

Deconstruction Of Signs In Tobit's Story: Umberto Eco's Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract: The Book of Tobit is one part of the book of Deuterocanonicals, which is a book recognized by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, which tells the story of the life of the Jewish people in the context of exile, with elements of faith, suffering, and restoration as the center of the narrative. The story blends historical and spiritual dimensions with a variety of symbols, making it a rich source for semiotic analysis. The interest in Tobit's book in this study was driven by efforts to uncover hidden meanings in religious texts that are loaded with cultural codes and symbols of collective faith in diaspora situations. The problem lies in how the signs that appear, whether in the form of social actions, rhetorical symbols, or cultural narratives, can function as an ideological and spiritual communication tool. This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach with narrative study techniques, and applies Umberto Eco's semiotic theory. The results of the study show that symbols such as charity, burial of the dead, marriage counsel, and the prayers of figures in Tobit contain an ideological dimension that affirms the identity of the Jewish community, as well as a form of resistance to the domination of foreign cultures. Cultural codes demonstrate efforts to maintain the integrity of ethno-religious identity through everyday actions rooted in ancestral laws and values, while rhetoric is used to build the legitimacy of figures, influence readers' responses, and reinforce the message of faith in the context of socio-political pressures. These findings broaden the scope of the application of Umberto Eco's theory, from popular cultural texts to religious domains, and open up space for interdisciplinary studies between theology, semiotics, and cultural studies.

Keywords: The Story of Tobit, Semiotics of Umberto Eco, cultural signs, political boundaries, Deuterocanonicals.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Book of Tobit is one of the ten books of the Deuterocanonical Books (Njiolah, 2006). According to (Sanjaya, 2022), the Deuterocanonical book is a book that distinguishes the Catholic and Protestant canons of Scripture. The book of Tobit is the most widely read book of Deuterocanonicals. This book tells the life of Tobit, a man who was expelled from the northern part of the kingdom and lived in exile in Assyria (Craghan & Kodell, 1990), as well as his son, Tobiah, who traveled with the angel Raphael. This story presents a blend of the daily lives of the people in the diaspora with divine intervention, through narratives of charity, prayer, burial of the dead, healing, and marriage that are full of symbolic meaning. The book of Tobit not only conveys moral and religious messages, but also reflects the identity, hope, and steadfastness of faith of the people living under foreign social and cultural pressures (Craghan & Kodell, 1990). Its complete story structure and rich symbolism make this book very relevant to be studied through semiotic approaches and interdisciplinary studies.

In human life, signs are present in every aspect of culture, communication, and religious practice. Signs not only convey literal meaning, but also shape the value system, ideology, and beliefs lived by a particular community (Eco, 2009; Dalyan et al., 2024; Abbas et al., 2024). In the context of religious texts, the signs contain a more complex spiritual dimension, not only communicating teachings, but also depicting collective identities and cultural resistance. The story of Tobit is one of the religious texts that has deep historical and spiritual value in the biblical tradition. More than just a story about journeys and miracles, The Story of Tobit presents a unique perspective on faith,

suffering, and self-healing through divine guidance, thus providing valuable insights into the author's faith and religiosity (LBI, 2022). The story combines real-life elements with supernatural interventions, creating symbolism and signs rich in theological meaning. Through characters, a storyline full of tests and hopes, and depictions of the interaction between humans and the spiritual world, *The Tale of Tobit* invites its readers to explore the deep messages hidden behind the narrative. Quality literary works not only present stories, but also reflect the inner complexity of human beings, especially in the face of their existential struggles (Suheri et al., 2025; Junaid et al., 2023; Sendana et al., 2025). In a strong narrative, it contains universal symbols rooted in mythology, the values of beliefs, traditions, morality, and the culture of society. According to Fairuz (2018), Literature can serve as a reflective medium that records and represents the cultural dynamics and spiritual conditions of a particular community.

Research on signs in religious texts is important to uncover how ideological meanings are conveyed implicitly through symbols, rituals, and narratives. However, semiotic studies of religious texts, especially the Book of Tobit, are still relatively limited compared to popular cultural texts such as novels or films. Therefore, it is important to examine the Book of Tobit from a semiotic perspective, so that the layers of ideological and cultural meaning within it can be revealed more comprehensively.

By applying Umberto Eco's semiotic framework, this study seeks to decode the Cultural Codes and Rhetoric embedded in the Book of Tobit. Eco's semiotics offers a way to understand how meaning is constructed and communicated through symbols, social behaviors, and moral expressions within a particular cultural and historical context. In this perspective, the Book of Tobit can be interpreted not merely as a religious text, but as a semiotic system that reflects the collective consciousness of a community living under foreign domination. Through the interaction of signs—such as acts of charity, expressions of faith, and moral decisions—the text reveals underlying ideological structures related to identity preservation, social ethics, and resistance to cultural assimilation. This approach allows the analysis to explore how language and narrative devices function as codes of meaning, shaping both the religious worldview and cultural resilience of Tobit's community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics is a branch of science that studies signs and marking processes to reveal the meaning implied in an object (Chandler, 2007; Sobur, 2013). Through this approach, researchers can understand how a message is constructed and communicated by its sender (Aart, 1993; Setiawan & Aditama, 2023). Semiotics aims to trace the structure of signs in a work in order to interpret the meaning and message to be conveyed to the audience (Agustina et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2013). Fairuz (2024)) states that semiotics is a discipline that studies various signs in an object to understand hidden meanings and uncover the way a communicator constructs and conveys his message. Signs not only convey information, but also represent something other than themselves (Danesi, 2012; Piliang, 2010).

Umberto Eco's semiotic approach, particularly within political or cultural boundaries, is used to discover how signs in texts shape identity awareness, resistance to foreign power, and the legitimacy of faith values in the midst of diaspora situations (Eco, 2009). Umberto Eco is one of the leading figures in the study of contemporary semiotics who integrates various previous theories to expand the scope and depth of sign analysis (Kaelan, 2019; Sobur, 2013). Eco states that semiotics is concerned with everything that can be considered a sign, that is, something that replaces something else significantly, even though it is not necessarily actually present (Anggraini, 2021)

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco divides semiotic boundaries into three categories: cultural (political) boundaries, natural boundaries, and epistemological boundaries (Sudjiman & Zoest, 1991). This study uses political boundaries, specifically two categories: cultural codes and rhetoric. Cultural codes represent a system of collectively accepted cultural values and customs, while rhetoric refers to

the style of expression and communication strategies in the text to convey ideological and spiritual meaning.

According to Eco (2009), cultural codes are a system of values, norms, and patterns of behavior that develop in a society and serve as a guideline in understanding and interpreting signs in daily life. In the study of semiotics, attention to cultural codes develops beyond the boundaries of sign systems in a narrow sense, such as language or visual symbols, into more complex social phenomena. These codes include systems of manners, social structures such as hierarchy and kinship, myths, legends, and religious beliefs that shape a community's collective view of the world. Semiotic thinkers like Lotman (1990) dan Levi-Strauss (Chandler, 2007), explains that cultural codes serve as symbolic frameworks used to organize life experiences, shape identities, and direct behavior. Therefore, an analysis of cultural codes in religious texts such as the Book of Tobit allows us to understand more deeply how narratives are constructed not only as stories, but also as reflections of the cultural structures and values that live in their communities of origin.

Meanwhile, Rhetoric in the study of semiotics according to Eco (2009), is not only understood as a beautiful art of speaking, but as a way of effectively conveying messages to influence the understanding, attitude, and emotions of the recipient of the message. In its development, rhetoric has extended into the realm of mass communication and the study of persuasive communication. By rereading the classical theories of rhetoric, from Aristotle to Perelman, in the light of modern semiotics, researchers realize that rhetoric is not just part of linguistics, but also one of the important foundations in the analysis of signs and meanings. Rhetoric acts as a bridge between form and content, between the structure of the sign and its communicative purpose. Therefore, in semiotic analysis, rhetoric is an important tool for understanding how a message is packaged in order to shape opinions, move emotions, or reinforce certain ideologies in the text, including in religious texts such as the Book of Tobit.

Previous studies have shown the effectiveness of this approach, such as the study conducted by Nurjanah et al. (2023) in his analysis of Gus Dur's humor which revealed that symbols such as "rats" and "barns" became rhetorical media in criticizing political reality. Next Fairuz (2024) explores cultural symbolism in the film *Spirited Away* that reflects the transition of identity and social criticism through visual and narrative codes. Similarly, Astuti et al. (2022) examined the cultural representation of patriarchy in the *Little Mom* series by finding that visual cues are used to implicitly construct gender ideology.

III. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach with a focus on the narrative study of the text of the Book of Tobit. This method was chosen to explore the deep meaning of the signs that appear in the narrative in an interpretive way. The main source of data is the narrative text of the Book of Tobit in the Catholic version of the Bible which is analyzed as a narrative structure that contains religious and cultural symbolism. The data collection technique is carried out through literature studies, namely by tracing the text of the Book of Tobit and secondary references from semiotic literature, biblical studies, and cultural communication theory. Data was collected using the see-and-record technique (Sudaryanto, 2015), i.e. read the text intensively and note the parts that contain relevant signs, symbols, or cultural codes.

The data analysis technique refers to Umberto Eco's semiotic framework, especially the category of political boundaries, namely Cultural Codes and Rhetoric. Cultural Codes to analyze the representation of cultural and religious value systems in the actions, events, and dialogues of characters. Meanwhile, Rhetoric is to examine narrative strategies and expressionist styles that form ideological and spiritual meanings. The analysis was carried out interpretive-critically by tracing the relationship between signs and meanings in the context of culture and religiosity of the diaspora. This research aims to uncover the construction of religious identity, forms of resistance to foreign cultural

domination, and the expression of faith manifested through symbols in the text.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the identification and interpretation of Cultural Codes and Rhetoric within the text of The Book of Tobit. Each data excerpt is analyzed through Umberto Eco's semiotic framework to reveal the underlying cultural, moral, and political meanings embedded in the narrative. The discussion explores how the selected passages construct and communicate values, beliefs, and ideological positions related to identity, faith, resistance, and social norms. The analysis also examines how rhetorical expressions function as persuasive strategies that shape the reader's perception of characters and their moral positioning within the socio-cultural and political context of exile.

A. Findings

The following is a discussion of the data of Cultural Codes findings, and rhetoric:

Data 1 Tobit self-introduction

"I, Tobit, walk in truth and justice all my life. I have done much good to my brothers and sisters and to my people who have gone with me to the exile of Assyria, to the city of Nineveh." (Tob 1:3)

Cultural Codes, seen in the sentence "I, Tobit, walk in truth and justice all my life". The phrase "walking in the truth" in the cultural context of Tobit's life means living according to the law, while the word "justice" is in harmony with the law, which is God's command. This sentence introduces Tobit not only as a person who obeys civil law, but also as a person who lives in harmony with the will of Allah. In modern culture, the value of justice is defined as a condition in which everyone is treated equally and in accordance with their rights and obligations, often used in the integrity statements of politicians, human rights activists, etc. In Tobit's self-introduction, this phrase becomes a sign of collective identity, which shows that Tobit lives in a corridor of norms recognized by his community. As a cultural code, this phrase functions like a social code that signifies Tobit's loyalty, piety, and obedience.

The data also contains a rhetorical meaning. The dialogue quote "I am Tobit, walk in truth and justice", is delivered confidently as a form of self-recognition, and the intention is to convince others that the speaker is a righteous person and worthy of respect. As rhetoric, this sentence not only wants to tell about what Tobit did, but is also a way to convince people that Tobit is an honest and true person. Within Eco's semiotic framework, this opening sentence serves as a moral and political code, not just information, but a political-rhetorical strategy to establish Tobit's position in his community's value system. This sentence creates a boundary between "what is right" and "what is not true", between "what is worth hearing" and "what needs to be ignored". This statement can also be read as interpellation, which is an attempt by a character to call or force the reader to acknowledge his identity as he claims. A declarative formula that interpellated the reader to accept Tobit's moral position from the beginning of the narrative. He calls on the reader to recognize, acknowledge, and accept his identity as a righteous person, make him an example, and create an emotional closeness between the character and the reader, so as to build trust. The reader is directed to position themselves as "the one who must believe" in Tobit. In Eco semiotics, this is a form of code manipulation, in which the text consciously forms a certain reading of itself. Tobit does not give an alternative space for interpretation of himself, he states who he is and how he should be understood.

Data 2 Dinner invitation from Tobit

"At our feast of Pentecost, the holy feast of the Seven Sundays, a delicious feast was prepared for me, and I sat down to eat. A table was placed in front of me and many dishes were served to me. I said to my son Tobiah, "My son, go, and if you find a poor man of our brothers and sisters who is exiled

to Nineveh, and who remembers the Lord with all his heart, bring him here, that he may eat with me." I'll wait until you come back, son. Then Tobiah went out to look for one of our poor brothers." (Tob 2:1-2)

Cultural **Codes**, seen in the sentence "Son, go, and if you find a poor man of our brothers and sisters who is exiled to Nineveh and who remembers the Lord with all his heart, bring him here, that he may eat with me." This sentence contains a political cultural code, as it relates to the situation of the Tobitian people living in exile under Assyrian rule. Inviting a poor man "from our brothers and sisters" who were "exiled to Nineveh" marked an ethno-religious consciousness that was at odds with the system of forced assimilation by the ruling regime, the ruler of Assyria. The act of inviting a meal together is not only a charitable blueprint, but a symbolic form of resistance to the domination of foreign (Assyrian) cultures. Tobit's actions were not just a form of kindness, but also a subtle attitude of resistance to foreign (Assyrian) cultures that tried to suppress the freedom of their people.

The data also contains the meaning of rhetoric, which is seen in the statement "who remembers God with all his heart". The act of seeking people who remember God with all their hearts is a symbolic limit, where Tobit does not want to eat with just anyone, he only invites with his godly neighbors. The statement can be seen as the rhetoric of exclusivity, which affirms the boundaries in the community between the "righteous" and the "ungodly". Tobit places himself as the guardian of his group's values.

Data 3 Tobit buries his murdered compatriot

"Then Tobiah went out to look for a poor brother of ours. When he came home, he said, "Father!" I said, "What's wrong, son?" He replied, "One of our people was killed. He was strangled to death in the market, and now he is still lying there!" I immediately stood up and left the banquet before tasting it. Then I took the corpse out of the food and put it in one of the houses. Only after sunset will I bury him. Then I went home, washed myself, and ate with a sad heart. So I was reminded of the words that the prophet Amos spoke against the city of Bethel: "Your days of mourning will be turned into mourning, and all your songs will be mourning!" Then I cried. After sunset, I went to dig a grave and bury the corpse. The neighbors laughed at me, saying, "Isn't he not afraid too? He had been wanted to be killed for doing this, until he had to flee. Nevertheless, now he buries the corpse again!" (Tob 2:3-8)

The data contains a rhetorical meaning, which is seen in the act of burying one of his people who was killed. Tobit risked his social position and safety in order to enforce his nation's law of honoring the dead, as seen in the words of his neighbors, "Isn't he not afraid too? He had been wanted to be killed for doing this, until he had to flee." The rhetoric was that Tobit went beyond the laws of the Assyrian state for the sake of God's law. The neighbors became representatives of the compromise community, who laughed or did not understand Tobit's actions. Tobit became a figure of opposition to the foreign power system and also to the compromised people. This is a double rhetoric: Tobit is against the (Assyrian) system and at the same time corrects the community itself.

Data 4 Tobit goes blind

"That night I washed myself, then went to the courtyard and slept by the fence. Because of the heat, I didn't cover my face. I didn't know that there were sparrows on the wall, right above me. His still warm poop fell on my eyes and caused white spots to appear. Then I went to the physician for treatment. However, the more I applied it with medicine, the more my eyes blurred because of those white spots, until I became completely blind. For four years I couldn't see. All my brothers and sisters were sad to see my condition. For two years Ahikar bore all the necessities of my life until he

moved to Elimais." (Tob 2:9-10)

The data contains a rhetorical meaning, which appears in situations that describe the cause of Tobit's blindness. This incident seems trivial, the sparrow throws up the feces, and Tobit becomes blind, opening up a wide rhetorical and semiotic space. This seemingly biological and natural event disrupts the moral system of the reader. Why do the righteous (called "walk in truth and righteousness" in Tob 1:3) suffer for trivial things? The situation changed the classical understanding that suffering is always the result of sin. The treatment effort carried out "The more I was applied with medicine, the more my eyes were blurred...", is an attempt to convince the reader that true healing comes from Allah, not from man alone.

Data 5 Tobit and Hannah's quarrel over goats

"At that time, my wife Hana made a living by accepting a job that women usually do. He used to deliver the results of his work to the orderers and receive his wages. One day, on the seventh day of the month of Distros, he finished weaving a piece of cloth and delivered it to his orderer. He received his entire wages. In addition, he received a male goat to be cut. When I arrived at my house, the baby goat started to squirrel. Then I called my wife and said, "Where did you get the kid goat? What is not stolen? Return it to its owner, for we are not allowed to eat stolen goods!" My wife said, "The goat was given to me as an additional reward." However, I didn't believe him. Then I told him to return it to its owner, and my face turned red. However, my wife replied, "Where is your virtue and where is your sincerity? Now everything that happened to you is real!" (Tob 2:12- 14)

The data contains the meaning of cultural *codes*, as seen in Tobit's rejection of the goats received by Hannah as a reward. Tobit was a pious man who strongly adhered to his nation's religious code of ethics which rejected goods resulting from injustice. However, behind the refusal also shows Tobit's fear of criminal charges by the legal system of foreign rulers. Under a foreign power system, these additional rewards can be understood as a form of dependency or even a potential legal trap, if perceived as bribes or stolen goods. In the context of political boundaries, the act of receiving gifts can be seen as a weak point that opens up space for the ruler to suppress minority groups under the pretext of breaking the law. Tobit's concern over the status of the goats points to the influence of external laws that threaten the moral dignity and religious identity of the exiles.

Data 6 Prayer of Work

"You know, O Lord, that I am clean from all depravity with a man. I have not profaned my name and my father's name in my exile. I am the only child of my father and he has no other children as heirs; He also had no relatives or other relatives, so I had to take care of myself to be married. Seven of my husbands are dead. Why do I still have to live?" (Tob 3:14-15)

The data contains the meaning of cultural codes, as seen in the quote of Hana's prayer "I am clean from all despicable deeds with a man". In the cultural context of the time, virginity was not just a personal moral issue, but a symbol of social and religious status. Virginity serves as a sign of purity, honor, and readiness to be part of the ideal social structure, namely marriage within one's own community. Within the framework of the cultural code, the female body is organized in a symbolic system as a "marker of collective honor. The phrase "do not tarnish my name and my father's name" indicates the relationship between women's morality and family honor, a value that was highly guarded in the culture of the time, particularly in the context of the diaspora where their cultural identity was being suppressed by foreign cultures. In the patriarchal system, women's morality reflects the honor of men in the family, especially the father. It is a form of genealogical honor code, which shows how a woman's personal morality belongs to the collective (father, family, and even community). The statement "in my exile" explicitly shows the political dimension of Sarah's piety. In

the conditions of diaspora (exile), Sara maintained her purity and refused assimilation. Sara identifies as part of an isolated community that is trying to preserve their identity through women's bodies and norms. In Umberto Eco's semiotic framework, this is included in the symbolic resistance to the dominant culture, that is, the form of cultural codes within political boundaries. Phrase "Seven of my husbands are dead. Why do I still have to live?" shows Sara's distressed feelings because of her status as a virgin despite having been married seven times, which in the socio-cultural perception of the time, could be considered a curse or disgrace. It shows how social systems place a burden of collective identity on women's bodies and statuses.

Data 7 Tobiah is sent to the land of Media

"Keep yourselves, my son, from all adultery. And besides your own wife, you should not have intercourse with any woman in an unlawful manner. Take a wife from the descendants of your ancestors; Do not take wives from foreign nations who are not included in the tribe of our ancestors. For we are the children of the prophets; Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were our forefathers from time immemorial. Remember, my son, that all of them take wives from among their own kindreds, and they are blessed in their children, and their descendants shall inherit the land." (Tob 4:12-13)

The data contains the meaning of cultural codes, as seen in the excerpt of Tobit's message to Tobiah: "Take a wife from the descendants of your ancestors; Do not take a foreign wife who is not of the tribe of our ancestors." Tobit's message about how Tobias should choose a wife affirms the political and cultural boundaries that were enforced in order to maintain his nation's ethnic and religious identity. Marriage is not only a personal matter, but also a means of preserving communal identity. Tobit's actions show an effort to keep his family's identity unpolluted because it is integrated with the culture of foreign nations, where intermarriage with foreign nationals is considered a threat to the continuity of his nation's identity. The admonition to marry within one tribe shows resistance to the dominance of foreign cultures (in this case, Assyrian and Medial cultures). In Eco semiotics, cultural codes are included in political boundaries, namely symbols, norms, and social actions that function as markers of the limits of power and collective identity. Tobit acts as an agent of cultural boundaries, which opposes the unwritten policy of the dominant power: assimilation through social mixing. The mention of "Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" is not only a homage to the ancestors, but a semiotic strategy to give sacred legitimacy to the commandment. In Tobit culture, reference to ancestors is an authoritative code that ties social behavior to a divine vision. In Eco's analysis, this is a form of "cultural legitimization", in which an action acquires moral- political weight because it is tied to a large narrative structure.

Data 8 Tobia proposes to Sara

After bathing and washing, they sit down to eat. Tobiah said to Raphael: "Brother Azariah, tell Raguel, that he give my sister Sarah to be my wife." Hearing these words, Raguel said to the young man, "Eat and drink, enjoy yourself tonight, for there is no one but you, brother, who has the right to marry Sarah my daughter. Nor do I have the right to give it to anyone but you, because you are my closest relative. It's just that, my son, I must tell you the truth. I have married Sarah seven times to the man of our relatives, but they all died on the night when I was going to sleep with her. Now, my son, eat and drink, the Lord will act for you both." Tobiah replied: "I will not eat or drink anything until you make up your mind about my business." Raguel said, "Okay! I have given it to you according to the statutes of the Book of Moses. It has been decreed from heaven that it should be given to you. Therefore, accept this sister of yours. From now on, you will be Sarah's husband and Sarah will be your wife. From this day on, it will be given to you forever. My son, may the Lord in heaven bless you tonight, may He

bestow upon you mercy and peace." (Tob 7:9-11)

The data contains the meaning of cultural codes, as seen in the statements "I have given it to you according to the decrees of the Book of Moses" and "It has been decreed from heaven" that indicates that marriage is not only a social contract or agreement between the parties, but an act that is sacred and religiously legal. In Eco semiotics, this is a cultural code that operates in a network of laws and religious symbols, showing that God's will is the foundation of the legitimacy of matchmaking. Marriage according to Tobit culture became a channel of divine authority and scriptural law, not just a customary practice, but a political and religious act in its cultural context. Raguel's statement that Sarah had previously

been married to "the man of our relatives", indicates that the main criteria for marriage in the culture were lineage and attachment to extended family relationships. It affirms a social structure in which arranged marriage is controlled by the head of the family, not by individual decisions. Within the framework of political boundaries, it is a system of internal control of the community to maintain the integrity of a nation in the context of the diaspora, which is a form of protection against external influences. The scene of Sara's matchmaking with Tobias in Tobit is a concrete example of the Cultural Code within political boundaries. Marriage is not only seen as a matter of love or biological need, but as a transcendent and legal medium to preserve the cultural, religious, and identity order. Through symbols such as "the Book of Moses", "established from heaven", and "our relatives", these texts produce and preserve ideological meanings that support the sustainability of communities in the diaspora.

B. Discussion

The findings reveal that the narrative of *The Book of Tobit* operates within a rich network of cultural and rhetorical codes that reflect the socio-political realities of the Jewish diaspora under Assyrian domination. Through Eco's semiotic framework, the text emerges not merely as a religious story but as a symbolic system that encodes values of identity preservation, moral integrity, and resistance to cultural assimilation. The interplay between signs, symbols, and cultural context reveals how Tobit's actions and faith represent a semiotic act of resilience. Ultimately, the narrative functions as a coded discourse that sustains communal identity amid oppression and displacement.

Cultural codes in the text demonstrate how Tobit and his family embody collective efforts to maintain religious and moral order amid external pressures. Acts such as inviting fellow exiles to a feast, refusing gifts of uncertain origin, and insisting on marriage within the same tribe signify a consistent attempt to protect communal identity and spiritual purity. These codes function as markers of social and political boundaries, differentiating the faithful community from the dominant Assyrian culture. Tobit's piety and adherence to divine law represent not only personal virtue but also a form of political resistance and symbolic defiance against assimilation.

From a rhetorical perspective, Tobit's speech and actions serve persuasive functions that reinforce the narrative's moral framework. Statements such as "I walk in truth and justice all my life" and his willingness to risk safety for the burial of his compatriot exemplify rhetorical strategies of self-legitimation. These utterances invite readers to accept Tobit's moral authority and align themselves with his values. Similarly, rhetorical devices like contrast, repetition, and moral exemplification are used to create an emotional connection between the reader and the protagonist, fostering empathy and moral conviction.

Moreover, the recurring emphasis on purity, justice, and divine law highlights the semiotic tension between human suffering and divine providence. Tobit's blindness and Sarah's repeated misfortunes function as rhetorical paradoxes that challenge conventional associations between sin and suffering, suggesting that righteousness does not guarantee worldly security but affirms faithfulness under trial. This moral complexity contributes to the text's broader function as a moral-political narrative that redefines holiness as endurance within oppression. Overall, the cultural and rhetorical codes in *The Book of Tobit* construct a discourse of identity, faith, and resistance. The narrative

becomes a semiotic space where personal virtue symbolizes collective survival. Through Eco's perspective, the text can be read as both a theological and political document—one that articulates how meaning, power, and faith intersect in the lived experience of exile.

V. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the narrative in Tobit's story contains various cultural and rhetorical signs that reflect collective identity, resistance to foreign cultural domination, and communication strategies of faith values in the context of the diaspora. Using Umberto Eco's semiotic approach, especially political boundaries in the form of cultural codes and rhetoric, it is found that the actions of characters such as Tobit, Tobiah, Hannah, and Sarah not only function in the narrative, but also as a tool for the formation of ideological meaning. The cultural codes in this story signify an effort to maintain the religious and social identity of the Jewish community in the midst of foreign cultural pressures, while the rhetorical aspect shows how the narrative is used to influence the reader and establish the moral legitimacy of the main character. The story of Tobit, with its complex symbols and communicative structure, proves to be a productive religious text for semiotic analysis, while also extending the scope of Eco theory into the realm of theology and spirituality.

This research opens up further opportunities to study deuterocanonical books and other religious texts. Researchers are further advised to explore other semiotic boundaries that Eco posits, such as epistemological boundaries and natural boundaries, in order to broaden our understanding of the dynamics of meaning in sacred texts. In addition, interdisciplinary studies that combine semiotics, theology, and cultural studies can enrich interpretations and demonstrate the relevance of religious texts in contemporary social and political contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

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