The Book of Ben Sira: Connecting the Jews All Over the Greek World

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i. The Book of Ben Sira and its Author

The book of Ben Sira[1] is signed by its author, Jesus son of Eleazar, son of Sirach (50:27). Hence the author's name was Jesus, Eleazar his father, and Sira his grandfather. From the prologue we know that his grandson translated the book into Greek from the original Hebrew.[2] Unlike most other wisdom works which do not seem to reflect closely a particular period, the book was written in a precise period dominated by Hellenism.[3] A Judean scribe of encyclopedic intelligence, Ben Sira lived with his family in Jerusalem[4] where he conducted a wisdom school (51:23) and wrote the book between 195 and 175 B.C.[5] Being a

[1] F.V. Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research on the Book of Ben Sira (1980-1996),' in P.C. Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research. Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28-31 July 1996*, Soesterberg, Netherlands (BZAW 255; Berlin, 1997), 23-59, here 23; P.C. Beentjes, 'Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research,' *BTFT* 66 (2005) 131-144; H. P. Rüger, 'Le Siracide: un livre à la frontière du canon,' in J.D. Kaestli and O. Wermelinger (eds), *Le Canon de l'Ancien Testament. Sa formation et son histoire* (Geneva, 1984), 47-69; A.A. Di Lella, 'The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Resources and Recent Research,' *CR:BS* 4 (1996) 161-181; G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira* (ATD.Apok 1; Göttingen, 2000), 17-35; P.W. Skehan and A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York, 1987), 3-4.

[2] B.G. Wright, 'Why a Prologue? Ben Sira's Grandson and his Translation,' in Sh. M. Paul, R.A. Kraft and L.H. Schiffman (eds), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Emanuel Tov* (Leiden, 2003), 633-644.

[3] N. Calduch-Benages, 'Elementos de inculturación helenista en el libro de Ben Sira: los viajes,' *EstBíb* 54 (1996) 289-298.

[4] Ben Sira conducted a school in Jerusalem, probably near the Temple, for young men to learn to become scribes. This is the most likely place of composition for the original text. The best Greek manuscripts (B and A) of 50:27 have; Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Σιραχ Ἐλεαζαρ ὁ Ἱεροσολυμίτης, 'Jesus the son of Sirach son of Eleazar the Jerusalemite'.

[5] From internal evidence it seems he did the work after 190 B.C., but before 175 B.C., for he praises the high priest Simon II (ca. 220 - ca. 195 B.C.) and there is no mention of the terror of Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.). Cf. P.W. Skehan and A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 9-16 (ca.180 B.C.); M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic period* (vol. I; Philadelphia, 1974), 159-160 (190-175 B.C.); M. Gilbert, 'Wisdom literature,' in M.E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the*

traditionalist and an innovator at the same time, he did not directly claim to be a prophet, although he stated that his teaching was inspired in 39:6-7:

> If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own and give thanks to the Lord in prayer. The Lord will direct his counsel and knowledge, as he meditates on his mysteries.[6]

Many theories have been put forward in order to identify the author. Some scholars say that he was a priest, or a physician, or even that he was one of the 72 translators of the LXX.[7] With his mature intelligence and wide experience of the world he is also revealed to be a prudent, practical and well-balanced man in the face of the introduction of Hellenism in Palestine.[8] Certainly he considered it as his responsibility to educate others in the wisdom of Israel, on the basis of the fear of the Lord and personal piety. He took a positive approach in presenting Judaism to the pagans, telling them what to do rather than what not to do. At this time Palestine had just come under the dominion of the Seleucids (198 B.C.).[9] There is no hint of the Maccabean revolt; however, he includes the earliest direct Jewish slur against the Samaritans in 50:25-26.

The author's grandson translated the work into Greek in Egypt after 132 B.C. (the 38th year of King Ptolemy VII Euergetes), most likely in or near Alexandria for the large Jewish community in Egypt.[10] There is some evidence that the Greek translator of Sirach knew some of the Septuagint, as seen in the use of the

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Second Temple Period (CRINT 2/2; Assen, 1984), 283-324, here 291 (190 B.C.); D.S.W. Williams, 'The date of Ecclesiasticus,' *VT* 44 (1994) 563-566 (ca. 175 B.C.).

[6] In my study, I will use the NRSV when citations are made from Ben Sira.

[7] A.R. Ceresko, 'The Liberative Strategy of Ben Sira: The Sage as Prophet,' *Toronto Journal of Theology* 13 (1997) 169-185; P. McKechnie, 'The Career of Joshua Ben Sira,' *JTS* 51 (2000) 3-26. H. Stadelmann states that Ben Sira was a priestly scribe and defends the authenticity of Sirach's school, cf. H. Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter: Einer Untersuchung zum Berufsbild des vor-Makkabäischen Sōfēr unter Berücksichtigung seines Verhältnisses zu Priester-, Propheten- und Weisheitslehrertum* (WUNT 2/6; Tübingen and Basel, 1980), 284-285; J. Marböck holds that he was a layman, cf. J. Marböck, 'Sir 38:24–39:11; Der schriftgelehrte Weise: Ein Beitrag zu Gestalt und Werk Ben Siras,' in M. Gilbert (ed.), *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris, 1979), 293-316, here 306; R. Smend states that Ben Sira must have been a member of the Jewish upper class and belonged to the scribes, cf. Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 35; H.V. Kieweler assumes that he was a public official and perhaps a member of the gerousia, cf. H.V. Kieweler, *Ben Sira zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Th. Middendorp* (BEAT 30; Frankfurt a.M., 1992), 220-245; O. Wischmeyer questions whether he was a physician, cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach* (BZAW 77; Berlin, 1995), 47; F.V. Reiterer and V. Tcherikover are of the opinion that he came from the poorer class while B.G. Wright suggests that he belonged to a retainer class that acted as mediators between the rulers, primarily the priests and the ordinary Jews, cf. B.G. Wright, 'Fear the Lord and Honour the Priest: Ben Sira as Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood,' in Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research*, 189-222, here 195.

[8] A. Sisti, 'Riflessi dell'epoca Premaccabaica nell'Ecclesiastico,' *RivB* 12 (1964) 215-256, here 226-227; A. Moreno, 'Jesús Ben Sira: Un judío en un tiempo de crisis,' *Teología y Vida* 10 (1969) 24-42.

[9] J.K. Aitken, 'Biblical Interpretation as Political Manifesto: Ben Sira in his Seleucid Setting,' *JJS* 51 (2000) 191-208. Probably, after Tobit, it was the first one of the deuterocanonicals to be written.

[10] Cf. Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 8-9, where we have the year 117 B.C., after the death of Euergetes II. The aorist participle συγχρονίσας implies that the grandson wrote after the king's death in 117 B.C. Probably the date is around 115 B.C.

identical Greek with the LXX in the same context and in verbal coincidences.[11] Regarding the differences between the vocabulary of Ben Sira in Greek and that of the LXX, F.V. Reiterer states that Ben Sira's grandson did not have certain translations to use.[12]

There can be little doubt that Ben Sira also derived material from gentile sources, since there are perhaps about a hundred texts in Ben Sira that have clear parallels in Greek literature, while Egyptian and other influences are also found in the book. However, Ben Sira used Hellenistic materials only when they suited his Jewish purposes. In fact he reflects Homer in 14:18 and the Greek poet Theognis elsewhere. In addition, he reflects also the sayings of the Demotic Egyptian 'Instruction' of the sage Phibis (or Phebhor), who possibly lived in the third century B.C., as preserved in *Papyrus Insinger*.

Next to the Psalms, Ben Sira is said to be the biblical book most used in the Catholic liturgy. St. Augustine discovered more essential material in the book than in any other book of the scriptures. In fact it is one of the longest books of the Bible. Ben Sira has also influenced Christian music. The exalted hymn of thanksgiving,*"Nun danket alle Gott"* (*"Now thank we all our God"*) was written by Pastor Martin Rinkart about 1636 just as the devastating Thirty Years War was nearing its end.

Although much study has been done (especially from the Catholic sphere), the way ahead for further study is always wide open. One field of future study includes the collection of ancient Jewish quotations from Ben Sira.[13] A second area of study concerns the additions made to the book in the course of transmission.[14] A third field of research concerns the original Hebrew of which the short Greek version is a good witness, even if it is not perfect.[15] It will also be useful to investigate the relationship with Qumran.[16] In addition, there is the prospect of studies to resolve the structure of the book, Ben Sira's attitude towards Hellenism, the exact relationship of the Ben Sira versions to the Hebrew parent text, and investigations into the book as a witness to the canonization process of the Hebrew Bible.

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[11] H.J. Cadbury, 'The Grandson of Ben Sira,' *HThS* 47 (1955) 219-225.

[12] Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 31; cf. G.B. Caird, 'Ben Sira and the Dating of the Septuagint,' in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Evangelica VII* (TU 126; Berlin, 1982), 95-100, where he states that the LXX was not all complete when the grandson made the Greek translation.

[13] J.R. Labendz, 'The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature,' *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 30 (2006) 347-392.

[14] C. Kearns, *The Expanded Text of Ecclesiasticus* (DCLS 11; Berlin, 2011).

[15] M. Gilbert, 'The Book of Ben Sira: Implications for Jewish and Christian Traditions,' in Sh. Talmon (ed.), *Jewish Civilization in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (JSPE.S 10; Sheffield 1991), 81-91, here 90-91; cf. E. Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach* (SBL Studies in Biblical Literature 9; Atlanta, 2004).

[16] M. Philonenko, ‚Sur une interpolation essénisante dans le Siracide,' *Orientalia Suecana* 33-35 (1984-86) 317-321; J.-S. Rey, *4Q Instruction: Sagesse et eschatologie* (STDJ 81; Leiden, 2008).

ii. Canonicity

Ben Sira regards the Law, Prophets and Writings as canonical and he even considers his own work inspired (24:33; 39:6-7). F. Gradl maintains that the book was not included in the Hebrew canon because it might have been read only in the Greek translation.[17] D. Barthélemy and M. Gilbert state that the Jewish leaders excluded the book in order to prevent Jews from reading books that were sacred to Christians.[18]

The rabbis' meeting (formed by only the Pharisees) at Jamnia around 90 A.D.[19] under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai fixed for all time the canon of the Hebrew scriptures, and Ben Sira was not accepted as canonical even though it was originally written in Hebrew. It is not present in the canonical list of Melito of Sardis, in Origen, in the Apostolic Canons and in the Councils of Laodicea, nor in Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Gregory Nazianzen in the east, nor in Hilary of Poitiers, Rufinus and Jerome in the west. But it is found in the list of the Apostolic Constitutions, Gelasius and in the African Councils of Hippo and of Carthage, following the church of Syria which then had its influence on Rome. The Council of Florence (1442) included it in the list of sacred books without defining its canonicity, which was finally defined at the Council of Trent (1546).

The book was very important and popular for Christianity. It was included in the LXX and was highly esteemed in the early Church. The book is not directly quoted in the NT, but its probable influence is seen in the gospels and on the letter of James. It is quoted by the Didache, Barnabas, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis, Cyprian of Carthage, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, John Chrysostom, the Western Syrian bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug and Gregory the Great.[20]

Here, however, we have to make an important distinction between the fact that a book is accepted as canonical and the fact that it is accepted for public reading or for public preaching. Although the work was not accepted as canonical by some fathers, they still used it in their homilies. The book was accepted as canonical by Augustine in the context of the dispute which he had with the

[17] F. Gradl, 'Das Buch Jesus Sirach (Sir),' in F. Gradl and F.J. Stendebach (eds), *Israel und sein Gott. Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (BiBaB 4; Stuttgart, 1992), 193-197.

[18] D. Barthélemy, 'L'état de la Bible juive depuis le début de notre ère jusqu'à la deuxième révolte contre Rome (131-135),' in Kaestli and Wermelinger (eds), *Le canon de l'Ancien Testament,* 9-45, here 34.

[19] D.E. Aune, 'On the Origins of the Council of Javneh Myth,' *JBL* 110 (1991) 491-498.

[20] N. Calduch-Benages, 'Ben Sira 2:1-18 y los Padres de la Iglesia,' *EstBib* 61 (2003) 199-215.

Manicheans, and this surely influenced the Catholic Church.[21] He insisted that all the books of the LXX were authoritative, including the deuterocanonicals.

St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* cited the book about 300 times, even though Jerome denied its canonical status. The book's canonicity was also denied by Martin Luther, claiming that the Palestinian canon was the correct one, but Erasmus cited a passage from the book and defended the book. Most Protestants do not accept the book as inspired scripture, following the position taken by Jerome. However, the Greek Orthodox Church accepted the canonicity of the book already in 692 and classified it as deuterocanonical.

Rabbi Akiba (d. 135) banned the reading of the book with a severe condemnation and placed it among the 'outside' books, the readers of which would have no part in the world to come (*T. Sanhedrin* 28a). Nevertheless, the book offers an important link between the Old Testament and the rabbinic writings. Given that it does not defile the hands (that is, it is not canonical) in the general opinion of the rabbis, as we read in *Tosefta Yadayim* 3.5,[22] the rabbis agreed that it should be stored away.[23] However, it is often quoted as scripture by later rabbis and seen as an authoritative source.[24] It was mostly avoided by the Talmud,[25] accused of misogyny, Epicureanism, and misanthropy, but had its influence in the midrashic commentaries. In the Mishnah, *Pirke Abot (The Chapters of the Fathers)* has affinities with Ben Sira: 2:3 (cf. Sir 6:8); 3:1 (cf. Sir 10:11); 4:4 (cf. Sir 7:17); 5:19 (cf. Sir 7:18); 6:5 (cf. Sir 7:4).

The Essenes, however, preserved portions of the book in the Qumran library and thus may have supported its canonicity. The only other apparent Jewish evidence in favour of the canonicity of Ben Sira is drawn from the Jews of China. Their center was at K'ai-fêng where a 1489 inscription records that

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[21] Cf. *Speculum de Scriptura sacra*, in *PL* 34.948ss, and *De quaest. ad Simpl.* 1,20 in *PL* 40, 125.

[22] Cf. also *Tosefta Yadayim* 2:13 and *Seder Olam Rabbah* 30.

[23] Cf. *T. Sanhedrin* 100b (*Yeb.* 63c), variant reading. However no controversy on the matter was recorded. It probably was considered as an 'outside book' since prophecy was already regarded as closed when it was written (*T. Sota* 13:2). Hence it was not accepted as inspired, in case they should make a mistake by doing so. See also B.G. Wright, 'B. Sanhedrin 100b and Rabbinic Knowledge of Ben Sira,' in N. Calduch-Benages and J. Vermeylen (eds), *Treasures of Wisdom. Studies in Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom. Festschrift M. Gilbert* (BEThL 143; Leuven, 1999), 41-50.

[24] Cf. *Hag.* 13a; *Yebam.* 63b; *Erubin* 54a; *B. Qam* 92b. According to R.H. Pfeiffer the Hebrew text was still being copied as late as the twelfth century, cf. R.H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1941), 66. According to Israel Lévi, single verses appear in: *Yer. Ber.* 11b; *Yer. Hag.* 77c; *Yer. Ta'an.* 66d; *Hag.* 13a; *Nid.* 16b; *Gen. Rab.* 8, 10, 73; *Lev. R.* 33; *Tan. Wayishlah* 8; *Tan. Mikkez.* 10; *Tan. Hukkat.* 1; cf. I. Lévi, 'The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach,' in *Jewish Encyclopedia* 11 (New York, 1905), 388-397, here 390.

[25] However, it is quoted by the Talmud 82 times. It is cited in *Ber.* 7a, 11b; *Sanh.* 10a; *Nid.* 16b; *Tanch.* 13a; 69a.

seventy Jewish families arrived from India or Persia in the Sung dynasty (960-1279).[26]

Ben Sira marks a decisive transition in wisdom literature by identifying Wisdom with the Torah (19:20; 24:23). According to R. Moulton (1896) and W. Oesterley (1912), the book was thought to have affinities with the Sadducees as seen from the positive praise of the priesthood and the lack of references to Ezra, but it is historically impossible for Ben Sira to have been a Sadducee.[27] But it also has affinities to the law as understood by the Pharisees. Like most of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature,[28] Ben Sira generally prefers the Deuteronomistic presentation of the monarchic period in comparison with the Chronistic one.[29]

The designation 'Liber Ecclesiasticus',[30] appended to some Greek and Latin manuscripts, was due to the extensive use which the church made of this book in presenting moral teaching to catechumens and to the faithful. It was also given to young people as their catechism. Jerome, who also called the book 'Ecclesiasticus', states that he found a Hebrew manuscript in which Ben Sira was called 'Proverbs' and was followed by the books of Qoheleth and Canticles. In fact for its type of literature Ben Sira is very similar to Proverbs 1-9, the speeches of Elihu in Job 32–37 and Qoheleth as well. Jerome quotes Ben Sira about 80 times in his own Latin translation made from the short Greek text.[31]

iii. Textual History and Recent Studies

The textual history of the book is considered as the most complicated and inexplicable of all the books in the Catholic Bible.[32] Most scholars now agree on

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[26] R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (London, 1985), 379.

[27] J. Fossum, 'Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Christians, and Gnostics,' in M. Sæbø, C. Brekelmans and M. Haran (eds), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of its Interpretation,* I, From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300) (HBOT I/1; Göttingen, 1996), 239-255, here 251.

[28] R.A. Kraft, 'Scripture and Canon in Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,' in Sæbø, Brekelmans and Haran (eds), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of its Interpretation,* I/1, 199-216; J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament. Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (SNTS.MS 54; Cambridge, 1995), 25.

[29] E. Ben Zvi, 'The Authority of 1-2 Chronicles in the Late Second Temple Period,' in *JSP* 3 (1988) 59-88. See also C. Hayes, 'Chronicles and Ben Sira: Questions of Genre,' in J. Corley and H. Van Grol (eds), *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes (*DCLS 7; Berlin, 2011), 1-25.

[30] From ἐκκλησία, '[The book of] the Church'. The title is found in Vetus Latina and the Vulgate MSS.

[31] Cf. *In Epist. ad Jul.,* in *PL* 22.961 and *On Is 3.13,* in *PL* 24.67 and *Against Pelagians 2.5,* in *PL* 23.541. See also M. Gilbert, 'Jérome et Ben Sira,' *Le Muséon* 100 (1987) 109-120. In fact Jerome only translated Tobit on the orders of the bishops.

[32] For a discussion of the complicated issues involved in the text criticism for the book, see Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 51-62; Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 26-34; L. Schrader, *Leiden und Gerechtigkeit: Studien zu Theologie und Textgeschichte des Sirachbuches* (BET 27; Frankfurt a.M., 1994), 13-57; N. Calduch-Benages, 'Ben Sira y el Canon de las Escrituras,' *Greg* 78 (1997) 359-370.

the presence of two text-forms,[33] one short and the other long in both Greek and Hebrew versions. We have the short text Greek-1 (GI)[34], which represents the original and which is attested in the uncial manuscripts of the LXX (B, א, A and C), and Greek-2 (GII), a development and adaptation of the original perhaps made in the 1st century B.C. which is attested representively in MS 248 (14th century) and in many minuscule manuscripts of the Origenic, Hexaplaric and Lucianic recensions of the LXX, as well as in the Latin version (Vetus Latina, 2nd century) incorporated in the Vulgate. Also we have the oldest text-form Hebrew-1 (HI) made by Ben Sira and Hebrew-2 (HII), the text-form of the Hebrew tradition that arose after the grandson's translation.[35] Developed perhaps after the middle of the 1st century B.C. and completed before 150 A.D., HII is the source for GII, which is itself the basis for the Vetus Latina and Vulgate in the 2nd century A.D. The Greek and the Syriac MSS suggest that already at an early date, two different Hebrew *Vorlagen* had emerged.[36]

For centuries the Hebrew text was known through some quotations in Talmudic and rabbinic literature. Then with the 1896 rediscovery of the Hebrew text,[37] a new era began for Ben Sira studies. We now know that HI and HII are contained in six manuscripts from the Genizah of the medieval synagogue in Cairo.[38] The first fragment was found in Palestine in 1896 and brought to Cambridge by two Scottish sisters A.S. Lewis and M.D. Gibson.[39] As a result, between 1896 and 1900 the textual situation changed dramatically with the

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[33] N. Calduch-Benages, J. Ferrer and J. Liesen, *Wisdom of the Scribe. Diplomatic Edition of the Syriac Version of the Book of Ben Sira According to Codex Ambrosianus with Translation in Spanish and English* (Biblioteca Midrásica 26; Estella (Navarra), 2003), 37: 'A text is what is actually found in a manuscript; a text-form is not a hypothetical reconstruction of a supposedly original or primitive text but is rather a certain form of the text that can be deduced from the existence of a distinct group of manuscripts.'

[34] It is preferred today as the one made by the grandson and the one which is the most attested in the uncial and minuscule manuscripts.

[35] HII was written in a language close to that of the Mishnah and connected with the Syriac translation. For M. Gilbert, both the short and the long texts are canonical and inspired; cf. M. Gilbert, 'L'Ecclésiastique: Quel texte? Quelle autorité?' *RB* 94 (1987) 233-250.

[36] M. Gilbert supposes a combination of HI and HII for the Peshitta. See also R.J. Owens, 'The Early Syriac text of Ben Sira in the Demonstrations of Aphrahat,' *JSS* 34 (1989) 39-75.

[37] See also the editions of the Hebrew fragments in Z. Ben Hayyim (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira. Text, Concordance, and an Analysis of the Vocabulary. The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* (The Academy of the Hebrew Language and the Shrine of the Book; Jerusalem, 1973), 1-69 and P.C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew. A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (VTS 68; Leiden, 1997).

[38] P. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford, 1959), 3-13; A.A. Di Lella, 'Qumran and the Geniza Fragments of Sirach,' *CBQ* 24 (1962) 245-267. The history of this Genizah in the synagogue of Ben Ezra is quite complex, taking us above all to the Jewish diaspora in Cairo. It became a synagogue when the Jews bought the church of St. Michael of the Jacobites from the Copts in 882. It then became the resting-place of our sacred book (the Cairo Genizah).

[39] Fragment Or. 1102 (Ben Sira, paper: 18 x 18cm; 1f; 17 lines; stained, torn and holed with some loss of text, script: oriental square of the 10th century) is the most famous manuscript of the collection. It was identified by Schechter on 13 May 1896 as part of the lost Hebrew original of the book of Ecclesiasticus, which motivated his trip to Cairo and his discovery of the Ben Ezra Genizah. It was the first in a series of discoveries that led to the reconstruction of the original Hebrew of Ben Sira. Cf. S.C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo* (Richmond, Surrey, 2000), 112-113, 118-119.

discovery and identification of four distinct manuscripts from the 10th-12th centuries by Solomon Schechter and Charles Taylor. These four manuscripts became known as A[40], B (+ marginal readings: Bm)[41], C[42] and D[43].

In 1931 a fifth manuscript (E)[44] was found in the Adler Collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Further identifications were made by M.Z. Segal and J. Schirmann in the late 1950's and Y. Yadin after the discoveries at Masada in 1964.[45] Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2Q18 (2QSir) found by the Bedouin in 1952 contains portions of 6:14-31.[46] In 1956, a form of Sir 51:13-20, 30b was found in the Psalms scroll from Qumran Cave 11.[47] The Ben Sira texts from Masada and Qumran were conclusive evidence that the Hebrew text of the medieval MSS of Ben Sira from the Cairo Genizah was to a high degree authentic. In 1982 the sixth manuscript (F) was found in the Genizah materials of the Taylor-Schechter Additional Series Collection at Cambridge.[48] Most

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[40] MS A covers chaps. 3–16. MS A held at the Cambridge University Library (CUL) in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research unit are as follows: T.–S. 12.863 (3:6–5:10a+14:11b–16:26a) of Schechter; T.–S. 12.864 (5:10b–7:29a+11:34b–14:11b) of Schechter. The Genizah MS of 7:29a–12:1 (ENA 2536) is at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York.

[41] This is of the 11th-12th century A.D. There are nineteen leaves. MS B, held at CUL are as follows: T.–S. 12.871 (10:19c–11:10) of Schirmann; T.–S. NS 38a.1 (15:1–16:7) of Schirmann; T.–S. 16.312 (30:11–31:11+37:27–38:27b) discovered by Schechter; T.–S. 16.313 (32:1b–33:3; 35:11–36:21) of Schechter; Or.1102 (39:15b–40:8) of Lewis/Gibson; T.–S. 16.314 (49:12c–50:22b) of Schechter and T.–S. 16.315 (50:22c–51:30) of Schechter. There are portions of B at the British Museum (31:12-31; 36:22–37:26) and at the Bodleian in Oxford (40:9–41:9a; 41:9b–42:11d; 42:11e–43:17b; 43:17c–44:16; 44:17–45:13; 45:14–46:6d; 46:6e–47:10; 47:11–48:12b; 48:12c–49:11).

[42] There are four leaves (older than A and B) of MS C, held at CUL, as follows: T.–S. 12.727 (4:23b.30-31; 5:4-7.9-13; 36:19; 25:8.13.17-24; 26:1-2a) of Schechter; T.–S. 12.867 (3:14-18.21-22a; 3:22b; 41:16; 4:21; 20:22-23; 4:22-23a; 26:2b-3.13.15-17; 36:22-26), of Schirmann; T.–S. AS 213.4 (25:8.20-21) of Yeivin (1974) with the corner of a damaged leaf of A. Scheiber (1982). 6:18b.19.28.35; 7:1.4.6.17.20.21.23-25; 8:7a, are present at the Bibliothèque de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle (BAIU) in Paris.

[43] The discovery of MS D was of a single leaf of the 11th century containing 36:24–38:1a (BAIU, Paris).

[44] MS E is a single leaf, ENA 3597, containing 32:16–34:1.

[45] The Masada Scroll contains parts of seven columns of text (written two hemistichs to the line) from Sir 39:27–44:17c, preserved at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. It dates from the first century B.C. and it already gives us light on the many differences which are found in the medieval Hebrew MSS. Cf. Y. Yadin, 'The Excavations of Masada–1963/64: Preliminary report,' *IEJ* 15 (1965) 1-120; Ibid., *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada with Introduction, Emendations, and Commentary* (Israel Exploration Society and the Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, 1965); Sh. Talmon et al., 'Masada VI. The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965: Final Report. Hebrew Fragments from Masada, Jerusalem 1999,' in SDSSRL 9/2 (2002) 274-276; J. Strugnell, 'Notes and Queries on the Ben Sira Scroll from Masada,' *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969) 109-119.

[46] The two Hebrew Fragments from Qumran Cave 2 (2Q18) are from before the year 70 A.D. Cf. E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Leiden, 1999), 18-23, 90-91,148-149, 206-207; H. Germann, 'Jesus ben Siras Dankgebet und die Hodajoth,' *ThzZ* 19 (1963) 81-87; J.H. Charlesworth, 'Qumran in Relation to the Apocrypha, Rabbinic Judaism, and Nascent Christianity: Impacts on University Teaching of Jewish Civilization in the Hellenistic-Roman Period,' in Talmon (ed.), *Jewish Civilization in the Hellenistic-Roman Period,* 81-91.

[47] The Hebrew Ben Sira poem in the Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 (11QPs[a]) is a copy from the first century B.C. Cf. J.A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11* (DJD 4; Oxford, 1965), texts 79-85, plates xiii-xiv; M.R. Lehmann, '11QPs[a] and Ben Sira,' *RQ* 11 (1983) 239-251. According to E. Puech, part of Sir 18:33 is present in the Qumran Beatitudes text 4Q52 25.4, cf. E. Puech, *Textes Hébreux (4Q521-4Q528, 4Q576-4Q579): Qumran Cave 4.18* (DJD 25; Oxford, 1998), 164-165.

[48] MS F, T.–S. AS 213.17 (31:24–33 :8) of Yeivin (1974) and A. Scheiber (1982) held at CUL. It is a single leaf written stichometrically, probably of the 11th century. Cf. A. Scheiber, 'A New Leaf of the Fourth

recently, S. Elizur has published two newly discovered portions of the Genizah manuscripts of Ben Sira.[49]

Although the authenticity of the Genizah fragments has been established, study is still going on in order to solve the complicated textual situation of the book. For example, A.A. Di Lella asserts that the translator had to work from the Syriac where the *Vorlage* was missing or corrupt.[50] H.P. Rüger states that the readings in the Genizah fragments can be studied in the light of later language developments, exegetical methods, and style,[51] while Th. Middendorp claims that the differences are due to oral transmission.[52]

There is now around 68% of the Hebrew text, about 2200 cola of the 3221 present in the complete book according to the Greek text of the Codex Vaticanus. We do not have chapters 1-2 or the beginning of chapter 3, and much of chapters 16-30 is also missing. Disagreeing with H.P. Rüger, L. Schrader states that the earlier rather than the later Hebrew textual form of Ben Sira is closer to medieval Hebrew. He concludes that there was a first recension (parallel with medieval Hebrew) which is best attested in Masada and in MS A, whereas MS B is of poorer quality.[53] F.V. Reiterer states that Masada supports MS B as an early version, while MS B shows also that the Greek version is a valuable translation. The transmission of the Hebrew protocanonical text and that of the Greek translation are independent, a fact which does not apply to the Syriac version nor of the rest of the Peshitta in relation to H.[54]

The short Greek version of Ben Sira (GI) is close to the Hebrew text found at Masada. The discovery proves that the book was read in Hebrew not only by the Qumran community but also by others. This would explain the presence of

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Manuscript of Ben Sira from the Geniza [25:11…-24; Belonging to Paris manuscript 31:24…–33:8],' *Magyar Könyvszemle* 98 (1982) 179-185; A.A. Di Lella, 'The Newly Discovered Sixth Manuscript of Ben Sira from the Cairo Geniza,' *Bib* 69 (1988) 229-238; P.C. Beentjes, 'A Closer Look at the Newly Discovered Sixth Hebrew Manuscript (MS. F) of Ben Sira,' *EstBíb* 51 (1993) 171-186.

[49] For portions of MS C see S. Elizur, 'Two New Leaves of the Hebrew Version of Ben Sira,' *DSD* 17 (2010) 13-29. For Sir 7:18-8:18 in MS D see S. Elizur and M. Rand, 'A New Fragment of the Book of Ben Sira,' *DSD* 18 (2011) 200-205.

[50] A.A. Di Lella, 'Authenticity of the Geniza Fragments of Sirach,' *Bib* 44 (1963) 171-200.

[51] H.P. Rüger, *Text und Textform im hebräischen Sirach: Untersuchungen zur Textsgeschichte und Textkritik der hebräischen Sirachfragmente aus der Kairoer Geniza* (BZAW 112; Berlin, 1970), 112-115.

[52] Th. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden, 1973). Cf. C.S. Shaw, 'Ecclesiasticus, or Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira,' in J.H. Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, 1999), 315.

[53] Schrader, *Leiden und Gerechtigkeit*, 94. Cf. A. Hurvitz, 'Further Comments on the Linguistic Profile of Ben Sira: Syntactic Affinities with Late Biblical Hebrew,' in T. Muraoka and J.F. Elwolde (eds), *Sirach, Scrolls, and Sages* (StTDJ 33; Leiden, 1999), 132-145.

[54] Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 30; cf. M.M. Winter, 'Peshitta Institute Communication XII/XIII. The Origins of Ben Sira in Syriac (Parts 1 and 2),' *VT* 27 (1977) 237-253, 494-507, where M.M. Winter suggests that Ben Sira was first translated from Hebrew into Syriac by Ebionites no later than the early fourth century, and that it was revised in the latter part of that century by orthodox Christians who gave it the definitive form in which it entered the Peshitta version.

quotations from Ben Sira in early rabbinic literature. These discoveries confirm the quality of the short Greek version and the general authenticity of the Hebrew manuscripts found in Cairo. It is known for sure that the book was read in Hebrew at Qumran, at Masada and elsewhere. These discoveries indicated that the Hebrew text of the medieval Ben Sira manuscripts found at the Cairo Genizah in 1896 were essentially authentic. The Hebrew Ben Sira was read by the Jews in Palestine and venerated also by the Tannaim and Amoraim.[55] Therefore the most recent studies suggest that the Greek translation is faithful to the original Hebrew in conveying the thought, although it is not slavishly literal.[56]

iv. Literary Genre

Whereas Ben Sira is similar in style to the book of Proverbs,[57] there are also about a hundred texts in Ben Sira that have clear parallels in pagan literature.[58] Besides the various kinds of *māšāl* (proverb, comparison, paradigm, byword, word play, taunt song, allegory, and didactic poem), the principal literary genres in the book are especially the hymn of praise; prayer of petition; autobiographical narrative; lists or onomastica (lists of geographical, mineralogical, cosmic, meteorological and other natural phenomena), and didactic narrative with the aim of teaching a theme.[59] The book is basically a compilation of lessons given by Ben Sira to his students, and for this reason one can understand the lack of clear order of the various subjects.

Ben Sira's poetry makes use of assonance, alliteration, rhyme, chiastic patterns, rhythm and inclusio.[60] In the book we frequently find twenty-two and twenty-three-line poems, combining strophes of six or four verses. While he wrote often in 3+3 accents per bicolon or poetic line, there are also many cola that have two as well as four accents.

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[55] Gilbert, *The Book of Ben Sira: Implications for Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 81-91; S.Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Transactions 47; Hamden CT, 1976), 92-102

[56] Cf. B.G. Wright, *No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to its Hebrew Parent Text* (SBLSCS 26; Atlanta, 1989), 249; A. Minissale, *La versione greca del Siracide. Confronto con il testo ebraico alla luce dell'attività midrascica e del metodo targumico* (AnBib 133; Rome 1995); C. Wagner, *Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena im Buch Jesus Sirach. Untersuchungen zu Wortwahl und Wortbildung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des textkritischen und übersetzungstechnischen Aspekts* (BZAW 282; Berlin, 1999).

[57] J. Corley, 'An Intertextual Study of Proverbs and Ben Sira,' in J. Corley and V.T.M. Skemp (eds), *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit: Essays in Honor of Alexander A. Di Lella* (CBQ.MS 38; Washington D.C., 2005), 155-182.

[58] J.T. Sanders mentions the *Iliad* and *Insinger*, cf. J.T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico CA, 1983), 39-41, 69; Ibid., 'A Hellenistic Egyptian Parallel to Ben Sira,' *JBL* 97 (1978) 257-258; cf. S.L. Mattila, 'Ben Sira and the Stoics: a Reexamination of the Evidence,' *JBL* 119 (2000) 473-501.

[59] Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 21.

[60] Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 63-74; L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (SubBi 11; Rome, 1988), 40.

v. System of Verse Numbering

In the Greek manuscripts and in all the other dependent versions (except the Vetus Latina, Armenian and Slavonic versions), chapters 30-33 and 33-36 have been transposed by comparison with the Hebrew.[61] It is suggested that Greek 33:16–36:13 must come after Greek 30:25, therefore the counting must begin after 36:13 with 30:26. For the dislocated chapters we must follow J. Ziegler's numeration: 30:24a.b; 33:13b.c (30:25a.b); 34:1a.b (31:1a.b); 33:13a (36:10a); 33:16b (36:10b). The Syriac and the Vulgate do not have this change, although they have their own numeration.[62] The 'Ben Sira Forschungsprojekt' at Salzburg has produced a synopsis of all the different chapters and verses, making them parallel to each other. Such a work is useful for an internationally accepted standard of the verse numbering system of Ben Sira which will be used also in this study.[63]

vi. Structure

There have been many positions and theories on the structure of the book of Ben Sira, and recent studies have been dedicated to this topic.[64] R. Smend suggested 23 subsections, N. Peters 10 subsections and M.Z. Segal suggested 8 subsections.[65] For many scholars the book of Ben Sira can be divided into three major parts: 1–23; 24–43; 44–50/51 or 1–23; 24–42:14; 42:15–51:30 and the appendix 51.[66] According to W. Roth the original stage of Ben Sira consisted in Sir 1:1–23:27 and 51:1-30, but in a later period the author added 24:1–50:29.[67] An interesting proposal for the structure of the book has been made by G. Sauer, based on a thematic division as follows: 1–2 (introduction); 3–23 (units on the

[61] J. Marböck states that 30:25–33:13a was switched with 33:13b-36:16, while O. Kaiser says that the passages 33:13b–36:13a should be placed between 30:26/27.

[62] Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 34-35.

[63] F.V. Reiterer, *Zählsynopse zum Buch Ben Sira* (FoSub 1; Berlin, 2003), 68.

[64] P.C. Beentjes, 'Five Years of Ben Sira Research (1994-1998). An Annotated Bibliography,' *BTFT* 61 (2000) 76-88; D.J. Harrington, 'Sirach Research since 1965: Progress and Questions,' in J. Kampen and J.C. Reeves (eds), *Pursuing the Text: Studies in honour of Ben Zion Wacholder* (JSOTSS 184; Sheffield, 1994), 164-176; A.A. Di Lella, 'The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Resources and Recent Research,' CR:BS 4 (1996) 161-181; J. Marböck, 'Structure and Redaction History of the Book of Ben Sira. Review and Prospects,' in Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research*, 61-79; J.D. Harvey, 'Toward a Degree of Order in Ben Sira's book,' *ZAW* 105 (1993) 52-62; H.W. Jüngling, 'Der Bauplan des Buches Jesus Sirach,' in J. Hainz et al. (eds), *Den Armen eine frohe Botschaft: Festschrift für Bischof Franz Kamphaus zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997), 89-105; G. SAUER, Sauer, 'Gedanken über den thematischen Aufbau des Buches Ben Sira,' in Calduch-Benages and Vermeylen (eds), *Treasures of Wisdom*, 41-50.

[65] R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt* (Berlin, 1906), xxx-xxxiv; N. Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach oder Ecclesiasticus* (EHAT 25; Münster, 1913), xli; M.Z. Segal, *Sēper ben-Sîrā' haššālēm* (The Complete Book of Ben Sira) (Jerusalem, 1972), 15-16. According to A. Lefèvre, the book is a collection of proverbs without internal order.

[66] Reiterer, 'Review of Recent Research,' 37-38.

[67] W. Roth, 'On the Gnomic-Discursive Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach,' *Semeia* 17 (1980) 59-79.

individual and family); 24 (centre); 25:1–42:14 (units on the family and the individual); 42:15–50:29 (units on the individual); 51 (conclusion).[68]

In the study of J.D. Harvey we can see a degree of order in the book. He states that for the first level of order, there is a general agreement on the so-called 'two-volume' division of the book at chap. 24. He observes the presence of eight wisdom poems: 1:1-30; 4:11-19; 6:18-37; 14:20–15:10; 24:1-29; 32:14–33:18; 38:24–39:11; 44:1–50:29. They serve to preview the issues discussed in each section which follows. In fact in the first 'volume' there are four sections: 1:1–4:10 (Understanding Wisdom); 4:11–6:17 (Applying Wisdom personally); 6:18– 14:19 (Applying Wisdom socially); 14:20–23:27 (Applying Wisdom to speech and thought). The second 'volume' has three sections: 24:1–32:13 (Applying Wisdom to the Covenant Community); 32:14–38:23 (Using Wisdom to make decisions); 38:24–43:33 (Demonstrating the results of Wisdom), each introduced by a wisdom poem, with 44:1–50:29 (In Praise of Devout Men) as the concluding longer poem. Therefore, apart from a prologue and epilogue, the book is divided into two major parts, with each 'volume' being divided into four sections, the last section being the concluding poem.

Then we can proceed to a second level of order, which is to see each section with its own internal logic and structure. Here, however, no single principle can be equally applied, since each section has its own internal logic. The precise relationship between these sections cannot be defined with certainty. It seems that they were a set of individual lectures which were collected then to form the book. According to J.D. Harvey the degree of order is related to the '*Lehrzyklus*' or lecture cycle which probably forms the occasion of the teachings contained in the sections which had existed separately before they were compiled together to form the book. [69]

vii. Ben Sira's Scope and Message

The purpose of the book is seen in 50:28-29: 'Happy are those who concern themselves with these things, and those who lay them to heart will become wise. For if they put them into practice, they will be equal to anything, for the fear of the Lord is their path.'[70] Being a generous man, Ben Sira wanted to share with the younger generation what he had learned in his life so that they could live a correct and better life, especially in times of challenges arising from the Hellenistic way of life. Theological themes are important in the book, as

[68] G. Sauer, 'Gedanken über den thematischen Aufbau des Buches Ben Sira,' in Calduch-Benages and Vermeylen (eds), *Treasures of Wisdom*, 51-61.

[69] J.D. Harvey, 'Toward a Degree of Order in Ben Sira's Book,' 52-62.

[70] A. Bonora, 'Il libro del Siracide,' in A. Bonora, M. Priotto et al. (eds), *Libri sapienziali e altri scritti* (Logos. Corso di Studi Biblici 4; Torino, 1997), 90-96; M. Tábet and G. De Virgilio, 'Il libro del Siracide o Ecclesiastico,' in *Introduzione alla lettura dei libri poetici e sapienziali dell'Antico Testamento* (Roma, 2000), 170-171; Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 559.

evidenced for example by the contributions of J. Haspecker and J. Marböck towards the theological perspective in Ben Sira research.[71]

All other themes are connected to the fundamental principle of wisdom as fear of God. Wisdom can be achieved if one fears the Lord and follows his commandments (as we can read in 1:26; 19:20; 23:27cd). We can say that the fear of God is the book's overall theme (*Gesamtthema*). In fact, the theme occurs about 55 times in the book; in the rest of the OT it is only in the Psalter that it occurs more frequently (79 times).[72] This great unifying theme, present in many sections of the book, certainly has an influence on the many other themes of the book, as confirmed by J. Marböck and W. Roth.[73]

Ben Sira's themes such as sin, free will, retribution, prayer, worship, personal morality and social justice, like those of other wisdom writers, tend to be universal.[74] For instance, he encourages his students to respect and honour their parents (3:1-16; 7:27-28) and warns against immoral associations with women, recognizing however the merits of a good wife and a happy marriage (7:25-26; 9:1-9; 25:16–26:28; 36:26-31; 37:11; 40:19; 42:12-14). He encourages strict discipline in raising children (26:10-12; 30:1-13; 42:11). We can see therefore that Ben Sira provides wise counsel for the God-fearing family within a patriarchal society.[75]

He stresses his message to the younger generation with the traditional values of Israelite religion under the dress of the new Hellenistic setting. This makes Ben Sira a diplomatic and prudent scribe, strong in his convictions and message without getting himself involved against the new Hellenising authorities. Therefore the book of Ben Sira really served to connect the Jews all over the Greek world of his times.

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[71] J. Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach. Ihre religiöse Struktur und ihre literarische und doktrinäre Bedeutung* (AnBib 30; Rome, 1967); J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BZAW 272; Berlin, 1999).

[72] Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach*, 87-105.

[73] J. Marböck, ‚Das Buch Jesus Sirach", in E. Zenger et al., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (KStTh 1,1; Stuttgart, 1995), 285-292; Roth, 'On the Gnomic-Discursive Wisdom,' 59-79.

[74] Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 75-92.

[75] Cf. A. Minissale, *Siracide. Le radici nella tradizione* (LoB.AT 1/17; Brescia, 1988), 56-60; J. Corley, 'Rediscovering Sirach,' *SB 27* (1997) 2-7.

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