Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*

Having established in Chapters IV and V that the *Tobiad Romance* and Qohelet are utterances that are each uniquely adopting and re-accenting aspects of “traditional” wisdom, this chapter will examine the intertextual, dialogical relationship between these two texts through an analysis utilizing Bakhtinian concepts.

To review, reading Qohelet through a Bakhtinian lens allows for an understanding of the text as a unique utterance situated within an “unrepeatable” real-life context, and participating in a broader dialogized environment surrounding the topic it is directed toward. Chapter III identified the context for this utterance as Ptolemaic Palestine in the third century BCE, and I have interpreted Qohelet as being engaged in a dialogue around the topic of how to adequately navigate, cope, and operate under Ptolemaic imperial rule. Within this dialogized environment, varying perspectives and/or social discourses also emerged with similar considerations; namely, to conceptualize the most appropriate form of wisdom that could enable survival and assist in navigating a Ptolemaic socio-economic context characterized by the concentration of social power within bureaucratic hierarchies and the heavy extraction of agricultural resources. As a dialogized utterance, Qohelet is not only influenced and shaped by the socio-historical context that produced it, but also by other utterances that themselves are articulating a response to the social reality of Ptolemaic domination and extraction. Understood in this way, Qohelet will necessarily be expressing an “attitude toward others’ utterances”¹—whether these utterances existed prior to Qohelet, or in anticipation of utterances that would respond to Qohelet.² Consequently, the intertextual relationship between Qohelet and any other text is not dependent on a strict historical dating and a chronological determination of which text is responding to the other.

This dissertation has identified the *Tobiad Romance* as another utterance that employs wisdom concepts to articulate a strategy for navigating and surviving Ptolemaic imperial rule.

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 92.

² Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 137.

Both Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* make use of the wisdom speech genre as means for communicating their own unique message, allowing these texts to be dialogically situated to one another.

Much like Qohelet, the *Tobiad Romance* is a text that advocates a specific way of navigating the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine, and supports its claims by utilizing wisdom constructs in the presentation of its protagonists. Though both Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* maintain “detailed prescriptions of wisdom,”³ they each present a nuanced emphasis on the function of wisdom, articulating varied emphases and evaluations of wisdom’s ability to assist in navigating the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine. Put otherwise, each text “re-accent” the speech genre of wisdom from their own situated perspective: both Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* are utterances that draw upon the wisdom concept, yet are both individual expressions shaped by their unique historical and social context.

Given this, the dialogical encounter between Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* occurs on two shared planes. Not only are they engaged in dialogue around how to appropriately navigate their shared Ptolemaic context, but also in how each utterance employs and utilizes the concept of wisdom as a strategy for navigating this context. Broadly speaking, Qohelet conceives of wisdom as a kind of shrewd knowledge and practical skill that helps one to survive the daily struggle of living under Ptolemaic rule, a socio-economic context Qohelet perceives as being fraught with economic exploitation and a lack of moral retribution. The *Tobiad Romance*, on the other hand, emphasizes a shrewd “court wisdom” practiced by Joseph and Hyrcanus as a practical means for ensuring the survival and flourishing of the Judean polity, even as it authorizes their participation within the extractive and brutal Ptolemaic political and economic structures.

In the proceeding sections, this chapter will consider how the emphases and evaluations made in Qohelet surrounding the concept of wisdom can be read in dialogical relation to those within the *Tobiad Romance*. I will begin with a comprehensive analysis that juxtaposes the general discourses surrounding wisdom within each text, acknowledging both their similarities and differences. This overview and comparison will primarily be based on the conclusions drawn

³ Susan Niditch, “Father-Son Folktale Patterns and Tyrant Typologies in Josephus’ Ant. 12:160-222,” *JJS* 32:1 (1981): 51.

from how wisdom is specifically conceptualized within the *Tobiad Romance* in chapter IV, and Qohelet in chapter V.

To supplement this broad overview, I will then zoom in to focus on select passages within Qohelet that I read as being particularly representative of how Qohelet's wisdom is dialogically engaged with the framing of wise behavior in the *Tobiad Romance*. I have identified Qoh 1:12-2:10, 7:15-20, and 9:4 as particularly relevant to, and emblematic of, this dialogical relationship. Each of these texts will be interpreted by 1. Situating how Qohelet is framing wisdom in relation to other utterances of wisdom, primarily the shrewd court wisdom maintained within the *Tobiad Romance*; and 2. Demonstrating the value of Qohelet's perspective over the perceived dangerous, risky, and morally problematic perspective of the *Tobiad Romance*.

Before proceeding to a dialogical analysis between these texts, a point of clarification is in order. By using Bakhtinian theorization, I am not suggesting that the author of Qohelet composed this text with the *Tobiad Romance*, or the Tobiad family, specifically in mind. Such an assumption would be impossible to verify. Accordingly, I will try to avoid language that suggests direct references when considering how these texts are intertextually related (e.g., "echoing" or "alluding/allusion"). But as an utterance directed toward a broader topic and object of speech, Qohelet is drawing on an at hand wisdom rhetoric and naturally responding to other possible utterances surrounding the same or similar topic and object of speech. These other utterances may have already existed, or Qohelet may be anticipating their existence. It is better said that the text/utterance found in Qohelet is representative of a particular social perspective and is addressing or engaging other social perspectives that may have found manifestation within the *Tobiad Romance*.

Section 6.02 General Comparisons of Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*

To understand the dynamic dialogical relationship between Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*, it is important to acknowledge that the two utterances are not diametrically opposed, nor even wholly polemical to one another. Bakhtin explains that utterances within a dialogical environment will weave "in and out of complex interrelationships," capable of both merging with and recoiling from other utterances.⁴ Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* certainly maintain different and varying emphases in how they frame their presentation of wisdom, yet they also

⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 276.

share some commonalities. Having established in chapter IV and V how each text was uniquely accenting wisdom, I will now juxtapose the two texts, acknowledging where they “merge” and observing where they “recoil” in their accentuation of wisdom.

(i) *Shared Emphases and Evaluations of Wisdom*

A primary and major emphasis within both Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* is the belief that the proper use of wisdom promotes survival and so enables some conception of “life.” In this sense, both Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* are drawing upon a broad understanding of wisdom as instruction and skill that aids persons in navigating a myriad of lived experiences in order to avoid an untimely death, survive, and hopefully flourish. Since both texts were rooted within and concerned about the harsh and oppressive circumstances of Ptolemaic rule, the need to survive was imperative. These circumstances would have influenced the “speech plan” of each utterance, and may be the reason as to why each text draws upon the wisdom speech genre to communicate a vision for navigating these realities, since wisdom discourse entails within itself a variety of rhetorical trajectories that texts can assume and exploit for their own communicative needs.

The pragmatic emphasis on wisdom as the use of knowledge, skill, and shrewdness for achieving a goal of survival can be discerned in statements and narrations that express Qohelet’s particular evaluation of wisdom. Having observed circumstances of economic extraction (Qoh 2:20-23; 6:2), oppression (Qoh 4:1), and an overall lack of social justice (Qoh 5:7; 8:14), Qohelet notably states in Qoh 7:12 that wisdom’s primary goal within this context is survival:

[To be] in the shadow of wisdom [is like being] in a shadow of money; and the profit of the knowledge of **wisdom is it will allow its possessor to survive.**

Additionally, Qohelet’s observation of the wise peasant saving the city in Qoh 9:13-16 narrates how wisdom, and the skills that it consists of, can be used to preserve life as the wise peasant saves the city “with his wisdom”—even as he is not remembered or heard. This brief account emphasizes a claim that Qohelet makes in 10:10b, that there is “a profit in the proper use of wisdom”—that profit being the survival spoken of in Qoh 7:12.

Similarly, the *Tobiad Romance* frames its characters as embodying specific wisdom skills that enable them to survive desperate circumstances. The tale narrates how Joseph intervenes while the city of Jerusalem is described as being in complete disarray; the city is continually being raided by Samaritans (*Ant* 12:154-156), and King Ptolemy threatens to seize Jewish land

and parcel it out to the his soldiers because Onias withheld the owed tribute (*Ant* 12:158-159). Amid this chaos, Joseph takes charge by utilizing witty, “favorable” speech (c.f., Prov 22:11) and a shrewd court wisdom in the presence of King Ptolemy to gain his favor and become the province’s tax farmer (*Ant* 12:167-185). According to the narrative, Joseph’s activity ultimately functions to deliver Jerusalem from these desperate circumstances, as the text claims that he “brought the Jewish people from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life” (*Ant* 12:224).

Both texts promote a concept of wisdom that heavily emphasizes a type of pragmatic shrewdness so that the volatile circumstances of Ptolemaic Palestine can be adequately navigated and survived. An example of how this gets played out in both texts is through instructions and narrations on how to relate to powerful figures, with particular emphasis on how to manage their possible anger. Qohelet advises that a king’s commandment should be kept so as not to anger him, and persons should not tarry to long in the king’s presence or they might find themselves in an “evil affair” (Qoh 8:2-3). Persons should also be careful not to curse the king or the rich, because you never know who will hear it (Qoh 10:20). However, when one finds themselves in the presence of an angry ruler or being attacked by a powerful figure (as in the story of the wise peasant), one will need to remain calm (Qoh 10:4) and utilize a wisdom based in shrewdness, skill, and communal solidarity to save their city (Qoh 9:15; also, 10:8-11 and 4:12). Within the *Tobiad Romance* both Joseph and Hyrcanus demonstrate a shrewd court wisdom in the presence of King Ptolemy that includes actions such as persuasive speech, gift giving, and bribes to gain social favor to assuage the anger of the king and win over his companions (*Ant* 12:172-178; 184-185; 205-214).

(ii) *Diverging Emphases and Evaluations of Wisdom*

As each text/utterance “merges” in their promotion of a pragmatic shrewdness that promotes survival, they seem to “recoil” from one another in their emphasis upon where and with whom this shrewd wisdom takes place. When considering Qohelet’s accenting of wisdom vis-à-vis the *Tobiad Romance* there are three emphases and/or evaluations that must be considered. First, Qohelet’s emphasis on wisdom’s objective of survival can be correlated with where Qohelet is observing the practice of wisdom to occur, which is at variance with where *Tobiad Romance* imagines the practice of wisdom happening.

The *Tobiad Romance* advocates for indigenous, elite figures such as the Tobiads to engage and participate in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy in order to gain the favor of the Ptolemies and assuage their anger. This functions to alleviate the threats placed upon Judea by Ptolemy after the High Priest Onias refused to pay the required tribute (*Ant* 12:159). By gaining favor from the Ptolemaic rulers, the Tobiads are consequently integrated into the Ptolemaic ruling bureaucracy by becoming tax farmers for all of Syria. As tax farmers the Tobiads become active participants in the Ptolemaic imperial objective of agricultural extraction, demanding and collecting enough tribute to satisfy Ptolemy and advance their own wealth (*Ant* 12:180-183; 230). Wise behavior within the *Tobiad Romance* is thus narrated as primarily occurring in close proximity to elite and royal figures, working within their ruling structures, and participating in their extractive policies.

Conversely, Qohelet's rhetoric perceives of ruling figures as more of a dangerous threat to one's well-being than as figures who can be engaged, persuaded, and profitably mimicked—as the Tobiads do with the Ptolemies. Unlike the Tobiads, Qohelet does not solely present wisdom as an elite practice by those participating in the ruling bureaucracy, but considers how it occurs and is practiced among “the people”—a group that the sage Qohelet is said to have taught (Qoh 12:9). Throughout the text Qohelet's critiques, instructions, and observations, work together to present a conceptualization of wisdom that is operative among all social groups—elites, retainers, and peasants—as they strive to survive.

For example, Qohelet begins by satirically portraying elite wisdom through a self-aggrandizing king (Qoh 2:1-12). Despite the somewhat veiled critique of King Qohelet, the text does not deny his exercise of wisdom, but merely critiques the manner and ends to which it was deployed. Later in the text, Qohelet shifts from the royal persona to provide wise instructions for interacting with powerful figures (Qoh 8:1-4; 10: 4, 20). These instructions—which as described in Chapter V may be referring more to interactions with locally elite figures than the reigning king in Alexandria—appear to be directed toward scribal retainers employed by wealthy, local elites in Judea. As was delineated in chapter III, scribal retainers occupied a complex social position with “fuzzy” boundaries between the elite and peasant classes. Since the retainers were employed by the ruling elite, they had access to these circles and benefitted somewhat from their wealth; yet their inclusion in elite spaces was the result of a need for their abilities, and not the retainer's own acquired wealth or social capital. As a result, retainers were considered to be

“disposable,” and if no longer needed by the ruling class, capable of slipping into the peasantry. Hence, Qohelet offers wise instruction that urges them to not draw unnecessary attention to themselves, and thereby experience devastating consequences (e.g., Qoh 8:3, 10:20).

In addition, elites and their retainers, Qohelet also locates the practice of wisdom with persons on the lower rungs of society who are trying to survive impositions of power. This most notably occurs in the mentions of wise peasants, who as a youth is said to be better off than a foolish elderly king (4:13), and in another instance is able negotiate and survive a conflict imposed by a “great king” (9:14-16). While this is not be the only place Qohelet believes that wisdom can be practiced (after all, “wisdom is good with an inheritance,” [7:12]), Qohelet juxtaposes the wise peasant with two figures who seemingly maintain a significant amount of social power. Additionally, Qohelet emphasizes the necessity of practical knowledge and skill for enabling one to navigate and survive the extractive agricultural and economic climate—a wisdom that would be needed by peasants and agricultural laborers. Qohelet believes that this practice of wisdom can generate a relative profit, as skilled workers find “a profit in the proper use of wisdom” in that they know how to avoid unnecessary and preventable harm (Qoh 10:8-12⁵).

Second, Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance* diverge not only on where they socially locate wise action and behavior, but also in how they perceive and evaluate wisdom’s payoff. The *Tobiad Romance* adopts a more “traditional” stance of connecting wise behavior and action with flourishing and well-being. This is evidenced in the text’s propaganda claim that Joseph’s activity as a Ptolemaic tax farmer—a role gained by utilizing a shrewd court wisdom—not only ensured survival, but brought the Jewish people from a state of poverty and weakness to “more splendid opportunities of life.” Wise action within the *Tobiad Romance* is narrated with specific reference to its Ptolemaic context, seeing the mechanisms of Ptolemaic rule as an opportunity for success and flourishing despite the initially desperate circumstances. The wise action of Joseph and Hyrcanus function to deliver real, valuable social goods both for the Jewish people and the Tobiad family; that is, the Jewish people avoid having their land parceled out to Ptolemy’s soldiers, and the Tobiad family grows their wealth and power (*Ant* 12:184-185).

The book of Qohelet is much opaquer in reflecting its historical context. The text vaguely describes a reality occurring “under the sun” which is negatively evaluated as *hevel* (Qoh 1:2-3).

⁵ For a fuller exegetical analysis of this passage, see Chapter V of this work.

Within this *hevel* reality labor does not produce a profit, and if a profit is somehow obtained, it is nullified by death and/or extraction by foreign entities (Qoh 2:11-23; 6:1-2). Like the *Tobiad Romance*, Qohelet is concerned with how to navigate and survive these harsh circumstances experienced by colonial subjects living under Ptolemaic imperial rule. But unlike the Tobiads, Qohelet does not view this context as profitable for opportunistic individuals; rather, Qohelet consistently observes an overall lack of moral retribution and persistent injustice in society. This includes the mistreatment of the righteous (Qoh 8:9-14), the hierarchical exploitation of the poor (Qoh 5:7-8), and a consistent and prevalent oppression (Qoh 4:1-3). For Qohelet the domination of Ptolemaic extraction and oppression robs society of being able to manifest wisdom's moral virtues of justice and righteousness.

As a result, Qohelet is much more critical regarding the efficacy of wisdom. Wisdom certainly has its advantages for Qohelet, namely in how it helps one to survive these difficult circumstances (Qoh 7:12); but Qohelet's accenting of wisdom does not go as far as emphasize its ability to generate "more splendid opportunities" as in the *Tobiad Romance*. Qohelet perceives that the vagaries of life lived "under the sun"—and under Ptolemaic rule—do not guarantee bread for the wise, riches to the intelligent, or favor to those with knowledge (Qoh 9:11-12). Qohelet appears to be bothered by this rampant oppression and a perceived lack of justice, often leading to the thesis declaration that all is *hevel*, and a judgement that the present reality is "evil" (Qoh 6:1; 8:9-10)

In this sense, Qohelet maintains an ethical concern that is lacking or minimized within the *Romance*. It was argued in chapter V that, although Qohelet does not contain moral instruction, the concern for wisdom's social-moral virtues is reflected in the text's laments over oppression and injustice (e.g., Qoh 4:1-3). This lamenting may be symptomatic of scribal enculturation, wherein the scribe(s) who composed Qohelet were likely formed by the virtues of "traditional" wisdom in their scribal education.⁶ The tradition's concern for social justice would have then been written "on the tablet of [their] hearts" (Prov 7:3), leading to the scribes becoming moral agents who were shaped by their received tradition. Consequently, the scribes who produced Qohelet cannot advocate for a shrewd form of survival that heavily involves exploiting others because doing so would violate their moral standards.

⁶ See Chapter III, Section 3.03 for a more detailed analysis of scribes and their moral formation.

Conversely, the Tobiads seemingly lacked this scribal enculturation, and there appears to be no strong emphasis upon their moral formation. As a result, the *Tobiad Romance* deemphasizes the practice of “traditional” wisdom’s moral virtues of righteousness, justice, and equity (Prov 1:3) in the text’s framing of the “wise” behavior of the Tobiads. Both Joseph and Hyrcanus appear to be uninhibited in taking advantage of the Ptolemaic economic mechanisms and hierarchical structure for their own prosperity, and in effect act as ruthless tyrants in their positions of relative power. While Joseph is celebrated as an “excellent and high-minded man” whose career as a tax farmer brought the people “more splendid opportunities of life” (*Ant* 12:224), both Joseph and Hyrcanus engage in violent acts of extraction and oppression, seemingly mimicking their imperial rulers rather than acting as liberators and protectors of the people (*Ant* 12:180-183; 12:222). According to the text, the wealth that Joseph obtained through violent and terrorizing means is used to “make permanent” his power and secure a place of well-being with Ptolemy and Cleopatra (*Ant* 12:184-185). The exacting actions of Joseph and Hyrcanus seem to have engendered an “anti-Tobiad” sentiment that gets preserved within the *Romance*, namely in the words of Tryphon, Ptolemy’s court jester, who comments that Joseph has “stripped all Syria” (*Ant* 12:212).⁷

This anti-Tobiad sentiment fits more with Qohelet’s critique and negative assessment of the present reality than it does with the broader tone of the *Tobiad Romance*. Qohelet, in “merging” with the perspectives of Tryphon and the people of Syria (*Ant* 12:181-182; 212), is well aware that wickedness exists in places where justice should, and wicked people often get celebrated as if they are righteous (Qoh 3:16; 8:10-14). It is unlikely that the sages who produced Qohelet would be surprised by Joseph and Hyrcanus’ brutal practices, as participation in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy unsurprisingly results in the oppression of the poor (Qoh 5:7).⁸ Similar to Tyrphon’s claim that Joseph has “stripped all of Syria,” Qohelet demonstrates an awareness of how those with more power can “strip” wealth and material gains from those who labor (Qoh 2:18; 5:13; 6:2). Qohelet communicates observations of the rampant injustices and oppressions

⁷ It is possible that the scribal authors of the *Tobiad Romance*, who included this critique within the text, were enculturated with wisdom’s virtues. However, because the text is intended as pro-Tobiad propaganda (see Chapter IV of this work), their status as retainers charged with this work may have prevented them from overtly demonstrating their moral virtue.

⁸ As was explored in Chapter IV, the awareness of oppressive rulers is also present within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 28:3, 15-16). However, Proverbs remains optimistic that just rulers can still exist (e.g., Prov 16:10, 20:28). For Qohelet, the present context has rendered this optimism non-existent, and is de-emphasized in Qohelet’s conception of wisdom, since oppressive rule seems to be the overwhelming norm.

that are the result a social system where “one person domineers over another, causing evil” (Qoh 8:9), a hierarchical dominance present within the Ptolemaic bureaucracy.

Third, and significantly, Qohelet suggests that immoral and greedy behavior, such as that practiced by the Tobiads, is too risky and unsustainable. Since Qohelet maintains that wisdom can enable one’s survival in this *hevel* reality, the Tobiad strategy—while it may generate wealth that assists one in staying alive (7:11-12)—brings upon itself unnecessary and avoidable dangers. As will be more fully analyzed in the proceeding section, Qohelet’s emphasis upon the riskiness of elite behavior can be observed within Qohelet’s satirical parody of elite wisdom in 2:1-10, and summed up in Qohelet’s use of animal imagery in 9:4, where the text claims “it is better for a living dog than a dead lion.” Taking the animal symbolism into account, this statement can be read as a critique of the elite practice of wisdom by the Tobiads—a practice that is not to be valued by the wisdom of Qohelet because it runs the risk of an untimely death (e.g., Qoh 7:17; 9:12). Of course, such a sentiment may be authorized by the *Tobiad Romance* itself, as the text ends with Hyrcanus taking his own life because of the shifting power dynamics above him.

Section 6.03 Qohelet’s Dialogue with the *Tobiad Romance*: Select Passages

Having just broadly sketched the dialogical relationship between Qohelet and the *Tobiad Romance*, I further elucidate Qohelet’s unique accenting of wisdom through an in-depth analysis of three passages that are particularly relevant to the dialogical relationship between Qohelet’s wisdom and the wisdom of the Tobiads. These include: Qohelet’s satirical parody of a king in 1:12-2:10, the wisdom continuum in 7:15-20, and the living dog/dead lion juxtaposition in 9:4. Each of these passages represents a specific instance where Qohelet’s concept of wisdom can be read as dialogically “merging” and “recoiling” from the wisdom of Tobiads.

(a) Qohelet’s Royal Persona: A Tobiad Caricature?

While discussed at length in chapter V, the caricature of a royal figure in 1:12-2:10 may be further elucidated by considering how it is dialogically engaged with a discourse of elite “wisdom” embodied by the figures such as Joseph and Hyrcanus within the *Tobiad Romance*. Chapter V established Qohelet’s royal persona as a satirical parody utilizing a “double-voiced discourse” that takes over the utterances of socially elite figures for “critical and hostile purposes.” More precisely, the extreme rhetoric of grand claims of wisdom suggest that the text is satirically portraying elite and powerful figures who claim to embody wisdom, yet do not demonstrate any type of moral virtue in their practice of wisdom. As satire, the royal persona

within Qohelet can be understood as a highly contextual act that is targeting actual situations, individuals, or known types of human behavior. Since the satire does not explicitly reference any known person, but simply speaks of “Qohelet... king upon Israel in Jerusalem” (1:12), it cannot be known for certain if the author(s) were targeting a specific individual or a typical figure that operated and existed within society.

That being said, the heavy emphasis upon wisdom coupled with excessive wealth and extensive building projects has led readers to hear an echo of Solomon in the presentation of “King” Qohelet. This observation has been picked up by Sandoval, who compares the satiric depiction of a royal figure in Qohelet with the critiques of the imperial-oriented Solomon in the pre-Deuteronomistic 1 Kings material.⁹ Since Solomon is never actually named, but merely echoed in the language, Sandoval argues that the reader attending to the Hellenistic context of Qohelet is able to construct an image of the royal figure in “the mold of an oppressive elite figure from Ptolemaic Judea.” The ironic and satirical portrayal of a ruler “in Jerusalem” may then be functioning as a subtle critique of local Hellenistic and indigenous elites who operate within the Ptolemaic bureaucracy to carry out their own “imperial pretensions.”¹⁰ Sandoval does include the Tobiads as a type of Ptolemaic era figure who could be the target of Qohelet’s royal satire,¹¹ a suggestion that can be strengthened when drawing this passage into a dialogical relationship with the construction of an “elite” wisdom in *Tobiad Romance*.

Similar to that of King Qohelet, the Tobiads exhibit a type of wisdom based in shrewd and clever problem solving by using what they have at their disposal to accomplish their desired objectives. This type of wisdom is evidenced when Joseph tests Hyrcanus’ virtue by sending him into the wilderness to sow the ground, but withholding the yoke-straps so that Hyrcanus must figure out how to accomplish his task (*Ant* 12:190-195). This story of Hyrcanus is emblematic of the larger objectives undertaken by the Tobiads, as both Joseph and Hyrcanus demonstrate an ability to utilize what is at their disposal—namely their wit and persuasive speech—to manipulate social situations for their favor.

⁹ Timothy J. Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon in the Royal Fiction of Ecclesiastes,” in *On Prophets, Warriors, and Kings: Former Prophets through the Eyes of Their Interpreters*, eds. George J. Brooke and Ariel Feldman, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 13-39.

¹⁰ Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon,” 30-31.

¹¹ Sandoval, “Reconfiguring Solomon,” 32. Also briefly mentioned in Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 66.

Throughout the narrative the Tobiads engage in a “wise behavior” that consists of practical, clever, and shrewd maneuvering so that they can ultimately bind themselves to the Ptolemaic bureaucracy and accomplish personal objectives of increasing their wealth, influence, and power (e.g., *Ant* 12:184-185; 217-219). This emphasis by the Tobiads is also confirmed by the extra-textual evidence for the Tobiads in the Zenon papyri that was discussed in Chapter IV. The papyri reference Toubias as a local military commander over a cleruchy of military settlers, and contain letters sent from Toubias to King Ptolemy that accompanied gifts of slaves and tamed, “exotic” animals. These letters demonstrate the Tobiad strategy of maintaining cordial relations with the ruling imperial powers by incorporating themselves within their ruling structures and providing gifts to the imperial monarchs.¹²

As was demonstrated in Chapter IV, the wisdom of the Tobiads, like that of King Qohelet, neglects wisdom’s moral virtues, as they build their wealth by ruthlessly demanding tribute from residents of their own province, and in turn mimic their Ptolemaic overlords. Notably, Hyrcanus’ wise maneuvering enables him to build a “strong fortress” with an extravagant “country estate” (*Ant* 12:230-233) that, like King Qohelet’s, includes “vast parks” (παρὰδείσοις; *Ant* 12:233; c.f. LXX Qoh 2:5), and extensive irrigation (*Ant* 12: 231; Qoh 2:6). As was noted, the text’s description of this estate is a near accurate representation of the archeological site of ‘Iraq El-Amir, which has been associated with the Tobiad family due, in part, to its “Tobiah” inscription. For Hyrcanus, “wise behavior” also included the practice of buying and gifting slaves to gain favor, a practice also demonstrated Toubias in the Zenon papyri, and an act that King Qohelet similarly undertook while he was becoming “great” and being guided by wisdom (*Ant* 12:227-228; Qoh 2:7).

When placed in dialogical relation to one another, it can be assumed that the ironic and satirical presentation of King Qohelet is intending to undermine an elite conception of wisdom that gets demonstrated within the *Tobiad Romance*. Despite the grand claims regarding King Qohelet’s achievements and greatness, the persona may be subtly expressing and reinforcing the limited power of local elites within the imperial bureaucracy. King Qohelet is repeatedly relativized to being “in Jerusalem” (Qoh 1:1; 1:12; 2:9), and during the third century BCE, there were no known monarchs who would have had influence in this area other than King Ptolemy in Alexandria. Local power was usually wielded through the priesthood or within the hands of

¹² For the papyri, see P.Cair.Zen.59003; P.Cair.Zen.59075; P.Cair.Zen.59076.

wealthy residents like the Tobiads who maintained local dominance by acquiescing Ptolemaic power and control. The satiric king in Qohelet may be evoking local elites, rulers, and powerful figures “in Jerusalem” who were not really monarchs, but were capable of exerting their relative power and locally demonstrating their wealth, such as Joseph and Hyrcanus.

The idea that the royal figure in Qohelet be understood as more of a powerful figure and not necessarily an actual monarch was first proposed H. Louis Ginsberg.¹³ Ginsberg argues that מֶלֶךְ in 1:1, 1:12, 2:12 should be re-vocalized to מְלִיךְ, and read as “a man of means” or “property holder.” This argument does not appear to have garnered wide support, being particularly rejected by Seow and Schoors.¹⁴ However, Ginsberg does point out that the powerful figure only tells us of his intellectual and economic pursuits and, while these are not incompatible with a royal figure, the description lacks the typical accomplishments of kings such as wars, erecting public buildings, administering justice and governing the people.¹⁵ Ginsberg explains that the title the title of מֶלֶךְ is not meant to necessarily convey the speaker’s status as a monarch, but “merely to explain how he was in position to do the things he is going to tell us about.”¹⁶

Whether one accepts Ginsberg’s proposed re-vocalization or not, his assessment of the rhetoric surrounding “King Qohelet” astutely recognizes how this figure maintains only a relative sense of power. King Qohelet certainly occupies a position that enables him to obtain great wealth, but he is also apparently in a position to lose it as well (i.e., Qoh 2:11-18). While King Qohelet may brag about extending his reach beyond Jerusalem, claiming to amass the wealth “of kings and the provinces,” such wealth ultimately will come under the control of one who is more powerful than he. According to the text, King Qohelet will express a consternation over not having any control over who will receive his resources after his death (Qoh 2:18), and as the Sage Qohelet observes, local wealthy figures constantly live under the threat of having a “foreign man” consume from their wealth (Qoh 6:2). The royal persona arrogantly proclaims that all that has been done in establishing the estate is his own labor, and that he did it for himself, yet the king “in Jerusalem” is still unable to generate a lasting profit (יתרון) (Qoh 2:11). This elite

¹³ H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 17 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 12-15.

¹⁴ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB18C (Garden City, NY; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 97; Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 36.

¹⁵ See a more extensive discussion of this in Chapter V where I note the variances between King Qohelet, ANE royal inscriptions, and propaganda for Ptolemy II.

¹⁶ Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, 14.

figure, like all laborers, is only able to gain a portion (חלק) that includes a mere enjoyment of the king's perceived accomplishments (Qoh 2:10; c.f., 3:22; 9:9).

As Qohelet warns, even wealthy persons—such as the powerful in Jerusalem—are susceptible to losing their acquired wealth (Qoh 5:12-13, 6:2) in a society where there are greater persons above those of relative greatness (Qoh 5:7). Thus, even the self-proclaimed wisest and greatest king who gains joy off the back-breaking labor of others is unable to generate a lasting profit; if not lost to other, more dominant extracting powers, it will ultimately vanish in death. A similar sentiment can be discovered within in the figure of Hyrcanus, who through wise action is able to endear himself to Ptolemy and establish his own extravagant estate. Yet, these are transitory accomplishments that are ultimately seized by a more powerful figure when the power dynamics shift from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids, and Hyrcanus dies not having control over that which he “labored” for (*Ant* 12:236).

(b) The Wisdom Continuum of Qoh 7:15-20

While Qohelet may satirize elite wisdom, the text does indicate that there may be some value in the shrewd maneuverings that were the trademark of the Tobiads. Qohelet 7:15-20 is a noteworthy passage in the text's conceptualization of wisdom, particularly in how it may situate Qohelet in relation to more “traditional” wisdom and the picture of wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance*.

(15) I have seen it all in my *hevel* days: there are righteous ones (צדיק) perishing in their righteousness (בצדקו) and there are wicked ones (רשע) prolonging [their life] in their wickedness (ברעתו). (16) Do not be overly righteous and do not make yourself excessively wise, lest you be baffled (תשומם). (17) Do not be overly wicked and do not be a fool. Why should (למה)¹⁷ you die when (it is) not your time? (18) [It is] good that you seize the one, but also do not relax your hand on the other; For the one who fears God will go forth with all of them. (19) Wisdom (החכמה) will prevail for the wise one/sage (לחכם) more than ten bureaucrats (שליטים) who are in the city. (20) For there is not a human so righteous on the earth who will do [only] good and not sin.

Wisdom, and the associated attribute of righteousness, are consistently favored in Qohelet over their binary opposites, namely foolishness and wickedness (Qoh 2:13-14; 4:13; 8:12-13; 9:17; 8:12-15). Yet, Qoh 7:16 contains a caution against making oneself “overly righteous” and “excessively wise”; this is followed and accompanied by a similar caution to not be “overly wicked” and “a fool” (7:17). Cautioning against these two extremes, Qohelet then

¹⁷ Could also be translated as “lest” or “otherwise,” i.e., “otherwise you will die before your time.”

urges that one should maintain a hold on both the “one” and the “other” (7:18), presumably referring to both sets of the righteous/wise and wicked/fool binary. While Qohelet often operates out of the traditional “wise-fool” and “righteous-wicked” binaries, this passage represents an instance where the text attempts to move beyond the binary by considering the complexity of human behavior in difficult circumstances.

Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger explains that within this passage Qohelet moves away from a traditional perspective conceiving of righteous/wise and wicked/fool as contradictory opposites, and instead re-formulates these binaries as opposite poles on a line where they embody “different degrees of righteousness.”¹⁸ In other words, the “righteous and wise” and the “wicked and fool” are not definite categories where each person must be wholly categorized as one or the other. Instead, Qohelet is here conceiving of wisdom and proper behavior as existing along a continuum, advising that one not attempt to go too far on either side. By reading this passage in light of Qohelet’s dialogical relations, I argue that Qoh 7:15-20 is articulating a concept of wisdom that is capable of utilizing the most valuable and useful aspects of the “traditional wisdom” of Proverbs, and the shrewd court wisdom of the *Tobiad Romance*, while also dispensing with the perceived undesirable, unachievable, or harmful aspects of these perspectives.

The move to conceive of wisdom and proper behavior as existing along a continuum follows two statements that sum up Qohelet’s evaluation of wisdom. In 7:12 Qohelet equates the protection offered by wisdom with the shadowy protection of money, emphasizing how wisdom allows “its possessor to survive” (7:12). While wisdom does allow one to survive, Qohelet qualifies its value by offering an observation regarding the lack of appropriate moral retribution, stating that there are “righteous ones perishing in their righteousness” while wicked ones are “prolonging [their life] in their wickedness” (7:15). It is in this tension of wisdom’s ability to help one survive, yet not being able to fully deliver a life of prospering and well-being that Qohelet nuances a description of appropriate behavior.

(i) *Don’t be too wise...*

Qohelet’s caution against being “overly righteous” and “excessively wise” is based in a belief that those who do strive for these extremes will “be baffled (תְּשׁוּמָה)” (7:16b). As Seow

¹⁸ Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Order: Wisdom, Retribution, and Skepticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 96

notes, the term זמז , used here in the rare hithpolel stem, has connotations of emotional or psychological devastation (c.f., Ps 143:4).¹⁹ If we accept that the text of Qohelet is a scribal production from one who has likely been instructed in and formed by wisdom's virtues, then it may be that this sentiment arises from the disappointment and anguish expressed in 7:15 and throughout the text.²⁰ The wise can be "baffled" because, as 7:15 expresses, one's training in wisdom would have cultivated an expectation "to see consistent justice," but Qohelet is "shocked when it is violated."²¹ Qohelet seems to be addressing the purported moral efficacy within "traditional" wisdom where the righteous and wise are expected to have a prolonged life and the wicked and fool are expected to perish (e.g., Prov 3:16, 33-35).

From Qohelet's perspective within the Ptolemaic context, "excessive wisdom" may engender a naivete within the wise person, causing shock and distress when it is realized that living as one who is wise and righteous doesn't safeguard a person from "perishing." Qohelet has noted the rampant injustice within Ptolemaic Palestine, observing that it is those who act wickedly, or are "sinners," who are able to prolong their life—not those who are wise and righteous (Qoh 7:15; 8:12). This lack of moral retribution is most poignantly expressed in Qoh 8:14 where Qohelet observes that "there are righteous ones who [things have happened to them] as if they [did] wicked acts. And there are wicked ones who [things have happened to them] as if they [did] righteous acts."

Tamez explains that, although Qohelet is contradicting traditional theology, Qohelet is frankly being "honest with reality," wherein "the righteous are often worse off than the wicked."²² It should be noted that Qohelet's caution against being "overly righteous" and "excessively wise" in 7:16 is not wholly dismissing wisdom's value, or minimizing the pursuit of it. If one is to be wise then they must, according to Qohelet, maintain a realistic perspective regarding wisdom's efficacy within a society dominated by imperial powers who are heavily extracting the area's resources. Accordingly, Qohelet's advice may not necessarily be an overt

¹⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 254.

²⁰ See also 3:16, 4:1-3, 5:7, 6:1-2, 8:9-14

²¹ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 259.

²² Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 99.

attempt to overturn a traditional axiom; rather, Qohelet is “simply looking for ways to survive in the context of total frustration.”²³

(ii) *...or too foolish.*

Within the wise/fool binary if one veers from wisdom then they necessarily fall into the category of foolishness. Qohelet avoids this distinction and follows up the caution against excessive wisdom by stating that one should not “be overly wicked” and “not be a fool.” These imperatives are supported by a more devastating consequence than the bafflement of being too wise, as Qohelet suggests that the wicked and the fool will experience an untimely death (7:17b). It can be deduced that within this framework, the fool and the wicked represent persons who have operated outside of the virtues of traditional wisdom in their attempts to navigate life and achieve well-being. Yet the suggestion in 7:17 that those who are too wicked and act like a fool will lead them to “die when it is not [their] time” appears to be in tension with the observation in 7:15 that the “wicked ones” are “prolonging [their life] in their wickedness.” Qohelet also express this tension in 8:12-13, acknowledging that the wicked are prolonging their life, yet it will ultimately “not be good for the wicked one” since they are “not fearful before God” (8:13).²⁴ Qohelet seems to be filtering perceptions through traditional instruction by acknowledging what has been observed, yet trusting in a belief that excessive wickedness will eventually get its comeuppance (e.g., Prov 2:22; 10:3, 22-30). At the same time, Qohelet seems to imply in 7:15-18 that if wicked persons are prolonging their life, then they must be doing something right if surviving into a prolonged life is a desirable objective.

When understood in a dialogic setting, Qohelet’s comments can be interpreted as reflecting upon and offering a sharp critique of figures like the Tobiads. While the *Tobiad Romance* portrays Joseph and Hyrcanus as characters who embody particular wisdom characteristics, the text also reveals how they do not embrace the social virtues of righteousness and justice in their role as communal leaders. Instead, they act as figures who mimic their imperial rulers by engaging in violent and brutal extractive practices, increasing their own wealth at the expense of the residents of their own province. By neglecting the social virtues of wisdom and instead taking on the role of a “cruel oppressor” engaged in “unjust gain” (c.f. Prov 28:16;

²³ Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 99.

²⁴ See Chapter V for a fuller exegetical analysis of this passage.

see also Prov 1:10-19), the Tobiads could be categorized on the negative side of the constructed binaries within instructional literature; specifically, they could be perceived as the “wicked.”

While their “wicked” acts can be observed from a virtuous, outside perspective, the *Tobiad Romance* presents a propaganda that on its surface largely extolls the actions of Joseph and praises the traits of Hyrcanus. This text may be understood from Qohelet’s perspective as an example of the wicked who are treated as though they are righteous (Qoh 8:14), who prolong their life through wicked and unjust acts (Qoh 7:15), yet also run the risk of experiencing an untimely death (Qoh 7:17). Both Joseph and Hyrcanus gain a measure of power and increase their wealth through shrewd maneuverings among Ptolemaic powerbrokers, enabling them to gain the position of a tax farmer and the favor of Ptolemy (*Ant* 12:179, 220). The personalities of both Joseph and Hyrcanus are honored in the narrative, with Joseph praised as an “excellent and high minded-man” (*Ant* 12:224) and Hyrcanus extolled for his “good sense,” “quickness of intelligence,” and “boldness” (*Ant* 12:195). The narrative further celebrates Joseph as a liberator of the Jewish people, leading them “from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life” (12:224).

However, by taking part in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy and undertaking its objectives of economic extraction, their fate was ultimately tied up with the more powerful figures that they bound themselves to. This proved to be a risky endeavor as the control of the province shifted from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids, leading Hyrcanus to abruptly end his life out of fear that he would not maintain the same status with his new imperial overlords. The story of the Tobiads narrates the tension of the oppressive “high” figures (Qoh 5:7) who advance themselves through wicked and unjust acts, yet are fragile figures whose “prolonged life” could come to a crashing halt because of the power machinations above them.

(iii) *A Third Way*

Qohelet’s double caution against pursuing the extremes of righteousness/wisdom and wickedness/foolishness enables Qohelet to advocate for a “third way” that does not fit in the constructed binaries. Qohelet states that it is “good that you seize the one, but also do not relax your hand on the other” (7:18a), indicating that in a world where the righteous often perish and the wicked prolong their life, there is value in maintaining wisdom along with attributes that may be classified as “wicked” or “foolish.”

Commenting on the passage, William Brown notes how Qohelet displays a correlation between a perceived lack of human control in navigating life with a lack of moral efficacy in human conduct. Qohelet does not question “the moral assessability of human agents,” but does question where moral conduct can lead a person. As a result, Qohelet does not merely abandon or devalue the social and moral virtues of “traditional wisdom”; rather, Qohelet seeks a way forward that moves beyond conventional notions of righteousness and wickedness, wisdom and folly. As Brown notes, this “third way” is “thoroughly pragmatic” in the attempt to avoid both extremes.²⁵ Since it is believed that the pursuit of either extreme along the righteous/wise-wicked/fool continuum leads to destructive consequences within the Ptolemaic context, Tamez adds that Qohelet is here recommending a type of moderation “as a means of survival.”²⁶

There is no doubt that this passage—specifically 7:18—is deeply perplexing and seemingly contradictory. However, when read in a dialogical relationship to the differing perspectives maintained in the utterances of “traditional” wisdom and the *Tobiad Romance*, the emphasis may be that one can take the best and most practical aspects put forth by these discourses, using them when necessary and appropriate, but cautioning against a wholesale acceptance of each. “[It is] good that you seize the one” (Qoh 7:18a)—the “one” likely referring to the righteous/wise distinction, the first category and end of the spectrum mentioned in 7:16. Throughout the text, Qohelet has clearly valued wisdom over foolishness, specifically for its ability to engender survival using shrewd behavior and practical skill—elements also present within the “traditional” wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 1:4). As noted, Qohelet has also maintained a perspective that values righteous and just behavior in society, even offering instructions that emphasize mutual, communal support (Qoh 4:8-12).

“But also do not relax your hand on the other” (Qoh 7:18a)—a statement that is likely referring to the wicked/fool distinction in Qoh 7:17, and read here as emblematic of behavior demonstrated by Joseph and Hyrcanus in the *Tobiad Romance*. Though the Tobiads lacked moral virtues, they did demonstrate a shrewdness that, although not always operating for “righteous” purposes, was necessary for surviving the difficult and threatening circumstances of Ptolemaic Palestine. For example, the *Romance* begins by describing the difficult circumstances facing the

²⁵ William P. Brown, “Virtue and its Limits in the Wisdom Corpus: Character Formation, Disruption, and Transformation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 61.

²⁶ Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 99.

Jewish people: they were being raided and enslaved by neighboring Samaritans (*Ant* 12:156), and Ptolemy was sending an envoy to Jerusalem threatening to seize and parcel out their land to soldiers if the withheld tribute was not paid (*Ant* 12:159). The Tobiads were able to act in a way that assuaged Ptolemy and, according to the text, brought the Jews “more splendid opportunities of life.” Joseph and Hyrcanus demonstrated a shrewdness and wit that assisted them in navigating these difficult circumstances—a virtue of “traditional” wisdom and one that is also emphasized in Qohelet’s conception of wisdom. Like the Tobiads, the wise peasant in Qoh 9:14-16 was able to save his city “with his wisdom,” an act that can be assumed to involve some level of shrewdness. The difference, of course, was that the Tobiads were not poor and powerless like the wise peasant—who had to act shrewdly just to survive—but were able to manipulate this desperate situation for their own advantage, as they exploited others to increase their wealth and social standing.

While Qohelet does maintain a moral compass that recognizes social inequalities and oppressions, Qohelet also sees the value in shrewd behavior, knowledge, and activity that can allow one to successfully navigate a *hevel* reality. By stating that one should not be too righteous or not completely let go of what may be considered “wicked” activity, Qohelet can be read here as suggesting that one will need to act in less-than-righteous ways from time to time—at least as righteousness has been conventionally understood. After all, there is no one who is so righteous that they “do [only] good and not sin” (7:20). Since the wicked have been observed to prolong their life (Qoh 7:15; 8:12), achieving the goal of survival through acts of shrewdness and the use of skill may involve occasionally going against traditional morality. Tamez interprets Qohelet as advising one to keep “their options open even when one does not fully agree with them” since the overarching goal within this brutal context is “to survive the present.”²⁷ According to Qohelet there are times when particular actions may be merited for achieving one’s overall objective of maintaining life, since “for everything there is a season, a time for every matter under the sun” (Qoh 3:1 ff.; also, 3:17).

It should be noted that while Qohelet does seem to move beyond the constructed wise/fool and righteousness/wickedness binaries, this “third way” hardly represents a middle ground. Qohelet still favors and leans more toward the side of righteousness and wisdom, stating when one seizes “the one” (righteousness/wisdom) and holds on to “the other”

²⁷ Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 99-100.

(wickedness/foolishness), “the one who fears God will go forth with all of them” (7:18b). Within Proverbs the fear of YHWH is claimed to be the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10); it is also believed to prolong one’s life, whereas wickedness will shorten one’s years (Prov 10:27; also 14:27). While not an overwhelming theme within Qohelet, the “fear of God” does maintain a similar notion. According to Seow, those who are “fearers of God” are able to maintain an awareness of humanity’s potential, and more appropriately, humanity’s limitations; this enables one with a knowledge and perspective that is needed to adequately navigate life (c.f., Qoh 8:13).²⁸ Simply put, Qohelet believes that the danger of excessive wisdom is merely being baffled, whereas excessive wickedness and foolishness is believed to be life threatening.

The value of wisdom is further expressed in 7:19 where Qohelet claims that “wisdom will prevail for the wise one more than ten bureaucrats (שליטים) who are in the city,” echoing the sentiment expressed in the story of the wise peasant in 9:14-16. The term שליטים indicates persons with power and authority, specifically those who have power over others (c.f., Qoh 8:8; 10:5). According to Fox, this term is best understood as referencing rich and powerful persons who are not necessarily rulers or governors, but “may have received their wealth by holding positions in the officialdom whose corruption Qohelet observes in 5:7.”²⁹ This interpretation fits with the Ptolemaic context, where persons of power achieved or maintained a relative authority and wealth by acclimating themselves into the Ptolemaic governing bureaucracy. This term can be read as referencing such bureaucrats within this system, of which the Tobiads would be included.³⁰ As Fox summarizes, by claiming that wisdom will prevail more than ten bureaucrats, Qohelet is stating that, like the situation of the wise peasant, wisdom is more valuable than relative wealth for achieving long-term survival.³¹ For Qohelet, what is needed to survive is not a form of relative wealth and political power that will always be subjected to one more powerful in the hierarchy, but, as Tamez writes, a “realistic wisdom” that can adequately navigate this difficult context.

²⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 255.

²⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 257. Fox translates as “magnates.”

³⁰ Seow, citing Aramaic docs that use the term for authority over property, similarly translates the term as “proprietors” and interprets it as not designating a political office, but merely indicating the socioeconomic position of the people (*Ecclesiastes* 256-257). While Seow’s work is insightful, I believe he too easily dismisses the connection between wealth and power.

³¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 257. Fox does propose that Qoh 7:19 is out of place and is more correctly read following 7:12. While his argument on the placement of the verse is not convincing, the analysis of the verse itself is insightful.

While Qohelet does advocate that one hold on to a little wickedness if it assists in survival, Qohelet is also seemingly aware that there are limits to how much one should dabble in wicked activity. Although there are wicked and powerful persons who do prosper (as the *Tobiad Romance* narrates), wicked behavior and unjust actions done for the purpose of social and economic gain is a risky business that may bring short-term gains, yet is ultimately suicidal. While the righteous may perish in their righteousness (Qoh 7:15), Qohelet still advocates for and places the primary value upon wisdom, but in way that does not make grand promises regarding one's flourishing and well-being. As has been delineated, the socio-economic context of Ptolemaic Palestine has choked out Qohelet's hope of obtaining enough resources to enable any sense of material flourishing. Yet, as Tamez summarizes, Qohelet's perspective is that "those who act with discernment and moderation, trusting the mysterious God, will survive." Qohelet's wisdom, with a little "wickedness" vis-à-vis conventional norms mixed in, will do what needs to be done to obtain the primary objective of wisdom: survival.

(c) Qohelet and Hyrcanus: A Living Dog and a Dead Lion

Though Qohelet emphasizes wisdom's ability to engender survival, the text minimizes a confidence in wisdom's ability to engender material flourishing and societal honor, a tenant of "traditional" wisdom. Conversely, the *Tobiad Romance* narrates the increasing wealth and high status of Joseph and Hyrcanus while also propagating a "trickle-down economics" where Joseph's activity as a tax farmer supposedly brings Jews "from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life" (*Ant* 12:224). An analysis of the dialogical relationship between these two perspectives raises the question: why should Qohelet's conception and outlook on wisdom be valued over the construction of wisdom within *Tobiad Romance*? If there is no profit to be gained from one's labor, as Qohelet suggests, why not just embrace the Tobiad strategy of empowering elite figures to engage in structures of power, mimic imperial behaviors, and extract whatever wealth they can? In other words, Does the *Tobiad Romance*, more so than the survival wisdom of Qohelet, adequately project a vision of flourishing that can deliver an overall state of well-being?

This study has identified three emphases and evaluations of wisdom within Qohelet that vary from the *Tobiad Romance*: 1. By emphasizing survival, Qohelet observes wisdom as being practiced by persons of a various social classes, and not just locally elite figures like Tobiad family; 2. Qohelet maintains an ethical concern that is lacking or minimized within the *Romance*;

and 3. Qohelet suggests that the behavior of locally elite figures, such as that practiced by the Tobiads, is too risky since hitching one's wagon to imperial monarchs is perceived to be a dangerous and unsustainable strategy.

Qohelet's valuing of survival wisdom over the practice of binding oneself to the Ptolemaic bureaucracy may be communicated in the animal imagery evoked in Qoh 9:4:

כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִחְבֵּר אֶל כְּלֵי־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בְּטַחֲוֹן
כִּי־לְכֹלֵב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת

For the one who is joined to the living there is hope, because it is better for a living dog than a dead lion.

Occurring within a wider passage that emphasizes the common fate of death shared by all types of persons (9:2-3), but also insisting that there is value in being alive (9:4-5), Qoh 9:4 significantly qualifies the status of the living and the dead by utilizing a unique formulation of the “better-than” proverb with the imagery of a dog and a lion. The use of the dog/lion imagery is set up, and partially explicated, in the first clause that states “For the one who is joined to the living there is hope...” I follow most translators, both ancient and contemporary, by translating with the *Qere* verb of חָבַר (“be joined”) as pual imperfect third masc. sg., instead of the *Ketib* verb of בָּחַר (“to choose, elect”).³² It is likely that the *Qere* represents a correction and a “metathesized reading” of the *Ketib*, as it fits better with the following statement יֵשׁ בְּטַחֲוֹן (“there is hope”), and the overall rhetoric of the surrounding verses.³³ The verse appears to be communicating a value to being alive, or “joined with the living,” a sentiment within the subsequent verses of 9:5-6.

Qohelet further emphasizes the value of being alive in the second line of this verse with a somewhat ironic statement that juxtaposes a living dog with a dead lion in a “better-than” formulation. The “better-than” proverb is a common form within Hebrew wisdom instruction that evaluates various aspects of human experience by determining what is relatively

³² For an overview of how various sources have chosen to read this verb, see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 662.

³³ Tova Forti, “The Fly and the Dog: Observations on Ideational Polarity in the Book of Qoheleth,” in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 250-251.

beneficial.³⁴ The most common and basic form of these proverbs uses a template of “better is x than y” with the adverb טוב at the head of the first strophe, and the preposition מן beginning the second strophe (e.g., Prov 12:9, 15:16 16:8; Qoh 4:6, 13 5:4, 6:9, 7:1-3). Qoh 9:4, to the contrary, deviates from this typical template, representing a variant “better-than” saying.³⁵

Uniquely, Qoh 9:4 begins with a prepositional ל, and the adverb טוב occurs at end of the opening clause, where it appears in conjunction with the prepositional particle מן. According to Fox, the sentence should still be read as communicating a beneficial state of being, since the opening ל represents “a *lamed* of benefit” for the favored subject: “a live dog is better off than a dead lion.”³⁶ Tova Forti explains that this alternative form, coupled with the interesting choice of animals, gives a rhetorical emphasis to the irony expressed in the saying “The (scorned) dog=is alive and the (glorious) lion= is dead.”³⁷ Since the statement is used to illustrate the advantage of life over death being expressed in Qoh 9:1-6, Forti reads Qohelet’s juxtaposition of a living dog and dead lion in this alternative “better-than” formulation as concretizing a “cynical position toward life” to prove an advantage for the living “over the glorious dead.”

Further understanding of Qohelet’s use of this specific animal imagery in a variant form may be gleaned when interpreting this verse within a dialogical context. Specifically, I argue that these images can be read as symbolically evoking the perception and experience of two different social statuses within the Ptolemaic Palestine. Read in this way, I interpret Qohelet to be communicating that it is better to be like a dog, who is viewed as a subordinate, yet kept alive because its labor is needed, than a lion who is valorized for its fierceness, yet always under the threat of being killed and subjugated by more powerful figures asserting their dominance. When considering how the narrative of the *Tobiad Romance* plays out, it appears as though this possible critique levied against figures like the Tobiads by Qohelet is valid, if not justified. This assertion will be fleshed out through a thorough examination of the symbolic character of each

³⁴ See the discussion in Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 597 and 939. As Fox explains, this template can vary and become more complex to add nuance and description in what the proverb is communicating as being beneficial.

³⁵ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 292-293; Forti, “The Fly and the Dog,” 253.

³⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 292. Seow disagrees, reading the *lamed* as emphatic (as in, indicating assertiveness), but offering a similar translation: “Yes, a living dog is better than a dead lion” (*Ecclesiastes*, 301).

³⁷ Forti, “The Fly and the Dog,” 253.

animal, and considering how this statement functions in evaluating the relationship between the discourse of wisdom within Qohelet and its dialogical engagement with the *Tobiad Romance*.

(i) *“It is better for a living dog...”: Dogs in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*

The use of a “living dog” as being positive in this better/than binary is an interesting rhetorical choice. While modern Western culture has increasingly domesticated dogs and tabbed them as “man’s best friend,” the portrayal of dogs (כלב) within Hebrew Bible isn’t overly positive. Dogs are often portrayed as animals existing on the peripheral of human communities, notably depicted as living in unmanaged packs who act as a menacing presence to urban communities (Ps 22:17; 59:7, 15), and as scavenging pariah’s who feed on dead bodies (1 Kgs 16:4; 21:19, 23-24; 22:38; 2 Kgs 9:10, 35-37; Ps 68:22-23). The Hebrew Bible commonly implies negative connotations upon canine imagery, often using the term as a slur or insult (e.g., 1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 3:8); specifically, Proverbs 26:11 compares fools who repeatedly act foolishly to a barfing dog: “Like a dog returning to its vomit, is a fool repeating his folly.” Contra to Qohelet, the use of “dog” as an insult can be intensified by referring to someone as a “dead dog” (1 Sam 24:15; 2 Sam 9:8; 16:9).³⁸

Geoffrey David Miller has noted that, while several texts do portray canines negatively, biblical scholarship has tended to focus singularly upon these negative portrayals, leading to unnuanced conclusions that within the Hebrew Bible dogs are considered “vile” and “contemptible” animals. Miller instead draws attention to canine references within the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish literature that demonstrate an awareness of the closeness and usefulness of dogs to humans (e.g., Job 30:1; Isa 56:10; Tob 6:4; 11:2), indicating that the text’s attitude towards dogs was often “neutral” and not entirely negative.³⁹ This correlates with archaeological evidence from the ancient Near East—including within Palestine—that suggests that dogs maintained close relationships with humans, as they were domesticated and utilized to assist humans in hunting, herding, and security.⁴⁰ Mesopotamian iconography even associated dogs with healing deities, an association that may have been motivated by the perceived healing

³⁸ Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 135.

³⁹ Geoffrey David Miller, “Attitudes toward Dogs in Ancient Israel: A Reassessment,” *JSOT* 32.4 (2008): 488. Miller cites an article by D. Winton Thomas as particularly influential in the misguided consensus that dogs were consistently viewed with contempt (“*Kelebh* ‘Dog’: Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the Old Testament,” *VT* 10 [1960]: 410-27).

⁴⁰ See Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 134-140; Miller, “Attitudes toward Dogs,” 489-494; Also, Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 46-47.

powers of a dog licking wounds.⁴¹ When reviewing both textual and archaeological records, it is clear that dogs occupy an interesting place in their relation to humans; that is, an ambivalent portrayal that at once can express revulsion toward dogs as scavengers existing on the margins of human communities, yet also functionally valuable to humans for the labor they can provide.

In fact, Ken Stone has noted how the use of “dog” as an insult to other humans may evidence the closeness of dogs to humans, and more significantly represent assertions of social hierarchies. Cross-cultural studies on the relations between humans and dogs have observed that the use of canine references as insults (e.g., “dog,” “bitch”) “frequently coexists with affection toward actual dogs.”⁴² Using the example of Hazael’s response to Elijah where he refers to himself as “your servant, the dog” (עבדך הכלב) in 2 Kgs 8:13, Stone explains that dogs were likely viewed as close and useful subordinates to humans, and the use of the term within biblical and ancient literature functions to underscore assertions of subordination within a social hierarchy. The use of this canine rhetoric can carry different connotations depending on the perceived intent of the one speaking it. For example, Hazael’s self-proclamation as a servant and a dog may be “understood as loyal service, for which dogs were exemplars.” As noted above, a dog’s loyal and subordinate service was valued for the labor they could provide in accomplishing the human objectives of hunting, herding, and security.

On the other hand, if the term is used with derisive intent as a slur, then it can function as a rhetorical assertion of the dominance of a particular person(s) over others. An example of this occurs within the *Tobiad Romance*, where Hyrcanus rhetorically asserts his superiority over the other guests at Ptolemy’s banquet by referring to them as dogs. When Ptolemy asks Hyrcanus why he has so many bones before him, Hyrcanus cleverly replies that the other men did not have any bones before them because they were dogs who ate “the bones together with the meat.” Hyrcanus then comments on his self by stating that a man is one who will “eat the meat and throw the bones away,” which is what he, as a man has done (*Ant* 12:210-213). Hyrcanus’ reply was clearly meant to assert his superiority over the other guests, who were attempting to belittle him, while also gaining Ptolemy’s favor in these back-and-forth banquet antics. This objective is accomplished by drawing upon this unique human-animal relationship to portray himself as the

⁴¹ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*, 47.

⁴² Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*, 54.

dominant figure (the man) in relation to the other guests, who are to be understood as subordinate and inferior in this social setting (dogs).

Qohelet's statement that it is "better to be a living dog" is similar to Hyrcanus use of dog as an insult in that Qohelet may be evoking a subordinated status within a social hierarchy, while maintaining a different tone and intent. Stone writes that the faithful service of a dog inspires both admiration and discomfort, as he draws a connection between the ambivalent attitudes toward dogs and the "biblical ambivalence toward the many status hierarchies that shaped ancient human societies, hierarchies that are sometimes critiqued but often affirmed in biblical literature."⁴³ This correlation of canine symbolism and social hierarchies may be informing Qohelet, since the text maintains a general awareness of operative social hierarchies, with a concern for those who are subordinated and experiencing oppression as a result (Qoh 4:1; 5:7; 8:9). Qohelet's use of canine imagery can be set in dialogical relation to the use of "dog" as insult, exemplified by Hyrcanus, in that Qohelet is not speaking as one trying to rhetorically assert dominance, but is speaking from the perspective of those who have been subordinated.

Accordingly, the claim that "it is better to be living dog," can be read as a statement affirming the ability to survive by those have been socially subordinated and subjected to the *hevel* and profit-less labor that one must endure under the sun. Qohelet's use of "dog" is not intended to be an insult, but is operating in the rhetorically ambivalent space that correlates the unique positions of dogs with that of persons of low-social status. This could include peasant laborers, such as the wise peasant (מַסְכֵּן) within Qoh 4:13 and 9:14-16 and the community of laborers reflected upon in Qoh 4:8-12, or even the scribal retainers who are advised in Qoh 8:1-5 and 10:4, 20. Like a dog, a wise peasant or retainer may be perceived as one who is without dignity by those in power, and whose actions are unable to manufacture social status and honor for themselves. Yet, the wise peasant, like a dog, is valued for their labor and wisdom, as they are able to "save the city" (9:15); similarly, retainers were of value as they provided much needed services for the functioning of society. Like the dog, peasants and retainers find ways to exist and survive along the margins of, or in close proximity to, hierarchical social and political structures.

⁴³ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*, 55.

(ii) ...“than a dead lion”: *Leonine Imagery in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East*

Of course, the “better/than” phrasing of Qohelet places only relative value upon the “living dog” in its relation to the “dead lion.” Momentarily setting aside the living and dead adjectives, this juxtaposition draws into relation two animals that held starkly different places within the ancient human imagination. Unlike dogs, lions (אֲרִיָּה) were a valorized figure within biblical literature and other ancient Near Eastern sources. Lions were considered to be “ferocious animals” that were at once feared and revered (e.g., Amos 3:8; Prov 26:13; 30:30), as they were known to attack humans (1 Kgs 13:24; Amos 5:19; Prov 22:13) and their herds of domesticated animals (1 Sam 17:34-37; Amos 3:12).⁴⁴ Consequently, it was understood that humans were to be cautious of lions, or more appropriately, fear them. Due to this track record the lion came to be a useful trope in signifying both threat and power. The lion’s ferociousness, often encapsulated in its powerful roar, was utilized as a symbol and metaphor that often depicted the lion in its naturalistic acts of pursuing, attacking, or devouring prey.⁴⁵ This symbol was used to communicate the threat and power of other, non-leonine figures such as monarchs, powerful persons, deities, and enemies (e.g., 2 Sam 1:23; 1 Kgs 10:19-20; Isa 31:4; Jer 50:17; Amos 3:8; Prov 19:12; 20:2; 28:15).⁴⁶

Brent Strawn concludes that the use of leonine symbolism within the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern artifacts generally contains an unambiguous meaning, but is “polyvalent—open to multiple uses.” Strawn explains that leonine imagery and metaphor is generally based “in the power and threat it represents and symbolizes,” but this power and threat “is differently experienced and variously portrayed depending on the perspective of the observer... and the one who encounters the image or receives the metaphor.”⁴⁷ This is a fine, but important distinction for interpreting texts that utilize leonine imagery. The lion is always symbolic of a threatening, dominant force that is capable of harm and attack, but is also valorized and representative of magnificence and power.⁴⁸ A lion metaphor can thusly be used to communicate a sense fear by those who are threatened, or as a trope used by powerful and elite figures to symbolize their own power and dominance. For example, the lion as metaphor

⁴⁴ Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 196-197.

⁴⁵ Brent A. 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), 235.

⁴⁶ Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 232-233.

⁴⁷ Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 284.

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animals Studies*, 121-125.

communicating both fear and power occurs within specific instances in Proverbs that warn against angering a king. In Prov 19:12a and 20:2a, the anger of a king is likened to the growl of lion (נהם כפיר), indicating that, like a growling lion, an angry king can be harmful and life threatening (Prov 20:2b).⁴⁹ Similarly, Prov 28:15 compares the difficult experience of poor people living under a “wicked ruler” (משל רשע) to that of “a roaring lion or a charging bear” (NRSV).

The symbolism of a lion was not only a metaphor for the powerful status of elite figures, but was also used as a trope to communicate how these elite figures were even more dominant and ferocious than the mighty lion. As Qoh 9:4 recognizes, lions were not indestructible creatures, but were mortal and capable of being killed. Many kings and powerful figures in the ancient Near East hunted lions as a royal sport, where they were often captured and encaged for the king’s viewing pleasure, or released from their cage for the king’s “target practice.”⁵⁰ Strawn notes that texts and images containing the popular motif of a royal lion-hunt would portray a “dominant human figure” fighting with live lions or “pictured triumphant over dead ones.”⁵¹ It seemed that if one could physically subdue a lion, then that figure’s assertion of dominance, strength, and power was justified (e.g., Samson in Judg 14:5-20). In these instances, it was not the power of the lion emphasized, though the understanding that lions were powerful and ferocious creatures certainly contributed to the meaning of the lion-hunt motif. Instead, the emphasis was upon the dominance of the royal and elite figures who were to be perceived as more powerful than the lion.

It is possible that this complex and nuanced use of leonine imagery within the ancient imagination is informing Qohelet’s juxtaposition of a dead lion with a living dog in 9:4. The reference to a “dead lion” can be read as a metaphor for persons who were perceived as powerful, ferocious, and dominant—yet only relatively so. These “lions” were thus susceptible to being an object of domination by those who were even more dominant and threatening than they were. When reading Qohelet in dialogical relation to the *Tobiad Romance*, Qohelet’s “dead

⁴⁹ These verses use a varying term: כפיר instead of אריה, the term used in Qoh 9:4. According *HALOT*, כפיר refers more specifically to a young, male lion looking for food by himself (and not in pack), and distinguished by his mane (c.f., Judg 14:5; Isa 31:4).

⁵⁰ Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 196-200. Notes that there is no record of Judean or Israelite kings engaging in this practice, but there is no reason to believe that they certainly did not hunt lions.

⁵¹ Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 235. It should be noted the “king-killing-lion” motif is lacking in the Hebrew Bible, but was a prominent theme in Egypt, “woven deeply into the ideology of kingship” of the New Kingdom (161-163).

lion” can be read as symbolizing elite figures such as Joseph and Hyrcanus: fierce and powerful within their own domain, yet still subject to the more dominant imperial overlords who could leverage the “lion’s” strength to demonstrate their own absolute power.

The association of the Tobiads with leonine imagery goes beyond them merely being powerful figures within their province. Chapter III described how the Tobiad palace of Qsar el-‘Abd contains reliefs of lions on each corner of the building, along with carvings of panthers that also functioned as fountains. This detail seems to have been noted within the *Romance’s* description of the estate, as the fortress built by Hyrcanus is described as having “beasts of gigantic size” carved upon it (*Ant* 12:231). The use of lion carvings was not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern architecture, as they would frequently appear upon gates, temples, and palaces.⁵² According to Strawn, these functioned as apotropaic carvings with a “two-sided” emphasis: the “guardian lions” were believed to offer protection for those on the inside, but also signaled threat and danger to those who view these images from the outside of these typically elite spaces.⁵³

It is likely that the lion reliefs on the Qsar functioned in this same way for the Tobiad estate, marking their palace as a protected, elite space with an outward portrayal of dominance and power. This is justified by how both Joseph and Hyrcanus were characterized within *Tobiad Romance*. Like the symbolic lion, the Tobiads represent fierce actors who are valorized by the *Romance’s* propaganda, depicting them as shrewdly wise, but aggressive, characters whose actions protect and enhance the well-being of the Jewish people. Additionally, despite the stated propaganda in *Ant* 12:224 that extolls Joseph for accomplishing “more splendid opportunities of life” for the Jewish people, the characters of Joseph and Hyrcanus reflect the leonine imagery in that they represent powerful and threatening figures who exert their dominance through a mimicry of the Ptolemaic monarchs.

The *Romance* narrates this “lion like” portrayal by describing how each character was feared and viewed as a threat by certain groups of people. This is evidenced when Joseph leads a Ptolemaic army on a campaign through his own province, demanding tribute and violently extracting from those who refused to submit to his authority and pay the tribute (*Ant* 12:180-185); subsequently, the text notes how the Syrians feared and acquiesced Joseph because of these

⁵² Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 217-228.

⁵³ Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?*, 221, 225.

actions (*Ant* 12:182). Similarly, Hyrcanus is seen as a threat by his own brothers due to his favored status, shrewd actions, and close relation to Joseph and Ptolemy (*Ant* 12:195; 221-223). After being expelled from Jerusalem Hyrcanus settles across the Jordan where, like his father, he levies a heavy tribute upon the area's residents and wages war against "the Arabs," enforcing their submission through acts of violence and captivity (*Ant* 12:222, 229).

These violent and extracting practices of the Tobiads do not seem to be undertaken without self-awareness, but play into how the Tobiads perceive themselves as social figures. When Tryphon—Ptolemy's court jester—jokes to Hyrcanus that Joseph has "stripped all of Syria," Hyrcanus does not refute this accusation, but turns it around to rhetorically assert his dominance over his opponents by insinuating that they are merely dogs while he is the "man" at the table. It may be assumed that the character of Hyrcanus embraced the leonine imagery carved upon the family's estate, and viewed himself as a powerful, dominant, and threatening "lion like" figure who should be feared and respected—even more so than the inferior "dogs" who try to challenge and mock him (*Ant* 12:211-213).

Qohelet's use of the living dog/dead lion dichotomy in Qoh 9:4 complexifies the symbolism embraced by the Tobiads by possibly alluding to how dominant lions could become objects of domination by those with more power and strength. This coincides with Qohelet's satirical parody of a royal persona who claims to be "the Son of David, king in Jerusalem." The leonine symbol has a tradition with Jerusalem and Judahite kings, as it is used to describe Judah in a blessing that Jacob offers upon him in Gen 49:9. According to 2 Samuel 5, David establishes Jerusalem—a city within Judah—as the capital of the united kingdom of Israel, where it would subsequently continue as the city from which the monarchs of the southern kingdom of Judah would reign. Situating King Qohelet within this tradition, the text demonstrates the relativity of King Qohelet's reign, as he is susceptible to losing control of his status, wealth, and power to a "higher one" (i.e., Qoh 5:7). King Qohelet bemoans this lack of control by stating that he hates all the labor he has done because there is no remembrance for even a wise person, and he has to leave all that he has acquired to one who is "after" him without knowing, or having control over, who this person is (Qoh 2:17-19). Here King Qohelet is essentially conceding what the "sage" Qohelet will make explicit: there is no real value in being a "dead lion."

The complexity of this symbolism articulated by Qohelet is also narrated within the *Romance* itself, as both Joseph and Hyrcanus are shown to have only relative power, and are

subjected to the machinations of the more dominant imperial powers they operate under. Prior to the eulogizing propaganda regarding Joseph in *Ant* 12:224, Joseph's story concludes by noting how he was angry with Hyrcanus for spending a large sum of his money, but Joseph had to conceal his anger because he "feared the king" (*Ant* 12:221). Here the "excellent and high-minded man" was shown to be a subordinate who could not openly go against the wishes of Ptolemy, even if he felt his own property was squandered. Things did not end well for Hyrcanus either, as the *Tobiad Romance* concludes by stating that Hyrcanus "ended his life by his own hand," resulting in his property being "seized" by Antiochus Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire. Hyrcanus takes his own life because the ruling power of his locale shifted from Ptolemy to Antiochus, and he feared being subject to Antiochus' own "lion hunt" because of "what he had done to the Arabs" (*Ant* 12:235-236). In the end, Hyrcanus is nothing more than a "dead lion."

Section 6.04 Qohelet's Evaluation of the "wise peasant" and a "living dog"

Qohelet's claim in 9:4, consequently, can be read as an evaluation of varying discourses of wisdom operative within the Ptolemaic context. By reading Qohelet in dialogical relation to the *Tobiad Romance*, the juxtaposition of the living dog and the dead lion evokes two categories of socio-economic and political power within society: indigenous elites such as the Tobiads or the caricatured "King" Qohelet, and lower-class persons like the wise peasant in Qoh 9:14-16 (also 4:13). Within this dialogue the lion imagery can be read as symbolizing local, wealthy, and elite persons like Joseph and Hyrcanus, who practice a shrewd form of court wisdom in the presence of the Ptolemies, but act as fierce extractors of wealth and resources within their own province. The *Tobiad Romance* portrays these actions in a positive light, proclaiming that Joseph was a protector of the people and Hyrcanus was naturally intelligent and bold. Like lions, the Tobiads are depicted as figures who should be at once valorized and feared.

Despite Qohelet's own willingness to recognize that sometimes one must move beyond traditional wisdom to survive (i.e., Qoh 7:16-18), from Qohelet's perspective this elite concept of wisdom is not only unethical and lacking in moral virtue, but is also a dangerous endeavor. Instead of keeping a low profile and thereby avoiding the ire of powerful figures, as suggested by Qohelet's instruction, the emphasis on witty speech and shrewd maneuvering within the court leaves the Tobiads readily available and vulnerable to the power exertions of those with greater authority. For Qohelet, being in close relation to powerful figures is less an opportunity for social advancement and more a threat to one's well-being. Since Qohelet emphasizes how wisdom can

help one survive, the text instructs that one should maintain a safe distance from spaces of power (8:2-4), and not to make statements or declarations about the king that would draw attention to oneself (10:20).

While the discourse of wisdom within the *Tobiad Romance* may emphasize the acquisition of relative wealth and power, Qohelet perceives an overall lack of profitability in laboring and existing “under the sun.” Any material gain is ultimately nullified by death and the threat thereof (2:18-21), and is susceptible to being extracted by a foreign power (6:2)—a reality that Hyrcanus faced at the end of his life. Qohelet’s emphasis upon wisdom’s value in engendering survival intrinsically devalues any risky behavior; for as much as the Tobiads gain, they run the risk of being a “dead lion”—a figure with only relative power who is subjected to the “evil” of being domineered by “higher ones above them” on the food chain (Qoh 5:7; 8:9).

Qohelet seems to accept the reality of social disparities, and encourages persons to do what they must do to survive in a context where death might arrive unexpectedly (9:11-12⁵⁴): “all that your hand finds to do, do it with strength because there is not work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in sheol...” (9:10). Qohelet observes that there is more value in being a “living dog,” a symbol that resonates with the figure of the “wise peasant”: a poor laborer who is rhetorically subordinated and marginalized to the point that no one remembers them even after they save the city “with [their] wisdom” (9:15). Like the wise peasant, a dog may find ways to survive along the margins, even if it doesn’t gain any relative honor, wealth, or power like that of the Tobiads within the *Tobiad Romance*, or the “King” within Qohelet’s royal satire. And though they are viewed as subordinate, the peasant class is perceived as valued for the labor they can provide. It is here, in the peasant class and with their use of skilled labor (10:8-11), that Qohelet observes and locates the practice of a wisdom that is providing the shade for the “evil time” that is occurring “under the sun.”

Like Joseph elevating the Judeans out of desperate circumstances, the wise peasant is credited by the text for saving a city through his use of wisdom; but unlike Joseph—who is named and celebrated—the wise peasant is not remembered in the city, is not given a voice, and is not named by the text. The lack of any personal benefit, reward, or societal honor for the wise peasant engenders a sentiment of disappointment for Qohelet (9:16-10:1)—not necessarily a

⁵⁴ In these verses Qohelet also employs animal imagery, as the “evil time” that can come upon one suddenly is likened to fish caught in a net or birds caught in a snare (Qoh 9:12).

disappointment in wisdom per se, but that the other residents of city do not appropriately appreciate the wisdom from this lowly figure.⁵⁵ Further, it could be presumed that locally elite figures who lived within the city—figures like the Tobiads or King Qohelet—would benefit from the wise peasant’s saving actions, allowing them to continue their dominant practices of oppression and extraction upon the lower classes without having to honor their contributions (as in Qoh 4:1, 5:7). Their continued dominance may enable them to appropriate the wise peasant’s action as their own, as in how King Qohelet claims to himself build, plant, irrigate, buy, amass, and labor in establishing his estate; but as delineated in chapter III, the actual labor would have likely been undertaken by slaves or peasants. This self-aggrandizing behavior could also lead to these figures disseminating disingenuous propaganda that, for example, may claim that they themselves brought the city “from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life,” while ignoring the contributions of the area’s residents (*Ant* 12:224).⁵⁶

But perhaps Qohelet is also implying a subtle, moral distinction within this “important” (9:13) observation about the wise peasant’s wisdom. Though we are not told what actions were taken, the wise peasant seems to be utilizing his knowledge, skill, and own form of shrewd action to hold off the impending threat of a besieging king upon his city. That is, the wise peasant does not use his skill and shrewdness to save his only his own skin, or to generate his singular flourishing. Instead, the wisdom of the wise peasant actively demonstrates a concern for the survival of the broader community. This coincides with Qohelet’s emphasis upon communal solidarity in 4:8-12, and resonates with “traditional” wisdom’s emphasis on the social virtues of “righteousness, justice, and equity” (Prov 1:3; also, c.f., 2 Sam 20:14-22).

When placed in dialogue with the *Tobiad Romance*, the shrewdness demonstrated by the wise peasant isn’t a tool used to ingratiate himself with imperial powers in order to enhance his own wealth; rather, the peasant’s own shrewd wisdom is employed to resist imperial forces and help his community survive another day. In this way the wisdom of the wise peasant further “recoils” from the Tobiad conception of wisdom. Unlike the risky court “wisdom” of the Tobiads—a “wisdom” that could lead to relative wealth or to loss and death at the hands of the

⁵⁵ See the discussion in Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 300-302.

⁵⁶ See the discussion in Chapter III on how the *Tobiad Romance* may be functioning as pro-Tobiad propaganda.

imperial powers—the wisdom of the wise peasant demonstrates a greater value for engendering survival, not only for the wise peasant himself but also for the broader community.

Chapter VII. Conclusion: Is Survival Enough?

This dissertation has argued that the conceptualization of wisdom within Qohelet is, on the one hand, the product of the socio-economic climate within Ptolemaic Palestine, and on the other, shaped by its intertextual, dialogical relationships with other wisdom and Ptolemaic era texts/utterances. Arising from this specific historical moment and dialogical environment, Qohelet's unique accenting of wisdom emphasizes a kind of shrewd knowledge and practical skill that can be used for achieving wisdom's primary goal of promoting life, which for Qohelet takes the form of ensuring survival. Wisdom for Qohelet helps persons to survive the daily struggle of living in a world fraught with hierarchical exploitation and a lack of moral retribution, a context dominated by the Ptolemaic imperial objective of economic extraction. Accordingly, Qohelet observes the practice of this "survival wisdom" as not being limited to any specific class of persons, but being particularly operative among the lower and peasant classes (e.g., 4:13, 9:13-16), and so useful for retainers who also need to navigate life "under the sun" of Ptolemaic rule in ways distinct from, but not unrelated to, the ways laborers had to.

Qohelet's conception of wisdom seemingly assumes the validity of moral virtues promoted within the "traditional" wisdom of Proverbs, since the text recognizes and laments persistent injustices that pervade the imperium's social and economic hierarchies (4:1, 5:7-9, 8:9). However, this context prevents Qohelet from associating wisdom with a life of success and well-being because Ptolemaic extraction has limited the way most people might access the area's material resources (see 2:20-22; 6:2), sufficient access to which is typically regarded as necessary for human thriving. More precisely, Qohelet values wisdom for its ability to offer a profit (יתרון) that amounts not to flourishing as with Proverbs, nor extravagant elite success (which if obtained is always fleeting and risky) as with the *Tobiad Romance*, but to survival, an occasional bit of shade for those "living under the sun" (Qoh 7:12, 10:8-11).

Qohelet's emphasis on wisdom's ability to engender survival, particularly for those within the peasant class who labor within a harsh and difficult context, leads to a critical question of Qohelet as a wisdom text: Within a context that Qohelet describes as *hevel* and evil, observing persistent subordination, domination, and oppression (Qoh 4:1-4; 6:1-2; 8:9-14), what value is there in merely surviving only to continue to experience *hevel* and gain no profit from one's unending and tedious labor? Is there no possibility of changing, resisting, or re-envisioning the

present reality for those who labor endlessly? Does Qohelet not maintain any hope or expectation for peasant laborers to experience any measure of well-being, let alone any experience of material flourishing?

These questions may not be completely lost on Qohelet, though the adequacy of what the text suggests can be up for debate. The text of Qohelet proceeds as a response to the opening question “What profit is there for a human in all their labor that they will labor under the sun?” (1:3; 3:9) and unambiguously asserts that there is no profit to be gained in one’s labor (2:13). However, Qohelet does appear to provide a way that one can experience some good. While Qohelet gives up on the possibility of one gaining a lasting profit, the sage does repeatedly assert within the text’s oft cited *carpe diem* passages that one is capable of gaining a “portion” (קֶלֶחַ), claiming that this portion should bring a measure of joy and satisfaction to life where one “see good” in all their labor (3:9, 22; 5:17). Yet the portion repeatedly described by Qohelet is at best transitory, only providing moments of simple enjoyment. As a whole, the text of Qohelet stops short of envisioning or advocating for any sense of liberation from the present, “evil” situation.

I will conclude this study by briefly exploring the statements that Qohelet makes about one experiencing their “portion,” and then offer a critical analysis of Qohelet’s claims by revisiting the social location of scribal retainers as the position from which the author(s) of the text would generate their utterance. I will argue that, although the situatedness of Qohelet may not be able to provide an adequate perspective of human flourishing for suffering peoples, the text nonetheless provides ethical value in its willingness to observe, name, and inquire about social inequalities and injustices while advocating for survival.

Finally, I argue that the perceived oversights by Qohelet may be supplemented by placing Qohelet in a dialogical environment with the hermeneutical insights of contemporary readers. Because of their shared emphasis on survival, I will heuristically place Qohelet in dialogue with womanist biblical interpretation, drawing particularly from the work of Delores Williams. To clarify, by drawing womanism and womanist interpretation into a dialogical encounter with Qohelet I will not be offering a womanist reading of Qohelet. My social location as a white male obviously prevents me from maintaining a womanist perspective. That being said, I believe that womanism is one of the most significant contemporary, ethical and hermeneutical discourses within biblical studies. Like Qohelet, womanist discourse will often emphasize survival, but will move beyond initial survival to attempt to envision and advocate for the flourishing of all

persons. In this way, the work of womanist scholars can be an invaluable dialogical partner with my reading of Qohelet's wisdom, as they will both "merge" in their shared emphasis of survival, but "recoil" in the extent to which they value and advocate for one's well-being.

Section 7.01 Hope for One's Portion

The recurring and oft cited *carpe diem* passages within Qohelet (Qoh 2:24-26; 3:12-14, 22; 5:17-19; 9:7-10)—which consistently include a call to "eat" and "drink"—provide the possibility that, for Qohelet, one can experience some good in the present reality amidst persistent oppression, stark inequality, and an overall lack of justice. These passages reiterate that the experience of this "good" (טוב), or "joy" (שמחה), is one's "portion" (חלק) in life. The term חלק, translated as "portion," occurs as a noun in Qohelet, but is derived from a verbal root meaning "to divide" or "to apportion."¹ The meaning of חלק has "social overtones," as it refers to a "portion coming to one by law and custom." The term is typically used to refer to something concrete that may be defined in economic terms, but is understood to, in some way, maintain and support the receiver of the "portion."² For example, the noun חלק is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to refer to a portion of land as an allotted territory (e.g., Josh 14:4, 15:13; Num 18:20); the term also references a share in plunder (Gen 14:24; Num 31:36), food set aside for Levites (Lev 6:10; Deut 18:1, 8), and an inheritance (Gen 31:14). In Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are described as being YHWH's "portion" (Deut 32:9). It is understood that society consists of the totality of "portions" that are then meted out to individuals or groups (c.f., Deut 4:19).

The term חלק occurs eight times in Qohelet (Qoh 2:10, 21; 3:22; 5:17, 18; 9:6, 9; 11:2), and takes on a somewhat nuanced, though not unrelated use when compared with its other usages in the Hebrew Bible. In Qohelet חלק indicates what persons can achieve with and through their labor, since one is unable to generate any lasting "profit" (יתרון) (see Qoh 2:10-11). Within Qohelet a portion can include finding "joy" (שמחה) in one's labor (2:10; 3:22), eating and drinking with "joy" (שמחה) (5:17-18; 9:7), seeing the "good" (טוב) in one's labor (3:13; 5:17), and "experiencing life" (ראה חיים)³ with one's wife (9:9). Qohelet does not imply that a portion is

¹ The root חלק can also mean "to be smooth," but there is no indication that this meaning is present in Qohelet.

² Tsevat, "חלק חלק חלקה חלקה חלקה מן חלקת," *TDOT* 4:448.

³ Literally "seeing life," but ראה is used regularly to indicate experience, particularly when paired with "life" (Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C [Garden City, NY; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 126).

only for a specific class of people, but is experienced both by those with wealth (2:10; 5:18)—such as the Tobiads—and those who are considered to be “workers” (3:9)⁴ or “laborers” (5:15-17; 9:9)⁵—tenant farmers, day laborers, and others within the peasant class. Portions can be given away and shared with others (11:2), but can also be taken away from persons who labor with “wisdom and knowledge and skill” and given to one who did not labor for it (2:21). It can be concluded that a portion within Qohelet includes both material and non-material things, is achievable with labor, but runs the risk of being extracted, and cannot be experienced or enjoyed once one dies.⁶

Portions are thus not easily reduced to a single concept or collection of materials for Qohelet. Fox contends that a portion can sometimes be material wealth itself (Qoh 2:21; 5:18; 11:2), but is more often the pleasure *potential* of material wealth, and the *potential* to experience a range of “feelings, sensations, and cognitions the living can have.”⁷ Hence, a portion within Qohelet typically includes experiences available to all persons, and the enjoyment and use of available materials needed for one’s sustenance. Qohelet does not seem to unequivocally equate a portion with wealth or riches, but sees it as an experience of enjoying and gaining pleasure from one’s labor, and what may be produced through that labor. More precisely, the commending to “see the good in one’s labor” and to “eat” and “drink” as one’s portion (5:17; 9:7-9) is something that, in theory, retainers and the peasant class were capable experiencing.

Here we may consider the situation of the tenant farmers working on Apollonius’ estate at Bet Anath, an instance preserved within the Zenon papyri.⁸ The letter notes how the tenant farmers complained because “they had been robbed,” apparently only getting paid “12 kors” instead of a promised “22 kors”—a dry measure that likely indicates a payment of grain⁹—and their grape pressings “were taken away.” The tenants also “complained about the figs,” though

⁴ Hebrew העושה. A qal masculine singular participle, translated as “the worker” or “one who works.”

⁵ Hebrew verb עמל. Occurs in 5:15-17 as a qal masculine singular imperfect, but with the relative particle װ attached. This engenders a translation of “the one who laborers,” or simply “laborer.” The form of this term in 9:9 can be a noun or adjective, though most translate as a participle “that you have labored/toiled.”

⁶ On the connection between the urging to enjoy one’s portion and the looming reality of death, see particularly 3:19-22 and 9:1-10.

⁷ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 111.

⁸ PSI VI 554. For a translation and discussion, see John S. Kloppenborg, *Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 359-364.

⁹ John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, WUNT 195 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 361, 364.

the nature of this dispute is unclear from what is preserved of the letter. The lack of grain payment and confiscation of grape pressings are said to be done by an official identified as a *komomisthotes* and an individual named “Melas.” According to Kloppenborg, it is unclear whether the *komomisthotes* is a tax farmer, or a royal official who was responsible for leasing out estate lands to tenant farmers. The role of Melas is also unclear, though other papyri list a Melas as a senior Ptolemaic official who made a tour of Apollonius’ land holdings in Palestine (e.g., P.Cair.Zen I 59004.30; P.Cair.Zen I 59019.9).¹⁰

Regardless of their official positions, it appears as though resources intended for the tenant farmers are being confiscated or withheld by persons functioning in some form as Ptolemaic officials. The letter seems to indicate that the majority, if not all, of the wine pressings were extracted from the farmers due to a “lack of water” that ruined the harvest, and the tenants did not have any left over for themselves. The letter communicates that an attempt to assuage these complaints would be made by offering a “(sufficient) pressing” of wine to the tenant farmers who did not have their own landholding—an offering that could be perceived as receiving a “portion.” While these tenant farmers would receive some wine (according to the letter), the offered relief is both limited and constricted.

This letter indicates that, for those in the peasant class, access to securing needed resources was difficult and overly complicated, but not impossible. As was delineated in chapter III tenant farmers were having the fruits of their labor extracted and overtaxed, as they were expected to handover one-half to two-thirds of the crops from their plot to the landowner, while also paying taxes and tithes from what was left over.¹¹ The extraction and taxation undoubtedly made it difficult to hold on to the material goods that were produced, as indicated by the poor harvest and the Ptolemaic extraction at Bet Anath. However, it was not wholly impossible to obtain and consume produce such wine, figs, grain, etc., This situation obviously would not allow for any additional “profit” to be achieved, but would allow the tenant farmers to maintain a limited amount from which they could sustain themselves—a “portion” from which they could “eat and drink.” After all, it was in the best interests of the landowning class to ensure that their

¹⁰ Kloppenborg, *Tenants in the Vineyard*, 361.

¹¹ Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 116.

laborers had enough sustenance so that they could continue to provide essential labor on their estates.

This example illustrates Qohelet's perspective that a portion is capable of being enjoyed regardless of one's class status, as Qohelet often speaks of the enjoyment of a portion in relation to the "laborer"/"one who labors" (Qoh 3:22; 5:17; 9:9). According to Krüger, Qohelet's statements do assume that one must have the "minimum of personal property" (i.e., grain/bread and wine) to find enjoyment, but the call to enjoy one's portion is something that everyone has a claim upon, whether it be a "laborer" or a "rich man" as in the juxtaposition of these two figures in 5:17-18.¹² This includes the *potential* to enjoy one's life and labor, and the enjoyment of the material means that are produced—and held on to—from one's labor. This opportunity is understood to be a "gift from God," yet the vagaries of life may limit the availability of this opportunity for good (e.g., 6:2; 7:13-14; 11:6-7ff.). As Krüger summarizes, Qohelet maintains the perspective that persons should "seize the available possibilities for pleasure and not push enjoyment into an uncertain future—whether in or after life."¹³

Sandwiched in between a reflection on the pervasiveness of death in Qoh 9:1-6 and the observation of a wise peasant who helps save his city in Qoh 9:13-18, is a *carpe diem* passage where Qohelet urges one to eat their bread "with joy," drink their wine "with a good heart," be adorned with white garments and oil, and experience life with one's wife; Qohelet sees these acts as important because this is one's "portion" in life and in their labor (Qoh 9:7-9). Interpreters such as R.N. Whybray and Eunny P. Lee read such *carpe diem* passages with their urgings to enjoy food, drink, and labor as indicative of Qohelet being a "preacher of joy" who advocates an ethic of enjoyment where one realizes that God has not only gifted them with food and drink, but has also enabled them to enjoy these things.¹⁴ But when placed within the overall rhetoric of the text, these statements—particularly in 9:7-9—may be better understood as communicating the potentials and possibilities that accompany survival. In this sense, Qohelet's insistence is not so

¹² Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 122-123. Elsewhere, Krüger notes that Qoh 3:12-13, 21 establishes a general and same opportunity for "good" for every person, namely, to eat, drink, and enjoy one's labor (*Qoheleth*, 89, 94).

¹³ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 94. Tamez adds that Qohelet judges reality as *hevel* because laborers cannot enjoy their work, but a "non-*hevel*" reality would consist of the opportunity for a laborer to enjoy their work, and though such an expectation may be bleak, there is "a season" and "a time" for everything "under the sun" (Qoh 3:1) (*When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes*, trans. Margaret Wilde [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000], 26).

¹⁴ R.N. Whybry, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 7.23 (1982): 87-98; Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric*, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).

much an overarching “ethic of enjoyment,” but as Fox explains, a call to embrace what one can in the present since “the void of death stretches on forever” (i.e., Qoh 9:10).¹⁵

Qohelet’s urging to eat, drink, and enjoy one’s labor can thus be read as being based in the realization of the inescapability of death, a realization that appears to be heightened by Qohelet’s observation of persistent injustice. As Qohelet will go on to acknowledge in the narration of the wise peasant, even survival achieved through wisdom does not guarantee the realization of the possibilities of good things, since the wise peasant is forgotten and ignored (9:15-16). As a result, such urgings to eat and drink as one’s “portion” in life may be more of a resignation that this is merely all that one is capable of securing in life. In other words, enjoyment is not guaranteed, but being alive keeps it as a possibility and a potential.

For Qohelet, being alive is thus the necessary requirement for one to maintain the potential of enjoying a portion, more so than being of a particular economic standing. Consequently, the “living dog,” the wise peasant, and the laborer have the hope of achieving a portion because they find ways to survive and continue in life. Although better to be a living dog, there is an underlying awareness that the “dogs” will die just like “lions,” since Qohelet reiterates that there is one common fate of death that will befall all categories of the living: wise and fool (2:15-16), human and beast (3:18), righteous and wicked, clean and unclean, sacrificers and those who do not sacrifice, the good and the sinner (9:2)—and to extend this logic, the wise peasant will eventually die like the Tobiads. People can only survive for so long before they experience the common fate of death, and humans are unable to know when this will occur (e.g., 9:12).

While death is unavoidable, the value of wisdom is that it can help one successfully navigate an existence where untimely deaths can occur, as wisdom “will allow its possessor to survive” (Qoh 7:12). Qohelet’s perspective then, is that if one who labors with wisdom can continually survive, and stay “joined to the living,” then they have the hope of experiencing what their portion can offer them: the joy of eating and drinking, and experiencing life in relationship with others, and finding pleasure in their work (c.f., Qoh 4:8-12; 9:7-9; 11:2). These are valuable things, even though they do not constitute, or equal, an economic “profit”; but they do constitute a worthwhile portion—one whose value cannot really be quantified in economic terms, and can only be experienced by living. For Qohelet, this is the value in the appropriate use of wisdom

¹⁵ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 294.

over that of the risky Tobiad strategy. From Qohelet's perspective Hyrcanus certainly had opportunities for experiencing a portion. Yet, he put himself in a precarious situation that resulted in an untimely death, and as a "dead lion" any possibility of enjoyment and experience of the "good" was negated (c.f., Qoh 9:10).

Qohelet insists that a life lived "under the sun" cannot produce a profit—at least not an enduring one (cf. Prov 8:18 where wisdom itself is counted as enduring wealth); and the "living dogs," the socially subordinated, the oppressed, and the wise peasants all must live in a world of social hierarchies where "one person domineers over another, causing evil" (Qoh 8:9), resulting in the predictable "oppression of the poor and a robbery of justice and righteousness" (5:7). Within this world, righteous ones are treated as though they are wicked, and wicked persons are treated as though they are righteous (8:14). Even if one is able to live through good days, they will also experience "the day of evil," as God provides both for humans (7:14). Yet, despite the *hevel* that those who labor with wisdom and strive for righteousness must experience, wisdom increases their chances of surviving this brutal context. By surviving, laborers maintain the ever-present potential of experiencing moments of sustenance, joy, and community—their "portion" in life. This potential "accompanies one in their labor" (8:15), in all their *hevel* existence under the sun. The *hope* and *potential* for a portion is not something that can be extracted and taxed, but is only nullified by the common experience of death.

Section 7.02 Critical Reflection on Qohelet's Rhetoric: "Enjoy your Portion," but Stay in your Lane

This study has attempted to understand Qohelet as a product of its socio-economic climate and dialogical environments, which has involved an ideological critique aimed at investigating how economic class relations within the society of Ptolemaic Palestine are reflected and reproduced within the text. I have noted how the text of Qohelet readily reports observed inequalities occurring within the socioeconomic realm: material extraction (2:20-23; 6:1-2), oppression of the poor and powerless (4:1; 5:7), and the hierarchical exploitation of persons causing harm (8:8). The text not only presents an awareness of these inequalities, but seemingly judges them negatively by describing them in moral terms: an "evil" (6:1; 8:9), an "evil work" (4:3), a "great evil" (2:21), and "a robbery of justice and righteousness" (5:7); the situations are

also described as *hevel*, and function as Qohelet's evidence for the text's encompassing declaration "all of it is *hevel*" (1:2; 12:8).¹⁶

An analysis of how the text is reflecting the larger material realities in society must not only identify how the text is identifying and speaking about these inequalities, but also consider how the text itself is "encoding" or reinforcing any social ideology that attempts to explain unequal distributions of wealth and control over the means of production.¹⁷ This involves a critical examination of the text's rhetoric to determine if the text is disguising or, more directly, culpable in reproducing unjust Ptolemaic policies and power differentials within society.

Despite Qohelet's acknowledgment and moral judgment of this oppressive economic system, Qohelet's only attempt at suggesting any relief for the present reality is to encourage laborers who are experiencing the brunt of this extractive socio-economic machine to embrace their "portion" with joy, to eat and drink, and experience this "portion" as the only "good" they have available. Thus, critical questions must be asked of Qohelet's suggested remedy for dealing with this oppressive context: Does this advice offer any real respite, let alone liberation, for laborers, the poor, and the peasant class—groups that Qohelet has observed as experience injustice, oppression, and powerlessness? And more broadly, can Qohelet's rhetoric of a "survival" wisdom and the enjoyment of a "portion" function to reify these social inequalities?

I argue that Qohelet's insistence that labor cannot produce profit, the conceptualization of a wisdom for survival, and the commending of a mere "portion" can unfortunately be read or heard as an utterance that reinforces the idea that oppressive hierarchies as absolute; additionally, Qohelet's rhetoric can be read as subtly reinforcing a social ideology that laborers and the peasant class must survive so that they can continue to provide their labor to support an oppressive economic system. In other words, Qohelet's words could be heard by the lower class as encouraging them to "stay in their lane," enjoying what resources and experiences they are able to get, and to not cause too much disruption because nothing will change.

We may consider again the letter contained within *PSI VI 554* and the situation of the tenant farmers on the estate at Bet Anath in order to hypothesize how Qohelet's words may

¹⁶ See chapter V where I interpret *hevel* as a term expressing a negative evaluation.

¹⁷ For an overview of Ideological Criticism and a Materialist Analysis of Biblical texts, see Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism," in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 139-160; Fernando F. Segovia, "Reading the Bible Ideologically: Socioeconomic Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application*, eds. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Hayes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 283-306.

encounter actual laborers in Ptolemaic Palestine. These farmers were not paid what they were owed and had a meager grape crop extracted by Ptolemaic officials; the only way they could achieve a “portion” of wine was to persistently complain to higher officials regarding their situation. While our information is limited, it can reasonably be presumed that these laborers were given no real relief from the persistent extraction they experienced, and were unlikely to be guaranteed any better conditions moving forward.¹⁸ The letter reads as though the allotment of a pressing of wine for those without a landholding was intended to quell the laborer’s complaints and keep them just satisfied enough to continue to work their plot on the estate. It can be hypothetically deduced that these laborers may not find much value in how Qohelet’s words would address their present situation: “enjoy the portion of wine you were given; take joy in the difficult labor you have labored during this dry year with meager production; Drink your wine, eat your bread, and be happy.” In fact, Qohelet’s message could be used by those in power to ideologically ensure that the laborers keep coming back to the estate to produce more grapes to be turned into wine that will be shipped out of Palestine and into Ptolemaic Egypt.

Though Qohelet may identify wisdom as being operative with laborers and low-class persons, it is possible that Qohelet’s conceptualization of wisdom as means for survival may, intentionally or not, serve the interests of the ruling class. This is possible since Qohelet does not accompany the wisdom rhetoric with any message or advice for achieving a lasting relief or shift in circumstances for those who are laboring without profit—laborers such as those at Bet Anath and the wise peasant in Qoh 9:13-16. Moreover, the imperative to enjoy one’s “portion” may be intended as a type of encouragement or comfort to those engaged in profitless labor during this “evil time,” but it likely does not go far enough. It is merely an encouragement for a shift in one’s outlook on life and not a vision of, or a call for, significant material or structural changes that would enable peasant laborers to flourish in a more robust sense and over the course of their lifetimes. Qohelet’s discourse on a “portion” at best provides laborers with a meager solace and a “pathetic comfort,”¹⁹ and at worst reinforces the present oppressive system.

However, it should be maintained that Qohelet does express a general concern for the poor, peasants, and exploited laborers—a concern that is likely rooted in “traditional” moral

¹⁸ In fact, relief was only given to those who were determined to have no landholdings of their own. It was expected that those who did have landholdings could provide for themselves—according to the officials—and thus were not offered any relief at all. See Kloppenborg, *Tenants in the Vineyard*, 364.

¹⁹ I thank Dr. Timothy Sandoval for the use of this term in a review of an early draft.

virtues. Further, the emphasis on survival may be echoing a genuine and altruistic sentiment rooted in wisdom that is valuing the life of these laborers. Yet, Qohelet does not appear to resist the social hierarchies and inequalities that are generating oppression; or, more likely, Qohelet is not capable of envisioning and articulating any notion of social transformation for those who survive. This is evidenced in Qohelet's dialogical relation to the *Tobiad Romance*, where passages within Qohelet can be read as critiquing the exploitative practices of figures such as the Tobiads, but the text seemingly accepts, and reinforces, the "profit-less" Ptolemaic economy as an unchangeable reality. As Qohelet proclaims in the opening chapter "What was, it will be; and what has been done, it will be done; there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9). The tension within Qohelet of at once recognizing the unjust inequalities in society and rhetorically reinforcing their absolute existence may be indicative of the social location from which the utterance of Qohelet is produced: that of a scribal retainer.

As noted in chapter III, scribal retainers were employed by, sustained through, and participated within the governing and administrative structures of the ruling elite. A scribe's participation within the ruling bureaucracy was purely functional in that their scribal abilities provided a necessary service for the ruling class. Scribal retainers thus maintained a liminal position within society, where they were employed by the elite and served their ruling interests, but were also bound to the peasant class in that they could slip into the peasantry if their services were determined to be no longer needed. This social location was complexified for Judean scribes by their training and enculturation within their religious and moral tradition. This empowered scribes to maintain a "semi-autonomous" position from which they could level a certain measure of social critique arising from their religious and ethical commitments. Scribes were able to maintain a degree of epistemological independence through the traditions they preserved, yet as retainers they were still materially bound to and supported by the ruling class.

Since scribes were known to have responsibilities in record keeping and accounting for the purposes of taxation, it is possible that the author(s) of Qohelet was directly exposed to—and likely in some fashion even participating in—the economic extraction from the peasant class. The administrative tasks of a scribal retainer and the moral training of the authorship could have generated a tension within these scribes, who would have seen and recorded the heavy taxation, indebtedness, and land grabs from the peasant class while knowing that these actions were a violation of their moral virtues. It is possible that this experience would have given rise to a

critique of these unjust economic practices, and generated an ethical desire to relate a concept of wisdom that can assist persons in surviving a context that was set up to “trap” them within an “evil time” (9:12). The text of Qohelet is willing to acknowledge and name these “evils” and inequalities that are being experienced, and emphasizes the practice of a wisdom that can assist persons in surviving this unpredictable and oppressive context.

But while Qohelet may acknowledge these social injustices, the text can’t quite go far enough to envision any structural change that would put an end to the suffering being caused. Instead, as delineated above, Qohelet provides the meager solace of calling for one to enjoy what they have, and to see the good in their “portion.” Thus, we reach the sagacious limits of Qohelet: Qohelet’s eyes are open to the rampant oppression occurring, but as a retainer these scribes are unable to envision any overturning of the present world order.²⁰ What I am suggesting is that the authorship’s social location as scribal retainer—one who worked for and was supported by the ruling class—may have limited the sage’s ability to desire, envision, and/or promote any significant change to the present economic system: “What was, it will be...”²¹

In assessing Qohelet’s perspective, the complexity of the scribe’s location must be critically considered without slipping into judgments that place the text in an either/or binary where either Qohelet is either serving the interests of the ruling class, or is actually honoring and advocating for exploited labors. Like the scribe’s status in society, the text produced by scribes is ambivalent in how it conceives and presents social analysis. It is possible that a scribe operating in a socially liminal space would have a general concern for laborers who are being exploited, even having first-hand knowledge of this if the scribe was engaged in accounting, registering, and recording in the imperial taxation apparatus. Formed with moral virtues, the scribe(s) of Qohelet may desire the enactment of the traditional moral virtues of “justice, righteous, and

²⁰ For example, see feminist interpreters of Qohelet who rightly note that while Qohelet does critique hierarchical power structures, Qohelet does not extend this critique to issues of sex and gender, even at points utilizing misogynistic language (e.g., Qoh 7:26-28): Jennifer L. Koosed, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol Ann Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 243-246; Lisa Michele Wolfe, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, Wisdom Commentary 24 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020).

²¹ Interpreters who have argued for Qohelet maintaining an aristocratic background that serves elite interests include: Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 19 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM, 1991), 115-130; Frank Crüsemann, “The Unchangeable World: The ‘Crisis of Wisdom’ in Koheleth,” in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 57-77.

equity.” However, the scribe’s status as a retainer by those in power may also limit this perspective and the extent to which the scribe is willing to assert these virtues.

It is possible that due to this liminal position the scribe operates with a degree comfort, where enjoying their “portion” is possible and an adequate strategy for navigating their existence within this context. This in turn may restrict the scribe’s perspective and the subsequent advice that the scribe could offer to peasant laborers. The scribe(s) behind Qohelet appears to have observed first-hand the brutal extremes that those in power will go to, and may not want to see laborers subjected to even more abuse, knowing that in the hand of the oppressors is power, but there is seemingly no available comfort for the oppressed (Qoh 4:1). Accordingly, the scribe(s) may not want to go too far in offering a scathing critique of those in power, understanding the anger and danger that the powerful pose (e.g., Qoh 8:2-5; 10:4, 20).

It is also a possibility that due to their social location these particular scribes do not even know where to begin in envisioning such a drastic change, evidenced by the text stating “there is nothing new under the sun” (1:9). Further study on how Qohelet’s wisdom is formed within a dialogical environment through a Bakhtinian lens may want to draw in the early emerging Jewish apocalyptic literature as another dialogue partner in conceiving how to navigate these oppressive circumstances. While Qohelet, as a text emphasizing wisdom, may seem on the surface to be at odds with apocalyptic literature, scholars have consistently noted how these two scholarly categories cannot be cleanly separated from one another since both sets of texts are being produced by scribes. As George W.E. Nickelsburg explains, both sapiential and apocalyptic literature are “products of wisdom circles that are becoming increasingly diverse in the Greco-Roman period.”²²

John J. Collins broadly juxtaposes the general characteristics of wisdom and apocalypticism and explains that while wisdom literature—of which Qohelet is included—sought to make sense of the world through truths that could be demonstrated with lived experience and was marked by a promotion of morality, apocalyptic literature promoted a worldview distinguished by an increasing importance given to supernatural agents, a world

²² George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion,” in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, eds. Lawrence M. Wills and Benjamin G. Wright, *SymS* 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 36. For a theorization of how particular groups of texts are the products of varying scribal circles, see Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

beyond the current one, and the hope for judgement and vindication beyond death.²³ For Qohelet specifically, the present reality is understood as “evil,” and the text focuses upon the present by emphasizing survival and the enjoyment of one’s portion before one suffers the inescapable fate of death. Apocalyptic texts, conversely, understand the future to be open, and they attempt to envision a utopia in “which history changes course and good overcomes by evil.”²⁴

The apocalyptic perspective maintains value in that it can give persons hope in desperate circumstances, and empower them with a measure of resistance against dominant and oppressive powers, trusting that change will occur in the future.²⁵ However, such an otherworldly perspective may be somewhat disconnected from the present reality that one must struggle through and survive each day. Tamez concludes her work by acknowledging the need for an apocalyptic perspective that can envision something new, but maintains that this must be coupled with a perspective like that of Qohelet: “the apocalyptic vision, which takes in all of history at a glance, does not help us live life from day to day, night to night, moment to moment, in the midst of enslaving labor and sorrow.”²⁶ Although Qohelet does not, or cannot, envision structural change, Qohelet does present a wisdom aimed at surviving the brutalities of the present context, a survival which must be obtained if one is to continue to hope and strive for any structural change.

Section 7.03 Continuing the Dialogue: Suggestive Hermeneutical Engagements

From a liberation perspective, it is fair to conclude that Qohelet doesn’t go far enough in critiquing power differentials within society and in providing hope to those who are being oppressed and/or exploited. At the same time, Qohelet does exhibit a morality that is bothered by oppression and injustice, more so than other perspectives as evidenced by its dialogical engagement with the *Tobiad Romance*. At minimum, Qohelet is an utterance that serves as “a reminder that all is not well,”²⁷ and the wisdom of survival is a necessary emphasis regardless of

²³ John J. Collins, “Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, eds. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 169-170. For a fuller definition and explanation of apocalyptic literature, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 1-52.

²⁴ Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 144. E.g., Dan 7-12 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-82.

²⁵ For an overview on how apocalyptic texts represent a resistance of powers, see Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

²⁶ Tamez, *When the Horizons Close*, 145.

²⁷ James G. Williams, “What does it Profit a Man?: The Wisdom of Koheleth,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 389.

what else the utterance includes. Even with Qohelet's meager call for an enjoyment of one's portion, Krüger comments that the awareness of the suffering of others within Qohelet "restricts one's own enjoyment of life." Drawing from various instructions provided within the text, Qohelet can also be read as promoting communal solidarity where "instead of thinking of oneself, one should get together with companions and turn over to the needy a portion of one's means of nourishment and enjoyment (4:9-12; 11:1-2)."²⁸ Although Qohelet does not place a heavy emphasis upon communal flourishing and well-being in the text's "survival wisdom," survival and staying alive are nonetheless a prerequisite for human flourishing.

While Qohelet may not be able to envision any drastic change to the human condition, we can learn from Qohelet's wisdom that surviving brutal times is an important and necessary skill to maintain any hope for change. Here it is important to revisit Qohelet's "programmatic question" in 3:9, a rephrasing of what was asked in 1:3: "What profit is there for the one who works in all one's labor?" Jione Havea writes that Qohelet's answer to this question is/would have been useless for workers, mainly for reasons that have been explored above. "But," writes Havea "Qohelet's question rings with hope..." That is, the question is "more useful" and relevant than the text's answer.²⁹ If Qohelet is a participant in a social heteroglossia and dialogical environment, then contemporary readers can be drawn in and push the dialogue further based on the important question raised by Qohelet—whether addressing economic exploitation in Ptolemaic Palestine or in contemporary society. I will conclude by briefly sketching how contemporary readers, and their attempts to understand texts, are themselves participants in a dialogical environment with the text; I will then suggest how womanist interpretation and its emphasis upon survival may provide a robust dialogue with the text of Qohelet, as womanists ask similar questions, but go beyond the scope of Qohelet's "survival wisdom."

(a) A Bakhtinian Perspective on Cultural Hermeneutics

As Bakhtin explains, the meaning of a text is certainly not restricted to its context of origin, but rather all "great works continue to live in the distant future." Artistic texts that continue to be read and engaged, of which Qohelet could be counted, continue a life wherein "they are enriched with new meanings, new significance: it is as though these works outgrow

²⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 1.

²⁹ Jione Havea, "Toiling with Qoheleth for Pasifika, Papua, and Palestine: Reading Eccl 3:9-13 with 7:13-18" in *Reading Ecclesiastes from Asia and Pasifika*, eds. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, IVBS 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 65.

what they were in the epoch of their creation.” Using the continued reading of Shakespeare as an example, Bakhtin explains that the longevity of these texts is based in what readers have continually found within them, “but which neither [the author] nor his contemporaries could consciously perceive and evaluate in the context of the culture of their epoch.”³⁰ A similar sentiment is maintained in readings of biblical texts, where readers are continually finding new meanings in ancient texts by consciously reading the texts through their own social location and unique cultural experiences.³¹

It is this emphasis upon culture that Bakhtin uses to discuss the hermeneutical implications of a reader/interpreter being drawn into dialogue with an ancient work by framing this interaction as a dialogic encounter between two cultures. To fully engage a work of a different time, space, and culture, a reader must engage it with what Bakhtin terms “*creative understanding*.”³² In *creative understanding*, one party attempts to understand the world through the perspective of the other, but as Bakhtin explains, this process must maintain a sense of outsidership where the reader “does not renounce” themselves, their place in time, or their culture; *creative understanding* “forgets nothing.” Bakhtin explains that this allows for the raising of new questions of the foreign culture (i.e., text or work), ones that the culture/text “did not raise itself.” In what can represent a dialogical encounter between a contemporary reader and ancient text, Bakhtin asserts that “the foreign culture (i.e., a text) responds to us (i.e., a reader) by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths.”³³

L. Juliana M. Claassens, writing on the theological implications of using Bakhtin to interpret texts, explains how Bakhtin’s notion of *creative understanding* and the dialogue between cultures relates specifically to biblical interpretation. Claassens explains that while readers may be able to see connections between texts (such as, recognizing intertextuality), and can interpret these connected texts through a Bakhtinian lens of dialogism, it is important to recognize that “the reader brings her own self to the dialogue.” In such instances, the reader is

³⁰ M.M. Bakhtin, “Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff,” in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 4.

³¹ For works that have outlined cultural hermeneutics in biblical studies, particularly emphasizing minority perspectives, see Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, SemeiaSt 57 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

³² Bakhtin, “Response to a Question,” 7. Italics original.

³³ Bakhtin, “Response to a Question,” 7.

“not only observing the dialogue in the text, but is also participating in the dialogue herself.”³⁴

With this in mind, I suggest that a fruitful dialogue could be maintained between womanist biblical scholars and the text of Qohelet with their shared emphasis upon surviving oppressive contexts. While survival is a primary emphasis within womanist thought and womanist biblical scholarship, womanism, unlike Qohelet, is not resigned to mere survival, but sees survival as imperative to achieve “wholeness,” a “quality of life,” or to struggle for communal liberation.

(b) Defining Womanism and Womanist Biblical Scholarship

The term “womanist” was defined by Alice Walker in her work *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens*—a work canonized by womanists that continues to guide womanist thought. Walker’s definition is a poetic account describing a womanist through short descriptors and brief exchanges between black mothers and their female children. Included within Walker’s definition is the statement that a womanist is one who is “Committed to *survival* and *wholeness* of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health.”³⁵

As a critical apparatus, womanism foregrounds the experiences of black women, and reflects upon the number of ways in which black women have experienced oppression. This includes (but is not limited to) a critical analysis regarding the intersecting issues of racism, classism, sexism, and sexuality. Wilda C. Gafney explains that womanism is “as much perspectival as ideological,” as womanist biblical interpretation reads biblical texts through the lens of the experiences and interests of women of color in general, and black women in particular.³⁶ But as Gafney explains, womanist interpretation does not privilege these experiences at the expense of others, but true to womanist practice “the whole community is sought and valued.” Womanist interpretation naturally fits within a Bakhtinian, dialogical framework as interpreters pose questions from a “womanist praxis” and are concerned with issues of “power, authority, voice, agency, hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion.”³⁷ For Gafney,

³⁴ L. Juliana M. Claassens, “Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology,” *JBL* 122.1 (2003): 137-138.

³⁵ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), xi. Italics added

³⁶ Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 7. See also the introduction in Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, SymS 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 1-18.

³⁷ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 7.

this includes the interpretive practice of “talking back to the text,” by “challenging it, questioning it, interrogating it,” from a standpoint that is “unafraid of the power and authority of the text...”³⁸

(c) Hagar the Womanist and Qohelet’s Wise Peasant

The emphasis upon survival from a “womanist praxis” was particularly emphasized by Delores Williams in her seminal work of womanist theology and biblical interpretation, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*.³⁹ In this work Williams centers the experiences of black women against the backdrop African-American liberation theology and feminist discourse through an exploration of the story of Hagar within Genesis 16 and 21. Recognizing “striking similarities between Hagar’s story and the story of African-American women,” Williams draws upon a noted long tradition of black women appropriating the Hagar narrative in their shared struggle to survive.⁴⁰ The observed commonalities between Hagar and black women include shared experiences of slavery, forced surrogacy, cruel treatment from wives of slave owners or employers, and the role of religious experience in their efforts to survive desperate circumstances. As Williams elucidates, the narrative of Hagar has been influential upon black women in churches who have consistently testified “about their serious personal and salvific encounters with God, encounters that helped them and their families survive.”⁴¹

Williams’ reading of Hagar as a prototype for the experience of black women provides an interesting dialogical partner with Qohelet’s brief narration of the wise peasant (Qoh 9:13-16), which I read in this study as emblematic of Qohelet’s overall rhetoric of wisdom. Like Qohelet’s wise peasant, Williams sees survival as imperative to Hagar’s story, and subsequently the experience of black women. Also, in a similar fashion to Qohelet’s framing of wisdom, the survival of Hagar for Williams does not promote immediate liberation.

For example, Williams cites God’s imperative to Hagar to return to her oppressor, Sarai, after she ran away as an act of survival since it would have been unlikely that Hagar could have survived childbirth in the wilderness (Gen 16:7-9). This allows for the survival of not only Hagar, but also of her child. Yet, since she is advised to return to her oppressor, Williams states

³⁸ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 8-9.

³⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993; repr., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

⁴⁰ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 12-13.

⁴¹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 13.

that God is not shown to be “concerned with nor involved in liberation.”⁴² The primary emphasis upon survival is also present when Hagar and Ishmael are cast out of the home of Abraham and Sarah and into the wilderness in Gen 21:9-20. After wandering in the wilderness for a time, Hagar becomes desperate and without resources, with Ishmael nearing death due to thirst. In this moment God hears the cries of Ishmael and “opened [Hagar’s] eyes” to see a well of water (Gen 21:15-19). Williams explains that in this moment God enabled Hagar and Ismael’s survival by giving Hagar a “new vision to see survival resources where she saw none before.”⁴³ As a result, Hagar achieves survival for herself and Ishmael, who is able grow up and “become an expert with the bow” (Gen 21:20; NRSV).

Although it lacks the theological dimension of the Hagar story, the story of the wise peasant in Qohelet utilizes knowledge, skill, and a form of shrewd action to hold off the impending threat of a besieging king upon his city and similarly ensures survival in the midst of desperate circumstances. Like Hagar, the wise peasant does not use his skill and shrewdness to save merely himself, but demonstrating a shared concern with womanists, the wise peasant actively works on behalf of the broader community and saves his city (Qoh 9:14-15). Although we are not disclosed the specific actions of the wise peasant, his own shrewd wisdom can nonetheless be read as resisting powerful and threatening forces, thus helping engender his community’s survival into another day.

While the narrations of both Hagar and the wise peasant emphasize survival, Williams’ reading of Hagar from the experience of black women pushes beyond the “survival wisdom” of Qohelet and seeks to envision how Hagar struggles to secure a relative “quality of life” for her and her son. Williams defines “quality of life” as referring to “persons, families and/or communities attempting to arrive at well-being through the use of, search for and/or creation of supportive spiritual, economic, political, legal or educational resources.”⁴⁴ When Hagar is told by God to return to home of Sarai, God assures Hagar with a birth announcement of Ishmael and a promise to multiply Hagar’s descendants (Gen 16:10-11). According to Williams this statement functions to forecast both a strategy of survival, and one “for obtaining a quality of life.”⁴⁵ After Hagar and Ishmael survive their initial despair in the wilderness, Ishmael is able to grow,

⁴² Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 22.

⁴³ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 27.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 139.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 22.

become skillful with a bow, and establish a home in the wilderness where Hagar secures a wife for him from Egypt (Gen 21:20-21). These acts not only demonstrate a will to survive, but more poignantly how Hagar, despite her poverty, “like many black women, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and her child, with only God by her side.”⁴⁶

Conversely, after Qohelet observes the wise peasant saving his city “with his wisdom,” Qohelet becomes concerned that wise peasant is then forgotten and ignored by the city (Qoh 9:15-16). While the narration is brief, Qohelet’s assessment aligns with the observation made in Qoh 8:14: “There are righteous ones who [things have happened to them] as if they did wicked acts...”; additionally, Qohelet does not, or cannot, envision any significant structural or social change for persons like the wise peasant in their present circumstance, stating “What was, it will be... there is nothing new under the sun” (Qoh 1:9). Unlike Williams’ reading of Hagar, Qohelet does not speak to how the wise peasant might achieve, has achieved, any sustaining “quality of life,” but instead offers the hollow urgings to embrace present activity such as eating, drinking, and enjoying one’s labor (Qoh 2:24-26; 3:12-14, 22; 5:17-19; 9:7-10). The womanist perspective espoused by Williams and others may interrogate, or “talk back,” to Qohelet by asking: was it the wise peasant who was concerned about his own remembrance, or was this merely a concern of the scribe(s)? Was it possible that the wise peasant could have still struggled for a “quality of life,” even if it was not recognized by the scribe(s) and the text? Who gets to define one’s “quality of life”? Is it possible that Qohelet’s narration of the “wise peasant” (מסכן חכם) is a mere retelling of the story of the wise woman (אשה חכמה) from Abel of Beth-maacah in Sam 20:14-22, and is Qohelet (or, the scribe) participating in this figure’s lack of remembrance by not acknowledging (or shifting?) her identity?⁴⁷

Williams’ reading of Hagar, unlike the Qohelet’s narration of the wise peasant, moves beyond the present context of suffering to envision and hope for a better future. Of course, this vision may not be realized until the emergence of future generations (c.f., Qoh 1:4), but the survival of both Hagar and Ishmael is imperative to be able to achieve this. While Womanist scholarship emphasizes survival, this survival is undertaken as a sort-of prerequisite in the continued struggle for liberation and well-being. As Renita Weems explains,

⁴⁶ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 22.

⁴⁷ See chapter V for a comparison of these two passages.

womanist hermeneutics of liberation begin with African American women's will to survive and thrive as human beings... what is celebrated most in our writings is our determination to survive, to nourish, and to protect those things dear to us, and to assert our will to thrive in what often is a hostile and dangerous world.⁴⁸

Both Hagar and the wise peasant will, as Williams notes, "make a way out no way."⁴⁹ Yet, where this ongoing dialogue can be fruitful is in articulating a worthy destination of this "way."

Of course, the juxtaposition of Williams' reading of Hagar with my reading of Qohelet's wisdom is suggestive for further dialogue, since I do not and cannot maintain a womanist perspective based in the experiences of black women in North America. Nonetheless, I hope this juxtaposition demonstrates how Qohelet can continue to be engaged in dialogue over the struggle to survive brutal and oppressive contexts, which are "nothing new under the sun." Contemporary readers can learn from Qohelet's wisdom that surviving brutal times is an important and necessary skill in order to maintain any hope for change. But where Qohelet stops short in envisioning or advocating for human flourishing, interpreters can chime in with their own utterances, rooted in their own situatedness and unrepeatable context. Maybe Qohelet doesn't get it all right, but for the dialogue the significance of Qohelet is in the observations that are named, the important questions the text raises, and the questions that readers will continue to ask

⁴⁸ Renita J. Weems, "Re-Reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible," in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015), 47.

⁴⁹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 14.

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