CHARACTERS AND NAMES IN THE *VITA AESOPI* AND IN THE *TALE OF AHIQAR* PART I: LYKOROS AND HERMIPPOS[1]

1. Introduction: The *Vita Aesopi* and the Near-Eastern *Tale of Ahiqar*

In the so-called *Vita Aesopi*, an extensive fictional narrative about Aesop, the original form of which was most probably composed in the 1st or 2nd c. AD, a large section is dedicated to Aesop's adventures in Babylon (ch. 101–123). Arriving at Babylon, Aesop exhibited his wisdom and won the favour of the Babylonian monarch, Lykoros, who entrusted to Aesop the administration of the kingdom. Being childless, Aesop adopted a young nobleman of Babylon and took great care in his education. But the young man went astray and got involved in a love-affair with the king's own concubine, for which Aesop severely reproved him. So the youth, angered with Aesop, decided to harm him and falsely accused him before the Babylonian king as a traitor, adducing forged letters as evidence. The king was deceived and gave orders to a military officer, named Hermippos, to put Aesop to death. Hermippos, however, was a good friend of Aesop's: so he hid the persecuted man and kept him secretly alive, while falsely reporting to the king that Aesop had been slain. After a while, Nektanebo, the king of Egypt, heard that Aesop was dead and decided to challenge Lykoros with difficult problems, knowing that, apart from Aesop, no one else in Babylon would be in a position to solve them. He sent a letter to Lykoros and asked him to send to Egypt people who could construct a castle in mid-air and give answer to all the other questions of the Egyptian king. If Lykoros found such people, the Egyptian would pay him tribute for ten years; if not, Lykoros himself would be obliged to pay the same tribute to Egypt. No one among Lykoros' courtiers was able to think of a solution to the problem of the aerial castle. So Lykoros fell into despair and began lamenting for the loss of Aesop. At that point Hermippos revealed to the

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king that Aesop had been kept alive. Lykoros was overjoyed and ordered that Aesop be released and brought before him. Aesop demonstrated his innocence to the king and disproved the false accusations of his adoptive son. Lykoros reinstated Aesop and handed over to him his adoptive son for punishment. Aesop admonished the young man with a long tirade of wise sayings, and the youth felt great shame and grief for having wronged his adoptive father; so he refused to take food and died. After that, Aesop travelled to Egypt, where he cleverly solved the problem of the aerial castle, along with a series of other tricky riddles propounded by the Egyptian king. Nektanebo greatly admired Aesop's ingenuity, duly gave him the tribute of Egypt and sent him back to Babylon, where Aesop received many honours from Lykoros.

This entire section of the *Vita Aesopi* (often called "the Babylonian section") is a relatively faithful adaptation of a Near-Eastern narrative work, the *Tale of Ahiqar*, which was compiled as a whole in the late 7th or early 6th c. BC, most probably in the Aramaic language and in an Assyrian environment. The central hero of this work, Ahiqar, the wise vizier of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, is shown undergoing all the adventures and ordeals attributed to Aesop in the Greek adaptation: he adopts and raises his nephew Nadin, he is calumniated by the treacherous young man before the Assyrian king, he gets condemned to death but is saved and hidden by the executioner; and afterwards he is reinstated, helps his king in the riddle-contest against the Egyptian Pharaoh and harshly punishes his nephew. The oldest surviving version of the *Tale of Ahiqar* is written in Aramaic and transmitted by a fragmentary papyrus of the late 5th c. BC, which was discovered at Elephantine, Egypt, among the remains of the Jewish community situated there. The papyrus preserves only the earlier part of the narrative, up to the point when Ahiqar is hidden and falsely reported as dead to the Assyrian king. All the rest of Ahiqar's adventures have been lost in a large gap, and the remaining papyrus fragments contain only part of a collection of the wise vizier's sayings, which must have been appended at the end, after the narrative.[2]

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[2] On the papyrus of Elephantine, and generally on the provenance, dating and textual tradition of the *Tale of Ahiqar* see R. Degen, "Achikar", *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 1 (1977) 53–59; J. M. Lindenberger, "Ahiqar. A New Translation and Introduction", in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (London 1985) 479–482; J. C. Greenfield, "The Wisdom of Ahiqar", in J. Day, R. P. Gordon, H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel. Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge 1995) 43–52; P. Grelot, "Les proverbes d'Aḥîqar", *RBi* 108 (2001) 511–516; and I. M. Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος. Η Διήγηση του Αχικάρ στην αρχαία Ελλάδα* (Athens 2008) I, 23–32 with more bibliography.

The sequel of the narrative, with the riddle-contest, Ahiqar's rein-
statement and his journey and triumph in Egypt, is known only from the
later versions of the *Tale of Ahiqar*, which circulated in many lan-
guages: Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Ethiopic, Old Church Slavonic, and
afterwards also Old and Modern Turkish, Russian, Romanian, Serbo-
Croatian, and Georgian. These later versions are transmitted by manu-
scripts dating from medieval times onwards; the oldest ones among
them appear to be the Syriac and the Armenian version, which may go
back to the last centuries of antiquity. The later redactions offer a more
extensive narrative than the ancient version of Elephantine, but not a
substantially different one with regard to the main events of the plot, as
it transpires from the collation of their text with the preserved narrative
part of the Aramaic papyrus: they follow the same essential storyline
and have only expanded the briefer core of the Elephantine version with
additional details, adventurous developments and novelistic or folktale
motifs.[3] Many of the amplifications found in the later versions must
have been introduced into the narrative of *Ahiqar* from an early period.
The apocryphal book of *Tobit* (probably 3rd or 2nd c. BC), which repeat-
edly alludes to Ahiqar's adventures, appears to presuppose a form of
Ahiqar including some characteristic additions of the later versions.
Fragments of a Demotic Egyptian version of *Ahiqar* in papyri of the
1st c. AD contain an episode which is absent from the text of Elephan-
tine and has been added only in the later redactions.[4]

The Greek adaptation of *Ahiqar* incorporated in the *Vita Aesopi* also
contains many elements occurring only in the later versions. Obviously,

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For text and translation of the papyrus see A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth
Century B.C.* (Oxford 1923) 212–226; B. Porten, A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic
Documents from Ancient Egypt* III. *Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Jerusalem 1993)
24–53; other translations in F. C. Conybeare, J. R. Harris, A. S. Lewis, *The Story of
Aḥiḳar. From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek
and Slavonic Versions* (Cambridge ²1913) 168–173 (henceforward to be cited as
CHL); P. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte* (Paris 1972) 432–451; Linden-
berger, 494–507; H. L. Ginsberg in J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Re-
lating to the Old Testament* (Princeton ³1969) 427–430.

[3] On the later versions of *Ahiqar* see CHL xxi–xxvii; T. Nöldeke, *Unter-
suchungen zum Achiqar-Roman*, Abh. Ges. d. Wiss. Göttingen, phil.-hist. Kl., N.F.
14.4 (Berlin 1913) 25–29, 51–61; Konstantakos (n. 2) I, 32–36 with more biblio-
graphy. For translations of the main texts see CHL 1–23 (Slavonic), 24–85 (Arme-
nian), 86–98 (Old Turkish), 101–127 (Syriac), 130–161 (Arabic); R. Schneider,
"L'histoire d'Ahiqar en éthiopien", *Annales d'Éthiopie* 11 (1978) 147–152 (Ethi-
opic); M. Gaster, "Contributions to the History of Aḥiḳar and Nadan", *JAS* 21
(1900) 302–309 (Romanian).

[4] On all this see Konstantakos (n. 2) I, 34, 158–166 with further bibliography.

the author of the *Vita Aesopi* (henceforward to be called "the *Vita*-Author", for the sake of brevity) used an expanded version of the *Tale of Ahiqar*, closely similar to the later redactions. The provenance and language of this model version are debated. Most scholars assume that the *Vita*-Author was based on a pre-existent Greek translation of the *Tale of Ahiqar*.[5] As I have argued elsewhere, such a Greek version was available already from early Hellenistic times, probably prepared in Peripatetic circles, perhaps at the instigation of Theophrastus, who wrote a book about Ahiqar (Ἀκίχαρος, Diog. Laert. 5, 50 = Theophr. F 727, 13 FHSG). It was presumably this same version that was subsequently attributed to Democritus and spuriously introduced into the corpus of Democritean works.[6] Therefore, this version must have enjoyed at some point a wider circulation and popularity beyond the Peripatetic circles in which it originated, and so it could have been read by the *Vita*-Author in the early imperial age. As is commonly recognized nowadays, the *Vita*-Author was an educated man, well-versed in earlier Greek literature and also familiar enough with philosophical teachings (this is indicated by his frequent echoes of various philosophical doctrines and traditions, Cynic, Socratic, Platonic and Stoic).[7] Such a man might have had access to Peripatetic or Democritean texts, and in this way he could have obtained a copy of the Hellenistic version of *Ahiqar*.

However, in the early imperial period we may also imagine a bilingual author from the East, most probably a Hellenized man of Near-Eastern or Egyptian origins, who has assimilated the Greek literary and philosophical tradition and writes in Greek but also knows the language

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[5] See Nöldeke (n. 3) 62; B. Meissner, *Das Märchen vom weisen Achiqar* (Leipzig 1917) 16; A. La Penna, "Il romanzo di Esopo", *Athenaeum* 40 (1962) 289; J. J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor. A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's* Golden Ass (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1985) 279–280; S. Jedrkiewicz, *Sapere e paradosso nell'antichità: Esopo e la favola* (Roma 1989) 129–130; F. M. Fales, "Ahiqar e Boccaccio", in E. Acquaro (ed.), *Alle soglie della classicità. Il Mediterraneo tra tradizione e innovazione. Studi in onore di Sabatino Moscati* I (Pisa – Roma 1996) 148; M. J. Luzzatto, "Sentenze di Menandro e 'Vita Aesopi'", in M. S. Funghi (ed.), *Aspetti di letteratura gnomica nel mondo antico* I (Firenze 2003) 41; M. Marinčič, "The Grand Vizier, the Prophet, and the Satirist. Transformations of the Oriental *Ahiqar Romance* in Ancient Prose Fiction", in S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, W. Keulen (eds.), *The Ancient Novel and Beyond* (Leiden – Boston 2003) 61; C. Jouanno, *Vie d'Ésope* (Paris 2006) 26.

[6] See [Democr.] 68 B 299 DK (= Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1, 15, 69, 4); Konstantakos (n. 2) II, 17–81, 225–270.

[7] See I. M. Konstantakos, "Riddles, Philosophers and Fishes: Aesop and the θαλάσσιον πρόβατον (*Vita Aesopi* W 24, G 47)", *Eranos* 101 (2003) 108–111 with examples and bibliography.

of his homeland and can read texts in it. A writer of this kind might well have read *Ahiqar* in a foreign, oriental version.[8] If we adopt Perry's theory about the Egyptian provenance of the *Vita*-Author,[9] we may suppose that the latter used the Demotic Egyptian version of *Ahiqar*, which circulated at least from the 1st c. AD (i. e. around the very time of composition of the *Vita*), as is shown by its extant papyrus fragments.[10] On the other hand, if we follow La Penna and locate the *Vita*-Author in the region of Syria or more generally of the Middle East,[11] we may assume that his model was a version of *Ahiqar* in Aramaic, i. e. in the original language of the work, like the version of Elephantine, though clearly posterior and more expanded than the Elephantine text.

In any case, the *Vita*-Author evidently made a series of alterations to the narrative of *Ahiqar*, in order to better integrate it into his own work. The Babylonian section of the *Vita* presents a great number of divergences from all the surviving versions of *Ahiqar* (both the text of Elephantine and the later redactions); most of these divergences concern small details of the plot and the setting, although there are also a few differences in important elements. Some of the discrepancies may go

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[8] The only scholar who has expressly reckoned with this possibility is J.-Th. A. Papademetriou, *Αἰσώπεια καὶ Αἰσωπικά* (Athens 1989) 10, 12–13. B. E. Perry, *Aesopica. A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition That Bears His Name* (Urbana 1952) 4–5, and Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 129, arguing that the *Vita* was composed in an Egyptian environment, imply that the *Vita*-Author used a version of *Ahiqar* circulating in Egypt, but do not enter into details about the language of that version.

[9] See Perry (n. 8) 2–4, followed by many scholars: e. g. M. W. Haslam in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 53 (1986) 149–150; J. Dillery, "Aesop, Isis, and the Heliconian Muses", *CPh* 94 (1999) 272–280; T. Hägg, *Parthenope. Selected Studies in Ancient Greek Fiction* (Copenhagen 2004) 50. However, Perry's arguments are not compelling, as has been pointed out by others: see e. g. La Penna (n. 5) 271–272; Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 171, 179; N. Robertson, "Aesop's Encounter with Isis and the Muses, and the Origins of the *Life of Aesop*", in E. Csapo, M. C. Miller (eds.), *Poetry, Theory, Praxis. The Social Life of Myth, Word and Image in Ancient Greece. Essays in Honour of William J. Slater* (Oxford 2003) 249–250; N. Kanavou, "Personal Names in the *Vita Aesopi* (*Vita G* or *Perriana*)", *CQ* 56 (2006) 208.

[10] See K.-Th. Zauzich, "Demotische Fragmente zum Ahikar-Roman", in H. Francke et al. (eds.), *Folia rara Wolfgang Voigt LXV. diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicata* (Wiesbaden 1976) 180–185. The Demotic text itself may of course be considerably older than the papyri transmitting it; see Konstantakos (n. 2) I, 33, 159.

[11] See La Penna (n. 5) 272–273; cf. already P. Marc, "Die Achikarsage. Ein Versuch zur Gruppierung der Quellen", *Studien zur vergleichenden Litteraturgeschichte* 2 (1902) 398–399. But this theory too rests on no more than slight indications.

back to the model version of *Ahiqar* used by the *Vita*-Author: this version was considerably older than all the expanded versions of *Ahiqar* known today, so it is reasonable to suppose that it differed from them in a number of points. For many divergences, however, it can be plausibly argued that they are modifications consciously made by the *Vita*-Author, in order to ensure the literary fulfilment of the Babylonian section and of the *Vita* as a narrative whole: their purpose may be e. g. to connect the Babylonian section with previous episodes of the *Vita*, to introduce into the Babylonian section important recurrent themes of the entire work, to adapt the adventures of Ahiqar to Aesop's different figure, to render the oriental story more accessible to a Greek audience, to introduce additional topical details for local colouring, and so forth.

A full description and discussion of all these divergences of the *Vita* from *Ahiqar* have not been hitherto attempted.[12] In the present article I only intend to discuss the changes in the names of some characters and propose explanations for them. The replacement of Ahiqar, the central hero of the Near-Eastern work, with Aesop, the protagonist of the *Vita*, was natural. Apart from this, in the Greek work the anonymous Pharaoh of *Ahiqar* was named Nektanebo, the Assyrian king became Lykoros or Lykourgos, Nadin, the ungrateful young man, was christened Ainos or Helios, and Nabusumiskun, the executioner, Hermippos. These names were purposefully selected by the *Vita*-Author: as it will transpire from the following discussion, his choices were chiefly motivated by a wish to connect the Babylonian section with important recurrent themes and

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[12] Of course, many scholars have made occasional observations about differences in plot, setting and narrative. They regularly point out the changes in the characters' names and in the place of the action (for which see below), those concerning the position and the content of the hero's precepts, and sometimes other modifications in the storyline: see e. g. E. Cosquin, "Le livre de Tobie et l'*Histoire du sage Ahikar*'", *RBi* 8 (1899) 60–61; Marc (n. 11) 396–398; CHL lxx–lxxi; Nöldeke (n. 3) 62–63; A. Hausrath, *Achiqar und Aesop. Das Verhältnis der orientalischen zur griechischen Fabeldichtung*, Sitz. Akad. d. Wiss. Heidelberg, phil.-hist. Kl. 1918/2 (Heidelberg 1918) 7–8; La Penna (n. 5) 284–286, 289; B. Holbek, "Äsop", *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 1 (1977) 887–888; Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 127–128; G. Ragone, "La schiavitù di Esopo a Samo. Storia e romanzo", in M. Moggi, G. Cordiano (eds.), *Schiavi e dipendenti nell'ambito dell'*'oikos' *e della* 'familia' (Pisa 1997) 135–136; Hägg (n. 9) 48; Jouanno (n. 5) 26–28, 239–243. Perry, *Aesopica* (n. 8) 5–9 provided a synoptic correlation between the text of Elephantine, the later redactions of *Ahiqar* and the Babylonian section of the *Vita*, in the form of a three-columned table; but a full inventory and analysis of all the alterations of the *Vita* could not be accommodated in that schematic survey. I intend to treat these matters in detail in a future study (Ἀκίχαρος III. Ἡ Μυθιστορία τοῦ Αἰσώπου καὶ ἄλλα ἀφηγήματα [Athens, forthcoming]).

patterns of the entire narrative of the *Vita*. I have extensively discussed
the case of Nektanebo in another study: Nektanebo, the last native Pha-
raoh of Egypt before the second Persian occupation, became a legend-
ary personage, and many tales were circulating about him, both in the
Egyptian and in the Greek tradition. Those tales, still popular at the time
of the composition of the *Vita*, had turned Nektanebo into a kind of "ar-
chetypal" Pharaoh and a figure easily recognizable for the reading pub-
lic of the time. Moreover, the Nektanebo of those tales presented a num-
ber of impressive similarities with the Pharaoh of *Ahiqar*. For these rea-
sons, the *Vita*-Author gave Nektanebo's name to his own version of the
Egyptian king.[13] The following sections will focus on two other impor-
tant characters, the Babylonian king and the friendly executioner. The
second part of this study, to be published in a subsequent issue of the
Hyperboreus, will be devoted to the figure of the ungrateful adoptive
son.

2. Lykoros, the king of Babylon

In the version of Elephantine Ahiqar is initially presented as the
counsellor and seal-bearer of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria; it is then
stated that Sennacherib died and his son Esarhaddon succeeded him.
Ahiqar remained at Esarhaddon's service, but, seeing that he was grow-
ing old, he decided to adopt his nephew Nadin and properly educate
him, so that this young man might succeed Ahiqar as Esarhaddon's
counsellor. The story that follows, with the adventures of Ahiqar and
Nadin, is played out during Esarhaddon's reign.[14] The Elephantine text
presumably reflects in this respect the original form of the *Tale of
Ahiqar*, with the kings of Assyria naturally placed in the right historical
order. On the contrary, in the later redactions the entire story is set dur-
ing the reign of Sennacherib: in some of them the order of the Assyrian
kings is reversed and Sennacherib is called the son and successor of
Esarhaddon (so in the standard Syriac, the Arabic and a later Turkish
version);[15] in the others only Sennacherib is mentioned and Esarhad-
don's name does not appear at all.[16] These alterations were probably

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[13] See I. M. Konstantakos, "Nektanebo in the *Vita Aesopi* and in Other Narra-
tives: A Study in Comparison", *C&M* 60 (2009) 99–144.

[14] See Cowley (n. 2) 212, 220; Grelot, *Documents* (n. 2) 433; Lindenberger
(n. 2) 494; Porten, Yardeni (n. 2) 26–27.

[15] See CHL 101 ff. (Syriac), 130 ff. (Arabic); M. A. Danon, "Fragments turcs
de la Bible et des Deutérocanoniques", *JA* (sér. 11) 17 (1921) 116, 120 (Turkish).

[16] See CHL 1 ff. (Slavonic), 24 ff., 56 ff. (Armenian), 86 ff. (Old Turkish);
Gaster (n. 3) 302 ff. (Romanian). In the Ethiopic version Ahiqar's monarch is the

due to the fact that Sennacherib was better known to the readers of the Christian era, thanks to his appearances in Old Testament books.[17] We may imagine that some later redactor or translator, who was not familiar with Neo-Assyrian history, made the mistake of calling Sennacherib a son of Esarhaddon, instead of vice versa; this mistake was retained in certain later redactions, while in others it was "emended" with the suppression of Esarhaddon's name.[18] As for the place of action, most of the later versions retain the original setting, calling Sennacherib "king of Assyria and Nineveh" (or with similar designations) and duly placing the events in those locations.[19] The addition of Nineveh (not mentioned in the text of Elephantine) is probably again a loan from Old Testament texts, in which Sennacherib is said to abide in that city (see 2 *Kings* 19, 36; *Is*. 37, 37; *Tob*. 1, 18–22).

We do not know what happened in the model version of *Ahiqar* which was used in the *Vita Aesopi* with regard to the Assyrian kings. But it is noteworthy that the author of *Tobit*, in the 3rd/2nd c. BC, was reading a version of *Ahiqar* which, though clearly more expanded than the text of Elephantine and probably closer to the amplified narrative of the later redactions, still put the Assyrian monarchs in the right order and presumably had the story evolve in the reign of Esarhaddon, like the original form of the work (see *Tob*. 1, 21–22). The model version used by the *Vita*-Author was chronologically closer to the one read by the author of *Tobit*, and even to the Elephantine text, than to the later redactions in the form in which they survive today. So it seems likely that in that model version too the Assyrian monarchs were correctly identified and placed in the proper historical sequence. In any case, the *Vita*-Author, in his own adaptation, changed both the name of the wise hero's king and the location of his kingdom.

"king of Persia" (not of Assyria) and remains nameless (see Schneider [n. 3] 142–152); this is doubtless a later redactor's innovation.

[17] Cf. M. J. Luzzatto, "Grecia e Vicino Oriente: tracce della 'Storia di Ahiqar' nella cultura greca tra VI e V secolo a.C.", *QS* 36 (1992) 68.

[18] Cf. in general CHL xxxii–xxxiv; Nöldeke (n. 3) 27; Meissner (n. 5) 20. Certain Syriac manuscripts preserve an intermediate stage of confusion, before the definitive predominance of Sennacherib: at one point they show Ahiqar serving Esarhaddon the son of Sennacherib, while at another point they make him the counsellor of Sennacherib the son of Esarhaddon; see F. Nau, "Le roman turc de Haïqar", *JA* (sér. 11) 19 (1922) 265–266.

[19] See CHL 1, 12, 16, 18, 20 (Slavonic), 24, 37, 42–43, 46–47, 49, 56, 78, 80–81 (Armenian), 86 (Old Turkish), 101, 110, 114, 117, 119–121 (Syriac), 130, 139–140, 144, 152–155 (Arabic). In the Ethiopic version the action is translocated to Persia (see n. 16); in the Romanian it is set in an otherwise unknown "land of Rodu" or "Doru" (Gaster [n. 3] 302).

In the Babylonian section of the *Vita* the monarch whom Aesop serves is the king of Babylon, not of Assyria. The transfer of the action to Babylon was doubtless intended to adapt the story to the knowledge and expectations of the Greek audience. For the Greeks Babylon was the most famous and emblematic centre of Mesopotamia, much better known than Assyria or Nineveh. A parallel is provided by the story of Gilgamos in Aelian (*Nat. anim.* 12, 21): Γίλγαμος is unmistakably a Hellenized form of Gilgamesh, the celebrated Mesopotamian hero, and Aelian's narrative appears to be ultimately derived from an old, authentic Mesopotamian legend (probably introduced into the Greek-speaking world by a writer with access to Mesopotamian traditions, like Berossus or Ktesias).[20] Yet, unlike the traditional Mesopotamian stories about Gilgamesh, which are always centred in Uruk, the city with which Gilgamesh was standardly associated, the Greek story is set in Babylon: Gilgamos is presented as the abandoned grandson of a Babylonian monarch, who finally regains his rights and becomes himself king of Babylon. Obviously, the Greek or Hellenized writer who collected and retold the Mesopotamian story transferred the action from Uruk (a town unknown to the average Greek) to Babylon, the most renowned and easily recognizable city of Mesopotamia for his Greek audience.[21]

The name of the Babylonian king takes different forms in the various extant texts of the *Vita*. In the G version and in some manuscripts of

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[20] For this story, its provenance and sources see in detail W. Henkelman, "The Birth of Gilgameš (Ael. *NA* XII.21). A Case-Study in Literary Receptivity", in R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg (eds.), *Altertum und Mittelmeerraum: Die antike Welt diesseits und jenseits der Levante. Festschrift für Peter W. Haider zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart 2006) 807–856, and Konstantakos (n. 2) II, 96–103 with further bibliography.

[21] Dr. Antonio Corso points out another factor which may also have contributed to this shift of place. In Greek the term Assyria could be used in a broader sense, to cover the entire Mesopotamian area, including Babylonia: this sense is common already in Herodotus (1, 178, 1; 1, 185; 3, 92) and survives until the imperial period (Strab. 16, 1, 1, p. 736 C; Arr. *Anab.* 7, 17; cf. later Amm. Marc. 23, 6, 15; 23, 6, 23); see T. Nöldeke, "Ἀσσύριος Σύριος Σύρος", *Hermes* 5 (1871) 454–457. In addition, it has been suggested (though not universally accepted) that the Roman *Assyria provincia*, created after Trajan's Parthian war, was located in lower Mesopotamia (i. e. Babylonia); for arguments and counter-arguments see A. Maricq, "Classica et orientalia. 6. La province d' 'Assyrie' créée par Trajan. À propos de la guerre parthique de Trajan", *Syria* 36 (1959) 256–261; C. S. Lightfoot, "Trajan's Parthian War and the Fourth-Century Perspective", *JRS* 80 (1990) 121–124. If the *Vita*-Author considered Babylonia as part of "Assyria" (following the attested Greek usage), or indeed as identical with the Roman province of "Assyria", it would have been natural for him to identify the Assyria of his model with Babylon.

the Westermanniana (O, R, V, W) he is called Lykourgos (Λυκοῦργος). In other manuscripts of the Westermanniana he bears the name Λύκουρος (P), Λυκοῦρος (S, A, M, L), Λυκόρος (A) and Λύκηρος or Λυκῆρος (B, and similarly in Planoudes' version).[22] In the oldest papyrus fragment of the *Vita*, *P. Berol.* 11 618 (late 2nd/early 3rd c. AD), the name takes the form Λυκωρος (without accentuation);[23] this form is corroborated by another papyrus of the 3rd c. AD, *P. Oxy.* 3720.[24] The striking agreement of these two papyri, which date from an age very close to the *Vita*-Author's own time, leaves no doubt that their form of the name must be the authentic one: Λυκωρος was the name employed by the *Vita*-Author in his original text.[25] On the basis of this form we can guess how the other variants were derived: Λυκωρος could easily be corrupted into Λύκουρος/Λυκοῦρος or Λύκηρος/Λυκῆρος; and at some point the otherwise unattested and unfamiliar Λύκουρος/Λυκοῦρος was emended into the famous Greek name Λυκοῦργος.

Although the authentic form of the name can be regarded as certain, the reasons for which the *Vita*-Author chose it have never been elucidated: most scholars propose no explanation for the name Λυκωρος or restrict themselves to remarking that it is not attested elsewhere.[26] Recently, N. Kanavou suggested that Λυκωρος may be the Hellenized form of a foreign (presumably oriental) name; but she was unable to point out any specific name which might underlie the Greek form.[27] Such a hypothesis, unsupported by any concrete proposition, is not satisfactory. Moreover, in all surviving versions of the *Tale of Ahiqar* the king, when named, is either Esarhaddon or Sennacherib: we do not know any redaction in which the king bears a different name, and so it

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[22] On the forms of the name see B. E. Perry, *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop* (Haverford 1936) 30, 53, 57–58; Perry (n. 8) 20–21; Haslam (n. 9) 149, 164; Ragone (n. 12) 135; Karla (n. 1) 54, 60, 67; Kanavou (n. 9) 212–213.

[23] Col. II v. 31: Λυκωρ[ος]; col. III v. 41: [Λ]υκωρος. See Perry (n. 22) 55.

[24] Col. I vv. 21–22: Λυκω[ρος]; col. II v. 114: Λυκωρω. See Haslam (n. 9) 154–155, 160–161.

[25] This is accepted by most scholars (see bibliography supra, n. 22). A few, however, seem to believe that the original name was Lykourgos, and attempt to explain it on the basis of its historical, mythological or linguistic connotations (see G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans. Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* [Baltimore – London 1979] 239; Dillery [n. 9] 272; Jouanno [n. 5] 239). But the textual tradition supports the priority of Λυκωρος, which is, additionally, a *lectio difficilior* by comparison with Λυκοῦργος.

[26] See e. g. Perry (n. 8) 21; Haslam (n. 9) 150; Ragone (n. 12) 135; Kanavou (n. 9) 213.

[27] See Kanavou (n. 9) 212–213.

would be arbitrary to assume that this occurred in the model version used by the *Vita*-Author. Yet, the name Λυκωρος does not have the slightest similarity with the names Esarhaddon or Sennacherib and could not possibly be the Hellenized form of either of the two.

In reality, the claim that the name Λυκωρος is nowhere else attested is not correct: it holds true only for the names of historical personages. But all queries are solved the moment we open a mythological lexicon: we then discover that Λύκωρος was the name of a mythical hero, a son of Apollo; further, various other derivatives or etymologically akin personal or place names and adjectives were similarly connected with Apollo and with his capital centre of worship, Delphi. According to Pausanias (10, 6, 3, cf. *Etym. Magn.* 571, 47–50), Λύκωρος was the son of Apollo and the nymph Korykia (who gave her name to the Corycian cave, on the slope of Parnassus, over Delphi). High up on Parnassus, above the site of Delphi, Lykoros founded the town of Λυκώρεια, which is mentioned in many ancient sources.[28] Lykoros' great-grandson was Delphos, from whom Delphi took their name (Paus. 10, 6, 3). In other sources the same hero is called Λυκωρεύς[29] – evidently a variant of the form Λύκωρος. The inhabitants of Lykoreia were called Λυκωρεῖς (and also Λυκωρ(ε)ῖται or Λυκώριοι);[30] but by extension the name Λυκωρεῖς was also occasionally applied to the inhabitants of Delphi,[31] for whom there was a legend that they had sought refuge higher up at Lykoreia during the Flood (Paus. 10, 6, 2). Λυκωρεύς and Λυκώρειος were also cult epithets of Apollo, especially used by Hellenistic and later Greek and Roman poets.[32] Statius (*Theb.* 7, 715) uses the name *Lycoreus* for a personage of his own invention, a Theban priest of Apollo, suitably remaining within the sphere of the Apollonian cult.

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[28] See *Marmor Parium*, *FGrHist* 239 A 2; Strab. 9, 3, 3 (p. 418 C); Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 394 F (Λυκουρίαν in the codd.); Suda λ 829; Steph. Byz. s. v. Λυκώρεια (p. 422 Meineke); *Sch. Apoll. Rhod.* 4, 1490–1494 a (p. 318 Wendel).

[29] See Suda λ 829; Luc. *Tim.* 3; Hyg. *Fab.* 161; Steph. Byz. s. v. Λυκώρεια (p. 422 Meineke); *Sch. Apoll. Rhod.* 2, 705–711 h (p. 182–183 Wendel).

[30] See Steph. Byz. s. v. Λυκώρεια (p. 422 Meineke); Paus. 4, 34, 9.

[31] See *Sch. Apoll. Rhod.* 2, 705–711 h; 4, 1490–1494 a (p. 183, 318 Wendel).

[32] See Call. *H. Apoll.* 19; Euphor. fr. 80, 3 Powell; Apoll. Rhod. 4, 1490; *Orph. h.* 34, 1; Paul. Silent. in *Anth. Pal.* 6, 54, 1; Steph. Byz. A 314 Billerbeck. Cf. also the *deus Lucoris*, god-protector of asylum, in Serv. *Aen.* 2, 761 (I p. 327 Thilo) – doubtless a corruption of the Greek adjective Λυκωρεύς or Λυκώρειος. See in general L. Weniger, "Lykoreus (1)", in W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* II. 2 (Leipzig 1894–1897) 2181–2183; F. Bölte, "Lykoreia", *RE* 13 (1927) 2382–2384; R. Ganszyiniec, "Lykoreus", *ibid.*, 2384–2385.

The association of all these names with Apollo and Delphi explains why the *Vita*-Author named the Babylonian king Lykoros. A basic theme running through the entire *Vita Aesopi* is precisely the enmity between Aesop and Apollo, which finally leads to the false accusation and execution of Aesop in Delphi. At least in the G version this theme is clearly developed. Already from early on in the narrative, while serving at Xanthos' household, Aesop narrates a fable to explain why not all dreams come true – a fable which sounds rather humiliating for Apollo (G 33). This is the first indication of Aesop's antipathy to the Delphic god. Later, when Aesop manages to reconcile King Kroisos with Samos, the Samians honour the wise fabulist by naming "Aisopeion" the place at which Aesop had been sold as a slave; at that spot Aesop sacrifices to the Muses, builds a temple for them and places among their statues an image of himself, instead of Apollo. This is a grave offence against the god: since Apollo is traditionally the "leader of the Muses" (as Aesop too calls him in ch. G 33, with distinctive irony), Aesop's act signifies that the fabulist himself wants to usurp the god's place. For this reason, Apollo is angered against Aesop, just as he had been against Marsyas (G 100). Similarly, at the end of the Babylonian section, when Aesop returns triumphant from Egypt, the king of Babylon rewards him by erecting a golden statue of him in the company of the Muses, i. e. once again in the rightful place of Apollo (G 123). The culmination of this feud between Aesop and Apollo occurs in the final, "Delphic" section of the *Vita* (G 124–142): Aesop scoffs at the inhabitants of Delphi for their pettiness and derides them as descendants of slaves; the Delphians are vexed, they insidiously frame Aesop with planted incriminating evidence and false accusations, and they put him to death. All this was a traditional part of the legends about Aesop already from the 5th c. BC. But the G version of the *Vita* adds that the Delphians were induced to treacherously exterminate Aesop by Apollo himself, who was incensed against Aesop because of the fabulist's offensive attitude at Samos (G 127).[33]

This "anti-Apollonian" tendency is absent from the Westermanniana. Of course, the enmity of the Delphians against Aesop and their treach-

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[33] For the "anti-Apollonian" theme in the *Vita* see most notably Perry (n. 8) 2–3, 11–12, 22; A. Wiechers, *Aesop in Delphi* (Meisenheim am Glan 1961) 14, 36, 44–49; La Penna (n. 5) 269–270, 272, 279–280; Nagy (n. 25) 289–290, 302–303; Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 80–81, 85–88, 91–99, 151–152, 158–160; N. Holzberg, "Der Äsop-Roman. Eine strukturanalytische Interpretation", in N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der Äsop-Roman. Motivgeschichte und Erzählstruktur* (Tübingen 1992) 69–70; Ferrari (n. 1) 12–20; Dillery (n. 9) 274, 279–280; Robertson (n. 9) 248–249, 253, 263–265; Jouanno (n. 5) 39–40, 46–50.

erous actions are retained (these were integral parts of Aesop's legend and essential elements in the plot of the *Vita*); but all the aforementioned references to Apollo are missing and there is no trace of animosity between the god and Aesop. It is almost universally agreed that in this matter the G reflects more faithfully the original form of the *Vita*, in which Apollo's conflict with Aesop must have been an important theme: in the Westermanniana this theme was presumably suppressed for religious reasons, by a redactor who was embarrassed by Aesop's apparent impiety towards the god.[34] Indeed, the anti-Apollonian tendency may have formed part of older traditions about Aesop. It is interesting that Aesop (called a Thracian in the earliest Greek sources) starts being presented as a Phrygian from the Hellenistic period onwards;[35] it has been conjectured that the Phrygian origins were invented or emphatically highlighted for the first time by Demetrius of Phaleron in his work on Aesopic fables, probably because of Aesop's similarities to the Phrygian Marsyas, the notorious enemy of Apollo.[36] If so, the conflict

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[34] This is accepted by almost all scholars (see bibliography supra, n. 33). Only Ferrari (n. 1) 12–20, followed by Luzzatto (n. 5) 35, has argued that the Westermanniana preserves the authentic form and that Apollo's enmity was a later, secondary addition by the redactor of the G. But his arguments are weak. He points out that in *P. Berol.* 11 628, at the end of the Babylonian section (col. III vv. 40–43 = ch. 123), Lykoros is said to erect only a statue of Aesop, without the Muses (just as in the Westermanniana), and that in *P. Oxy.* 2083 (vv. 59–60 = ch. 62) an exclamatory oath of Xanthos to the Muses (used in the G and absent from the Westermanniana) is similarly omitted. But such tiny details cannot prove that the versions represented by the aforementioned papyri did not include the anti-Apollonian theme: neither of the adduced papyrical passages directly concerns Apollo, and the omission of the Muses may simply be a coincidence. Even if we assume, for the sake of the argument, that the versions of those old papyri did not contain the anti-Apollonian theme, we may suppose that the suppression of this theme took place quite early in the tradition, shortly after the composition of the original *Vita*. The choice of the name Lykoros, which unmistakably points to the Apollonian sphere, proves now beyond doubt that the anti-Apollonian theme formed part of the original work.

[35] The earliest testimony for Aesop as a Phrygian is a brief tale found in ancient lexica and paroemiographers, as an explanation of the proverb μᾶλλον ὁ Φρύξ (Zenob. Ath. 2, 5 Bühler; Zenob. 5, 16; Suda μ 116; Phot. *Lex.* μ 78 etc.), and most probably derived from a Hellenistic grammarian: see W. Bühler, *Zenobii Athoi proverbia* IV (Göttingen 1982) 74–77; I. M. Konstantakos, "Amasis, Bias and the Seven Sages as Riddlers", *WJA* N.F. 29 (2005) 21. The Phrygian origins become a commonplace in later writers: see testimonies in Perry (n. 8) 215 and Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 73.

[36] See B. E. Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fables", *TAPhA* 93 (1962) 332–334; cf. Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 80–81, 92–93; and Ragone (n. 12) 144–

of Aesop with Apollo must have existed in legend from much earlier than the *Vita*: either it was one of the characteristics which brought about Aesop's correlation to the figure of Marsyas, or else it was transferred to Aesop from Marsyas after their association, just like the Phrygian origins. Besides, the enmity against the Delphic god might easily have developed, as a logical extension, from Aesop's traditional confrontation with the citizens of Delphi.[37]

In the Babylonian section of the *Vita* the king of Babylon – at least at the beginning, when he is misled by the false accusations of Aesop's adoptive son – is hostile towards Aesop and seeks to destroy him, just like Apollo: he persecutes and condemns Aesop to death, just as the Delphians will do in the next section of the *Vita*, at the instigation of their god. It is, therefore, appropriate that this enemy and persecutor of Aesop (even though only a temporary one) should bear a name directly pointing to Apollo, Aesop's implacable enemy and pursuer. The name Λύκωρος also clearly alludes to the area of Delphi (cf. the adjacent town of Λυκώρεια and the designation Λυκωρεῖς for the Delphians), i. e. to the very place where Aesop will once again suffer calumny, persecution and finally death in the following section of the *Vita*. Thus, the name of the hostile Babylonian king reminds us of the other great hostility, that of Aesop against Apollo and his Delphian servants, and prepares the readers for the culmination of this conflict in the final section of the work. A number of analogies between the Babylonian and the Delphic section contribute to the narrative cohesion of the *Vita* as an integral whole: in the land of Lykoros Aesop becomes the victim of slander and treachery, just as he will become also in the land beneath Lykoreia; Lykoros attempts to put him to death, just as the Lykoreis (Delphians) will do. Aesop escapes death in the country of Lykoros, but not so in the land of the Lykoreis: Lykoros is in the end reconciled with the hero, but the Lykoreus Apollo is not. And Aesop is killed by being thrown from a cliff (ch. 132, 134, 140–142) – presumably down a precipice of Parnassus, not far from the location of the lofty and steep Lykoreia.[38]

145, who attributes the invention to the Hellenistic age. La Penna (n. 5) 273–275 regards the Phrygian origins as a prime and very ancient constituent of Aesop's identity, because of the affinity between Aesop's name and certain Phrygian names (e. g. of the river Aisepos); cf. Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 72–73; but see the critical remarks of Ragone (n. 12) 144–145.

[37] See especially Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 80–81, 92–99, 151–152.

[38] According to Plutarch (*De ser. num. vind*. 557 A), Aesop was flung down from the rock called Hyampeia: this was thought to owe its name to Hyamos, the son of Lykoros according to Pausanias (10, 6, 3); cf. Weniger (n. 32) 2182.

3. The officer Hermippos

In the text of Elephantine (which presumably reflects in this re-
spect too the original form of *Ahiqar*) the officer who is ordered by
King Esarhaddon to put Ahiqar to death but instead saves and hides
the wise vizier is called Nabusumiskun.[39] This is an attested Akkadian
personal name, borne by various officials (military officers, an augur,
court and administrative personnel, scribes and other functionaries, as
well as a Babylonian royal prince) in the time of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon
and Ashurbanipal.[40] In the later redactions of *Ahiqar* this long and
cumbersome name, when not altogether omitted, suffered various cor-
ruptions and abridgements, retaining however, even in the most ex-
treme cases, a rudimentary phonetic resemblance to its authentic form.[41]
In the *Vita Aesopi* the officer[42] takes the Greek name Hermippos (ch. 104,

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[39] See Cowley (n. 2) 213–215, 221–222; Grelot, *Documents* (n. 2) 449–451;
Lindenberger (n. 2) 495–497; Porten, Yardeni (n. 2) 30–35.

[40] See K. L. Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names* (Helsingfors 1914) 160–161;
L. Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire* (Ann Arbor 1930–
1936) I, 296–297, 436–437, II, 44–47, 208–209, 256–257, III, 159, 207, 234, 282,
296; and Konstantakos (n. 2) I,175, with more references and bibliography.

[41] In some Syriac manuscripts the ancient Akkadian name was further length-
ened, taking the form "Yabusimikmaskinat" or "Yabusmikmaskinakti"; in the Cam-
bridge Syriac codex edited by CHL (Cant. Add. 2020) this enormous form was
split in three, "Yabusemakh Meskin Kanti"; see CHL 112–117, 122; Nau (n. 18)
263–264. From the first of those three segments were apparently derived the forms
found in the other redactions: Abusmaq (Abusmak, Abousmaq) in the Armenian
and Old Turkish (CHL 40–42, 45, 51, 76–77, 79, 82, 97), Abu Samîk (or Ibn
Samîk) in the Arabic (CHL 142–143, 145–146, 155). In the remaining versions the
officer is not named but simply styled a "friend" of Ahiqar's (Slavonic, CHL 14–
17, 21), "the (great) executioner" (Romanian, Gaster [n. 3] 306–307) or "the
commander of the (royal) guard" (Ethiopic, Schneider [n. 3] 148–149). The
redactors of those versions presumably omitted the man's name because they
considered it too awkward.

[42] The man is called στρατοφύλαξ in the G (ch. 104, 107), i. e. a military officer
or army commander. This is in accordance with the text of Elephantine, in which
Nabusumiskun is called an officer or captain, with obvious military connotations
(see Cowley [n. 2] 213–214, 221–222, vv. 33, 41, 54; Ginsberg [n. 2] 427–428;
Grelot, *Documents* [n. 2] 449–451; Lindenberger [n. 2] 495–497; Konstantakos [n.
2] I, 148; on the significance of this designation see Cowley [n. 2] 229). The military
capacity is retained in the Ethiopic version, where the man is the commander of the
king's guard (Schneider [n. 3] 148–149). In the other later redactions the original
army officer is turned into a simple executioner (Arabic, Romanian, cf. first
Armenian and Old Turkish; see CHL 40, 96–97, 142–143, 145–146; Gaster [n. 3]
306–307) or loses all traces of his military role (Syriac, Slavonic, second Armenian).
Similarly, in the Westermanniana version of the *Vita* (in both recensions) the military

107). At first sight the rationale of the renaming is easy to understand. Nabusumiskun is a theophoric name, a compound containing the name of the Babylonian god Nabû (Nabû-šum-iškun = "Nabû has effected a son").[43] The *Vita*-Author correlated the Mesopotamian Nabû with the Greek god Hermes, and so he used as an equivalent a known Greek theophoric name containing that of Hermes.[44]

But why was Hermes chosen in particular? This interesting case may throw light on the *Vita*-Author's tactics of character-naming and also provide valuable indications about his knowledge. In Greek sources the god Nabû himself is never overtly identified with Hermes, at least not in the areas of myth, theology, cult, iconography and onomastics. Only in astronomy is such an identification implied, and then indirectly, via the planet Mercury: in Mesopotamian astronomy this planet was associated with Nabû, while the Greeks regularly called it after Hermes.[45] Otherwise, the Hellenic god with whom Nabû was regularly identified or fused, both in texts and in monuments of Graeco-Roman antiquity, was Apollo. Strabon (16, 1, 7, p. 739 C, cf. Steph. Byz. B 126 Billerbeck) calls Borsippa a city sacred to Apollo: the god meant by this is certainly Nabû, for whose cult Borsippa was indeed a major centre from very early times.[46] The "Apollo"

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rank explicitly brought out in the G is suppressed: the man is simply called Hermippos, without any indication as to his office or capacity.

[43] See Tallqvist (n. 40) 160; Waterman (n. 40) III, 159; Lindenberger (n. 2) 483.

[44] Cf. Perry (n. 8) 6.

[45] See A. Jeremias, "Nebo", in W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* III. 1 (Leipzig 1897–1902) 57–60; F. Cumont, "Les noms des planètes et l'astrolatrie chez les Grecs", *AC* 4 (1935) 7–13, 16; É. Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Paris 1945) 79–80, 93–94, 151; H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden 1980) 62, 74–75; A. Bounni, "Nabu", *LIMC* 6. 1 (1992) 698; F. Pomponio, "Nabû. A. Philologisch", *RLA* 9 (1998–2001) 22, 24. To my knowledge, Diod. Sic. 2, 30, 3 (the Chaldeans τοὺς δ᾽ ἄλλους τέτταρας [sc. πλάνητας ἀστέρας] ὁμοίως τοῖς παρ᾽ ἡμῖν ἀστρολόγοις ὀνομάζουσιν, Ἄρεος, Ἀφροδίτης, Ἑρμοῦ, Διός) is the only Greek passage actually implying an equation of the Babylonian Nabû with Hermes. All the other passages adduced by scholars make no allusion to Nabû. [Arist.] *Mund.* 392 a 26–27, Plin. *Nat. hist.* 2, 39 and Apul. *Mund.* 2 (adduced by J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian. On the Syrian Goddess* [Oxford 2003] 456) only state that the planet Mercury was called by the Greeks and Romans either after Hermes or after Apollo; there is nothing about Nabû here. Hesych. σ 469 (σεχές· τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ ἀστήρ. Βαβυλώνιοι, adduced by J. G. Février, *La religion des Palmyréniens* [Paris 1931] 97) also refers to the planet Mercury (glossing what seems to be a Greek rendering of its Akkadian name, *šeḫtu* or *šiḫtu*, see H. Hunger, "Planeten", *RLA* 10 [2003–2005] 589–590) and does not mention Nabû.

[46] See Jeremias (n. 45) 45–47, 52–54, 60; Dhorme (n. 45) 151–152, 170; A. Bounni, "Nabû Palmyrénien", *Orientalia* 45 (1976) 46, 48; J. Teixidor, *The*

of Hierapolis, mentioned by Lucian (*Syr. D.* 35–37) and Macrobius (*Sat.* 1, 17, 66 ff.), who describe his cult statue at the temple of Atargatis, is also doubtless to be identified with Nabû.[47] In Palmyra and Dura-Europos, from Seleucid times onwards, Nabû appears to have merged with Apollo, as is indicated by many monuments (votive reliefs, statues, tesserae and coins): these depict the figure of a god, dressed or naked, who holds the lyre or bears other characteristics and attributes of the Greek Apollo; but on the other hand he also frequently presents typical oriental traits (beard, hair-style, kalathos, earrings etc.) and he is named Nabû in the inscriptions accompanying some of the monuments.[48] Evidently, in the syncretistic Graeco-Syriac environment Nabû was equated with Apollo; this assimilation was presumably fostered by the Seleucids, who promoted Apollo as the divine ancestor of their dynasty.[49]

On the basis of this evidence, we would expect the *Vita*-Author to give to his officer a Greek name compounded with or derived from that of Apollo. Indeed, such a translation of Nabû-names is historically attested in Syria during the imperial period: e. g. on an inscription from Nikopolis (probably 3rd/4th c. AD) the name Barnebu ("son of Nabû") is Hellenized as Apollinarios,[50] while on a bilingual one from Palmyra (AD 191) the name Apollonios seems to be used as an equivalent of Nebuzabad ("Nabû has given").[51] However, in our case an Apollonian

Pantheon of Palmyra (Leiden 1979) 108; Pomponio (n. 45) 17, 19–20, 22–23; L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria* (Leiden – Boston – Köln 1999) 135; Lightfoot (n. 45) 456.

[47] See R. A. Stucky, "Figures apolliniennes grecques sur des tessères palmyréniennes", *Syria* 48 (1971) 141; Drijvers (n. 45) 66–70, 72, 94; Dirven (n. 46) 130–131; Lightfoot (n. 45) 41–42, 74, 176, 456–466.

[48] For these monuments see H. Seyrig, "Antiquités syriennes", *Syria* 24 (1944–1945) 63–64, 67, 76; Stucky (n. 47) 135–141; Bounni (n. 46) 49–50; A. Bounni, "Les représentations d'Apollon en Palmyrène et dans le milieu syrien", in L. Kahil, C. Augé (eds.), *Mythologie gréco-romaine, mythologies périphériques. Études d'iconographie* (Paris 1981) 108–111; Bounni (n. 45) 698–701; Drijvers (n. 45) 47, 65–67, 72–73; W. Lambrinudakis et al., "Apollon", *LIMC* 2. 1 (1984) 244, 246–248; Pomponio (n. 45) 23–24; Dirven (n. 46) 128, 132–134, 254. Nabû's association with music in some inscriptions of Palmyra is also doubtless due to his identification with the Greek god of music (Pomponio [n. 45] 23).

[49] See Bounni (n. 46) 47–49; idem (n. 48) 107–108; Drijvers (n. 45) 68–72; Dirven (n. 46) 128, 135–137, 141–146; Lightfoot (n. 45) 41–42, 390, 456–457, 462.

[50] *IGLS* I, 166, vv. 1–2: Βαρνεβουν τον και Απολλιναριον. Cf. H. Seyrig, "Antiquités syriennes", *Syria* 14 (1933) 161; Bounni (n. 46) 48; Lightfoot (n. 45) 456.

[51] J. Cantineau, "Textes funéraires palmyréniens", *RBi* 39 (1930) 532 (nr. 4B); *SEG* 7 (1934) 158: the Palmyrenian text (v. 1) gives *'plnys nbwzbd*, which is rendered in the Greek (v. 3) as Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Νεβουζαβάδου. Note that in the

name was unacceptable because of the anti-Apollonian theme of the *Vita Aesopi*. Just like the corresponding personage of the *Tale of Ahiqar*, so also in the *Vita* the officer is presented as a loyal friend (ch. 104) and saviour of Aesop: when King Lykoros condemns Aesop to death, the officer does not execute him but hides and saves him, disobeying the royal order. Such a character could not possibly bear a name referring to Apollo, the great enemy and destroyer of Aesop. The *Vita*-Author needed, therefore, to replace Apollo with another god.

There were similarities between Nabû and Hermes, which must have encouraged the *Vita*-Author to select the latter as a substitute. As noted above, in Mesopotamian astronomy Nabû's name was given to the planet Mercury, which was associated with Hermes by the Greeks. This astronomical correlation, if the *Vita*-Author was aware of it, may have influenced his choice of Hermes. Of greater importance were the analogous properties and functions of the two gods. Nabû was the son of the great god Marduk and also his minister, just as Hermes was the son of the highest god Zeus and often functioned as his helper or attendant. Nabû was the messenger or herald of the gods (his very name derives from the Semitic root *nb'*, "to call", and may signify "the one who announces"), just like Hermes. Nabû was also the god of writing – his most important attribute – and, by logical extension, of wisdom; he was the scribe of Marduk and the patron god of scribes, the patron of arts and crafts, the teacher and protector of cultural activities.[52] These traits

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Palmyrenian there is no *br* between the two names, unlike what happens in all the cases of name plus patronymic mentioned in that inscription; this gives the impression that *nbwzbd* is not the name of Apollonios' father but rather the man's Semitic name which was Hellenized as Apollonios. Cf. Bounni (n. 46) 48; Lightfoot (n. 45) 456. Compare also the persons named Ἀπολλώνιος ὁ καὶ Ἀπο[λ]ινάριος (*SEG* 19 [1963] 887, vv. 5–6, Heliopolis-Baalbek, late 2nd/early 3rd c. AD) and Ἀπολλώνιος ὁ καὶ Ἀπολλινάρις (H. Seyrig, "Antiquités syriennes", *Syria* 20 [1939] 303–304, Hierapolis, time of Hadrian). In these cases the double name suggests that both forms are alternative Greek renderings of a Semitic name like Barnebu: see Y. Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek. Son culte et sa diffusion à travers les textes littéraires et les documents iconographiques et épigraphiques* (Leiden 1977) I, 35–36; Lightfoot (n. 45) 456–457. M. I. Rostovtzeff et al. (eds.), *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Preliminary Reports* IV (New Haven 1933) 138 suspect that in Dura-Europos the name Nebouchelos ("Nabû is mighty") may have been translated as Apollonios.

[52] On these qualities of Nabû see Jeremias (n. 45) 45–51, 55–57, 60–63; Dhorme (n. 45) 150–154, 170–171; D. O. Edzard in H. W. Haussig, *Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient* (Stuttgart 1965) 106–107; Bounni (n. 45) 698; Teixidor (n. 46) 107; Drijvers (n. 45) 61–64, 179; Pomponio (n. 45) 16–23; Dirven (n. 46) 129.

also favoured the equation with Hermes, the Λόγιος god of learning and eloquence: in an analogous manner Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing, inventor of the letters and patron of scribes, was standardly identified in Greece with Hermes, from the classical period down to the Hermetic treatises of late antiquity.[53]

One further contributive factor may have been the close association of Isis with Hermes (as the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian Thoth). This is encountered in a variety of texts from the Hellenistic and imperial period, beginning with the so-called "aretalogies" of Isis, a group of kindred cult texts preserved on inscriptions in several parts of the Greek world and probably deriving from a common model of Hellenistic times.[54] In the aretalogies of Kyme (probably 1st c. BC) and of Ios (2nd/3rd c. AD) one of the first things that Isis mentions in her self-introduction is that she was educated by Hermes and that she invented together with him the letters, so that texts might be written down. Similar statements are included in the segment of an aretalogy transmitted by Diodorus (1, 27, 4), in the encomium of Isis found at Maroneia (2nd/1st c. BC) and in the versified aretalogy of Andros (1st c. BC).[55] Isis' association with Hermes presumably stems from the Egyptian background of her worship: in Egyptian tradition Isis is occasionally mentioned together with Thoth in texts, assisted by him in myth, or coupled with him in pictures which show both of them as scribes.[56]

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[53] See H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin – New York 1952) 289–290, 808, 812; D. Müller, *Ägypten und die griechischen Isis-Aretalogien* (Berlin 1961) 22–23; J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (University of Wales 1970) 263; D. Kurth, "Thot", *LdÄ* 6 (1986) 503–510.

[54] It is debated whether this model was a stele in the temple of Ptah at Memphis, as claimed in the aretalogies of Kyme and Andros; see Müller (n. 53) 8–9, 12–14; J. Bergman, *Ich bin Isis. Studien zum memphitischen Hintergrund der griechischen Isisaretalogien* (Uppsala 1968) 15–18, 42–43; Y. Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétalogie d'Isis à Maronée* (Leiden 1975) 12–15; H. Engelmann, *Die Inschriften von Kyme* (Bonn 1976) 100–103; F. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA – London 1979) 43–46.

[55] Kyme: see *I. Kyme* 41, vv. 5–8 (Engelmann [n. 54] 98): ἐπαιδεύθην ὑπ[ὸ] Ἑρμοῦ καὶ γράμματα εὗρον μετὰ Ἑρμοῦ, τά τε ἱερὰ καὶ τὰ δημόσια γράμματα, ἵνα μὴ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς πάντα γράφηται; cf. W. Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros und verwandte Texte* (Berlin 1930) 122; Grandjean (n. 54) 122. Ios: see *IG* XII (5) 14, vv. 4–7 and p. 217 (Appendix to nr. 739); *IG* XII Suppl., p. 98, 14, B, 2; *SIG*³ 1267, vv. 4–7; Peek 123. Maroneia: see Grandjean (n. 54) 17–18 (vv. 22–24); M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim 1985) 61 (nr. 19, vv. 22–24). Andros: see *IG* XII (5) 739, vv. 10–12; Peek 15; Totti 5 (nr. 2, vv. 10–12).

[56] See Bonnet (n. 53) 810; Müller (n. 53) 21–25; Bergman (n. 54) 155, 172–173, 234–237; Griffiths (n. 53) 62, 263–264; Engelmann (n. 54) 104; Solmsen (n.

Apart from the aretalogies, Isis and Hermes are associated also in other later Greek texts (Plutarch, Diodorus, the Greek magical papyri, and texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*), which present the goddess as Hermes' daughter or pupil or as accompanied and assisted by Hermes on various occasions.[57]

All this acquires a special significance if we remember that Isis appears in the *Vita* as a benefactress of Aesop. Once again, this theme is fully brought out only in the G version. Aesop is initially presented as mute; but one day he meets in the fields a priestess of Isis who has gone astray, offers her food and water and helps her find her way. In return for this help, the priestess invokes Isis and asks her to reward Aesop for his piety with the gift of speech (G 4–5). This is indeed what happens: that same afternoon, while Aesop is taking a nap, Isis arrives accompanied by the nine Muses, endows Aesop with speech and persuades the Muses to grant him eloquence and the ability to compose fables (G 7).[58] So, by contrast to Apollo, Aesop's implacable enemy, Isis is Aesop's friend and protectress, who saves him from muteness and donates to him the virtues and skills which will make him famous. It is therefore suitable that the saviour and protector of Aesop in the Babylonian section should bear a name referring to Hermes, who was closely associ-

54) 47; Robertson (n. 9) 249–250; more generally on the association of the two deities see Peek (n. 55) 31–33; R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London 1971) 108–109, 206–208.

[57] See Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 352 A, 358 D; Diod. Sic. 1, 17, 3; 1, 20, 6; *PGM* 4, vv. 2289–2290; 8, vv. 22–27; 24 a, vv. 1–10 (cf. H. D. Betz [ed.], *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells* [Chicago – London 1992] 79, 145–146, 264); *Corp. Herm.* fr. 23, 64–68 Festugière (Κόρη κόσμου, Stob. 1, 49, 44, I p. 406–407 Wachsmuth). Cf. also the Demotic text in *PGM* 4, vv. 95–114 (= Betz, *op. cit.*, 39), where Isis converses with her father Thoth.

[58] In the Westermanniana Isis' role has been almost entirely eliminated. Aesop helps some priests, who are still designated as "priests of Isis" in some manuscripts (M, O, cf. a single priest of Isis in P) but transformed into "priests of Artemis" in others (B, S, A; see Papathomopoulos [n. 1] 43; Karla [n. 1] 168). The priests pray for Aesop, and while Aesop is sleeping, the personified Tyche (or Philoxenia in O and P) comes and awards him the gifts of speech, eloquence and creation of fables. Here it is evident that the G stands closer to the original *Vita*: especially the fact that traces of Isis' role survive in manuscripts of both recensions of the Westermanniana (M and O of the MORN, P of the BPThSA) shows that the replacement of Isis by Tyche (or Philoxenia) is secondary. Cf. Perry (n. 22) 12–14; idem (n. 8) 2, 10–12, 22; La Penna (n. 5) 268–270; Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 88–89, 178–180; Robertson (n. 9) 247–249; Jouanno (n. 5) 49–50, 147. The removal of Isis was possibly part of that same religiously motivated adaptation, which also censored Aesop's conflict with Apollo (see above, section 2).

ated with Isis in many ways, as her father, teacher, counsellor or assistant. The *Vita*-Author must have known a lot about the worship of Isis, as becomes obvious from the aforementioned episode in ch. G 4–7: both the priestess' invocation of Isis and the basic traits displayed by the goddess herself (healing, donating the power of speech, connection to the Muses etc.) find exact parallels in extant texts of the Isiac cult, like the aretalogies and various hymns to Isis.[59] The *Vita*-Author may well have been familiar with such texts. Whether from them or more generally from his experience of the Isiac cult and his contacts with its devotees, he could easily have learned about Isis' connection with Hermes-Thoth. And this connection will have contributed to his decision to choose Hermes for the theophoric name of Aesop's saviour.

The process delineated above obviously implies that the *Vita*-Author possessed some knowledge about the Mesopotamian religion and pantheon: he must have been familiar with the god Nabû and his basic qualities, so as to perceive Nabû's similarities to the Greek Hermes. This would not have been difficult, because, already since Seleucid times, the cult of Nabû was more widely spread and well established in the area of Syria. But it does presuppose that the *Vita*-Author maintained some sort of relations with the Near East, so as to acquire the relevant information about the god. Still, it does not seem compulsory to assume that the *Vita*-Author must have been a native of Syria, as proposed by La Penna.

The Hellenization of the name Nabusumiskun does not necessarily mean that the *Vita*-Author used a version of *Ahiqar* written in a foreign language, in which the officer's name had retained its original linguistic form. The *Vita* could have been based on a Greek version of *Ahiqar*; we need only suppose that in that Greek version the name Nabusumiskun had not been fully translated or replaced with a Greek equivalent but simply transcribed in Greek letters and, at the most, assimilated to the Greek system of inflection, as was usual with foreign names introduced into the Greek tradition. In that case, the transcribed name would still recognizably retain the word Nabû as its first segment. Compare the manner in which the names of several Babylonian kings or sages, which were compounds of Nabû, were transcribed into Greek by writers of the Hellenistic period, like Megasthenes, Berossus and Menander of Ephesus (and later taken over by authors of the Roman age, like Strabon, Alexander Polyhistor, Abydenus, Josephus, Eusebius etc.): Nabû-kudurri-uṣur became Ναβο(υ)κοδρόσορος or Ναβουχοδονόσορος (cf. Ναβουχοδονόσπορ

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[59] For discussion of these parallels see Jedrkiewicz (n. 5) 89–91; Ferrari (n. 1) 69–73; Dillery (n. 9) 271–272, 275 (and more generally 272–280 on the *Vita*-Author's familiarity with Isiac worship); Jouanno (n. 5) 218–220.

in the *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament), Nabû-nāṣir was rendered as Ναβονάσ(σ)αρος, Nabû-apla-uṣur as Ναβοπαλάσ(σ)αρος, Nabû-nā'id as Ναβόννηδος, Ναβαννίδοχος or Ναβαννήδοχος, and the astronomer Nabû-rīmannu was turned into Ναβουριανός.⁶⁰ Similar transcriptions of Semitic Nabû-names are found on Greek inscriptions, graffiti and documents from Syria of the imperial period: Βαρνεβουν (acc.) in Nikopolis and Νεβουζαβάδου (gen.) in Palmyra (see above); Βαρναβο[ς] in Birecik (*IGLS* I, 126); and a great number of cases in Dura-Europos.⁶¹ All these transcriptions clearly preserve the name of Nabû (Ναβο-, Ναβου-, Νεβου-, -ναβου(ς), -νεβου(ς)), and an educated writer familiar with the worship of that god in the Near East would have no difficulty in recognizing it. The *Vita*-Author may have worked from a version of *Ahiqar* containing an analogous transcription of Nabusumiskun. The possibility that the name Hermippos goes back to the Greek version of *Ahiqar* used by the *Vita*-Author must be excluded. A Greek-speaking translator or adapter rendering the *Tale of Ahiqar* into Greek would have no reason to avoid the identification of Nabû with Apollo, which was established in

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⁶⁰ See Megasthenes, *FGrHist* 715 F 1 (= Jos. *Ant. Jud*. 10, 227, cf. 10, 219; *Contr. Ap*. 1, 144, cf. 1, 132; Eus. *Praep. evang*. 9, 41, 1–2); F 11 (= Strab. 15, 1, 6, p. 687 C); Menander of Ephesus, *FGrHist* 783 F 7 (= Jos. *Contr. Ap*. 1, 154, 156); Berossus, *FGrHist* 680 F 7 c–d (= Georg. Sync. p. 396); F 8 (Jos. *Contr. Ap*. 1, 131–132, 135–137; *Ant. Jud*. 10, 219–222; Tat. *Orat. ad Gr*. 36; Eus. *Praep. evang*. 10, 11, 8); F 9 (Jos. *Contr. Ap*. 1, 146, 149, 151–153; Eus. *Praep. evang*. 9, 40, 3, 6, 8–10); F 16 a (= Georg. Sync. p. 388); Diocles, *FGrHist* 693 F 1, and Philostratus, *FGrHist* 789 F 1 (= Jos. *Ant. Jud*. 10, 228; *Contr. Ap*. 1, 144); Abydenus, *FGrHist* 685 F 1 (= Eus. *Praep. evang*. 9, 41, 6); F 5; F 6 (Eus. *Praep. evang*. 9, 41, 1–2, 4, 7); Alexander Polyhistor, *FGrHist* 273 F 79; Strab. 16, 1, 6 (p. 739 C); *Alexander Romance*, rec. β 2, 18 (p. 106 Bergson); Ptol. *Alm*. 3, 7; 5, 14 (I p. 254, 418 Heiberg); cf. also the many phonetic or spelling variants of these names recorded in the apparatus of critical editions.

⁶¹ Here is a full list of the names in Dura-Europos: Βαρναβου (nom.), Βαρναβους, Βαρνεβους, Ναβοννιος, Ναβουαζζανης, Ναβουβαρακος, Ναβουβαραχης, Ναβουδαραος, Ναβουιααβος, Ναβουιαβος, Ναβουκορεος (?), Ναβουμαλαχος, Ναβουμαρι, Ναβουνις, Ναβουσαμαος, Ναβουσαμδος, Ναβουχηλος, Νεβουχηλος; the name of the god himself also appears on a graffito rendered as Ναβους. See F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris 1926) 300, 399, 412, 444, 446; M. I. Rostovtzeff et al. (eds.), *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Preliminary Reports* (New Haven 1929–1952) II, 122, IV, 77–78, 83, 98, 104, 111, 120, 130, 132, 163, 166, V, 20, 24, 114, 142, 146, 167, 178–179, 194, 196, VI, 113, 134–135, VII/VIII, 172, 427; C. B. Welles, R. O. Fink, J. F. Gilliam, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Final Report* V.1. *The Parchments and Papyri* (New Haven 1959) 94, 100–101, 161–162; *SEG* 7 (1934) 381, 382, 386, 417, 461, 533, 561, 680, 708, 712, 723 b, 743 a, 749, 756; in general cf. Cumont, 343, 400; Février (n. 45) 98; Welles, Fink, Gilliam, 61, 103.

the Hellenized Near East already from the Hellenistic period. Only the *Vita*-Author had reason to avoid Apollo, and so only he can have replaced him with Hermes and introduced the name Hermippos.

<div align="right">(to be continued)</div>

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В основе "вавилонской части" романа об Эзопе (*Vita Aesopi* 101–123) лежит ближневосточная "Сказка об Ахикаре". Автор *Vita* либо использовал греческий перевод "Ахикара", сделанный в эллинистическую эпоху, либо – если он владел двумя языками – текст сказки на другом языке, например, на арамейском или демотическом египетском. Приписывая приключения Ахикара Эзопу, автор сделал ряд изменений, касающихся места действия и имен персонажей. Вместо Ассирии и Ниневии, как в "Ахикаре", события разворачиваются в Вавилоне – видимо, потому, что этот город был лучше знаком греческой аудитории.

Царь, в различных версиях "Ахикара" зовущийся Асаргаддон или Сеннахериб, получает имя Ликор. Это имя вызывает ассоциации с культом Аполлона: Λύκωρος в мифе – сын Аполлона; Λυκωρεύς/Λυκώρειος – эпитет самого бога; Λυκώρεια – город неподалеку от Дельфов; Λυκωρεῖς – обозначение дельфийцев. В *Vita* Аполлон систематически выступает как недруг Эзопа и в конце концов уничтожает его руками дельфийцев. Точно так же вавилонский царь настроен (временно) враждебно к Эзопу и пытается казнить его. Таким образом, имя царя Ликор вписывается в анти-аполлоновскую тему *Vita*, а его конфликт с Эзопом предвещает роковое противостояние героя Аполлону в заключительной части жизнеописания.

Друг героя, который должен казнить его, но спасает от смерти, в "Сказке об Ахикаре" носит теофорное имя Набушумишкун, производное от месопотамского бога Набу. В *Vita* этот персонаж назван Гермиппом. На эллинистическом Ближнем Востоке Набу обычно отождествлялся с Аполлоном, а не с Гермесом. Но автор *Vita* предпочел, чтобы имя спасителя Эзопа не было связано с враждебным герою Аполлоном. Выбору имени "Гермипп" способствовали некоторые очевидные сходные черты в характере и функциях Набу и Гермеса, а также тесная связь Гермеса (как греческого аналога египетского Тота) с Исидой – благодетельницей Эзопа в *Vita*. Автор романа об Эзопе явно был знаком с культом Набу. Если он пользовался греческим переводом "Ахикара", в нем имя Набушумишкун, очевидно, было транскрибировано по-гречески, так что первая часть композита "Набу" оставалась узнаваемой, как во многих других греческих транскрипциях имен, производных от Набу.