The Figure of Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon’s Re-narration of Gen 12:10–20

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It is well known that the Genesis Apocryphon embellishes the biblical narration of Abraham’s and Sarah’s stay in Egypt (Gen 12:10–20) with the aim to fill the narrative gaps of the biblical story, and to make it more attractive and more edifying. In this context, a chronological and spatial framework has been given, and biblical figures like Lot and Hagar have been inserted into the story. However, most of the embellishments have been added in order to underline Abraham’s outstandingly pious character. Research literature often hinted at this aspect.1 Still lacking in research, however, is a comprehensive overview

1 Cf. Geza Vermes, Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies (2d rev. ed.; StPB 4; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 125: “The author of GA does indeed try, by every means at his disposal, to make the biblical story more attractive, more real, more edifying, and above all more intelligible. Geographic data are inserted to complete biblical lacunae or to identify altered place names, and various descriptive touches are added to give the story substance. There were, for example, three Egyptian princes, and the name of one of them was Harkenosh. They praised Sarah as though with one mouth. Abraham was frightened by his dream and Sarah wept because of it. The Patriarch prayed for the deliverance of his wife and his tears flowed. He was sad when his kinsmen went away from him. The summary statements of Genesis are often expanded to explain how the Egyptian princes praised Sarah’s beauty, how God afflicted Pharaoh, how Abraham obeyed the divine command to travel through the land, how he was informed of Lot’s misfortune, and so on. To this work of expansion and development Genesis Apocryphon adds another, namely, the reconciliation of unexplained or apparently conflicting statements in the biblical text order to allay doubt and worry. Abraham knew that Sara would be taken from him because of his dream. Sara’s identity was revealed to Pharaoh by Lot.” Cf. also Peter Weimar, “Formen frühjüdischer Literatur: eine Skizze,” in Literatur und Religion des Frühjudentums (ed. Johann Maier and Josef Schreiner; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1973), 123–62, at 153. Furthermore, it seems notable that the events are put in chronological order: After five years of inhabiting Egypt, Sara is brought to the Pharaoh’s harem; after two further years she is rescued from there; cf. Ben Zion Wacholder, “How long did Abram Stay in Egypt,” HUCA 35 (1964): 43–56; Benjamin Ziemen, Abram—Abraham: Kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Gen 14, 15 und 17 (BZAW 350; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 43 n. 176. Concerning the aspect of embellishment cf. Craig A. Evans, “The Genesis Apocryphon and the Rewritten Bible,” RevQ 13/49–52 (1988): 153–65, at 162–64. Concerning the literary relation of Gen 12:10–20 and the Genesis Apocryphon,
of Abraham’s role in the re-narration of the story of the sojourn by Abraham and Sara in Egypt as it is attested in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Therefore, this contribution will show the patriarch’s depiction in this passage. In addition to the motif of Abraham’s exculpation, as expressed in a dream much debated in the scholarly literature, further elements in this story of the *Genesis Apocryphon* characterise Abraham as an ideal figure who has a distinct relationship with God. He is depicted as a transmitter of divine revelation, as a God-trusting man of prayer, and as an exorcist. Finally, it will be made clear that Abraham’s wide-ranging wisdom and his prayers play an outstanding role in the plot of the overall story.

1. Abraham’s Dream

Some scholars have already pointed out that Abraham’s dream in the *Genesis Apocryphon* functions as an exculpation for Abraham who—according to the biblical narration—gave his wife Sara to Pharaoh for fear of being killed by the Egyptians. As Abraham passes Sara off

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2 Subsequent to the presentation of this paper at the IOQS congress in Ljubljana, Daniel K. Falk’s contribution concerning the parabiblical texts was published (*The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures among the Dead Sea Scrolls* [CQS 8; LSTS 63; London: T&T Clark, 2007]). This significant book also contains a large chapter on the figure of Abraham in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Falk refers to the following “Abraham Motifs”: (a) Character and Piety of Abraham [80–85]; (b) The Beauty and Purity of Sarai [85–87]; (c) The wisdom of Abraham [87–88]; (d) Revelation [88–89]; (e) Abraham as Patriarch (e.g., Abraham as prophet and as priest) [79–93]; (f) Chronology and Calendar [91–93]; (g) Geography [93]; (h) Characterization (e.g., the emotional aspects of Abraham’s depiction) [94]. I am grateful to Daniel K. Falk for his important analysis which adds some important aspects to my paper. However, whereas Daniel Falk gives an overall sketch of the traditions in the *Genesis Apocryphon* as an interpretation and expansion of the biblical Book of Genesis, my study can be characterised as a close reading of the *Genesis Apocryphon*’s re-narration of Gen 12:10–20, taking a special interest in the relationships the various Abraham motifs have with each other. I would also like to express my gratitude to the editors for their willingness to include my paper in this volume.