On Anthropology and Honor in the Testament of Job

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1 Introduction

In 2004 Richard Rohrbaugh and I argued that the prominence of women in the Testament of Job served the work’s larger purpose of commending to its audience dependence on ascribed honor from God rather than on honor acquired through their own effort. Two women in particular, Sitidos and the maidservant, epitomized the futility of relying on acquired honor when circumstances did not allow one to accumulate it. And though the work’s date and provenance remain somewhat contested, we suggested the context that provoked the author’s narrative argument was the transition from Ptolemaic to Roman rule in Egypt: under the Ptolemies Jews had the capacity to acquire considerable honor, but no more under the Romans, and if they were to find any honorific sustenance for remaining true to their Jewish identity, it would have to be of the ascribed kind, and that from God.¹

In this essay I add a significant dimension to this argument: the testament’s distinction between acquired and ascribed honor also depends heavily on a contrast between a kind of anthropological monism held by most characters in the story and Job’s dualistic anthropology. Furthermore, Job’s understanding of the intrinsic duality of the human being is the key to his concomitant appreciation of the dualistic cosmology that everyone else in the narrative accepts, but fails to fully value. While especially Job’s fellow kings and Sitidos languish in a unitary anthropology that compels them to hang their identity on the accouterments of honor acquired in the earthly realm, Job grasps the two-part nature of the human being that makes possible ascribed honor’s sustaining power in the here-and-now by trusting in a heavenly future. We see the narrative’s case for this perspective in a series of passages including *T. Job* 20:1–3; 26:1–6; 35–38; 46–50.

2 Testament of Job 20:1–3: The First Episode

A summary of the testament up to 20:1–3 sets the scene for the first episode in the work’s elaboration and defense of a dualistic anthropology. Job’s deathbed speech to his children born from a second marriage (to Dinah, daughter of Jacob), the testament begins with Job explaining that he suffered earlier in life because he destroyed a local temple to save his neighbours from unwittingly worshipping Satan. As a consequence Satan gained charge over his fate, but an