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*“NOW I WILL RECALL THE WORKS OF GOD”:  
ALLUSION AND INTERTEXTUALITY  
IN SIRACH 42:15–43:33*

by

Gary P. Klump

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University,  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August, 2022

## ABSTRACT

*“NOW I WILL RECALL THE WORKS OF GOD”:  
ALLUSION AND INTERTEXTUALITY  
IN SIRACH 42:15–43:33*

Gary P. Klump

Marquette University, 2022

Since the discovery of the Hebrew fragments of Sirach in the Cairo Geniza, the study of influence and intertextuality has been pervasive. However, previous scholars have generally overestimated the occurrence of literary allusion, partially due to the lack of a universally accepted method and nomenclature. This dissertation addresses that issue by investigating Ben Sira's deployment of culturally constructed registers related to the storm-god theophany, the combat myth, divine speech, and the sapiential register in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator. Using a reconstructed version of the Masada Manuscript, none of the discrete parallels proposed by various scholars held up as literary allusions or echoes to detailed investigation. This dissertation argues that Ben Sira employs the storm-god theophany motif to undergird his claim that God can be known through creation. He creates the expectation for the combat myth by deploying words and images associated with it and the divine warrior motif, then undermining its actualization by eliminating any hint of opposition. Instead, Ben Sira portrays God as the unopposed lord of the cosmos. Instead of battling opponents, Ben Sira's God need only speak. Thus, Ben Sira employs the divine speech register to showcase the way God effortlessly creates and maintains cosmic order through the divine council. By activating the sapiential register and portraying God as a sage *par excellence*, Ben Sira posits that all of creation is wisely and justly ordered by its magnificent sage-sovereign. God's omnipotence and administration raise questions about theodicy and retribution. As an answer, Ben Sira develops throughout his book a doctrine of balance, which culminates in Sir 42:15–43:33. According to this doctrine, humans are repaid according to their deeds, for which they are culpable, since God has ordered creation and revealed Godself through it. In this formulation, wisdom and piety are united. God and Wisdom dwell especially in Israel.

## Acknowledgments

What is good in this work is dedicated to my loving and patient wife, Jen, without whom this project and my education would have been impossible. Her support throughout this process, which included hours of proofreading, was invaluable. Thank you for your *hesed*. This final step in my formal education is also dedicated to my friends and family for their unwavering support of a dream that at times seemed foolish.

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In the end, this project is the culmination of a great deal of hard work and wisdom, not all of which was my own. Though the work was hard and not without grief (see Sir 7:15 and Eccl 1:17–18), my hope is that it contributes something to the field, that it is more than, in the words of William Blake, “the Contents or Index of already publish’d books.”

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*The first human being never finished comprehending wisdom,  
nor will the last succeed in fathoming her.  
For deeper than the sea are her thoughts,  
and her counsels, than the great abyss.  
Now I, like a stream from a river,  
and like water channeling into a garden—  
I said, “I will water my plants,  
I will drench my flower beds.”  
Then suddenly this stream of mine became a river,  
and this river of mine became a sea.  
Again I will make my teachings shine forth like the dawn;  
I will spread their brightness afar off. - Sir 24:28–31 (NABRE)*

In this hymn to wisdom, Ben Sira compares himself to a stream connected to the sea of wisdom. What starts as a channel becomes a river and then a sea unto itself. This image is fitting, not only for Ben Sira as a teacher of wisdom, but also for Ben Sira as cultural tradent. Earlier in the poem (verse 8), Wisdom is told by the Creator to dwell among “Jacob,” “Israel,” “Zion,” and “Jerusalem.” The fruits of wisdom, planted in Jerusalem, are “the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the Law which Moses commanded us, as a heritage for the community of Jacob” (Sir 24:23, NABRE). According to the poem, Wisdom abides in Israel and her traditions, and Ben Sira is her conduit. Ben Sira is a part of a literary stream that predates him and continues after he is gone. This study will investigate how Ben Sira participated in that stream, how he acted as a cultural canal.

## 1.1 - Scribal Training and Ben Sira

Although there is some internal evidence concerning the identity and exact occupation of Ben Sira, recent studies of scribal training and activity fill in the picture. This fuller picture of scribal activity will allow for a better separation between the wheat and chaff once the intertextual investigation is undertaken in earnest.

### 1.1.1 - *Who was Ben Sira?*

Sirach is one of the few books from ancient Israel whose author is identified.<sup>1</sup> While there is no external evidence concerning the life and work of Simeon ben Yeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira, or simply “Ben Sira” by convention and for the sake of brevity, internal evidence suggests a number of things about his identity (see Sir 50:27). First, he was most likely a scribe and a teacher by training and trade. Ben Sira’s epilogue refers to “the house of my instruction” (Sir 51:23), seen by some as the earliest clear reference in Jewish literature to a school, suggesting that Ben Sira was also an educator of professional scribes.<sup>2</sup> Ben Sira’s also provides a job description of the scribe in Sirach 39, which entailed substantial interaction with his cultural patrimony.<sup>3</sup> Second, he was

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 88. In the epilogue of the book, the author identifies himself as “Simeon ben Yeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira” (50:27 שמעון בן ישוע בן אלעזר בן סירא Heb. MS B). In the prologue to the Greek recension of the book, the translator refers to “my grandfather Jesus,” (0:7 ὁ πάππος μου Ἰησοῦς Gk. LXX) thus corroborating the authorship of the Hebrew recension. “Ben Sira” will be used to refer to the person, while “Sirach” will be used to refer to his work.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase may be metaphorical, as noted by Mroczek (*The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 101). By itself, the appearance of בית מדרש is not convincing evidence, given that most of the information about a “house of study” is Talmudic.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the job of the sage in general and Ben Sira in particular, see John G. Gammie, “The Sage in Sirach,” 355–72. See also Roger N. Whybray, “The Sage in the Israelite Royal Court,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,

active primarily in Jerusalem, according to the grandson's epilogue (Sir 50:27). Though Ben Sira was part of the literati in the cultural capital, his attitude toward contemporary socio-political leaders seems to have been ambivalent.<sup>4</sup> Third, he may have been a priest or associated with the priestly class and cultus, based on his geographical location (see Sir 24:8), the ideology in his work, and his name.<sup>5</sup> Instead of being a priest himself, Ben Sira may have been a retainer for an aristocratic priestly patron.<sup>6</sup> Though scribes were certainly necessary for a well-functioning political administration, scribes in the ancient Near East were also often attached to temples or other cult sites.<sup>7</sup> All of the evidence provided by Sirach about its own *Sitz im Leben* and author must be weighed against the admission that Ben Sira's self-presentation is idealized, having more in

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1990), 133–39. For more on Ben Sira's conception of the role of the scribe, see Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Scripture and Scribe: Ben Sira 38:34c–39:11," in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 115–22.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Ibolya Balla, "Glimpses into Ben Sira's Society: With a View to the Connections between Ben Sira and Amos," in *Figures Who Shape Scriptures, Scriptures That Shape Figures: Essays in Honour of Benjamin G. Wright III*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies, ed. Greg Schmidt Goering and Géza G. Xeravits (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 140–50.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of concerning Ben Sira's priestly identity, see Saul M. Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood," *HTR* 80 (1987): 261–86. See also John G. Gammie, "The Sage in Sirach," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 355–72.

<sup>6</sup> John J. Collins, "Wisdom and Torah," in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, EJJ, ed. Rodney A. Werline (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 59–79. See also see Pancratius C. Beentjes, "The Book of Ben Sira: Some New Perspectives at the Dawn of the 21st Century," in *With All Your Soul Fear the Lord* (Sir. 7:27): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira II*, CBET 87 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 3–18.

<sup>7</sup> Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 56.

common with pseudepigrapha than with modern notions of authorship, as demonstrated by Eva Mroczek.<sup>8</sup>

### *1.1.2 - Scribal Training in the Second Temple Period*

Recent scholarship on the training and function of scribes has helped to flesh out the skeleton provided by Ben Sira.<sup>9</sup> Reading and writing in Ancient Israel and Judah, like elsewhere, was limited to the educated elite, like Ben Sira. These elites were tasked with the preservation, production and proliferation of literature in number of literary genres.<sup>10</sup> Recent historical scholarship on the role of scribes in the production and transmission of texts has raised awareness of their importance as cultural tradents, as those in charge of preserving and revising their tradition.<sup>11</sup> In his wide-ranging study of ancient Near Eastern scribal practices, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, David M. Carr

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<sup>8</sup> Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 86–113. See also Benjamin G. Wright III, “Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar” in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 165–82. It seems certain that Ben Sira is presenting himself as an idealized sage or “exemplar,” which means any autobiographical information must be taken with a grain of salt. However, two historical-critical commitments stand. First, despite the opacity concerning Ben Sira’s actual spatio-temporal location to Jerusalem and the Second Temple, there is certainly an intellectual affinity for the priesthood and established Temple cultus. Because of this, most arguments predicated on Ben Sira’s location in Jerusalem and status as a priest would stand. Second, any idealized self-presentation must have been in some way “reasonable.” Ben Sira may have been operating within conventions concerning pseudepigrapha. Nevertheless, in order for the exemplar to be effective, it had to be in some way believable to the implied audience. Exemplarity does not work if the model is impossible to reproduce, at least in part.

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of scribal education before the Second Temple period, see William M. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 165–69.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Sneed, “Is the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ a Tradition?” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71.

<sup>11</sup> Preservation and revision are the two axes that Bruce K. Waltke works with in “How We Got the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint, *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27–50.

proposes a model for understanding the education of scribes.<sup>12</sup> He argues that scribal education was not just about learning the mechanics of writing technology (information) but was also about enculturation and socialization (formation). Scribes learned how to read and write, but they also became the bearers of their people's cultural heritage by memorizing and reciting a wide range of traditional literature. This is partially due to necessity, as physical copies of texts were rare and difficult to consult.

Because scribes memorized and recited texts, the environment of Israel's tradition was not only textual but also oral. Several studies have demonstrated the importance of orality in ancient Israel and its impact on textual objectifications. William M. Schniedewind noted that the culture of Israel was largely oral, outside of the rarified scribes in the royal court or temple.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority of Israelites would have encountered their cultural heritage orally/aurally. James Crenshaw demonstrated that biblical literature itself implies, through its use of verbs related to speech and hearing, that wisdom was primarily transmitted orally.<sup>14</sup> Examples include Sir 3:1, 4:24, and

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<sup>12</sup> David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). William Barclay (*Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* [London: Collins, 1959], 11–48) emphasizes that Jewish education was primarily for the purpose of “holiness.” This conception of holiness is the means by which Jews maintained their national identity, in the face of acculturative forces. Already in 1959, Barclay has observed that one of the primary purposes of education is enculturation, that education was largely done by memorizing, and that memorizing was largely accomplished through oral recitation.

<sup>13</sup> William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10–11.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*, AYBRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

16:24–25. Although one must also recognize the metaphorical nature of these sensory terms, orality functions as a root metaphor founded in historical illiteracy.<sup>15</sup>

Even where the technology of writing was available, orality persisted alongside those written instantiations. Susan Niditch demonstrates a continuum between orality and textuality.<sup>16</sup> The traditional material, existed, then, both as a written text, but also in the memories of scribe and audience. Each performance was a reiteration of a pluriform tradition. Jocelyn Penny Small suggests conceiving of texts primarily as aids for memory, that is, as devices that help expand the scribes' ability to remember, not as a substitute for it.<sup>17</sup> Within this context, the notion of "authoritative text" becomes nearly absurd. When investigating the specific relationship between two texts, one cannot rule out the possibility that the author of the later text was exposed to the previous tradition via oral performance,<sup>18</sup> or that the later author was only familiar with an interpretive tradition concerning a text and not the text itself.<sup>19</sup> This is especially true of texts that enjoyed authority, as there were public readings and translations of sacred texts in the synagogues every Sabbath and on festival days.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For more, see Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundations of Biblical Metaphors*, AIL 31, ed. Thomas C. Römer, et al. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 240–45.

<sup>18</sup> Carr, "Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts," 44.

<sup>19</sup> A point made by James A. Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage," in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, ed. James L. Kugel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1–26. See especially page 14.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley, "The Social Environment of 'Free' Biblical Quotations, 21.

Martin Jaffee summarizes the situation tersely: “the characteristic organ of literary life was the mouth and the ear, and its main textual reservoir was the memory.”<sup>21</sup> Small and Jaffee shift the locus of authority from single textual instantiations of a tradition to the cultural memory shared by both performer and audience. Their work dovetails well with that of Paul J. Achtemeier, who also argues for an oral and textual environment during the Second Temple period and the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>22</sup> The compositional context of the oldest manuscript of Sirach, the Masada Scroll, was the same oral and textual environment.

The implications for textual production and performance are difficult to overstate. Ziony Zevit summarizes the situation of authors producing new works well:

Israelite society valued memorization in learning and may have preferred imitation in the crafting of its literature. It may have esteemed conservatism and shunned overt creative innovation... Under such circumstances, originality in ancient Israel may have consisted in drawing liberally from stores of memorized, partially memorized, and incompletely recalled materials deemed traditionally acceptable... New authors, if talented, altered old templates for better, or for worse, if they were not. They attired their thoughts in literary and stylistic hand-me-downs, very much aware of the cultural attitudes affecting their use of generic patterns and language.<sup>23</sup>

In this oral-textual environment, tradents were able to employ words, phrases, and traditions, which they had accumulated through their own interaction with and

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 3–27.

<sup>23</sup> Ziony Zevit, “Echoes of Texts Past,” in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 1–21. Quotation from page 8. Zevit is cautious about how “allusive” this re-use is.



memorization of their cultural heritage, when composing their own works, which also would have been keyed for oral performance.

The text of Ben Sira still bears witness to the oral-textual matrix in which it was produced. For instance, the opening of “The Hymn to the Creator” (Sir 42:15–43:33) contains an oral/aural structural indicator. The pericope begins with an invocation: “Now will I recall God’s works; what I have seen, I will describe” (Sir 42:15).<sup>24</sup> This is in addition to the typical sapiential instruction language, which is often in an oral/aural key.

The oral context has been completely lost, and the textual evidence is far from complete.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, according to Carr, this mixed media environment can lead to memory variants within textual traditions.<sup>26</sup> Looking at the reception of texts, Paul J. Achtemeier concludes that quotations contained in the New Testament were likely from memory.<sup>27</sup> Achtemeier continues by elaborating the double implication of this situation. First, establishing the exact base text with which an author is working can be an exercise in futility, because authors are quoting from memory and not a physical text, and a variant might be supplied by the unrecoverable mind of the author and not a variant

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<sup>24</sup> Translations my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>25</sup> A point emphasized by Carr (“The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies,” 520–21).

<sup>26</sup> Carr, “Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts,” 44.

<sup>27</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Omne verbum sonat,” 27. The situation of Ben Sira circa 180 BCE is much more akin to the first-century CE New Testament authors than to pre-exilic or even exilic authors. In general, texts that became canonical were written and/or had found something approaching their final form. Therefore, scholarship on New Testament intertextuality is tentatively applicable to work on Ben Sira.

reading. Second, sources were often modified to strengthen their position in their current rhetorical situation, that is, deliberately “misquoted” (by modern standards). Menahem Kister notes that Ben Sira does this very thing.<sup>28</sup> Christopher D. Stanley argues that the limited freedom demonstrable in quotations of Israel’s sacred text by later scribes is part of a social attitude toward texts and the traditions which they instantiate.<sup>29</sup> Models of intertextuality based on widespread literacy, available written texts, and verbatim citation are generally untenable. Doubts about a purely textual model of intertextuality in Sirach have been raised by Wright.<sup>30</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon observes that some textual variation is the result of accepted scribal practice and not “incompetence or professional laxity.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, scholars must adjust their expectations and their criteria to match the situation in which they find themselves.

Cynthia Edenburg studied the interplay between orality and intertextuality in the production and performance of biblical texts, focusing on the reception by the audience

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<sup>28</sup> Menahem Kister, “Some Notes on Biblical Expressions and Allusions and the Lexicography of Ben Sira,” in *Sirach, Scrolls, and Sages: Proceedings of a second international symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and the Mishnah, held at Leiden University, 15–17 December 1997*, ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John F. Elwolde (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 160–87. Quotation from page 187.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher D. Stanley, “The Social Environment of ‘Free’ Biblical Quotations,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, SSEJC 5, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 18–27.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III, “The Use and Interpretation of Biblical Traditions in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors,” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 183–207. See especially pages 205–6.

<sup>31</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Textual Study of the Bible: A New Outlook,” in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 321–400. Quotation taken from page 326.

utilizing a cognitive approach.<sup>32</sup> Because recall is necessary for literary allusions, while only the recognition of commonplaces (words or images with strong cultural associations that are not bound to a specific text) is suitable to oral performance, though both devices can be present in written texts, Edenburg concludes that many of the intertextual relationships within the Hebrew Bible have literate authors and intended audiences.<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that intertextuality in Ben Sira has been done primarily from the perspective of textuality, though Wright specifically highlights oral-textual matrix of Ben Sira's culture.<sup>34</sup> The work of Edenburg and Wright is a good start in investigating literary (both textual and oral) devices and the kinds of work they can be expected to perform in and upon audiences. Because so much attention has been paid to the textual, literary allusions, this study will focus on the generic commonplaces available to both reading and listening audiences.

### *1.1.3 - Scribal Culture*

Perhaps in response to the unmooring effect of recognizing the literary environment of the Second Temple period as both oral and textual, in addition to what Samuel Sandmel called "parallelomania," an appeal has been made to "scribal

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<sup>32</sup> Cynthia Edenburg, "Intertextuality, Literary Competence and the Question of Readership: Some Preliminary Observation," *JOT* 35 (2010): 131–48.

<sup>33</sup> Edenburg, "Intertextuality, Literary Competence and the Question of Readership," 147.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III, "The Use and Interpretation of Biblical Tradition in Ben Sira's Praise of the Ancestors," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 183–207. See especially page 206.

culture.”<sup>35</sup> JiSeong James Kwon locates textual similarities between the contemporaneously written/developed texts of Job and Deutero-Isaiah in “scribal culture” of the literati of the second half of the Persian Period, that is, the common worldview of their tradents.<sup>36</sup> While Kwon’s approach admirably attempts to situate textual production and preservation in a complex oral/textual environment of the scribes who produced the text, Matthew Neujahr observes “quite simply, that all texts (with the likely exception of things such as graffiti) are scribal texts” (emphasis original).<sup>37</sup> Neujahr’s observation should make one hesitant to make the category “scribal culture” bear much weight, since (nearly) all texts are the product of scribes. Kwon’s work has also been criticized as being overly minimalist, dismissing potentially valid and meaningful intertextual relationships.<sup>38</sup> The merit of Kwon’s work, as it relates to this project, is his attempt to explain the subtle similarities between texts of the same cultural tradition that do not seem to be explained by direct dependence. Within the study of Sirach, Lindsey A. Askin also appeals to “scribal culture,” particularly the “practices of reading, note-taking, drafting, and writing,” in order to determine to what

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<sup>35</sup> Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” JBL 81 [1962]: 1–13.

<sup>36</sup> JiSeong James Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality: Literary and Historical Relationships between Job and Deutero-Isaiah*, FAT 85, ed. Konrad Schmid, Mark S. Smith, and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Neujahr, “Babylonian Scribalism and the Production of Apocalypses and Related Early Jewish Texts,” HBHI 5 (2016): 212–32.

<sup>38</sup> See Hugh G. M. Williamson, “Scribal Culture and Intertextuality: Literary and Historical Relationships between Job and Deutero-Isaiah,” JSOT 41 (2017): 120.

degree Ben Sira was an imaginative author.<sup>39</sup> Askin must be commended in taking stock of evidence that goes beyond the textual to explain how tradents worked with the traditions they inherited so that intertextual researchers can calibrate their expectations to the actual state of affairs.

## 1.2 - Ben Sira as Tradent

It has long been recognized that Ben Sira was a master tradent, well-schooled in Israel's cultural heritage. When they published the newly rediscovered Hebrew fragments of Sirach, Solomon Schechter and Charles Taylor provided a list of textual parallels with the Hebrew Bible.<sup>40</sup> In the preface to the work, Taylor claims of Ben Sira that "in diction as in thought our author is a sedulous imitator of the Hebrew Scriptures, the words which he uses are not all his own, his work being more or less a tissue of old classical phrases, like a modern school composition in a dead language."<sup>41</sup> More recent scholars have appreciated the nuance in Ben Sira's role as cultural tradent. According to Roland E. Murphy, Ben Sira "knows the Bible so well that he expresses his thoughts in

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<sup>39</sup> Lindsey A. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 184 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Solomon Schechter and Charles Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Portions of the Book Ecclesiasticus: From Hebrew Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah Collection Presented to the University of Cambridge by the Editors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 13–27.

<sup>41</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, vii. Scholars have been toiling under the weight of this damning assessment. For instance, after a careful examination of Ben Sira's use of scripture, Beentjes concludes that "Ben Sira loses the usual image of being merely a copyist or imitator of biblical phrases and expressions" ("Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira," 183). Beentjes effort to defend Ben Sira from the criticisms of Schechter and Taylor, though valiant, accepts some of the flawed premises upon which Schechter and Taylor build their case. All communicators are imitators, and Ben Sira should not be damned on this account.

the phraseology of previous biblical books; his work becomes, as it were, a mosaic of biblical terms and images.”<sup>42</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, claims that Ben Sira is “a very careful author who in a very selective and conscientious way adopted and elaborated the Holy Scriptures of his day into his own book.”<sup>43</sup> Wright concludes that “Ben Sira certainly knew the Israelite textual tradition extraordinarily well.”<sup>44</sup> About Ben Sira, Georg Sauer concludes: “Aus dem allen kann gefolgert werden, daß Ben Sira als Mann seiner Zeit (beginnendes 2. Jh.v.Chr.) aus dem reichen Schatz der ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Tradition schöpft und dergleichzeitig die ihn umgebende Zeit und Welt ernst nimmt und in sein Denken sinbezieht.”<sup>45</sup> Ben Sira references and adapts older scriptural traditions, while making them relevant to his community’s new Hellenistic context, a project continued by later tradents, including his grandson.<sup>46</sup> This assessment is

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<sup>42</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 67.

<sup>43</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 169–86. Quote from page 183.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III, “The Use and Interpretation of Biblical Tradition in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors,” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 183–207. Quote from page 206.

<sup>45</sup> Georg Sauer, “Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” in *Verbindungslien: Festschrift für Werner H. Schmidt zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Axel Graupner, Holger Delkurt, and Alexander B. Ernst (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 311–21. Quote from page 321.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander A. Di Lella and Patrick William Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 40. For more on the use of Ben Sira in the New Testament, see Rosario Pistone, “Blessing of the Sage, Prophecy of the Scribe: From Ben Sira to Matthew,” in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, DCLS 1, ed. by Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 309–53.

common, and it is no surprise that Beentjes identifies intertextual studies as one the four main areas of research in Ben Sira scholarship.<sup>47</sup>

More recent scholarship has attempted to re-evaluate previous assumptions concerning Ben Sira and his own cultural context. Burkard M. Zapff argues that several pericopes (Sir 38:15; 40:27; 41:11; and 45:23) demonstrate Ben Sira's creative employment of previous traditions.<sup>48</sup> According to John R. Levison, Ben Sira enjoyed so much freedom while employing these traditions that he seems to have used the same tradition (Gen 1–3) in contradictory ways, based on the rhetorical context.<sup>49</sup> The work of Zapff and Levison further shows the coherence between the case of Ben Sira and idea that scribes were cultural tradents and not just copyists.

In addition to being a tradent to who employs recognizable traditions, Ben Sira has his own authorial style. Beentjes has observed that "Ben Sira often *avoids* common biblical word pairs for more idiosyncratic associations" and often uses "a vocabulary that is broader than that found in the Bible," whereas later scribes had tendency to

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<sup>47</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 3–16. See, for instance: Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 12–28; Andreas Eberharder, *Der Kanon des Alten Testaments zur Zeit des Ben Sira: auf Grund der Beziehungen des Sirachbuches zu den Schriften des A.T. dargestellt* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1911), 6–52; and Theophil Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 49–91.

<sup>48</sup> Burkard M. Zapff, "Schriftgelehrte Rezeptionen im hebräischen, griechischen und syrischen Sirach," in *Die Septuaginta - Orte und Intentionen: 5. internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal, 24.–27. Juli 2014*, ed. Sigfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 361 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 614–28. See also by the same author: "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," *Biblica* 92 (2011): 347–67.

<sup>49</sup> John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*, JSPSup 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 33–48.

exchange those words for more common synonyms and therefore harmonize the text with other traditions.<sup>50</sup> For instance, some of the manuscripts of Ben Sira show signs of being harmonized with the book of Job, Genesis, and others.<sup>51</sup> Ben Sira's tendency to use obscure words may obscure his reliance on other works, and later hands can create textual affinities where there were none before.

Ben Sira's participation in his culture's ongoing discourse is evidenced by a diverse set of phenomena. Direct attribution or reference to a book of what would become Scripture is rare in Sirach, outside of the "Praise of the Famous" (Sir 44–50). Only once (Sir 48:10c) does Ben Sira use הכתוב to introduce a quotation (to Mal 3:23b–24a). In general, "ungrammaticality" may mark an implicit quotation,<sup>52</sup> though

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<sup>50</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 3–16. Quotes taken from page 13. See also Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Reading the Hebrew Ben Sira Manuscripts Synoptically: A New Hypothesis in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 301–15. See especially page 308.

<sup>51</sup> In the second colon of Sir 42:15 one of the tradents who took part in the process of producing MS B, changed the reading in Masada Scroll (וזה חזיתי ואספרה) to reading (וזה חזיתי ואספרה) in line with Job 15:17 (וזה חזיתי ואספרה). For more, see Beentjes, "Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research," 14–15. See also Beentjes, "Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 169–86. See also Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Reading the Hebrew Ben Sira Manuscripts Synoptically: A New Hypothesis," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 301–15. Benjamin G. Wright III ("Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira," Academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/1862976/Biblical\\_Interpretation\\_in\\_Ben\\_Sira](https://www.academia.edu/1862976/Biblical_Interpretation_in_Ben_Sira), 373) argues that Sir 15:14 in MS A and MS Bmrg have been harmonized with Gen 1. The case cited by Wright, however, may actually be the reverse. The presumption that the Greek and MS B preserve the more original reading, while MS A and MS Bmrg harmonize, is certainly possible, but given the complexity of the transmission of Sirach, MS B may witness to a corruption, while the LXX could be a dependent of independent corruption.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 6.



transitions may also be fluid.<sup>53</sup> Ben Sira has at least three strategies for marking a text: with an introductory formula, via inverted quotations, and using unique word combinations.<sup>54</sup> Wright argues that “Ben Sira both summarizes *and* interprets” (emphasis original) the story of Noah by reproducing source language, but with important differences, a common scribal practice, noted above.<sup>55</sup> Beentjes detects a reminiscence or structural use of a previous text when he argues that Sir 6:5–17 is structured by elements from 1 Samuel 25; Sir 45:6–25 by Exodus 28; and much of the rest of Sirach 45 by Numbers 45.<sup>56</sup> Ben Sira employs not just the language and images of older texts but also structures.

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<sup>53</sup> Nahum Sarna, in “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner-Biblical Exegesis” (in *Studies in Biblical Interpretation*, JPS Scholar of Distinction Series [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2000]: 377–94) shows that “repeated use of a large number of key words and phrases and the smooth transition from one section to another constitute the techniques by which the psalmist harmoniously integrated the varied elements into a perfectly homogenous poetic unit” (380). See also Bilha Nitzan, “Approaches to Biblical Exegesis in Qumran Literature,” in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea scrolls in honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman and Weston W. Fields (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 347–65.

<sup>54</sup> Beentjes, “Discovering a New Path of Intertextuality,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. J. de Regt, J. De Waard, and J. P. Fokkerman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 31–50; Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” 169–86. Beentjes’s work has not been completely immune from criticism. Benjamin G. Wright III (“Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira,” Academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/1862976/Biblical\\_Interpretation\\_in\\_Ben\\_Sira](https://www.academia.edu/1862976/Biblical_Interpretation_in_Ben_Sira), 361–86, but see especially page 371) argues that some of the discrepancies between the text in Sirach and the one to which Ben Sira purported alludes suggests that Ben Sira is working with a common tradition and not a specific text. Wright demonstrates the difficulty of a purely “textual” approach. This may be true, but the only witnesses we have to traditions are texts.

<sup>55</sup> Wright, “Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira,” 398.

<sup>56</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Structural Use of Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Intertextual Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Geoffrey David Miller, DCLS 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 57–78. See also Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom” (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 169–86. See especially pages 177–80. It has also been suggested that Sirach 7 structurally re-uses the decalogue, but this is far from certain. Observations that militate against structural use primarily refer to the order of elements (the structure). For instance, fathers and mothers appear in Sir 7:27–28; wives, in Sir 7:19, 26; honoring God and his priests, in Sir 7:29–31. These elements

Direct intertextual relationships shared between Sirach and his cultural patrimony have been distended. John G. Snaith was correct in writing that “the amount of Ben Sira’s conscious literary quotation from the Hebrew Bible has been overestimated through lack of detailed investigation into each alleged instance.”<sup>57</sup> Not only have “quotations” been overestimated, but direct literary dependence and citationality as a whole have been overestimated. John J. Collins suggests that “many of the alleged allusions are loose, and may be coincidental.”<sup>58</sup> This overestimation may be caused, as Richard J. Coggins suggests, by the lacuna of data concerning the popular and literary idioms of Ben Sira’s day.<sup>59</sup> The cure for this overestimation is the production of an intertextual methodology keyed to the practices of the time.

### 1.3 - Intertextual Method

It is the general scholarly consensus that Ben Sira was a master tradent who knew his own literary heritage extraordinarily well. That knowledge is manifest in the text that he produced. Thus, Ben Sira certainly participated in the previous cultural

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are out of order, while other subjects of the decalogue are difficult to detect. For an example from the reception of Sirach, see William S. Kurz, “Intertextual Use of Sirach 48:1–16 in Plotting Luke-Acts,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. W. Richard Stegner and Craig A. Evans, JSNTSup 104, SSEJC 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 308–24.

<sup>57</sup> John G. Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” *JTS* 18 (1967): 1–12. Quote from page 11.

<sup>58</sup> John J. Collins, “Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach,” in *The Apocrypha*, ed. Marin Goodman, John Barton, and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68–111. Quote from page 70.

<sup>59</sup> Richard J. Coggins, *Sirach*, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 63.

discourse. However, until recently, the tools used to investigate how Ben Sira participated in that discourse have lacked dexterity. More recently, greater methodological care has been taken in the study of intertextuality.<sup>60</sup> David M. Carr traces how the traditional study of “influence” has evolved into the more subtle investigation of “intertextuality.”<sup>61</sup> The study of influence has broadened to include some of the aspects of broader cultural discourse which are untraceable to an original source.<sup>62</sup> Carr wants to limit the term “intertextuality” to only those cases where direct dependence cannot be confirmed.<sup>63</sup> This proposal is an injustice to Julia Kristeva’s main point when she coined the term, which was that all language participates in an antecedent discursive environment that makes it intelligible.<sup>64</sup> The reception of “intertextuality” into the guild of biblical studies has neither been uniform nor without controversy.<sup>65</sup> The term has been used to refer to an array of methodologies, each with

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<sup>60</sup> For some of the issues that have plagued intertextual research, see Geoffrey D. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *CurBR* 9 (2011): 283–309.

<sup>61</sup> David M. Carr, “The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential,” in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 505–35.

<sup>62</sup> For an excellent history of the movement from “influence” studies to “intertextuality” see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality,” in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, edited by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3–36. See also María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, “Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept,” *Atlantis* 18 (1996): 268–85.

<sup>63</sup> Carr, “The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential,” 505–35.

<sup>64</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτική* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 143–73. Later translated into English and published as “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64–91.

<sup>65</sup> Part of the baggage that accompanies the term “intertextuality” was acquired by Kristeva from Bakhtin: political ideology. What existed in structuralism as description—that texts only mean within contexts that can be changed or removed—was taken up by Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Barthes (“The Death of the Author,” *Aspen* 5–6 [1967], later published in French as “La mort de l’auteur,” *Manteia* 5 [1968]: 12–

a diverse set of underlying assumptions.<sup>66</sup> Although the concept gets flattened by later tradents, intertextuality is naturally diachronic, in so far as new texts participate in a *previous* discourse when they are authored.<sup>67</sup>

The term “intertextuality” points to the original phenomenon of texts participating in a prior discourse and can thereby signify any possible relationship between a text and one or more anterior texts.<sup>68</sup> This is the basic definition with which Jeremy Corley and Geoffrey David Miller work when they attempted to summarize the extensive literature on intertextuality in their introductory essay to *Intertextual*

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17) as proscription, that texts can and should be divorced from the personages of the author and read in social and political protest. Some biblical scholars are hesitant to use the term “intertextuality” because of its political connotations. One such scholar is Thomas R. Hatina (“Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?” *BiblInt* 7 [1999]: 28–43.). Other scholars distinguish between intertextuality, the concept, and intertextuality, the synchronic method proposed by Kristeva. For an example, see Russel L. Meek, “Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology,” *Biblica* 85 (2014): 280–91.

<sup>66</sup> For a brief history on the appropriation of intertextuality by biblical scholars, see Eric M. Vanden Eykel, “*But Their Faces Were All Looking Up*: Author and Reader in the Protevangelium of James” (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 31–63.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher B. Hays (“Echoes of the Ancient Near East?: Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. Ross Wagner, C. Kevin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 20–43) is a much more careful reader of Kristeva than most. See especially pages 26–35. Other practitioners of intertextuality promote a synchronic approach which de-emphasizes the role, authority, and personality of the author. The logical and temporal priority belongs to the pre-existent texts, even if it may be lost on second-or-later-generation readers, who can encounter the texts out of order and therefore fall into synchrony and ahistoricism.

<sup>68</sup> Kirk E. Lowery (“The Theoretical Foundations of Hebrew Discourse Grammar,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine, Semeia, [Atlanta: Scholars, 1995], 103–30.) uses the term “intertextuality” to refer to “those factors which make the proper understanding of one text dependent upon knowledge of other texts exhibiting similar or contrasting characteristics” (quotation from page 111). This definition is contra Carr (“The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies,” 517–26) who wants to use the term only for non-referential intertextuality.

*Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*.<sup>69</sup> Corley and Miller propose the useful distinction between diachronic, author-oriented intertextuality and synchronic, reader-oriented intertextuality.<sup>70</sup> This distinction is, however, predicated on the problematic of “authorial intention.” Unfortunately, Miller’s closing essay adds another problematic element, certainty: “authorial intention is paramount, and readers wish to be certain that the similarities they perceive between two or more texts were created deliberately by the author of the later text.”<sup>71</sup> Both “authorial intention” and “certainty” ought to be expunged from the discourse concerning intertextuality, if they cannot be recognized as the heuristics they are.

The only evidence of authorial intention is media which the author has produced. Kister summarizes the problem of intentionality as it relates to Ben Sira: “in Ben Sira, as in almost any other composition of the late Second Temple period, we are faced with the dilemma of whether the use of a biblical expression is a deliberate allusion to the biblical verse in which it occurs, or is it just a stylistic borrowing.”<sup>72</sup> Kister appeals to authorial intention with his use of the adjective “deliberate.” Richard B. Hays

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<sup>69</sup> Jeremy Corley and Geoffrey David Miller, “Encountering Intertextuality in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature,” in *Intertextual Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Geoffrey David Miller, DCLS 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 1–30.

<sup>70</sup> Corley and Miller, “Encountering Intertextuality in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature,” 3. For an example of a reader-oriented proposal, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality,” 3–36.

<sup>71</sup> Geoffrey David Miller, “Methodological Reflections for Future Intertextual Studies,” in *Intertextual Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Geoffrey David Miller, DCLS 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 319–43. Quote taken from page 329.

<sup>72</sup> Kister, “Some Notes on Biblical Expressions and Allusions and the Lexicography of Ben Sira,” 186–87.

used authorial intention to separate “echo” from “allusion.”<sup>73</sup> The merits and deficits of Hays’s work are known.<sup>74</sup> Specifically, Hays’s criteria for separating “echo” from “allusion” are vague, since “obvious” is not a critical criterion. Kister and Hays are not alone in appealing to the intention of the author.<sup>75</sup> Authorial intention may be a helpful heuristic for conceptualizing what scholars of diachronic, author-oriented intertextuality are attempting to investigate. It cannot serve as a critical criterion since it is unrecoverable. Authorial intention can serve as a cypher or shorthand for an attempt to delineate historically plausible meaning which an author could have encoded in a medium that would have been understood by an intended audience. Put differently,

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<sup>73</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Hays uses the term allusion to refer to “obvious intertextual references,” while using the term echo of “subtler ones” (29). It seems wise view echo and allusion on a spectrum, which would call for some flexibility as Hays suggests. Steve Moyise proposes subsuming “echo” under the broader category of “allusion” in “Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise, JSNTSup 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 18–19.

<sup>74</sup> Stanley Porter has criticized Hays’s work on pages 82–84 of “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scripture of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 79–96. Hays responded to his critics in “‘Who Has Believed Our Message?’ Paul’s Reading of Isaiah,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1998 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 205–25. Christopher B. Hays (“Echoes of the Ancient Near East?” 20–43) refined the criteria of his father for work in the Hebrew Bible, using similar principles.

<sup>75</sup> Gabriel Barzilai (“Incidental Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Scrolls and Its Importance for the Study of the Second Temple Period,” *DSD* 14.1 [2007]: 1–24) uses the phrase “incidental exegesis” to refer to the phenomenon of how “while writing the author used the wealth of images and knowledge common to him and the community in which he worked and reflected exegetical traditions that were accepted in his time or community” (2). Although I am interested here in “incidental exegesis,” I must object to Barzilai’s importation of authorial intention. He seems to claim that because the works in which incidental exegesis occur are not exegetical in nature, the author was not consciously intending to interpret the referenced verse(s). Such a claim seems impossible to prove or disprove and is therefore irrelevant. These authors are recontextualizing previous material for some “exegetical” purpose, and it is this purpose which this study investigates. To Hays and Barzilai, I must add Ziony Zevit (“Echoes of Texts Past,” 1–21) who argues that much that language re-used by later authors was not “intentional,” and therefore should not bear interpretive weight, because such language was commonplace, an issue already address above.

authorial intention can be used to rule out readings that are synchronic (from the perspective of a modern interpreter) or historically implausible.

Because scholars make probabilistic arguments based on historical evidence when researching diachronic intertextuality, the term “certainty” cannot be the threshold for the viability of an argument. Miller is not the only scholar to pursue “certainty.” When looking at instances of combinations of at least two words found only once in Sirach and in the texts that become part of the Hebrew Bible, Beentjes uses context to rule out false positives.<sup>76</sup> He concludes that “put to the test with the criterion of contextual similarity, it appeared that only ten of these unique word-combinations in the Book of Ben Sira with certainty can be considered a parallel of biblical texts.”<sup>77</sup> However, certainty can never be ascertained. Publications would be greatly reduced if the threshold for acceptable work was certainty. The various forms of intertextuality vary in subtlety and therefore in the certainty with which they can be recovered or identified. Scholars trade in the probable and plausible. Care should be taken to avoid even hyperbolic references to certainty.

Nevertheless, the distinction between diachronic, author-oriented approaches and synchronic, reader-oriented approaches is helpful, even if the language is imprecise.

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<sup>76</sup> Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” 183. Every argument for a direct allusion has as a premise an argument from silence. If one proposes that Ben Sira is alluding to the Psalms, for instance, based on shared language, that argument presupposes that that shared language does not exist elsewhere. Even arguments that try to calibrate based on the distinctiveness of the language, that distinctiveness is based on extant witnesses. See John G. Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” 1–12.

<sup>77</sup> Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” 182.

Diachronic, author-oriented approaches attempt to produce readings of ancient texts which the original author may have plausibly intended and which an ancient audience may have plausibly received. Synchronic, reader-oriented approaches seek only to read two or more texts together, to discover similarities in vocabulary or images which may occur to any reader who has both texts available. This study will be synchronic in the how it treats Ben Sira's tradition and diachronic with how that tradition is related to Ben Sira and the text that he produced, because it is interested in how Ben Sira read (or heard) his received tradition, how he authored a new work based upon it, and how his audience would have received that work.

### *1.3.1 - Allusion, Echo, and Commonplace*

In addition to Hays, Corley and Miller also cite the work of Benjamin D. Sommer and Ziva Ben-Porat.<sup>78</sup> Corley and Miller do well to use Ben-Porat's notion of "activation" as the factor that distinguished a literary allusion from an echo. According to Ben-Porat the "actualization" of a literary allusion, which she defines as "a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts," occurs in four stages: recognition of a marker, identification of the evoked text, modification of the initial local interpretation, and activation of the evoked text as a whole.<sup>79</sup> Only the modification of the local interpretation is necessary for an allusion to be considered "activated." Corley and

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<sup>78</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*, Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory* 1 (1976): 105–28.

<sup>79</sup> Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," 107.



Miller define “echo” as “a clever reference to an earlier text for the reader’s appreciation but without any deeper significance.”<sup>80</sup> In an echo, a marker evokes a text, but the evoked text has no exegetical significance, that is, it does not activate the evoked text. The added context provided by the evoked text does not add meaning to the marked text. This criterion is much more practicable than appealing to authorial intent, though it still relies on a historically plausible reconstruction.

Corley and Miller also cite the work of Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, who employed a computerized model to detect intertextual relationships, while also individually scrutinizing the work of other scholars.<sup>81</sup> They employ a discriminating taxonomy to identify intertextual relationships based on the amount of shared language. Their method is a helpful touchpoint given for establishing general relationships between texts and for categorizing those relationships, because their categories are objective, the subjectivity of the task occurred in establishing the categories. The dexterity of their tools may not always be suitable to the actual phenomena.

In addition to literary allusion and echo, systemic functional linguist M. A. K. Halliday provides another category for those studying intertextuality: the evocative

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<sup>80</sup> Corley and Miller, “Encountering Intertextuality in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature,” 4.

<sup>81</sup> Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). For a critique of the methodology used by Lange and Weigold, see Joseph Ryan Kelly, “Identifying Literary Allusions: Theory and the Criterion of Shared Language,” in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 22–40. See especially pages 23–24.

commonplace.<sup>82</sup> Elements which may seem to be markers of citationality may in fact be due to reified commonplaces like idiom or genre which point not to a specific text, but to a common cultural register.

Though words, which are conventional signs that point to objects or abstractions, are referential, they also have cultural associations. Steven Pinker notes that “the arbitrary sign works because a speaker and a listener can call on identical entries in their mental dictionaries.”<sup>83</sup> Because signs and referents, words and concepts, are formed within a cultural context, they bear a host of contingent associations. Euphemisms, vulgarities, and slurs may refer to the same objects as their scientific counterparts, but the associations that are attached to one or the other is what makes each suitable for a particular context, or no context at all. Halliday discovered that by means of what he called “registers,” all language is evocative and allusive. According to Halliday, registers are “semantic configurations that are typically associated with particular social contexts.”<sup>84</sup> Halliday’s primary focus was on social interactions, and he observed that within those social interactions words and contexts are mutually constructive. To social contexts, literary contexts could be added as a sub-type. According to Halliday, register activation and context are intimately related: “any actual context of situation...that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of

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<sup>82</sup> M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>83</sup> Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

<sup>84</sup> Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text*, 43.

features but a totality—a package, so to speak, of things that typically go together in a culture.”<sup>85</sup> The context of situation is an input that will constrain the possible texts that could be produced. Alternately, each text bears the imprint of the context that produced (and produces) it.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Halliday found that registers can have “indexical features, indices in the form of particular words, particular grammatical signals, or even sometimes phonological signals that have the function indicating to participants that this is the register in question.”<sup>87</sup> Contexts activate cultural scripts just as starting a script is a speech-act which can realize a context.

In Halliday’s view, the movement between text and context and back is necessarily intertextual: “part of the environment for any text is a set of previous texts, texts that are taken for granted as shared among those taking part.”<sup>88</sup> The signs, referents, texts and contexts, are all culturally constructed from previous iterations. Biblical scholars, implicitly recognizing what Halliday makes explicit, have attempted to place texts within their proper contexts, or *Sitz im Leben*. Halliday does not just describe the relationship between texts and contexts; he proposes the mental mechanics by which the two are mutually constructive. Context triggers informs certain texts, just as texts indicate context. There are internal, conventional indications which activate common registers, socially conditioned by culture, language, and intertexts. Therefore,

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<sup>85</sup> Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text*, 38.

<sup>87</sup> Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text*, 47.

if certain words or images occur in similar literary contexts, then those words and images probably belong to the register associated with that context.

Because words, texts, and contexts are mutually constructive, associations can get reified into commonplaces like idioms, dead metaphors, and formulae. The relationship between literary context and associations and idioms has not gone unnoticed by scholars, though it has not been connected to the work of Halliday. Snaith warns that “great caution is therefore necessary in distinguishing conscious imitation and quotation from the use of conventional phrases and expressions of common speech.”<sup>89</sup> What Snaith calls “conventional phrases” and “expressions of common speech” belong to intertextual and contextual registers, in so far as they rely on previous discourse and are activated or suggested by a particular context. Similarly, Zevit observes that what contemporary readers consider artful and what we credit to the author’s skill “may turn out after investigation to be an expression of Israelite writers’ cultural awareness that their production should sound/read very much like other texts of the same genre.”<sup>90</sup> Zevit demonstrates the relationship between an author or tradent and the culturally constructed register and the commonplaces it produces. He continues, stating that authors “need not have been aware of the source(s) of the well-turned phrase or infrequently used words fished out from their lexical pool and dropped into their compositions. Their proposed allusions and citations may owe their existence

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<sup>89</sup> Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” 3.

<sup>90</sup> Zevit, “Echoes of Texts Past,” in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 1–21. Quotation from page 9.

to random coincidence.”<sup>91</sup> Snaith and Zevit are right to be cautious in alleging allusion where intertextual, culturally constructed registers activated by literary context may simply be yielding commonplaces. However, Halliday’s work suggests that there is a large gap between literary allusions and “random coincidence.”

Concordances and lexica like *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, which give known occurrences of words in their contexts, can be helpful in reconstructing cultural associations or registers.<sup>92</sup> Hindy Najman’s work on semantic constellations is similar.<sup>93</sup> She writes:

I want to develop the notion of what I call a *semantic constellation*. Such a constellation would comprise a number of terms such that, if one is found in a text, then the others are likely to be found too. While the linkages between the terms may be somewhat flexible, the *iterability* of the network suggests that we are dealing with a specific worldview or family of worldviews.<sup>94</sup>

Najman’s term “semantic constellation” seems to be equivalent to Halliday’s “register,” in so far as both are collections of related words which evoke each other and their associations, either as a “worldview” or a motif. Within Sirach scholarship, Robert C. T. Hayward has argued that Ben Sira’s usage of the various divine monikers relates to the

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<sup>91</sup> Zevit, “Echoes of Texts Past,” 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2016).

<sup>93</sup> Hindy Najman, “Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the Study of a Semantic Constellation,” in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioatǎ, and Charlotte Hempel (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 459–72.

<sup>94</sup> Najman, “Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period,” 464.

context in which those names occur.<sup>95</sup> This is an excellent illustration of the relationship between literary context and lexical choice, in addition to the associations that those lexical options bring with them. More broadly, these associations take the form of abstractions like “genre,” “form,” and “motif,” all of which exist in particular instantiations. Snaith suggests that one should not be surprised to see “wisdom-type vocabulary” in “wisdom-type material.”<sup>96</sup> Askin argues that the appearance of a pair of words (ענן and עבים) is not the result of allusion to one example of their three co-occurrences, but of “Ben Sira’s familiarity with the literary convention and with the language of nature-lists.”<sup>97</sup> The associations between words and context may not bear as much interpretive weight as an allusion, but they are neither random nor meaningless. Commonplaces like traditional, formulaic, or idiomatic language are wed to the contexts in which they occur. George J. Brooke recognized this while working on intertextual interpretations shared in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Robert C. T. Hayward, “El Elyon and the Divine Names in Ben Sira,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference, Durham – Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel, BZAW 321 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 180–98.

<sup>96</sup> Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” 5.

<sup>97</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 122.

<sup>98</sup> George J. Brooke, “Shared Intertextual Interpretations in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament,” in *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12–14 May, 1996*, ed. Michael E. Stone and Esther G. Chazon (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 35–57.

Beentjes has attributed the similarities, which he calls *topoi*, between Song of Songs and Sirach to this phenomenon as well.<sup>99</sup>

Regardless of nomenclature, the relationship between word, context, and association remains. This relationship is intertextual, that is, conditioned by previous use. Context evokes a register of related words, phrases, and images. Similarities between texts that share similar contexts may be attributed to indeterminate intertextuality, the phenomenon of texts sharing cultural and literary traditions, which produces similar—and potentially identical—expressions, images, or commonplaces in similar contexts.

### *1.3.2 - Criteria for Distinguishing Types of Intertextuality*

The methodological discussion among members of the biblical studies guild and the attempt to standardize the approach to intertextuality and allusion has required scholars to be explicit about what they are doing and how they are doing it. Underlying the desire to establish universal criteria for detecting and naming intertextual relationships seems to be an anxiety about the discipline being scientific and objective, a true *Wissenschaft*.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, each scholar must develop a methodology suitable

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<sup>99</sup> “Ben Sira and Song of Songs: What about Parallels and Echoes?” in *“With All Your Soul Fear the Lord” (Sir. 7:27): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira II*, CBET 87 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 141–56.

<sup>100</sup> Christopher B. Hays, “Echoes of the Ancient Near East?: Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 20–43. See especially pages 22–35. Any proposal for “objective” criteria simply hides the inherently subjective nature of the hermeneutical event in the establishment and application of the criteria. No matter how one calibrates her methodological sieve, the gauge will yield some false positives, while overlooking other valid relationships.

to her task.<sup>101</sup> Corley and Miller summarize the work of Richard B. Hays, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Dale C. Allison who have each provided criteria identifying diachronic, author-oriented intertextuality, providing a table to compare their work.<sup>102</sup> To summarize, those proposing a literary allusion must demonstrate (1) the availability of the evoked text, (2) the strength of the marker, and (3) the coherence of the activated text with the author's rhetorical goals.<sup>103</sup>

The availability of an evoked text can be demonstrated with both internal and external evidence. Although demonstrated dependence on the evoked text elsewhere can strengthen the case for dependence, this can lead to circular reasoning, whereby dubiously shared language in one place is used to bolster the claim the language is more likely shared in another.<sup>104</sup> This is, nevertheless, a necessary evil. External evidence would include not only the date of composition for the evoked text relative to the marked one, but also the popularity and circulation of the evoked text.

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<sup>101</sup> This suggestion was made by David M. Carr in "Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts," in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 41–53. See especially page 52.

<sup>102</sup> Corley and Miller, "Encountering Intertextuality in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature," 6–8. Dennis R. MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001), 2–3. Dale C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 13. Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 19–20.

<sup>103</sup> For an example of a scholar who successfully demonstrates the proposed methodological checkpoint within the study of Sirach, see Greg Schmidt Goering, "Simon and the Actualization of Wisdom in the Jerusalem Temple," in *Figures Who Shape Scriptures, Scriptures That Shape Figures: Essays in Honour of Benjamin G. Wright III*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies, Greg Schmidt Goering and Géza G. Xeravits, eds. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 105–24.

<sup>104</sup> Carr ("Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts," 43), Stanley Porter ("The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," 87), and Richard B. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 30) all use this as a criterion to help determine whether one text depends on another.



The strength of the marker relies on a triangulation of several factors. In addition to the scholars mentioned above, Jeffrey M. Leonard offers some universal principles for establishing an intertextual connection based on shared language.<sup>105</sup> In general, there are four basic factors for determining the strength of a marker: (1) the density or volume of the shared language/images, (2) the uniqueness of the shared language language/images, (3) similarities in order and structure, and (4) similarities in context. The density of volume of shared language is the most important factor. The uniqueness or distinctiveness of the shared language is fundamentally and inescapably an argument from silence. It is possible that the shared language existed in other oral and written intertexts that are no longer extant. Similarities in word order or the structure of thematic elements strengthens a case for a direct intertextual connection. Shared literary context is a two-edged sword. While shared context increases the likelihood of a literary allusion, if the shared language or images are not voluminous or distinct, then shared context may indicate that the shared language is commonplace in a culturally constructed register.

Once a marker and an evoked text have been identified, one must investigate how or if the allusion is actualized. If a marker and an evoked text are identified but no actualization is apparent, that is, the context added by the evoked text has no discernable impact on the marked text, then what has been identified is not an allusion but an echo. Alternatively, as Halliday demonstrated, non-distinct language that occurs

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<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *JBL* 127 (2008): 241–65.

in similar situations may be commonplaces that evoke the entire register to which they belong. In such a case, the markers would evoke a register or motif, instantiated in different texts, instead of a specific text.

#### 1.4 - Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33)

Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33) provides an ideal opportunity for intertextual research for at least three reasons. First, though the structure of Sirach is difficult to discern, the Hymn to the Creator resonates thematically with the rest of the book, while also acting as an introduction to the *Laus Patrum*. Second, a theology of creation is not only central to Ben Sira's personal theology, but there are also rich and diverse materials from which he could draw from his own heritage. In developing his own theology, it is likely that Ben Sira would have marked his participation in this cultural discourse in recognizable ways. Third, though intertextual relationships between this pericope and Ben Sira's received tradition have been observed or suggested, they have often lacked methodological rigor and their impact on the interpretation of the passage have gone unnoticed.

##### *1.4.1 - The Structure of Sirach*

Before reconstructing a base text, the limits of that text must be established. Discerning the structure of Sirach is one of the many difficulties for those who study it. According to Di Lella, "except for chapters 44–50, which in Cairo Hebrew MS B are appropriately entitled 'Praise of the Ancestors of Old,' the book manifests no particular

order of subject matter or obvious coherence.”<sup>106</sup> Corley acknowledges the difficulty observed by Di Lella but proposes that wisdom poems be seen as structural indicators and that the book’s eight part structure may mirror a similar structure in Proverbs:

- Part I, 1:1–4:10: “Understanding Wisdom,” begun by wisdom poem (1:1–10)
- Part II, 4:11–6:17: “Applying Wisdom Personally,” begun by wisdom poem (4:11–19)
- Part III, 6:18–14:19: “Applying Wisdom Socially,” begun by wisdom poem (6:18–37)
- Part IV, 14:20–23:27: “Applying Wisdom to Speech and Thought,” begun by wisdom poem (14:20–15:10)
- Part V, 24:1–32:13: “Applying Wisdom to Household Life,” begun by wisdom poem (24:1–34)
- Part VI, 32:14–38:23: “Using Wisdom to Make Good Decisions,” begun by wisdom poem (32:14–33:18)
- Part VII, 38:24–43:33: “Demonstrating the Results of Wisdom,” begun by wisdom poem (38:24–39:12)
- Part VIII, 44:1–50:24: “Wisdom in History,” begun by wisdom poem (44:1–15)
- Appendices, 50:25–51:30, ended by wisdom poem (51:13–30).<sup>107</sup>

According to Corley, this structure is further supported by the use of catchwords (*mots crochets*) to link sections of material and stylistic devices (*inclusio*, non-alphabetic acrostics of twenty-two or twenty-three lines, and opening/closing rhyme) to delimit passages.<sup>108</sup>

While the structure of the whole book may be contented, there is no doubt that Sir 42:15–43:33 is a literary unit. Manuscript B inserts a blank line before the hymn and

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<sup>106</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

<sup>107</sup> Corley, “Searching for Structure and Redaction in Ben Sira,” 34–36. For a summary of arguments concerning structure and compositional history, see Johannes Marböck, “Structure and Redaction History of the Book of Ben Sira: Review and Prospects,” in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference 28–31 July 1996, Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. Pancratius C. Beentjes (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 61–79.

<sup>108</sup> Corley, “Searching for Structure and Redaction in Ben Sira,” 45.

Sir 44:1 starts with a heading or title. Scholarly consensus divides the poem into three parts: introduction (Sir 42:15–25),<sup>109</sup> body (Sir 43:1–26), and conclusion (Sir 43:27–33).<sup>110</sup> Some scholars, such as Skehan and Di Lella, further divide the body.<sup>111</sup> There are several *inclusios* in the first and fourth stanzas.<sup>112</sup> First, both stanzas begin in the first person, while the body of the poem is in the third person. In the first stanza (Sir 42:15), Ben Sira says that he will “recall” (אזכרה) and “recount” (אשננה) the works of the Lord that he has “seen” (זה חזיתי). In the fourth stanza (Sir 43:27), he stops “adding” to the list and encourages his audience to praise (Sir 43:30). There is also a recognition that he has only “seen” (ראיתי) a small portion of these works (43:32). The repetition of the seeing verbs produces the second *inclusio*. Third, the thesis of the poem, that God’s glory is revealed in his works (מעשי אל), occurs in Sir 42:16, and it is mirrored in 43:28, with a reiteration that God is revealed in his works (מעשיו), but transcends them. God’s glory (כבוד) and the splendor (הוד, תור, הדר) of creation are themes that unify the

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<sup>109</sup> Sauer (“Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33”) further divides what I have called the introduction into an introduction (42:15–17), a passage on the wisdom of God ruling the world (42:18–21), and the result of that observation, namely, that everything is meaningful and good (42:22–25). However, the whole section (42:15–25) functions as an introduction, providing the poem’s theme, echoing previous material, and creating bookends with the conclusion (43:27–33).

<sup>110</sup> For example, see John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 209; John E. Rybolt, *Sirach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 91; A. Jordan Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 42 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 162.

<sup>111</sup> The division were proposed by Di Lella (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491). The two body stanzas could be further divided, or not divided at all, but the sake balance and transition in subject matter, the division is warranted. For a review of different proposals, see Núria Calduch-Benages, “God, Creator of All (Sir 43:27–33),” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference, Durham – Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 79–100. See especially pages 86–87.

<sup>112</sup> A number of these are observed by Núria Calduch-Benages, “God, Creator of All (Sir 43:27–33),” 87.

poem. Fourth, the poem begins with some catch words that tie it to the rest of the book: instruction (Sir 42:15b לִקְחָ) and wisdom (Sir 42:21a חִכְמָה), in addition to casting God in the role of a super-sage, who searches and probes hidden things (Sir 42:19 חִקֵּר נִסְתָּרוֹת), the secrets of the deep and the heart, knowing all, even the future (Sir 42:18). The pericope ends with a reiteration of the poem's theme, that God made everything, which is tied into one of the major themes of the book, that God gives wisdom to the pious. The connection between these two ideas is provided by the poem: the created world is a lens through which humans can see God's glory and therefore grow in wisdom, though some things remain hidden (Sir 43:32 נִסְתָּרוֹת) and God remains unfathomable (Sir 43:28, 30 חִקֵּר). Fifth, the theme of power is echoed in the beginning and end of the section. In the beginning, the poem indicates that the angels are not capable of enduring the glory of God's presents without divine buttressing (Sir 42:17) and that God regulates the world by his wisdom (Sir 42:21a). The poem ends by mentioning the wonder of God's power (Sir 43:29).

This poem is connected to its immediate surroundings. Beentjes sees the Hymn to the Creator as part of a rhetorical movement that begins much earlier and continues afterwards.<sup>113</sup> The optimistic view of creation and human life expressed in Sir 39:16–25 is counterbalanced by Sir 40:1–16, which illustrates the difficulties of human life by means of numerous examples. Though neither of these is a single note—the good is mixed in with the bad—the movement continues through chapter 41 and culminates in

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<sup>113</sup> Beentjes, "De verhalen van het begin terug(ge)lezen," 98–99.

Sir 42:15–43:33, with the *dénouement* or reprise in the Hymn to the Famous (Sir 44.1–50:29). Georg Sauer also sees Sir 42:15–43:33 as a prelude to the Praise of the Ancients.<sup>114</sup> He argues that similar to the way the creation accounts in Genesis act as a “porch” to the primeval history and on to the ancestral history, so the Hymn to the Creator acts a “porch” to Ben Sira’s praise of Israel’s famous ancestors.<sup>115</sup> Greg Schmidt Goering argues that the Praise of the Ancients is a “thematic envelope” encased by the Hymn to the Creator and Simon’s recapitulation of creation in his celebration of Rosh Hashanah.<sup>116</sup> To summarize, although this passage is a clear literary unit, it has structural and thematic connections both to the preceding and following material.

Although Di Lella has observed some similarity between the Hymn the Creator in Sirach and the Egyptian “onomasticon,” Ben Sira’s poem defies categorization into a single form.<sup>117</sup> While Sir 42:15–43:33 does resemble the onomasticon, as does Job 38–41, Proverbs 30:15–16, 18–20, 24–31, and Wisdom 7:17–22a, the function is hardly similar. Other parallels to the Hymn to the Creator, which resemble the onomasticon less, include Daniel 3:52–90 and Psalm 104. The reason this pericope defies categorization is, primarily, because of the shift from and to the first person, to the

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<sup>114</sup> Sauer, “Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” 312.

<sup>115</sup> See also Jeremy Corley, *Sirach*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 119.

<sup>116</sup> Goering, “Simon and the Actualization of Wisdom,” 118.

<sup>117</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491. Sauer (“Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” 312), though he cites Skehan and Di Lella, states “Von Ich-Bericht über hymnische Aussagen bis hin zu grandiosen naturwissenschaftlichen Beschreibungen vereint dieser Passus in fast verwirrender Weise alles zu einem imponierenden und gleichzeitig überzeugenden Ganzen, das nicht auf eine einzige Form festgelegt werden kann.”

emphasis on the phenomena of world, the calls to praise, and the sapiential vocabulary, to name but a few. Ben Sira uses forms and material from his cultural heritage, while blending both content and features into a unique work.

#### *1.4.2 - Creation in Sirach and the Hebrew Bible*

The importance of creation for Ben Sira and in Sir 42:15–43:33 has been recognized by several scholars. A number of monographs also touch on the theme. Josef Haspecker considers Ben Sira's use of "Creator" as a divine attribute to be characteristic of the book as a whole.<sup>118</sup> Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer also highlights the importance of the theme of creation for Ben Sira, which he links to Ben Sira's piety of "fear of the Lord."<sup>119</sup> Recently, A. Jordan Schmidt has published a monograph on the relationship between creation, wisdom, and the temple cultus.<sup>120</sup> Schmidt argues that "Ben Sira's doctrine of the well-ordered cosmos is a kind of substratum to his thought through which seemingly disparate teachings may be related to one another."<sup>121</sup> This may be why, in attempting to synthesize a somewhat disparate tradition, Ben Sira's doctrine of creation is somewhat idiosyncratic. In an unpublished dissertation for the University of Glasgow, Keith Wayne Burton concludes "creation faith within Sir goes well beyond an

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<sup>118</sup> Josef Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach: Ihre religiöse Struktur und ihre literarische und doktrinaire Bedeutung* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1967), 302.

<sup>119</sup> Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, "Die Immateriellen Ebenen der Schöpfung bei Ben Sira," in *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom; Festschrift M Gilbert*, ed. Núria Calduch-Benages and J. Vermeylen (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1999): 91–127.

<sup>120</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*.

<sup>121</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 1.

ancillary function,” “it provides the main form for his total thought structure,” and “rather than being merely a presupposition, the doctrine of creation is developed as an intricate part of Sirach’s message.”<sup>122</sup> These above-mentioned specific studies have led to similar sentiments being echoes in introductions and commentaries, such as that by Leo G. Perdue.<sup>123</sup>

Given the importance of the topic for Ben Sira and the subject matter of passage, it is no surprise that creation has been a topic of investigation in Sir 42:15–43:33. Two works in particular investigate the bookends of the passage. Otto Mulder studies the theology of creation and the creator in Sir 42:15–25.<sup>124</sup> Mulder sees Ben Sira’s emphasis on the order of creation that reveals the wisdom of the creator as a renewal of the classical wisdom tradition, while acknowledging that God is beyond human comprehension. Similarly, Núria Calduch-Benages investigates how Ben Sira characterizes God in Sir 43:27–33, concluding that for Ben Sira, creation is both an object of instruction and a motivation for praising the God the creator, who is mighty and mysterious.<sup>125</sup> The material between these two bookends has received less

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<sup>122</sup> Keith Wayne Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1987), 219.

<sup>123</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 234.

<sup>124</sup> Otto Mulder, “A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25,” in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 201–22.

<sup>125</sup> Núria Calduch-Benages, “God, Creator of All (Sir 43:27–33),” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference, Durham – Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 79–100.



attention. Mulder's material can be seen as the pericope's thesis and Calduch-Benages looks at the unit's conclusion, which acts as a reprise to the opening, but Ben Sira employs a great deal of imagery in between the two to illustrate his point.

### *1.4.3 - Intertextuality and Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator*

The imagery that Ben Sira uses to illustrate his point that God is powerful and worthy of praise, even if unfathomable, is striking both because of how traditional it is, but also because of its uniqueness. The traditional commonplaces, both words and images, have been detected by numerous scholars. As noted above, the seminal work of Schechter and Taylor provided a list of parallels between Sirach and books of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>126</sup> Lange and Weigold employ more methodological precision and detect intertextual relationships between Sirach and his cultural patrimony.<sup>127</sup> Sauer sees Genesis operating in the background of the Hymn to the Creator, based on lexical and thematic parallels.<sup>128</sup> Neither Schechter and Taylor nor Lange and Weigold attempts an explanation of what the intertextual relationships are doing. Similarly, Sauer study provides little payoff. Even though there has been a growing appreciation for Ben Sira's creative role as a cultural tradent, less attention has been paid to how Ben Sira mobilizes the elements he draws from his culture's ongoing discourse about creation.

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<sup>126</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 13–27.

<sup>127</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

<sup>128</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 311–21.

Di Lella provides a number of parallels between Sirach and both Hebrew and Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman material, including mythological material.<sup>129</sup> Corley also observes the mythological elements employed by Ben Sira.<sup>130</sup> So too do Sauer and Rybolt.<sup>131</sup> However, no study, to my knowledge, investigates how Ben Sira employs the disparate and somewhat contradictory traditions and myths about creation which he inherited, specifically looking at the rhetorical effect of that employment.

### 1.5 - Program of Research

Given that Ben Sira a cultural tradent, well versed in his literary heritage, an intertextual investigation using sound methods into how he participated in the ongoing discourse about the theology of creation, an important theme in Sirach, will not only shed light on Ben Sira's own theology and method, but potentially on those of other, similar tradents. Specifically, it striking that Ben Sira employs traditional imagery to produce his own theology. Reinhard Muller argues that Yahweh was originally a royal storm-god.<sup>132</sup> So it is no surprise to see storm-god and storm theophany imagery in Ben Sira's poem since it attempts to demonstrate God's power and presence in nature. Yet, connected to that theme is the combat myth, the story of how God ascends to the divine throne. While there are numerous iterations of this myth outside of Israel, the

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<sup>129</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 484–96.

<sup>130</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 119–21.

<sup>131</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 91–94.

<sup>132</sup> Reinhard Müller, *Jahw als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen*, BZAW 387, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

myth is also present in positive forms, especially in the Psalms, and as the object of polemic, as in Genesis and Isaiah.<sup>133</sup> While Sir 42:15–43:33 does contain martial imagery and reference to the throne scene, Ben Sira never depicts God as engaging in combat against a cosmic enemy. Ben Sira seems to follow the lead of texts such as Genesis 1 and Isaiah 51, which present God as the unopposed deity, since to posit a cosmic enemy would be to undermine Ben Sira's doctrine of balance and order in creation, a doctrine predicated on divine sovereignty. Instead of using warfare to subdue his enemies, God simply uses divine speech or commands to accomplish his unopposed will. Though personified Wisdom seems to act as divine intermediary in Sirach, divine speech does not seem to be personified. Ben Sira employs images and traditions drawn from his cultural heritage, while grappling with the implications of that inheritance, even while he formulates a strictly monotheistic theology of a transcendent Yahweh. Ben Sira's method for engaging in the cultural discourse about creation does not seem to employ allusion or echoes, but instead he mobilizes commonplaces that recall cultural registers already associated with different aspects of that discourse.

Studying Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator in Sir 42:15–43:33 to see how Ben Sira incorporated received traditions into the text that he produced will require one preliminary chapter and three chapters of analysis.

Chapter two will address two methodological issues: the content and shape of cultural dialogue that Ben Sira inherited and the shape of the Sirach tradition. The

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<sup>133</sup> The capitalized "Psalms" will refer to the canonical, or "final" version(s) of the biblical book. With a lower case, psalms will refer to individual poetic compositions that may or may not have been collected in a widely accepted edition. More on this below.

former will provide potential intertexts, while the latter will establish a base text from which to investigate Ben Sira's interaction with those intertexts. Chapter two will demonstrate that Ben Sira was familiar with the majority of books or traditions that would become part of the Hebrew Bible. However, potential intertexts for this study will be limited to Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. These three texts are recommended by their popularity and Ben Sira's interaction with them elsewhere. James E. Harding raised a number of methodological issues concerning intertextual studies of Sirach.<sup>134</sup> Primarily, he notes the difficulties in treating the different textual witnesses and translations as a coherent tradition, suggesting that each be treated individually. Unfortunately, a fully intact version of Sirach in Hebrew has not survived. However, after the discovery of the Geniza fragments, Hebrew texts of Sirach have also been discovered at Masada and Qumran. Study of these manuscripts has illuminated the nature of the Geniza fragments. Study of the Hebrew manuscripts has also helped with the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions. While each of these traditions is "authentic," each also witness to substantial scribal intervention. Consequently, a Hebrew base text will have to be established, and a fresh English translation provided. Admittedly, this work is speculative. The Hebrew base text for this study will rely heavily on the Masada Scroll of Ben Sira, which is separated from a hypothetical autograph by no more than two centuries and little geographical distance. This base text will nevertheless be contextualized within the wide array of scribal activity.

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<sup>134</sup> James E. Harding, "Ben Sira on Friendship: Notes on Intertextuality and Method," in *Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Jarick (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 439–62.

With due diligence paid the fundamental elements of intertextual research, the relationship between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Ben Sira's inherited tradition will take place under three main themes or cultural registers, with a chapter being dedicated to each. The first of these, chapter 3, will examine if and how Ben Sira employs the various elements related to the portrayal of Yahweh as a storm-god. While Ben Sira does not seem to be alluding to any particular texts in his employment of this motif, Ben Sira is activating the storm-god register and its association with theophany. The overall impact of these elements and their associations supports his basic thesis that God can be seen in nature.

Chapter four, the second thematic chapter, will be dedicated to the divine warrior motif and the combat myth. Again, it will be shown that it is unlikely that Ben Sira is alluding to a particular text when he reproduces words and images related to the divine warrior motif and the combat myth. Instead, he is employing elements from a culturally constructed register related to the combat myth. Though Ben Sira uses mythemes related to the combat myth and martial imagery, he does not employ the combat myth *per se*. There is no implication that God must struggle with a cosmic opponent. By retaining words and imagery associated with the combat myth without employing the myth itself, Ben Sira synthesizes the “demythologizing” and potentially polemical first creation account in Genesis 1 with the cosmic combat myth. This synthesis retains the association between the combat elements and the power of God and God's agents, without positing a cosmic enemy, a notion incongruent with Ben Sira's view of the cosmos. In this rhetorical turn, Ben Sira follows Deutero-Isaiah. By

portraying God as the lord of all, Ben Sira accounts for the problem of evil and theodicy with his doctrine of opposites or balance.

The third thematic chapter, chapter 5, will deal with Ben Sira's use of the motif of divine speech. Though there are several texts which portray God as having created humanity and the cosmos by means of a physical, anthropomorphic action, Ben Sira avoids such images. As demonstrated in chapter 4, he also avoids the combat myth. Instead, Ben Sira focuses on divine speech, which is also amply represented in the books that would become the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the opening chapter of the Gospel of John, the divine speech in Sir 42:15 is not portrayed as an independent, hypostasized agent. The concept of the divine word as an agent is certainly rooted in older Jewish texts, but it does not come to full blossom until after the time of Ben Sira. Ben Sira employs the common motif of divine speech-act to reinforce his portrayal of God as powerful and active in the world in traditional ways, much like a sovereign on his throne, while avoiding most physical anthropomorphism.

Chapter 6 will depart slightly from the previous three thematic chapters. Those three looked at registers constructed from specific texts to see how Ben Sira actualized them. They were primarily intertextual. Chapter 6 will be intratextual, that is, focused primarily on how Ben Sira's portrayal of God as the ultimate sage in Sir 42:15–43:33 relates to other sections of Sirach. To be sure, there will be intertextual connections with Proverbs and Isaiah, to name but two, but this will not be the primary focus. By portraying God as the ultimate sage, Ben Sira is reinforcing the notion that the cosmos is an ordered, balanced place, a notion that is mutually reinforcing with his doctrine of

opposites/balance. Ben Sira further undergirds the notion that not only reveals God's self in creation, but also offers wisdom to the wise, to those willing to study, through creation. Creation, in addition to revelation, is one of the means by which God communicates to humanity. By following the logic revealed in creation, humans can live happy lives.

Finally, an attempt will be made to summarize the findings and to draw conclusions. Not meeting the criteria for literary allusions or echoes, most lexical and thematic similarities between Ben Sira and other texts are generic commonplaces associated with particular contexts or topics. Ben Sira draws from a culturally constructed storehouse of these words and images to further his rhetorical purpose in a way that fits his own particular point of view. Ben Sira uses the storm-god tradition and elements of the combat myth to show God as powerful and active in the world. He avoids anthropomorphic, physical images of creative activity. He also avoids elements of the combat motif that suggest God has a cosmic enemy. Anthropomorphism and divine opposition are contrary to Ben Sira's view of the cosmos as purposeful and carefully balanced. Ben Sira employs elements of the tradition that he inherited to support his own, somewhat idiosyncratic view of the cosmos. This conclusion will provide the foundation for further research.

## Chapter 2: Jesus Ben Sira, Scribe & Author

*Now I am the last to keep vigil,  
like a gleaner following the grape-pickers;  
Since by the Lord's blessing I have made progress  
till like a grape-picker I have filled my wine press,  
Consider that not for myself only have I labored,  
but for all who seek instruction.* - Sir 33:16–18 (NABRE)

This metaphor from vinification demonstrates that Ben Sira sees himself as part of a tradition, both in what he has received and in what he hands on. As a scribe, he is a literary horticulturalist, responsible for watering, fertilizing, transplanting, grafting, pruning, culling, and harvesting his culture's traditions. Having already reviewed scribal training and its potential effects on intertextuality in the previous chapter, this chapter will move investigate what grapes Ben Sira picked and what happened to the wine after he made it, that is, what traditions were available to him and how scribal practices impacted the Sirach tradition. Knowing the content and form of Ben Sira's literary tradition will establish what intertexts were available to him and his audience. Tracing scribal interventions after Sirach was authored will determine the relationship between the various manuscript and language traditions, allowing some determination to be made about the reliability of using one to reconstruct another.

It will be shown that Ben Sira was aware of traditions related to every book that would become the Tanakh, except Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, and Daniel. Ben Sira may have known Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, and Daniel, but this knowledge does not seem to have left a mark in the text he produced. Though there was some textual variation during the Second Temple period, it is most probably that Ben Sira was aware of the



proto-Masoretic text type, especially in the cases of the texts on which this study will focus: Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. Though Sirach was produced and handed on in a context where textual instantiations were no more authoritative than the scribes who edited and handed them on, the Masada Scroll of Sirach is as close to an autograph as exists in biblical studies, separated from the text's original composition (or last addition by the author) by about a century. The Masada Scroll is not pristine but is far more reliable than the other witnesses. The textual evidence which gives rise to the model of scribes-as-tradents disqualifies other textual witnesses and language traditions from speaking too loudly about or against the Masada Scroll, because they each show signs of scribal intervention. Nevertheless, some recourse must be made to those other traditions because the Masada Scroll is not completely intact in Sir 42:15–43:33.

## 2.1 - Availability: Ben Sira's Tradition

One of the most important factors for proposing or validating a diachronic, author-oriented intertextual connection is establishing the availability of the evoked text to the author of the marked text.<sup>135</sup> In the case of Ben Sira, this is fairly simple, given the precision with which Ben Sira can be dated and the certainty of its chronological position relative to other texts, especially those that would become biblical. Even with confidence in Sirach's relative chronological position, Snaith locates a

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<sup>135</sup> In "Reading through the Rearview Mirror: Inner-Biblical Exegesis and the New Testament," (*The Covenant Quarterly* 72 [2014]: 125–39) Robert L. Hubbard Jr. criticized Michael Fishbane for not establishing direction of influence carefully enough. "Availability" is Richard B. Hays' first criterion for identifying an echo (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 29–30). See also Carr, "Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts," 45.

difficulty in the study of intertextuality in Sirach in identifying Ben Sira's canon, which he grants is an anachronistic category.<sup>136</sup> The following will be an investigation of Ben Sira's tradition: first, the books included in that tradition (canon), and second, the shape of those books (text).<sup>137</sup> This study will be limited to direct influence from three works: Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. Nevertheless, works that may have influenced Ben Sira's register will be limited only to what could plausibly have known.

### *2.1.1 - The Canon and Form of Ben Sira's Tradition*

Ben Sira's use of Israel's tradition in his own sapiential work raises questions about what was included in that tradition. The grandson's prologue (Sir 0:8–10) is the first extant work from Jewish antiquity to name the traditional threefold division of the Hebrew Bible: "the Law and the Prophets and the other ancestral books." There are other, similar ancient witnesses.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, special vigilance is required to protect Ben Sira from anachronistic retrojections concerning the content of those divisions and

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<sup>136</sup> Snaith, "Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus," 4.

<sup>137</sup> Though these are theoretically distinct, at least according to their end points, the processes by which they met their endpoints are entangled. On the one hand, Robert A. Kraft ("Scripture and Canon in Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996], 1.1:199–216 ) calls "scripture consciousness" the "reverential attitudes towards the localization and preservation of traditional authoritative materials in fixed written form" (201). The development of this consciousness leads toward textual stabilization. On the other hand, "canonical consciousness" has to do with investing a limited collection of texts with special authority (202). The impulse to fix a text (scripture) is related to the authority of that text (canon). Nevertheless, tradents evidently felt comfortable modifying for their own purposes the texts that they cited as authoritative.

<sup>138</sup> Examples include 2 Maccabees 2:14 (late second century BCE), in which Judas gathers the books scattered by the war and 2 Maccabees 13:7 & 10, which also mentions the Law and implies that it has specific content. 4QMMT (around the turn of the era) categorizes scripture under the subdivisions of Moses, the Prophets, and David. The sectarian *Rule of the Community* (1QS) and Luke-Acts tend to divide scripture into "Moses and the Prophets" (see especially Luke 16:16, 29, 31; Acts 26:22; 28:23).

from the assumption that those divisions were universally accepted.<sup>139</sup> The various canonical finish lines often beg the question about the development of those canons.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, Philip Davies warns against the “teleological fallacy,” by which the canonical end is seen as inevitable and read anachronistically back in to previous stages.<sup>141</sup> Although Sirach does mention the three-fold division of the Hebrew Bible that gives the Tanakh its name, there was no single canon during the Second Temple.<sup>142</sup> There was no Bible, only scriptures; there was no authoritative and universally accepted collection of

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<sup>139</sup> A point made by Beentjes in “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” 170.

<sup>140</sup> Within the guild of biblical studies there has been a tendency to study allusions from one text that became canonical to another text that became canonical. However, the present study will eschew the designation of “inner-biblical,” which has been used by others, including Michael A. Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985]). It is inapplicable to Ben Sira, who had no Bible, only texts which enjoyed varying degrees of authority. Furthermore, the phrase is inherently ahistorical and problematic, because no author of any book that became part of the standard canon for Jews (Hebrew Scriptures) or Christians (Old Testament, including the Deuterocanon, and New Testament) had a “Bible.” For more on the authority of texts, see Michael L. Satlow’s *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Similar objections can be made to the term “inter-biblical,” used by Alan Kam-Yau Chan in *Melchizedek Passages in the Bible: A Case Study for Inner-Biblical and Inter-Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Katarzyna Tempczyk, Josaphat Tam, Amalia Jiva, and Jaroslaw Moeglich (Boston: de Gruyter, 2016). In addition to being liable to the charge of anachronism, Chan’s vocabulary seems to be Marcionite, as though the New Testament alone is the Christian Bible.

<sup>141</sup> Philip R. Davies “Loose Canons: Reflections on the Formation of the Hebrew Bible,” *JHebS* 1 (1997): 57–76. Quote from page 57. Contra Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes*, AB 39 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987], 10) who seem to assume the content of the three divisions. Contra Bruce K. Waltke, (“How We Got the Hebrew Bible: The Text and Canon of the Old Testament,” in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint. *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*, ed. Peter W. Flint, Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Florentino Garcia Martinez [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 27–50) who sees indications of the relative stability of the proto-MT and its popularity among certain groups as evidence that the canon was closed and stable. Also contra F. F. Bruce (*The Canon of Scripture*, 28), who seems to be motivated or at least influenced by confessional concerns.

<sup>142</sup> Some scholars still hold that the “Old Testament” or “Hebrew Bible” existed, was textually stable, and universally authoritative. For instance, see Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, *The Psalms in the New Testament*, *The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). In the introduction to their edited volume, they write: “To first century Jews such as Jesus of Nazareth and his first followers, the collection of writings that we use to call the ‘Old Testament’, was Holy Scripture, a divine revelation that was relevant to their past, present and future” (1).

texts, but there were texts afforded varying degrees of authority by different communities.<sup>143</sup> Carr argues that the relatively disparate groups of Judaism at the time of Josephus accept a similar body of literature as authoritative.<sup>144</sup> It is easy to overstate both unity and diversity of the category “Scripture” through the Second Temple period. In the end, the “majority canon” of the Pharisees became the de facto canon for Jewry, more by attrition than anything else.<sup>145</sup>

If there was no canon until the first century CE at the earliest, then it cannot be presumed that Ben Sira had a closed canon in the second century BCE.<sup>146</sup> In fact, internal evidence suggests that he did not. In his prologue, the grandson refers alludes to the Tanakh three times (0:1–2; 0:8–10; 0:24–25). In each of these the “Law” is constant. “Prophets” (0:1, 0:9) or “prophecies” (0:24) is a category which shows minor variation. The third category shows more variation: “the others that followed them” (0:2), “the other ancestral books” (0:10), and “the remaining books” (0:25).<sup>147</sup> That

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<sup>143</sup> For instance, see James H. Charlesworth, “Writings ostensibly outside the Canon,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology, ed. Craig A. Evans and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 57–85. See also Jude 1:14’s citation of 1 Enoch.

<sup>144</sup> Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 242–51.

<sup>145</sup> Contra the “myth of stabilization” see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 174–75. This also is the basic thesis of Timothy H. Lim in *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For more, see Armin Lange, “‘The Law, the Prophets, and the Other Books of the Fathers’ (Sir, Prologue): Canonical Lists in Ben Sira and Elsewhere?” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55–80.

<sup>146</sup> Coggins, *Sirach*, 62.

<sup>147</sup> Roger Beckwith (*The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church: and its Background in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 110–11) argues that the definite article implies the three-fold canon was defined and closed in the time of both the grandson and Ben Sira. Weighing the

there is no technical term yet for the third division suggests that it is not a definite, closed category.<sup>148</sup> Lange argues that each of the divisions was an open category during the time of Ben Sira.<sup>149</sup> If the three divisions are taken as categories in the time of Ben Sira, then they were not yet fixed. There are suggestions that Ben Sira and his grandson considered Sirach to be “inspired,” which would necessitate that the canon was not yet closed, at least not until Sirach was added.<sup>150</sup> In sum, the internal evidence provided

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presence of the Greek article more than the variation in name or suggesting that each of the names refers to a different set of set books is untenable.

<sup>148</sup> If the category was not yet closed for the grandson, it was unlikely to be closed for Ben Sira himself. Nevertheless, Ben Sira also alludes to the threefold division of authoritative Hebrew texts in Sir 39:1. Later, he hints at what is included in this third category “the wisdom of all the ancients” (σοφίαν πάντων ἀρχαίων [39:1]) when he lists activities of the scribe and the objects of his study, which include: “the tales of famous men” (διηγήσεις ἀνδρῶν ὀνομαστῶν [39:2]), “parables” (παραβολή [39:2]), “proverbs” (παροιμία [39:3]), and “riddles of parables” (αἰνίγμασι παραβολῶν [39:3]). Di Lella (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 452) observes that Ben Sira himself mentions each of the three divisions in rather quick succession (38:34–39:1). They also observe that Ben Sira’s order Law-Wisdom-Prophets matches the ordering of the LXX while the grandson’s order Law-Prophets-Other matches the Hebrew Bible. That this is exactly the opposite of what would be expected given that Ben Sira is writing in Hebrew and his grandson in Greek suggests these categories are still unstable. Furthermore, other literature is mentioned in the opening verses of Sirach 39. Following the logic of Di Lella would necessitate that these are additional categories of the Bible, which is untenable.

<sup>149</sup> Lange, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Other Books of the Fathers’ (Sir, Prologue),” 55–80. Timothy H. Lim (*The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 94–106) has argued that the three references to three divisions of what would become the Tanakh do not point to a scriptural canon but a scribal curriculum. Granting the technical distinction between canon of scripture and scribal curriculum, the two seem intrinsically intertwined, held together by the concept of authority. The curriculum, as a list of authoritative texts for the education and enculturation of scribes, is a proto-canon, a precursor to an officially established list of accepted texts. The curriculum is a *de facto* canon before there is a *de jure* canon. However, this curriculum or canon does not yet seem to be entirely closed in the time of Ben Sira.

<sup>150</sup> In Sir 24 (not extant in Hebrew) Ben Sira sees himself in continuity with Israel’s tradition, where Wisdom dwells, as one who passes on that tradition and therefore Wisdom. This sentiment is echoed in Sir 33:18 (κατανοήσατε ὅτι οὐκ ἔμοι μόνῳ ἐκοπίασα, ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν τοῖς ζητοῦσιν παιδεῖαν.). He does so not only for himself but for all who seek wisdom (Sir 24:34 ἀλλ’ ἅπασιν τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτήν), and he will pour out teaching like prophecy and leave it for generations forever (Sir 24:33 ἔτι διδασκαλίαν ὡς προφητεῖαν ἐκχεῶ, καὶ καταλείψω αὐτήν εἰς γενεὰς αἰώνων). Finally, in chapter 51, Ben Sira identifies himself as a conduit for wisdom and the piety that comes from it. According to the grandson’s prologue, Ben Sira wrote the work so that those who seek to learn can profit from living according to the law (Sir 0:13–14 ὅπως οἱ φιλομαθεῖς καὶ τούτων ἔνοχοι γενόμενοι πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐπιπροσθῶσιν διὰ τῆς ἐννόμου βιώσεως). While the cases of Sir 24 and 38 may be ambiguous, in Sir 33:16–18 Ben Sira likens himself to the first gleaner. Gleaning suggests that the harvest is over, and a new phase has begun. This image,

both by Ben Sira and his grandson suggest not only that the third category of texts important for the education and enculturation of scribes—after the Law and Prophets—was not yet defined and also that Sirach may be included in it.

Despite the state of the external evidence, internal evidence bears witness to the texts and traditions that Ben Sira did know and use: the traditional Jewish (Masoretic) canon, except Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, and Daniel.<sup>151</sup> Ben Sira alludes to all of the other books (or traditions related to those books) that would become canonical.<sup>152</sup> The primary source of allusion in the Book of Ben Sira is the “Praise of the Famous” in Sir 44–50.<sup>153</sup> Absent from the “Praise of the Famous” are Deuteronomy and most of the books from the writings, except Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.<sup>154</sup> References to the others,

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however, may be an attempt at modesty, for Ben Sira is still doing what his predecessors are doing, namely, picking grapes. For a dissenting opinion, see Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 377–79.

<sup>151</sup> This is a modest expansion of the “recurrence” test, proposed by Richard B. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 30), while recognizing that quantity of potential or weak references is no match for quality.

<sup>152</sup> Wright (“Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira,” 363) argues that Ben Sira’s simply mentioning the figures that we know through a book does not constitute enough evidence to conclude that Ben Sira was familiar with the book as such.

<sup>153</sup> Because of this, Alon Goshen-Gottstein (“Ben Sira’s Praise of the Fathers: A Canon-Conscious Reading,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference. Durham–Ushaw College, 2001*, BZAW 321, ed Renate Egger-Wenzel [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002], 235–67) argues that the “Praise of the Famous” is a canon list. Goshen-Gottstein’s thesis is that Ben Sira is “actively and consciously describing the canon, rather than simply providing us information in passing” (242 n. 21). The two options provided are a false dichotomy. I agree that Ben Sira is “consciously and actively”—to the degree that those things are possible to measure through a mediating text—describing a collection of authoritative texts (probably) and/or traditions (possibly). However, a canon is something self-consciously decided on by a community. There is no evidence that such a thing exists during the time of Ben Sira.

<sup>154</sup> Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 208–12. For a discussion of the cases of Chronicles, Ezra, and Qoheleth, see Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” 171–72. Beentjes (“In Search of Parallels: Ben Sira and the Book of Kings,” in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 [Leuven: Peeters, 2006], 187–99) demonstrates how Ben Sira used traditional material from the Book of Kings to produce new contexts.

(excluding Ruth, Songs, Esther, and Daniel) can be detected throughout the rest of the book.<sup>155</sup> Ben Sira's favorite book to quote is Proverbs.<sup>156</sup> In the words of Beentjes, "there is a consensus of opinion that Ben Sira does not mention, or quote from, the books of Esther, Ruth, Daniel, Song of Songs, and the Book of Ezra."<sup>157</sup> Lange and Weigold generally confirm this position; they find allusions in Sirach to every book of, or at least to the traditions contained in, the Hebrew Bible, except Nahum and Habakkuk (which are included in the 12 Minor Prophets mentioned in Sir 49:10), Lamentations (which may be considered part of Jeremiah), Songs (although they detect a possible allusion to Songs 2:9 in Sir 14:23 MS A), Ruth, Esther, and Daniel. Contrary to Beentjes, Lange and Weigold do detect a handful of references to Ezra, three of which are in Sir 49:12 MS B.<sup>158</sup> Ben Sira's references follow traditional canon lists, including his list of the 12 minor prophets. In sum, Ben Sira is aware of and employs most of the traditions that become part of the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament, though some works are on the periphery or his use of them is open to debate.

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<sup>155</sup> There is a whole volume dedicated to Ben Sira's interaction with Chronicles: *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes*. Edited by Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol. Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 7. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011.

<sup>156</sup> Alexander A. Di Lella, "Ben Sira's Doctrine on the Discipline of the Tongue: An Intertextual and Synchronic Analysis," in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, DCLS 1, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 233–52.

<sup>157</sup> Beentjes, "Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira," 172.

<sup>158</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74. However, given the nature of MS B, these may be harmonizations.

### 2.1.2 - Intertexts for this Study

Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator in Sir 42:15–43:33 provides an excellent example of the more subtle types of intertextuality. Lange and Weigold found a total of seven allusions from Sir 42:15–43:33 to three different books that would become biblical: Psalms, Isaiah, and Job.<sup>159</sup> Additionally, Sauer argues that Genesis 1 is operating in the background of the same poem.<sup>160</sup> Yet, according to Beentjes, Ben Sira never quotes Genesis.<sup>161</sup> Further, Beentjes' precise methodologies, using exact quotations and unique word combinations, produce a somewhat minimalist view. Nevertheless, commentators like Di Lella detect numerous parallels with other texts.<sup>162</sup> Since the purpose of this work is to demonstrate that Ben Sira participated within a literary tradition that shaped his new expressions of that tradition, the field will be narrowed to the books which contain the most material about creation: Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. Both internal and external evidence also recommends each of these traditions.

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<sup>159</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 311.

<sup>160</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 311–21.

<sup>161</sup> Beentjes, "Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 169–86. See especially page 157. Beentjes concludes that "Ben Sira in all those cases where he quotes Scripture, he not only adopted the biblical wording as such, but also added a contextual clue that supports his use of Scripture." (Quote from page 157) Elsewhere, Beentjes observes that a number of "unique word combinations," that is "[a]n expression or formula consisting of at least two words that is found only once in the Book of Ben Sira and in the Hebrew Bible," produce 53 apparent connections between Sirach and books of the Hebrew Bible. However, 43 of these connections disintegrate when their elements are situated within their native, dissimilar contexts. ("Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research," *Bijdragen* 66 [2005]: 131–44.)

<sup>162</sup> Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes*, AB 39 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987).



### 2.1.2.1 - Genesis

External evidence for the popularity of Genesis could be supplied by a number of sources, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Literature, and the New Testament. Genesis is well attested in the findings of the Judean Desert, which speaks to the book's importance.<sup>163</sup> Nineteen fragmentary copies of Genesis were recovered from a combination of five different caves at Qumran (1, 2, 4, 6, and 8).<sup>164</sup> Outside of Qumran, four other fragmentary manuscripts of Genesis have been recovered. Two were found in Wadi Murabba'at; one, in Wadi Sdeir; and the last, in Masada.<sup>165</sup> According to Crawford, all of these Genesis manuscripts conform to the proto-Masoretic text-type.<sup>166</sup> This confirms Ulrich's conclusion that Genesis was basically stable by the late Second Temple

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<sup>163</sup> Sidnie White Crawford, "Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen, VTSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 353–73. See especially pages 354–55.

<sup>164</sup> The oldest is 6QpaleoGen, and as the name suggests it was written in paleo-Hebrew script. Based on that script, it dates between 250–150 BCE. The latest manuscript is 4QGen<sup>b</sup> and it dates to between 30–100 CE. Between the 19 witnesses almost the entire book is attested.

<sup>165</sup> These four manuscripts date paleographically to the late first or early second centuries of the common era.

<sup>166</sup> Crawford, "Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls," 355

period.<sup>167</sup> Genesis was an immensely popular intertext in early Jewish literature.<sup>168</sup>

Throughout the Christian New Testament, authors make use of Genesis.<sup>169</sup>

There is ample internal evidence that Ben Sira was familiar with the traditions of Genesis. The breadth and intensity of the intertextual evidence suggest that Ben Sira was familiar with the book itself, and not simply an intermediary. This does not rule out the possibility that some of the connections to the book of Genesis are indirect, but, given the popularity of Genesis and Ben Sira's use of Genesis traditions, it seems unlikely that all of the intertextual relationships are indirect.

Of the 327 biblical citations and 29 possible allusions that Lange and Weigold identify in the book of Ben Sira, 30 of them are to Genesis.<sup>170</sup> Of those 30, 17 are to the primeval history (Gen 1–11). Relatedly, Maurice Gilbert argues that Ben Sira is a careful

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<sup>167</sup> Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making," 59. Sidnie White Crawford (*Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]) observes a change in the mechanics of how scribes interact with a text during the Second Temple period. Scribes become increasingly reluctant to intervene in a text by harmonizing and editing, and instead opt for re-writing, as in the cases of the Temple Scroll, the Genesis Apocryphon, and Jubilees.

<sup>168</sup> Characters from the book donated their names to a number of independent works, including *Life of Adam and Eve*; *Testament of Adam*; *Apocalypse of Adam*; 1 and 2 *Enoch*; *Testament of Abraham*; *Apocalypse of Abraham*; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*; *Prayer of Jacob*; and the *History of Joseph*. Genesis even inspired "fan fiction," like the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Works like *Jubilees*, and Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* are clearly textually dependent on Genesis. Flavius Josephus makes extensive use of Genesis, and Philo of Alexandria wrote a commentary on it. This brief survey is enough to demonstrate Genesis's popularity as an intertext during the Second Temple Period. For more, see Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, "Genesis in Early Jewish Literature," in *Genesis in the New Testament*, ed. Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, T&T Clark Library of Biblical Studies 466 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 7–26.

<sup>169</sup> Jesus alludes to Gen 1:27 and 2:24 in Mark 10:6. The Gospel of Luke alludes to Genesis at least three times (Luke 3:38, 11:50–51; 17:26–27). Paul refers to God's act of creation in Acts 17:24–27, and he makes ample use of Genesis in his epistles (see especially Romans and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22). The flood of Noah is mentioned in 2 Peter 3:5–6.

<sup>170</sup> Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 306–16 & 345–74.

reader of Genesis, finding allusions to Gen 1–11 in Sir 15:11–18:14; 24; 33:7–15 (36:7–16 in the Greek); 39:16, 40:11; and 42:15–16.<sup>171</sup>

Five sections of Sirach have been the subject of comparison to Genesis. The first section of Sirach with a probable intertextual relationship to Genesis is Sir 15:11–18:14.<sup>172</sup> The second location in Sirach where scholars detect an intertextual relationship with Genesis is chapter 24.<sup>173</sup> The third section, Sirach 25:24, speaks of sin and death entering the world through a woman, which seems to contain an allusion to

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<sup>171</sup> Maurice Gilbert, “Ben Sira, Reader of Genesis 1–11,” in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit: Essays in Honor of Alexander A Di Lella, O.F.M.*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent T. M. Skemp (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 89–99. Most of these connections are affirmed by Lange and Weigold (*Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 309).

<sup>172</sup> Beentjes, “De verhalen van het begin terug(ge)lezen: Jesus Sirach en Genesis 1–3,” in *Stromen uit Eden. Genesis 1–11 in bijbel, Joodse exegese en moderne literatuur. Aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. N.R.M. Poulssen bij gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als hoogleraar in de exegese van het Oude Testament en het Hebreeuws aan de Theologische Faculteit Tilburg op 22 mei 1992*, ed. Wilhelmus Johannes Cornelis Weren and C. M. L. Verdegaal (Boxtel, Germany: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1992), 98–110. Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 & 345–74. John J. Collins, “Interpretations of the Creation of Humanity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 29–43. Shane Berg, “Ben Sira, the Genesis Creation Accounts, and the Knowledge of God’s Will,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 139–57. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 122–23. Hulisani Ramantswana, “Creation Retold: Use of Scripture and Tradition in Sirach 16:24–17:14,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38 (2017): 1–9.

<sup>173</sup> Hartmut Gese, “Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology: The Consistent Development of Biblical Theology,” *HBT* 3 (1981): 23–57. Matthew Goff, “Gardens of Knowledge: Teachers in Ben Sira, 4QInstruction, and the Hodayot,” in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, *EJL* 41 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 171–93.

Gen 2–3.<sup>174</sup> The fourth section is Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33).<sup>175</sup>

Finally, in his Praise of the Ancestors (Sir 44–49), Ben Sira makes ample use of traditions that can also be found in Genesis.<sup>176</sup>

Though some scholars have suggested that Ben Sira did not know Genesis in the form that we have it, this position has little evidence to support it. Based on some elements missing from Ben Sira’s recapitulation of Israelite creation theology in his Hymn to the Creator, Sauer suggests that Ben Sira does not know Gen 2–8 and Gen 10–11.<sup>177</sup> Saul M. Olyan demonstrates Ben Sira’s persistent reliance on P, to the exclusion of other Pentateuchal material.<sup>178</sup> Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis investigates the reception of

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<sup>174</sup> Ben Sira’s interpretation of Genesis 2–3 in chapters 16–17 seems to deny a “fall” as he states that God showed humanity “good and evil,” while implying that death was part of the human experience from the beginning. Earlier, Ben Sira denied that humanity was disobedient (Sir 16:28). While the book of the prophet Ezekiel and the watchers tradition witness to different traditions concerning the “fall” of humanity, Ben Sira’s reference to a single woman being responsible is only consonant with the tradition contained in Genesis. Based partially on this evidence, Levison (*Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*, 33–48) concludes that Sirach contains somewhat contradictory interpretations of Genesis 1–3, each adapted to fit the rhetorical context. This conclusion militates against that of Sauer (“Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” 316), who suggests that Gen 2–8 and 10–11 are unknown to Ben Sira. He seems to presume that if Ben Sira were aware of them, then he would not write about the “fall” as he did. However, as we have seen above, scribes enjoyed some license to interpret and adapt their received traditions, even in contradictory ways within the same work.

<sup>175</sup> Sauer (“Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” 311–21) argues that Gen 1–11 is operating in the background of the Hymn to the Creator. Hermann Spieckermann (“Is God’s Creation Good? From Hesiodus to Ben Sira,” in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise [Genesis 2–3] and its Reception History*, ed. Christoph Riedweg and Konrad Schmid [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 79–94) also recognizes the connection between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Genesis 1. Schechter and Taylor (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20) only see two connections to Genesis in the hymn. Lange and Weigold (*Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 310) do not see any.

<sup>176</sup> As he recapitulates the history of Israel as presented in the books that would become biblical, he mentions famous figures from Genesis, including Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. In that section Lange and Weigold (*Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 310) detect no fewer than 11 intertextual connections between the two texts. Schechter and Taylor (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 21) affirm a number of these.

<sup>177</sup> Sauer, “Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33,” 316.

<sup>178</sup> Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” 261–86.

P material in Sir 24 and 50, concluding that although Ben Sira and his grandson knew the P material intimately, they had a canonical consciousness that interpreted P material within its larger context.<sup>179</sup> Emphasis of Ben Sira and his grandson on P material is understandable given Ben Sira's association with the Temple and priestly ideology, but there is much evidence in favor of their knowing J traditions and therefore a version of Genesis similar to the one that would become canonical. Sir 25:24 seems to be an allusion to Genesis 3, while Sir 16–17 blends elements of both the P and J creation accounts. Arguments which suggest that if an ancient author knew a source, he ought to have employed it in a way which a modern reader expects—or would have if they were writing—are not a solid foundation for determining that an author is ignorant of a particular text.

#### 2.1.2.2 - *Psalms*

External evidence demonstrates that psalms were very popular. They were one of the most popular works in the Dead Sea Scrolls, totaling approximately 37 total manuscripts.<sup>180</sup> This book is one of the most three referenced books in the New

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<sup>179</sup> Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira," in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*, ed. Craig A. Evans (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 69–113.

<sup>180</sup> Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making," 63–64. Because of the fragmentary nature of the manuscripts, it is not always possible to determine whether fragments originated from the same manuscript or not. For instance, Peter W. Flint ("The Psalms Scrolls from the Judaean Desert: Relationships and Textual Affiliations," in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992*, ed. George J. Brooke with Florentino Garcia Martinez, STDJ 15 [Leiden: Brill, 1994] 31–52) counts 36 manuscripts.

Testament, with over 100 intertextual connections.<sup>181</sup> It is clear that psalms had a pervasive cultural influence and were widely copied and collected.<sup>182</sup>

Books of psalms demonstrate some textual diversity, even within modern canons. Based on the diversity of psalters found at Qumran, many of which included psalms that would not become canonical, Mika S. Pajunen argues that there was no single, authoritative Book of Psalms.<sup>183</sup> William Yarchin comes to the same conclusion after the variations among medieval Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>184</sup> According to Mroczek, the variety of psalm collections contain both psalm and psalm-like compositions, arranged for different purposes, including pedagogical, exorcistic, interpretative, and liturgical.<sup>185</sup> Though no little debate has occurred concerning the status of these psalm collections as “primary” or “secondary,” the manuscript evidence is not without some unifying characteristics. Peter W. Flint shows that although scholars have recovered at least four collections of psalms, representing at least two recensions (proto-Masoretic and Qumranite), psalms 1–89 showed little variation in those collections, while there was much greater variation in the psalms that appeared afterward.<sup>186</sup> Flint concludes that

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<sup>181</sup> For instance, see Moyise and Menken, *The Psalms in the New Testament*, 247–48.

<sup>182</sup> Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 11 & 15.

<sup>183</sup> Mika S. Pajunen, “Perspectives on the Existence of a Particular Authoritative Book of Psalms in the Late Second Temple Period,” *JSOT* 39 (2014): 139–63.

<sup>184</sup> William Yarchin, “Were the Psalms Collections at Qumran True Psalters?” *JBL* 134 (2015): 775–89.

<sup>185</sup> Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 15.

<sup>186</sup> Peter W. Flint, “The Psalms Scrolls from the Judaean Desert: Relationships and Textual Affiliations,” in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International*

the psalms 1–89 were basically stable by the mid-first century CE. Unfortunately, even this small foundation erodes when one acknowledges chronology: this is at least a century and half after Ben Sira authored Sirach.

Complicating the matter is the fact that a part of Sirach (51:13–20, 30) was found imbedded in a psalms scroll at Qumran (11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup>). The order of discovery has led some scholars to assume that these lines were originally from Sirach, though Manfred R. Lehmann suggests that the work is neither original to Ben Sira nor to this psalms scroll.<sup>187</sup> Marko Marttila argues that Sir 51:12a-o is original to Sirach, since its employment of other now-canonical psalms matches Ben Sira's style elsewhere.<sup>188</sup>

Internal evidence suggests that Ben Sira knew and used psalms in some form. Lange and Weigold demonstrate a pattern of dependence of Ben Sira on psalms, identifying 34 allusions to psalms throughout Sirach. According to Lange and Weigold, Ben Sira alludes to 25 different psalms with a possible 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>189</sup> Fewer than half of those

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*Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992*, ed. George J. Brooke with Florentino Garcia Martinez, STDJ 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 31–52.

<sup>187</sup> Manfred R. Lehmann, "11 Q PSa and Ben Sira," *RevQ* 11 (1983): 239–51. Lehmann actually falls victim the same logic that he critiques, as he argues that Sirach is used by the author of 11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup>, who is authoring a secondary liturgical text and employing Sirach in a way consistent with Rabbinic opinion about the book. While commenting on the canonical status of Sirach among the Rabbis is unnecessary here, it still seems strange that Lehmann assumes that Sirach is primary and 11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup> is secondary. It seems equally plausible that they are both secondary, or tertiary, for that matter. In short, it is possible that both Sirach and 11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup> employ the same traditions that are unattested elsewhere, meaning that they are both dependent on a common source or tradition.

<sup>188</sup> Marko Marttila, "Ben Sira's Use of Various Psalm Genres," in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner, BZAW 486 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 356–83.

<sup>189</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74. The psalms to which they find an intertextual relationship are 22, 25, 26, 34, 39, 51, 59, 66, 68, 72, 89, 102, 104, 106, 107, 111, 112, 113, 119, 121, 128, 132, 136, 141, and 148, plus a possible allusion to Ps 38.

allusions are to the “stable” part of the psalms collections (psalms 1–89), which suggests either a familiarity with the proto-Masoretic book of Psalms or a broad knowledge of psalmic compositions in general. Corley argues that Ben Sira reproduces commonplaces like forms, motifs, and vocabulary from various psalms throughout Sirach.<sup>190</sup> While Corley does observe a particular reliance of Psalms 89 and 119, he also notes that Ben Sira avoids exact quotation, preferring to fit the received material into its new context. Unfortunately, Corley does not tread Sir 42:15–43:33 in any detail.

It is likely that Ben Sira knew at least one collection of psalms but possibly more, given that they were so popular and that his work seems to have an intertextual relationship with them. However, it is unclear in what precise form Ben Sira encountered the psalms.<sup>191</sup> Askin suggests that Ben Sira may have known a collection of the psalms like 4QPs<sup>d</sup>, since Ben Sira places his Hymn to the Creator next to the Praise of the Famous, similar to the effect of the appearance of Ps 106:48 in 4QPsd.<sup>192</sup> Askin admits that this evidence is far from conclusive. We may tentatively work with the (proto-)Masoretic text as an instantiation of the tradition from which Ben Sira was drawing. This starting place is further justified by the fact the Sirach and the proto-Masoretic version of the psalms seemed to travel in the same circle, as the psalms scroll

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<sup>190</sup> Jeremy Corley, “Ben Sira’s Hebrew Poetry in Comparison with the Psalter,” in *Discovering, Deciphering and Dissenting: Ben Sira Manuscripts after 120 years*, ed. James K. Aitken, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Yearbook* 2018 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 243–66.

<sup>191</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 194.

<sup>192</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 136–37.



discovered at Masada was proto-Masoretic, containing psalms 81–85.<sup>193</sup> In this study, psalms must then be taken individually and not as a unified, collected work. The shape of the individual psalms must also be left as an open question.

#### 2.1.2.3 - *Isaiah*

External evidence demonstrates that the book of the prophet Isaiah was popular. Along with psalms and Deuteronomy, it is one of the three most attested traditions found in the Judaean desert. Additionally, Isaiah is one of the two most common intertexts for the New Testament, containing over 100 intertextual connections, according to the count of Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken.<sup>194</sup> At least 21 copies of Isaiah were found in the Qumran caves, though no copies were found at Masada and only a single copy was found at Wadi Murabba't.<sup>195</sup> Emanuel Tov argues that because some of the manuscripts of Isaiah discovered at Qumran originated elsewhere, while others were copied at the site, the witnesses discovered at Qumran are probably representative of ancient Israel as a whole.<sup>196</sup> Tov concludes that although there are textual differences, the known manuscripts of Isaiah do not differ from each other recensionally.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, Askin finds that the Isaiah material in Sirach is

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<sup>193</sup> Flint, "The Psalms Scrolls from the Judaean Desert," 47.

<sup>194</sup> Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, *Isaiah in the New Testament*, The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 211–12.

<sup>195</sup> Emanuel Tov, "The Text of Isaiah at Qumran," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Boyles and Craig A. Evans, VTSup 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2:491–511.

<sup>196</sup> Tov, "The Text of Isaiah at Qumran," 2:491–92.

<sup>197</sup> Tov, "The Text of Isaiah at Qumran," 2:511.

more akin to the Masoretic text than to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>.<sup>198</sup> Given that the differences between the various manuscripts of Isaiah are relatively minor, an intertextual study of Sirach and Isaiah may be done tentatively with the Masoretic text.

Internal evidence also recommends the study of Isaiah as a potential intertext for Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator, as Lange and Weigold detect 25 allusions to Isaiah throughout Sirach, with an additional four potential allusions.<sup>199</sup> Of those allusions, three occur within Sir 42:15–43:33. Ben Sira mentions Isaiah by name in Sir 48:20, and Askin finds that Ben Sira has harmonized three sources (2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Isaiah) in his portrayal of Hezekiah-Isaiah in Sirach 48, without showing any preference.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, Beentjes demonstrates that Ben Sira treated his sources like Isaiah with freedom, even as he quotes them.<sup>201</sup> For instance, Ben Sira neglects to mention the Babylonian Exile in his *Laus Patrum*. In addition to the section of his book in which he (selectively) rehearses Israel's history, Ben Sira also quotes Isaiah in chapter 36, a petition for the people of God.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 109.

<sup>199</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

<sup>200</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 95.

<sup>201</sup> Pantratijs C. Beentjes, "Hezekiah and Isaiah: A Study on Ben Sira 48, 15–25," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 145–58.

<sup>202</sup> Pantratijs C. Beentjes, "Relations between Ben Sira and the Book of Isaiah: Some Methodical Observations," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 201–6.

In sum, the internal evidence provided by the work of Lange and Weigold, Askin, and Beentjes demonstrates a pattern of dependence of Ben Sira on the Book of Isaiah, while the popularity of the book in the Judaean desert and in the New Testament suggest that it was widely available. While the text of Isaiah demonstrates some diversity, Ben Sira was probably familiar with a version of the book close to the Masoretic text.

### *2.1.3 - Conclusion*

The rather chaotic textual situation during the Second Temple period notwithstanding, a strong case can be made for Ben Sira's use of three particular sources: Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. This is not to deny Ben Sira's relationship to other texts and traditions, but to narrow the focus to a more manageable corpus. Each of these three works was popular during the Second Temple period, as evidenced by the abundance of copies recovered in the Judaean desert, and that popularity continued after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Each of these texts or collections of texts are employed by Ben Sira in places other than the Hymn to the Creator. Finally, it seems as though Ben Sira was familiar with recensions of each of these traditions generally corresponding to the Masoretic text. Bruce K. Waltke sees indications of the relative stability of the proto-MT and its popularity among certain groups as evidence that the canon was closed and stable.<sup>203</sup> Corroborating evidence is

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<sup>203</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "How We Got the Hebrew Bible: The Text and Canon of the Old Testament," in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint. *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*, ed. Peter W. Flint, Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Florentino Garcia Martinez (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27–50.

provided by the sages. Kugel demonstrates ideological affinities, manifest in the texts which they produced, between the Pharisees and the wisdom schools.<sup>204</sup> Since the Pharisees used the proto-MT, it is likely that Ben Sira did as well. Tov observes that every Second Temple period site where Hebrew manuscripts were found exclusively contains the proto-Masoretic textual tradition.<sup>205</sup> Lange has demonstrated Ben Sira's reliance on the proto-Masoretic version of Jeremiah.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, the Masoretic text of Genesis, Isaiah, and the Psalms will serve as heuristic representatives of Ben Sira and his audience's potentially evoked texts.

## 2.2 - The Text of Ben Sira's Book

Just as Ben Sira's inherited tradition was pluriform, so too are the witnesses to his own work. Indications of the oral-textual matrix within which scribes lived and worked can be found in the texts they produced. Wright describes the role of the scribe vis-à-vis the inherited tradition: "Sapiential exemplarity (if we can call it that) locates inspiration, understood both as revealed by God in a prophetic manner and as developed from interpretation of the inherited tradition, in the corporate work of the sages as a class of people who produced, transmitted and preserved the Israelite

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<sup>204</sup> Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage," 1–26. On some important difference between Ben Sira and the Pharisees, see Gammie, "The Sage in Sirach," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 355–72. See especially pages 360–64.

<sup>205</sup> Emanuel Tov, "The Socio-Religious Setting of the (Proto-)Masoretic Text," *Textus* 27 (2018): 124–52.

<sup>206</sup> Armin Lange, "The Book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Ben Sira," in *Making the Biblical Text: textual Studies in the Hebrew and Greek Bible*, ed. Innocent Himbaza, OBO 273 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 118–61.

wisdom/literary tradition.”<sup>207</sup> As such, the location of authority, which is ultimately traceable back to God, is localized in both the text and the tradent. Because texts and tradents were both loci of cultural authority, traditions were often employed by tradents in creative ways. The products of these textual interventions exist on a scale from new compositions that are clearly dependent on older ones (like the Book of Jubilees, the Temple Scroll, the Genesis Apocryphon, 1&2 Kings, and Deuteronomy)<sup>208</sup> to minor but meaningful variations.<sup>209</sup> The anthological Manuscript C from the Cairo Geniza may be justifiably called a new composition, for the re-arrangement of material is extensive, but it is clearly dependent on the fuller version of Sirach.<sup>210</sup> Manuscript B’s language was updated, with more obscure words or Aramaisms being replaced with

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<sup>207</sup> Wright, “Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar,” 82. See also Burton L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira’s Hymn in Praise of the Fathers*, CSHJ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 126–27.

<sup>208</sup> Sidnie White Crawford (*Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]) demonstrates the kinds of changes that Pentateuchal texts underwent at the hands of scribes. Particularly she demonstrates a tendency toward harmonization and content editing in the pre-Samaritan Pentateuch, in addition to more robust changes in works like Jubilees, the Temple Scroll, and Genesis Apocryphon.

<sup>209</sup> For further subdivision of scribal interventions, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 240. Michael A. Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], 6) writes about the relationship between the content of a tradition (which calls *traditum*, following D. Knight) and that tradition’s process of transmission (*traditio*). Fishbane demonstrates an interplay between the text and its audience, arguing that detectable scribal interventions (which he categorizes as scribal, legal, aggadic, and mantological) are the evidence of this process. He demonstrates how the same scribes responsible for preserving their own tradition, often modified it, leaving in the text marks of the reading community’s interaction with that text. James L. Kugel (“Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage,” in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, ed. James L. Kugel [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001], 1–26) also studied how scribes reference and modify previous texts. Much like Fishbane, he sees the same tendencies and assumptions about the text continue in later interpretive traditions and assumptions about how texts mean.

<sup>210</sup> For more on manuscript C, see Jeremy Corley, “An Alternative Hebrew Form of Ben Sira: The Anthological Manuscript C,” in *Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira: Transmission and Interpretation*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3–22.

more common, biblical words.<sup>211</sup> In some cases, these interventions obscure original features, such as acrostics.<sup>212</sup> In others, they add puns.<sup>213</sup> Some manuscripts of Sirach have been harmonized with the Masoretic text version of other books, strengthening textual connections.<sup>214</sup>

Eventually, scribes transitioned from author/editor to copyist.<sup>215</sup> The lines between the two are blurry, and it is often difficult to distinguish between a literary edition or a scribal intervention.<sup>216</sup> Sidnie White Crawford has demonstrated that during the late Second Temple period, scribal activity with regard to the Pentateuch was on a spectrum between copyist and interventionist, though the latter was controlled by the recognizable shape of the text.<sup>217</sup> In sum, the status of text at any given time was

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<sup>211</sup> For the specifics, see Corrado Martone, “Ben Sira Manuscripts from Qumran and Masada,” in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28–31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. Pacratius C. Beentjes, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 81–94, especially page 89.

<sup>212</sup> Émile Puech (“Ben Sira and Qumran.” in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, DCLS 1, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], 79–118) argues that the earlier compositions 11QPs<sup>9</sup> witness to that an original acrostic feature in Sir 51:13–30 which was lost in the later manuscript B.

<sup>213</sup> Eric D. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” in *Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira: Transmission and Interpretation*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 37–53.

<sup>214</sup> Wright (“Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira,” 373) demonstrates that in Sir 15:14 Bmrg and MS A have been harmonized to the Masoretic text of Gen 1:27, while MS B preserves the original reading. In this case, a later editor has made the intertextual connection, which was subtle, more obvious.

<sup>215</sup> Vocabulary from Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 283–85.

<sup>216</sup> Tov acknowledges this (p. 326) but seems to be motivated by doctrinal concerns when trying to recover the “original text” (see also page 167).

<sup>217</sup> Sidnie White Crawford, “Interpreting the Pentateuch through Scribal Processes: The Evidence from the Qumran Manuscripts,” in *Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*:

pluriform readings and potentially multiple literary editions (as demonstrated by Jeremiah, etc.).<sup>218</sup> The text of Sirach is no exception. This situation has led Snaith to identify the complex textual history of Sirach as one of the main difficulties in studying intertextuality within it.<sup>219</sup> This section will demonstrate that the Masada Scroll, though imperfect, is the most pristine witness to the Hebrew tradition of Sirach. Because translations to other languages are also transferences to other cultures, they are difficult to use in reconstructing the Hebrew original, especially since translators are not always consistent. There is scholarly consensus that Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33) is a literary unit. A textual reconstruction and translation of Sir 42:15–43:33 will be provided.

### *2.2.1 - Sirach in Hebrew*

The Hebrew texts of Sirach bear witness to the scribal practices of the time. The manuscript evidence of Sirach illustrates that it was more “cultural project” than static text.<sup>220</sup> Most of the manuscript evidence for the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is

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*What Does Documented Evidence Tell Us about the Transmission of Authoritative Texts?* ed. Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 59–80.

<sup>218</sup> For more on literary editions of texts that would become biblical, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 283–326.

<sup>219</sup> Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” 2–3.

<sup>220</sup> Kristen De Troyer (*Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible*, TCSt 4, ed. James R. Adair, Jr. [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003]) demonstrates that before, during, and after translation both the Hebrew base text and the Greek translations continued to undergo change at the hands of scribes. This project was continued by the rabbis. For more, see Benjamin G. Wright III, “B. Sanhedrin 100b and Rabbinic Knowledge of Ben Sira,” in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 183–93. See also Jenny R. Labendz, “The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature,” *AJSR* 30 (2006): 347–92.

separated from its “composition” by hundreds of years.<sup>221</sup> Because of this distance, there is growing pessimism among scholars about our ability to recover an “original” text.<sup>222</sup> The case of Ben Sira is no different. In Old Testament studies, Ben Sira is chronologically one of the closest manuscripts to an autograph original. The Greek translation of the author’s grandson probably dates to 117 BCE in Egypt, possibly Alexandria.<sup>223</sup> The autograph of Ben Sira can be dated to approximately 190–80 BCE, after the death of Simon the high priest and before the Maccabean revolt, with a probable location of Jerusalem. However, neither Ben Sira’s autograph nor his grandson’s original work survives.

The story of the recovery of numerous medieval fragments of multiple manuscripts (MSS A–F) of Sirach from the Geniza of Cairo is well known and will not be repeated here.<sup>224</sup> The largest and most complete manuscript was discovered at Masada, a fortress destroyed in 73 CE.<sup>225</sup> Although that date is a sure *terminus ante quem*,

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<sup>221</sup> I use quotes here, because this conceptualization is itself problematic, as it is a model built anachronistically on the printing press. For an excellent example of an attempt to move past this model, see Nicholas A. Elder, *The Media Matrix of Early Jewish and Christian Narrative*, LNTS 612 (New York: T&T Clark, 2019).

<sup>222</sup> Lyle Eslinger, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Question of Category,” *VT* 42 (1992): 47–58. See especially page 52.

<sup>223</sup> For details see Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 9.

<sup>224</sup> For a full retelling, see Stefan C. Reif, “The Discovery of the Cambridge Genizah Fragments of Ben Sira: Scholars and Texts,” in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28–31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. Pacratius C. Beentjes, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 1–22.

<sup>225</sup> For more see Yigael Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada: With Introduction, Emendations and Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society and the Shrine of the Book, 1965).



orthographic evidence suggests that the manuscript can be dated to 100–75 BCE.<sup>226</sup>

Two manuscripts of Sirach were discovered at Qumran. One of them (2Q18) can be dated to the middle of the first century BCE, but it is poorly preserved and contains only parts of chapter 6.<sup>227</sup> Dated to the first half of the first century CE, the second (11Q5 or 11QPs) contains part of Sirach 51 between the first eight verses of Psalm 138 and the so-called “Apostrophe to Zion.”

Careful examination of these discoveries has demonstrated that the shorter and more original recension of the Hebrew text of Ben Sira (H-I), best represented by the Masada Scroll, was expanded and corrupted, producing a longer form (H-II), attested to by MS B, before the Christian period.<sup>228</sup> These two traditions seemed to have persisted along-side one another, as the marginal notes on MS B, which already seems to be the result of multiple hands and critical work, demonstrate knowledge of a tradition very similar to the Masada Scroll.<sup>229</sup> The differences between MS B and the Masada Scroll

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<sup>226</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research,” in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 3–16. See page 14.

<sup>227</sup> For more on the manuscripts of Sirach recovered from Qumran, see Émile Puech, “Ben Sira and Qumran,” 79–118. Puech argues that all extant Hebrew manuscripts of Sirach derive from the Qumran community. While possible, this conclusion is far from certain. His argument certainly produces caution for assuming that a manuscript even within a century of the autograph is free from corruption.

<sup>228</sup> For more on the development of the text of Sirach, see Maurice Gilbert, “Methodological and Hermeneutical Trends in Modern Exegesis on the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Ben Sira: Recueil D’Études – Collected Essays*, BETL 264 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 3–21. Contra the notions that the expansion of the text was systematic and by the same hand, see Jason Gile, “The Additions to Ben Sira and the Book’s Multiform Textual Witness,” in *Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira: Transmission and Interpretation*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 237–56.

<sup>229</sup> Jean-Sébastien Rey and Marieke Dhont, “Scribal Practices in Ben Sira Manuscript B: Codicological Reconstruction and Material Typology of Marginal Readings,” in *Discovering, Deciphering and Dissenting: Ben Sira Manuscripts after 120 years*, ed. James K. Aitken, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Yearbook 2018* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 97–123.

have been characterized by Jean-Sébastien Rey as “irreducibly complex,” witnessing to manifold scribal interventions.<sup>230</sup> The difficulty in identifying the text’s structure has been taken as an indication that it may have been progressively constructed by Ben Sira.<sup>231</sup> The work may have undergone substantial revision after the death of Ben Sira, with scholars having called into question the authenticity of chapters 36 and 51.<sup>232</sup> The apparent lack of structure suggests multiple hands may have been involved in its composition.

Eva Mroczek concludes that “the book of Ben Sira is fluid and open to expansion and rearrangement, despite the attribution of the text to an identifiable author, and was neither intended nor received as an originary of finished intellectual product.”<sup>233</sup> Mroczek summarizes the scribal ethos concerning not only the texts which these tradents received but also the ones which they produced. The Hebrew manuscript witnesses of Sirach attest to this ethos, given the evidence of textual evolution.

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<sup>230</sup> Jean-Sébastien Rey, “Is the Hebrew of the Cairo Genizah Manuscripts of Ben Sira Relevant for the Study of the Hebrew of the Hellenistic Period?” in *The Reconfiguration of Hebrew in the Hellenistic Period: Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira at Strasbourg University, June 2014*, ed. Jan Joosten, Daniel Machiela, and Jean-Sébastien Rey, *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 213–25.

<sup>231</sup> Jeremy Corley (“Searching for Structure and Redaction in Ben Sira: An Investigation of Beginnings and Endings,” in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, DCLS 1, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], 45) suggests that work was constructed in five stages, during Ben Sira’s own lifetime.

<sup>232</sup> Gammie, “The Sage in Sirach,” 356.

<sup>233</sup> Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 91.

### 2.2.2 - Gained in Translation

Scribal creativity is especially demonstrable when traditions were translated across linguistic and social lines. Carr observed that “ancient authors gave themselves even more freedom to adapt traditions across language barriers than they did in adapting traditions in their own language.”<sup>234</sup> This comports well with the findings of Tessa Rajak, who demonstrated that translations not only transition from one linguistic idiom to another but also from one cultural idiom to another.<sup>235</sup>

The case of Ben Sira bears this out. According to Minissale, the Greek text tends to demonstrate a concern for God’s transcendence, a de-mythologizing tendency, a stress on God’s action in the world, but an avoidance of assigning responsibility to God for evil and natural phenomena.<sup>236</sup> The Greek translation seems to be an attempt to accommodate a more philosophical or Hellenistic audience. More specifically, Zapff demonstrates that Sir 31:12–24, which deals with table manners, is adapted by the various translators into their own cultural context.<sup>237</sup> These two cases bookend the

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<sup>234</sup> David M. Carr, “Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts,” in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 41–53. Quotation taken from page 44.

<sup>235</sup> Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 125–75.

<sup>236</sup> Antonio Minissale, *La versione greca del Siracide: confronto con il testo ebraico alla luce dell'attività midrascica e del metodo targumico*, AnBib 133 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995).

<sup>237</sup> Zapff, “Verschiedene Akzentuierungen für das ‘Benehmen bei Tisch’ (Sir 31,12–24): Ein synoptischer Vergleich der hebräischen, griechischen und syrischen Version,” in *Ästhetik, sinnlicher Genuss und gute Manieren: Ein biblisches Menü in 25 Gängen Festschrift für Hans-Winfried Jüngling SJ*, ed. Melanie Peetz and Sandra Huebenthal (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 423–40.

spectrum of translational changes, from broader issues of worldview to more specific issues of cultural customs.

In general, the different books of the LXX/OG are translated by scribes of varying abilities.<sup>238</sup> In the prologue of Sirach, Ben Sira's grandson defends himself against the common charge of "translator, traitor" (Sir 0:15–25), while acknowledging that the Hebrew text is foundational.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, the Hebrew *Vorlagen* of the LXX may be earlier or later than the tradition preserved by the MT.<sup>240</sup> In the case of Ben Sira, both Hebrew recensions were translated into Greek. The Septuagint's long (G-II) and short (G-I) recensions both have an authentic Hebrew *Vorlage*. Although certain scholars such as Moshe Z. Segal have produced a complete Hebrew text from extant manuscripts and retroversions from the Greek,<sup>241</sup> there seems to be a growing pessimism concerning the possibility of accurately producing a Hebrew text from the Greek.<sup>242</sup> The Old Latin translation was rendered from G-II. The Syriac seems to be a mixed version, translated

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<sup>238</sup> For a summary of the evidence, see Waltke, "How We Got the Hebrew Bible," 33–35.

<sup>239</sup> For more on the authority of the Hebrew version, see Stefan Schorch, "The Pre-Eminence of the Hebrew Language and the Emerging Concept of the 'Ideal Text' in Late Second Temple Judaism," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 43–54.

<sup>240</sup> Emanuel Tov, "The Septuagint as a Source for the Literary Analysis of Hebrew Scripture," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 31–56.

<sup>241</sup> Moshe Z. Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1997).

<sup>242</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III, *No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to Its Hebrew Parent Text*, SCS 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

from both H-I and H-II around 300 CE. Alternatively, it may have been translated from a tradition later than the Masada Scroll but more ancient than MS B.<sup>243</sup>

In sum, the Greek Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Aramaic Targums, and Latin Vulgate traditions may not be as helpful as they seemed at first glance, because they are all receptions of potentially corrupt traditions in different cultural idioms, and those idioms may or may not retain the original valence of the Hebrew text. Furthermore, in an investigation into Sir 40:17 Beentjes demonstrated the scribal tendency to harmonize Sirach with other, primarily biblical, texts such as Proverbs and the Psalms.<sup>244</sup> This situation leaves no alternative to Beentjes's recommendation that all of the witnesses must be "considered as *literary entities of their own*, which cannot be exchanged at pleasure."<sup>245</sup> This conclusion is shared by James K. Aitken, who detects variation in the earliest strata of Sirach.<sup>246</sup> Therefore, a method which presumes harmony between

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<sup>243</sup> Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, "Review of Recent Research on the Book of Ben Sira (1980–1996)," in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28–31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. Pancratius C. Beentjes, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 23–60. See especially page 33.

<sup>244</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, "De verhalen van het begin terug(ge)lezen: Jesus Sirach en Genesis 1–3," in *Stromen uit Eden. Genesis 1–11 in bijbel, Joodse exegese en moderne literatuur. Aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. N.R.M. Poulssen bij gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als hoogleraar in de exegese van het Oude Testament en het Hebreeuws aan de Theologische Faculteit Tilburg op 22 mei 1992*, ed. Wilhelmus Johannes Cornelis Weren and C. M. L. Verdegaaal (Boxtel, Germany: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1992), 98–110.

<sup>245</sup> Beentjes, "Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research," 5.

<sup>246</sup> James K. Aitken, "The Synoptic Problem and the Reception of the Ben Sira Manuscripts," in *Discovering, Deciphering and Dissenting: Ben Sira Manuscripts after 120 years*, ed. James K. Aitken, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Yearbook* 2018 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 147–67.

fragmentary texts is not tenable, although the fragmentary nature of the witnesses necessitates comparison.

### *2.2.3 - Establishing a Base Text*

The meaning of a text is a negotiation between whatever written instantiations exist, the performances of those texts and traditions by a tradent, and the reception and memory of those performances by the audience, original or otherwise. Meaning is dynamic and multi-faceted. As Stanley Fish observed that a reading community often has more control over the interpretation of a text than its author.<sup>247</sup> This is especially true in a world where authorship was unimportant and authors were unknown.<sup>248</sup> Brennan W. Breed argued that the distinction between a text and its interpretation or reception is arbitrary, because both are part of the same tradition.<sup>249</sup> There was no authoritative autograph that defended a tradition against modification. Textual instantiations of a tradition exist in a continuum of constant production, performance, and reception. Breed also noted that what we might consider canonical or original is itself a reception.<sup>250</sup> With regards to Sirach, Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer observed that “it

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<sup>247</sup> Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). Fish maintained, though, that texts can be communicative, as long as readers and authors share experiences. What Fish described, others proscribe, and so texts were freed from their moorings in their authors or in history, in favor of reader-response approaches.

<sup>248</sup> Mroczek argues that the tendency of pseudepigrapha to attach texts to well-known figures was not the desire to attach and author to a text but rather to attach a text to a legend (*The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 16).

<sup>249</sup> Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*, ed. Herbert Marks, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>250</sup> Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 3.

seems that the ‘oldest’ text is already an interpretation, so that every scholar is in fact interpreting interpretations.”<sup>251</sup> This is demonstrably the case for the Masada Scroll. The ongoing process of writing, copying, editing, and performing has led Mroczek to suggest reconceptualizing the whole endeavor of ancient scribes and their communities as an ongoing “multigenerational project” instead of a static “book.”<sup>252</sup>

This ongoing textual revision renders investigating the relationship between texts difficult. Lyle Eslinger pointed out that the network of literary linkages demonstrated by the Hebrew Bible is the “product of the Bible’s lengthy production history within the same literary and cultural stream.”<sup>253</sup> Eslinger’s metaphor is apt. As the individual books moved together, they affected each other through the hands of the tradents. If only later manuscripts survive, that is, manuscripts that have been changed, then it becomes very difficult to determine who is using what, when.<sup>254</sup> After centuries of redaction in an oral-written context, the seams between sources and the

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<sup>251</sup> Reiterer, “Review of Recent Research on the Book of Ben Sira (1980–1996),” 27.

<sup>252</sup> Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 13.

<sup>253</sup> Eslinger, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis and Inner-Biblical Allusion,” 47. See also Michael Fishbane’s work on the axial shift in scribalism (“From Scribalism to Rabbinism: Perspectives on the Emergence of Classical Judaism,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 439–56.

<sup>254</sup> Concerning intertextuality, this ongoing project had at least three moments: textual affinity due to original authorship in Hebrew, later harmonization with other Hebrew texts/versions, original translation in to Greek which may or may not have preserved textual similarities with the Greek versions of originally Hebrew texts, and later harmonizations between the Greek version of Sirach and other books of the LXX. Although all of these could make interesting projects, this paper will concern itself with the first: how Ben Sira, as witness by H-I/Masada Scroll references or interacts with other traditions.

relationships between texts that coexist in the same stream of tradition become obscure.<sup>255</sup>

The way forward, for this project at least, will be to use the Masada Scroll as the base text. Di Lella agrees that the Masada Scroll is the best witness.<sup>256</sup> It is the earliest witness, separated from the autograph by approximately a century. Nevertheless, the use of divine names demonstrates that the witness is not pristine.<sup>257</sup> The Masada Scroll was found close to the original place of authorship and therefore presumably the “original audience.” The proximity in date and location allows for a heuristic conflation between Ben Sira, the text that he produced, and his original audience on the one hand and the community that produced and consumed the Masada Scroll on the other. Therefore, the Masada Scroll will be the basis for a “diplomatic” text.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> This is the basic conclusion of David M. Carr in *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For instance, scholars continue to disagree on where to split the first and second creation stories in Genesis; verse 2:4 is the obvious seam, but it resists attempts to attach it to either Genesis 1 or 2, even when the verse is split in half.

<sup>256</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 59–60.

<sup>257</sup> All of the Geniza manuscripts (MSS A-F) use יי as a form of the tetragrammaton (as in Targum Neofiti), except MS D which only mentions God once, matching MS B’s reading *El* (אל). It seems like that the three *yods* was a circumlocution for the tetragrammaton, which a scribe expunged from the Masada Scroll, but which was preserved in the other traditions. The opposite change (from a different divine moniker to יי) makes little sense. The only exceptions seem to be in Sir 10:22 and Sir 15:13, where MS B reads אלהים and MS A reads יי. In Sir 32:24 three witnesses (MSS B, E, and F) all agree on the reading יי. Unfortunately, there are never more than two witnesses in any cases where the manuscripts disagree. The Masada scroll is the only textual tradition which employs אדני. See Patrick W. Skehan, “The Divine Name at Qumran, in the Masada Scroll, and in the Septuagint,” *BIOSCS* 13 (1980): 14–44

<sup>258</sup> For more on the different models of a critical texts, especially as relates to the book of Ben Sira, see Beentjes, “Reading the Hebrew Ben Sira Manuscripts Synoptically: A New Hypothesis,” 301–15. See also Pancratius C. Beentjes, “The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: Preliminary Remarks Towards a New Text Edition and Synopsis,” in *Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 283–91. Beentjes elucidates his “minimalist” approach in “Reconstructions and Retroversions: Changes and Challenges to the Hebrew Ben Sira Text” (in *Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira: Transmission and Interpretation*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 23–35). His approach is attractive on account of absolute



Despite the dangers, reconstruction is necessary. Though Gian Luigi Prato and Segal both seem to favor MS B over the Masada Scroll, MS B is an inferior witness.<sup>259</sup> Since it is largely intact where the Masada Scroll is extant, MS B will be used to fill in gaps when necessary. When marginal notes exist in MS B, some preference is given to them, as they often attest to readings of Masada Scroll, especially when Masada Scroll contains a rare word or Aramaism.<sup>260</sup> Beentjes warned that “using text editions of the Book of Ben Sira, one should constantly be aware that the editor is in the position to misinform his readers.”<sup>261</sup> Therefore, recourse has been made to the manuscripts themselves, for which BenSira.org has been exceedingly helpful.

#### 2.2.4 - *Sirach 42:15–43:33 in Hebrew*

Because the Masada Scroll is not a complete witness to Sir 42:15–43:33, reconstruction is required. Below is a proposed reconstruction, with some notes, based primarily on the Masada Scroll, but with recourse made to MS B of the Cairo Geniza

Sir 42:15a

וזה חזיתי ואשננה

אזכרה נא מעשי אל Mas1h 5:1

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consistency. Therefore, I have used his work, *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*, VTSup 68 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2006) as a starting point. However, his approach is ill suited for the task at hand.

<sup>259</sup> Gian Luigi Prato, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*, AnBib 65 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975); Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*.

<sup>260</sup> For more, see Benjamin G. Wright III, “Preliminary Thoughts about Preparing the Text of Ben Sira for a Commentary,” in *Die Septuaginta-Text, Wirkung, Rezeption: 4. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 19.–22. Juli 2012*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and Siegfried Kreuzer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 89–109. See especially page 107.

<sup>261</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, “The Reliability of Text Editions of Ben Sira 41:14–16,” in *“Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom” [Sir. 14:20]: Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 293–99. Quote from page 299.

Sir 42:15b	ופעל רצנו לקחו	באמר אדני מעשיו	Mas1h 5:2
Sir 42:16	[וכ]בוד אדני מלא מעשיו	שמש זהרת על כל נגלת[ה]	Mas1h 5:3
Sir 42:17a	לספר כל נפלאותיו	לא השפיקו קדשי אל	Mas1h 5:4
Sir 42:17b	להתחזק לפני כבודו	אמץ אדני [צב]איו	Mas1h 5:5
Sir 42:18a	ובמערמיהם יתבונן	תהום ולב חקר	Mas1h 5:6
Sir 42:18b	אתיות עולם <sup>262</sup> [וי]ביט	כי ידע עליון ד[עת]	Mas1h 5:7
Sir 42:19	[ו]מ[ג]לה [ח]קר [נס]תרות	מחזה חליפות [ונהיות]	Mas1h 5:8
Sir 42:20	כל דבר <sup>263</sup> ול[א] [עבר]ו	לא נעדר מפניו שכל	Mas1h 5:9
Sir 42:21a	אחד [הוא מע]ולם	גבורת חכמ[תו]תכן	Mas1h 5:10
Sir 42:21b	[ו]ל[א] צרך לכו[ל] מבין	לא נאסף [ולא נאצל]	Mas1h 5:11
Sir 42:22	עד ניצוץ וחזות מראה	הלוא כל מעשיו נחמד[ים]	Mas1h 5:12
Sir 42:23	צרך והכל נשמר <sup>264</sup> [ככ]ל	הכל חי וע[מד] לעד	Mas1h 5:13
Sir 42:24a		כלם [שנים שנים זה] לעמת זה	Mas1h 5:14
Sir 42:24b	לא עשה מ[הם] שוא		Mas1h 5:15
Sir 42:25	[ו]מי ישבע להביט הודם	זה על זה חלף טובם	Mas1h 5:16
Sir 43:1	עצ[ם] שמים [מביע נה]רו	תאר מרום ורקיע לטהר	Mas1h 5:17
Sir 43:2	[ע]ליון <sup>265</sup> כלי נורא מעשה	שמש מופי[ע] בצאתו נכסה	Mas1h 5:18

<sup>262</sup> Either *hiphil* participle (מביט) or *hiphil* imperfect (יביט) of נבט with *vav*. In either case, would have durative aspect or present tense.

<sup>263</sup> Contra Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 169. See Eric D. Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach*, SBLStBL 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 62 n. 110.

<sup>264</sup> Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 63 n. 114.

<sup>265</sup> Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 64 n. 118.

Sir 43:3	<sup>266</sup> ולפני חרב מי יתכולל	בהצהירו י[רת]ח תבל	Mas1h 5:19
Sir 43:4a	הרים <sup>267</sup> של[וח ש]מש[ישיק]	[כ]ור [נ]פון[ח] מעשי מוצק	Mas1h 5:20
Sir 43:4b	[ומנורה תכוה עין]	לשון מאור ת[ג]מיר נושבת	Mas1h 5:21
Sir 43:5	וד[בריו ינצח אביריו]	כי גדול אדנ[י] עשהו	Mas1h 5:22
Sir 43:6	[מ]משלת קץ ואות עולם	וגם [יר]ח יאריח עתות	Mas1h 5:23
Sir 43:7	<sup>268</sup> [וחפץ עשה בתקופתו]	לו מ[ועד] וממנו חג	Mas1h 5:24
Sir 43:8a	[מה נורא בהשתנותו]	[חד]ש כשמו הוא מ[תחדש]	Mas1h 5:25
Sir 43:8b	מ[רצף רקיע מזהירתו]	כלי צבא בבלי מרום	Mas1h 6:1
Sir 43:9	עד ומשריק במר[מי אל]	תור שמים והוד כוכב	Mas1h 6:2
Sir 43:10	ולא ישח באשמרתם	בדבר אדני יעמד חק	Mas1h 6:3
Sir 43:11	<sup>269</sup> כי מ[א]ד נהדר[ה בהוד]	ראה קשת וברך עשיה	Mas1h 6:4
Sir 43:12	[ו]יד אל נטתה בגב[ורה]	חן[ג הקיפה] בכבודה	Mas1h 6:5
Sir 43:13	ותנצח זיקות משפט	גערותו [תתו]ה ברד	Mas1h 6:6
Sir 43:14	ויעף עבים כעיט	למענו פרע אוצר	Mas1h 6:7
Sir 43:15	ותגדע [אב]ני ברד	גבורתו חזק ענן	Mas1h 6:8
Sir 43:17a/	ובכחו יניף הרים	קול רעמו יחיל ארצו	Mas1h 6:9

<sup>266</sup> Reymond, "New Readings in the Ben Sira Masada Scroll," 337.

<sup>267</sup> Although MS B reads יסיק the *samek* seems to be a spelling error, potentially caused by dictation.

<sup>268</sup> Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 65 n. 126.

<sup>269</sup> Benjamin G. Wright, "Ben Sira 43:11b—'To What Does the Greek Correspond?'" Text 13 (1986): 111–16.

43:16<sup>270</sup>

Sir 43:16/	עלעול סופה וסערה	אמ[רתו] תחריף תימן	Mas1h 6:10
43:17a			
Sir 43:17b	וכארבה ישכן רדתו	כרשף יפרח שלגו	Mas1h 6:11
Sir 43:18	וממטרו יתמיה לבב	תור לבנו יהג עינים	Mas1h 6:12
Sir 43:19	ויצמח כסנה צצים	[וגם כפו]ר כמלח ישפך	Mas1h 6:13
Sir 43:20a	וכרגב יקפיא מקור	[צנת רוח צ]פון ישיב	Mas1h 6:14
Sir 43:20b	[וכשרין ילבש מקוה]	[על כל מע]מד מים יקר[ים]	Mas1h 6:15
Sir 43:21	[וצור צמחים כלהבה]	יבול הרי[ם] [כחרב] יש[יק]	Mas1h 6:16
Sir 43:22	פורע לדשן שרב] <sup>271</sup> טל	[מרפא כל מערף ענן]	Mas1h 6:17
Sir 43:23	[ויט בתהום] איים	<sup>272</sup> אמר[תו משיק רהב]	Mas1h 6:18
Sir 43:24	[ל]שמע אזנינו נשתומם	[יורדי הים יספרו קצהו]	Mas1h 6:19
Sir 43:25	[ומין כל חי ו]גבורת רהב	[שם פלאות תמהי מעשיו]	Mas1h 6:20
Sir 43:26	[ובדבריו יפעל רצן]	[למענהו יצלח מלאך]	Mas1h 6:21
Sir 43:27 <sup>273</sup>	[וקץ דבר הוא הכל]	[עוד כאלה לא נוסף]	Mas1h 6:22
Sir 43:28	[והוא גדול מכל מעשיו]	[נגלה עוד כי לא נחקר]	Mas1h 6:23

<sup>270</sup> The cola in the Masada Scroll do not occur in the same order as MS B and the LXX, the latter of which is the basis for the versification of Sirach. Parallelism in the Masada Scroll is by colon, whereas parallelism in MS B and LXX is by line or bi-cola. The order of the Masada Scroll is here retained.

<sup>271</sup> Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 68 n. 137.

<sup>272</sup> The reconstruction of "Rahab" (רהב) is uncertain. Based on MS B's change of רהב to רבה in Sir 43:25, the same may have happened in verse 23. If רבה is the correct reading, based on parallelism, the referent is the same: the sea.

<sup>273</sup> This verse and following reconstructed from MS B and the Greek.

Sir 43:29	[ונפלאת גבורתו]	[נורא אדני מאד מאד]	Mas1h 6:24
Sir 43:30a	[בכל תוכלו כי יש אל]	[מגדלי אדני הרימו קול]	Mas1h 6:25
Sir 43:30b	[אל תלאו כי לא תחקרו] <sup>274</sup>	[מרוממיו החליפו כח]	Mas1h 6:25
Sir 43:31	[ומי יגדלנו כאשר הוא] <sup>275</sup>	[מי חזה אותו ויספר]	Mas1h 7:1
Sir 43:32	[מעט ראיתי ממעשיו] <sup>276</sup>	[רוב נפלא וחזק מאלה]	Mas1h 7:2
Sir 43:33	[ולחסידיה נתן חכמה] <sup>277</sup>	[את הכל עשה אדני]	Mas1h 7:3

Two issues deserve special attention. First, the last two words of Sir 43:1 are particularly difficult to reconstruct. Beentjes attempts no reading of the Masada Scroll. The readings of MS B and MS Bmrg disagree on both of the last words. Manuscript B 12r.18 reads מרביט הדור, in accord with Skehan and Segal.<sup>278</sup> However רבט is a hapax legomenon and is therefore probably corrupt. Manuscript B 12v.mrg reads מבית נהרה. Although Ben Sira does use נבט elsewhere, the *ayin* at the end is apparently readable in

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<sup>274</sup> The last word is unrecoverable, so I follow Segal (*Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*, רצ), who reconstructs the Hebrew from the Greek, which reads: οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἀφικησθε ("for you can never go far enough").

<sup>275</sup> This verse is entirely destroyed in the Masada Scroll and omitted in MS B. I follow Segal (*Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*, רצ), who reconstructs the Hebrew from the Greek, which reads: τίς ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκδηγήσεται; / καὶ τίς μεγαλυνεῖ αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστιν; ("Who has seen him and reported? And who will magnify him as he is?"). There is no new vocabulary in this reconstruction.

<sup>276</sup> This line is not preserved in the Masada Scroll and preserved only fragmentarily in MS B. I follow Martin Abegg, "B XIII Recto," BenSira.org, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=25>.

<sup>277</sup> This line is poorly preserved. Therefore, I follow Segal (*Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*, רצ), who reconstructs from the Greek, which reads: πάντα γὰρ ἐποίησεν ὁ κύριος, / καὶ τοῖς εὐσεβέσιν ἔδωκεν σοφίαν ("For the Lord made everything, / And to the godly he gave wisdom").

<sup>278</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 488; Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*, רפח.

the Masada Scroll, according to Eric Reymond.<sup>279</sup> Therefore the root is more likely נבע. The last word of MS B (הדרו) and MS Bmrg (נהרה) differ. In the Masada Scroll Reymond reads נהרו.<sup>280</sup> Others only see the final *resh-vav* in the Masada Scroll.<sup>281</sup> Beentjes does not attempt a reading.<sup>282</sup> The final *he* in MS Bmrg may be a correction to make the last word נהרה, instead of the more difficult reading (נהרו), which I take to be an infinitive construct with a 3ms pronominal suffix, referring back to God, in concert with the theophanic theme of the poem. It is possible that נהרה in MS B is an example of the 3ms ה.<sup>283</sup> Marginal readings in MS B often witness to the textual tradition of the Masada Scroll. Therefore, the evidence is in favor of Redmond and MS Bmrg and against MS B.<sup>284</sup>

Second, most scholars only read the last word of Sir 43:23 from the Masada Scroll (איים).<sup>285</sup> Fortunately, this last word matches MS B, which is generally readable,

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<sup>279</sup> Erik D. Reymond, "Masada, Column V," BenSira.org, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=Masada&PageNum=5>. This is a revision from his previous work: Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 60.

<sup>280</sup> Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 60.

<sup>281</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 488.

<sup>282</sup> Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 170.

<sup>283</sup> For more, see Reymond's "Reflections on Orthography and Morphology in Ben Sira's Hebrew: The 3ms *Heh* Pronominal Suffix," in *The reconfiguration of Hebrew in the Hellenistic period: proceedings of the seventh International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira at Strasbourg University, June 2014*, ed. Jan Joosten, Daniel Machiela, and Jean-Sébastien Rey (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 226–44.

<sup>284</sup> Contra Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 488; and Prato, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*, 117. For more on this lacuna, see page 336 of Eric D. Reymond, "New Readings in the Ben Sira Masada Scroll (Mas 1h)," *RevQ* 26/103 (2014): 327–43.

<sup>285</sup> Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 173; Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 60.

except the for the middle of the first colon. In that colon, there is a gap followed by *yod-qoph*. Beentjes reads a *sin/shin* before the *yod*.<sup>286</sup> Martin Abegg agrees with the *sin/shin* and reads תשיק.<sup>287</sup> God's thought causing the deep to "overflow" (שוק) is unlikely, because God is usually responsible for containing the flood, especially when the flood, sea, deep, or Rahab are personified as in the combat myth. Prato also agrees with the *sin/shin* but reconstructs תעשיק.<sup>288</sup> This reconstruction would be taken as a feminine imperfect *hiphil* of עשק, meaning "to be turbulent."<sup>289</sup> This imagery matches the combat myth. However, the reading is idiosyncratic and means the opposite of the Greek: λογισμῷ αὐτοῦ ἐκόπασεν ἄβυσσον. Skehan, Segal, and Reynolds agree with the *sin/shin* but reconstruct with a *mem*: משיק.<sup>290</sup> The most likely verbal root for משיק is נשק, making it a *hiphil* participle meaning "to keep in line" or "to seal."<sup>291</sup> Either is consistent with the imagery associated with the mythology of God's interaction with the sea and could be the *Vorlage* of the LXX. The final word of the first colon in MS B (רבה) may also not reflect the reading of the Masada Scroll. At some point a hand changed רהב (Masada Scroll) to רבה (MS B) in Sir 43:25, in concert with the overall demythologizing tendency

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<sup>286</sup> Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 173.

<sup>287</sup> Abegg, "B XIII Recto."

<sup>288</sup> Prato, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*, 118.

<sup>289</sup> "עשק," DCH 6:622.

<sup>290</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 490; Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira ha-shalem*, רפט; Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 61.

<sup>291</sup> Contra Victor Morla, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira traducción y notas*, Asociación Bíblica Española: Institución San Jerónimo 59 (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2012), 277. See "נשק," DCH 5:781–82. See especially definitions III and IV.

of that tradition. Therefore, the רבה in 43:23 may also have been a רהב in the Masada Scroll.<sup>292</sup> This textual reconstruction was proposed by Skehan and Reymond.<sup>293</sup> In sum, reconstructing the line as רהב משיק אמרתו coheres better with the Greek by preserving the mythological language while also following what is approaching the consensus concerning the reading of MS B. Furthermore, this reading also preserves some parallelism between the first and second cola. These two issues alone illustrate not only the complicated textual history of Sirach, but also the interplay between scribes, texts, and audiences.

### *2.2.5 - English Translation*

Below is an original translation of the above textual reconstruction.

42:15 Now let me recall the works of God, and what I have seen let me recount.

By the speech of the Lord are his works, and the work of his favor is his instruction.

42:16 As the sun rises upon everything uncovered, so the glory of the Lord is on the fullness of his work.

42:17 The holy ones of God are not able to count all his wonders.

The Lord must make his armies strong enough to withstand his glory.

42:18 The deep and the heart he searches, and into their secrets he probes,

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<sup>292</sup> Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," 105.

<sup>293</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 490; Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 68 n. 138.



because the Most High knows all, and he sees<sup>294</sup> what is to come forever.

42:19 He declares the past and the future, and he exposes hidden things.

42:20 Nothing is lacking from his understanding, nor does any matter escape him.

42:21 He orders the mighty work of his wisdom. He is eternal.

Nothing is added; nothing subtracted, and no need has he for any counselor.

42:22 Are not all his works glorious? Even a fleeting or indirect sight of them?

42:23 Each one is living and standing forever, and for every need each is preserved.

42:24 All of them are complimentary; this one corresponding to that one,

and he makes none among them in vain.

42:25 This exists for the sake of that;<sup>295</sup> it passes away for their good. Who could get enough of beholding their splendor?!

43:01 The beauty of the vault and the purity of the firmament—the substance of the heavens pours forth its radiance!

43:02 The sun shines forth; in its going out, it dazzles—an awesome tool are the works of the Most High!

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<sup>294</sup> Either *hiphil* participle (מְבִיט) or *hiphil* imperfect (יְבִיט) of נָבַט with *vav*. In either case, would have durative aspect or present tense.

<sup>295</sup> The translation of the unique phrase זה על זה is particularly difficult. There are three options. The first two come from read על as the preposition עַל. A possible valent of עַל is of excess or comparison, yielding a translation of “this in excess of that,” which would fit the overall tone of the pericope, especially the following colon (“עַל,” DCH 6:392). This could also be an instance of the “pathetic עַל” (“עַל,” DCH 6:393–94), which would yield a translation like “This [is] for the sake of that.” The context provided by the previous verse recommends this reading. Lastly, it is possible to read על as the noun עֶל, which means “nourishment” (“עֶל,” DCH 6:386). Taken as the predicate in construct with the second זה, the translation would be: “This [is] nourishment for that.” This word only occurs Prov 16:23, but Ben Sira is certainly familiar with the books of Proverbs and has an affinity for rare words. This reading fits the previous verse and the following colon. It is possible that this ambiguity is intentional. This translation is consonant with Sir 33:15 and Sir 39:21. For more, see Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” 37–53.

43:03 In its apex, it causes the world to swelter, and in such heat, who can endure?

43:04 A furnace is fanned during smithing, but the sun is sent and burns mountains.

A ray of light can destroy our habitat,<sup>296</sup> and by its fire the eye is burned.

43:05 For great is the Lord who made it, and by his words he directs his mighty ones.<sup>297</sup>

43:06 And also the moon paces the seasons—the governor of time and a sign forever.

43:07 To it belongs the appointed time, and from it, the feast; and the delight of its  
maker is in its circuit.

43:08 The new moon—as the name suggests—renews itself. How wonderful is its  
rhythm,

an army signal for the sky's waterskins, illuminating the dome with its brilliance!

43:09 The form of the heavens and the splendor of a star, they are a shining testimony  
in the heights of God.

43:10 At the word of the Lord it stands at attention, and it will not be relaxed during  
their watch.

43:11 Behold the rainbow and bless its maker, for exceedingly it is honored in its  
splendor.

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<sup>296</sup> Most authorities take לשון מאור as construct chain (literally: “tongue of light”), producing a similar image to the “tongue of fire” in Isa 5:24 (לִשְׁוֹן אֵשׁ). This produces an issue for translating תִּגְמִיר, which seems to be a feminine imperfect of גָּמַר. The *yod* naturally suggests *hiphil*, which is unattested. An active causative sense, relative to the primary definition, “to be ended,” matches the context.

<sup>297</sup> “His mighty ones” (אֲבִירָיו) is an ambiguous word, which may refer to heroes (Jer 46:15; Job 24:22; 34:20; Lam 1:15), bulls (Isa 34:7; Ps 22:13, 50:13, 68:31; Sir 7:31), stallions (Judg 5:22; Jer 8:16; 47:3; 50:11), or angels (Ps 78:25). Though it is tempting to read it as stallions, so as to match the imagery of Ps 19:7, as Di Lella (*The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 488) does, the most likely referent is the sun or an angel who controls the sun. For more information on the “steeds” of the sun, see John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 87. See also Collins, “Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach,” 105.

43:12 It surrounds the vault in its glory,<sup>298</sup> and the hand of God stretched it out with might.

43:13 His rebuke marks out hail, and it directs the lightning of judgment.<sup>299</sup>

43:14 For his own sake he opens his storehouse, and he lets fly the dark-clouds like a raptor.

43:15 His might makes the rain-cloud thick and hews the hailstone.<sup>300</sup>

43:16 The voice of his thunder causes his earth to tremble, and in his strength he shakes the mountains.

His command stirs up the south wind—along with the storm wind, the whirlwind, and storm.

43:17 Like a blaze, his snow flies; and like locusts it settles.

43:18 The beauty of its whiteness dazzles the eyes and astounds the heart more than rain.

43:19 And also frost, he pours it out like salt, and he causes it to grow like a thorn-bush in flower.

43:20 He makes to blow the cold of the north wind, and like a clod he freezes the spring.

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<sup>298</sup> The reconstruction of הקיפה, based off MS B, could be a *hiphil* perfect 3fs from the root נקף, but it could also be a *hiphil* infinitive construct with a 3.f.s. pronominal suffix, referring back to “rainbow” (קשת). The aspect of the participle seems more fitting.

<sup>299</sup> For the translation choice of “lightning” see Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 120.

<sup>300</sup> The Masada Scroll clearly reads חזק “to be strong,” but the subject must be גבורתו, which is feminine. The verb may have attracted the gender of the preceding suffix. In any case, it should be read as an imperfect, parallel to the following colon.

Over everywhere where there's water it covers, and the reservoir dons ice like a breastplate.

43:21 It parches the herbage of the mountains as a drought; and the cliff shrubs, like a flame.

43:22 The healing of all is the rain<sup>301</sup> cloud; it releases moisture to refresh scorched ground.

43:23 His speech contains Rahab, and he stretches out coastlands on the Deep.

43:24 Those who go down to the sea relate its breadth, when we hear the report, we are amazed.

43:25 The wonder of his works—there is amazement! And all kinds of living things!  
And the sea monsters!

43:26 For his own sake, his messenger makes haste, and his words produce consent.

43:27 To these we shall not continue to add, and the last word: He is the All.

43:28 He reveals himself<sup>302</sup> still because we cannot understand, since he is greater than all his works.

43:29 Exceedingly fearsome is the Lord, and wonderful, his power.

43:30 Lift up your voice to magnify the Lord, as much as we are able since he is God.  
Extol him with renewed strength!<sup>303</sup> Do not be weary, for in his praise there is no excess.

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<sup>301</sup> Reconstructed from MS B, מַעֲרֵף is a hapax legomenon. See “מַעֲרֵף,” DCH 5:416.

<sup>302</sup> I am taking the marginal note in MS B נגלה as masculine singular *niphal* participle from גלה.

<sup>303</sup> Literally: “The ones exalting him, renew strength!”

43:31 Who has seen him and reported? And who will magnify him as he is?

43:32 The abundance is wonderful and stronger than all these; few of his works I have seen.

43:33 The Lord made everything, and to the godly he gave wisdom.

## 2.3 - Conclusion

Even though there was not definitive, universally accepted set of authoritative texts during the Second Temple period, it is clear that Ben Sira was a master tradent, demonstrating knowledge of the texts or traditions of every book that would become the Tanakh, except Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, and Daniel. However, a study of all of these potential intertexts would be unwieldy, so the scope of this study has been narrowed to Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms. Each of these books was popular during the Second Temple period, and Ben Sira's dependence on them has been demonstrated elsewhere. While other books will be used to demonstrate the cultural commonplaces available to Ben Sira and his audience, or the possibility of direct dependence between Sirach and Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms will be studied.

Imperative for any intertextual investigation is a reliable base text, but unfortunately no such text is readily available for Sirach. Scribal training, cultural, and practice performed in an oral-textual matrix have left their marks on the texts they preserved, edited, and produced. Scribes enjoyed more freedom in their performance of their function as cultural tradent than has until recently been acknowledged, while they

also clearly worked within literary norms.<sup>304</sup> Recently, more light has been shed on these conventions, but more work is undoubtedly left to do.

Many of these conventions are evident within the text of Sirach, while others have left their mark in the history of the book's transmission. Ben Sira casts his new thoughts in traditional molds, mimicking in style and vocabulary books that enjoyed authority in his time. Ben Sira was clearly aware of a large body of literature, including most of the books that would become biblical. However, this study will be limited to studying his use of Genesis, Isaiah, and psalms, as each of these was popular and relatively stable. Ben Sira also demonstrates knowledge of them elsewhere in Sirach.

The Hebrew textual witness for Sirach is unfortunately incomplete and variegated; an entire Hebrew text has yet to be found, and the witnesses that have been recovered in the past century or so exhibit a great deal of variety. This variety frustrates any attempt to recover an autograph, and it further undermines such notions as an "ideal text" or an "original." Nevertheless, reconstructing probable Hebrew texts and situating them within their historical context is a worthwhile endeavor. The other language traditions are not very helpful in this task, as the translators also exhibit a great deal of freedom in translating their pluriform Hebrew *Vorlagen* into their own cultural and linguistic idioms. Though retroversion from Greek to Hebrew have been attempted, their results are far from certain.

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<sup>304</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 25.

The “Hymn to the Creator” (Sir 42:15–43:33) exhibits several structural indicators that justify its being treated as a literary unit, though it has clear resonances with themes from the rest of the book. Even though this pericope has been recovered in two different manuscripts (MS B from the Cairo Geniza and one from the Masada fortress), there are a number of discrepancies and the witness is still incomplete. A diplomatic text, based on the Masada scroll, was made, but lacunae—some of them large—remain. Therefore, certain sections of the text must be handled with care.

According to Wright, “identifying the possible texts [Ben Sira] knew constitutes only a preliminary step in any attempt to discover how he constructed his own discourse(s) that created the figured world in which he and his students lived and that left a legacy through both his words and his students’ lives.”<sup>305</sup> Now that the preliminary steps of exploring potential intertexts for Ben Sira and his audience, in addition to establishing a base text and a nuanced intertextual method, it remains to be seen how Ben Sira did in fact employ his tradition within his contribution to the ongoing cultural discourse. The work done above, namely establishing a Hebrew base text for Sir 42:15–43:33, will be indispensable for the work which is to follow: an intertextual investigation of Ben Sira’s “Hymn to the Creator.” Buoyed by the sure footing provided by the model of scribal culture and activity, a more nuanced explanation of the phenomena observed in this pericope will become available.

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<sup>305</sup> Wright, “The Use and Interpretation of Biblical Tradition in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors,” 206.

### Chapter 3: Ben Sira and the Storm-God

Since Ben Sira was a master literary tradent who has demonstrated knowledge of the majority of traditions that would become biblical, it is no surprise that his work bears some resemblance to the antecedent texts of his cultural patrimony. This chapter will investigate the similarities between Sir 42:15–43:33 and texts which contain portrayals of Yahweh as a storm-god, especially through theophany. Though Ben Sira depicts Yahweh as a storm-god though the use of imagery drawn from biblical theophanies, there is little basis for characterizing Sirach's relationship to antecedent texts as literary allusions, even though the theoretical framework for direct dependence is in place. Put differently, while Ben Sira (and, presumably, his audience) had access to Genesis, Isaiah, and the psalms (among others), there is little evidence to suggest that Ben Sira is making a literary allusion (even in the rare cases where specific direct dependence is plausible). Instead, throughout his Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira activates a culturally constructed register by reproducing commonplaces drawn from his literary heritage. By evoking the storm-god register, Ben Sira is participating in the tradition of the storm theophany, in which God's presence is accompanied by weather phenomena, capitalizing on the implicit logic that God's presence is indicated by meteorology, to illustrate his point that God can be known through nature (Sir 42:15–16; 43:28). The referential level of language, what Ben Sira is arguing explicitly, is working in concert with the associative level, the implicit context that is evoked by his choices for words and images.



This chapter will proceed by first building the network of vocabulary and images related to weather theophanies in texts that Ben Sira knew. Next, discrete parallels suggested by other scholars will be measured to see if they meet the previously established criteria for a literary allusion, echo, or commonplace. Taking the evidence as a whole, it will be shown that Ben Sira activates the storm-god motif and storm theophany registers to support his rhetorical agenda. He employs other elements, including the heavenly luminaries, the rainbow, the “bone of heaven,” and God’s “glory” to reinforce the theophanic aspect of nature.

### 3.1 - The Storm-God in Israel

Alberto R. W. Green has demonstrated that the storm-god is a widespread concept through the Near East, the Mediterranean, and even continental Europe.<sup>306</sup> Though there is variety in the particulars, iterations include Assyrian Haddad, Hurrian Teshshub, Hittite Tarhunt, Urartian Teisheba, Sumerian Ishkur, and more famously Babylonian Marduk, Canaanite Ba’al, Greek Zeus, Roman Jupiter, and Germanic/Viking Thor (who appears in blockbuster films to this day). Throughout the history of the Israelites, prolonged contact was made with a number of these cultures, and exchange was inevitable. The Hebrew Bible demonstrates the evolution of Yahwism from a polytheistic to a monotheistic religion, through the intermediary states of henotheism and monolatry.<sup>307</sup> As such, it contains vestiges or fossils of early content, in additions to

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<sup>306</sup> Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, BJSUCSD 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 2003).

<sup>307</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 224–26.

indications of that evolution. Green argues that Yahweh was originally a warrior-god (fourteenth/thirteenth centuries B.C.E.), conflated with the Canaanite god El, and later took on the characteristics of the Canaanite storm-god Ba'al (twelfth century B.C.E. and later), especially as the Hebrews transitioned from nomadic warriors to agrarian pastoralists.<sup>308</sup> To support his argument, Green uses Exod 15:1–18, Psalm 29, Habakkuk 3, Deuteronomy 33, Psalm 18 (= 2 Samuel 22), Ps 77:15–20, and Psalm 89. Similarly, Müller argues that Yahweh was a royal weather or storm-god during the early Iron monarchic period.<sup>309</sup> His primary evidence comes from Psalms 18, 24, 29, 36, 48, 77, 93, 97, and 104. Green and Müller rely on similar evidence, and their theses are compatible. By the time of the early monarchic period, one of the main ways that the Israelites conceived of their god, Yahweh, was as a royal storm-god, though remnants of Yahweh's identification with El remained in the literature that would become biblical and continued to bear upon theological reflection.

It is this variegated literary tradition that Ben Sira inherited, though it is unlikely that Ben Sira was aware of the diachronic dynamics highlighted especially by Green. Ben Sira would have received his culture's literary heritage synchronically, with all the interior tensions, even though that package was not yet a settled canonical unit. What Green and Müller have joined this study will pull asunder. This chapter will primarily be concerned with Yahweh as a storm-god, while next chapters will focus on royal and warrior aspects of Ben Sira's God.

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<sup>308</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 246–75.

<sup>309</sup> Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*.

The following analysis of Ben Sira's inherited literary tradition containing the storm-god motif will first use a representative sample of texts, excepting for the sake of expedience those that have been pointed to as parallel to Ben Sira's Hymn the Creator, to show the basic elements which make up the storm-god motif and related register. These include earthquakes, precipitation (especially hail), lightning, thunder (sometimes conceptualized as God's voice), wind (sometimes conceptualized as God's breath), clouds or smoke, fire, and darkness or light, which is sometimes related to the heavenly luminaries. Each of the texts explored below would have been available to Ben Sira, though no scholar—to my knowledge—has suggested an intertextual relationship between them and Sir 42:15–43:33.

### *3.1.1 - Exodus 19*

God's presence is made known on Mount Sinai with meteorological phenomena:

17 But Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke (עשן), because the LORD had come down upon it in fire (אש). The smoke (עשן) rose from it as though from a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled (חדד) violently. 19 The blast of the shofar grew louder and louder, while Moses was speaking and God was answering him with thunder (קול). (NABRE)

God's presence is accompanied by thunder (קול) and lightning (אש). Although the translator(s) of the New American Bible Revised Edition chose here to translate עשן as "smoke" and אש as "fire" as the image in Ps 18:9 suggests, here they could also be lightning and steam or a cloud. Additionally, God's presence is associated with earthquakes (חדד), presumably the result of thunder. Exodus 19 makes the storm-god theophany explicit.

### 3.1.2 - Psalm 81

The example of Psalm 81 explicates the importance of thunder as theophanic element in the Exodus tradition. Anja Klein argues that Psalm 81 is a post-exilic scribal product that blends history, prophecy, and cultic elements.<sup>310</sup> The author of Psalm 81 demonstrates the credibility of God by recounting the exodus, with the result that the Israelites ought to keep Yahweh's commandments, including the feast of the new moon, which is the occasion of this psalm. Like the Book of Exodus, Psalm 81 uses storm-god imagery by likening Yahweh's voice to thunder, placing on God's lips the following: "In distress you called and I rescued you; I answered you in secret with thunder (רעם); at the waters of Meribah I tested you" (Ps 81:8 NABRE). This verse moves from a generic account of God's rescuing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt to a specific trial (Exodus 17), which parallels the (author's and reader's) present temptation to idolatry (verses 5 and 10). Ps 81:8 equates God's voice to thunder.

### 3.1.3 - Psalm 99

Psalm 99, which also references the events of the Exodus, similarly associates earthquakes (נוט) with theophany. Moses and Aaron are mentioned in verse 6, and the pillar of cloud in verse 7. The psalm opens with theophanic elements in verse 1: "The LORD is king, the peoples tremble; he is enthroned on the cherubim, the earth quakes (נוט)" (NABRE). The trembling of the people is parallel to the quaking of the earth; both

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<sup>310</sup> Anja Klein, "Poetry, Prophecy and History: Divine Speech in Psalms 81 and 95" in *Prophecy and Its Cultic Dimensions*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, Journal of Ancient Judaism – Supplements 31 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 89–100.

are the result of God's presence. In Psalm 99 God's attention is associated with earthquakes.<sup>311</sup>

### *3.1.4 - Exodus 15*

Green argues that Exod 15:1–18 contains elements of the storm-god motif.<sup>312</sup>

Specifically, he points to verse 10, but verse 8 must also be included:

8 At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,  
the flowing waters stood like a mound,  
the flood waters foamed in the midst of the sea.  
9 The enemy boasted, "I will pursue and overtake them;  
I will divide the spoils and have my fill of them;  
I will draw my sword; my hand will despoil them!"  
10 When you blew with your breath, the sea covered them;  
like lead they sank in the mighty waters. (NABRE)

The strong winds that cause the waters of the Red Sea to pile up and then to collapse on the Egyptian army are conceived of as God's breath. In verse 8 the waters were piled up by the wind of God's nose (וּבְרוּחַ אִפְיֶךָ). The imagery in verse 8 colors the more generic usage in verse 10, where God's breath or wind (רוּחַ) causes the sea to return to its original location. In this passage it is evident that the wind is associated with God's breath.

### *3.1.5 - Psalms 33 and 80*

Yahweh's abode is conceptualized as being in the heavens by the author of Psalm 33, who writes in verses 13–14: "From heaven the LORD looks down and observes

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<sup>311</sup> The association between the storm theophany and Yahweh's enthronement supports Green's hypothesis.

<sup>312</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 259–61.

the children of Adam, from his dwelling place he surveys all who dwell on earth” (NABRE). A similar understanding is implied in Psalm 80, which asks God to “look down from heaven” (הבט משמים) in verse 15. The implication of these passages is that God is considered by their authors (and accepted by their audience) to dwell in the sky, the location or source of most weather-related phenomena.

### *3.1.6 - Psalm 135*

The author of Psalm 135 attempts to illustrate the power of God in verse 7 by using storm-god language: “It is he who raises storm clouds (נשאים) from the end of the earth, makes lightning (ברק) for the rain (מטר), and brings forth wind (רוח) from his storehouse (אוצר)” (NABRE). The psalmist illustrates the close connection between clouds, lightning, precipitation, and wind. Psalm 135 also attests to the metaphor of heavenly storehouses, in this case, for the winds, an image employed by Ben Sira for the clouds in Sir 43:14.

### *3.1.7 - Psalms 50 and 97*

Psalms 50 and 97 illustrate the association with fire and the storm theophany, though in some cases אש may be lightning. Ps 50:3 is suggestive of a storm theophany: “Our God comes and will not be silent! Devouring fire (אש) precedes him, it rages strongly around him.” God’s voice is most likely conceived of as thunder, and the fire may be lightning or the result of lightning. Psalm 97 also describes God’s presence in the categories of weather:

- 2 Cloud (ענן) and darkness (ערגל) surround him;  
justice and right are the foundation of his throne.
- 3 Fire (אש) goes before him,

consuming his foes on every side.  
 4 His lightning (ברק) illumines the world;  
 the earth sees and trembles (תחל). (NABRE)

The fire in verse 3 may be the same phenomenon as the lightning in verse 4. In these two psalms familiar elements are present: God's voice as thunder, fire or lightning (אש), clouds (ענן), the darkness of moisture-laden clouds (ערגל), and earthquakes (תחל).

### *3.1.8 - Psalm 68*

Psalm 68 portrays Yahweh as a storm-god who rides the clouds, causes earthquakes, precipitation, and whose voice is thunder:

5 Sing to God, praise his name;  
 exalt the rider of the clouds.  
 Rejoice before him  
 whose name is the LORD.  
 ...  
 9 The earth quaked, the heavens poured,  
 before God, the One of Sinai,  
 before God, the God of Israel.  
 10 You poured abundant rains, God,  
 your inheritance was weak and you repaired it.  
 ...  
 34 Who rides the heights of the ancient heavens,  
 Who sends forth his voice as a mighty voice?  
 35 Confess the power of God,  
 whose majesty protects Israel,  
 whose power is in the sky. (NABRE)

Psalm 68 contains many of the elements associated with the storm theophany. In verse 5, God is called "the rider of the clouds" (רכב בערבות) and the one "who rides the heights of the ancient heavens" (רכב בשמי שמי־קדם) in verse 34. In verses 9 and 10 God's presence is accompanied by earthquakes (ארץ רעשה) and rain (גשם תניף and שמים נטפו). Given the other instances of קול in storm theophanies, verse 34 probably refers to

thunder. Finally, God's power is "in the clouds" (בשחקים), according to verse 35, and his dwelling is on a mountain (Bashan in verse 16, Sinai in verse 18).

### *3.1.9 - Deuteronomy 33*

Deuteronomy 33 is framed as a blessing given by Moses to the different tribes of Israel, similar to the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49. It not only reveals a conception of the individual tribes, their character and geographic location, but also the conception of their shared god. Verse 26 claims that Yahweh "rides the heavens in his power, who rides the clouds (שחקים) in his majesty (גאות)" (NABRE). In addition to riding clouds in luminescent glory, Yahweh is also responsible for the fertility which Israel enjoys "in a land of grain and wine, where the heavens drip with dew" (verse 28, NABRE). Green notes the presence of the storm-god motif in both the cloud-riding reference and the connection between precipitation and the resultant fertility.<sup>313</sup>

### *3.1.10 - Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5*

Habakkuk 3 associates God with the storm, as recognized by Green:<sup>314</sup>

6 He stood and shook the earth;  
he looked and made the nations tremble.  
Ancient mountains were shattered,  
the age-old hills bowed low,  
age-old orbits collapsed.

...

10 at the sight of you the mountains writhed.  
The clouds poured down water;  
the deep roared loudly.  
The sun forgot to rise,

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<sup>313</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 266–69.

<sup>314</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 264–66.



11 the moon left its lofty station,  
At the light of your flying arrows,  
at the gleam of your flashing spear. (NABRE)

Verse 6 introduces the storm theophany with the perception of God's presence and earthquakes. Verse 10 continues with earthquake imagery, adding to it precipitation ("rainstorm of water," זרם מים), darkness due to the absence of the heavenly luminaries, and lightning (ברק) as a weapon.<sup>315</sup> The theophany in Habakkuk 3 associates God's presence with elements of the storm: cloud, darkness, rain, and earthquakes, similar to Judges 5, which states "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the plains of Edom, the earth shook (רעש), the heavens poured (נטף), the clouds (עוב) poured (נטף) rain (מים)" (5:4 NABRE). Each of these theophanies contain the same stock element of precipitation, clouds, and earthquakes, while Habakkuk 3 includes darkness and lightning as a weapon.

### *3.1.11 - Conclusion*

The above survey of literature sketched out some elements of the storm-god motif, and the commonplace elements that belong to its register. In Exodus 19, God's presence is accompanied by smoke/cloud, fire/lightning, thunder and earthquakes. Psalm 81 equates God's voice to thunder, while Psalm 99 associates God's presence with earthquakes. Exodus 15 conceives God's breath as wind. Psalm 33 and Psalm 80 imply that God's dwelling place was the heavens. Psalm 135 claims that God controls the clouds, lightning, rain, and winds, adding the image of the heavenly storehouses to

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<sup>315</sup> In verse 14 Yahweh uses the stormwind to scatter his foes, according to the NABRE translation. The Hebrew grammar is difficult, and it may mean that speaker's enemies "stormed" (יסערו) him, as the ESV translates.

the register. Psalms 50 and 97 reenforce the association of lightning, thunder, and earthquakes, in addition to clouds. In Psalm 68 God rides the clouds and lives in the sky, while his presence on earth is manifest in thunder, earthquakes, and rain. The author of Deuteronomy 33 conceives of a God whose majesty shines from the clouds upon which he rides, bringing fertility to the land. Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5 contain a storm theophany with the familiar elements of clouds, precipitation, lightning, darkness, and earthquakes.

In sum, the storm-god register includes the following elements: earthquakes, precipitation (especially hail), lightning and/or fire, thunder (sometimes conceptualized as God's voice), wind (sometimes conceptualized as God's breath), clouds or smoke, and darkness or light, which is sometimes related to the heavenly luminaries. God's presence is sometimes associated with fertility. There is some variation in imagery, including the ambiguous relationship between the lightning and fire and between clouds and smoke. Regardless of the variation, different arrangements of these commonplaces are associated with theophanies of Yahweh. That each of the above examples shares a handful of common elements suggests that each of the elements belonged to a common register, which was instantiated in and activated by discrete texts, but which was nevertheless independent of each individual text.

### 3.2 - The Storm-God in Sirach: Proposed Parallels

In the previous section, commonplaces in the register related to the storm-god motif were cataloged. They include earthquakes, precipitation (especially hail), lightning and/or fire, thunder (sometimes conceptualized as God's voice), wind (sometimes

conceptualized as God's breath), clouds or smoke (sometimes ridden by God), and darkness or light, which is sometimes related to the heavenly luminaries. Sir 43:13–22 contains several of the same elements, including different kinds of precipitation, clouds, lightning, different winds, and variations in temperature. Based on the same list of commonplaces, Di Lella suggests a parallel between this passage in Sirach and the "onomasticon," or nature-list.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, Askin argues that this passage is the product of the "sustained use of a literary convention such as nature-lists as a literary model," while also arguing for direct textual reuse of a few specific texts.<sup>317</sup> It is certainly possible that Ben Sira was aware of and used nature-lists to help him compose this section of Sirach. While the nature-list genre may inform the structure of this section of Sirach, and even the related calls to praise, it does not account for the theophanic association between Yahweh and the storm imagery. The onomasticon hypothesis accounts for the form of the text but not its rhetorical function.

Askin attempts to distinguish individual points of contact between Sirach and the specific nature-lists from which he drew. To be sure, the relationship between a genre and the instantiations of that genre are dialectical, the abstraction only existing in the particulars. Similarly, there is a dialectical relationship between the storm-god motif and the texts which instantiate it. The motif can only be known through specific examples.

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<sup>316</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491. Sauer ("Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 312), though he cites Skehan and Di Lella, states "Von Ich-Bericht über hymnische Aussagen bis hin zu grandiosen naturwissenschaftlichen Beschreibungen vereint dieser Passus in fast verwirrender Weise alles zu einem imponierenden und gleichzeitig überzeugenden Ganzen, das nicht auf eine einzige Form festgelegt werden kann."

<sup>317</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 112; 138.

Yet, when similar examples are accumulated, the motif functions as a tradition, independent of any one example, especially when the characteristics necessary to identify a specific intertext are lacking. The storm-god imagery in Sir 42:15–43:33 has been identified by a number of scholars as a motif.<sup>318</sup> Others, often in an attempt to identify the motif, point to specific texts. They vary in the degree to which they implicitly or explicitly posit direct diachronic relationships between the texts, and inconsistencies in vocabulary make comparisons between the work of individual scholars difficult. Instead of attempting to reproduce each scholar's argument or verbiage, all intertextual relationships suggested in the secondary literature will be classified here as "parallels." These parallels will be investigated individually to see whether the relationship should be cataloged as a literary allusion, echo, or commonplace.

### 3.2.1 - Psalm 77

Schechter and Taylor propose a parallel between Sir 42:15 (אזכרה נא מעשי אל—MS B differs only in the absence of the cohortative ה) and Ps 77:12 (אזכיר [אזכור] מעלליה).<sup>319</sup> Collins and Snaith suggest the same.<sup>320</sup> Burton draws the same parallel, adducing that the change from מעללי in Ps 77:12 to מעשי in Sir 42:15 indicates a change from a salvific

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<sup>318</sup> For instance, see Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 318–19; and Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93.

<sup>319</sup> Solomon Schechter and Charles Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Portions of the Book Ecclesiasticus: From Hebrew Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah Collection Presented to the University of Cambridge by the Editors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 20. Also observed by Burton, "Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation," 57.

<sup>320</sup> Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," 105; John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 213.

register to a creation one.<sup>321</sup> However, the marker in Sirach does not seem strong enough to evoke Psalm 77. First, the divine monikers are different, and if Yahweh were the original reading in Sirach, then יי would be expected in MS B. Since the divine designations are the same in both manuscripts, אל is probably the original reading. Second, the only shared word is used in other compositions. Like Psalm 77, Psalm 105:5 also asks listeners to “recall” the works of God: “Recall [זכרו] the wondrous deeds he has done, his wonders and words of judgment” (NABRE). The context of Psalm 105 is salvation-historical, as it is in Psalm 77. The closer similarity between Psalms 77 and 105, in addition to the difference in vocabulary and context between Sir 42:15 and both psalms, suggests that the invocation to “recall” (זכר) God’s works was a commonplace, at least by the time of Ben Sira. It is a word used in certain circumstances, but its use does not evoke other usages *per se*.

Although Sir 42:15 and Ps 77:12 only share a commonplace, they do have some more generic features in common. In particular, Green recognizes that Ps 77:16–20 contain a storm theophany.<sup>322</sup> Ps 77:18–19 activates the storm god theophany register by using theophanic elements to express God’s presence during the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus:

18 The clouds (ענן) poured (זרם) down their rains (מים);  
the thunderheads rumbled (קול);  
your arrows (ברק) flashed (אור) back and forth.  
19 The thunder (קול) of your chariot wheels resounded;  
your lightning (ברק) lit up the world;  
the earth trembled (רגז) and quaked (רעש). (NABRE)

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<sup>321</sup> Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 57.

<sup>322</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 271–72.

God's presence is accompanied by precipitation (מים), lightning (ברק), thunder (קול), and earthquakes (רעש / רגז). The account in Psalm 77 not only contains the theophanic storm imagery but even anthropomorphizes some of the elements. The text equates lightning to Yahweh's arrows, as they are in Wis 5:21, Hab 3:10–11, Zec 9:14. Thunder, which is often considered to be God's "voice," is described here as God's chariot wheels. Within the same motif, there is variation—sometimes mutually exclusive variation—among the commonplaces that make up the motif's register. Psalm 77 recounts the crossing of the Red Sea using clear theophanic storm god imagery, while the same Exodus account of the same event has no such imagery.<sup>323</sup> This suggests that the theophanic storm god imagery was independent of a particular tradition.

### 3.2.2 - Psalm 29

Smend detects parallels between Sir 43:17–19 and Psalm 29.<sup>324</sup> Schechter and Taylor note this similarity with Ps 29:3, 9.<sup>325</sup> Di Lella asserts a parallel between Sir 43:17a and Ps 29:8, based on the texts employing similar imagery, observing a general correspondence between Sir 43:13–26 and Psalm 29.<sup>326</sup> Askin also notes the parallel.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Whether Psalm 77 adds the imagery to the tradition or whether it was removed from Exodus 14 is difficult to say. The psalms tend to be more poetic and therefore employ this imagery more often, while the author and redactors of the Book of Exodus did not shy away from it either, as illustrated by Exodus 9 and Exodus 19.

<sup>324</sup> Rudolf Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach: Hebräisch und Deutsch* (Berlin: Reimer, 1907), 406–8.

<sup>325</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

<sup>326</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 493–4. See also Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

<sup>327</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 123–24.

However, these parallels are not precise enough to be allusions. Instead, they must be considered as commonplaces, as will be shown.

Psalm 29 starts *in media res*. The basic plot is the conquest of the storm-god over the waters (מים in verse 3) or flood (מבול in verse 10). Green re-iterates the hypothesis that Psalm 29 is “a Yahwistic adaptation of an older Canaanite hymn to the storm-god Ba’al,” since geographic markers within the poem, like Lebanon and Sirion (verse 6), are foreign to Israel.<sup>328</sup> The primary aspect of the storm theophany is God’s voice (קול) as thunder (רעם), although other elements typically associated with theophany also appear:

3 The voice (קול) of the LORD is over the waters (מים);  
the God of glory thunders (רעם),  
the LORD, over the mighty (רב) waters (מים).  
4 The voice (קול) of the LORD is power;  
the voice (קול) of the LORD is splendor.  
5 The voice (קול) of the LORD cracks the cedars;  
the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon,  
6 Makes Lebanon leap like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young bull.  
7 The voice (קול) of the LORD strikes with fiery (להבה) flame (אש);  
8 the voice (קול) of the LORD shakes (חיל) the desert;  
the LORD shakes (חיל) the desert of Kadesh.  
9 The voice (קול) of the LORD makes the deer dance  
and strips the forests bare.  
All in his Temple say, “Glory!” (NABRE)

Terrestrial movement is caused by God’s voice (קול), conceived of as thunder (רעם).

Another common theophanic element occurs in verse 7: “flames of fire” (להבות אש).

Context suggests that this fire, with which God strikes (חצב), may be identical with or the

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<sup>328</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 261.

result of lightning.<sup>329</sup> God's voice is also accompanied by earthquakes (חיל). Sir 43:16 reads: "The voice (קול) of his thunder (רעם) causes his earth to tremble (יחיל), and in his strength he shakes (יניף) the mountains." While both Sirach and Psalm 29 contain thunder and earthquakes, these elements are hardly unique to these two texts, as has been shown above. God's voice is conceived of as thunder in Exodus 19 and in Psalms 18, 50, and 81. The potential markers in Sir 43:16 do not specifically point to Psalm 29, since many are shared with Job 37:5. Additionally, the context that would be added by Psalm 29 does not go beyond the general association between the storm imagery and theophany. There is no compelling case to conclude that Ben Sira is alluding to Psalm 29 in Sir 43:16. Instead the elements employed by Ben Sira ought to be considered commonplaces associated with the storm-god theophany motif, of which Psalm 29 is an excellent example.

### 3.2.3 - Psalm 147

Several scholars have observed the similarity between the meteorological imagery in Sir 42:15–43:33 and Psalms 147.<sup>330</sup> One specific correspondence deserves special attention. Schechter and Taylor propose a parallel between Sir 43:19 and Ps 147:16 based on shared language.<sup>331</sup> Burton proposes the same parallel.<sup>332</sup> Psalm

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<sup>329</sup> For more on fire as a theophanic element, see Michael R. Simone, *"Your God Is a Devouring Fire": Fire as a Motif of Divine Presence and Agency in the Hebrew Bible*, CBQMS 57 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2019).

<sup>330</sup> Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*, 406–8; Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 72; Burton, "Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation," 59; Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

<sup>331</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

<sup>332</sup> Burton, "Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation," 60 n. 25.



147:16 reads “Thus he makes the snow like wool, and spreads the frost (כפור) like (כ) ash” (NABRE). The parallel with Sir 43:19 is weak: “And also frost (כפור), he pours it out like (כ) salt, and he causes it to grow like a thorn-bush in flower.” The passages only have the words “frost” (כפור) and the comparative (כ) in common. The subject of the analogy is the same (frost), the object of the comparison is different. This evidence is insufficient to establish direct dependence, whether as an echo or an allusion.

Despite not being able to demonstrate specific dependencies, similarities persist between the two texts. Verses 17 and 18 of Psalm 147 continue with an illustration of God’s power through wind and participation: “He disperses hail (קרר) like crumbs. Who can withstand his cold? Yet when again he issues his command, it melts them; he raises his winds (רוח) and the waters flow” (NABRE). Once again God is associated with familiar phenomena: clouds, precipitation—especially hail or ice (קרר)—and wind (רוח). Ps 147:8 invites praise for the God “who covers the heavens with clouds (עב), provides rain (מטר) for the earth, [and] makes grass sprout on the mountains” (NABRE). This verse not only casts God as a storm-god, but also illustrates the connection between the storm-god’s character and fertility function (as in Deuteronomy 33). Though the specific parallels proposed by Schechter, Taylor, and Burton are not enough to establish direct dependence or a specific allusion, the general correspondence between Sir 43:13–22 and Psalm 147 illustrates that each text was drawing on a common tradition, employing similar words and images to similar rhetorical ends.

### 3.2.4 - Psalm 148

Roland Murphy also observes the similarity in imagery between Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator and Psalm 148.<sup>333</sup> Schmidt, too, notes the similarity and investigates the parallel.<sup>334</sup> Psalm 148 calls on nature to praise its creator, listing different creations (not unlike the Greek addition in Dan 3:57–88). The meteorological phenomena are contained in a single verse: "Lightning (אש) and hail (ברך), snow (שלג) and thick clouds (קיטור), storm wind (רוח סערה) that fulfills his command" (Ps 148:8, NABRE). These are all stock elements or commonplaces in the storm-god theophany motif. Schmidt also observes important differences, including that in Psalm 148 creation is personified and called to praise God, but this is not the case in Sirach. It would seem then that both Sirach and Psalm 148 are participating in a common motif.

### 3.2.5 - Psalm 65

Similar to Psalm 147, Psalm 65 also illustrates God's active providence of water for agriculture and the effect which that nourishment has up the food chain. Corley observes the similarity between Sir 43:22 and Ps 65:10–12, where "the rain and dew makes the scorched (פקד) land fertile."<sup>335</sup> Psalm 65, addressed to God, illustrates the fertility function of Yahweh as storm-god in verses 10–14. Although Sir 43:13–15 is concerned with precipitation, especially in Sir 43:14–22, the tone and tenor are decidedly different from those of Psalm 65. Ben Sira is concerned with the power that

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<sup>333</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 72.

<sup>334</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 201.

<sup>335</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

the different kinds of precipitations illustrate, while the author of Psalm 65 is more concerned with their good effect for nature and thus for humans. Ben Sira condenses this sentiment into one verse. After illustrating the power of the sun to scorch the earth and dry up the land, Ben Sira notes that God provides the antidote: “The healing of all is the rain cloud; it releases moisture to refresh scorched (שרב) ground” (Sir 43:22). In Sirach, the power of the sun is balanced by the effect of precipitation. Though fertility would be the effect of the rain in Sirach, Ben Sira’s focus is not on fertility and its benefit to humanity. In sum, though both Psalm 65 and Sir 43:22 contain the movement from scorched earth to precipitation, the difference in focus and vocabulary makes an allusion or echo unlikely. Therefore, the two texts are probably employing a commonplace.

### 3.2.6 - Psalm 104

Psalm 104 observes the order and providence of creation. Schechter and Taylor and Burton propose an allusion in Sir 42:16 to Ps 104:31 based on shared language (ובבוד יי על).<sup>336</sup> Snaith does the same, linking a survey of natural phenomena to praise.<sup>337</sup> However, this parallel only exists in MS B and not in Masada Scroll (וכבוד אדני מלא ) (מעשיו), which indicates that the parallel may be a harmonization. Nevertheless, Psalm

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<sup>336</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20; Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 60 n. 25.

<sup>337</sup> John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 212.

104 and Sir 42:15–43:33 are linked by the usage of two commonplaces, including earthquakes, which is the common element that causes Askin to link the two texts.<sup>338</sup>

In Sir 43:23b, Ben Sira claims that God “stretches out (נטה) coastlands on the Deep.” Similarly, the author of Psalm 104 claims in verse 2b that God “spread out (נטה) the heavens like a tent” (NABRE). The idea of spreading out as an act of creation is most likely a commonplace, because it also occurs in Isa 40:22c, which claims that God “stretches out (נטה) the heavens like a veil” (NABRE), and in Isa 42:5b, which identifies God as the one “who created the heavens and stretched them out (נטה)” (NABRE). In Isa 48:13b, the same image is used: “my right hand spread out (טפח) the heavens” (NABRE). Psalm 104 and Isaiah 40 are more similar, because they have the same subject (God) and same object (the heavens), which makes it unlikely that Ben Sira is alluding to one or the other but utilizing a commonplace.

Psalm 104 and the Hymn to the Creator share another commonplace: storm imagery. Corley suggests a parallel between Psalm 104 and how Ben Sira treats God’s power as manifest in the storm.<sup>339</sup> The author of Psalm 104 has modified some of the traditional storm theophany imagery, while retaining other imagery. Instead of characterizing God’s appearance as darkness, because of the dark clouds which block the sun as in Psalm 18, God is associated in Ps 104:1c–2a with light (as in Deuteronomy 33): “You are clothed with majesty and splendor, robed in light as with a cloak” (NABRE). The image of the storm-god riding the chariot of clouds, propelled by the winds, and

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<sup>338</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 123–24.

<sup>339</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

associated with fire (lightning) remains in verses 3b–4: “You make the clouds (עב) your chariot; traveling on the wings of the wind (רוח). You make the winds (רוה) your messengers; flaming fire (אש להט), your ministers” (NABRE). This image of the cloud-chariot propelled by the winds can also be seen in Ps 77:19, Ps 18:11, and Deuteronomy 33. Ben Sira does not seem to allude to or be specifically reliant on Psalm 104, though both participate in a common tradition.

### 3.2.7 - Psalm 18

Though Psalm 18 as a whole can be classified as “A Royal Song of Thanksgiving,” Green identifies Ps 18:7–15 as a storm theophany.<sup>340</sup> Collins and Corley both observe that Sir 42:15–43:33 has overtones of the language connected with storm theophany, language shared with Ps 18:7–15.<sup>341</sup> Psalm 18 is a psalm of divine deliverance which uses the Yahweh-as-storm-god motif to colorfully describe God’s coming to the author’s aid:

8 The earth rocked (גענש) and shook (רענש);  
the foundations of the mountains trembled (רגז);  
they shook (גענש) as his wrath flared up.  
9 Smoke (עשן) rose from his nostrils,  
a devouring fire (אש) from his mouth;  
it kindled coals into flame (בער).  
10 He parted the heavens (שמים) and came down,  
a dark (ערגל) cloud under his feet.  
11 Mounted on a cherub he flew,  
borne along on the wings of the wind (רוח).  
12 He made darkness (חשך) his cloak around him;  
his canopy, water-darkened (חשבת-מים) stormclouds (עב).  
13 From the gleam before him, his clouds (עב) passed,  
Hail (ברד) and coals of fire (אש).

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<sup>340</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 269–71.

<sup>341</sup> Collins, “Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach,” 105; Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

14 The LORD thundered (רעם) from heaven;  
 the Most High made his voice (קול) resound.  
 15 He let fly his arrows and scattered them;  
 shot his lightning bolts (ברק) and dispersed them. (Ps 18:8–15 NABRE)

Common elements of the storm-god theophany include: God's voice (קול) as thunder (רעם), accompanied by lightning (ברק) conceived as arrows (חץ), earthquakes (רגד / געש), and dark (חשך / ערגל), water-laden (חשבת-מים) clouds (עב). God's presence is manifest by hail (ברד) and God rides the wind (רוח), two other elements of the storm-god motif. Finally, both smoke (עשן) and fire (אש / בער) appear. There are only generic similarities between Psalm 18 and Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator. These shared commonplaces belong to the same storm-god theophany register. There is little evidence to suggest that Ben Sira was alluding to Psalm 18 specifically.

### 3.2.8 - *Isaiah 29*

Lange and Weigold detect a parallel between Sir 43:16 (in both the Masada Manuscript and MS B) and Isa 29:6.<sup>342</sup> Askin notes the similarity as well.<sup>343</sup> The first part of Isaiah 29 is an oracle of judgment against Jerusalem. Yahweh will visit the city “with thunder (רעם), earthquake (רעש), and great noise (קול גדול), whirlwind (סופה), storm (סערה), and the flame of consuming fire (אש)” (verse 6, NABRE). In short, Isaiah is promising a storm theophany, using commonplaces associated with the storm-god. Askin suggests that the ordering of thunder, earthquake, storm-wind, and tempest is

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<sup>342</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

<sup>343</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 123–24.

drawn from Isa 29:6.<sup>344</sup> To this list, one could add the parallel between the flame of consuming fire (להב אש אוכלה) in Isa 29:6 and Ben Sira's analogy between snow and a blaze in Sir 43:17: "Like a blaze (כרשף), his snow flies; and like locusts it settles." However, different words for fire are used, with Ben Sira preferring a far more obscure word. This situation is not helped by the fact that the cola in the Hebrew versions do not match the versification in the Greek. Additionally, the cola that mentions thunder is missing from MS B. Askin's parallel only works in the Masada Scroll, but since that is probably the most original, the hands of later tradents may have obscured this reminiscence (structural re-use). Ben Sira's rhetorical objective vis-à-vis Isaiah 29 is difficult to ascertain. Certainly, they are drawing from the same tradition. Since Isaiah is an anterior exemplar of that tradition, relative to Ben Sira, there may be a direct intertextual link between the two. Even though Askin demonstrates a number of parallels between the aforementioned psalms and Isaiah throughout Sir 43:11–19, she does not suggest that these parallels are allusions.<sup>345</sup> Instead, she argues that Ben Sira is using them as source texts, as examples of nature-lists. Though Askin does, at times, attempt to identify the specific source of words or phrases, she seems to accept that most of the similarities are due to generic commonplaces. The parallels are not allusive. They are the result of literary convention, adding only the meaningful context associated with the convention and the specific text (Isaiah 29).

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<sup>344</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 126.

<sup>345</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 132.

### *3.2.9 - Conclusion*

Several parallels were proposed between Sir 43:13–22 and Ben Sira's inherited literary tradition, including Psalm 77, Psalm 29, Psalms 147 and 148, Psalm 104, Psalm 18, and Isaiah 29. Out of all of these proposals, none of them met the criteria for a literary allusion or an echo. The commonalities observed between Sirach and the various psalms, in addition to Isaiah 29, must be considered commonplaces belong to the storm-god register, associated with theophany.

### **3.3 - Actualization in Sirach**

While several parallels between Sirach and books that would become biblical were proposed, none of the proposed parallels qualified as literary allusions nor were the markers strong enough to be categorized as echoes. From the survey evidence, it is clear that the storm theophany motif was popular amongst those books that would become canonical, in addition to numerous works throughout the ancient Near East. Ben Sira was employing the commonplaces of the storm-god theophany motif, which include hail (43:13), lightning (43:13), storehouse (43:14), clouds (43:14, 15), God's voice as thunder (43:16), which causes earthquakes (43:16), wind (43:16), storm (43:16), and rain (43:18). To these traditional elements he adds other precipitation like snow (43:17) and frost (43:19). Ben Sira even mentions fire (43:17) for an analogy. In this passage, Ben Sira employs all of the most common commonplaces associated with the storm-god theophany, except perhaps smoke. Snaith recognizes the theophanic association of



thunder in Sir 43:16–17.<sup>346</sup> Similarly, Schmidt observes that “in his mention of God’s thunder making the earth writhe and mountains tremble (cf. 43:16–17), Ben Sira employs traditional theophanic language (cf. Exod 19:18–25; Pss 116:9; 97:4; 104:32) in order to indicate a connection between God’s presence and the meteorological phenomena that he is describing.”<sup>347</sup> None of these words on their own or as a group are unique enough to point to a specific text, so the similarities in language between Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator and the passages surveyed above cannot be due to literary allusion or echo. The markers are not strong enough and the parallels are not unique. Each of the commonplaces are found in multiple texts and so are groupings of them. Nevertheless, this group of meteorological language recalls the whole storm-god theophany register, abstracted from specific instantiations.

Ben Sira uses the weather imagery and its association to theophany to further the main argument of the poem, namely, that God can be known through nature. This sentiment occurs in the opening of the poem: “As the sun rises upon everything uncovered, so the glory of the Lord is on the fullness of his work” (Sir 42:16). It occurs again at the closing: “He reveals himself still because we cannot understand, since he is greater than all his works. Exceedingly fearsome is the Lord, and wonderful, his power” (Sir 43:28–29). The glory and power of God, in addition to God’s wisdom (Sir 42:21), are revealed in creation.

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<sup>346</sup> John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 213.

<sup>347</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 184.

Ben Sira activates the storm-god register to capitalize on its theophanic associations. In Sir 43:13–22 Ben Sira is positing that God controls the powerful meteorological forces. The power of these natural forces are manifestations of God's own power. This is similar to the explicit logic of Psalm 93, in which God is more glorious and powerful than the roaring voice (קול) of the sea. This supports Ben Sira's thesis in Sir 42:16. Meteorology is theophany, because God reveals himself in nature. Or to put it the other way around, nature reveals or responds to God's presence. Ben Sira employs the ancient trope of the storm theophany, which his audience is sure to recognize, to illustrate the premise that God can be known through his creation and to offer evidence to support his argument.

Ben Sira's use of the commonplaces associated with the storm-god theophany motif as a method for reinforcing the basic thesis of the poem are enough to demonstrate that he is aware of the motif's cultural cache, which he exploits for his rhetorical benefit. In the same poem, Ben Sira mobilizes similar theophanic associations with the heavenly luminaries, the rainbow, the bone of heaven, and the term "glory."

### *3.3.1 - The Heavenly Luminaries*

Ben Sira employs the heavenly luminaries and their cultural associations for a similar rhetorical purpose as the weather imagery. In this passage, Ben Sira praises the maker of the sun on account of the sun's power and the maker of the moon, since the moon acts as creation's metronome, ensuring order.

Though Psalm 19 may be composite of a Canaanite hymn to the sun (vv. 1–6) and meditation arising from Second Temple "Torah piety" (which may also be

composite), Ben Sira would have encountered it as a unit.<sup>348</sup> Di Lella observes the similarities between Sir 43:1–5 and Psalm 19.<sup>349</sup> Di Lella admits that the parallel between Ps 19:7 and Sir 43:5, which describes the sun as being pulled by steeds, is based on an uncertain reconstruction of Ben Sira's work, which has not been accepted here. A second parallel is between Sir 43:1 and Ps 19:2. Both texts propose that the sun, a creation of God, manifests its own glory, thereby attesting to God's glory. There are no tight lexical or grammatical parallels to suggest that Ben Sira is alluding the Psalm 19. Di Lella also acknowledges that sweltering sun at noon is a trope (or commonplace).

The metaphor in Psalm 19 between the sun and the Torah is similar to Ben Sira's thesis throughout the entire poem. Ben Sira, a master tradent of Israel's heritage, unites "Torah piety" and the wisdom tradition, therefore changing the sun from a metaphorical parallel to the Torah to an actual parallel. As the Torah manifests God's glory in Psalm 19, so the Sun itself manifests God's glory in creation, according to Ben Sira. The sun is first mentioned in Sir 42:16, which introduces comparison that God's glory can be seen through creation, just as the sun shines on everything that is uncovered. A similar analogy was also used by Ben Sira in Sir 17:19, where an analogy is drawn between the clarity of the sun (or which the sun provides) and the clarity with which God sees the deeds of humans. Ben Sira returns to the topic of the sun in Sir 43:1–5, where his main points are that the sun's brilliance and heat are manifestations

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<sup>348</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–77* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 111.

<sup>349</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 492.

of God's power. Speaking of the sun, Ben Sira states in 43:5 "for great is the Lord who made it." The sun has awesome power, how much more its creator.

The cosmological account in Genesis 1 does mention the heavenly luminaries (Gen 1:16–18). A number of scholars suggest parallels between Ben Sira's portrayal of the heavenly luminaries and Israel's literary patrimony. Sauer observes that both Gen 1:16 and Sir 43:1–10 follow the same sequence when introducing the heavenly luminaries: sun, moon, and then stars (contrary to other sources, such as Ps 104:19).<sup>350</sup> Perdue sees this passage as a poetic commentary on Gen 1:14–19.<sup>351</sup> More precisely, Di Lella sees a parallel between Sir 43:8d and Gen 1:16.<sup>352</sup>

This parallel is inexact. In Gen 1:16–18, the moon (ירח) is never named, though it is clearly signified by "the lesser light" (המאור הקטן) which governs the night. Sir 43:6 asserts that the moon "governs" (משל) the times. This precise sentiment only occurs in the Bible in Sir 43:6 and Gen 1:16, though Ps 136:8–9 also claims that the sun "governs" the day and that the moon "governs" the night.

The word "sign" (אות) does not connect celestial bodies and time anywhere in the Bible, except in Gen 1:14 and Sir 43:6. The connection is strengthened by the presence in both texts of עולם, "everlasting." The phrase "everlasting sign" (אות עולם) occurs in Isa 55:13, as noted by Schechter and Taylor.<sup>353</sup> However, the "everlasting

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<sup>350</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 317.

<sup>351</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 256.

<sup>352</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 493.

<sup>353</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

sign” in Isa 55:13 does not refer to the sun, moon, or stars. Ben Sira uses the same phrase in Sir 44:17, part of Ben Sira’s Praise of the Famous. Ben Sira recalls the story of Noah and his covenant with God by naming Noah and alluding to the covenant, but not the rainbow. Instead, Ben Sira simply refers to an “everlasting sign” (אות עולם) in verse 18, which clearly references the rainbow.<sup>354</sup>

The word “season” (מועד) is connected to the moon in only six of its 223 biblical occurrences (1 Ch 23:31, 2 Ch 8:13, Ps 104:9, Isa 1:14, and Hos 2:11), one of which is in Gen 1:14. The presence of the “vault” of heaven (רקיע) in both Sir 43:08 and Gen 1:6–8 is seen as a parallel by Di Lella.<sup>355</sup> Though many (7) of the biblical occurrences are clustered in Genesis 1, the term occurs a total of 15 times in the Hebrew Bible (Ezek 1:22, 23, 25, 26; 10:1; Ps 19:4; 150:1; Dan 12:3).

Though there are a number of lexical parallels, some of which are relatively rare, it does not seem as though Ben Sira is alluding to Genesis 1 in Sir 43:6–7. The addition of Genesis 1 as an interpretive context of Sir 43:6–7 adds little that is not already in Sir 43:6–7. Instead, it is more probable that Ben Sira is employing terms, phrases, and images associated with the topic of heavenly luminaries in particular and creation in general. The fact that Genesis 1 also treats this topic with many similar terms should be unsurprising, since Ben Sira had Genesis available to him and it probably helped to form

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<sup>354</sup> Wright (“Conflicted Boundaries,” 247) observes that in Genesis the covenant is called “eternal” not the “sign,” but admits that Ben Sira is probably referencing the rainbow in this passage.

<sup>355</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 492.

his register, but it does not necessarily mean that he is attempting to recall that specific text or tradition to the mind of his audience.

Genesis states that sun and moon rule over the day and night respectively, a sentiment echoed in Ps 136:8–9, which briefly rehearses the narrative tradition contained in Genesis-Joshua. The cluster of occurrences of רָקִיעַ in Ezekiel 1 demonstrates that persistence of the images and vocabulary found in Genesis 1 throughout the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, those images and vocabulary occur when dealing with similar topics—like creation, the great lights, the sky, etc.—illustrating the register that lays behind them

Though scholars have suggested parallels between Sirach and books in the Hebrew Bible, none of them meet the criteria for being a literary allusion or an echo. Just like the weather phenomena, the sun, moon, and the stars are also revelatory of their maker. In Genesis 1, the moon marks the seasons and rules the night. These heavenly luminaries act as proxies for order, since they “govern” their respective realms. The rhetorical thrust of Genesis 1 is that God made the cosmos effortlessly, and the resultant universe is well ordered. A similar sentiment can be found in Ps 104:19, Corley suggests as a parallel to Ben Sira’s treatment of the heavenly luminaries.<sup>356</sup> That this sentiment shows up in different places suggests that it is a commonplace by the time of Ben Sira. Without activating Genesis, Psalm 19, or Psalm 104 *per se*, Ben Sira is still capitalizing on the cultural association of the luminaries with order, which supports

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<sup>356</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 120.

the overall thesis of the poem, stated in Sir 42:16, which employs the sun as a metaphor.

### *3.3.2 - The Rainbow and Sky*

After Ben Sira finishes praising the maker of the sun and the moon, he similarly praises the same maker for the glory of the rainbow in Sir 43:11–12. The chief attributes in this passage are the rainbow's majesty and glory, which speak to its maker. Askin suggests that the use of קשת and ראה together parallels Gen 9:13–16 and Ezek 1:28. That there are two suggested parallels already rules out an echo or literary allusion, but Ben Sira is nevertheless capitalizing the rainbow's cultural associations to further his rhetorical purpose.

The Hebrew word for rainbow, קשת, generally (72/76 times) means war-bow. Genesis 9 contains three occurrences where קשת refers to the polychrome arc in the sky. The only other biblical occurrence where קשת means "rainbow" is Ezek 1:28. This verse is part of Ezekiel's call narrative when the prophet is having a heavenly vision. Ezekiel is attempting to describe his vision of the anthropomorphic Yahweh, who sits on his heavenly throne, when he describes God's aura or glory (כבוד) thusly: "Just like the appearance of the rainbow (קשת) in the clouds on a rainy day so was the appearance of brilliance that surrounded him. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speak" (Ezek 1:28 NABRE). In this passage, it is clear that קשת signifies the rainbow as terrestrial analog for divine brilliance.

Sir 43:11–12 is not the only place where Ben Sira deals with rainbows or the Noahide covenant. As mentioned above, Ben Sira writes of Noah and the “eternal sign” (אות עולם), a clear reference to the rainbow, in Sir 44:17.<sup>357</sup> It is interesting that in this passage Ben Sira mentions Noah and the covenant, but not the rainbow, though Ben Sira is clearly aware of the rainbow’s association with the covenant of Noah.<sup>358</sup>

The association of קשת in Sir 43:11–12 is not immediately or obviously associated with Noah, so it may be closer to that in Ezekiel 1 and Sir 50:7 than to Sir 44:17 and Gen 9:13–16. In Ezek 1:28, God’s glory is compared to the rainbow. In Sir 50:7 Ben Sira compares the glory (הדר) of Simon the High Priest to the rainbow: “and like a rainbow (ובקשת) seen (נראתה) in the cloud.” Though the comparisons in Ezek 1:28 and in Sir 50:7 are similar, the constructions are different. Sir 50:7 uses the simple preposition כ, while Ezek 1:28 employs a construct chain (במראה הקשת) beginning with the same preposition. Both verses also employ a form of the verb “to see” (ראה). They are also comparing different, though related, attributes (כבוד vs הדר).

A cursory reading suggests a parallel between Sir 43:11–12 and Ezek 1:28. In both places the primary attribute of the rainbow is its luminescence. In both passage “rainbow” (קשת) and ראה appear. In Ezek 1:28 the image of the rainbow is being compared to the “glory” (כבוד) of Yahweh. In Sir 43:11 the rainbow is being praised for

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<sup>357</sup> Wright (“Conflicted Boundaries,” 247) observes that in Genesis the covenant is called “eternal” not the “sign,” but admits that Ben Sira is probably referencing the rainbow in this passage.

<sup>358</sup> Ben Sira’s naming Noah is a literary allusion since the added context explicates the nature of the “eternal sign.”



its “splendor” (הוד) (according to my reconstruction).<sup>359</sup> The parallel, therefore, is inexact. The lexical overlap is not strong enough to produce a marker, and the function of the rainbow in each passage is different. In Sir 43:11–12 the rainbow is an object whose glory magnifies its creator. In Ezek 1:28 the rainbow is used as an analogous image for theophany, an association which is probably mobilized in Sir 50:7.

The term “glory” (כבוד) does appear in Sir 43:12, but it refers to the vault of the sky. Perdue picks up on the theophanic connotations of Ben Sira’s use of the term “glory” (כבוד), which refers to “the ‘manifestation’ of divine presence for the purpose of revelation.”<sup>360</sup> The association of “glory” (כבוד) with God’s presence, as in Ezek 1:28 (evidenced by Sir 50:7) is exploited by Ben Sira who applies the same term to the vault (חוג), a creation of God which manifests his wisdom, power, and splendor. Askin points out that it is associated with God’s heavenly abode in two (Isa 40:22 and Job 22:14) of its three occurrences (Prov 8:27), further supporting the word’s theophanic associations.<sup>361</sup>

Mulder observes an inverted parallel between Sir 43:1 and Exod 24:10. Both passages include עצם (ה)שמים and לטהר.<sup>362</sup> These two are the only places where the phrase “the bone of heavens” occurs. In Exodus 24, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel go up Mount Sinai “and they beheld the God of Israel. Under his

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<sup>359</sup> That a tradent in the line of scribes responsible for MS B changed that reading to כבוד suggests that they understood the association.

<sup>360</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254.

<sup>361</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 118.

<sup>362</sup> Mulder, “A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25,” 216.

feet there appeared to be sapphire tilework, as clear as the sky itself (ובעצם השמים לטהר) (NABRE). In Sir 43:1, Ben Sira is delighting in the radiance of the sky: “The beauty of the vault and the purity (לטהר) of the firmament—the substance of the heavens (עצם שמים) pours forth its radiance!” By connecting Sir 43:1 with Exodus 24, Ben Sira is again highlighting the theophanic aspect of nature through the associated level of the language he uses.

While Ben Sira is clearly aware of the rainbow’s association with the Noahide covenant in Genesis 9 and of the rainbow’s association with theophany in Ezekiel 1, there are no markers in Sir 43:11–12 to demand one or the other association. The usage is ambiguous. The potential association between the rainbow in Sir 43:11–12 will be taken up more fully in the next chapter. For now, it is worth observing that the rainbow’s association with theophany furthers Ben Sira’s rhetorical purpose, as does the term “glory” (כבוד) and the phrase “bone” or “substance” of heaven (עצם שמים). If the rainbow is associated with the glory of God in Ezek 1:28, then it is fitting that the same glory be used in praising God’s high priest, the divine mediator, in Sir 50:7. In Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator, all of creation is mediating God’s glory. It has been argued above that meteorological phenomena have been selected as examples of things in creation that mediate the power, wisdom, and glory of God because of their association with storm-god theophanies. A similar case can be made for the rainbow. Its association with theophany in Ezek 1:28 adds another layer of meaning. Ben Sira is holding out as objects for reflection things which are associated with God’s presence in order to prove the point that God can be known through those things.

### 3.3.3 - Conclusion

In his Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira is not producing a theological novum. Quite the opposite. Askin observes the revelatory role of nature, specifically weather, in the prophetic tradition (Ezekiel 1, Isa 40:21–24; Nah 1:20–10; Hab 3:5).<sup>363</sup> Ben Sira is making a traditional theological point, found throughout the books that would become biblical. He is reiterating his tradition. While he has organized the words differently, Ben Sira is culturally conditioned, whether consciously or unconsciously, to use certain words and images in specific contexts, to use images of weather phenomena to talk about God's presence in the world, because this is how his tradition does it. Ben Sira is mobilizing the trope that God is present in the storm or that the storm indicates God's presence, even while expanding it to the heavenly luminaries (as in Psalm 19), the rainbow, the "vault" (גֹּחַל) of the sky, and the "bone" or substance of heaven (עֵצִים שָׁמַיִם). Ben Sira is affirming the theophanic nature of the storm, while also affirming the theophanic nature of the rest of creation, even while noting that God transcends it (Sir 43:28–33). Schmidt categorizes Ben Sira's argument as an *a minore ad maius* or *qal wahomer*, that is, arguing that the cause of a thing must be greater than the thing itself.<sup>364</sup> God can be known through creation as its cause, but is not identified with it. Schmidt notes that God is the grammatical subject of the verbs in Sir 43:13–22.<sup>365</sup> This undercuts a theophanic logic by which God is identical to or with the phenomena. Instead, God is the agent and

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<sup>363</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 141.

<sup>364</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 177.

<sup>365</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 182.

the weather elements are his intermediary subjects. Nature is, therefore, a mediation of theophany.

### 3.4 - Conclusion

In conclusion, even though numerous parallels between Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator and his cultural patrimony were proposed, under scrutiny none of them held up as literary allusions or echoes. The images and language were not distinct enough to identify a single evoked text, since the same words and images co-occurred in multiple texts, often with differing contexts. Askin observes Ben Sira's creative use of sources, noting his "skipping across numerous texts with such dexterity that a proposal of direct quotation-checking is both implausible and impractical."<sup>366</sup> Instead, it was determined that Ben Sira was employing the common cultural register of the storm-god theophany, through his use of commonplaces, including wind, thunder, clouds, precipitation (especially hail), lightning, fire, and earthquakes. Each of these belongs to the storm-god theophany register. Ben Sira seems to capitalize on similar associations of the heavenly luminaries, the rainbow, and the so-called "bone" of heaven, which are also each associated with theophany.

Even without evoking specific texts, Ben Sira nevertheless capitalizes on the cultural associations of these commonplaces. Askin convincingly points to Ben Sira's literary models, adding that "Ben Sira's ability to harmonize texts is accompanied by a

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<sup>366</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 142.

strong tone of prophetic revelation through weather patterns.”<sup>367</sup> In the conclusion to the chapter, Askin does well to connect Ben Sira’s “nature-list” to the theme of divine revelation.<sup>368</sup> The storm-god theophany connects all of the dots that Askin lays out. Though Ben Sira may be listing natural weather phenomena in ways that appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple literature, and Ancient Near East, the elements in Ben Sira’s list are associated with divine revelation.

Storm theophany language is often used to illustrate God’s presence and power. Ben Sira is arguing that God’s presence and power are manifest in creation and so uses the same meteorological phenomena to make his point at the referential level of language. The associative level of language is doing similar work behind the scenes. The rainbow is associated with splendor and theophany. Its presence in the poem furthers the point made by the theophanic imagery. The heavenly luminaries are associated with power, order, and splendor. Ben Sira is arguing that God’s own power and wisdom may be known through the power, order, and splendor of his creation. At the referential level, Ben Sira is listing spectacular and wondrous things from nature that demonstrate the excellence of their divine craftsman. At the associative level, Ben Sira is undergirding his premise that the creator can be known through creation, since the language he uses is drawn from explicit instances and events where creation testified to the creator’s presence. Rhetorically, Ben Sira is advancing his argument on two different levels.

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<sup>367</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 133.

<sup>368</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 142.

## Chapter 4: Ben Sira and the Combat Myth

Ben Sira employs the storm-god register and its theophanic associations to bolster his claim that God and God's power can be known through creation. Ben Sira employs a related register to explicate the nature of God's power: the combat myth. The combat myth is well known throughout the ancient Near East, and it is related to the storm-god motif, since it is the storm-god who battles the personified sea, gaining kingship while often ordering the cosmos in the process. Care should be taken to distinguish the combat myth from the divine warrior motif, though the two are often related. In the combat myth, God (or a god) battles divine enemies, usually resulting in terrestrial creation or order. The divine warrior motif, sometimes premised on the primordial acts of the combat myth, is connected to God's action in history, often as an invocation to act in the present or near future. Scholars have proposed several parallels between Sir 42:15–43:33 to psalms which contain the divine warrior motif or the combat myth. However, none of these parallels constitute literary allusions or echoes since the markers are not distinct enough. It should be noted that the divine warrior motif is inappropriate for Sir 42:15–43:33 since Ben Sira neither requests nor recalls divine intervention against an enemy. Instead, Ben Sira activates the combat myth register as evidenced primarily in psalms by naming elements from the story and by employing martial imagery. Taking a cue from Genesis 1 and Deutero-Isaiah, Ben Sira undermines the notion that the combat myth contains a sufficient worldview and etiology for the cosmos, portraying God instead as the unopposed ruler of the cosmos.

This chapter will proceed by first building the network of vocabulary and images related to the combat myth in texts and traditions that Ben Sira knew. Next, parallels proposed by other scholars will be weighted to see if they can be classified as literary allusions, echoes, or commonplaces. After reviewing that evidence, it will be shown that Ben Sira does not allude to or echo any specific text, but instead activates the combat myth register in order to undermine it, replacing the combat myth with Lord of the Cosmos motif.

#### 4.1 - The Combat Myth and the Divine Warrior in Israel

In addition to being a weather god, Yahweh was also originally a royal god, as Müller has demonstrated.<sup>369</sup> Yahweh's supremacy in the pantheon, though necessitated by his fertility function, was predicated on military strength. Joanna Töyräänvuori deduces that the primary association of the combat myth is with kingship, broadly conceived.<sup>370</sup> Based on Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4–5; Hab 3:3–6; and Psalm 68, Green argues that Yahweh is depicted as a warrior in the earliest strata of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>371</sup> Worth noting is that each of the cited texts also contains a storm theophany, except Deuteronomy 33. Yahweh's position at the top of the pantheon, as king of the gods and then eventually the only god, was ostensibly predicated on his military prowess.

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<sup>369</sup> Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*.

<sup>370</sup> Joanna Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth: North West Semitic Political Mythology in the Hebrew Bible*, AOAT 457 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018), 533.

<sup>371</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 236–46.

Yahweh's martial strength is portrayed in two distinct but related motifs: the combat myth and the divine warrior motif.

The divine warrior was a pervasive ancient Near Eastern media motif, as Sa-Moon Kang has proven.<sup>372</sup> Nevertheless, Patrick D. Miller and Millard Lind have demonstrated that this motif is comfortably at home in an Israelite context.<sup>373</sup> A number of excellent studies have been done on the motif in various books of the Hebrew Bible. Studies—like those of Thomas R. Neufeld, Tremper Longman III, and Andrew R. Angel—have located the divine warrior well into the Second Temple period and the Christian Era.<sup>374</sup> The divine warrior motif was not only making an appearance in texts that were produced at this time, but audiences would have encountered it in texts which originated earlier but continued to be read.

Often associated with the divine warrior motif is the combat myth, an explicit or implicit narrative of a god, usually the storm-god, who conquers the forces of evil, usually personified Sea, and establishes order and/or creates the cosmos. Much of the controversy has centered around discussions of Genesis 1–3. Hermann Gunkel was one of the first to suggest that the combat myth, specifically the *Enuma elish*, stood behind

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<sup>372</sup> Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 177; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989).

<sup>373</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, HSM 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). Millard Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1980).

<sup>374</sup> Thomas R. Neufeld, *Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior From Isaiah to Ephesians*, JSNTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Tremper Longman III, "The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif," *WTJ* 44 (1982): 290–307; Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaokampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE*, LSTS 60. London: T&T Clark, 2006.



the creation account in Genesis 1.<sup>375</sup> Other notable scholars such as E.A. Speiser followed suit, adding their own insights.<sup>376</sup> For instance, Richard E. Averbeck, Mary K. Wakeman, Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid all see combat myth motif elements in Genesis 3 as well, particularly in the dragon-like nature of the serpent.<sup>377</sup>

Although Gunkel's hypothesis originally won strong support, there has been no little pushback. Some scholars reject the notion that *Chaoskampf* stands in the background of any biblical material. Most notably, Rebecca Sally Watson questions the validity of categorizing together the diverse material that contains "chaos imagery."<sup>378</sup> She also argues that Israel was unfamiliar with the "chaos" motif.<sup>379</sup> Similarly, David T. Tsumura rejects Gunkel's hypothesis that the *Enuma elish* and the chaos imagery

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<sup>375</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 78–111.

<sup>376</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

<sup>377</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, "The Three 'Daughters' of Ba'al and Transformations of *Chaoskampf* in the Early Chapters of Genesis," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 237–56; Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 84–86; Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 72–74. See also: Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 35–36.

<sup>378</sup> Rebecca Sally Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of 'Chaos' in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 1.

<sup>379</sup> Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 78.

therein lies behind the creation account in Genesis 1 in particular, and in the Bible as a whole.<sup>380</sup> Victor P. Hamilton's assessment is similar.<sup>381</sup>

Some scholars take a middle way. John H. Walton concludes that P does not employ theomachy (divine conflict) in the cosmology of Genesis 1, and its absence cannot be considered polemical, because theomachy is not a consistent motif in cosmogonies.<sup>382</sup> Wilfred G. Lambert accepts the general ancient Near Eastern creation context of Genesis 1 but excludes the combat myth specifically.<sup>383</sup>

John H. Walton attempts to bring some clarity to the situation by offering a more precise classification of *Chaoskampf* and related motifs.<sup>384</sup> He distinguishes the notions of "theomachy" from *Chaoskampf* (order vs. disorder in the macrocosmos) and from "cosmogony" (the initial establishment of order). With these tools, Walton is able to distinguish several distinct but related motifs: Divine Warrior (victory over a human enemy), Lord of the Cosmos (obedience without an enemy), and *Chaoskampf* (divine enemy, order restored). Walton provides a table where each of these three motifs is

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<sup>380</sup> David T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

<sup>381</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 110–11.

<sup>382</sup> John H. Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," *CTJ* 43, (2008): 48–63.

<sup>383</sup> Wilfred G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in *I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96–113.

<sup>384</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 48–63.

found in the psalms and Isaiah, in addition to the Book of Job.<sup>385</sup> Walton detects the divine warrior motif in Psalms 18, 29, 33, 44, 68, 74, 77, 78, 89, 106, 124, 135, 136, and 144, though some of these are secondary or associative connections. He also finds the motif in Isaiah 27, 30, and 51. According to Walton, the lord of the cosmos motif occurs in Psalms 29, 33, 65, 77, 78, 89, 104, 106, 114, 135, and 136, though again some of these are secondary, as it is in Isaiah 51. Walton only finds one primary example of *Chaoskampf* among the psalms (Psalm 74), though there are associations in Psalm 65, Psalm 89, and Isaiah 51.

Generally in line with Walton's distinctions, Debra Scoggins Ballentine argues against identifying the waters and her agents—variously named and described as chaos—as evil personified, thereby undermining the attribution of *Chaoskampf* but not theomachy.<sup>386</sup> Such an identification, she argues, is only valid in the *Enuma elish*, while other ancient Near Eastern divine warrior texts do not identify the warrior's enemy as chaos/evil. Other scholars maintain that *Chaoskampf* is an important background to understanding biblical creation material in general and Genesis 1 in particular.<sup>387</sup> For

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<sup>385</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

<sup>386</sup> Debra Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). See especially her concluding remarks on pages 186–98.

<sup>387</sup> Bernard F. Batto ("The Combat Myth in Israelite Tradition Revisited," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013], 217–36) is unconvinced by Watson and Tsumura. Although he backtracks slightly from the strong positions he took in *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), he nevertheless maintains that: "biblical writers were familiar with one or more version of the ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth, and they used motifs and mythemes from the Combat Myth to further their own theological agenda of Yahwism" (227) Batto maintains that the Combat Myth, specifically the *Enuma elish*, lies behind P's composition of Genesis 1 (233–36).

this study, it is not important whether or not God's opponents are considered to be chaos or evil *per se*, so the more generic label "combat myth" will be used instead of *Chaoskampf*.

In summation, the combat myth is theomachy with a divine or non-human adversary, often associated with cosmology. The divine warrior motif, which is often connected with the combat myth, portrays Yahweh battling with human opponents. The lord of the cosmos motif, often cosmological, portrays Yahweh as unopposed sovereign. Depending on the context, each of these may be more or less appropriate than the others. Ballentine finds six basic functions for this collection of motifs:

Yahweh's past victories against superhuman figures (Sea/sea, dragon(s), Rahab, and Leviathan) exhibit six possible rhetorical functions: (1) to assert Yahweh's dominion; (2) to claim that his dominion is universal; (3) to endorse royal authority; (4) to promote select groups of people; (5) to portray human enemies as destined for defeat; (6) and to invoke Yahweh to intervene against contemporary enemies.<sup>388</sup>

While any of the three motifs could be used for (1), (2), or (3), only the divine warrior motif properly undergirds (4), (5), or (6), though the combat myth may appear to substantiate the divine warrior motif.

Now that the basic categories of combat myth, divine warrior motif, and lord of the cosmos motif have been established, in addition to their basic rhetorical functions, Ben Sira's engagement with these categories must be assessed. The first step in that process is to build a register of words and images related to the motifs. If similar

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<sup>388</sup> Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition*, 193.

vocabulary appears in multiple texts, then those words are more likely to be commonplaces associated with a register than markers for a literary allusion or echo.

#### *4.1.1 - Exodus 14–15*

Patrick D. Miller recognizes the divine warrior motif in Exodus 15, but it actually starts one chapter earlier.<sup>389</sup> Exodus 14 contains the famous story of the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea. The newly freed Hebrews are afraid, because Pharaoh has reneged on his promise and has begun to pursue them with an army. Moses comforts the people by telling them "Do not fear! Stand your ground and see the victory the LORD will win for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight (יִלָּחֶם) for you; you have only to keep still" (Exod 14:13–14, NABRE). Then God parts the sea with a strong wind, allowing the Israelites to cross. When they had finished, God allows the waters to flood back into place, defeating Pharaoh's army. In this event, Yahweh is primarily the divine warrior who fights for the Israelites and defeats Pharaoh's physical army. Secondarily, though, Yahweh is also a storm-god, who controls the winds and uses them to demonstrate power over the sea, a force which threatens his people.

Exodus 15 contains one of the oldest strata in the Bible: the song of Moses and Miriam. Within the literary context of Exodus, it is framed as a song sung after the Israelites reach the other side of the Red Sea and the Egyptians are defeated. That the song contains narrative elements from the conquest of the Promised Land, suggests that

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<sup>389</sup> Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 113–17.

its current home in Exodus is not its original. Nevertheless, the song continues themes from chapter 14—though from the historical perspective, the direction of influence would be the opposite. Verse 3 states: “The LORD is a warrior (אֵישׁ מִלְחָמָה), LORD is his name!” (NABRE), picking up the divine warrior motif from Exod 14:14. The water of the Red Sea is given a mythological hue in Exod 15:5, where they are referred to as “the flood waters” (תְּהוֹמֹת) and “the depths” (מַצּוּלוֹת). There is also a storm-god element, as the winds are twice characterized as the breath of Yahweh’s nose (Exod 15:8, 10).

#### *4.1.2 - Deuteronomy 33*

In addition to the storm-god motif, Deuteronomy 33 also contains the divine warrior motif. In Moses’s blessing of Judah, he says:

7 Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah,  
and bring him to his people.  
His own hands defend his cause;  
be a help against his foes. (NABRE)

Moses implies the divine warrior motif by invoking God against Judah’s enemies. In

Moses’s blessing of Levi, the motif is more explicit:

11 Bless, LORD, his strength,  
be pleased with the work of his hands.  
Crush the loins of his adversaries  
and of his foes, that they may not rise. (NABRE)

That God is called to “crush the loins” of Levi’s enemies suggests that God is being conceived of as a divine warrior. This portrayal is again more explicit later in the blessing:

27 The God of old is a refuge;  
a support are the arms of the Everlasting.  
He drove the enemy out of your way

and he said, "Destroy!" ...  
 29 Happy are you, Israel! Who is like you,  
 a people delivered by the LORD,  
 Your help and shield,  
 and the sword of your glory.  
 Your enemies cringe before you;  
 you stride upon their backs. (NABRE)

In this section, Moses is imploring the Israelites to faithfulness to a God who has brought them victory/deliverance. God is likened to the offensive sword and the defensive shield. Though God is not portrayed anthropomorphically as a warrior *per se*, God is functioning like the divine warrior who defeats Israel's earthly enemies.

#### 4.1.3 - Psalm 8

Psalm 8 seems to be a brief reflection on Genesis 1, in which humans are given dominion over creation (Gen 1:28). There are also hints of the combat myth in verse 3: "You have established a bulwark against your foes, to silence enemy and avenger" (NABRE). The "bulwark" or "fortress" (טֹד) refers to either the dome of the sky, which holds the celestial waters at bay, or the limits of the sea. In either case, they presuppose the combat myth, which is seen more clearly in "silencing" or "stilling" (שָׁבַת) of the enemy and avenger.

#### 4.1.4 - Psalm 24

Within Psalm 24, the elements of creation (verses 1–2), the divine warrior motif or combat myth (verse 8), and the call to praise (verses 9–10) coalesce. The setting of the psalm seems to be a victory celebration as the army returns from battle (verse 7). However, since the psalm opens with a cosmic view of creation, the combat myth may be implied.

1 The earth is the LORD's and all it holds,  
the world and those who dwell in it.  
2 For he founded it on the seas,  
established it over the rivers. (NABRE)

God's establishment of the world "on the seas" (על־ימים) and "over the rivers" (על־נהרות) may imply cosmogonic theomachy and therefore the combat myth, potentially only as a demythologized remnant. However, the divine warrior motif is clear:

8 Who is this king of glory?  
The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in war. (NABRE)

In this verse it is implied that God is not only a king, but also a warrior who procures victory for his allies. Given the association between the divine warrior motif and the combat myth, verse 8 may suggest that verses 1 and 2 may have the combat myth in mind, but this is uncertain.

#### *4.1.5 - Psalm 33*

Walton detects the divine warrior motif and the lord of the cosmos motif in Psalm 33, which begins with a call to praise (verses 1–3), based on the relational greatness of God (verses 4–5).<sup>390</sup> The author further justifies God's position by positing his responsibility for creation (verse 6) and his power over the sea (verse 7). According to the psalmist, God "gathered the waters of the sea as a mound; he sets the deep into storage vaults" (NABRE). The language of gathering (כנס) the sea (מי הים) into a mound (נד) echoes that of Exod 15:8, where God's breath made the waters (מים) stand as a

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<sup>390</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.



mound (גִּבְעָה). Though the elements of the combat myth are not mythological, God is still portrayed as responsible for containing the deep. The divine warrior seems to have taken a back seat to creation.

#### 4.1.6 - Psalm 65

According to Walton Psalm 65 contains the lord of the cosmos motif.<sup>391</sup> It also implies the combat myth:

6 You answer us with awesome deeds of justice,  
O God our savior,  
The hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of those far off across the sea.  
7 You are robed in power,  
you set up the mountains by your might.  
8 You still the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples. (NABRE)

Verse 7 provides the justification (God's power) for the hope spoken of verse 6, and verse 8 illustrates that power. Creation serves to legitimate God's power (see also 1 Sam 2:8–10). In the case of Psalm 65, one of the illustrations of God's power is that God stills (משבִּיחַ) the roaring (שֹׁאֵן) seas (יָמִים), which are the traditional enemy in the combat myth.

#### 4.1.7 - Psalm 74

Psalm 74 contains one of the most explicit recollections of the combat myth in the Hebrew Bible:

12 Yet you, God, are my king from of old,  
winning victories throughout the earth.

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<sup>391</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

13 You stirred up the sea by your might;  
 you smashed the heads of the dragons on the waters.  
 14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan,  
 gave him as food to the sharks.  
 15 You opened up springs and torrents,  
 brought dry land out of the primeval waters. (NABRE)

Walton detects the divine warrior motif in the passage, but given the cosmic outlook of the poem, the combat myth fits better.<sup>392</sup> The mention of “victories” (יְשׁוּעוֹת) in verse 12 indicates a combat frame and implies that God is a warrior. While “stirring up” the sea is what Marduk did to Tiamat in the *Enuma elish*, a more basic translation of the second person masculine singular *poel* perfect פוררת would be “to split” or “to divide,” which is precisely what Marduk does to the carcass of Tiamat when he creates the earth. God defeated not just the sea (ים), but also dragons (תנינים) and Leviathan (לוייתן). Verse 15 connects these victories with the establishment of dry land, as in the *Enuma elish* and contra Genesis 1. It is also noteworthy that God is called a “king” (מֶלֶךְ). This episode in Psalm 74 is meant to remind God of his power and thus rouse God to defeat God’s enemies, who are also the enemies of God’s people. Therefore, Psalm 74 contains both the combat myth, in so far as God’s battle with the waters is recalled, and the divine warrior motif, since God’s ancient deeds are being recalled to rouse him presently (verses 22–23).

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<sup>392</sup> Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53.

#### 4.1.8 - Psalm 76

Psalm 76, which depicts a battlefield where all lays still after God's terrestrial victory, evokes the divine warrior motif:

4 There the flashing arrows were shattered,  
shield, sword, and weapons of war. Selah  
5 Terrible and awesome are you,  
stronger than the ancient mountains.  
6 Despoiled are the stouthearted;  
they sank into sleep;  
the hands of all the men of valor have failed.  
7 At your roar, O God of Jacob,  
chariot and steed lay still.  
8 You, terrible are you;  
who can stand before you and your great anger?  
9 From the heavens you pronounced sentence;  
the earth was terrified and reduced to silence,  
10 When you arose, O God, for judgment  
to save the afflicted of the land. (NABRE)

The motif is not explicit, because God is not said to do any fighting, but combat is implied by the literary setting of the psalm. God saved the afflicted (verse 10) by destroying the weapons of war (verse 4), causing the action of the battlefield to be stilled (verses 5–9). Since God's victory is over terrestrial enemies and since there is no cosmic conflict, Psalm 76 should be categorized as an example of the divine warrior motif and not the combat myth.

#### 4.1.9 - Psalm 77 and Psalm 78

In both Psalm 77 and in Psalm 78, Walton detects both the divine warrior motif and the lord of the cosmos motif.<sup>393</sup> The psalm is a lament in which the speaker is

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<sup>393</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

troubled by God's lack of action. In order to rouse God to action, the speaker recalls the works of God in Exodus. In addition to the storm theophany imagery mentioned above, Psalm 77 also characterizes Yahweh as the divine warrior, who redeems his people with his strong arm (זרוע) in verse 16. Yahweh's opponent is the sea (תהמות / מים), which trembles at the sight of God (verse 17). Psalm 78 also recounts the Exodus narrative, but the retelling seems to be devoid of the divine warrior motif.

#### *4.1.10 - Psalm 93*

Psalm 93 celebrates the kingship of Yahweh over all the earth (verse 1). Verses 3–5 imply the combat myth, God's victory over the personified Sea, here referred to as "flood" (נהרות):

3 The flood has raised up, LORD;  
the flood has raised up its roar;  
the flood has raised its pounding waves.  
4 More powerful than the roar of many waters,  
more powerful than the breakers of the sea,  
powerful in the heavens is the LORD.  
5 Your decrees are firmly established;  
holiness befits your house, LORD,  
for all the length of days. (NABRE)

The flood being "raised up" (נשא), may refer to rebellious exultation, the waves of the water literally becoming turbulent, or both. Whether the image is physical or metaphorical, the flood or sea are no match for Yahweh. Unlike Psalm 77, the motif is not connected with the exodus. Unlike Psalm 74, the combat myth is not connected the divine warrior motif, or a call to action. Instead, Psalm 93 is simply praising God. The oppositional dynamic between the waters and Yahweh implies the combat myth.

#### 4.1.11 - Psalm 135

In Psalm 135, where the seas and the depths represent the potential limits of God's power, Walton identifies both the divine warrior motif and the lord of the cosmos motif.<sup>394</sup> Yet the psalmist affirms that even the depths of the sea are ruled by God's will. It is difficult to determine whether the sea is only understood physically, as it is in Ps 36:7, where God's judgments (משפט) are compared to the deep (תהום), or if the combat myth associations are intended.

#### 4.1.12 - Psalm 144

Psalm 144, which is perhaps an anthology of other psalms (Ps 8; 18; 35; 39; 47–48; 102; 104), contains a reference to the combat myth:

1 Blessed be the LORD, my rock,  
who trains my hands for battle,  
my fingers for war;  
2 My safeguard and my fortress,  
my stronghold, my deliverer,  
My shield, in whom I take refuge,  
who subdues peoples under me.  
3 LORD, what is man that you take notice of him;  
the son of man, that you think of him?  
4 Man is but a breath,  
his days are like a passing shadow.  
5 LORD, incline your heavens and come down;  
touch the mountains and make them smoke.  
6 Flash forth lightning and scatter my foes;  
shoot your arrows and rout them.  
7 Reach out your hand from on high;  
deliver me from the many waters;  
rescue me from the hands of foreign foes.  
8 Their mouths speak untruth;  
their right hands are raised in lying oaths.

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<sup>394</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

9 O God, a new song I will sing to you;  
 on a ten-stringed lyre I will play for you.  
 10 You give victory to kings;  
 you delivered David your servant.  
 From the menacing sword  
 11 deliver me;  
 rescue me from the hands of foreign foes.  
 Their mouths speak untruth;  
 their right hands are raised in lying oaths.  
 12 May our sons be like plants  
 well nurtured from their youth,  
 Our daughters, like carved columns,  
 shapely as those of the temple.  
 13 May our barns be full  
 with every kind of store.  
 May our sheep increase by thousands,  
 by tens of thousands in our fields;  
 may our oxen be well fattened.  
 14 May there be no breach in the walls,  
 no exile, no outcry in our streets.  
 15 Blessed the people so fortunate;  
 blessed the people whose God is the LORD. (NABRE)

The psalm moves from petition (verses 5–11) to anticipatory thanksgiving (verse 9) and an illustration of the effect of deliverance (verses 12–15). The divine warrior motif often accompanies petition, and Walton detects that motif in the psalm.<sup>395</sup> The psalmist asks for victory over foreign perjurers (verses 7–9) who are equated with “the many waters” (מים רבים) in verse 7. Here, the waters clearly retain their association with the combat myth, as the psalmist asks God to shoot lightning arrows and to defeat them, thus also invoking the storm-god register. Storm theophany is paired with divine warrior in the combat myth, where the psalmist’s terrestrial foes are equated with God’s cosmic enemy.

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<sup>395</sup> Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53.

#### 4.1.13 - *Psalm 148*

Ps 148:7 references the traditional enemies of God without mythology: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all the deeps of the sea” (NABRE). In this passage both “the sea monsters” (תנינים) and “the deeps of the sea” (כל־תהמות) are called to praise Yahweh. Similarly, Gen 1:21 simply states that “the great sea monsters” (התנינים הגדלים) were created on the fifth day. 4 Ezra 6 is a retelling and embellishment of Genesis 1, and sea monster Leviathan makes an appearance in verses 49–52, which also mention the land monster Behemoth.

#### 4.1.14 - *Job*

The poet alludes to the cosmic combat myth in Job 7:12, 26:12, and 38:11. In Job 7:12, Job asks “Am I the Sea (הים), or the dragon (תנין), that you place a watch over me?” (NABRE). The implication is that both beings are God’s cosmic foes that need to be guarded, even after their defeat, but not Job, the titular character. Job again alludes to the combat myth in 26:12–13:

12 By his power he stilled (רגע) Sea (הים),  
by his skill he crushed Rahab (רהב);  
13 By his wind the heavens were made clear,  
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent (נחש). (NABRE)

Not only do God’s cosmic foes (personified Sea, Rahab, and serpent/dragon) appear in this passage, but there is also storm theophany language: God, like Marduk, uses the winds as weapons. Here, the combat myth is connected to cosmogony. Rahab also appears in Job 9:13. The third instance of the combat myth comes from the voice of God in chapter 38:

10 When I set limits for it  
 and fastened the bar of its door,  
 11 And said: Thus far shall you come but no farther,  
 and here shall your proud waves stop? (NABRE)

In this famous speech, God speaks Job out of a storm cloud, indicating a storm theophany. God asks Job where he was when God created the world. God alludes to the combat myth as part of creation by recalling how God contained the “proud waves” (גאון גלים) of the personified Sea.

#### *4.1.15 - Conclusion*

There are a number of explicit employments of the combat myth where God battles with a non-human enemy, usually the personified sea or monsters/dragons (Ps 74; and Job), the divine warrior motif where God battles human enemies (Exod 14–15; Deut 33; Ps 24; Ps 76; and Ps 77), or both together where God’s primordial victory is recalled to encourage God to fight human enemies (Ps 74 and Ps 144). A number of other texts take for granted or imply the combat myth (Ps 8; Ps 33; Ps 65; Ps 93; Ps 135; and Ps 148), which suggests that they were commonplaces known to their audience and evoked with only oblique cues.<sup>396</sup>

Though the divine warrior motif and the combat myth are related and sometimes appear together, they serve distinct functions. Both rely on the idea of Yahweh’s kingship, whether over the earth contra human enemies or over the cosmos contra divine ones. As noted above, the divine warrior motif is related to human

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<sup>396</sup> Other uncertain examples of the combat myth include Jonah 1:4 and Josh 3:16.



enemies, and several cases have been surveyed which demonstrate Ballentine's last two functions: "(5) to portray human enemies as destined for defeat" and "(6) and to invoke Yahweh to intervene against contemporary enemies."<sup>397</sup> The combat myth, in contrast, primarily serves Ballentine's first two functions: "(1) to assert Yahweh's dominion" and "(2) to claim that his dominion is universal."<sup>398</sup> Jon D. Levenson agrees that many of the texts that feature the divine warrior are invitations to God to finish the work begun in creation.<sup>399</sup> Additionally, Fishbane recognizes the relationship between primordial cosmogony and the exodus.<sup>400</sup> Again, it should be emphasized that these rhetorical functions are not always distinct, since the two motifs sometimes appear together. The motifs are also commonly associated with specific traditions, such as the exodus or creation, though there are accounts of both without either motif.

The purpose of the above survey was not to be exhaustive not completely describe each of the motifs. Instead, it was an attempt to demonstrate that that both the divine warrior motif and the combat myth are pervasive in the texts that Ben Sira and his audience had available. The motifs were associated with particular topics, that is, they were connected to specific registers, though not always exclusively so (for

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<sup>397</sup> Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition*, 193.

<sup>398</sup> Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition*, 193.

<sup>399</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>400</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 355.

instance the divine warrior and exodus). The combat myth in particular was so well known that appears only in veiled or demythologized ways.

## 4.2 - The Combat Myth and Ben Sira: Proposed Parallels

Since the combat myth and the divine warrior motif were so pervasive, it should come as no surprise that a number of scholars have identified parallels between Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator and texts which contain the divine warrior motif and/or the combat myth. One such scholar is Perdue, who cites parallels to Judges 5, Habakkuk 3, Psalm 18, Psalm 68, and Psalm 104.<sup>401</sup> Corley sees the combat myth operative in Sirach 43, stating "God's might is evident in God's victory over the ocean's destructive power, especially in subsiding the great flood."<sup>402</sup> Corley references Psalm 29, Psalm 89, and Genesis 8. Proposed parallels between Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator and texts which contain the divine warrior motif or the combat myth typically center on Sir 43:23–25:

23 His speech contains Rahab, and he stretches out coastlands on the Deep.  
 24 Those who go down to the sea relate its breadth, when we hear the report,  
 we are amazed.  
 25 The wonder of his works—there is amazement! And all kinds of living things!  
 And the sea monsters!

This passage demonstrates the glory of the creator through the works of creation, specifically the sea, which is shown to be vast and filled with a multitude of creatures.

The following section will investigate whether the parallels proposed constitute literary allusion or echoes, or whether the parallels are to be explained in some other

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<sup>401</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56.

<sup>402</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 121.

way. It will be shown that the best explanation for the parallels between Ben Sira and his cultural patrimony vis-à-vis the divine warrior and the combat myth is that he is activating the combat myth but not the divine warrior motif by employing commonplaces and martial imagery.

#### 4.2.1 - *Genesis 8–9*

A number of scholars have recognized the significance of the rainbow's appearance in Sir 43:11–12.<sup>403</sup> Fletcher-Louis suggests that it calls to mind the cosmogonic function of the rainbow and the associated mythology and covenant theology.<sup>404</sup> In his commentary on Sirach, Rybolt notes the ancient poetic connection between God's weapon, which shoots lightning, and the rainbow.<sup>405</sup> According to Di Lella, the rainbow recalls the flood narrative.<sup>406</sup> Sauer also sees Gen 9:12–17 operating in the background of Sir 43:11–12.<sup>407</sup> While several scholars have noticed the connection between the rainbow in Sirach and elsewhere, there is little agreement on its function.

The Hebrew word for rainbow, *qayish*, generally (72/76 times) means war-bow. By extension—through the combat motif as instantiated in Genesis 9—it comes to refer

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<sup>403</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 121.

<sup>404</sup> Fletcher-Louis, "The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira," 84–86.

<sup>405</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 92–93.

<sup>406</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 493.

<sup>407</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 317.

to the polychrome arc in the sky. Genesis 9 contains three occurrences where קשת refers to the polychrome arc in the sky. The only other biblical occurrence where קשת means “rainbow” is Ezek 1:28. While the function of the rainbow in Sir 43:11–12 is consonant with its associations with Ezek 1:28, Ben Sira may be capitalizing on the rainbow’s association with the combat myth as well, since the primary meaning of קשת is “war-bow,” and given that meaning, its primary association is martial. The two meanings and associations unite in Gen 8–9, since the rainbow is at the same time God’s weapon and the polychrome arc in the sky.

Gen 8–9 seems to be the only place in the Hebrew Bible where the rainbow is portrayed as God’s war-bow—Gen 9:13 has God call the rainbow “my bow” (קשתי). However, there are several texts equate lightning with God’s arrows (Ps 18; Ps 77; Ps 97; and Hab 3), which require a bow to shoot them. The conception of God shooting lightning from a rainbow can only be pieced together through several texts. Although Gen 8–9 is the most explicit about the rainbow as God’s war-bow, it seems to be a commonplace, especially given the lack of explanation concerning the conception.

#### 4.2.2 - Psalm 18

Several scholars note parallels between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Psalm 18, in which Walton detects the divine warrior motif.<sup>408</sup> Schechter and Taylor proposed Psalm 18:45 as a parallel to Sir 43:24, based on two shared words: “to hear” and “ear.”<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53. See for instance, Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56.

<sup>409</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

Unsurprisingly, “to hear” and “ear” often occur together: at least 163 times in the same verse in the Hebrew Bible. However, the phrase with the *lamed* and שמע followed by some form of אן is much rarer. In addition to Sir 43:24 and Ps 18:45 (2 Sam 22), the phrase also occurs in Job 43:5. Job 43:5 and Psalm 18:45 (and therefore 2 Sam 22) are semantically identical (לשמע אן), whereas Sir 43:24 (לשמע אזנינו) is not. That MS B has not been harmonized may suggest that later tradents did not consider the similarity to be an allusion. Part of this similarity though, is contextual. In Sir 43:24 the report that is heard concerning the extent of the sea causes desolation (נשתומם). In Psalm 18 foreigners hear of David’s strength and submit. In both cases the report causes fear of that which was reported. The case of Job is different. The context of Job 43:5 requires understanding the phrase as “hearsay,” but in Job, Job repents of believing the hearsay concerning God. In Psalm 18:5 “torrents” (נחל) is one of the images used for death from which the speaker of the psalm asks deliverance. In Sir 43:24 the subject of the report is the breadth of sea. The mass of water is literally the cause of fear in Sir 43:24, and it is symbolic of death in Ps 18:5. As Psalm 18 continues, God is portrayed as a storm-god (see above) and divine warrior who intercedes on behalf of David and rescues him. As is often the case with the divine warrior motif, the terrestrial perspective (Ps 18:36–46) is a mirror image of the divine (Ps 18:5–20).<sup>410</sup> God rebukes and defeats the cosmic enemy, called “the deep waters” (מים רבים) in verse 17, as David defeats his terrestrial ones.

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<sup>410</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 121–23.

Di Lella recognizes that Ben Sira is making a similar point in Sir 43:23, namely, that God has power over the waters. He connects this motif to Gen 1:2 and the *Enuma elish*, in addition to Ps 33:7; Ps 36:7; Ps 89:10–11; and Isa 51:9–10.<sup>411</sup> That so many texts are given already suggests that Ben Sira is not alluding to any of them in particular. In Ps 33:7 God is “gathering” (בָּנַס) the waters and puts them in a storehouse. Ps 36:7 compares God’s judgment to the mighty deep (תְּהוֹם רַבָּה). However, conflict is absent in Sir 42:15–43:33. The most likely explanation for the parallel between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Psalm 18 is coincidental or idiomatic usage of language since the marker is not very strong and seems to be mixed with commonplaces associated with the divine warrior motif or combat myth. Furthermore, the rhetorical contexts are not very similar.

#### 4.2.3 - Psalm 29

Walton detects the divine warrior motif and lord of the cosmos motif in Psalm 29.<sup>412</sup> Referencing Psalm 29, Corley sees the combat myth operative in Sirach 43, stating “God’s might is evident in God’s victory over the ocean’s destructive power, especially in subsiding the great flood.”<sup>413</sup> In addition to the theophanic storm-god imagery noted above, Psalm 29 implies the combat myth. The penultimate verse connects God’s victory over the flood with his kingship: “The LORD sits enthroned above the flood (מבול)! The LORD reigns as king forever!” (Ps 28:10, NABRE). The Psalm suggests that God attained

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<sup>411</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

<sup>412</sup> Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53.

<sup>413</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 121.

his throne by defeating the waters (מים in verse 3). The frame of the poem is cosmic, and there are no earthly enemies in frame, so Psalm 29 would be categorized as an example of the combat myth. Since Corley does not provide a precise lexical parallel, it should not be presumed that he is proposing a literary allusion, for which there is scant evidence. Instead, he seems to be (correctly) suggesting that Ben Sira is drawing upon a tradition that is instantiated in Psalm 29, among others.

#### 4.2.4 - Psalm 66

Lange and Weigold detect an allusion in Sir 43:2 (in both the Masada manuscript and MS B) to Ps 66:3.<sup>414</sup> More of the psalm is required for context:

2 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth;  
sing of his glorious name;  
give him glorious praise.  
3 Say to God: "How awesome your deeds!  
Before your great strength your enemies cringe.  
4 All the earth falls in worship before you;  
they sing of you, sing of your name!"  
5 Come and see the works of God,  
awesome in deeds before the children of Adam.  
6 He changed the sea to dry land;  
through the river they passed on foot.  
There we rejoiced in him,  
7 who rules by his might forever,  
His eyes are fixed upon the nations.  
Let no rebel rise to challenge! (NABRE)

The primary source of the parallel seems to come from a single word, "works" or "deeds" (מעשים). The word occurs over 35 times in the extant Hebrew of Ben Sira, appearing eight times in the Hymn to the Creator alone, most often—but not

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<sup>414</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

exclusively—referring to the works of God. (Hab 3:2 employs the same word similarly.) This single lexical parallel is not enough of a marker for a literary allusion. Nonetheless, Psalm 66 and Sir 43:2 have several commonalities, in addition to their treatment of the works of God. Both make the nature of God’s works the foundation for praising him. Both portray God as a cosmic ruler. Psalm 66 does invoke the divine warrior motif (and potentially the combat myth) and references the exodus. The example of Psalm 66 reinforces the connection between the combat myth and the divine warrior motif with the exodus and kingship.

#### 4.2.5 - *Psalm 68*

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that Psalm 68 contained a storm-god theophany. Relatedly, Patrick D. Miller, Perdue, and Walton highlights the divine warrior motif in Psalm 68.<sup>415</sup>

2 May God arise;  
may his enemies be scattered;  
may those who hate him flee before him.  
...  
8 God, when you went forth before your people,  
when you marched through the desert,  
...  
12 The Lord announced:  
“Those bringing news are a great army.  
13 The kings of the armies are in desperate flight.  
Every household will share the spoil,  
14 though you lie down among the sheepfolds,  
you shall be covered with silver as the wings of a dove,  
her feathers bright as fine gold.”  
15 When the Almighty routs the kings there,  
it will be as when snow fell on Zalmon.

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<sup>415</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 102–13; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56; Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53.



...

18 God's chariots were myriad, thousands upon thousands;  
from Sinai the Lord entered the holy place.

19 You went up to its lofty height;  
you took captives, received slaves as tribute,  
even rebels, for the LORD God to dwell.

20 Blessed be the Lord day by day,  
God, our salvation, who carries us.

21 Our God is a God who saves;  
escape from death is the LORD God's.

22 God will crush the heads of his enemies,  
the hairy scalp of the one who walks in sin.

23 The Lord has said:

"Even from Bashan I will fetch them,  
fetch them even from the depths of the sea.

24 You will wash your feet in your enemy's blood;  
the tongues of your dogs will lap it up."

25 Your procession comes into view, O God,  
your procession into the holy place, my God and king.

...

29 Summon again, O God, your power,  
the divine power you once showed for us,

30 From your temple on behalf of Jerusalem,  
that kings may bring you tribute.

31 Roar at the wild beast of the reeds,  
the herd of mighty bulls, the calves of the peoples;  
trampling those who lust after silver  
scatter the peoples that delight in war.

32 Let bronze be brought from Egypt,  
Ethiopia hurry its hands to God.

33 You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;  
chant the praises of the Lord,

34 Who rides the heights of the ancient heavens,  
Who sends forth his voice as a mighty voice?

35 Confess the power of God,  
whose majesty protects Israel,  
whose power is in the sky.

36 Awesome is God in his holy place,  
the God of Israel,  
who gives power and strength to his people.  
Blessed be God! (NABRE)

Psalm 68 is rather lengthy and the martial imagery permeates the whole poem. God is portrayed as king (verse 33), who conquers his mutual enemies with Israel (verses 20–22), takes captives (verse 19), and imposes tribute (verses 30–33). God protects Israel (verse 35), something that happened in the past (verse 8), so the psalmist asks for the same in the present/future (verse 2). Since cosmology is not in view, nor is God depicted as fighting a non-human enemy, Psalm 68 should be categorized as containing the divine warrior motif and not the combat myth, especially given the invocation at the beginning of the Psalm to act on Israel's behalf. Since no markers or lexical parallels are proposed, it seems unlikely that Miller, Perdue, or Walton is suggesting a literary allusion. Instead, Psalm 68 seems to be witness to commonplaces associated with the combat myth, which they see operative in Sirach.

#### 4.2.6 - *Psalm 89*

Psalm 89, in which Walton detects both the divine warrior motif and the lord of the cosmos motif, has been proposed as a parallel to Sir 43:23–25, mostly based on the mention of Rahab and God's combatting the waters.<sup>416</sup> Psalm 89, a psalm of lament after the fall of the Davidic dynasty, rehearses the combat myth in a section of praise:

10 You rule the raging sea;  
you still its swelling waves.  
11 You crush Rahab with a mortal blow;  
with your strong arm you scatter your foes.  
12 Yours are the heavens, yours the earth;  
you founded the world and everything in it. (NABRE)

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<sup>416</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53. For example, see Corley, *Sirach*, 121; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254; Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 495.

Familiar images appear in the section. God is said to rule the “raging” (גאה) sea (הים) and to still (שבח) the “swelling” (נשא) waves (גלים). Lest the waters appear non-mythological, the psalmist then claims that God is victorious over Rahab (רהב) and God’s other foes (איבים). Verse 12 is not a subject change; God’s possession of the heavens and earth, with the subsequent founding of the world and its inhabitants, is the result of God’s subduing God’s primordial foes.

The parallel between Psalm 89 and Sir 43:23–25 do not constitute an allusion. The primary lexical parallel, Rahab, is a commonplace, occurring in Job 7:12; 26:11; 38:8, 10, 11; Ps 65:8; 74:13; 89:10–11; 104:9; Prov 8:28; Isa 51:9; and Jer 5:22. Rahab is associated with the combat myth, as here. The combat myth in Psalm 89 is also associated with Yahweh’s kingship over the cosmos and Israel (Ps 89:19).

#### *4.2.7 - Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5*

It was demonstrated above that Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5 both participated in the storm-god theophany motif. The same texts have been proposed as parallels by Perdue, but for different reasons.<sup>417</sup> Patrick D. Miller detects the divine warrior motif in both Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5.<sup>418</sup> Because of the lack of tight lexical parallels indicative of a literary allusion, it seems more likely that Perdue is suggesting that the divine warrior motif is active in Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator. Some aspects of the texts are worth highlighting. After the storm theophany in Habakkuk 3 (verses 2–6), the divine warrior motif appears:

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<sup>417</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56.

<sup>418</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 87–101; 118–21.

7 The tents of Cushan trembled,  
 the pavilions of the land of Midian.  
 8 Was your anger against the rivers, O LORD?  
 your wrath against the rivers,  
 your rage against the sea,  
 That you mounted your steeds,  
 your victorious chariot?  
 9 You readied your bow,  
 you filled your bowstring with arrows. Selah  
 You split the earth with rivers; (NABRE)

The storm theophany continues in verses 10, but in verses 11–12 the two motifs are combined:

10 at the sight of you the mountains writhed.  
 The clouds poured down water;  
 the deep roared loudly.  
 The sun forgot to rise,  
 11 the moon left its lofty station,  
 At the light of your flying arrows,  
 at the gleam of your flashing spear.  
 12 In wrath you marched on the earth,  
 in fury you trampled the nations.  
 13 You came forth to save your people,  
 to save your anointed one.  
 You crushed the back of the wicked,  
 you laid him bare, bottom to neck. Selah  
 14 You pierced his head with your shafts;  
 his princes you scattered with your stormwind,  
 as food for the poor in unknown places.  
 15 You trampled the sea with your horses  
 amid the churning of the deep waters. (NABRE)

Yahweh is clearly a storm-god who uses his bow (verse 9), lightning arrows (verse 9, 11, 14), spear (verse 11), steeds or chariot (verse 8, 15), and winds (verse 14) to fight both the his cosmic enemies, portrayed as personified water (verses 8, 10) who parallel the terrestrial enemy (verse 12). Habakkuk 3 demonstrates the association between the

storm-god theophany and the divine warrior motif, in addition to the link between the latter and the combat myth.

The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 similarly connects the storm-god theophany with the divine warrior motif and the combat myth. Verse 4 connects the martial imagery of marching with the theophany: “LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the plains of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured rain” (NABRE). Next the poem calls on the tribes of Israel to fight, to “Take captive your captors, son of Abinoam! Then down went Israel against the mighty, the army of the LORD went down for him against the warriors” (Judg 5:12–13, NABRE). Verse 19 speaks of the terrestrial battle, while verse 20 projects it into the cosmos. The poem continues and ends by illustrating that Deborah did what the men of Israel could not or would not do: “For they did not come when the LORD helped, the help of the LORD against the warriors” (Judg 5:23, NABRE). Deborah acts on behalf of Yahweh, the divine warrior.

Both Habakkuk 3 and Judges 5 are examples of the divine warrior motif’s being connected with the storm-god theophany motif. The song of Deborah in Judges 5 is less explicit than Habakkuk 3 in its portrayal of God as the divine warrior. Habakkuk 3 contains several commonplaces. Any connection with Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator would have to be due to commonplaces associated with the divine warrior motif or the combat myth. Literary allusions are unlikely given the commonality of the shared language and images.

#### 4.2.8 - Conclusion

Though several parallels were proposed between Sir 42:15–43:33 and various psalms, in addition to Genesis 8–9, Habakkuk 3, and Judges 5, none of the parallels constituted literary allusions. By proposing multiple parallels of the same concept or text, scholars like Corley, Di Lella, and Perdue were implicitly recognizing that Ben Sira was participating in a culturally constructed motif with an associated register.<sup>419</sup> It was also observed that the combat myth and the divine warrior motif are associated with divine kingship and often co-occur with the storm-god theophany. Even though discrete parallels did not constitute literary allusions or echoes, the whole of the divine warrior motif or the combat myth may be activated by words or images belonging to the register. In this case, the motif acts as an independent tradition, not tied to a specific text, even though those texts instantiate the tradition and build the register for later tradents and their audiences.

#### 4.3 - Actualization in Sirach

The Hebrew Bible contains several explicit and implicit connections to the combat myth. Some of these references are connected to the divine warrior motif. The sheer volume of occurrences of these motifs in the psalms and elsewhere would suggest that this was more than a dead metaphor. It was a metaphor constantly resurrected through use and vivified in new compositions. It would seem difficult to miss this motif

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<sup>419</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 121; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56; Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

in traditional compositions such as Psalm 24, which implies that God is the King of Glory by stating that Yahweh is “mighty in war” (גבור מלחמה) and “Yahweh of hosts/armies” (צבאות).

Indeed, Ben Sira takes up this motif in Sir 35:22–36:22.<sup>420</sup> Regardless of the occasion for this particular composition, Ben Sira employs the image of Yahweh as a warrior to project into the future the solution to the current problem: “For God will not delay, and like a warrior he will not control himself (וגבור לא מה יתאפק), until he smashes the loins of the cruel one, and provides vengeance to the nations” (Sir 35:21–22, MS B). Argall notes the similarity between Sir 35:21 and Isa 42:13, which claims that “The LORD goes forth like a warrior (כאיש מלחמה)” (NABRE).<sup>421</sup> Di Lella observes a parallel in language with Isa 42:14; 63:15; and 64:11, which all contain the verb “to control” (אפק).<sup>422</sup> The language is not similar enough to constitute an allusion, but the two texts do seem to be drawing on similar traditions. Ben Sira employs similar imagery in the nationalistic prayer which follows (Sir 36:1–22), where he asks God to vindicate those who believe in God, specifically by stirring up his anger, pouring out his wrath, subduing his adversary, and driving back his enemy (verses 8–9).<sup>423</sup> Ben Sira again applies this

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<sup>420</sup> Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach*, 211–20.

<sup>421</sup> Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach*, 213.

<sup>422</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 420.

<sup>423</sup> Authenticity of this section has been doubted. For instance, see John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 23; and Burkhard M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, NEchtB 39 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2010), 236. The primary reason for these doubts seems to be that the interventionist outlook of the prayer does not seem to match the static or cyclical view of the universe expressed in the Hymn to the Creator. A distinction may be made between the cosmogonic divine warrior and the nationalistic one. While Ben Sira may not have space for the cosmogonic divine warrior, the Praise of the Famous certainly has an institutionalist outlook.

image to God in Sir 51:10, where he calls God “the warrior of my salvation” (גבור ישעי).

That Ben Sira’s usage is intentionally anthropomorphic is proved by his employment of similar imagery for humans elsewhere: Joshua (Sir 46:1), Samuel (Sir 46:18), and David (Sir 47:7). Ben Sira is clearly aware of the divine warrior motif and employs it outside of the Hymn to the Creator.

What, if anything, is to be made of the divine warrior motif and the combat myth in Sir 42:15–43:33? Even though literary allusions to specific texts were determined to be unlikely, it does seem as though the combat myth is operating in the background of this pericope. The tone of the poem and its cosmic scope would seem to preclude the divine warrior motif out of hand. There are no earthly enemies in Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator. The only thing humans do is praise. There is no petition in this poem; the thesis of the poem presupposes that everything is ordered and in place.

Admittedly, the combat myth does not appear explicitly in the poem either. Nevertheless, the combat myth register is evoked through the use of specific words and images associated with that myth. Before pressing on to new material, including Deutero-Isaiah, Genesis 1, and a few psalms (104, 107, and 148), it is worth reviewing some of what was already covered in the previous chapter, since the storm-god theophany motif and the combat myth are often associated: the Deep (Sir 42: 18; 43:23), the vault of heaven (Sir 43:1, 8, 12), the rainbow (Sir 43:11–12), the waters (Sir 43:20), Rahab (Sir 43:23, 25), stilling the deep (Sir 43:23), the sea (Sir 43:24) and the

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Furthermore, expecting complete consistency in a work that synthesizes a somewhat disparate tradition seems to be an unreasonable expectation. See for instance the different ways Ben Sira interprets Genesis 3 (see Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*, 33–48).



living things of the water (Sir 43:25). The Deep, the waters, the sea, and Rahab are often God's opponents in the combat myth, and he often said to "still" them. The vault of heaven is the result of defeat of the primordial waters. The rainbow is the weapon that God uses to (re-)defeat the waters in Genesis 9 after they "prevail" (גבר) over the land in Gen 7:18, 19, 20, and 24. Personified Sea is often accompanied by serpent, dragon, or sea-monster, and Ben Sira does mention the "sea monsters" (גבורות רבה) in Sir 43:25. Though all of these characters and items from the combat myth appear, they have no mythological role, that is, they are simply present. God's traditional enemies do not oppose God. There is some ambiguity whether God's weapon is being shown as a weapon at all. The other traditional weapons of the storm-god were also mentioned, including hail (Sir 43:13), lightning (Sir 43:13), thunder/earthquake (Sir 43:16), the winds (Sir 43:16, 20), and parched land (Sir 43:21).<sup>424</sup> None of these weapons are aimed at mythological foes. The divine warrior motif also seems to be operating in the background through register activation, as a number of martial images appear in the poem: God's army (Sir 42:17; 43:5); God's "tools," "instruments," or "weapons" (כלי) (Sir 43:2), the moon as army signal (Sir 43:8), stars as watchmen (Sir 43:10), and ice like a breastplate (Sir 43:20). While these images are martial, they are all being used as metaphors and non-mythologically. The combat mythemes, the storm-god commonplaces, and the martial imagery together give the impression of a conspicuous

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<sup>424</sup> There may be further martial imagery based on Ben Sira's use of an MT hapax "cold" (צינת) in Sir 43:20. The same term can also mean "shield" creating a wordplay, especially as the ice is compared to a breastplate later in the same verse. The association with the divine warrior is strengthened by the co-occurrence of ילבש and כשרין in Isa 59:17.

absence. There is a hole precisely where the combat myth and divine warrior should be. In order to ascertain Ben Sira's rhetorical purpose for creating this anti-combat myth, it will help to look at some intertexts.

#### *4.3.1 - The Storm-God Revisited*

Having observed the relationship between the divine warrior motif and the combat myth, it is also worth noting the role of commonplaces already mentioned in this study.

##### *4.3.1.1 - Instruments of Wrath*

Rybolt calls the storm in Sirach 43 “an instrument of God’s wrath” similar to Psalm 29.<sup>425</sup> In Sir 39:12–25 nature is portrayed as an instrument of God’s wrath. Three things in particular are associated with the combat myth and judgment in Sir 43:13: rebuke (גֵּרָה), hail (בָּרֶךְ), and lightning (זִיקָה), though even the dark clouds in Sir 43:14 are likened to menacing birds of prey (עֵיט).

The verbal root גֵּרָה generally means “to rebuke,” while its nominalized form גֵּרָה means “a rebuke.” Though God can rebuke human figures, the term is associated with the divine warrior motif and the combat myth. In Isaiah 66:15 God’s rebuke is associated with the divine warrior motif. In Psalm 18:16, God’s rebuke is associated with the storm theophany and the divine warrior motif. In Psalm 104:6–7 the rebuke directed against the waters: “The deeps covered it like a garment; above the mountains stood

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<sup>425</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93.

the waters. At your rebuke they took flight; at the sound of your thunder they fled” (NABRE). God’s rebuke has mythological associations.

Ben Sira pairs “rebuke” with hail, which as a kind of precipitation has associations with the storm-god, but also has a particular association with the Ten Plagues in Exodus. Exodus 9 demonstrates that the storm imagery was used to indicate Yahweh’s presence. Exod 9:13–35 details the events of the seventh plague: hail. These plagues are manifestations of God’s power over and against the gods of Egypt (Exod 12:12). Other theophanic elements accompanied the hail, as illustrated in verse 23: “So Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent forth peals of thunder (קול) and hail (ברד). Lightning (אש) flashed toward the earth, and the LORD rained down (מטר) hail (ברד) upon the land of Egypt” (NABRE). There is nothing supernatural *per se* in this description of a hailstorm. It contained thunder (קול), lightning (אש), and hail (ברד); however, coupled with the description of the theophany in Exodus 19, the plague of hail may be seen as theophanic. Hail is often associated with theophanies (Ps 18, Ps 147; and Ps 148). Ben Sira seems to have accepted the idea of weaponized precipitation by joining hail and rebuke.

Askin highlights the potential association of divine judgment with the term “hail-stones” (אבני ברך).<sup>426</sup> The term’s only other occurrence is in Josh 10:11, though a similar phrase occurs in Ezekiel (אבני אלג־ביש in Ezek 13:11, 13; 38:22). Ben Sira seems to be aware of the phrase’s association with Joshua, since he reproduces it while talking about

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<sup>426</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 123.

Joshua in the Praise of the Famous (Sir 46:5). Interestingly, in all other cases, including Sir 46:5, hail-stones are associated with divine judgment. As Askin observes, “Ben Sira’s ability to harmonize texts is accompanied by a strong tone of prophetic revelation through weather patterns *as signs of God’s judgement, positive and negative*” (emphasis original).<sup>427</sup>

Lightning was associated with the storm-god theophany, often identified with or compared to arrows (Ps 18; Ps 77; Ps 97; and Hab 3). It is not surprising that at least three out of the four contain the combat myth (which may be implied in Ps 97). Therefore, in Sir 43:13 Ben Sira uses three words that are associated with the combat myth: rebuke (גערה), hail (ברך), and lightning (זיקה). These “weapons” are not targeting any foes, human or divine. They bolster the register, but do not explicate its rhetorical purpose.

#### 4.3.1.2 - Vault of Heaven

The “vault” of heaven or “firmament” (רקיע) occurs in Sir 43:1 and 43:8b, in which there does not seem to be an allusion to any of the 17 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>428</sup> According to the *Enuma elish*, the vault which separates the heavenly waters from the air and dry land is made out of the carcass of defeated Tiamat. An alternative

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<sup>427</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 133.

<sup>428</sup> The common cosmological scientific thought in the ancient Near East posited everything lived in a kind of bubble, or—better yet—a submerged up-side-down bowl. That bubble or bowl was a dome in the sky that separated terrestrial waters like rivers, lakes, seas and sub-terranean water from what we might call the atmospheric or heavenly waters, which were above that dome. For an opposing view, see Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew רקיע (RĀQÎA’),” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 31–56.

mythology portrays god as a craftsman, and the dome of heaven one of his works: “the primeval copper cutting tool with which they (the primeval gods) cut apart heaven and earth.”<sup>429</sup> This Hittite text does not participate in the combat myth. Instead, it attests to a common tradition of anthropomorphizing one or more creator deities as craftsmen. Therefore, Ben Sira’s employment of רָקִיעַ has ambiguous associations, though the term may be associated with the combat myth.

#### 4.3.1.3 - Rainbow

A closer look at Ben Sira’s employment of the rainbow may suggest an association with the divine warrior motif. According to Di Lella, the rainbow in Sir 43:11–12 recalls the flood narrative, which also recalls the divine warrior motif, as the flood is the undoing of combat-creation relief from it comes as God re-asserts his dominance.<sup>430</sup> According R. A. F. MacKenzie, the verses on the rainbow “underline its symbolism as a the bow which the Lord has bent but will never shoot at the earth (Gen 9:13–16).”<sup>431</sup> Fletcher-Louis sees in this passage undertones of both the Noahide Covenant and God’s defeat of the Deep.<sup>432</sup> Rybolt also sees God’s bow as “an ancient poetic view of the rainbow” akin to Gen 9:13.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> “Song of Ullikummi,” translated by H. A. Hoffner Jr. (Bill T. Arnold, and Bryan E. Beyer, eds. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002]), 65.

<sup>430</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 493.

<sup>431</sup> R. A. F. MacKenzie, *Sirach*, OTM 19 (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983), 164.

<sup>432</sup> Fletcher-Louis, “The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira,” 84.

<sup>433</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 92.

The association with divine warrior and combat myth rests on a *double entendre*: “The hand of god stretched it out with might.” The double meaning centers on ambiguity of the term נטה, which means “to stretch out.” As noted above, it occurs in Sir 43:23, Ps 104:2b, Isa 40:22c, and Isa 42:5b. It is used to anthropomorphically describe an act of creation. That is one possible sense in 43:11–12. The other image is of God “stretching out” or tensioning a (rain)bow. Other elements in the passage display similar ambiguity. The primary meaning of the Hebrew יד is “hand,” but by extension it comes to mean “(sphere of) power, rule, control” or “power, strength, force.”<sup>434</sup> The primary meaning of the Hebrew נטה is to “stretch out, hold out, extend.”<sup>435</sup> It is often used with “hand” as the direct object, as in Sir 46:2 and Sir 48:18, where it has a military valence.<sup>436</sup> To stretch out one’s hand against another is to attack them in some way. However, “hand” (יד) is never the subject of “to stretch out” (נטה) in extant Hebrew literature, as it is in Sir 43:12. The implied direct object of “to stretch out” (נטה) is “rainbow” (קשת). Askin notes that Ben Sira is alone in having נטה “to stretch out” take the rainbow as an object, whereas the majority of biblical (Isa 40:22, 42:5; 44:24; 51:13, 16; Job 9:8) and non-biblical (11QPsa 26:14, 1QH9.9) texts have heavens (שמים) as the object.<sup>437</sup> Smend argues that because of the appearance of נטה suggests that קשת in this

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<sup>434</sup> “יד” DCH 4:82–95.

<sup>435</sup> “נטה” DCH 5:672–76.

<sup>436</sup> See also Exod 7:5; Isa 5:25; Jer 51:25; Ezek 6:14; 14:9, 13; 16:27; 25:7, 13, 16; 35:3; Zeph 1:4; 2:13; Job 15:25.

<sup>437</sup> See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 118–19.

context is not an archer's bow.<sup>438</sup> Askin argues against an allusion to Genesis 9 in Sir 43:11–12, noting that other Second Temple texts that allude to rainbows, such as 4Q37 and Jubilees 6, typically highlight its covenantal valence, which is not the case here in Sirach.<sup>439</sup> The first reading parallels Sir 43:23, Ps 104:2b, Isa 40:22c, and Isa 42:5b where God creates the rainbow with his power, or potentially stretches or spreads it out like paint or an elastic substance. The second image comes from a secondary meaning of נטה: "bend or bow."<sup>440</sup> This meaning creates this image of an archer tensioning a bow, which is the primary meaning of קשת. The image is supported by the playful employment of "hand" (יד) and "stretch out" (נטה) together, but not according to the traditional military formula. Both potential images serve Ben Sira's rhetorical purpose. If, on the one hand, God is meant to be stretching out his hand or power in an act of creation, then that creation manifests God's glory—just as the analogy of the rainbow is meant to function in Ezek 1:28. If, on the other hand, the image is of God using his hand to tension a rainbow conceived as a war-bow, then this is another element belonging to the combat myth. This evidence may seem to justify the conclusions of Sauer and Rybolt. Sauer sees Genesis 9 operating in the background of Sir 43:11–12.<sup>441</sup>

In the previous chapter it was observed that the rainbow's association with theophany, particularly the theophany of a storm-god, fit his rhetorical purpose. That

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<sup>438</sup> Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*, 405.

<sup>439</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 116. See also Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93.

<sup>440</sup> "נטה" *DCH* 5:672–76.

<sup>441</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 317.

rhetorical purpose is furthered by either proposed reading: God's glory is again manifest in creation as he spreads out (creates) the rainbow and God's power is also manifest in using his hand to tension his cosmic war-bow. Both meanings are possible and plausible given the context. Schmidt observes that the rainbow is associated with God's mercy, providing balance to the other meteorological elements associated with judgment.<sup>442</sup> The double meaning of the rainbow is exactly the irony that Ben Sira is capitalizing on. The bow is associated both with the combat myth and a reprieve from God's militaristic attention. The weapon is ironically a sign a peace. Ben Sira is taking advantage of that valence while also having the same words state that the rainbow is simply a beautiful creation of God that manifests its creator's glory. Ben Sira is evoking the combat myth to undermine it.

#### 4.3.1.4 - Heavenly Luminaries

The heavenly luminaries, part of the storm-god register, are also associated with the combat myth. Perdue sees Sir 43:2–9 as a poetic commentary on Gen 1:14–19, which contains theophanic elements and hints of the combat myth.<sup>443</sup> In the *Enuma elish*, the luminaries themselves are placed by Marduk after he defeats Tiamat and creates the world. Sir 43:2–5 notes how powerful the sun is, calling it a "tool" in verse 2. However, כלי may also be translated "weapon." This association may be why the tradition attested to by MS B has changes the passage to read "How fearsome are the

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<sup>442</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 181–82.

<sup>443</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 256.



works of the YYY.” Seeing the sun as a destructive force would not be a unique reading, as Isa 45:15 seems to weaponize it: “I will lay waste mountains and hills, all their undergrowth I will dry up; I will turn the rivers into marshes, and the marshes I will dry up.” In this passage God is drying up the water, which would have associations with God’s own role as storm-god, but also be facilitated by the sun (see also Isa 42:10–16 and Ps 107:33–34). A similar episode occurs in the Ba’al cycle, when Ba’al is absent from the earth and the sun goes out of control under the coercion of Môtu (CTA 5 ii–iii).

Martial imagery also occurs in connection with the moon. Like the sun, the moon is also called a “weapon” or “instrument” (כלי) of God in Sir 43:8. Specifically, the construct chain כלי צבא suggests an “army signal” for the waterskins of the sky, the containers of rain, similar to images in 1 En. 60:20–22, Job 38:37, Sir 39:17 and Sir 43:14.

Like the sun and the moon, the stars are portrayed with military metaphor in Sir 43:10, “At the word of the Lord it stands at attention, and it will not be relaxed during their watch.” While the pronominal references are somewhat obscure (though the Greek makes the pronouns and verbs plural), the plural must refer to the stars. The stars then are being compared to night watchmen, who diligently do their duty. Snaith observes that the stars are often called “the hosts of heaven,” a metaphor underlying Ben Sira’s portrayal of the moon in Sir 43:8 and the stars in Sir 43:10.<sup>444</sup> The moon may also be an army signal for the stars, which play the metaphorical role of soldiers.

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<sup>444</sup> John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 213.

Ben Sira is clearly not shying away from martial imagery. It's pervasive. For instance, in Sir 43:20, Ben Sira compares ice to a breastplate or armor. All of this martial imagery continues to support the expectation for the combat myth or the divine warrior motif, even as actual conflict is completely absent.

#### 4.3.1.5 - Heavenly Court

The heavenly court may also have a military association, as the angels are referred to as God's "host" or "army" (צבא) in Sir 42:17, (see also 1 En. 1:4). Similar imagery appears elsewhere in Sirach. The sapiential poem in Sirach 24 is introduced by setting the stage:

1 Wisdom sings her own praises,  
among her own people she proclaims her glory.  
2 In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth,  
in the presence of his host she tells of her glory: (NABRE)

Personified Wisdom praises herself "among her own people" (ἐν μέσῳ λαοῦ αὐτῆς), "in the assembly of the Most High" (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ Ὑψίστου), and in the presence of God's "hosts" (δυνάμεως). Wisdom belongs to the order of heavenly beings, who are also conceived of as an army, both in Sirach 24 and in the Hymn to the Creator. Perdue sees the heavenly council as the operative commonplace in the introduction to the Hymn to the Creator.<sup>445</sup> This heavenly council is a gathering of angelic warriors.

#### 4.3.1.6 - Wind

The final potential martial association in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator is the winds that God controls in Sir 43:16, 20. It is significant that four total winds are

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<sup>445</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254.

mentioned—three in Sir 43:16 and one in Sir 43:20—because Marduk used the four winds as weapons. It is possible that the four winds, like the four cardinal directions, are cultural commonplaces that need not be associated with the combat myth, but the result of the cold north wind in Sir 43:20 is that the pond is covered with ice like a breastplate (שריון). This clearly martial metaphor employed by Ben Sira may suggest that the reader ought to accept the martial associations of ambiguous cases like the four winds.

#### *4.3.1.7 - Conclusion*

In conclusion, the instruments of God's wrath have been neutralized by Ben Sira. The vault of heaven is non-mythological. The rainbow is polyvalent, related to the combat myth or a sign of peace, potentially both. Ben Sira uses martial imagery to describe the heavenly luminaries, but there is no conflict. The heavenly court of celestial warriors is present but not engaged in combat. The wind, a weapon of the storm-god is treated amply, but is never weaponized. Martial imagery pervades Ben Sira's hymn to the creator, contributing to the expectation on behalf of the reader that the combat myth or the divine warrior motif appear, but they are conspicuously absent. A few test cases will help to illustrate what Ben Sira's rhetorical purpose is: to actively undermine the combat myth.

#### *4.3.2 - Isaiah 40–55*

Deutero-Isaiah is an example of a text that explicitly recalls the combat myth in order to undermine it. Clifford notes that Isa 40:12–31 recalls creation as a means to

rhetorically establish that Israel's god, Yahweh, is master of all.<sup>446</sup> Clifford also observes that in this passage, Yahweh is portrayed as a storm-god who uses wind as a weapon (verse 24).<sup>447</sup> Put differently, Yahweh is being portrayed as the master of the cosmos, the divine king, who uses his storm god weapons to accomplish his will, which, according to the passage, is un-opposed. Even though there is martial imagery, there is no enemy.

Isa 43:16–21 conflates the application of the combat myth to the exodus tradition (as seen in Exodus 14–15 and Psalms 77 and 78) with a new exodus characterized by crossing the desert, representing a return from Babylon and the building of a temple or temple-city in Isaiah 44–45.<sup>448</sup> The “mighty waters” appear in verse 16, but they are not personified and do not oppose God.

In chapter 45, the lord of the cosmos motif is on full display.<sup>449</sup> God is taking responsibility for everything in creation. Michael Fishbane sees in Isa 45:7, in addition to 40:17–18, 25–6, 28–31, and 47:18–19, as aggadic exegesis of Gen 1:2, that is as an “atomistic” and “polemical” reinterpretation.<sup>450</sup> God makes the light and the darkness. God is unopposed. The basic logic of the combat myth, that in the divine realm there is

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<sup>446</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, CBQMS 26 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 169.

<sup>447</sup> Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, 169–70.

<sup>448</sup> Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, 171–72.

<sup>449</sup> Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*,” 53.

<sup>450</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 428.

conflict, that God must act as a warrior and defeat his enemies, falls apart. God has no enemies. All of those things which were deduced to be the result of divine conflict were entirely the responsibility of Yahweh alone.

J. Gerald Janzen argues that God's power, according to Deutero-Isaiah, does not differ from the power of other gods in degree, but in kind.<sup>451</sup> While other gods like Marduk rely on military victory for creating and maintaining coercive, hegemonic rule, Deutero-Isaiah critiques the dominant model, even though he has inherited one which is very similar. As Müller has demonstrated, Yahweh, according to a great deal of material that would have been inherited by Deutero-Isaiah, was a royal-weather god, whose dominion was built on the same or similar combat myth and divine warrior motif as Israel's neighbors.<sup>452</sup> In place of the combat myth, Deutero-Isaiah places the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, according to Janzen.<sup>453</sup>

To get to the Suffering Servant, Deutero-Isaiah explicitly rejects the combat myth in Isaiah 51. As Janzen notes, Isa 51:9–11 voices the people's expectation of God and in so doing recalls the combat myth as it relates to the exodus:<sup>454</sup>

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,  
arm of the LORD!  
Awake as in the days of old,  
in ages long ago!  
Was it not you who crushed Rahab,  
you who pierced the dragon?

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<sup>451</sup> J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 458–78.

<sup>452</sup> Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*.

<sup>453</sup> Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power," 476.

<sup>454</sup> Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power," 478.

10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
 the waters of the great deep,  
 You who made the depths of the sea into a way  
 for the redeemed to pass through?  
 11 Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return  
 and enter Zion singing,  
 crowned with everlasting joy;  
 They will meet with joy and gladness,  
 sorrow and mourning will flee. (NABRE)

The people's expectation is that God will do mighty deeds, as Yahweh has done in the past. Familiar elements from the combat myth include Rahab (רהב), the dragon (תנין), and the sea as enemy of God. The association between the combat myth and the exodus recalls Isa 30:1–17, in which the prophet admonishes the people for not doing as God commands, by making an alliance with Egypt. As in Ps 87:4, Egypt is identified as "Rahab" (רהב) in Isa 30:7, in which it is predicted that Egypt/Rahab will be still (שבת) when Judah is in need, inverting the imagery of the sea monster rising up. The divine is once again conflated with the terrestrial, as Egypt is identified as Rahab, making Judah's alliance with them a betrayal. Nevertheless, the association with the exodus event, specifically the crossing of the Red Sea and the combat myth is common, occurring in Exodus 14–15 and Psalm 77.

In the case of Isaiah 51, the combat myth is serving one of its generic functions, to rouse God into action on behalf of God's people.<sup>455</sup> There is a subtle shift in speaker. The "I" of verse 12 is discordant with the invocation of God in verse 9. Instead of God through (Deutero-)Isaiah speaking to God's people, the narrative "I" is parroting the people's perspective by calling on Yahweh to "awake," to rouse God's might to defeat

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<sup>455</sup> Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition*, 193.

Israel's enemies. Deutero-Isaiah presents this perspective, only to undermine it. Though Yahweh comforts his people (verse 12), he does so by pointing out that the so-called oppressor is not threatening (verse 13). Yahweh assures Israel of their release from bondage (verse 14), but does so in an unsettling way. According to the people's perspective (the combat myth), God defeats the enemies who rise up in revolt, but in Isa 51:15, it is Yahweh "who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar" (NABRE). The people want to blame Yahweh's cosmic enemies manifest in their earthly enemies for the people's misfortune, but Yahweh takes ownership, taking agency over their experience. Israel's enemies are God's instruments, just as Cyrus in Isa 45:1. Yahweh is the unopposed God of all. It is not Yahweh who must "arise" but the people, in verse 17.<sup>456</sup>

Throughout Deutero-Isaiah, the combat myth and the divine warrior motif are being activated, only to be undermined. In their place is a God is unopposed lord of the cosmos, completely responsible for both blessings and curses.

#### 4.3.3 - *Genesis 1*

As noted above, there is no little discussion concerning the precise background and target of the potential polemic in Genesis 1. JoAnn Scurlock, who sees the omission of the combat myth motif in Genesis 1 by P as polemic against Babylonian Marduk creation theology, is in basic agreement with Bernard Batto and Kent Sparks.<sup>457</sup> Richard

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<sup>456</sup> The divine warrior motif is reprised in Isaiah 59. Completing the transformation, the divine warrior motif is God acting not on behalf of Israel against her enemies but against (unrepentant) Israel through her enemies! For more, see Neufeld, *Put on the Armour of God*, 22.

<sup>457</sup> JoAnn Scurlock, "Chaoskampf Lost—Chaoskampf Regained: The Gunkel Hypothesis Revisited," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn

Averbeck sees the demythologizing of common ancient Near Eastern *Chaoskampf* elements as part of P's polemic against Israel's neighbors.<sup>458</sup>

Instead of identifying a specific text, tradition, or people, it may suffice to identify a specific worldview: the polytheistic worldview through which conflict on earth is seen as conflict amongst the gods and vice versa. Specifically, the worldview to which both the combat myth and the divine warrior motif belong. Seen through the lens of the history of religions approach, one might call the divine warrior motif in the psalms a remnant of a bygone, potentially polytheistic age, but the Israelites were in constant cultural contact with their neighbors. There was no shortage of social and cultic interchange—as the Deuteronomist often laments (see above comments on Psalm 29). Regardless, the divine warrior motif remained within the Jewish religious imagination through the psalms and other texts. Brevard Childs sees the demythologizing tendencies of P as part of the general *modus operandi* of biblical authors as a whole.<sup>459</sup>

This conclusion does not seem to fit the case of Ben Sira, who seems very comfortable with other myths.<sup>460</sup> In fact, Ben Sira's mythological language is one of the reasons one would expect to see the combat myth in Sir 42:15–43:33. Mark Smith

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Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 257–268. Kent Sparks, “*Enūma elish* and Priestly Mimesis: Elite Emulation in Nascent Judaism,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 625–48.

<sup>458</sup> Averbeck, “The Three ‘Daughters’ of Ba’al and Transformations of *Chaoskampf* in the Early Chapters of Genesis,” 252.

<sup>459</sup> Brevard Springs Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

<sup>460</sup> A further case could be the mention of the רשף in Sir 43:17. While the term may just refer to birds of prey, the term can also mean plague or fire (Deut 32:24; 4Q418.127.3). The second valence has a mythological history, witnessed to in the Ugaritic story of Keret or Kirtu (14.19).



agrees that P is demythologizing, but Smith shifts the focus from anti-Marduk polemic to P's asserting a priestly vision of God.<sup>461</sup> It is difficult to tell whether P or Ben Sira are engaging in polemic or presenting a worldview that is simply mutually exclusive with those of their contemporaries.<sup>462</sup> This seems to be the basic conclusion of Sauer, who acknowledges that under the influence of Greco-Hellenistic philosophy, Ben Sira's image of God is more refined and transcendent, even though that same image is clothed in the traditional garb of the ancient Israelites.<sup>463</sup>

Adding to the theophanic valence of this passage is Ben Sira's usage of the polyvalent רוּחַ, which can mean "wind," "breath," or "spirit." The distinction between these meanings is not always clear. For instance, Gen 1:1 may be claiming that God's spirit was over the formlessness and void, or it may be talking about a mighty wind. Perhaps, given the storm theophany motif, they are the same thing. There is some internal evidence that Ben Sira was aware of the storm theophany motif. Similar to Sirach 43:16, Ben Sira, probably drawing from 1 Sam 7:10, states that Yahweh thundered (ἐβρόντησεν) his response to Samuel's prayer in Sirach 46:17.<sup>464</sup>

The case of Genesis 1 is well rehearsed and mentioned above. In short, the primordial waters, "the deep" or "the abyss" (תהום) refers to the subterranean waters of

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<sup>461</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 69.

<sup>462</sup> Potential polemical targets will be suggested in the Conclusion, as part of the "Suggestions for Further Research" section.

<sup>463</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 320.

<sup>464</sup> The passage is not extant in Hebrew, but combination of the Greek tradition of Sirach and the Hebrew tradition from which Ben Sira drew suggests that the Hebrew of Ben Sira probably would have employed the same imagery.

ancient thought.<sup>465</sup> These waters are not just a scientific postulant, however. They also represent the region of chaos, due to their association with the Tiamat or Yam in the combat myth.<sup>466</sup> According to Caldusch-Benages, the term “deep” (תהום) in Sirach is a symbol of anti-creation, as it seems to be in Genesis 1.<sup>467</sup>

However, in Genesis 1, the primordial waters do not pose any opposition to God’s creative process. In the *Enuma elish*, the “firmament” is made by Marduk from Tiamat’s corpse. The “firmament” (רקיע) is mentioned a number of times (Gen 1:6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20), but only as a cosmological object, not as the product of theomachy. While the celestial bodies are said to “rule” (משל) the night and days, they are in no other way personified. While the author of Genesis 1 uses common mythemes from the combat myth, those elements are employed non-mythologically to present an account of creation wholly other from the one attested in the *Enuma elish* and certain biblical texts.

Ben Sira, even if not alluding to Genesis 1 specifically, is participating in an ongoing cultural discourse, a discourse in which Genesis has a loud voice. The texts that contain a worldview fertile for the combat myth and the divine warrior motif—or the texts themselves—persisted to and past the time of Ben Sira. He inherited a discordant tradition. In his portrayal of the cosmos, he seems to have sided with P by portraying Yahweh as the unopposed lord of the cosmos.

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<sup>465</sup> Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 210.

<sup>466</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254.

<sup>467</sup> Caldusch-Benages, “God, Creator of All (Sir 43:27–33),” 88.

#### 4.3.4 - Psalm 104, Psalm 107 and Psalm 148

Di Lella also sees the mention of Rahab and God's water creatures in Sir 43:23 and 43:25, respectively, as parallels to the sea creatures in Ps 104:25–26 and the mention of Leviathan in Isa 27:1.<sup>468</sup> The similarities between Sirach 43 and Psalm 107 have not gone unnoticed. Lange and Weigold see an allusion to Ps 107:23 in Sir 43:24.<sup>469</sup> Burton also detects a parallel between the same two texts.<sup>470</sup> Schechter and Taylor do as well, but they also see a parallel with Psalm 104:25, as does Perdue.<sup>471</sup> Sauer sees Ben Sira's own travels as a source of his knowledge of the seas, while also seeing Psalm 104 and Psalm 107, in addition to Jonah, and Job 40 standing in the background.<sup>472</sup> Though Ben Sira suggests that sages like himself travel the world (Sir 39:4), reading this section autobiographically exceeds the evidence. Starting with so many texts "in the background" already suggests that Sirach does not contain literary allusions, but that Ben Sira is activating a culturally constructed register.

Psalm 107 recalls a series of plights from which God delivered people: the lost (verses 4–9), the imprisoned (verses 10–16), the sick (verses 17–22), and the imperiled at sea (verses 23–32). These specific, but vague, situations are followed by a summative

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<sup>468</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 495.

<sup>469</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

<sup>470</sup> Burton, "Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation," 59.

<sup>471</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20. See also Corley, *Sirach*, 121. Corley adds Jonah 1:4–16; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253–56.

<sup>472</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 319.

rehearsal (verses 33–41) and a call to praise (verse 42). The last verse (43) gives the *raison d'être* of the psalm: “Whoever is wise will take note of these things, and ponder the merciful deeds of the LORD” (NABRE). The psalm is a psalm of personal salvation, which does not fit the context of Sirach 43. Specific correspondence between Sir 43:24 and Ps 107:23 include the phrase “go down (יֵרֵד) to the sea” (יָם), but the verbs are different forms, and a variation of the phrase appears in Josh 16:3; 1 Kgs 5:23; and Isa 42:10. The function of the sea is different in the two texts. In Sirach, the sea is marvelous for its size, while in Psalm 107, the primary characteristic of the sea is its threat to human life. The two cannot even be equated in either text, as it is not the sea’s size that is perilous but its waves. Nor are the waves mentioned in Sirach. The construct chain, “works of Yahweh” (מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה), occurs in Ps 107:24, while the same noun occurs a number of times in the Hymn to the Creator, but the idea of “the works of God” is not unique to these two texts (see Ps 66 and Ps 111:2). There is a general correspondence between the worldview of Psalm 107 and that expressed in Sirach, but this is unsurprising; they are both part of the same cultural literary tradition.<sup>473</sup>

The rhetorical function of the sea in Ps 104:24–26 is much more similar to Sir 43:23–25 than Psalm 107. Schmidt has a rather lengthy investigation into the parallels between Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator and Psalm 104, in which he observes that Psalm 104 draws upon “Mesopotamian storm-god imagery.”<sup>474</sup> While both Psalms 104

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<sup>473</sup> For instance, Ben Sira expresses a balance in creation in this poem (Sir 42:23–25) and elsewhere (Sir 33:14–15), while explaining earlier that the same things work out for benefit or detriment of the individual, depending on their circumstance (39:12–35).

<sup>474</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 195.

and Sir 43:1–26 contain theophanic language and meteorological imagery, in addition to calls to praise, in Sirach the former two are integrated while in Psalm 104 they are not.<sup>475</sup> In this section of Psalm 104, God is being praised for the wisdom evident in creation, while using the breadth of the sea and the creatures within it as examples. This is precisely the movement in Sir 43:24 to 43:25—from the vastness of the sea to the creatures that swim in it, both of which are demonstrations of the glory and wisdom of God manifest in creation. Nevertheless, there is no indication that Ben Sira is attempting to evoke Psalm 104 locally or globally. Praising the God of creation is not unique to this section of Sirach and Psalm 104. Ben Sira does not seem to be alluding to Psalm 104; instead, Ben Sira seems to be using similar elements for a similar rhetorical purpose. He is using stock images and cultural commonplaces to make a traditional point.

Psalm 104 is a psalm of praise for God the creator. The psalmist recalls the episode of God's establishing the dry land:

5 You fixed the earth on its foundation,  
so it can never be shaken.  
6 The deeps covered it like a garment;  
above the mountains stood the waters.  
7 At your rebuke they took flight;  
at the sound of your thunder they fled.  
8 They rushed up the mountains, down the valleys  
to the place you had fixed for them.  
9 You set a limit they cannot pass;  
never again will they cover the earth. (NABRE)

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<sup>475</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 198.

As with many of the storm theophanies, God's voice is portrayed as thunder (קול רעם), which rebukes (גערה) the waters (מים) or the deeps (תהום). A similar episode occurs in Psalm 18:

16 Then the bed of the sea appeared;  
the world's foundations lay bare,  
At your rebuke, O LORD,  
at the storming breath of your nostrils. (NABRE)

As with Psalm 104, there is theophanic language; this time God's breath is portrayed as "storming breath" (נשמת רוח) or wind. Like Psalm 104, Psalm 18 claims that the waters retreated at God's "rebuke" (גערה). Rebuke implies some opposition and personification, which may therefore recall the combat myth.

A later portion of Psalm 104 contains a number of by now familiar elements, though they seem to be devoid of menace:

24 How varied are your works, LORD!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
25 There is the sea, great and wide!  
It teems with countless beings,  
living things both large and small.  
26 There ships ply their course  
and Leviathan, whom you formed to play with. (NABRE)

The psalmist praises God for the wisdom manifest in creation (verse 24), highlighting specific creatures such as Leviathan (לוייתן) and the sea (הים), whose primary characteristic is its vastness (גדול ורחב). In Psalm 104, Walton sees the lord of the cosmos motif.<sup>476</sup> In a similar vein, Ps 148:7 contains familiar characters, but they pose no threat

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<sup>476</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

to God; in fact, the psalmist calls on them to worship their creator: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters (תנינים) and all the deeps of the sea (כל־תהמות)” (NABRE). Both the formerly personified Sea and her serpentine minions are called to join the rest of the cosmos in worship of Yahweh.

The tone of Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator is similar to Ps 104:5 and Ps 148:7, since the existence of the sea monsters is an opportunity to praise their creator. In Sir 43:25, God “contains” Rahab, but this does not necessarily imply opposition, just danger, in a similar way that animals at the zoo are contained without being the enemies of humans. By neutralizing the traditional enemies of Yahweh, Ben Sira is again replacing the divine warrior motif with the lord of the cosmos motif.

#### *4.3.5 - Conclusion*

By using martial imagery and employing words and images that belong to the combat myth register, Ben Sira is activating the myth without alluding to a specific text, thereby participating in the ongoing cultural discourse related to the myth for the purpose of undermining the myth and replacing it with the lord of the cosmos motif. Ben Sira toes a fine line between employing the martial imagery and mythemes without actually portraying opposition. What Deutero-Isaiah did explicitly, Ben Sira follows the author of Genesis 1 in doing implicitly. This tradition is also attested to in Psalms 104, 107, and 148.

#### 4.4 - Conclusion

The divine warrior motif, where God battles human enemies, is common in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 14–15; Deut 33; Ps 24; Ps 66; Ps 68; Ps 76; and Ps 77). The combat myth, where God battles non-human or divine enemies, usually the personified sea or monsters/dragons, is also common (Gen 8–9; Ps 29; Ps 74; Ps 89; and Job). The often occur together (Ps 18; Ps 74; Ps 144). There are a number of locations where the myth is implied (Ps 8; Ps 33; Ps 65; Ps 93; Ps 135; and Ps 148). Sometimes the myth is recalled implicitly (Gen 1) or explicitly (Isa 40–55; Ps 104; Ps 107; Ps 147) only to be undermined.

Given this diversity, it is astonishing that Ben Sira synthesizes the traditions he received. Rybolt claims that “it is note-worthy that the ancient idea of rivalry between the sea with its creatures and God had disappeared by Ben Sira’s time.”<sup>477</sup> Firstly, Ben Sira should not necessarily be taken as a representative of his time, which is noteworthy for its diversity of perspectives. Secondly, Francis M. Macatangay has convincingly argued that the combat myth plays an important role in the book of Tobit, whose author was a contemporary of Ben Sira.<sup>478</sup>

The combat myth and the divine warrior motif were far from dead metaphors. Ben Sira’s use of the divine warrior motif elsewhere (Sir 35:21–22; Sir 36:8–9; and Sir 51:10) suggests that he knew it and was comfortable with it; therefore, he was not undermining that motif *per se*. Instead, Ben Sira seems to be aiming his rhetoric at

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<sup>477</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93.

<sup>478</sup> Francis M. Macatangay, “God’s Conflict with the Chaos Monster in the Book of Tobit,” in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 319–30.



cosmogonic theomachy, the association between the divine warrior, the storm-god, divine conflict and the establishment of the cosmos.

Deutero-Isaiah explicitly recalls the combat myth and the divine warrior motif, only to undermine them by making God responsible for all human experience. Yahweh is similarly portrayed as the lord of the cosmos in Genesis 1, where God creates unopposed, even by his traditional enemies, the sea and sea monsters. Similar to what P has done in Genesis 1, a psalmist did with Psalm 104. Even though there is anthropomorphic language—and potentially even mythology—in Psalm 104, the combat myth is absent, and conspicuously so. For instance, in Ps 104:26 Leviathan, that fearsome sea monster, is God's pet! Rhetorically, the abortive divine warrior motif and the unfulfilled combat myth functions in an analogous way in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator. In all three texts, God's power and wisdom are being illustrated in creation, even when that creation is unopposed, as a strict monotheism requires. Taking the lead of Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, Ben Sira continues the project of removing vestigial elements of polytheism, even as he employs commonplaces from the same tradition to make a monotheistic point.

Ben Sira's participation in his inherited tradition is in keeping with common scribal practice. Scribes were critical of traditions both foreign and domestic. Carr observes that scribes were inclined to "invert, mock and otherwise reject foreign source texts" even as they appropriated them.<sup>479</sup> This consideration should not be limited to

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<sup>479</sup> Carr, "Method in Determining the Dependence of Biblical on Non-Biblical Texts," 46.

texts and traditions that were actually foreign but should be expanded to include traditions perceived to be foreign. The storm-god and divine warrior motif were not foreign to Israelite tradition, but if one accepts the Deuteronomistic history, one could be forgiven for thinking that texts like Psalm 29 were acts of synchronism, instead of traditional Yahwism. Furthermore, even if these developments were considered by Ben Sira to be properly “Israelite,” Clifford observes that in the ANE, scribes often criticized their own traditions.<sup>480</sup>

In the final analysis, only two of the rhetorical functions identified by Ballentine can be operative in Sir 42:15–43:33, “(1) to assert Yahweh’s dominion” and “(2) to claim that his dominion is universal.”<sup>481</sup> Yahweh has no enemies in Ben Sira’s renderings. By synthesizing and editing his own received tradition, which included the divine warrior motif, the storm-god, and the combat myth, Ben Sira rejected parts of that tradition, especially the combat myth, even as he used commonplaces from them to activate the register. By activating the registers using a series of words and images associated with them and then guarding the poem against any substantive reference to the combat myth, Ben Sira recalls the myth and undermines it at the same time. Therefore, though Ben Sira recalls elements from the combat myth register, he does so to undermine the myth, placing in its stead the portrayal of Yahweh, lord of the cosmos.

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<sup>480</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 37–40.

<sup>481</sup> Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition*, 193.

## Chapter 5: Ben Sira and Divine Speech

In his Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira refers to divine speech in several places (Sir 42:15, 19; 43:5, 10, 13, 16, 26), though the contents of that speech are never quoted. Instead, Ben Sira refers to God's word(s), commands, speech, or rebuke. Ben Sira once again seems to be drawing on a common biblical tradition. As will be shown below, several parallels between Sir 42:15–43:33 and passages from Ben Sira's tradition have been proposed. Although it will be shown that none of these parallels constitute a literary allusion or an echo, Ben Sira is nevertheless participating in an ongoing cultural dialogue by employing commonplaces associated with the register of divine speech for the purpose of expressing (1) God's participation in the creation and sustenance of the cosmos which reveals God's power and (2) God's transcendence of that cosmos.

This chapter will proceed by first building the network of vocabulary and images related to divine speech in texts that Ben Sira knew. Next, discrete parallels suggested by other scholars will be measured to see if they meet the previously established criteria for a literary allusion, echo, or commonplace. Taking the evidence as a whole, it will be shown that Ben Sira is not portraying God's speech as a hypostasized agent but as effect commands suitable to a monarch with supreme authority.

### 5.1 - Divine Speech in Ancient Israel

Throughout the books that would become biblical, God's speech is a commonplace, clustered especially in the Pentateuchal narratives, the prophets, and poetry. Often this speech is quoted. Casper J. Labushagne used "logotechnical analysis,"

the counting of syntactical units, to discover numerical patterns in the introductory formulae and divine speech in the Pentateuch, concluding the numerical patterns taken up by later tradents had much earlier roots.<sup>482</sup> To be sure, sometimes divine speech is simply communicative, that is, it is intended to convey a message to an audience, without necessarily effecting a change. It provides information (though often, of course, for a rhetorical purpose). Though the model of communication as information transfer may be applicable to the prophetic utterances where God is quoted by the prophet, this model is inapplicable to Ben Sira's Hymn to the creator, since Ben Sira does not quote God in Sir 42:15–43:33, and it is therefore impossible to ascertain what information would have been transferred.

Instead of prophetic utterance, Corley suggests both Genesis 1 and John 1 as parallels to Ben Sira's notion that God created the world through speech.<sup>483</sup> Corley is clearly not suggesting that Ben Sira was alluding to John 1, but there is a big difference between the portrayal of creation in Genesis 1 and John 1. Though scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann have attempted to draw a strong dichotomy between Hellenized Christianity and "authentic" Judaism, recent scholarship has problematized this position, particularly in reference to the hypostasized agents of God.<sup>484</sup> Daniel Boyarin traces the

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<sup>482</sup> See his most representative/summative work: Casper J. Labuschagne, "The Literary and Theological Function of Divine Speech in the Pentateuch," in *Congress Volume: Salamanca*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 154–73. For a counter-argument, see Philip R. Davies and David M. Gunn, "Pentateuchal Patterns: An Examination of C J Labuschagne's Theory," *VT* 34 (1984): 399–406.

<sup>483</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 119.

<sup>484</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 21.

development of a universal Jewish Logos theology to John 1 through the usage of *Logos*, *Sophia* and *Memra*.<sup>485</sup> James H. Charlesworth adds to this list by tracing the development of the hypostatic “Voice” in the Apocalypse of John from Old Testament texts like Isa 50:4–5, Isa 55:11, Ps 33:6, Ps 147:15, and Wis 18:15 through later apocalyptic works like 4 Ezra 6:38. Charlesworth also notes similarities with the terms *Shekhina*, *Dabbar*, and the *Bath Qol*, which he recognizes as hypostatic creatures. Richard A. Lammert highlights the theophanic aspect of these concepts, particularly the “word” (דבר) of God.<sup>486</sup> The consensus opinion is that logos theology in that bloomed in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John clearly had deeper roots in Second Temple Judaism, but how deep those roots are remains somewhat controverted and ambiguous.<sup>487</sup>

Uncertain relative dating makes tracking the development of traditions within the books that would become biblical difficult. That the psalms did not become the Book of the Psalms as we have it now until relatively late, regardless of the dating of each individual psalm, exemplifies the issue. Deliberate archaizing, the re-use of older material, and scribal editing further complicate the task of tracking the genetic developments of a tradition. Therefore, this task will not be attempted here. Instead of this diachronic study, which numerous scholars have already attempted, this chapter will investigate Ben Sira’s potential sources synchronically. By first scouring the texts

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<sup>485</sup> Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *HTR* 94 (2001): 243–84.

<sup>486</sup> Richard A. Lammert, “The Word of YHWH as Theophany,” *CTQ* 73 (2009): 195–210.

<sup>487</sup> See also Oskar Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament*, BZAW 4 (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1934).

that Ben Sira had available for their portrayals of divine speech, received categories can be established. This will help to determine how Ben Sira himself is portraying God's speech. Before doing this, a few preliminary comments are in order.

In addition to conceptualizing divine speech as a hypostasized, personal agent capable of independent action, God's speech has a long history of being conceptualized as a speech-act. Speech-act theory has recently permeated biblical studies. For instance, J. Gordon McConville applies speech-act theory to Jeremiah, the book that bears his name, and the reception of that book, noting that that Jeremiah has been deputized by God.<sup>488</sup> Speech-act theory primarily focuses on the way in which words accomplish tasks beyond simply pointing to concepts.<sup>489</sup> In this study, speech-act theory will be primarily used with relation to how God's speech is portrayed as effective. Prime examples occur throughout Genesis 1, where God commands something and that command is accomplished (through an agency which is left unstated).

What follows will be a brief survey of divine speech in those books that would become biblical, paying special attention to Genesis, psalms, and Isaiah. Ben Sira would have certainly encountered anthropomorphism, speech-act (in addition to simple divine speech), and divine agents. Nevertheless, Ben Sira avoids suggesting that God has physical form, even metaphorically, in his Hymn to the Creator. What remains to be

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<sup>488</sup> J. Gordon McConville, "Divine Speech and the Book of Jeremiah," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18–38.

<sup>489</sup> The Catholic notion of sacrament (a sign that effects what it signifies) is a similar concept. More mundanely, within the context of a restaurant, simply saying "I would like such-and-such," is accompanied by the notion that that thing will appear through the intermediary agency of the waitstaff.

seen, then, is whether Ben Sira employs the *topos* of the divine speech as speech-act or of divine speech as hypostasized agent. A selection of representative texts have been selected and divided below. These texts have either been categorized as illustrating the speech-act motif, as illustrating the hypostasized agent motif, or as ambiguous.

### *5.1.1 - Speech-act*

In the cases below, divine speech is portrayed as an effective speech-act, as a command that accomplishes what is stated.

#### *5.1.1.1 - Psalm 18 and 106*

As has already been shown above, Psalm 18 describes a petitioner's deliverance from danger, characterized in terms of God's traditional opponent, the sea. God's presence is described in terms of a storm theophany. God's victory over the sea, however, is not through combat, but through speech. It is God's "rebuke" (גְּעוּרָה) in verse 16 which made the waters retreat:

Then the bed of the sea appeared;  
the world's foundations lay bare,  
At your rebuke, O LORD,  
at the storming breath of your nostrils. (NABRE)

This "rebuke" is a speech-act, effecting the thing it signifies. Similarly, Ps 106:9 reports:

"[God] roared (גָּעַר) at the Red Sea and it dried up. He led them through the deep as through a desert" (NABRE). Psalm 106 is recalling the Exodus events. As has been shown above, the Red Sea is sometimes portrayed as personified Sea, God's cosmic enemy. Because the sea is an object of God's action, Walton detects the divine warrior motif in both Psalm 18 and Psalm 106, while also seeing the lord of the cosmos motifs in Psalm

106.<sup>490</sup> In Ps 106:9 and Ps 18:16, the same root (גער) is used for God's dealing with the waters. In both cases, the sea is conquered or stopped by God's "rebuke" or "roar." In neither case are the waters personified. Though both psalms may participate in the divine warrior motif, that participation is not explicit, at least not with regards to God's enemy, the waters. Instead, God accomplishes his will verbally.

#### 5.1.1.2 - Psalm 105

Psalm 105 similarly demonstrates God's effective speech-act as it recounts salvation history, the acts of God on behalf of Israel, beginning with Abraham and ending with the conquest. Most to the attention of the psalm is focused on Egypt: Joseph, Moses and Aaron, the 10 plagues, and the Exodus. Both verses 31 and 34 contain the formula "He spoke and there came" (אמר ויבא). In verse 31 the swarm of flies comes, and in verse 34, the locusts. The tradition in Exodus does not contain the divine commandments regarding the flies or the locusts (or any of the plagues for that matter). In fact, the story relates how God commands Moses to perform an action, which correlates to the ensuing plague. Psalm 105 makes God's speech the cause of these two plagues, not Moses's actions.<sup>491</sup> Psalm 105 witnesses to the speech-act motif operative outside of a creation context.

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<sup>490</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

<sup>491</sup> It would seem that the author of Psalm 105, uncomfortable with the "magical" undertones of the original Exodus account and influenced the conception of the divine speech-act, has replaced the former with the latter.



### 5.1.1.3 - Psalm 107

Though Psalm 107 was proposed as a parallel to Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator for the other similarities (see above), the psalmist claims that God both starts and stops a storm that imperiled a ship at sea. The storm starts in verse 25: "He commanded and roused a storm wind; it tossed the waves on high" (NABRE). God spoke (אמ) and the storm began. After the pleading of the boat's inhabitants, God ends the storm in verse 29: "He hushed the storm to silence, the waves of the sea were stilled" (NABRE). The action of "hushing" is not, however, accompanied by a speaking verb. In this section of Psalm 107 God's word is shown to be an effective speech-act, for as long as God wills it.<sup>492</sup> In this way, Psalm 107 depicts God as lord of the cosmos, who is responsible for both peril and salvation.

### 5.1.1.4 - Psalm 148

Psalm 148 is a psalm of praise, which contains a reference to God's speech-act. After calling on the hosts of heaven and the heavenly luminaries, the psalmist moves the celestial and earthly waters:

4 Praise him, highest heavens,  
you waters above the heavens.  
5 Let them all praise the LORD's name;  
for he commanded and they were created,  
6 Assigned them their station forever,  
set an order that will never change. (NABRE)

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<sup>492</sup> The New Testament provides an example of somebody, in this case Jesus, stilling the storm with speech. In Matt 8:23 Jesus and his disciples get into a boat, then encounter a storm. The disciples were afraid and go to Jesus for help. He "rebuked" (ἐπετίμησε) the storm and the seas were calmed.

Verse 5 references the divine speech-act by which the waters were made. God commanded (צוה) and the waters were created (נבראו).<sup>493</sup> Further, God's command is unchanging. The order he established in the beginning will endure. Not only is God's word effective, but that effect also perdures.

Ps 148:8 also exemplifies God's effective speech-act. It claims that the storm wind does as God says: "Lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds, storm wind that fulfills (עשה) his command (דברו)" (NABRE). Even though there is a list a of meteorological phenomena, עשה is a feminine singular participle, and in that list the only possible subject is the feminine noun "wind" (רוח), which is in construct with "storm" (סערה). Therefore, it is specifically the storm wind that does God's command, providing an example of God's effective speech-act from the perspective of meteorological phenomena.

#### 5.1.1.5 - *Isaiah 44*

God is identified as the creator "who made all things," "who alone stretched out the heavens," and who "spread out the earth by myself" (NABRE) in Isa 44:24, the context for what follows is creation. Verses 25 and 26 identify the creator God as the same god who frustrates false prophets while confirming his own, true prophets. Beginning in verse 26 and continuing through verse 28, there are three tripartite "I say" (האמר) clauses, which contain the frame "I say," the command or commands, and a pledge. For instance, Isa 44:27 reads "I say to the deep, Be dry! I will dry up your rivers"

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<sup>493</sup> It is worth noting that the object created by God's speech is the same object which Marduk in the *Enuma elish* had to battle for. While Marduk had to slay Tiamat and create the dome of the sky, which holds back the waters above, from her carcass, Yahweh need only command.

(NABRE). Two things are of note. First, in Isaiah 44 there is a unity of the creative or effective word and the prophetic word. Second, the naming of the deep (צולה), a traditional enemy of the storm-god, recalls the ancient Near Eastern mythical commonplace, while further identifying the creative and prophetic word with the God who acts in history, in this case through his agent Cyrus. God's speech-act is effective, and God's utterances revelatory.

#### *5.1.1.6 – Conclusion*

In the texts surveyed above (Ps 18; Ps 106; Ps 105; Ps 107; Ps 148; and Isa 44), God effects change through his word. God commands and something happens. Later texts, such as the Gospel of Luke, contain a similar speech-act motif (Luke 4:35, 39; 5:20; 7:6, 14; 8:29, 54; 9:42; 17:14; 18:42), suggesting that the motif had legs and continued to walk through the tradition. In each case surveyed above, there is no combat or opposition explicitly, though in each case the divine warrior motif or combat myth appears or would be appropriate. The non-personified sea or waters are the object of God's verbal action. This association suggests that speech-act may have taken the place of divine combat, even where traditional combat myth elements appear in demythologized form.

#### *5.1.2 - Ambiguous Cases*

While the previous examples have demonstrated a clear difference between God's speech as effective speech-act and when God's word acts as an agent or intermediary, there are some examples which are not so clear.

### 5.1.2.1 - Psalm 107

As seen above, Psalm 107 is primarily a petition for deliverance. Clifford divides the body of the poem into four acts of deliverance: those hungering and thirsting in the wilderness (vv. 4–9), prisoners (vv. 10–16), the sick (vv. 17–22), and those caught in an ocean storm (vv. 23–32).<sup>494</sup> In Ps 107:19–20, God’s word (דברו) may act as an intermediary for the healing of his people: “In their distress they cried to the LORD, who saved them in their peril, sent forth his word (דברו) to heal them, and snatched them from the grave.” Unfortunately, the grammar here is ambiguous. It is possible to read either “Yahweh” (from verse 19) or “his word” as the subject of the verbs “and he healed them” (וירפאם) and “he snatched” (וימלט). It is possible to read this verse as containing either a divine speech-act or a divine agent. Either God sent forth his word and God healed and God snatched, or God sent forth his word and the word healed, and the word snatched. Given the clearer example of divine speech-act in Psalm 107 (above), it is probably safest to conclude that it is a speech-act here, though ambiguity remains.

### 5.1.2.2 - Psalm 119 and Isaiah 40

Addressed to God, Psalm 119 provides an example of divine speech:

89 Your word, LORD, stands forever;  
it is firm as the heavens.  
90 Through all generations your truth endures;  
fixed to stand firm like the earth. (NABRE)

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<sup>494</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 165.

God's word (דברך) endures. It is unclear if the word of God is being conceptualized as a speech-act, as an unchangeable decree, or as an eternal mediatorial agent. The parallelism between verses 89 and 90 seems to suggest the former. Additional evidence is negative: the word is not said to be performing any action other than "standing" (נצב). While this verb in the *niphal* often has a God (Gen 28:13; Isa 3:13; Amos 7:7; 9:1; Ps 82:1), an angel (Num 22:23, 31,34), a human (Exod 5:20; Num 16:27; 1 Sam 22:9; etc.), or a group of humans (Exod 18:14; 33:8; Deut 29:9) as a subject, the subject may also be non-humanoid or inanimate (Gen 37:7; Exod 15:8; Prov 8:2; etc.). Therefore, there is not enough evidence to determine whether the word of God in Ps 119:89 is being personified or not. Isa 40:8 provides another example of the enduring aspect of God's word: "The grass withers, the flower wilts, but the word of our God stands (יקום) forever" (NABRE). Both Psalm 19 and Isaiah 40 claim that God's word "stands" forever (לעולם). In both cases, the word's status as a hypostasized agent is ambiguous.

#### 5.1.2.3 - Psalm 147

Psalm 147 contains two examples of ambiguous divine speech. Ps 147:15 reads: "He sends his command (אמרתו) to earth; his word (דברו) runs swiftly!" (NABRE). The words "command" (אמר) and "word" (דבר) are not exact synonyms, but they are placed in parallel construction, suggesting that they refer to the same object. In this verse the command/word is a semi-personified agent who is sent and who runs. Ps 147:15 by itself does not provide a conclusive depiction, since God's word is not said to do anything on God's behalf, except move. Ps 147:18 is equally ambiguous: "Yet when again he issues his command (דברו), it melts them; he raises his winds and the waters

flow” (NABRE). The translators of the NABRE take דברו as the subject of the verb “to melt” (וימסם). This is a possible reading as the word (דברו) is the closest masculine singular noun. However, it is also possible to repeat the same subject as “to issue” (וישלח), which is God, as the NABRE translator does with the verbs “he blows” (ישב) or “he raises his winds” in the second half of the verse. This passage would then be an example of effective speech-act and not God’s word as agent. In both passages from Psalm 147, it is unclear whether God’s word is acting as a hypostasized agent or whether the psalmist is poetically describing a speech-act.

#### 5.1.2.4 - *Isaiah 9*

Within the prophetic tradition, Isa 9:7 illustrates how God’s word occupies a liminal space between a speech-act and a hypostasized agent:

7 The Lord has sent a word against Jacob,  
and it falls upon Israel;  
8 And all the people know it—  
Ephraim and those who dwell in Samaria—  
those who say in arrogance and pride of heart,  
9 “Bricks have fallen,  
but we will rebuild with cut stone;  
Sycamores have been felled,  
but we will replace them with cedars.”  
10 So the LORD raises up their foes against them  
and stirs up their enemies to action— (NABRE)

The word (דבר) of the Lord in verse 7 is summarized in verse 10, which claims that Israel’s foes rise against her. God’s word is causative. This is somewhat atypical of how דבר often functions in a prophet setting, as a reference to a message delivered by a

prophet but which came from God.<sup>495</sup> In this case, the word itself foments militaristic behavior, but this reading is undercut by verse 10 which makes Yahweh the cause. It may be that the word is the proximate, efficient cause while God is the ultimate cause, but the text is unclear since no verbs are ascribed to the word.

#### 5.1.2.5 - *Isaiah 55 and Jeremiah 23*

Isaiah 55 provides another case where God's word may be seen as an agent or intermediary. Isa 55:10–11 contains an analogy between the efficaciousness of precipitation and of the divine word:

10 Yet just as from the heavens  
the rain and snow come down  
And do not return there  
till they have watered the earth,  
making it fertile and fruitful,  
Giving seed to the one who sows  
and bread to the one who eats,  
11 So shall my word be  
that goes forth from my mouth;  
It shall not return to me empty,  
but shall do what pleases me,  
achieving the end for which I sent it. (NABRE)

The author of this passage is claiming that God's word is as effective as the rain, which makes the earth fruitful. Rain is an object, suggesting that God's word too is an object, not an action. That object acts as an agent who goes forth from the mouth of God, fructifying the earth, but like an emissary, returns. Not only does the emissary return, but God's word fulfills the purpose for which it was sent.

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<sup>495</sup> W. H. Schmidt, "דָּבָר *dābār*; דְּבַר *dābhār*," TDOT 3:109–11.

Nevertheless, this passage may just be a simile, like the metaphor in Jeremiah 23, which reads:

28 Let the prophets who have dreams tell their dreams; let those who have my word speak my word truthfully!  
 What has straw to do with wheat?  
 —oracle of the LORD.  
 29 Is not my word like fire—oracle of the LORD—  
 like a hammer shattering rock? (NABRE)

Jer 23:28–29 compares God’s word to fire or a hammer smashing a rock, with both images illustrating how effective it is. This passage from Jeremiah does not conceive of the word as a hypostasized agent, as made clear in the next verse: “Therefore I am against the prophets—oracle of the LORD—those who steal my words from each other” (NABRE). God’s singular word is being identified with the words of the prophets.

Similarly, the word of God in Isa 55:10–11 may be the oracle of forgiveness and reconciliation between God and Israel, which is the context of the metaphor. The metaphor then is a statement of the strength of God’s promise. That word represents a prophetic message is supported by the appearance of the verb “to send” (שלח), which is associated with the prophetic call (Exod 3:10; Judg 6:14; Isa 6:8; 61:1; Jer 1:7; 14:14; 26:5; Ezek 2:3; etc.), as was the case for Isa 9:7. Therefore, the word of God in Isa 55:10–11 does not seem to be a hypostasized agent.

#### *5.1.2.6 - Conclusion*

Though there was an emphasis on God’s speech being effective (Isa 55; Jer 23), in the cases surveyed above (Ps 107; Ps 119; Isa 40; Ps 147; Isa 9; Isa 55; Jer 23), it was unclear whether God’s word is acting as an agent, primarily because no action words



were ascribed to it other than movement, which may have been poetic analogy. When actions words could have been ascribed to God's word, the pronouns were ambiguous, potentially referring to God instead of the word. Additionally, later texts such as Jdt 16:14, Wisdom 9 and 4 Ezra 6:42–53 are also ambiguous.

### *5.1.3 - Hypostasized Agent*

While the previous examples illustrate the effective power of divine speech, in the biblical tradition that speech may sometimes be objectified. In addition to a speech-act that effects what it signifies, the divine word becomes a hypostasized object or agent of the divine will. The only clear example of this is in the Gospel of John.

#### *5.1.3.1 - John 1*

Perhaps the most famous example of God's efficacious word comes in the prologue to the Gospel of John:

1 In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
2 He was in the beginning with God.  
3 All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be. (NABRE)

The first words primarily recall Gen 1:1, in addition to Genesis 2, which itself participates in the ancient Near Eastern *topos* of creation accounts beginning with a temporal clause. For John, the divine word (λόγος) is an agent of God in creation, separate from God but also somehow identical with God.

### *5.1.3.2 - Conclusion*

In the Gospel of John, the divine word (λόγος) seems to take the place of lady wisdom, who acts as an intermediary or agent in creation in texts like Wisdom 9, which post-dates Ben Sira. Though Ben Sira does participate in the tradition that personifies wisdom, he does not have any clear examples of a tradition that personifies God's word, at least not any clear traditions. Instead, most of the sources he has portray God's speech as an effective speech which accomplishes what it signifies.

### *5.1.4 - Conclusion*

Several texts that would become biblical witness to the motif of divine speech as speech-act, including Psalms 18; 105; 106; 107; 148; and Isaiah 44, while only one text, which postdates Ben Sira, clearly portrays the divine word as a hypostasized intermediary (John 1). Additionally, there are several ambiguous cases, where it is not clear whether the divine word is acting as an agent (Psalms 107; 119; 147; Isaiah 9; 40; 55; and Jeremiah 23). The ambiguity in these cases chiefly arises from issues of grammar, where it is necessary to choose what the subject of a given verb is. If the God's word is taken as the subject, then the word is acting as an agent. If God is taken as the subject, then the texts suggest that God is performing a speech-act. The paucity of strong evidence in favor of seeing the divine word as a hypostasized agent suggests that the trajectory which culminated in the Gospel of John was still very much in the developmental phase during the time of Ben Sira. Therefore, the tradition Ben Sira inherited was still characterized by divine speech being portrayed as speech-act.

## 5.2 - Divine Speech in Sirach: Proposed Parallels

Within Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator, there are multiple passages that refer to divine speech. Some of these passages have already been addressed (Sir 43:5, 10, 13, 16). In Sir 43:5, God directs his "mighty ones" with his words. In Sir 43:13, God's "rebuke" causes hail, and in Sir 43:16 God's voice is conceived of as thunder. Sir 43:10 claims that the stars stand watch at God's command. To these instances of divine speech, parallels have been proposed between Sir 43:10 and Psalm 33, between Sir 42:15 and Genesis 1, and between Sir 43:9–10 and Isaiah 48. These proposals will be investigated presently.

### 5.2.1 - *Psalm 33*

The parallel between Psalm 33, an acrostic, hymnic reflection on the primeval history tradition, and Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator has been proposed by several scholars.<sup>496</sup> Both works show concern for the three realms of creation: heaven, earth, and waters. Both are concerned with God's knowledge of the human heart (לב/לב see Sir 42:18a; 43:18 and Ps 33:15). Both use "storehouse" (אוצר) imagery for natural phenomenon (Sir 43:14a // Ps 33:7), which can also be found in Job and Isaiah. Both are more focused on the creator than the creation.

Finally, both works identify God's speech-act as the mode of creation, which seems to be the primary parallel. Ps 33:6 reads: "By the LORD's word (בדבר) the heavens

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<sup>496</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20; Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," 105; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254. Perdue also noted another parallel between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Psalm 33 based on the appearance of the Deep (תהום).

were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host” (NABRE). The prepositional phrase “by the word” (בדבר) of God does not occur in Sir 42:15–43:33. Two similar phrases do occur. Sir 42:15 contains the cola “by the speech (באמר) of the Lord are his works,” but a different noun is used to express a similar sentiment. Sir 43:10 contains the same phrase (בדבר), but it does not refer to creation. The closer parallel to Ps 33:6 is Sir 42:15. Not only does Sir 42:15 not contain the same noun, but different divine appellations are used. Ps 33:6 uses the tetragrammaton, while the Masada Scroll uses אדני, and MS B uses אל. Allowing that MS B probably has the more original reading in the case of divine nomenclature (see discussion above), even that tradition does not reproduce the tetragrammaton or a closer equivalent. This lack of lexical coherence suggests that there is no literary allusion from Sir 43:10 to Ps 33:6.

In Ps 33:9, the psalmist also writes of God establishing the cosmos through a speech-act: “For he spoke (אמר), and it came to be, commanded (צוה), and it stood (עמד) in place” (NABRE). However, the vocabulary is not similar to Sir 43:10. Divine speech using the same word (אמר) does occur in Sir 42:15, but the grammatical form is different, and אמר is a common word for speech. These are not strong enough similarities to be considered markers for a literary allusion or echo.

Nevertheless, it must also be noted that both texts participate in the tradition of the “everlasting” or “inalterable” word. Ps 33:11 reads “But the plan of the LORD stands forever, the designs of his heart through all generations” (NABRE). In Sir 43:26, Ben Sira writes that “For his [God’s] own sake, his messenger makes haste, and his words produce consent.” Ben Sira also writes about the unchanging nature of the cosmic plan

in Sir 42:21–25. Though these parallels create another point of contact between the Hymn to the Creator and Psalm 33, there still does not seem to be a literary allusion.

### 5.2.2 - *Genesis 1*

Robert Alter suggests that the author of Psalm 33 is drawing on Genesis,<sup>497</sup> so it is no surprise that a number of scholars connect Sir 42:15 to the creation account in Genesis 1.<sup>498</sup> Sauer and Mulder connect Sir 42:15 to Gen 1:3 through the verbal root אמר.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, that root occurs 11 times in the first chapter of Genesis and each of these have God as the subject. The phrase ויאמר אלהים is characteristic of the opening chapter of Genesis and becomes formulaic. It is through God's speech-act that the cosmos take shape.<sup>500</sup>

The divine name used in Sir 42:15 also connects the passage to Genesis 1. The most likely original reading of the divine name in Sir 42:15 is *Elohim* (אלהים).<sup>501</sup> *Elohim* is the characteristic designation for God in Genesis 1, occurring 36 times in that chapter.

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<sup>497</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2009), 114, n. 9.

<sup>498</sup> See Gilbert, "Ben Sira, Reader of Genesis 1–11," 97; John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or The Wisdom of Jesus Son or Sirach* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 210; Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254; and Di Lella and Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

<sup>499</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 313; Mulder, "A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25," 206.

<sup>500</sup> For more, see Wagner, "אמר," *TDOT* 1:336–37.

<sup>501</sup> The only two extant Hebrew manuscripts for this section are MS B and the Masada Scroll. The Masada Scroll reads *Adonai* (אדני), while MS B reads *Elohim* (אלהים). As noted above, no other manuscript tradition uses *Adonai* (אדני), so that is probably not the original reading. It is possible, since twice (Sir 10:22 and Sir 15:13) MS B reads אלהים where MS A reads יי. If MS B has on occasion been changed to read אלהים instead of יי, then original reading may be יי and neither אלהים nor אדני. If this is the case, then a later hand may have recognized the propriety of using אלהים in this context.

The name is so characteristic of the chapter that the transition to YHWH in chapter 2 is foundational evidence for the documentary hypothesis.

A series of words that are characteristic of Genesis also appear in the Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator. In Sir 42:19 Ben Sira uses the verb "to be" (היה). This word is very common, but it occurs 17 times in Genesis 1. The nominalized form "living being" (חי) also occurs both in this pericope (Sir 42:23; 43:25) and in Genesis 1 (verses 20, 21, 24, 30). These three elements form the recognizable formula "And God said let there be..." (ויאמר אלהים יהי) from Genesis 1 (verses 3, 6, 14 and variants). Similarly, the elements of the execution formula from Genesis 1 (verses 7, 16) "And God made..." (ויעש אלהים) also appear in the Hymn to the Creator. Though Ben Sira prefers the nominalized form "work" (מעשה in Sir 42:15a, 15b, 16, 22; 43:2, 4a, 25, 28), he also uses the simple verbal root "to make" or "to do" (עשה in Sir 42:24b; 43:5, 7, 11, 33). The simple verbal form occurs seven times in Genesis 1 (verses 7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31). This cluster of vocabulary shared between Genesis 1 and Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator suggests a strong connection.

The connection between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Genesis 1 does not seem to be a literary allusion. All of the shared terms are common. They also have to do with creation and speech, so one would expect a work which contains both ideas to contain those words. The very fact that Di Lella proposes multiple parallels suggests that they are not positing a literary allusion from Sir 42:15 to another text, but that this passage of Sirach is employing a traditional motif, especially since two of the texts he cites postdate the

authorship of Sirach.<sup>502</sup> An alternative explanation seems more likely: Genesis 1 and related texts (like Psalm 33) form part of Ben Sira's culturally constructed register so that when Ben Sira wants to talk about something (like creation) he inevitably uses words and images from that register. These words and images are no longer linked necessarily to a specific text but abstracted from multiple instantiations of the tradition.

### 5.2.3 - *Isaiah 48*

Burton suggests a parallel between Isa 48:13 and Sir 43:9–10.<sup>503</sup> Isa 48:13 reads: “Yes, my hand laid the foundations of the earth; my right hand spread out the heavens. When I summon (קרא) them, they stand forth (יעמדו) at once (יחדו)” (NABRE). In Sir 43:9–10 God also commands the heavenly luminaries, which “stand at attention” (יעמד חק) at God's word (בדבר). While the two passages share the generic imagery of God commanding and the celestial bodies obeying, there is little lexical overlap.<sup>504</sup> Only the common verb “to stand” (עמד) appears in both passages. This commonality is not enough for a literary allusion. As with the creation imagery above, Ben Sira is probably drawing on a cultural commonplace, a commonplace which is also instantiated in Isa 48:13. Though it is probable that Ben Sira read and knew this passage from Isaiah, it may not have been a direct, or at least conscious, influence.

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<sup>502</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

<sup>503</sup> Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 59.

<sup>504</sup> That Marduk does a similar thing in the *Enuma elish* by commanding the constellation suggests that this is a trope within the ancient Near East.

#### 5.2.4 - Psalm 147

Askin suggests that Ps 147:15, 18 could be the source for Ben Sira's usage of "God's command" (אמרתו) in Sir 43:16.<sup>505</sup> The case of Psalm 147 was treated above. It was observed that it contains ambiguous usage of divine speech, which may be seen as a personified agent, though it is unlikely. Ps 147:15 reads: "He sends his command (אמרתו) to earth; his word (דברו) runs swiftly!" (NABRE). Verses 17 and 18 of Psalm 147 continue with an illustration the power of God's word through wind and participation: "He disperses hail (קרח) like crumbs. Who can withstand his cold? Yet when again he issues his command (דברו), it melts them; he raises his winds (רוח) and the waters flow" (NABRE). Indeed Sir 43:16 contains a similar sentiment: "The voice of his thunder causes his earth to tremble, and in his strength he shakes the mountains. His command (אמרתו) stirs up the south wind—along with the storm wind, the whirlwind, and storm." The sentiment in Sir 43:16 and its association with weather is more similar to Ps 147:17–18, but a different word is used. The same word is used in 147:15, but in different circumstances. There are no parallels tight enough to constitute a literary allusion or an echo. The two works are participating in the same tradition, sharing a common register.

#### 5.2.5 - Wisdom 9

Collins and Di Lella both propose a parallel between the divine speech in Sirach and Wisdom 9.<sup>506</sup> Clearly neither is suggesting an allusion from Sirach to Wisdom, since

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<sup>505</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 125.

<sup>506</sup> Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," 105; Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.



Wisdom post-dates the authorship of Sirach, making a literary allusion a chronological impossibility. Wisdom 9 opens with “God of my ancestors, Lord of mercy, you who have made all things by your word (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ σου)” (NABRE). The singular “word” may function in a way similar to John 1, but the frame may not be creation. The Greek verb ποιέω can mean “to make,” but it can also mean “to do.” Wisdom 9 may just be stating that God accomplishes everything by his word, instead of creating everything by his word. Nevertheless, though Wisdom 9 may be an intermediary step between Genesis 1 and John 1, it is far from conclusive evidence that Ben Sira had the tradition of God’s speech as a hypostasized agent available to him.

#### *5.2.6 - Conclusion*

There is little convincing evidence that Ben Sira is making a literary allusion to Psalm 33, Genesis 1, Isaiah 48, Psalm 147, or Wisdom 9. Regardless of the lexical concurrence, these overlaps suggest that all five texts are participating in a common tradition, built on associated words and images. Each of these passages is concerned with God’s speech or God’s word(s), and each seems to participate in a tradition which extends throughout the ancient Near East, but which received later refinement within Israelite literature, nearer to the time of Ben Sira.

### **5.3 - Actualization in Sirach**

Though the tradition that Ben Sira inherited may have been on the trajectory toward God’s word as a personified agent, the status of that tradition at the time of Ben Sira weighs heavily in favor of God’s speech as an effective speech-act. God’s speech

occurs often in the absence of actual conflict where the combat myth or the divine warrior motif creates an expectation for the appearance of conflict. In this way God's speech is related both to deliverance as a replacement for the divine warrior motif and creation as a replacement for theomachy and the combat myth. In addition to the previous two associations and that of the prophetic work, God's speech is also related to the administration of cosmos after their initial establishment. The following survey will help to determine the associations of divine speech in Sirach in order to ascertain its function.

### *5.3.1 - Divine Speech in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator*

There are eight lines in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator which reference divine speech. In none of these cases, however, is God's word portrayed as a hypostasized agent. Instead, all the divine speech is portrayed as an effective speech-act. This, perhaps, is to be expected, given the lack of clear models that Ben Sira inherited where divine speech was personified.

#### *5.3.1.1 - Sirach 42:15*

The poem opens with the lines: "Now let me recall the works of God, and what I have seen let me recount. By the speech of the Lord are his works, and the work of his favor is his instruction" (Sir 42:15). These lines are an introduction to what will follow in the poem, where Ben Sira will survey natural phenomena, demonstrating that the glory of the creator can be seen through the creation. Though the poem is basically phenomenological, focusing on the creatures as they are encountered by humans, it is necessary for Ben Sira to connect creation as experienced by humans to the creator, as

Sir 42:15 does. It is unlikely that God's "speech" (אמר) is being conceived of as an agent, since the valence of דבר would more readily lend itself to that interpretation than אמר. The Hebrew word אמר typically refers to the act of speaking and not the content of the speech itself, which is often denoted by דבר.<sup>507</sup> Therefore, the term probably has the valence of a command or simply speech. As noted above, אמר has associations with creation given its 11 appearances in Genesis 1.<sup>508</sup> Furthermore, the root also has associations with prophetic revelation, as it is the primary verb used for divine speech.<sup>509</sup> The Hebrew אמר has multiple associations, including creation and prophecy.

Sir 42:15 is not confined to creation. Though the term מעשה refers at least to creation in this context, it generically just means "deed" or "action." Stated differently, Sir 42:15 may not mean "God created through speech," but "God accomplishes through speech." The latter is especially appropriate given that the first part of the poem is not only about cosmogony but also the wisdom with which God continues to regulate his creation.

#### 5.3.1.2 - *Sirach 42:19*

The second example of divine speech in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator occurs in Sir 42:19, which requires the previous verse for context:

18 The deep and the heart he searches, and into their secrets he probes,  
because the Most High knows all, and he sees what is to come forever.  
19 What he proclaims becomes, and he exposes hidden things.

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<sup>507</sup> Wagner, "אמר," TDOT I:328–35.

<sup>508</sup> See also Wagner, "אמר," TDOT I:336–37.

<sup>509</sup> Wagner, "אמר," TDOT I:335–36.

This passage is in a sapiential register. God is being portrayed as the sage *par excellence*. God searches what is hidden, not unlike the sage in Sirach 38. According to Sirach 24, these places are where personified Wisdom dwells. Since God's portrayal is metaphoric, the precise relationships between God's knowing, seeing, proclaiming, and exposing remain somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, God's speech is effective. What God proclaims actually happens. Ben Sira seems to be using prophetic literature as his model. The omniscient God sees the future and proclaims through the prophets, thus exposing hidden things. Regardless of the text's precise meaning, Ben Sira seems to be highlighting the effectiveness of God's speech-act as potential models Isaiah 55 and Jeremiah 23 do.

#### 5.3.1.3 - Sirach 43:5

Sir 43:5 follows the section in which Ben Sira rhapsodizes about the sun. The first half of the verse restates Ben Sira's basic thesis that God is known and glorified through creation: "For great is the Lord who made it, and by his words he directs his mighty ones." If the second half is not to be read as a *non sequitur*, then the sun (or potentially an angel in charge of the sun) must be considered one of "his mighty ones" (אביריו). Therefore, the sun (and probably the rest of the celestial bodies) is directed by God's words (דבריו). Schmidt argues that this is an analogy: "whereas the sun's power is experienced through its rays, the power of God is experienced through his word by which he continues to direct even his mighty angels."<sup>510</sup> While it is tempting to see word

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<sup>510</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 178.

as a reference to an inner logic or coherence standing behind creation, it must be observed that דבר is plural (according to MS B, the only Hebrew text which survives). The only other textual witness is Greek, which is also plural (λόγοις). The plural eliminates the possibility that a hypostasized divine agent is acting as an intermediary. Instead, God directs his mighty ones, who act as intermediaries, with his speech. As in Sir 42:15, God's speech is associated with his administration of the cosmos, in this case, the sun.

#### 5.3.1.4 - *Sirach 43:10*

Sir 43:10 does contain the singular דבר, but again context indicates that a hypostasized agent is not what Ben Sira had in mind. The passage reads: "At the word (דבר) of the Lord it stands at attention, and it will not be relaxed during their watch." The most proximate antecedent for the pronoun is the star, which explains the shifting from singular to plural, from star to stars. Each individual star stands at attention during their collective watch, the night. Schmidt suggests that the moon ought to be included in this plural subject, since it was reckoned by the ancients as a particularly beautiful star.<sup>511</sup> Ben Sira uses the metaphor of a guard for the stars. The kind of word received by a guard would be a command, so God's word in Sir 43:10 refers to a command for the stars to stand at attention, watching and guarding (see Sir 16:26–30). Though poetic, Ben Sira connects God's speech with his administration of the cosmos, in this case, the moon and stars.

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<sup>511</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 179.

#### 5.3.1.5 - *Sirach 43:13*

In Sir 43:13 there is an interaction between the divine word and the storm-god registers. It was demonstrated above that hail and lightning were associated with the storm-god motif. It was also shown that “rebuke” was often associated with demythologized versions of the combat myth (see Psalm 18 and Psalm 106). In this case, God’s “rebuke” (גְּעוּרָה) directs the hail and lightning: “His rebuke marks out hail, and it directs the lightning of judgment.” Instead of the rebuke being a speech-act which stays the waters, in Sir 43:13, the hail embodies the rebuke, as the lightning does God’s judgment. This portrayal is consonant with Ben Sira’s doctrine of retribution (see Sir 30:24–31) and again refers to God’s administration of the cosmos.

#### 5.3.1.6 - *Sirach 43:16*

Similarly, in the second half of Sir 43:16, God’s command is said to be in charge of the winds: “His command (אִמְרָתוֹ) stirs up the south wind—along with the storm wind, the whirlwind, and storm.” There is no indication that “command” is acting as an agent. God commands, the weather obeys. As in Sir 43:13, there is a mixture of the speech-act and the storm-god motif. Again, God’s speech is connected to his administration of the cosmos, in this case, the winds.

#### 5.3.1.7 - *Sirach 43:23*

In this study, the reconstruction of 43:23 is “His speech contains Rahab, and he stretches out coastlands on the Deep.” Reference to God’s speech, “his speech” (אִמְרָתוֹ), would provide another example of divine speech in the poem. Again, God’s speech is associated with his regulation of the cosmos and the combat myth, albeit a

demythologized version of it. For similar reasons to Sir 42:15, God's speech is almost certainly not a personified agent but an effective speech-act.

#### *5.3.1.8 - Sirach 43:26*

The final example is also one of a divine speech-act and not of a personified agent, because God's words (בדבריו) are plural, as in Sir 43:5. Sir 43:26 reads: "For his own sake, his messenger makes haste, and his words produce (בדבריו) consent." God's words are effective, since they naturally produce consent or compliance (רצון).

"Messenger" (מלאך) is singular, which suggests that the words themselves are not being conceived as intermediaries. Instead, the messenger delivers the words, which are obeyed. The phrase "for his own sake" (למענו) may also be translated "on behalf of him," which would render more idiomatically the dependence of the messenger on the sender. Sir 43:26 provides another example of divine speech being associated with the administration of the cosmos, this time through the intermediary of his messenger. God's command is unopposed, since it produces consent or compliance. Thus, the combat myth is absent.

#### *5.3.1.9 - Conclusion*

Divine speech occurs in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator eight times. In no instances is the content of that speech provided. In each case, the speech seems to be an effective speech-act and not a hypostasized agent. Agents are sometimes involved, since divine speech often is related to God's administration of the cosmos, rather than the original establishment of order in the act of creation. Part of that administration relates to the storm-god theophany motif, since God is responsible for regulating

everything, including the weather, by his command. Another part of that administration is related to the combat myth and the divine warrior motif, since God's speech suffices to keep his traditional enemies under control.

### *5.3.2 - The Divine Council*

It has been observed that divine speech in Sir 42:15–43:33 is portrayed as effective speech-acts used to regulate the cosmos. Both the intermediaries and the different elements in the cosmos are often personified, which suggest that Ben Sira considers them to be angels or divine beings. There are several references to angels and the heavenly court in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator, which suggests an employment of the motif. In the opening of his Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira states: "The holy ones of God are not able to count all his wonders. The Lord must make his armies strong enough to withstand his glory" (42:17). In this passage, Ben Sira employs the commonplace of the divine council to express God's inexpressible glory. The consensus opinion is that "holy ones" refers to angels of the heavenly court.<sup>512</sup> Only Mulder seems to dissent, arguing that the "holy ones" refers to a special group of Israelites on earth, as in Ps 16:3; Ps 34:10; and Ps 106:16.<sup>513</sup> Given the cosmic perspective of the poem, Mulder's suggestion, though possible, is unlikely. As will be shown, the heavenly court motif and angelology permeate Sir 42:15–43:33. Unsurprisingly, scholars have suggested several intertexts for this motif.

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<sup>512</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254; Rybolt, *Sirach*, 91; Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 166; Corley, *Sirach*, 119; MacKenzie, *Sirach*, 162.

<sup>513</sup> Mulder, "A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25," 208.



### 5.3.2.1 - Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 33

It has already been observed that Exodus 15 contains a storm-god theophany and the divine warrior motif. It also refers to God's enthronement among the "gods" in verse 11: "Who is like you among the gods (אלים), O LORD? Who is like you, magnificent among the holy ones (קדש)?" (NABRE). Though the substantive adjective is technically singular, it may be conceived of as plural. The LXX translator took it as plural (ἁγίοις). While there has been a suggestion to emend the text based on the Greek, in Deuteronomy 33 there also appears a singular קדש that refers to many heavenly beings:

2 The LORD came from Sinai  
and dawned on his people from Seir;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran.  
With him were myriads (רבבת) of holy ones (קדש);  
at his right hand advanced the gods.  
3 Indeed, lover of the peoples,  
all the holy ones (קדשיו) are at your side;  
They follow at your heels,  
carry out your decisions. (NABRE)

In Deuteronomy 33 the "holy ones," according to verse 3, carry out or receive (ישא) the decisions of God (מדברתיך). According to Deuteronomy 33, the "holy ones" (sometimes grammatically singular) carry out God's orders. This suggests that Exodus 15 has "gods" or heavenly beings in mind in the first half of the verse. At the end of the poem, God is spoken of as enthroned on Mount Zion:

17 You brought them in, you planted them  
on the mountain that is your own—  
The place you made the base of your throne, LORD,  
the sanctuary, LORD, your hands established.  
18 May the LORD reign forever and ever! (NABRE)

God is conceived of as enthroned in the temple on Mount Zion. Thus Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 33 witness to the early tradition of heavenly beings who do God's will and the enthronement of God as the divine monarch.

#### *5.3.2.2 - Divine Council in the Psalms*

Several psalms depict Yahweh enthroned amongst his divine council, which carries out his commands. In Psalm 82, God gives judgment against the wicked: "God takes a stand in the divine council (בעד־תֵּאל), gives judgment in the midst of the gods (אלהים)" (Ps 82:1, NABRE). God is judging the nations and the gods associated with them, condemning them to death. While these gods are destroyed for not doing God's will, the heavenly beings in Psalm 103 are more faithful:

19 The LORD has set his throne in heaven;  
his dominion extends over all.  
20 Bless the LORD, all you his angels,  
mighty in strength, acting at his behest,  
obedient to his command.  
21 Bless the LORD, all you his hosts,  
his ministers who carry out his will.  
22 Bless the LORD, all his creatures,  
everywhere in his domain.  
Bless the LORD, my soul! (NABRE)

The original divine council seems to have been a vestige of polytheism, though the motif is later adjusted to be in accord with monotheism. Psalm 97:7 states that "all gods" (כל אלהים) bow down before Yahweh. The implication is not that idols point to things that do not exist but that they represent lesser deities than Yahweh. A similar image occurs in Psalm 135: "For I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods" (Ps 135:5, NABRE). Psalm 135 does not deny the existence of other gods, but does make

them subordinate to Yahweh. In both cases, Yahweh is portrayed as the head of a divine council populated with heavenly beings.

Psalm 29 opens with an invitation to the “sons of [the] gods” (בני אלים) to praise Yahweh. While the NABRE translates אלים as “God,” this plural form often refers to the divine assembly. The literary setting of the psalm as the divine throne room or assembly is further supported by the ending of the psalm, which claims that Yahweh sits “enthroned” over the flood and reigns as king forever. While the term “enthroned” does not appear in the Hebrew, context suggests that this is the proper understanding of the passage. The term אלים also denotes the divine assembly in Psalm 89:

6 The heavens praise your marvels, LORD,  
 your loyalty in the assembly of the holy ones (קדשים).  
 7 Who in the skies ranks with the LORD?  
 Who is like the LORD among the sons of the gods (בני אלים)?  
 8 A God dreaded in the council of the holy ones (קדשים),  
 greater and more awesome than all those around him!  
 9 LORD, God of hosts (צבאות), who is like you?  
 Mighty LORD, your faithfulness surrounds you. (NABRE)

Burton identifies “holy ones” (קדשים) as a marker for Ps 89:6–7.<sup>514</sup> However, the same term appears in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 33, making it not specific to Psalm 89. As in Psalm 29, Psalm 89 depicts the divine council as a group of lesser deities subordinate to Yahweh. This group of heavenly beings are called “the holy ones” (קדשים), the “sons of gods” (בני אלים), and “hosts” (צבאות) or army of God.

In Psalm 82 and 97, the heavenly beings carry out God’s will. In Psalm 135 and Psalm 89, Yahweh is the head of the other gods. In Psalm 103, some of them, those

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<sup>514</sup> Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 57.

associated with the nations, are destroyed. In Psalm 103, Yahweh is enthroned and the divine beings act as his agents. The setting of Psalm 29 is the enthronement of Yahweh amongst the gods over the flood. In sum, they portray Yahweh as a divine monarch who administers his cosmic kingdom by commanding members of the divine council.

#### 5.3.2.3 - Psalm 95

There is ample evidence for the conception of the divine council within Hebrew literature. Nevertheless, Schechter and Taylor note the parallel between Sir 43:5 and Ps 95:3.<sup>515</sup> Psalm 95 claims that Yahweh is the “great king over all gods” (ומלך גדול על-כלי) (אלהים). The verbal similarities are weak, especially since a number of other psalms depict Yahweh as king over other divine beings. The only common elements between Sir 43:5 and Ps 95:3 are a divine moniker (but not the same one), the common particle כי, and the adjective “great” (גדול). The lexical overlap is unconvincing, and the sentiment is common; therefore, it is unlikely that Ben Sira intends a literary allusion to Psalm 95. Instead, he is participating in an ongoing cultural discourse by employing a commonplace notion.

Di Lella also notes the similarities between Ben Sira’s depiction of the angels standing before the Lord in Sir 42:17 and a number of Biblical passages that depict a similar scene in a heavenly court or throne room, especially those that refer to God as the Lord of “hosts” or armies, such as Ps 103:20–21 and Ps 148:2.<sup>516</sup> He does not suggest that Ben Sira is alluding to any of these passages in particular, implying that it is

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<sup>515</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

<sup>516</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

a commonplace or motif. In a similar vein, Di Lella notes the similarity between Ben Sira's use of "holy ones" and their appearance in Job 5:1, 15:15, Ps 89:8, Zech 14:15, and Dan 8:13.<sup>517</sup> The number of parallels suggests that Ben Sira was not alluding to one text in particular but that Ben Sira was employing a cultural commonplace in Sir 42:17 (supported by Sir 43:05) to recall a heavenly court scene.

#### 5.3.2.4 - Conclusion

According to the survey above, Ben Sira would have received as part of his literary tradition the portrayal of Yahweh, enthroned, surrounded by heavenly beings who do his bidding. Additional texts support this conclusion. The narrative frame of Job, in which the accuser challenges Job's faithfulness before God, implies a divine assembly. This construct is further supported by references to "the holy ones" (קדושים) in Job 5:1 and 15:15. Dan 8:13 also implies a divine assembly through the plurality of speakers. In Genesis 1, the commonplace of the divine assembly accounts for the repetition of the plural cohortative (usually translated "let us") throughout the creation account. Bernard Batto connects the image of the unopposed God ruling from the heavens who occasionally must reestablish order as typical to priestly (P) theology.<sup>518</sup> Fletcher-Louis has noted the similarities between Ben Sira's theology and that of the Priestly Source.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 491.

<sup>518</sup> Bernard F. Batto, *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Siphut 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 135.

<sup>519</sup> Fletcher-Louis, "The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira," 69–113.

Ben Sira is aware of this divine council motif, whether he was drawing specifically from Genesis 1 or from a host of other sources with similar theologies.

The divine council appears in Sirach outside of the Hymn to the creator. In Sir 24:2, the setting for personified Wisdom's speech is "the assembly of the Most High" (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ Ὑψίστου) and "before his hosts" (ἐναντι δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ). Goering argues that while this may refer to the Temple, the connection between the Temple and the divine council is well established, citing Isaiah 6, where the vision is in both places.<sup>520</sup> In returning to that well, Ben Sira is not alluding to any text in particular. There is not enough lexical and semantic evidence to locate a particular evoked text. Instead, he is actualizing a commonplace constructed from and witnessed to in a number of texts.

### *5.3.3 - Conclusion*

In sum, divine speech occurs several times in Sir 42:15–43:33, but each time that speech is portrayed as speech-act, not as a hypostasized agent. The poem does contain reference to intermediaries, such as the messenger in Sir 43:26, but these intermediaries seem to be angels, natural phenomena, or both (the sun in Sir 43:5). Furthermore, personified Wisdom's speech in Sirach 24 suggests a certain identity with God or at least divine action (see also Sir 1:4; Proverbs 8). In this pericope Wisdom or the Word are not the personified intermediaries as they are elsewhere. Instead, creation and administration by word—although it is instrumental—does not refer to an

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<sup>520</sup> Goering, *Simon and the Actualization of Wisdom*, 113.

agent, but a mode or manner. God spoke, then God's will was accomplished, as in Genesis 1.

The divine council is a commonplace that illuminates Ben Sira's use of divine speech. Divine speech in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator was associated with the administration and regulation of the cosmos. Recalling the divine council furthers Ben Sira's rhetorical purpose. In Sir 42:17 Ben Sira claims that the holy ones, the members of the divine council or angels, are not able to count, recall, or perhaps catalog all of God's works. They would not even be able to stand in God's presence, if God did not provide them the strength. Ben Sira is exploiting the hierarchy of the divine council, in which God is separated from the holy ones by an incredible degree, to illustrate how much more separated are the dwellers of the earth from that same glory. Though creation is glorious and expresses something of its maker, the maker's own glory is superlative. According to Ben Sira, God cannot be known directly: "He reveals himself still because we cannot understand, since he is greater than all his works" (Sir 43:28). Therefore, God reveals Godself and controls the cosmos through intermediaries, God's collection of "holy ones" who make up the divine council.

## 5.4 - Conclusion

Ben Sira's usage of divine speech is on a trajectory that culminates in the hypostasized word of John 1. That trajectory begins with the divine speech-act, portrayed in Genesis 1, various psalms, and Isaiah. Ben Sira certainly had access to Genesis, Isaiah, and the psalms, in addition to most of the books that would become biblical. He did not have access to texts where this tradition blossomed. While Snait

links God's creation via speech to Genesis 1, he also notes that connection made with wisdom (Sir 24:3).<sup>521</sup> He correctly recognizes that Ben Sira is on a trajectory that moves towards Wisdom 9 (and John 1), but that he is not yet there. The psalms do not present a unified understanding of divine speech, with some of them portraying it as a speech-act (Psalm 18; 33; 105; 106; 107; 148) and others ambiguously (Psalm 33; 107; 119; 147). The examples of divine speech surveyed illustrate that Ben Sira's sources overwhelmingly portrayed divine speech as a speech-act, as effectively accomplishing God's will. There are some ambiguous cases that could be read as God's word acting as an intermediary or agent, but the grammar is unclear.

Though scholars have pointed to specific books as direct intertextual models for Ben Sira's portrayal of divine speech, when investigated in detail, none of them constituted literary allusions or echoes, because similar usage can be identified in multiple texts. Since no strong markers could be detected in Sirach, Ben Sira's employment of the tradition is not an allusion. Ben Sira does not employ any of these traditions with enough specificity for (modern) readers to identify any direct intertexts, though a number of parallels have been proposed. Instead, it is better to say that Ben Sira is evoking a culturally constructed register through the use of commonplaces, words and images that belong to literary motifs. Ben Sira uses divine speech as speech-act in a way that fits his received tradition, and he uses it in an appropriate context. This usage is characteristic of the way registers function, not of literary allusion. The use of these marked or associated words and images evokes a register, not a specific text,

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<sup>521</sup> Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 209–10.



though those texts help to build the register, just as individual instantiations of a genre are necessary for the abstraction of the category.

After surveying Ben Sira's portrayal of divine speech in Sir 42:15–43:33, it was observed that God's speech was connected to his administration of the cosmos, and not only his initial creation. According to Clifford, Genesis 1 "betray[s] the influence of different traditions, it is eclectic and concerned with divine speech as the animating principle of creation activity."<sup>522</sup> Like P in Genesis 1, Ben Sira seems to be emphasizing that God interacts with the world through speech, both directly and indirectly, as a monarch administers his kingdom. While the association between divine speech and God's intervention in and administration of the created world did occur in several psalms related to divine speech, the idea of the divine council, which also appears in Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator, helps to flesh out the conception. Ben Sira portrays God as a divine monarch, enthroned among the heavenly beings. After creating, God administers and delegates cosmic functions to various heavenly beings, including the luminaries.

The activation of the divine word register furthers Ben Sira's rhetorical purpose and fits his overall outlook. Ben Sira's thesis for this pericope is that nature reveals God's glory. References to the speech-acts, to God's action in nature, create a causal chain for which God is ultimately responsible, even when he uses messengers or intermediaries. As with Genesis 1 and a number of psalms, God's action in the creation

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<sup>522</sup> Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, 144.

and maintenance of the cosmos is unopposed. God's creation is good and balanced (see especially Sir 42:22–25), revealing the goodness and wisdom of the creator. This is a worldview with deep resonances with Genesis 1, Psalm 19, and Wisdom 9. While there is some resonance here with the *דן נהיה* of 4QInstruction, in so far as Ben Sira sees a wisdom and order in the framework of creation, the apocalyptic aspects of 4QInstruction seem to be missing, at least from this poem.<sup>523</sup>

Because Yahweh rules the other heavenly beings in the divine council, they do his will, as was also depicted in the psalms. According to Ben Sira, God regulates the cosmos with his speech. God commands and everything else obeys. God is an unopposed monarch, who orders the personified heavenly luminaries (or the angels that control them). Perdue seems the term “messengers” in Sir 43:26 as applying to all of creation: “This verse refers to the notion that each element of creation functions according to its purpose, even as the Creator’s words bring about and then regulate what he decrees. Each element of creation serves as the messenger of God that carries out the divine order with purpose and success.”<sup>524</sup> Schmidt argues that Sir 43:26 signals “that every one of the created works considered in the poem can be taken as a part of God’s instruction.”<sup>525</sup> This, he argues, creates an *inclusio* with Sir 42:15. Earlier Schmidt had suggested that Sir 42:15 is a “simple confessional statement of a traditional belief,”

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<sup>523</sup> For more, see Matthew J. Goff, “The Mystery of Creation in 4QInstruction,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10 (2003): 163–86.

<sup>524</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 256.

<sup>525</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 189.

namely, “God’s effortless action of creation through his word.”<sup>526</sup> The same scholar observes that the focus of the verse immediately shifts to the “pedagogical value” of creation, which is described throughout the poem.<sup>527</sup> Severino Bussino observes that for Ben Sira, the cosmic and anthropological perspectives are integrated.<sup>528</sup> Ben Sira draws his advice for wise conduct from the created world around him, imploring his disciples to live in harmony with it. Perdue concludes that “creation not only reveals the Creator, but also becomes the instrument of his teaching given to those who seek wisdom.”<sup>529</sup> Creation itself is a book, spoken by God. It acts as an intermediary to communicate and accomplish God’s will. Reflecting on Sir 42:15, Reiterer connects the divine speech which causes creation and the divine speech of instruction, noting the didactic function of each.<sup>530</sup> This connection makes sense of the apparent *non sequitur* in Sir 43:33, “The Lord made everything, and to the godly he gave wisdom.” For Ben Sira, God gives wisdom to those who accept the premise that God is revealed in creation and take time to study it. This passage is reminiscent of Sir 39:6–7, where wisdom and piety are equated, as they are throughout Sirach 1.

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<sup>526</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 164.

<sup>527</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 164; 203.

<sup>528</sup> Severino Bussino, “Creation and Humanity in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Stefan C. Reif, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2019 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 149–78.

<sup>529</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254.

<sup>530</sup> Reiterer, “The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira,” 298.

## Chapter 6 - Ben Sira and the Sage

In the previous chapters, this study has investigated Ben Sira's employment of the storm-god theophany motif to highlight the theophanic aspect of nature, Ben Sira's evoking then undermining the combat myth and replacing it with the image of the unopposed lord of the cosmos, and Ben Sira's associating divine speech with the regulation and administration of the cosmos through angelic intermediaries. The collective impact of each of these commonplaces is the portrayal of God as the divine monarch whose initial and continued ordering of the cosmos says something about who that God is.

It is probably no accident that Ben Sira see God as somewhat similar to himself: a sage. This chapter will investigate how Ben Sira utilizes sapiential imagery to portray God as a sage, who orders and continues to regulate a cosmos that reveals its maker's wisdom to those willing and able to look. This chapter will take a somewhat different approach than the previous three. While their main emphasis was on intertextuality, that is, how Ben Sira constructed his Hymn to the Creator in dialogue with his received tradition, this chapter will focus on how previous passages of Sirach flesh out Ben Sira's portrayal of God and the role nature plays to mediate God to humans. To be sure, intertextuality will play a role, but it will not be the focus. If nature says something about the God who creates and administers it, what does it say? For Ben Sira, nature is a well-ordered book that discloses a wise author.

In his article “Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar,” Wright employs Najman’s work on pseudepigraphal authorship to investigate how the literary “I” in Sirach is constructed and how it functions rhetorically.<sup>531</sup> Ben Sira’s (constructed) self-disclosure separates Sirach from other sapiential works, such as the Book of Proverbs. Wright observes that by taking on the traditional role of “father” in sapiential literature and portraying himself as an idealized sage, Ben Sira makes himself out to be a model for his students or “sons” to follow. Ben Sira invites his audience to become seekers of wisdom by emulating him: by doing what he says and by doing what he does (or at least what he claims to do).

This chapter will add an additional layer of “exemplarity”: God. It will be shown that the Hymn to the Creator portrays God as the sage *par excellence*. Through sapiential images and vocabulary, Ben Sira connects the work of God in creation with the work of the sage, setting up a seeker/revealer relationship, akin to the relationship between a master and his students. In this way, the portrayal of God is a blend of the scholar, who creates knowledge, and the pedagogue, who passes it on. Specifically, Ben Sira’s portrayal of God as sage in Sirach 42–43 reverberates intratextually with Sirach 39. Both participate intertextually in a common tradition with texts that would become biblical, including Proverbs, Isaiah 40, Jeremiah 17, and Ecclesiastes 12–13. To accomplish this goal, this chapter will first look at Ben Sira and his portrayal of the sage.

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<sup>531</sup> Wright, “Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar,” 165–82. The published works of Najman cited by Wright are: Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, JSJSup 77 (Leiden, Brill, 2003); “How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha? Imitation and Emulation in 4 Ezra,” *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino Garcia Martinez*, ed. A Hilhorst, E. Puech, E. Tigchelaar, JSJSup 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 529–36.

Then it will look at how Ben Sira presents God as a sage and what that says about Ben Sira's understanding of the cosmos.

## 6.1 - The Sage in Ben Sira

Of the Hymn to the Creator, Perdue writes that it is “a cosmological canticle that depicts God as the sage whose wisdom shapes a reality of beauty, coherence, justice, and life.”<sup>532</sup> While much of the study has focused on the latter part of Perdue's statement, the present section will look at the way Ben Sira portrays God as the cosmic sage. The main source of information about Ben Sira's views on scribes is in Sir 38:24–39:11. Sir 38:24 is the thesis for the first half: only those who have leisure can be wise. The rest of chapter 38 is spent illustrating how the tradesmen must focus on their labor, which is necessary for civilization, though this industry precludes them from being wise. Ben Sira's primary portrayal of the sage occurs in Sirach 38–39, though that depiction reverberates intratextually with Sirach 4 and Sirach 1. Changes made to the Greek tradition of Sirach 10 foreground the mediatory role of the sage, while backgrounding the king's role as expressed in the Hebrew tradition.

### 6.1.1 - *Sirach 39:1–3*

In chapter 39, Ben Sira transitions to his description of the scribe whose work is wisdom in action:

1 σοφίαν πάντων ἀρχαίων ἐκζητήσει, καὶ ἐν προφητείαις ἀσχοληθήσεται·  
 2 διηγήσεις ἀνδρῶν ὀνομαστῶν συντηρήσει, καὶ ἐν στροφαῖς παραβολῶν  
 συνεισελεύσεται·  
 3 ἀπόκρυφα παροιμιῶν ἐκζητήσει, καὶ ἐν αἰνίγμασι παραβολῶν  
 ἀναστραφήσεται.

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<sup>532</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 253.

- 1 He will search earnestly the wisdom of all the ancients, and he will be engaged in prophecies.
- 2 He will preserve the tales of famous men, and he will place himself amongst the twists of parables.
- 3 He will search earnestly what's hidden among proverbs, and he will inhabit the riddles of parables.

This passage starts with the literary life of the sage in verses 1–3. According to Ben Sira, the sage is a cultural tradent, occupied with “the wisdom of the ancients,” “prophecies,” “the tales of famous men,” twisty parables, proverbs, and riddles. The work of the sage is oriented both to the past and the present, for the sage works with received material while pressing them for their contemporary application. The literary life of the sage is not one of mere passivity; instead, the sage actively “searches earnestly” (ἐκζητήσει) and is “engaged” (ἀσχοληθήσεται) with the things hidden in his inherited tradition.

Ben Sira metaphorically describes his own part in the preservation of his culture’s literary heritage in both Sirach 24 and 33. In chapter 24, Ben Sira describes himself as a canal which channels wisdom’s waters into his garden. While wisdom overflows his banks, he nevertheless passes her on to others. In chapter 33, Ben Sira describes himself as the last gleaner in the field of his culture’s literary heritage. Ben Sira says explicitly that he has not labored for himself alone, but does so for others, that they too may enjoy wisdom’s vintage (Sir 33:16–18). These passages together demonstrate that Ben Sira sees his role as a tradent, as one responsible for both receiving and transmitting. The whole conceit of the book points to this. In Sir 42:15–16, Ben Sira portrays himself as one who passes on what he himself has seen.<sup>533</sup> As a sage, Ben Sira

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<sup>533</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 164.

is a teacher, just as some of his pupils may become. As Saint Paul instructed the Corinthians to “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), so Ben Sira places himself as the exemplar sage, urging his students to follow his lead, while he imitates God. God (sometimes by means of personified Wisdom) reveals, and Ben Sira is both the recipient of and medium of that revelation, according to the fluvial metaphor in Sirach 24 and the agricultural one in Sirach 33.

#### *6.1.2 - Sirach 39:4*

Ben Sira’s attention moves to the socio-political role of the sage in verse 4. These more active ventures of the sage are founded on his contemplative, literary pursuits.

4 ἀνὰ μέσον μεγιστάνων ὑπηρετήσῃ, καὶ ἔναντι ἡγουμένων ὀφθήσεται· ἐν γῇ ἀλλοτρίων ἔθνων διελεύσεται, ἀγαθὰ γὰρ καὶ κακὰ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐπείρασεν.

4 He will serve in the midst of nobles, and he will appear before leaders. He will travel on the lands of foreign nations, for he tested good and evil among men.

It is the life of the mind described in verses 1–3 which qualify the sage to meet with leaders both foreign and domestic, as described in verse 4. The tone of the passage, especially the praise the sage will receive for his wisdom, suggests that he is providing a service to these politicians. The change in verb tense from future to aorist makes the sage’s testing what is “good and evil among men” the condition of his advising. Because the sage tested (aorist) what is “good and evil among men,” he is qualified to advise rulers (future).

The sage’s knowledge that qualifies him to speak with leaders is referred to as his having tested “good and evil.” The same phrase occurs Gen 2:9 and 2:17. The verses in Genesis match lexically in both the Hebrew (טוב / רע) and the Greek (καλός /



πονηρός). However, the Greek of Sir 39:4 (ἀγαθὰ / κακὰ) does not match with the LXX of Gen 2:9 and 2:17. The two words in Sirach are synonyms of those in Genesis but are not identical. Compounding the problem is that the Hebrew of Sirach in this section is not extant, so we are left to guess about the *Vorlage* of the Greek translation. The phrase “good and evil” also occurs in Eccl 12:14, which matches Genesis in the Hebrew, and only partially in the Greek (ἀγαθόν / πονηρόν). The Greek also partially matches Sir 39:4. Clearly the LXX translators were not perfectly consistent, which leaves open the possibility that the Hebrew of Sir 39:4 matches Genesis, which would suggest an allusion.

Nevertheless, even if we presume a deliberate allusion by Ben Sira in Sir 39:4 to the fruit which caused the fall of humanity, Sirach offers a different perspective. The end of Sirach 16 continuing into chapter 17 is a recapitulation of the creation accounts in Genesis 1–3, as a number of scholars have observed.<sup>534</sup> There are, however, important differences. While the Hebrew of Sir 16:26 survives in MS A, the manuscript ends there. Once again, we must forge ahead in the Greek. Ben Sira blends both the P (Genesis 1) and the J (Genesis 2–3) traditions, producing a unique narrative where

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<sup>534</sup> For instance, see Beentjes, “De verhalen van het begin terug(ge)lezen: Jesus Sirach en Genesis 1–3,” in *Stromen uit Eden. Genesis 1–11 in bijbel, Joodse exegese en moderne literatuur. Aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. N.R.M. Poulssen bij gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als hoogleraar in de exegese van het Oude Testament en het Hebreeuws aan de Theologische Faculteit Tilburg op 22 mei 1992*, ed. Wilhelmus Johannes Cornelis Weren and C. M. L. Verdegaal (Boxtel, Germany: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1992), 98–110; Shane Berg, “Ben Sira, the Genesis Creation Accounts, and the Knowledge of God’s Will,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 139–57; Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 122–23; John J. Collins, “Interpretations of the Creation of Humanity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 29–43; Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 306–16 & 345–37; and Hulisani Ramants’hna, “Creation Retold: Use of Scripture and Tradition in Sirach 16:24–17:14,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38 (2017): 1–9.

humans are still created in God's image and have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26–28) but are subject to death (“limited days”) from the beginning, instead of having death imposed as a punishment (Gen 2:16–17). Importantly, knowledge of “good and evil” is not the result of humans disobediently eating from a mythic tree but ordained from the beginning. In fact, in Sir 16:28, Ben Sira claims that humanity never disobeyed (ἀπειθήσουσιν) God's word. Instead of disobedience causing the human primogenitors to know good and evil, God is the agent of that education: “He [God] filled them [humanity] up with knowledge of understanding, and he showed to them good things and evil things (ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ)” (Sir 17:7). James Kugel observes that the same dichotomous pair appears in 4Q303, 4Q504, the Wisdom of Solomon, and 2 Enoch, but in these cases it refers to the image of God.<sup>535</sup> The usage in Sirach is not identical, but it does seem to be related, though filtered through a sapiential lens. God passes along the knowledge of good and evil in Sir 17:7, which the sage exercises in Sir 39:4. Furthermore, the Greek vocabulary in Sir 17:7 matches that of Sirach 39:4. The clear dependence of Sirach 17 on the first few chapters of Genesis increases the likelihood that Ben Sira was taking part in a cultural conversation connected to both Gen 2–3 and Sir 39:4.

### 6.1.3 - *Sirach 39:5–8*

After treating the literary life and socio-political role of the sage, Ben Sira moves on to the necessity of piety for wisdom in verses 5–8.

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<sup>535</sup> James L. Kugel, “Some Instances of Biblical Interpretation in the Hymns and Wisdom Writings of Qumran,” in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, ed. James L. Kugel (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001), 155–69.

5 τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπιδώσει ὀρθρῖσαι πρὸς Κύριον τὸν ποιήσαντα αὐτόν, καὶ ἔναντι Ὑψίστου δεηθήσεται· καὶ ἀνοίξει στόμα αὐτοῦ ἐν προσευχῇ, καὶ περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτοῦ δεηθήσεται.

6 ἔὰν Κύριος ὁ μέγας θελήσῃ, πνεύματι συνέσεως ἐμπλησθήσεται· ἀνομβρήσει ῥήματα σοφίας αὐτός, καὶ ἐν προσευχῇ ἐξομολογήσεται Κυρίῳ·

7 αὐτὸς κατευθυνεῖ βουλήν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμην, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀποκρύφοις αὐτοῦ διανοηθήσεται·

8 αὐτὸς ἐκφαίνει παιδείαν διδασκαλίας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐν νόμῳ διαθήκης Κυρίου καυχήσεται.

5 He will give his heart to rise early toward the Lord who made him, and he will pray before the Most High, and he will open his mouth in prayer, and concerning his sins he will beg.

6 If the Lord Almighty wills, he will be filled with a spirit of understanding. He will pour forth his words of wisdom, and in prayer he will confess to the Lord.

7 He will direct his counsel and knowledge, as he meditates upon God's mysteries.

8 He shows the instruction of his teaching, and in the law of the covenant of the Lord he will glory.

Of all the extant Hebrew sapiential texts, Sirach most explicitly weds traditional Israelite piety with the wisdom tradition. According to verse 5, the sage will wake up early to pray, asking forgiveness for his sins. In verse 6, God acts as an agent who fills the sage with the spirit of understanding. The second half of verse 6 connects piety and practical wisdom: the sage will speak wise words and confess to the Lord. This connection between piety and practical wisdom continues into verses 7 and 8. In the first halves of the verses, the sage demonstrates practical wisdom by directing his council and manifesting his education. In the second halves, the sage meditates on God's mysteries and glories in God's Law/covenant.

Elsewhere in the Sirach, Ben Sira connects piety with practical wisdom.

Sandwiched between didactic sections in chapter 4 is a small section on the rewards of wisdom: Sir 4:11–19. This section can be divided into two parts: the first section, verses

11–14, speaks about personified Wisdom in the third person, while the second section, verses 15–19, is spoken by personified Wisdom in the first person. We will focus our attention of the first section:

11 חכמות למדה בניה ותעיד לכל מבינים בה:  
 12 אהביה אהבו חיים ומבקשיה  
 13 יפיקו רצון מִיִּי: ותמכיה ימצאו כבוד מִיִּי ויחנו בברכת יִי:  
 14 משרתי קדש משרתיה ואלהו במא ויהא

*11 Wisdom teaches her sons, and she testifies to all who understand her.  
 12 Those who love her love life, and those who seek her obtain favor from YHWH.  
 13 And those who hold her find glory from YHWH, and they dwell in the favor of YHWH.  
 14 Those who minister to the Holy One, minister to her, and they [text corrupt] in what will be. (MS A)*

11 Ἡ σοφία υἱοὺς ἑαυτῇ ἀνύψωσεν, καὶ ἐπιλαμβάνεται τῶν ζητοῦντων αὐτήν.  
 12 ὁ ἀγαπῶν αὐτήν ἀγαπᾷ ζωὴν, καὶ οἱ ὀρθρίζοντες πρὸς αὐτήν ἐμπλησθήσονται εὐφροσύνης·  
 13 ὁ κρατῶν αὐτῆς κληρονομήσει δόξαν, καὶ οὗ εἰσπορεύεται, εὐλογεῖ Κύριος.  
 14 οἱ λατρεύοντες αὐτῇ λειτουργήσουσιν ἁγίῳ, καὶ τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας αὐτήν ἀγαπᾷ ὁ κύριος·

*11 Wisdom exalts her sons, and she seizes those who seek her.  
 12 The one loving her loves life; and those who rise to her are filled with joy.  
 13 The one grasping her will inherit glory, and where he enters the Lord will bless.  
 14 Those serving her will serve the Holy One, and the Lord loves those who love her.*

The connection between piety and practical wisdom is clearest in verse 14, where both the Hebrew and Greek versions equate service to personified Wisdom to service to God. Through these 4 verses there is a shift in agency. In verse 11, personified Wisdom is the agent who teaches and testifies in the Hebrew tradition, while exalting and seizing in the Greek. In verse 12, the sage is the agent who loves Wisdom and seeks her, and by doing so obtains the favor of God in the Hebrew tradition. In the Greek tradition they are passively filled with joy. In both textual traditions, God becomes the agent in verse

13, blessing and glorifying the wise. In the Hebrew of verse 14, both verbal forms of “to serve” are participles, making them equivalent or interchangeable. However, in the Greek tradition, service of Wisdom is a participle and service to God is a finite verb, making the service offered to Wisdom the condition or precursor to service of God. In both traditions, piety is equated with the search for Wisdom and rewarded by God.

The link between piety and practical wisdom is also made in Sir 1:25–27, which comes towards the end of the opening chapter of Sirach, the first of many hymns in praise of wisdom.

25 ἐν θησαυροῖς σοφίας παραβολαὶ ἐπιστήμης, βδέλυγμα δὲ ἁμαρτωλῶ θεοσέβεια.

26 ἐπιθυμήσας σοφίαν διατήρησον ἐντολάς, καὶ Κύριος χορηγήσει σοι αὐτήν.

27 σοφία γὰρ καὶ παιδεία φόβος Κυρίου, καὶ ἡ εὐδοκία αὐτοῦ πίστις καὶ πραότης.

*25 In the treasury of wisdom are informative proverbs, but an abomination to sinners is godliness.*

*26 If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments; and the Lord will supply her to you.*

*27 For wisdom and instruction are fear of the Lord; and his goodwill are faith and gentleness.*

The presumed parallelism in verse 25 seems strained, but it is made clearer in the subsequent verse. Piety, characterized by “fear of the Lord” and keeping the commandments, is the proximate cause of God’s bestowing wisdom. This wisdom allows one to unlock “informative proverbs” (παραβολαὶ ἐπιστήμης, lit. “proverbs of knowledge”).<sup>536</sup> These three verses are similar to Sir 1:10, as they illustrate that wisdom

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<sup>536</sup> The literal translation “proverbs of knowledge” is rather hard on anglophone ears. The translator uses a similar construction in Sirach 17:7, ἐπιστήμην συνέσεως, which translated woodenly is

is given to the pious by God, who is the source of all wisdom (Sir 1:1). In Sir 1:10, Ben Sira claims that wisdom is lavished on those who love God.

The logic of Sir 1:25–27 is like that of Sir 39:5–8, but the opposite of Sir 4:11–14. In Sir 39:5–8 and Sir 1:25–27, piety is the precursor of the wisdom that God bestows. In Sir 4:11–14, seeking and obtaining wisdom is treated as the functional equivalent of piety. While it may be possible to view the two as antithetical, it seems more appropriate to read them in harmony, as two different ways of looking at the same movement. Regardless of the order of operations—whether the sage should be pious to become wise or the reverse—God is the primary agent throughout. It is God who provides the spirit of understanding in Sir 39:6, who offers the rewards for seeking wisdom in Sir 4:11–14 (even though Wisdom is said to “teach”), and who provides wisdom in Sir 1:26. Wisdom takes the place of an intermediary, object, or reward. God is the teacher, and studiousness is piety.

#### *6.1.4 - Sirach 39:9–11*

Finally, the rewards of a life well “saged” are enumerated in Sir 39:9–11.

9 αἰνέσουσιν τὴν σύνεσιν αὐτοῦ πολλοί, ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἐξαλειφθήσεται  
οὐκ ἀποστήσεται τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ζήσεται εἰς γενεὰς  
γενεῶν·  
10 τὴν σοφίαν αὐτοῦ διηγῶνται ἔθνη, καὶ τὸν ἔπαινον αὐτοῦ ἐξαγγελεῖ  
ἐκκλησία·  
11 ἐὰν ἐμμείνη, ὄνομα καταλείψει ἡ χίλιοι, καὶ ἐὰν ἀναπαύσῃται, ἐμποιεῖ αὐτῷ.

9 Many will praise his understanding, and he will not be erased for eternity. His memorial will not be removed, and his name will live for generations of generations.

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“knowledge of understanding.” This construction is fairly common in the Greek of Sirach. It may be a Hebraism.

- 10 Peoples will proclaim his wisdom, and the assembly will declare his praise.  
 11 If he should continue to live, he will leave a name better than a thousand, and if he should die, he claims it.

The reward for being wise is fame and honor, both in the sage's lifetime and afterwards.

Similarly in Sir 4:13, the sage is glorified by God. If Ben Sira's audience lacks the internal motivation for piety and wisdom, he plays to their vanity by suggesting that fame and honor (and fortune?) await the wise. His words were certainly not empty, as we are still talking about him today!

### *6.1.5 - Changes in the Greek Tradition: Centering the Sage*

Sir 10:4–5 comes at the end of a section on rulers (Sir 9:17–10:5) which emphasizes the value of wisdom and temperance. While the Hebrew of MS A fits this context seamlessly, it makes the LXX translation of Sir 10:5 rather jarring, as the figure of the scribe makes an unexpected appearance.

4 ביד אלהים ממשלת תבל ואיש לעת יעמד עליה:  
 5 ביד אלהים ממשלת כל גבר ולפני מחוקק ישיית הודו:

*4 By the hand of God is dominion of the world, and he raises up a man for a time over it.*

*5 By the hand of God is dominion over all men, and he sets his splendor before the commander (MS A<sup>537</sup>)*

4 ἐν χειρὶ Κυρίου ἐξουσία τῆς γῆς, καὶ τὸν χρήσιμον ἐγερεῖ εἰς καιρὸν ἐπ' αὐτῆς.  
 5 ἐν χειρὶ Κυρίου εὐοδία ἀνδρός, καὶ προσώπῳ γραμματέως ἐπιθήσει δόξαν αὐτοῦ.

*4 In the hand of the Lord is power over the earth, and he raises up the useful one for a time over it.*

*5 In the hand of the Lord is the good journey of a man, and to the face of the scribe he adds his glory.*

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<sup>537</sup> In manuscript A from the Cairo Geniza, the order of verses four and five have been switched. They have been placed in their traditional order here.

The editing of the Greek translator, presumably the grandson of Ben Sira, or even a later hand, serves an ideological function. In Sir 10:5, the Septuagint translator exploits the ambiguity of the prepositional phrase לפני and the rare word (מחוקק) to shift attention from a commander to the scribe. Manuscript A reads מחוקק, which seems to be the Poel of חקק. This stem has the basic meaning of “to engrave.” However, in the Poel it typically means “to decree,” while the participle—which appears here—is used substantively as a noun to mean “commander,” as it does in Deut 33:12, Judg 5:14, and Isa 33:22. Instead of the parallelism in the Hebrew tradition, the translator of the Septuagint constructs juxtaposition, as the ruler in verse 4 is replaced with the scribe (γραμματέως). Instead of participating in the glory of God, which seems to be the sense of the Hebrew, the scribe in the LXX encounters the glory of God.

Ibolya Balla suggests that the corruption of the Tobiad family lies behind the verse.<sup>538</sup> Regardless of the specific context of the change, the reception of the concept of a monarchy ordained by God must have been increasingly difficult to swallow as the Jewish leadership after the Maccabean revolt became corrupt and foreigners invaded. This decline in the “monarchy” correlated with some dissatisfaction with the temple cultus (as evidence by the “sectarians” at Qumran), which ultimately ended in 70 CE. At this time, authority was increasingly given to texts which became the new locus of authority when the temple and monarchy were destroyed. Scribes, as the guardians of

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<sup>538</sup> Ibolya Balla, “Anthropomorphic Language in the Descriptions of God in Ben Sira,” in *Theology and Anthropology in the Book of Sirach*, ed. Bonifatia Gesche, Christian Lustig, and Gabriel Rabo, *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 72 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020), 137–72. See especially page 144.



Israel's cultural tradition, became the chief mediators of divine wisdom, as Ben Sira claimed so many years before.

A similar ideological change can be observed elsewhere. Kenneth E. Pomykala demonstrates that Ben Sira's grandson modified his grandfather's portrayal of Phinehas in Sirach 45:23–26 by expunging the idea of familial succession, changing the language of intercession to an act of faithfulness, and decentering the high priesthood—changes made in response to the Hasmoneans controlling the high priesthood.<sup>539</sup>

While the Hebrew version of Sirach places earthly rulers in a mediatorial role, as in Prov 8:15–16 (and Wis 6:3), in the Greek tradition that role is usurped by the scribe, obscuring Ben Sira's more balanced approach to the mediation of wisdom. These changes speak to the growing importance of the educated literati. In both traditions, the role of God remains the same. God is the source of wisdom and glory for the ruler in the Hebrew tradition. As the source of wisdom in the Greek tradition, God takes the position of teacher or sage, as was demonstrated above.

### *6.1.6 - Conclusion*

It is unfortunate for the present study that the many of the passages in Sirach have not survived in reliable Hebrew. Since the present study is focused primarily on the Masada manuscript of Sirach, having the rest of that manuscript would be required for perfect methodology. Nevertheless, something can still be gleaned from working in the Greek and the Hebrew together. Sir 39:1–3 demonstrated that part of the sage's job, at

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<sup>539</sup> Kenneth E. Pomykala, "The Covenant with Phinehas in Ben Sira (Sirach 45:23–26; 50:22–24)," in *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Kenneth E. Pomykala (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17–36.

least according to Ben Sira, is to be actively engaged in one's literary tradition, then to mediate the fruits of that engagement. That literary engagement bears practical fruits, according to Sir 39:4, which seems to be in conversation with Sir 16:28 and Gen 1–3. Contrary to the latter the former seems to suggest that humanity never disobeyed God and that God taught them "good and evil." Instead, God has instructed humanity, allowing the wise to discern the difference between the two. Sir 39:5–8 connects wisdom to piety, as in Sir 1:25–27 and Sir 4:11–14. Though the agency is unclear, there is a reciprocal relationship between wisdom and piety. The reward of the wise is praise, as indicated in Sirach 39:9–11. A small detour was taken to look at Sir 10:4–5, the Hebrew of which indicates commanders are appointed as mediators, while the Greek places the scribe in that role. In short, the sage seeks wisdom, applies and mediates that wisdom, and is rewarded.

## 6.2 - God as Sage

In the previous section we have seen how the sage's search for wisdom in literature leads to the application of that acquired wisdom in practical matters. We also saw how, for Ben Sira, wisdom is rooted in piety, and vice versa, as God is the ultimate source of wisdom, though Wisdom can be a personified mediator. Finally, those who acquire wisdom win for themselves esteem and glory for ages to come. This (self-) glorification is evident in the changes in the text of Sir 10:4–5. Such is the life of the sage.

But how do such human attitudes and behaviors map on to God? Though human categories can only describe what God does imperfectly (see Sir 43:28),

anthropomorphism and anthropathism abound in the Hebrew Scriptures and literature from the Second Temple period.<sup>540</sup> In many cases, these anthropomorphisms and anthropathisms are attempts to project human virtues on to God. Given this logic, it would make sense for someone like Ben Sira, who finds the life of the sage so laudable, to portray God as a sage. This portrayal primarily occurs in two places: Sir 1:8–10 and throughout the Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33). Before directly addressing Ben Sira's depiction of God as a sage in his Hymn to the Creator, the intersection of God, wisdom, and creation in Ben Sira's theology will be addressed.

### *6.2.1 - God, Wisdom, and Creation*

As noted above, Ben Sira opens his book with something akin to a thesis statement: "All wisdom is from the Lord and is with him for all eternity" (Sir 1:1). There immediately follows a series of rhetorical questions which build to the answer: God. Ben Sira asks who has counted (ἐξαριθμήσει) the uncountable sands or rains or the days of eternity. He follows by asking who has explored (ἐξιχνιάσει) the heaven's height, the earth's breadth, the abyss and wisdom. Reiterer observes that these things "exceed the capacity of human insight."<sup>541</sup> After a physical synecdoche of heaven's height and earth's breadth, the abyss and wisdom are placed together. It is clear from the context that the abyss is considered unsearchable. It is unclear what is to be made of wisdom in

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<sup>540</sup> For more on anthropomorphisms and anthropathisms in Sirach, see Balla, "Anthropomorphic Language in the Descriptions of God in Ben Sira," 137–72.

<sup>541</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 289.

this parallelism. There is, however, an intratextual resonance with Sir 24:5, in which personified Wisdom claims to encircle the heavens and walk the abyss.

The rhetorical purposes of both sections are congruent but slightly different. In chapter 1, the rhetorical questions require the answer: God. Only God can count these things or search these places (Sir 1:8). In chapter 25, personified Wisdom is claiming to do these things. Ben Sira's placement of wisdom with the abyss as something potentially unsearchable is baffling. In chapter 1, wisdom is an object. In chapter 25, Wisdom is an agent. Issues like this prevent one from being too dogmatic in one's categories and parallelism. Wisdom is both the knower of and container of mysteries, while being not fully knowable herself. Wisdom is an ambiguous concept precisely because she is unknown and therefore must be spoken of in anthropomorphic analogy. Wisdom functions as a proxy for God.

The appearance of the abyss in this context should not be wholly surprising, as it performs a similar function in Prov 15:11. Because parts of Sirach are textually dependent on the book of Proverbs, one should expect similarities.<sup>542</sup> However, even where sections are not lifted whole cloth, the two texts bear a resemblance. In fact, John G. Gammie argues that the portrayal of the sage in Sirach is meant to conform with the book of Proverbs.<sup>543</sup> Gammie provides a number of examples, emphasizing

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<sup>542</sup> For more, see Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 43.

<sup>543</sup> John G. Gammie, "The Sage in Sirach," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Purdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 355–72. See especially pages 358–60.

especially where the worldviews and theologies expressed in Sirach and Proverbs are consonant. One example is particularly instructive.

Gammie uses Sir 42:18 and Sir 39:19 to show that Ben Sira agrees with the book of Proverbs on the omniscience of God (see also Sir 15:19). Sir 42:18, mentioned above vis-à-vis God's omniscience as it relates to prophecy, reads: "The deep (תהום) and the heart (לב) he searches (חקר), and into their secrets he probes, because the Most High knows all, and he sees what is to come forever." Because both passages deal with God's omniscience, Gammie connects Sir 42:18 to Sir 39:19, which reads: "The works of all humankind are present to him; nothing is hidden (נסתר) from his eyes." Finally, Gammie connects both passages from Sirach to Prov 15:11, which reads: "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts (לבות) of mortals!" (NABRE). Sheol and Abaddon serve similar functions to the "deep" (תהום) in Sir 42:18 (along with Job 38:16 and Amos 9:3) and the abyss in Sir 24:5. These unsearchable exterior locations produce a synecdoche when in conjunction with the unsearchable interior location, the heart (לב). Prov 15:11 observes that the human heart is no mystery to the God who penetrates Sheol and Abaddon. Though there is some similarity here between Proverbs 15:11 and the passages from Sirach, there is not enough to posit direct dependence. Instead, these elements seem to be commonplaces in the wisdom tradition.

Another text which mentions God's searching the human interiority is Jeremiah 17:10a, which reads: "I, YHWH, search (חקר) the heart (לב) and the mind (כליות)."<sup>544</sup> The

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<sup>544</sup> Literally, כליות translates to "kidneys," which seem to play a cognitive/affective role in the Hebrew understanding.

same verb (חָקַר) takes the same object (לֵב) in both Sir 42:18 and Jer 17:10a. Though these are the only two extant verses where “search” (חָקַר) and “heart” (לֵב) co-occur, the verb is rather a favorite of Ben Sira’s; he uses it 13 times, while all other extant literature totals 27. Although both texts place in parallelism/juxtaposition the human heart with impenetrable, mythic locations, the relationship between the two texts cannot be called an allusion or echo. The lexical similarity is not great, and the allusion does not seem to do any rhetorical work. Once again, it would appear that Jer 17:10a contains the same commonplace.

Similar to Jer 17:10a is Ecclesiastes 12:13–14, which reads: “The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this concerns all humankind; because God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden (נְעֻלִים) qualities, whether good or bad” (NABRE). Though both texts share a concern with God’s judgment of hidden things, they do not share much vocabulary, making the presence of an allusion from one to the other unlikely. Instead, God’s knowledge of the hidden seems to be a trope.

The rhetorical questions in the opening lines of Sirach are similar to those in Isa 40:12–14, where the prophet asks:

12 Τίς ἐμέτρησεν τῇ χειρὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν σπιθαμῇ, καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν δρακί; τίς ἔστησεν τὰ ὄρη σταθμῶ καὶ τὰς νάπας ζυγῶ;  
 13 τίς ἔγνω νοῦν Κυρίου, καὶ τίς αὐτοῦ σύμβουλος ἐγένετο, ὃς συμβιβᾷ αὐτόν;  
 14 ἢ πρὸς τίνα συνεβουλεύσατο καὶ συνεβίβασεν αὐτόν; ἢ τίς ἔδειξεν αὐτῷ κρίσιν; ἢ ὁδὸν συνέσεως τίς ἔδειξεν αὐτῷ;

12 Who measured with his hand the water and with his span the heavens and all the earth by the handful? Who placed the mountains in a scale and the forests in a balance?

13 Who knew the mind of the Lord and who made himself his counselor? Who advised him?

14 Or to whom did he turn for council and advised him? Or who showed him judgment? Or who showed him the way of understanding?

In fact, Lange and Weigold detect an allusion in Sirach to Isaiah.<sup>545</sup> This passage moves from asking who can measure (ἐμέτρησεν) various parts of creation that are (practically) immeasurable to who has acted as advisor—the work of a sage—to God. As in Sirach, the implied answer for Deutero-Isaiah is negative. Nobody has taken the measure of the immense cosmos, nor acted as an advisor to God. Implied in Isaiah is that God has made these measurements; consequently, none are fit to council him. Similar questions appear in Job 38, where God speaks to Job from the storm, asking him a series of rhetorical questions which imply a negative answer. In Job, as in Isaiah and Sirach, God founded and measured the earth; God has probed the depths of the sea; God controls the unfathomable cosmos—humans may only wonder.

Similarly, Ben Sira offers the same answer to his rhetorical questions in Sir 1:8–10:

8 εἷς ἐστὶν σοφός, φοβερὸς σφόδρα, καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ.  
 9 Κύριος αὐτὸς ἔκτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ἶδεν καὶ ἐξηρίθμησεν αὐτήν, καὶ ἐξέχεεν αὐτήν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ,  
 10 μετὰ πάσης σαρκὸς κατὰ τὴν δόσιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐχορήγησεν αὐτήν τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν.

8 One is wise and exceedingly fearsome, sitting upon his throne.  
 9 The Lord himself created her [Wisdom], and he saw and measured her, and poured her out on all his works,  
 10 upon all flesh according to his gift, and he supplied her to those loving him.

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<sup>545</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74.

According to Ben Sira, God alone is wise (σοφός) and worthy to feared (φοβερός), sitting on the divine throne. The term “fear” recalls Prov 9:10a, “the fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom.” As the one who created (ἔκτισεν) her, God is clearly superior to personified Wisdom, having “measured” (ἐξηρίθμησεν) her. As in Isaiah 40 and Job 38, the idea of measuring implies some sort of mastery.

One could be tempted to read the statement as a metaphorical way of saying that God does all things in accordance with wisdom or “wisely,” and it is certainly that. However, Ben Sira also has a strong sense of natural revelation, which is to say that he believes God can be seen in and through creation, as evidenced by the opening lines of his Hymn to the Creator in Sir 42:15–16, “Now let me recall the works of God, and what I have seen let me recount. By the word of the Lord are his works, and the work of his favor is his instruction. As the sun rises upon everything uncovered, so the glory of the Lord is on the fullness of his work.” Sir 42:16 acts as a thesis to the hymn, and the sentiments are echoes in Sir 43:28, “He reveals himself still because we cannot understand, since he is greater than all his works.” Ben Sira’s emphasis on creation is one aspect of his work which separates it from traditional wisdom texts. Calduch-Benages demonstrates how important creation is for Ben Sira, observing that creation is not only the locus of revelation but also an impetus for praise.<sup>546</sup> Another aspect in which Sirach differs from traditional wisdom texts is the presence of hymns, particularly

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<sup>546</sup> Calduch-Benages, “God, Creator of All (Sir 43:27–33),” 79–100.



to Wisdom. Recognizing their centrality, Corley sees them as structural indicators for the book.<sup>547</sup>

The two themes of creation and wisdom combine to identify creation as the arena for revelation, where Wisdom can be known to the extent she can be known. Knowledge and mystery elevate Ben Sira and his audience to praise, thus connecting again wisdom and piety. For Ben Sira, the sacred and the profane are one. Piety is necessary for practical wisdom and vice versa. This connection may explain why, on the one hand, a hymn to creation follows immediately after his description of the sage in Sirach 39, and why, on the other hand, God is portrayed as the ultimate sage in the Hymn to Creator. Creation is the mediator of divine Wisdom, the place where she may be sought and discovered. Books are but distillations of creation itself.

### *6.2.2 - God the Sage*

Ben Sira is a man of letters, and the ways he talks about God and creation are informed by cultural conventions. These cultural conventions are manifest in textual instantiations, which inform later authors and provide a reservoir of images and phrases. Ben Sira's use of rhetorical question is a commonplace found both in Job and Isaiah, demonstrating that Ben Sira's register or vocabulary was informed by a source or sources in common with those texts, though their common lineage may be remote. That Ben Sira uses similar terms and images for God in his Hymn to the Creator as he does in his description of the sage illustrates that he is drawing from the same sapiential

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<sup>547</sup> Corley, "Searching for Structure and Redaction in Ben Sira," 45.

register to describe both. This sapiential register also has resonances in other works that would become biblical, which again implies common intertextual sources, direct or indirect. The way in which Ben Sira activates his culturally constructed sapiential register to clothe God in the robes of the sage will be treated presently.

The above section demonstrated the centrality of wisdom for Ben Sira and, therefore, other sages. The sage will search with wisdom of the ancients by investigating his literary heritage (Sir 39:1–3). The sage will put this wisdom to use among leaders (Sir 39:4). Though God alone is wise (Sir 1:8), God can and does bestow wisdom on the pious (Sir 1:1, 25–27; 39:5–8), through the medium of creation (Sir 42:15–16, 43:28), though sometimes personified Wisdom is the agent of education (Sir 4:11). The wise will win glory among men (Sir 10:4–5 [LXX]; 39:9–11; 42:8). Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator picks up this theme, as observed by Schmidt.<sup>548</sup> In this poem, Ben Sira claims that the strength of God’s wisdom regulates creation (Sir 42:21) and the poem ends with a somewhat enigmatic line: “The Lord made everything, and to the godly he gave wisdom” (43:33). Similarly, in Sir 1:10, Ben Sira claims that wisdom is lavished on those who love God. This sentiment is an echo of Sir 42:15. While the sage gains wisdom by studying creation and the tradition, God creates and regulates with his own wisdom, which is revealed through creation. God and the sage both “possess” wisdom, but God is the source and the sage is the recipient, although in Sirach 24 and 33 the sage may also be a conduit. In a line of mediation in which the scribal student (the sage in training) receives wisdom from a teacher, who passes on the wisdom that he himself received, God is at the end,

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<sup>548</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 169.

even when personified Wisdom is placed in the penultimate position. The sage becomes a teacher of the wisdom tradition, and the source, the first teacher of that tradition, is God. God is the ultimate teacher.

In Sir 39:4, the sage puts his literary learning to practical use in socio-political matters. What Deutero-Isaiah intimates in Isa 40:13–14, Ben Sira states directly in chapter 42. God does not need anybody to counsel or advise him, because God already knows everything: “Nothing is lacking from his understanding, nor does any matter escape him. He orders the mighty work of his wisdom. He is eternal. Nothing is added; nothing subtracted, and no need has he for any counselor” (Sir 42:20–21). To riff on Aquinas’s proofs for the existence of God, for Ben Sira, God is the un-counseled counselor. Once again, Ben Sira has conceptually created a chain or hierarchy that the sage participates in, depending on his own excellence, but which begins with God. God is the ultimate counselor.

Both God and the sage deal with “hidden” things. In addition to searching out the “hidden meaning of proverbs” (39:3a) and the “enigmas found in parables” (39:3b), the sage also meditates on God’s mysteries (39:7). In the Hymn to the Creator, God “exposes hidden things” (42:19). So, while the sage searches (39:5), God reveals. God’s knowledge is of a superior order, not only because human sayings are an imperfect expression of the heart and not the heart itself, but also because God’s knowledge is perfect, according to Ben Sira. In this case, the next line corrects any possible misunderstanding by stating that God is omniscient. The human sage labors for a derivative of what God possesses completely and perfectly. God is the ultimate seeker,

because God is actually the revealer. The two endeavors are unified by the objects sought and revealed.

The characterization of God as sage and the dynamic of human seeker/divine revealer is encapsulated in the words Ben Sira uses to describe the interaction of each with prophecy. According to Ben Sira, the human sage is “occupied with the prophecies” (39:1). In the Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira casts God in the role of prophet: “he sees what is to come forever. What he proclaims becomes” (42:18–19). God is the author of prophecies, here understood as future-telling, while human sages can only puzzle over their meanings. God is not an interpreter of prophecies; he is their source.

### *6.2.3 - Conclusion*

By setting up the dynamic of seeker/revealer within a context that is clearly sapiential, Ben Sira is placing God as the master-sage, the scribe *par excellence*, while human sages and scribes are always in the subordinate role of student, even when they enjoy esteem among other humans. God is the ultimate teacher, counselor, seeker, and interpreter of prophecies, because God is the omniscient source of knowledge who reveals all that is known, even if sometimes he uses the medium of personified Wisdom.

## **6.4 - Conclusion**

In the first part of this chapter, the contents of Ben Sira’s sapiential register were demonstrated by referencing texts within Sirach that dealt with the role of the sage. The culturally constructed nature of this register is evident based on similar occurrences of words, phrases, or images where direct dependence seemed unlikely. As for content,

Ben Sira viewed the sage as a scholar and tradent, responsible for receiving, investigating, and handing on his own cultural heritage. Because of his learning, the sage was called to weigh in on matters of the state, showing the practical application of his studies. Necessary for those who seek wisdom is piety, for God is the object of both. God gives wisdom to the pious, though sometimes through the intermediary of personified Wisdom, while it is an act of piety to seek wisdom. Finally, if the heavenly rewards of piety are not enough, the sage is awarded with fame and praise, both while he lives and in the generations that follow. The way Ben Sira wrote about the sage is part of a culturally constructed register. As part of the same cultural tradition, later authors within the Hebrew sapiential world would read and memorize earlier texts. These texts would become the building blocks of their own thought and compositions, the latter of which would understandably bear resemblance to previous iterations of the sapiential (and prophetic) traditions.

The second part of this chapter elucidated a sapiential theme in Sirach 42:15–43:33. In his Hymn to the Creator, Ben Sira portrays God as an ideal sage by using common sapiential words and images. Similarly, in Sir 10:4–5, Ben Sira uses the image of God as King, where earthly rulers are seen as being imperfect imitators of God.<sup>549</sup> The analogy between what God does and what human sages (or rulers) do lacks a certain precision because of the ontological gap: what God does in creation, humans only have the power to imitate imperfectly. As noted above, Wright argues that Ben Sira portrays

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<sup>549</sup> See Benjamin Wright, “Ben Sira on Kings and Kingship,” in *Jewish perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*, ed. Tessa Rajak, Sarah Pearce, J. K. Aitken, and Jennifer M. Dines, Hellenistic Culture and Society 50 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 76–91.

himself as an exemplar of the sage, which produces a spectrum of sagacity, where Ben Sira portrays himself as imitating God, while urging his students to imitate him. Ben Sira accomplishes his portrayal of God as sage by activating a sapiential register through attributing to God the attitudes and actions of the sage. In Sirach 42:15–43:33, God is the ultimate teacher, the ultimate counselor, and the ultimate seeker, because God is actually the source of knowledge, the source of wisdom, and the revealer of that which is sought. At some point the analogy breaks down. God is not the best sage; God is the source of wisdom, who reveals himself in creation to those who seek. God is not a sage at all, but the foundational principle of wisdom and those who seek it.

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Reiterer's assessment of Ben Sira's participation in his ongoing cultural dialogue reveals the tension felt by modern scholars. In his introduction, he writes that Ben Sira "employs traditional means of expression, and uses those, according to his abilities and techniques, in a conventional form on the one hand, but also in a surprisingly redesigned fashion on the other."<sup>550</sup> This statement represents scholarly consensus. At the end of the article, Reiterer concludes that "Ben Sira cannot say everything he wants to say. In order to imply, or to include, a multitude of additional themes and problems, he chooses the methods of allusion and antitheses."<sup>551</sup> What Reiterer, who serves here as an example of a widespread phenomenon, calls "allusion" very often does not meet the requirements of a literary allusion.<sup>552</sup> Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the related dynamics of influence and citationality.

Influence is the dynamic of an anterior text or tradition shaping a posterior one in some way. Usually, this is detectable through shared images and vocabulary. Citationality is an acknowledgement of influence. It is a textual phenomenon that points back to a specific, influential text or tradition. A literary allusion is a specific type of citationality by which an author points to an influential text in a way that imports that text as an additional layer of meaningful context. The impact of an anterior tradition

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<sup>550</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 286.

<sup>551</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 312.

<sup>552</sup> See especially Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 290 and 293.

may be traceable in a posterior text in such a way that illuminates the cultural discourse in which the later author is engaging, without that author's having alluded to that text. This was seen again and again in this study, as each parallel was assessed. These proposed parallels may have elucidated lines of influence, but citationality was rare, given the weakness of supposed markers and multiplicity of possible evoked texts. Schmidt notes that there are several discrete parallels between Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator and texts from his tradition, but most of these parallels are short and only seem to indicate a sharing of standard vocabulary, from which little can be concluded.<sup>553</sup> Nevertheless, the cultural commonplaces were shown to do work by evoking the whole culturally constructed register with which certain motifs are associated. How Ben Sira did this in Sir 42:15–43:33 was the main topic of this work.

## 7.1 - Final Summary

After a number of preliminary tasks in addition to clarifying vocabulary, which included determining potential intertexts for Ben Sira and his audience and establishing a base text, Ben Sira's use of four different registers was examined. In chapter 3, it was argued that Ben Sira used the storm-god theophany motif at the associative level to undergird his argument that God can be known, even if not exhaustively, through nature.

In chapter 4, it was demonstrated that although the storm-god is often associated with the combat myth and the divine warrior motif, with the resultant

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<sup>553</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 195.



enthronement imagery, Ben Sira subverts that expectation, even as he supports the expectation with martial imagery unrelated to the combat myth. Instead of portraying God as the divine warrior who achieves victory over his opponents, Ben Sira portrays God as lord of the cosmos, the unopposed ruler. Schmidt highlights an important sequence of logic employed by Ben Sira, who first “directly engages the mythological terminology found in the biblical tradition concerning the sea,” then Ben Sira “opts to employ mythopoeic language by describing God’s governance of creation by means of his thought,” which is “the basis for a forceful rhetorical argument by which Ben Sira attributes to God complete power and sovereignty over creation.”<sup>554</sup> Put differently, Ben Sira is activating the combat myth register by mentioning elements common to the combat myth, then undermining the same myth by stripping God’s traditional opponents of agency. Instead of opposing God, these traditional enemies are his creatures that do his will.

In chapter 5, it was determined that Ben Sira was participating in a tradition of divine speech. It was observed that there is little evidence for suggesting that speech in Ben Sira, or elsewhere until John 1, acted as a hypostasized agent. Speech was the means by which the God of Ben Sira both created and administers the cosmos, often through intermediaries like the angels who make up the divine council or the personified luminaries. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. concludes his monograph on the divine council in the ancient Near East and Israel with the following statement: “Israelite literature depicts Yahweh as a warrior/king/judge who proclaims his decree in his

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<sup>554</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 186.

council.”<sup>555</sup> Green observes the connection between God and his enthronement among the heavenly hosts and the storm-god motif.<sup>556</sup> Rybolt recognizes the difference between the Canaanite storm theophany motif and Ben Sira’s claim that God controls the storm through his command.<sup>557</sup> Perdue suggest that Ben Sira is portraying God as “the divine sovereign whose edicts create and rule his cosmic kingdom.”<sup>558</sup> In the texts surveyed, it has been shown that each of these coalesces in Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator. Weather imagery is used to highlight God’s strength and the theophanic aspect of nature. The storm still reveals God’s power, but Ben Sira adds a degree of separation. Ben Sira takes a similar tact with the traditional enemies of God in the combat myth, like the waters or the sea monsters. They still appear, but they are effortlessly controlled by God’s command. Ben Sira is midpoint in a trajectory plotted out by Michael A. Fishbane, who sees a paradigm shift away from the combat myth toward a Logos-type creation.<sup>559</sup> Ben Sira has not arrived at that final point, but he has stepped away from the combat myth.

Chapter 6 was a slight departure, taken to show how Ben Sira portrays God as the ultimate sage, placing all humans in a subordinate role to the God who reveals,

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<sup>555</sup> E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, HSM 24 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 282.

<sup>556</sup> Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 272–73.

<sup>557</sup> Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93.

<sup>558</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 254. See also Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 168.

<sup>559</sup> Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–69.

teaches, and counsels. According to Schmidt, by stating that God is “all” in Sir 43:27, Ben Sira is highlighting the fact that all of nature is theophanic, that all nature points back to the creator; its beauty and balance reveals the goodness and wisdom of the creator.<sup>560</sup> Between God and humanity is creation, a book written by God and read by the wise, who in dedicating their lives to living in accordance to nature, piously follow the precepts of nature’s creator. Ben Sira emphasizes creation's concrete and visual aspects, what Schmidt calls Ben Sira's “cosmic aesthetic,” in which people can observe the elements of creation performing their divinely appointed tasks.<sup>561</sup> Humans are called to the same. Within the nexus of the created order, wisdom and piety are the same. In the words of Wright, “wisdom functions strategically in Ben Sira as a theological construct, a framework for understanding the world, including the temple cult and the ‘Law of the most High.’”<sup>562</sup> Wisdom makes her dwelling in Israel, according to Sirach 24, illustrating the same notion.

## 7.2 - Ben Sira and Theodicy: Opposite Pairs

While the evidence marshaled and conclusions drawn have hopefully been helpful and illuminating in their own right, they also shed light on a debate within Ben Sira scholarship: theodicy and the problem of evil. If God is the divine monarch who effortlessly and wisely administers through angelic intermediaries the good and

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<sup>560</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 189.

<sup>561</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 140.

<sup>562</sup> Wright, “Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira,” 370.

purposeful cosmos which thereby reveal something about their maker, then what accounts for the things humans perceive as bad? If, as in Deutero-Isaiah and Genesis 1, God is wholly responsible for the way things are, and humans have not caused a fall from grace by their own disobedience, then the world is as God intends. Put differently, Schmidt argues that Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator reemphasizes "the concepts of orderliness, goodness, and purposiveness of the cosmos while at the same time also seeking to establish a cosmic aesthetic of beauty and wonder."<sup>563</sup> According to Schmidt, through the repetition of כל and צרך in Sir 42:15 Ben Sira "reminds his students that the goodness, purposiveness, and desirability of every created work remains even when it might appear destructive or evil for a human being."<sup>564</sup> The Hymn to the Creator helps to flesh out Ben Sira's answer to that problem of evil and theodicy.

Ben Sira's view of the problem of evil and the justification of God (theodicy) has received no little attention.<sup>565</sup> Though God is good and just, creation is experienced as both good and evil by humans. On the whole, creation is good, according to Ben Sira. Sauer sees 42:22–25 as a poetic expression of the concluding judgment on creation in Genesis 1.<sup>566</sup> This is the basic datum received by Ben Sira. Nevertheless, human

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<sup>563</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 140.

<sup>564</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 170.

<sup>565</sup> See especially Prato, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*; Ursel Wicke-Reuter, *Göttliche Providenz und menschliche Verantwortung bei Ben Sira und in der Frühen Stoa*, BZAW 298 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000); Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Theodicy in the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *"Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14:20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 265–79.

<sup>566</sup> Sauer, "Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Ben Sira 42:15–43:33," 315.

experience is not universally positive. This may be why Genesis 1 is quickly followed by an etiology for evil in Genesis 3, which exonerates God from any wrongdoing. Humans are to blame for the disordered state of the world. However, Ben Sira seems to reject the mythical narrative of “the fall.” In Sir 16:28, Ben Sira claims that God’s creation never disobeyed God’s word. Ben Sira follows this claim by stating that God was responsible for showing humanity good and evil in Sir 17:7, which seems to run directly contrary to Genesis 3.<sup>567</sup> Beentjes observes how striking it is that “nowhere in the Book of Ben Sira the problem of theodicy is related to Gen 2:8–3:24.”<sup>568</sup>

The Hymn to the Creator (Sir 42:15–43:33) is part of a larger argument that Ben Sira is making about balance and harmony in creation.<sup>569</sup> Ben Sira’s *theologoumenon* concerning the polarity and balance of the created order and how it relates to theodicy is a popular topic in Sirach studies. A full review cannot be provided here. Instead, there will be a brief rehearsal that illustrates the relationship between the doctrine of opposites and the combat myth. It should be stated at the outset that they are mutually exclusive. Ben Sira inherited the combat myth, along with some discordant voices, and produced his doctrine of opposites, potentially (but not necessarily) under stoic influence, as a way of dealing with theodicy.

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<sup>567</sup> The suggestion that Ben Sira had a view of creation as eternal and unfallen is problematized by Sir 25:24, which claims that sin and death were caused by a woman. However, Genesis 3 is not the only etiology for evil that involves a woman.

<sup>568</sup> Beentjes, “Theodicy in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 279.

<sup>569</sup> Corley, *Sirach*, 119.

For Ben Sira, creation is good and balanced. As Reiterer notes, for Ben Sira, the order of creation reveals God's wisdom, through balanced, opposite pairs.<sup>570</sup> He goes on to state that, according to Sir 1:9–10, according to Ben Sira "one may see a blueprint of divine wisdom in every aspect of creation."<sup>571</sup> Creation is described in terms of opposites in both Sir 42:24 and Sir 33:7–15. Theodicy is addressed in Sir 15:11–18–14; 33:7–15; 39:12–35; and 43:15–43:33.<sup>572</sup> Calduch-Benages argues that, despite textual issues, the binary structure of creation as expressed by Ben Sira in Sir 33:7–15 relates both the cosmic and human perspective, both demonstrating the creative wisdom of God.<sup>573</sup>

Polarities exist in both the cosmic and human domains, though the relationship between divine determinism and human freedom is left ultimately unresolved, according to Zapff.<sup>574</sup> Calduch-Benages suggest that humans determine their own fate through their behavior.<sup>575</sup> Ben Sira builds into creation a retributive logic.<sup>576</sup> For

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<sup>570</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 303–5.

<sup>571</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 305.

<sup>572</sup> Gabriel Barzilai sees Sirach 15:14–17 as a polemic against *Musar LeMevin* and a fall narrative, though he concedes that this reading is incongruent with other passages of Sirach, especially 25:24. See "Incidental Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Scrolls and Its Importance for the Study of the Second Temple Period," DSD 14 (1) 2007:1–24. A more probable intertext is Deuteronomy 30:15 and not Genesis 1. See also Genesis 8:21 and 6:5.

<sup>573</sup> Núria Calduch-Benages, "Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15)," in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Stefan C. Reif, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2019 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 179–200.

<sup>574</sup> Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 213.

<sup>575</sup> Calduch-Benages, "Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15)," 197.

<sup>576</sup> For more on Ben Sira's teaching on retribution, see Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 83–87.

instance, Sir 16:14 reads, “Whoever does good has a reward; each receives according to their deeds” (NABRE). Things cannot simply be seen as good or bad.<sup>577</sup> Instead, something may be good for those who are good, but the same thing may be bad for those who are bad (see Sirach 40–41, see especially Sir 40:10).<sup>578</sup> Evil (from the human perspective) is a function of God’s judgment (see Sir 39:16–35). This sentiment is echoed in Sir 42:25. As Calduch-Benages observes, Ben Sira stands in a tradition exemplified by the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10) before him and the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56) and Canticle of Zachariah (Luke 1:68–79) after (see also Sirach 10).<sup>579</sup> In each of these, God reverses the fortunes of the undeservingly prosperous and the pious lowly.

After investigating Sir 15:11–18:14, Maurice Giles concludes that God repays each person according to the deeds they perform, since humanity has been endowed with freedom.<sup>580</sup> Nevertheless, God is merciful. Gilbert emphasizes that not only does this formulation protect God from being responsible for evil, but it also leans on Israel’s cultural heritage.<sup>581</sup> In an investigation into the Greek version of Sirach 18:1–10 (since

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<sup>577</sup> James L. Crenshaw, “Beginnings, Endings, and Life’s Necessities in Biblical Wisdom,” in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel* (ed. Richard J. Clifford; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 93–105.

<sup>578</sup> Spieckermann, “Is God’s Creation Good?: From Hesiodus to Ben Sira,” 90.

<sup>579</sup> Calduch-Benages, “Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15),” 191.

<sup>580</sup> Maurice Gilbert, “God, Sin and Mercy: Sirach 15:11–18:14,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference, Durham – Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel, BZAW 321 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 118–35.

<sup>581</sup> Gilbert, “God, Sin and Mercy: Sirach 15:11–18:14,” 132–33.

unfortunately the Hebrew does not survive), Corley also highlights the God's almighty power, a notion rooted in the Pentateuch's priestly vision of the cosmos and its sole creator.<sup>582</sup> In the terms of our study, it was determined in chapter 4 that the combat myth was replaced by the lord of the cosmos motif in Sir 42:15–43:33. Corley also explores potential parallels between stoic texts, including Cleanthes's Hymn to Zeus.<sup>583</sup> Caldusch-Benages draws a parallel between Sir 33:7–15 and Chrysippus's *On Providence* (Book IV) and the sentiments of Heraclitus preserves in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (8.2), suggesting that Ben Sira may have drawn on the stoics.<sup>584</sup> While this is plausible, it is not necessary. The material parallel to the stoics is either present or latent within Israel's own cultural patrimony. Furthermore, as Snaith notes, the sentiments in Sir 18:1–7 and Sir 33:7–15 are distinct from stoic pantheism.<sup>585</sup> Ben Sira is not a stoic, though he may have had contact with them.

Randal A. Argall argues that the doctrine of opposites permeates Sir 42:15–43:33 in which Ben Sira emphasizes that everything in creation—even the scary bits—is doing God's will and are fully under God's control.<sup>586</sup> The monsters of old are not monsters

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<sup>582</sup> Jeremy Corley, "Creation and Cosmos in Greek Sirach 18:1–10," in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Stefan C. Reif, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2019 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 223–43.

<sup>583</sup> Corley, "Creation and Cosmos in Greek Sirach 18:1–10," 227–29.

<sup>584</sup> Caldusch-Benages, "Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15)," 195–96. See also John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 85; Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," 105.

<sup>585</sup> John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus: Or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 214.

<sup>586</sup> Randal A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation, and Judgment* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 150–54.



but creatures of God. God does not struggle to defeat them; he controls them effortlessly. They do not threaten him; they do his will. This is God as the lord of the cosmos. Reiterer sees Sir 42:21 as emphasis on monotheism in a polytheistic environment.<sup>587</sup> By rejecting the polytheistic worldview inherent in the combat myth, Ben Sira is forced to reckon with what is experienced as evil or disordered from the human perspective. Unlike in the combat myth, where a celestial force opposes Yahweh, with the doctrine of opposites, the only opposition appears within the realm of creation. God is not opposed, though God sets up oppositional forces which have different effects on humanity.

Schmidt argues that Sir 42:24 is “often misinterpreted...as a statement expressing Ben Sira’s doctrine of opposites.”<sup>588</sup> Schmidt points out that much of the following poem does not illustrate “opposites” so much as balance, noting that the material in the Sirach builds on itself.<sup>589</sup> Corley uses the word “balance” to describe Ben Sira’s so-called doctrine of opposites, which may be the best way to harmonize Sirach 42 with Sirach 11 and 33.<sup>590</sup> In this view, the doctrine of opposites is actually the doctrine of balance, in which opposites play a role, but do not characterize the whole schema. Similarly, Perdue introduces the term “esthesis,” which he defines as “an order that is

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<sup>587</sup> Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, “The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira: The Basics,” in *Discovering, Deciphering and Dissenting: Ben Sira Manuscripts after 120 years*, ed. James K. Aitken, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Yearbook 2018 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 285–315. See especially page 300.

<sup>588</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 172.

<sup>589</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 206.

<sup>590</sup> Corely, *Sirach*, 119.

both elegant and purposeful.”<sup>591</sup> Perdue and Schmidt seem to be in accord concerning Ben Sira’s cosmic aesthetic resulting from the balance or complementarity of the cosmos. It is within this balanced cosmos that human behavior can result in positive or negative consequences, including being the object of divine wrath as discussed in chapter 4. Unlike the author of Psalm 104 who also demythologizes the combat myth, Ben Sira ascribes retributive value to the weather phenomena.<sup>592</sup>

Throughout his work, Ben Sira consistently presents his doctrine of balance within the created order, both cosmic and terrestrial. According to this doctrine, the cosmos is a balance of forces which rewards the good and punishes the bad. Like a bee who can provide honey or sting, the same things may provide good or ill, depending on human behavior. This system as a whole is good, which protects God from being the source of real evil. This system is retributive, so that each individual gets their just deserts. This system, based on God’s total sovereignty, replaces a polytheistic worldview in which divine battle mirrors earthly strife. Both views, though incoherent together, were inherited by Ben Sira, who attempts to harmonize his received tradition.

### 7.3 - Connected Registers

While certain defects in the presentation of evidence in this work are certainly the responsibility of the author, some of the argument’s lack of linear presentation is down to the sources. Accepting that it is a poor craftsman who blames his tool, it should

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<sup>591</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 255.

<sup>592</sup> Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 199.

be observed that some texts were examined in more than one diagnostic chapters (3–6), because different discrete registers showed up in the same texts. For instance, the primeval history in Genesis was investigated concerning the combat myth and divine speech, as was Psalm 18. Psalm 29 was proposed as a parallel for the storm-god theophany motif and the combat myth. Psalm 33 and Psalm 104 were each also investigated in multiple chapters. Psalm 148 provides a good example of multiple registers being activated in the same text:

1 Hallelujah!  
 Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
 praise him in the heights.  
 2 Praise him, all you his angels;  
 give praise, all you his hosts.  
 3 Praise him, sun and moon;  
 praise him, all shining stars.  
 4 Praise him, highest heavens,  
 you waters above the heavens.  
 5 Let them all praise the LORD's name;  
 for he commanded and they were created,  
 6 Assigned them their station forever,  
 set an order that will never change.  
 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,  
 you sea monsters and all the deeps of the sea;  
 8 Lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds,  
 storm wind that fulfills his command; (NABRE)

Like Ben Sira's Hymn to the Creator, the psalms opens with a call to praise (verse 1 and following), mentions the divine council of heavenly beings (verse 2), lists the heavenly bodies in the same order (verse 3), portrays divine speech as an effective speech-act (verse 5), talks about an eternal order (verse 6), mentions the traditional enemies of God in the combat myth though they are demythologized (verse 7), and the traditional elements associated with a storm-god theophany even claiming that they are controlled

by God's command (verse 8). Psalm 148 is replete with parallels to Sir 42:15–43:33. It is very likely that Ben Sira knew Psalm 148. It is very possible that Psalm 148 influenced Ben Sira. It is unlikely that Ben Sira was attempting to echo or allude to Psalm 148. Instead, the example of Psalm 148 proves that the registers employed by Ben Sira in his Hymn to the Creator were culturally conditioned in the same tradition that produced Psalm 148. Similar ideas appear in Sir 42:15–43:33 and Psalm 148 because those ideas were connected in the cultural discourse in which both texts were participating. Similar cases can be made about the numerous threads that crisscross in the tapestry of the Hebrew literary tradition.

Ben Sira was a knower of the tradition and an editor of the tradition, but nevertheless enjoyed some freedom in interpreting that tradition. According to Di Lella, "Ben Sira's procedure was to adapt the older Scriptures in order to popularize them and make them relevant to the new Hellenistic age in which he lived. Though he often quotes or refers to a sacred text, he does not hesitate to alter it or change the wording so that there is a new emphasis or a different meaning."<sup>593</sup> Yet the tradition had authority, and so Ben Sira used the tradition. According to Wright, "Ben Sira both summarizes *and* interprets the biblical story while maintaining literary contact with it."<sup>594</sup> Ben Sira is like a scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven in Matt 13:52; he brings out the old and the new, as I hope I have done in this work.

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<sup>593</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 40.

<sup>594</sup> Wright, "Conflicted Boundaries," 248

## 7.4 - Suggestions for Further Research

Having concluded the current study, several avenues of research remain unexplored. These avenues for potential further research fall into seven basic categories: other registers, other potential intertexts, Greco-Roman and ancient Near Eastern evidence, intratextuality and structure, comparing Ben Sira's use of sources with other tradents, Ben Sira and apocalypticism, and the reception of Sir 42:15–43:33.

### 7.4.1 - Other Registers

Even within the scope of the present study, some commonplaces and registers were not treated. Some register that would be interesting to explore include the use of rhetorical questions, registers related to praise, and portrayal of the divine will.

Rhetorical questions seem to be a trope associated with specific contexts. Rhetorical questions occur in both Sirach 1 and Sirach 42–43 (see also Sirach 18). Burton suggests that Sir 42:15–43:33 is a response to the מ questions in Ps 89:6–7.<sup>595</sup> Mulder identifies Isa 40:25–26 as the intertext.<sup>596</sup> J Kenneth Kutz investigates similar questions in Isaiah.<sup>597</sup> Given that Ben Sira had access to both Psalm 89 and Isaiah, it would be interesting to see if one particular intertext could be identified, or if Ben Sira is

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<sup>595</sup> Burton, "Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation," 58.

<sup>596</sup> Mulder, "A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25," 212.

<sup>597</sup> J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Form, Location, and Function of Rhetorical Questions in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Boyles and Craig A. Evans, VTSup 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 121–42.

employing the questions generically. A study of the use of rhetorical questions, especially those relating to God, could help to illuminate their use in Sir 42:15–43:33.

The methodology employed in this study may fruitfully be applied to terms of praise within the Hymn to the Creator. Scholars have recognized parallels between the Hymn to the Creator and psalms with language related to praise. Askin relates Sir 42:15–43:33 to nature-lists, which call for praise.<sup>598</sup> Schechter and Taylor identify Psalm 40 as a parallel for Sir 42:17.<sup>599</sup> The same authors, in addition to Burton, see Ps 145:3 as a parallel to Sir 43:28.<sup>600</sup> Burton identifies Ps 57:11 as a parallel for Sir 42:16.<sup>601</sup> Lange and Weigold, Schechter and Taylor, and Burton all identify Ps 66:3 as a parallel for Sir 43:2.<sup>602</sup> Di Lella observes a movement from beauty to praise in Psalm 104, similar to that in the Hymn to the Creator.<sup>603</sup> The same author proposes a parallel between Sir 43:31 and Ps 106:2.<sup>604</sup> All of these proposed parallels suggest that a culturally constructed register is at play in this section.

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<sup>598</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 112–38.

<sup>599</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20.

<sup>600</sup> Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 21; Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 60 n. 25.

<sup>601</sup> Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 60 n. 25.

<sup>602</sup> Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, 306–16 and 345–74; Schechter and Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 20; Burton, “Sirach & the Judaic Doctrine of Creation,” 58.

<sup>603</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 495.

<sup>604</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 495.

### 7.4.2 - Other Potential Intertexts

In addition to investigating what other traditions may have contributed to the construction of Ben Sira's register, it may also be instructive to look at other potential intertexts. This study restricted itself to only looking at instances where scholars had proposed parallels between Sir 42:15–43:33 and Genesis, psalms, or Isaiah. Direct intertextual connects have been proposed to other books that would become biblical, in addition to some that would not.

Perhaps the most robust study could be done on the intertextual connection between Job and Sirach. The relationship may be synchronic, where they both are using the same texts, instead of diachronic where Sirach is using Job. C. L. Brinks argues that Job is in dialogue with Deutero-Isaiah, that is, Job alludes to Deutero-Isaiah in order to disagree with the author's portrayal of God.<sup>605</sup> Askin, Rybolt, and Schmidt all suggest connections between the Hymn to the Creator and Job.<sup>606</sup> Walton detected the divine warrior motif and the combat myth in Job.<sup>607</sup> Parts of Sirach have been harmonized with Job, which suggests a later hand recognized the connection. Specifically, it would be interesting to see how each author uses their sources to answer questions surrounding the problem of evil and theodicy. A recent dissertation by Israel McGrew addresses the

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<sup>605</sup> C. L. Brinks, "Job and Deutero Isaiah: The Use and Abuse of Traditions," *BibInt* 20 (2012): 407–20.

<sup>606</sup> Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 111–42; Rybolt, *Sirach*, 93; Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 197–201.

<sup>607</sup> Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," 53.

different speakers' usage of mythological language, specifically the combat myth, in their attempts to address the problem of evil and theodicy.<sup>608</sup> Given the findings of this study, it would be interesting to compare both the methodologies and conclusions of Sirach and Job.

Collins suggests comparing Sir 42:15–43:33 with the praises of nature in Job (28; 38–41), the Song of the Three Young Men in Greek Daniel, and some of the Hymns found at Qumran (1QH 9:10–14).<sup>609</sup> Proverbs and the Deuteronomistic history may also be fruitful investigations, as could non-biblical texts.

#### *7.4.3 - Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Evidence*

Evidence permitting, it would be instructive to expand the scope of Ben Sira's register to include as potential intertexts works that did not become biblical or that were part of different cultures and traditions. Since only a portion of the conversation in which Ben Sira was participating survives, and since Ben Sira may have been aware of other traditions outside of those that would become biblical, it would be interesting to see to what degree Greco-Roman sources influenced Ben Sira's (or his grandson's) register and what evidence from the ancient Near East could flesh it out. Ted Kaiser warns about the methodological pitfalls of moving from evidence concerning particular cults and cultures to broad abstractions about the cultural and literary milieu of the

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<sup>608</sup> Israel McGrew, "Where is Wisdom? Privileging Perspectives in the Book of Job" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2021).

<sup>609</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 87.



Mediterranean and Mesopotamia (and then back again).<sup>610</sup> Nevertheless, if done carefully, broadening the scope of what Ben Sira knew and therefore to what texts he could allude, may prove fruitful.

Though some scholars see the influence of ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the divine word on Israelite religion, others note that in the prophetic tradition that influence is quite late.<sup>611</sup> Similarities, as those illustrated above, are clear, but direct dependency is less so.<sup>612</sup> According to Johann Marböck, the mention of “coastlands” or “islands” in Sir 43:23 may allude to the Isis aretology of Kymes, in which Isis was acclaimed for having created islands.<sup>613</sup> Jack N. Lawson demonstrates how the Stoic concept of *logos* had much earlier roots in the ancient Near East.<sup>614</sup> Ben Sira’s own work has stronger associations with the Mesopotamian precursors than with Stoicism itself.<sup>615</sup> Ben Sira was probably not directly influenced by the Stoics, though he may have indirectly encountered similar ideas through his own cultural tradition or other

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<sup>610</sup> Ted Kaizer, “In Search of Oriental Cults: Methodological Problems Concerning ‘the Particular’ and ‘the General’ in Near Eastern Religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” *Historia* 55 (2006): 26–47.

<sup>611</sup> W. H. Schmidt, “דָּבָר *dābār*; דְּבַר *dābhār*,” TDOT 3:119–25.

<sup>612</sup> Corley, “Creation and Cosmos in Greek Sirach 18:1–10,” 227–29; Caldich-Benages, “Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15),” 195–96. See also John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 85; Collins, “Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach,” 105.

<sup>613</sup> Johann Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira*, BBB 37 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1971), 52.

<sup>614</sup> Jack N. Lawson, “Mesopotamian Precursors to the Stoic Concept of Logos,” in *Mythology and Mythologies*, ed. Robert Whiting, Melammu Symposia 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 69–91.

<sup>615</sup> Mattila, “Ben Sira and the Stoics: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” 473–501.

cultural traditions with which he came into contact. Ursel Wicke-Reuter attempts a nuanced evaluation of the evidence, concluding that it is highly probable that Ben Sira had encountered the basic ideas of the Stoics.<sup>616</sup> Sharon Lea Mattila argues on historical and conceptual grounds that Ben Sira was influenced indirectly, that cultural interchange happened in a more local and mediated way, even when scribes like Ben Sira travelled.<sup>617</sup> Lawson demonstrates that some of the basic ideas of Stoicism can be seen in much older ancient Near Eastern texts, which suggests a much wider diffusion of some the basic motifs found in Stoic works.<sup>618</sup> Nevertheless, a full study on Ben Sira and the Stoics is in order.

Ben Sira and the texts of Israel did not exist within a vacuum, a truth to which both attest (see Sir 39:1). Therefore, one must ask to what extent these “foreign” traditions may have influenced the work of Ben Sira. Kwon has argued that Israelite scribes were influenced by foreign literatures, while keeping their own traditions distinct.<sup>619</sup> The three figures of Philo of Byblos, Berossus, and Manetho will provide examples of native priestly scholars translating their own cultural heritages into the thought-worlds of their Hellenistic occupiers. They may provide fruitful models for understanding Ben Sira’s position.

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<sup>616</sup> Wicke-Reuter, *Göttliche Providenz und menschliche Verantwortung bei Ben Sira und in der Frühen Stoa*.

<sup>617</sup> Sharon Lea Mattila, “Ben Sira and the Stoics: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 473–501.

<sup>618</sup> Lawson, “Mesopotamian Precursors to the Stoic Concept of Logos,” 69–91.

<sup>619</sup> Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality*, 151–83.

The first-century CE Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus preserves in *Against Apion* several accounts purportedly about the origins of the Jews, in which the dual accounts of the Egyptian priest Manetho from the third century BCE received no little attention (§75–90). Lucia Raspe demonstrates the complicated transmissional history of Exodus, the accounts of Manetho, the other authors cited by Josephus.<sup>620</sup> She claims that Manetho is innocent of Exodus, and similarities, which would be exploited by later Egyptian tradents, are owed to common literary motifs.<sup>621</sup> Later authors, like Chaeremon, Lysimachus, and Apion, took up Manetho's mantle, adding other material, to make the tradition more antisemitic.<sup>622</sup> This editorializing was motivated by their liminal position between the native people and their foreign overlords, whom the Egyptian priesthood(s) helped legitimize, in return for their own legitimation.<sup>623</sup> A mythological and literary motif, originally aimed at foreign invaders, was repurposed to target the Jews, once the native authors could no longer take aim at the original target.<sup>624</sup>

The work of Philo of Byblos, a Euhemerist Greek writer from the late first century to early second century CE, mainly survives in the later work of the Christian theologian and historian Eusebius, but other fragments survive in other sources, including

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<sup>620</sup> Lucia Raspe, "Manetho on the Exodus: A Reappraisal," *JSQ* 5 (1998): 124–55.

<sup>621</sup> Raspe, "Manetho on the Exodus: A Reappraisal," 148–49.

<sup>622</sup> Raspe, "Manetho on the Exodus: A Reappraisal," 151.

<sup>623</sup> John Dillery, "The First Egyptian Narrative History: Manetho and Greek Historiography," *ZPE* 127 (1999): 93–116

<sup>624</sup> Raspe, "Manetho on the Exodus: A Reappraisal," 155.

Porphyry.<sup>625</sup> While there are several parallels between the biblical tradition and the Phoenician one reported by Philo via Eusebius, this is not the primary importance of the text here.<sup>626</sup> Instead, the case of Philo is instructive concerning the transmission of traditions. Philo's purported source is the Phoenician Sanchuniathon from the late second millennium BCE, whose own work is said to preserve diverse traditions even more ancient, though this claim, which has some textual merit, should be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>627</sup> Perhaps ironically, Philo seems to lament the "distortion" of the tradition by the later thinkers Thabion and Eisirios.<sup>628</sup> Though the authenticity of Philo's work has been historically doubted—primarily due to the similarity between the Phoenician creation account which he purportedly translated and the much newer *Theogony* by Hesiod—his stock has risen more recently.<sup>629</sup> James Barr concludes that Philo's work seems to contain both original myths of early Phoenicia, obscured at times by later Hellenistic syncretism.<sup>630</sup> This conclusion is generally shared by Jordi Cors i Meya.<sup>631</sup> While the work of Philo provides an instance of a native text being translated

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<sup>625</sup> James Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," *BJRL* 57 (1974): 17–68.

<sup>626</sup> Guy Darshan, "*Ruah 'Elohim* in Genesis 1:2 in Light of Phoenician Cosmogonies: A Tradition's History," *JNSL* 45/2 (2019): 51–78. See also Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," 59–60.

<sup>627</sup> Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," 36–38.

<sup>628</sup> Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," 29. See also page 45.

<sup>629</sup> Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," 18–21.

<sup>630</sup> Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History'," 61.

<sup>631</sup> Jordi Cors i Meya, "Traces of the Ancient Origin of Some Mythic Components in Philo of Byblos' Phoenician History," *AuOr* 17–18 (2000): 341–18.

for an occupier, the Phoenicians also took the worship of their god Ba'al all over the Mediterranean, as evidenced by the 'Kothon' at Motya, a Phoenician sacred pool dedicated to the god and active between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>632</sup>

*Babyloniaca*, the work of Berossus, a Babylonian priest living in the third century BCE, is no longer independently extant but survives in substantial fragments in the works of others, including Eusebius, possibly by means of Alexander Polymath. Paul-Alain Beaulieu argues that it is difficult to extricate the original Babylonian content from the layer of Hellenistic accommodation.<sup>633</sup> One of the complicating factors is the formal similarity between a number of Babylonian and Hellenistic elements. Nevertheless, Beaulieu concludes that Berossus uses as sources authentic Babylonian textual and oral traditions, including the *Enuma elish*.<sup>634</sup> Berossus himself occupied a liminal space between the Hellenistic occupiers and the native Babylonian occupied, and he therefore acted as a cultural bridge, moving literary and mythological content from one cultural idiom to another.

The three figures of Philo of Byblos, Berossus, and Manetho may provide models for understanding Ben Sira's cultural position with regards to his own received tradition

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<sup>632</sup> For the archaeological report, see Lorenzo Nigro, *The So-Called "Kothon" at Motya: The Sacred Pool of Baal 'Addir/ Poseidon in the Light of Recent Archaeological Investigations by Rome "La Sapienza" University, 2005–2013, Stratigraphy, Architecture and Finds* (Rome: Missione archeologica a Mozia, 2014).

<sup>633</sup> Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Berossus and the Creation Story," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 8 (2021): 147–70.

<sup>634</sup> Beaulieu, "Berossus and the Creation Story," 152.

and his Hellenistic context. It may partially explain Ben Sira's relationship to Stoic and other common Mediterranean and ancient Near Eastern traditions.

#### *7.4.4 - Intratextuality and Structure*

Especially in chapter 6, it was observed that Sir 42:15–43:33 was in dialogue with different parts of Sirach. It was also demonstrated earlier in this chapter the Ben Sira's doctrine of balance, which was presented multiple times throughout the work, reaches its apex formulation in the Hymn to the Creator. Therefore, it may be instructive to look at all of the intratextual resonances within the book. Topics include the topic of humility in Sir 1:6, Sir 3:23, and Sir 43:28–33 and the relationship between wisdom and piety.<sup>635</sup>

That Ben Sira often lays down then picks back up certain topics may help to illuminate the structure of the book. It would also be instructive to see what, if any, the effect of the actualization of the storm-god, combat myth, and divine speech registers in Sir 42:15–43:33 has on the rest of the book. Furthermore, since the Hymn to the Creator appears just before the Praise of the Famous, it may be fruitful to investigate how the book, with the insights of this study, drives towards these last two sections, especially in light of ongoing discussion.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> Reiterer, "The Theological and Philosophical Concepts of Ben Sira," 291. On the link between wisdom and piety in Sirach 1, see Alexander A. Di Lella, "Fear of the Lord as Wisdom; Ben Sira 1,11–30." in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28–31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. Pacratius C. Beentjes, BZAW 255 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 113–33. On humility, see Bradley C. Gregory, "Exemplars of Humility and the Discourse of Authority in Second Temple Judaism: A Comparison of Sirach and the Community Rule," in *Figures Who Shape Scriptures, Scriptures That Shape Figures: Essays in Honour of Benjamin G. Wright III*, DCLS, ed. Greg Schmidt Goering and Géza G. Xeravits (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 151–63.

<sup>636</sup> Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*; Marböck, "Structure and Redaction History of the Book of Ben Sira," 61–79; Pacratius C. Beentjes, "Ben Sira 44:19–23—The Patriarchs: Text, Tradition,

It may also be fruitful to look into the structural use of scripture in Sir 42:15–43:33. Beentjes investigates the structural use of Scripture, but he does not treat Sir 42:15–43:33.<sup>637</sup> It would be worth investigating the similarities in structure between the Hymn to the Creator and 1 En. 147:12–20, Isa 42:10–16, Ps 135:1–12, and Ps 147:12–20.

#### *7.4.5 - Comparing Ben Sira's Reception with Other Receptions*

Following MacDonald's criteria for analogy between the reception of a single text in multiple authors, it would perhaps be instructive to see how the same texts that I have argued contributed to Ben Sira's registers show up in other texts. For instance, Steven Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken have together edited volumes on Genesis, the Psalms, and Isaiah in the New Testament.<sup>638</sup> Wisdom 8 bears a striking similarity to both Sir 39 and the books of Proverbs. It may be instructive to see how rough contemporaries interpret the same texts that Ben Sira has received. (See also comments above on Job and theodicy.) Such a study could investigate the use of the same registers here in other authors.

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Theology," in *"With All Your Soul Fear the Lord" (Sir. 7:27): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira II*, CBET 87 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 69–88.

<sup>637</sup> Beentjes, "Structural Use of Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira," 57–78.

<sup>638</sup> Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, *Genesis in the New Testament*, LNTS 466 (London: T&T Clark, 2012); *Isaiah in the New Testament*, The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel (London: T&T Clark, 2005); *The Psalms in the New Testament*, The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel (London: T&T Clark, 2004). See also Jeremy D. Lyon, *The Genesis Creation Account in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019).

#### 7.4.6 - Ben Sira and Apocalypticism

The conclusions drawn from this study may also be applicable to ongoing scholarly dialogue surrounding Ben Sira and apocalypticism.<sup>639</sup> Despite the attention the topic has received, a definitive study which produces consensus has yet to be achieved. Wright argues that Ben Sira blurs the lines between traditional categories such as sage and prophet by portraying himself as a conduit of inspired teaching.<sup>640</sup> Wright suggests that this insight may have some effect on the way Ben Sira's relationship to apocalypticism should be understood.<sup>641</sup> Ben Sira rejects the validity of revelatory dreams (Sir 34:1–8) and esoteric knowledge (Sir 3:21–24), two hallmarks of apocalypticism.<sup>642</sup> He also does accept both divine intervention and an eternal view of creation, ideas which seems somewhat difficult to reconcile. According to Benjamin Wright, Sirach, 1 Enoch, and Aramaic Levi represent Judaisms, "who know about each other, who don't really like each other, and who actively polemicize against each other although not necessarily directly."<sup>643</sup> Bilha Nitzen writes of an interpretation of Genesis

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<sup>639</sup> Jean-Sébastien Rey, "Knowledge Hidden and Revealed: Ben Sira between Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature," *HBAI* 5 (2016): 255–72; Anssi Voitila, "Is Ben Sira Opposing Apocalyptic Teaching in Sir 3, 21–24?" *ZAW* 122 (2010): 234–48.

<sup>640</sup> Benjamin Wright III, "Conflicted Boundaries: Ben Sira, Sage and Seer," in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 229–53.

<sup>641</sup> Benjamin G. Wright, III, "Ben Sira and the Book of the Watchers on the Legitimate Priesthood" in *Intertextual studies in Ben Sira and Tobit: Essays in honor of Alexander A Di Lella, O.F.M.* ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent T. M. Skemp (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 241–54.

<sup>642</sup> See Lewis J. Prockter, "Torah as a Fence against Apocalyptic Speculation: Ben Sira 3:17–24," in *Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Bible and its World*, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 245–52.

<sup>643</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III, "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions Concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed.



in the *Book of Jubilees* 6.32–38 and 1 En. 72–82 as part of a controversy concerning calendrical matters during the Second Temple period.<sup>644</sup> James L. Kugel recognizes that Sir 43:7 seems to be interacting with Exod 12:2 concerning calendrical issues.<sup>645</sup> The Hebrew manuscripts of Sirach are witness to this controversy, as the Masada Scroll claims that only the moon is responsible for the times and seasons, whereas in MS B the sun shares in that responsibility. Gabriele Boccaccini argued that Enochic Judaism split from the mainstream Judaism which focused on the Temple cultus and Mosaic Torah in the last part of the second century BCE.<sup>646</sup> This may be so, but dissatisfaction with the Second Temple and those running it is a tree with deeper roots. Mulder sees Sir 42:15–25 as a polemic against the apocalyptic perspective.<sup>647</sup> Caldich-Benages, however, simply sees Ben Sira's presentation as mutually exclusive with apocalypticism, but not

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Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills, *SBLSymS*, 35 (Atlanta: SBL Press), 89–112. Quotation from page 108.

<sup>644</sup> Bilha Nitzan, "The Idea of Creation and Its Implications in Qumran Literature," *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London, Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 242.

<sup>645</sup> James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 567.

<sup>646</sup> Gabrielle Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). See also Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The Pentateuch and Biblical Interpretation in the Enoch Literature from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE". See also Boccaccini, "Where Does Ben Sira Belong? The Canon, Literary Genre, Intellectual Movement and Social Group of a Zadokite Document," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 21–41.

<sup>647</sup> Mulder, "A Theology of the Creator and His Creation in Sir 42:15–25," 220.

necessarily polemical.<sup>648</sup> Bentjes and Corley have also written on the topic.<sup>649</sup> The concluding presentation of Ben Sira's doctrine of balance and divine retribution may contribute to the conversation on his relationship with apocalypticism.

#### *7.4.7 - The Reception of Sir 42:15–43:33*

Since scribes often harmonized textual traditions, it would be interesting to see how later tradents, such as the those whose work is seen in MS B or in the other language traditions, modified Sirach in ways that indicated that they were thinking intertextually. This task would be bi-focal, looking at both the ways translators transmitted the tradition into a different cultural idiom that may or may not have employed similar literary motifs in comparable ways.<sup>650</sup> It would also compare the translations of Ben Sira with any intertextual resonances with biblical texts in the same language.

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<sup>648</sup> Núria Calduch-Benages, "The Hymn to the Creation (Sir 42:14–43:33): A Polemic Text?" in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, DCLS 1, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 119–38.

<sup>649</sup> Pancratius C. Beentjes, "What about Apocalypticism in the Book of Ben Sira?" in *"With All Your Soul Fear the Lord" (Sir. 7:27): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira II*, CBET 87 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 159–74; "The 'Praise of the Famous' and its Prologue: Some Observations on Ben Sira 44:1–15 and the Question on Enoch in 44:16," *Bijdr* 45 (1984): 374–83; Jeremy Corley, "Wisdom Versus Apocalyptic and Science in Sirach 1,1–10," in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*, ed. Florentino García Martínez (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 269–85.

<sup>650</sup> Wright, *No Small Difference*; Milward Douglas Nelson, *The Syriac Version of the Wisdom of Ben Sira Compared to the Greek and Hebrew Materials*, SBLDS 107 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

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