

Garegin Hambardzumyan

**The Book of Sirach in the Armenian Biblical Tradition**

# **Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies**



Edited by

Friedrich V. Reiterer, Beate Ego and Tobias Nicklas

## **Volume 33**

Garegin Hambardzumyan

# **The Book of Sirach in the Armenian Biblical Tradition**

---

Yakob Nalean and His Commentary on Sirach

**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-3-11-043163-6  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-042896-4  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-042905-3  
ISSN 1865-1666

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2016 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston  
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck  
♻️ Printed on acid-free paper  
Printed in Germany

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

## Acknowledgments

Learning that a renowned publishing house such as Walter de Gruyter is willing to publish my PhD dissertation within Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Series was a great delight not only for me but also for my three-years-shut-down-less laptop which eternally fell asleep after giving up to contain the amount of material that it had to, while I was doing my research. I would like to express my deep gratitude to de Gruyter and to Prof. Friedrich Reiterer personally, for their kind consideration to include the current work into the DCLS.

As Ben Sira himself would have put it, 'Let us now sing the praises of famous men'. These are those people to whom I offer my appreciation and respect for all the support shown to me in the past three years of my studies as a doctoral student.

My first words of gratitude go to my two supervisors: Dr. Mark Finney and Rt. Rev. Dr. Vahan Hovhannessian for their continued support throughout my research. It has been an honour to work with Dr. Finney whose constant encouragement and wise guidance made the entire process of my research a great experience of exploration of new horizons in the field of biblical studies. Bp. Vahan Hovhannessian, my second supervisor, has been a tremendous mentor for me throughout the past three years. He opened up to me an entire spectrum of opportunities which will help me to be actively involved in academia for the visible future of my life.

I also thank Robert Thomson, Alison Salvesen and John Barton at the University of Oxford as well as Allan Lowe (Leeds), Claude Cox (Canada), Michael Stone (Jerusalem) and Alexander Di Lella (USA) for their wise advice and helpful comments on various parts and aspects of my thesis.

My sincere thanks to the members of the College of the Resurrection in Mirfield and St. Stephen's House in Oxford for their warm hospitality and care shown to me while writing my dissertation. Especially, I am indebted to Fr. Peter Allan, the Principal of CoR, and Canon Robin Ward, the Principal of SSH, for their personal kindness and help. I am also extremely grateful to Fr. Nicolas Stebbing CR for a much helpful course of Greek which I eventually did for credit at the University of Sheffield and to Deborah Rooke for a year-long course of Hebrew at Oxford. I thank Theo van Lint, Chair of Armenian Studies at Oxford, Dr. Christine Gore, Principal of the Yorkshire Ministry Course, and many others for the opportunities given to me to lecture on the subjects of my interest. In addition, I thank Rev'd Katherine Price for her continuous support and Mrs. Alison Bygrave in the Department office for her help and advice as well as the librarians at Oxford Bodleian libraries and Sheffield Western Bank library.

I would also like to express my gratitude for their love and support, to the members of both the parishes of Holy Trinity, Manchester and St. Yeghiche, London, where I have been serving as a visiting pastor all this time.

Finally, my wholehearted thanks to my family and the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin to which I belong, for their prayers and love.

# Contents

## Abbreviations — IX

### 1 Introduction — 1

- 1.1 General Introduction — 1
- 1.2 General Plan of the Research — 5
- 1.3 Review of Existing Secondary Literature — 6
- 1.4 The Name of the Author and the Date of the Book of Sirach — 12
- 1.5 Sirach and Hellenism — 16

### 2 The Armenian Version of Sirach — 19

- 2.1 The Translation of the Book of Sirach and its Inclusion in the Canon of the Armenian Bible (*The Earliest Translations of the Bible into Armenian*) — 19
- 2.2 Dating the First Translation of the Book of Sirach — 22
- 2.3 References from the Book of Sirach in Medieval Armenian and Translated Literature — 31
- 2.4 Textual Sources of the Armenian Translation of Sirach — 58
  - 2.4.1 Hebrew Version of Sirach — 59
  - 2.4.2 Syriac Version of Sirach — 62
  - 2.4.3 Greek Version of Sirach — 65
- 2.5 List of all the Extant Armenian Manuscripts, Complete and in Fragments, which Contain Sirach — 68
- 2.6 Printed Editions of the Armenian Bible — 72
- 2.7 The Newly Found Chapters of Sirach in Jerusalem and Yerevan — 77
- 2.8 Misplaced Chapters — 79
- 2.9 Four Unique Passages Which Are Found Only in the Armenian Translation — 82
- 2.10 A Comparative Chart of the Extant Armenian Texts of Sirach — 88

### 3 Yakob Nalean's commentary on Sirach — 127

- 3.1 Yakob Nalean — 127
- 3.2 A Historical Glance on Armenia and the Armenian Communities Abroad Which Shaped the Theology of Nalyan's Commentary — 130
- 3.3 Nalean in Literature and His Commentary — 143
- 3.4 The Twelve MSS of Nalean's Commentary — 144
- 3.5 Nalean's Theological Views and Hermeneutical Methods — 147
- 3.6 One-Line Commentary by Nalean — 152

**4 The Main themes of Sirach discussed by Yacob Nalean — 160**

- 4.1 Wisdom, Fear of God, the Law and Happiness — **160**
- 4.2 The Vocation of the Sages and Scribes — **172**
- 4.3 Creation, Free Will and Sin — **177**
- 4.4 God — **182**
- 4.5 Retribution — **185**
- 4.6 Prayer, Worship — **188**
- 4.7 Social Justice — **192**
- 4.8 Attitude towards Women — **197**

**5 Conclusions — 202**

**Bibliography — 211**

Manuscripts — **211**

Volumes and Entries — **211**

**Index of names — 223**

**Subject index — 225**



# Abbreviations

Arm.	Armenian
Bag.	Bagratowni Edition of the Armenian Bible (1860)
Eth.	Ethiopic Bible
Gr.	Greek
HB	Hebrew Bible
Heb.	Hebrew
Jer.	MS N. 2558 of Jerusalem, St. James' Monastery
Jer.SJ	St. James' Depository in Jerusalem
LXX	Septuagint
M	Masoretic texts
MM.	Mesrop Maštoc' Matenadaran in Yerevan
MS	Manuscript
MS B	Cairo Genizah MS B
MSS	Manuscripts
NJ.	The Armenian MS Depository of New Julfa
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the English Bible
NT	New Testament
Os.	Oskan Erewanc'i's edition of the Armenian Bible (1666)
OT	Old Testament
Pl.	Plural
Sg.	Singular
Syr.	Syriac
VeM	Mechitarist Armenian Monastery in Venice
ViM	Mechitarist Armenian Monastery in Vienna
Vul.	Vulgate
Yer.	MS N. 5608 of Mesrop Maštoc' Matenadaran
Zôh.	Zôhrapcan Edition of the Armenian Bible (1805)



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 General Introduction

There has been growing interest in the Book of the Wisdom of Sirach over recent decades. Scholars have been particularly attracted to this book because of its almost encyclopedic coverage of a wide variety of topics, moral, theological and historical. Since the famous discovery of the Geniza MSS at the Qaraite Synagogue in Cairo, as well as the subsequent discoveries at Qumran and Masada, the book of Sirach has received significantly increased scholarly attention. Before these findings, the Hebrew text of Sirach had been considered extinct and only a few verses from the entire book were preserved in Hebrew Rabbinic literature. No serious textual analysis had been produced on any of the translations of Sirach prior to these new discoveries.

Straight after the new MSS were excavated, they were identified as copies of the original Hebrew text, that is, they were free from any direct dependence on Syriac or Greek texts.<sup>1</sup> Solomon Schechter was the first scholar to identify the Geniza MSS and to publish them in 1899.<sup>2</sup> Currently, about sixty-eight percent of the Hebrew text has been recovered and exposed to broader scholarship. The latest edition, comprising all of the extant Hebrew fragments, as well as a synopsis of all parallel Hebrew texts of Sirach, was published by Pancratius Beentjes in 2006.<sup>3</sup>

The role of Sirach as a part of the Writings (kəṭûvîm) of the OT has been a matter of dispute throughout the centuries and its use both in Rabbinic literature and in the Christian patristic tradition has given rise to a whole spectrum of arguments from later scholars.<sup>4</sup> A fair proportion of these disputes have been with respect to the place of Sirach in the OT.

This is also true in the case of the Armenian text of Sirach. The status of this book within the canon of the Armenian Bible has never been clearly defined ei-

---

1 A. Di Lella, *The Hebrew Text of Sirach: A Text-Critical And Historical Study* (London: Mountain & Co., 1966), pp. 15–9.

2 S. Schechter, C. Tylor, *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: University Press, 1899).

3 P. C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). The book was reprinted in Atlanta in 2006.

4 G. Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 190–4; 228–9.

ther by the ecclesiastical councils of the Armenian Church or by individual authors when referring to ancient canon lists. Furthermore, the Armenian translation of Sirach has not received sufficient attention from Armenian or Western scholars. Based on just a brief glance at the indexes of some major works in the field, it can be seen that the Armenian Sirach is yet to be thoroughly examined. Some Western scholars have even tended to dismiss the Armenian version of Sirach as a text of ‘secondary’ importance<sup>5</sup>, and have thus neglected to carry out any further textual investigation – a decision doubtless influenced by their lack of familiarity with the Armenian language. This has not been the universal response, however. Some others have carried out research, perceiving the valuable role of the Armenian translation as a textual witness to both Greek and Syriac texts.<sup>6</sup>

As the first research to be undertaken in the field of Armenian translation of Sirach, this study sets out to achieve not one but several goals. Firstly, research has been carried out into the place of Sirach within the Armenian biblical tradition, assessing the textual value of the Armenian version. In this area, this thesis seeks to advance the state of knowledge by demonstrating that Sirach was translated not in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as proposed by several scholars<sup>7</sup> but not later than the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. An exhaustive chart has been compiled to support this argument, containing a textual comparison of some key chapters of the Grabar text (Classical Armenian) with other translations, as well as references to Sirach which appear in medieval Armenian and translated literature.

The two sources of the Armenian text of Sirach, Syriac and Greek, have been studied far more than the Armenian itself. The Syriac Peshitta was used in the preparation of the first Armenian translation in around 406 C.E., which is known as the ‘P’owt’anaki’ (lit. hurried) version. Indeed, it was soon agreed by the Armenian translators of the ‘Golden Age’<sup>8</sup> to produce a new recension in combination with Greek text.

The first one, which was done partly from the Syriac and partly from the Greek texts, was produced in the period between 405–6 AD, when Armenians created the alphabet, and the Council of Ephesus (431 AD). The second translation was a revision of the previous one with

---

5 P. W. Skehan, A. A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (USA: Yale University 2010), p. 38.

6 H. Wace, *The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary and A Revision of the Translation by Clergy of the Anglican Church: Apocrypha* (London: John Murray, 1888), p. 194.

7 Մովսէս, Սիրաքայ հին թարգմանութիւնները, [Covakan, ‘Sirak’ay hin hay t’argmanowtiwnnera’] [The Old Armenian Translations of Sirach] in *Sion* (Jerusalem, 1936), p. 150–3.]

8 Because of the fruitful work carried out by Sts. Mesrop and Sahak together with their disciples the 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. is reputed among Armenians as the ‘Golden Age’ of Armenian culture.

amendments from the new Greek text brought from Byzantium straight after the Council of Ephesus.<sup>9</sup>

It is known that the first Syriac translation was made from the Hebrew original. However, in the case of the translation of Sirach, it had additionally been influenced by Greek.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is difficult to determine clearly which parts were transmitted directly from Syriac into Armenian with no allusions to Greek. However, it is evident from an examination of the chapters of the Zôhrapean edition of the Bible, published in 1805,<sup>11</sup> that on many occasions it follows the Syriac order of the chapters as well as the brevity of verses, which is characteristic of the Syriac text.<sup>12</sup> Also, in a few instances the Armenian text has a cross sign (+) which combines two or more bicola into one verse. This is not typical for the Greek text of Sirach but occurs frequently in Syriac.<sup>13</sup> Thus, this is another testimony that some of the Syriac influence is still preserved in the Armenian text. However, as stated above, the fusion of Syriac and Greek within the Armenian text is so strong that the surviving Syriac elements are almost unidentifiable.

The Greek version of Sirach has come down to us in two major recensions generally known as GI and GII. The latter is not preserved in a separate MS, however it can be reconstructed from Joseph Ziegler's groups of origenic and lucianic MSS.<sup>14</sup> Ziegler in his extremely valuable edition not only identifies the sources of extant Greek texts of Sirach but also indicates which textual witness belongs to which group.<sup>15</sup> According to him, the Armenian text, together with the Old Latin and Syro-Hexaplaric texts, belong to what he classifies the origenic group, though in some instances with influences from the lucianic recension.

Another contribution of this thesis is the creation of a list cataloguing all the extant Armenian biblical MSS in the world which contain either complete or fragmentary passages from Sirach. This list will be a valuable tool for future re-

9 Շ. Անասյան, Հայկական մատենագիտություն [H. Anasyan, *Haykakan Matenagitowhyown*, [Armenian Bibliography] Vol. 2 (Yerevan, 1976), p. 308].

10 M. D. Nelson, *The Syriac Version of The Wisdom of Ben Sira Compared to the Greek and Hebrew Materials* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 19.

11 Աստուածաշունչ մատենան Հին և Նոր կտակարանաց [Astowacašownč' matean Hin ew Nor ktakaranac' Vol. 1 [Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments] (ed. Y. Zôhrapean, Venice, 1805). The edition is discussed in detail under the title 'Printed Editions of the Armenian Bible'].

12 A few examples of the Syriac influence are presented in the Comparative Chart of the extant Armenian texts of Sirach in the first section of this thesis.

13 J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Jesu Filii Sirach* (Göttingen, 1965), p. 36.

14 B. Wright, *No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to its Hebrew Parent Text* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 4–5.

15 J. Ziegler, 'Sapientia', pp. 58–69. Cf. B. Wright, 'No Small Difference', pp. 4–5; 264.

searchers, and could be used for instance as a platform for making a much needed critical edition of the Armenian text of Sirach. It may also help to determine the setting in which this piece of wisdom literature was used in Armenia and its role within Armenian biblical literature.

In the second part of this thesis, the focus of research turns to the only Armenian commentary on Sirach, which was written by Yakob Nalean in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> This commentary has suffered unjust neglect from scholars and has never been published. Although Gevorg Bambowkč'ean<sup>17</sup> and Tigran Sawalaneanc'<sup>18</sup> have written on Nalean's commentary, both these scholars have treated it somewhat as an addition to the commentary on the Book of Lamentations by St. Grigor Narekac'i. They present it as having a more empirical approach in contrast to the mystical and broadly allegorical commentary on the Book of Lamentations.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, this thesis seeks to uncover the unique contribution of Nalean's commentary to the Armenian scholarship of Sirach. The text of the Commentary is preserved only in twelve MSS scattered over the world and they are examined for the first time in this work.

The primary reason for including Nalean's work in this research is its importance as the only Armenian commentary on this biblical book and also the first Armenian *kerygmatic* (homiletic) commentary since medieval times.

Nalean's work is also valuable for its all-encompassing character in terms of the scope of the subjects commented on. In this regard, there are many similarities between Sirach itself and Nalean's commentary, in that they both set out to teach their readers how to conduct a righteous life which is shaped by wisdom and which has happiness as the final destination of one's life: 'Happy is the one who meditates on wisdom'.<sup>20</sup> Within his substantial work, Nalean not only gives profound explanations of all the verses of Sirach, but also responds to the polit-

---

**16** There is a MS containing an Armenian translation of Cornelios A'Lapida's commentary on Sirach produced by Kapowtik Vardapet in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: cf. M. M. Matenadaran, N. 2055. This commentary has not been consulted in the current research as it does not represent the Armenian schools of interpretation.

**17** Գ. Բամբուկճեան, Յակոբ Պատրիարք Նալեան. 1706–1764, Կեանքը, գործերը եւ աշխատանքները [G. Bambowkč'ean, *Yakob Patriarch Nalean: 1706–1764, Keankə, gorcərə ew ašxatanknerə* [Patriarch Yakob Nalean: 1706–1764, His life works and deeds] (Istanbul, 1981), p. 43].

**18** Թ. Սաալանեանց, Պատմութիւն Երուսաղեմի [T. Sawalaneanc', *Patmowt'wn Erow-salemi*, [The History of Jerusalem] Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1931), pp. 750–9].

**19** Գ. Բամբուկճեան, Յակոբ Պատրիարք Նալեան [G. Bambowkč'ean, *'Yakob Patriarch Nalean'*, 43.

**20** Sir. 14:20].

ical and social situation of his time. He was influenced by Armenian national motives, and his commentary is conditioned by the context in 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century Armenia as well as in the Armenian communities abroad. An interesting example is the short poem called ‘Մեծացի՛ր’ (Grow up!), which Nalean brings into his commentary when commenting on Sir. 10:15, ‘The Lord plucks up the roots of the nations, and plants the humble in their place’.<sup>21</sup>

Nalean’s use of Sirach attests, first, to his fascination with this great book of wisdom, and second, to the great importance given to the latter by Armenian teachers of the Church.

## 1.2 General Plan of the Research

The *first* part of the **introduction** is a summary of the issues and arguments addressed in the thesis. It clarifies the major objectives upon which the whole work is based. The literature survey included in this passage helps to grasp the current state of the scholarship of the Armenian Sirach both in Armenia and around the world. The chapter also contains an observation on Yakob Nalean’s unique commentary presented in detail in the final chapter of this thesis. A treatment of some concerns regarding the date and authorship as well as major literary influences of Sirach can be found in the *second* part of the introduction.

In the **second chapter** of the research I present a background study of the Armenian text of Sirach which forms a basis for further discussions. This is followed by one of the two main sections of the thesis. After discussing the date of the original text of Sirach and its first Greek translation in the introduction I confine my study to the Armenian translation, its date and the sources of Armenian texts of Sirach. A large quantity of patristic references to Sirach in Classical Armenian, which supports an early date for the translation, has been engaged for the first time.

Within this chapter all sources of the Armenian text of Sirach are examined: Hebrew as a parent text of all translations and respectively Syriac and Greek as first and second sources.

The *second* part of this chapter is comprised of a list of all the extant Armenian MSS of Sirach. From research in the catalogues, as well as personal investigations in a number of major libraries and MS depositories which are known to contain Biblical texts in Armenian, I have been able to combine all the data into

---

<sup>21</sup> The poem is discussed under the title ‘Social Justice’.

one list which makes it possible to find any MS containing Sirach, either as part of an entire Bible MSS or copied separately.

In the same part of the chapter a thorough examination is undertaken of the major printed versions of the Armenian Sirach and the texts of the recently discovered Jerusalem and Yerevan MSS. This passage also introduces the four passages or verses which are found nowhere else but in the Armenian text of Sirach. The character and style of these verses have a lot to say about the role of Sirach in medieval Armenia, which inevitably and in a vivid way influenced the commentary of Nalean on Sirach.

The closing section of the second chapter presents a chart where selected chapters of the Armenian text of Sirach have been subjected to a detailed analysis in comparison with the parent texts as well as the English translation of NRSV. The principles directing the selection of chapters as well as the methods of examination are discussed before the chart.

The **third chapter** focuses on the only Armenian commentary on Sirach, which was written by Yakob Nalean. The *first* half of the chapter is an outline of Nalean's biography. A general overview is given of the socio-political, cultural and religious context, referring both to the situation in Armenia and also the Armenian communities outside Armenia, which shaped the theology of Nalean and especially his approaches as reflected in his Commentary.

More observation of Nalean's theological as well as hermeneutical views is given in the *second* part of this chapter together with a brief description of the only known extant MSS of the Commentary. The one-line interpretation of each chapter which is an abbreviation of the whole commentary is also included in this chapter.

The **fourth chapter** focuses on some major theological themes of Sirach which are treated in light of Nalean's commentary as well as some non-Armenian primary sources.

In the chapter **Conclusions** I summarise the outcomes of this research and its contribution to the scholarship of the field.

### 1.3 Review of Existing Secondary Literature

Unfortunately the academic boost caused by the discoveries of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did not have a corresponding effect on the study of the Armenian translation of Sirach. Only a few articles were written on the subject by two Armenian authors, and a small number of foreign scholars have also touched upon this subject in passing.



As noted, the main issue regarding the Armenian text of Sirach has been its canonicity and the extent of its dependence on each of the two parent translations. Up until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was generally known that the Armenian Sirach terminates at chapter 42 with some verses from chapter 43 incorporated.<sup>22</sup> However, this supposed certainty was overturned when some fragments from chapters 42–46 were identified in Jerusalem in 1927 by Ehišê Dowrean in an undated MS.<sup>23</sup> In his article called ‘Noragiwt glowxner Sirakay grkin hin t'argmanowtenên’ (Newly Discovered chapters of the Old Translation of Sirach), Dowrean says, ‘We have no doubts that these chapters are a part of an old translation’. Nevertheless, Dowrean does not think that the chapters are the work of the first translators of the Armenian Bible,<sup>24</sup> relying on the evidence of a few Grabar<sup>25</sup> words which in his view do not resemble the linguistic style of the earliest translators.

The greatest discovery of the Armenian text of Sirach was that of 1966 in the Yerevan MSS depository. In the same year Gevorg Abgaryan published an article<sup>26</sup> in which he set forth new copies of the same chapters discovered by Dowrean and some additional portions of chapters 18–20 which were missing in all other extant MSS. This new MS was exempt from all those linguistic imperfections which occur in the Jerusalem MS. Unfortunately, Abgaryan does not comment on the date of the MS, restricting himself to stating that it is an ancient translation.

One would expect the two remarkable MSS of Jerusalem and Yerevan<sup>27</sup> to have dramatically changed the direction of scholarship and spark greater interest in the Armenian version of Sirach. However, the chapters still remain to be thoroughly examined. With this in mind, these chapters have been included in the

---

22 Cf. Գիրք Աստուածաշունչ Հին եւ Նոր Կտակարանաց, Ա. Բագրատունի [*Girk' Astowacašownč' Hin ew Nor Ktakaranac'* [Scripture of the Old and New Testaments] (ed. A. Bagratouni, Venice 1860); Աստուածաշունչ մատենան Հին եւ Նոր կտակարանաց, Յ. Զօհրապէան [*Astowacašownč' matean Hin ew Nor ktakaranac' Vol. 1* (ed. Y. Zôhrapean, Venice, 1805)].

23 Jer.SJ MS N. 2558, 1615, 369v-381r. The first part of it was copied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However the second part which also contains Sirach is still to be dated.

24 E. Dowrean, ‘Noragiwt glowxner Sirakay grkin hin t'argmanowtenên’ [Newly Discovered chapters of the Old Translation of Sirach] in *Sion* (Jerusalem, 1927), pp. 246–50.

25 The word ‘Grabar’ will sometimes be used in this work instead of ‘Classical Armenian’.

26 Գ. Աբգարյան, Միրաքի գրքի հնագույն թարգմանության նարահայտ հատվածներ [G. Abgaryan, ‘Sirak'i grk'i hnagowyn t'argmanowt'yan norahayt hatvacner’ [The Newly Found Passages of the Oldest Translation of Sirach] in *Etchmiadzin No. 11–12*, (Etchmiadzin, 1966), pp. 60–70].

27 MM. MS N. 5608, 1363, pp. 102r-147v

comparative chart presented in the current thesis. The examination of these chapters is of particular significance as it proves our hypothesis that one or more Armenian translations of Sirach were produced during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It also explicitly demonstrates that at least one of these versions had more than the 42 or 43 chapters preserved in most Armenian MSS.

Michael Stone mentions three criteria for determining the weight allocated to the Armenian version of Biblical texts: the accuracy of the translation, the age of the translation and the state of the Greek text. However, as already mentioned, the Armenian biblical texts, in particular Sirach, have almost always been neglected and considered as ‘secondary’.<sup>28</sup> Alexander Di Lella, for example, in his book co-authored with Patrick Skehan, speaks about the textual witnesses of GII and mentions the Armenian translation, but does not give any information about the original source of the Armenian text, which is the Syriac Peshitta, and so the reader of his book gets the impression that the Greek text is the only source of the Armenian.<sup>29</sup> Di Lella also does not specify in his commentary which Armenian translations he is referring to. Nor does he specify, when he says that the Armenian translation is a textual witness of GII, whether the Zôhrapean or Bagratowni version is meant. However, it is well established that these two texts have a variety of sources which sometimes give different readings for certain verses or even entire passages. The Oskanean version is not considered by Di Lella (nor will it be considered here), by reason of its being almost literally translated from the Latin Vulgate. Western scholarship has not yet provided any detailed examination of the sources of the Armenian translation. Of course, a lack of knowledge of Armenian has always been one major reason why this research has been neglected in Western scholarship. Some scholars have sadly assumed certain things to be what they consider ‘generally known’, rather than undertaking their own deeper research.<sup>30</sup> Having said this, however, I must make honourable mention of the NRSV. In producing the translation of Sirach, the editors of this translation made use of the Armenian alongside other texts. An example of its use is the translation of verse 40:6 ‘He gets little or no rest; he struggles in his sleep as he did by day’. The NRSV Bible translators relied on the Armenian text of this verse in their translation, since the meaning of the Greek is uncertain.<sup>31</sup> The note in the NRSV edition merely confirms that the meaning of this verse is taken from the Armenian text and does not give a detailed explanation or the reason for using it. But if we examine particularly

---

<sup>28</sup> R. J. Coggins, *Sirach* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> W. Skehan, A. A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>30</sup> R. J. Coggins, *‘Sirach’*, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Sir. 40:6 in *NRSV Bible* [<http://biblia.com/books/nrsv/Sir40.6>], Revised 01.08.2012.

the second part of this verse, we can see the following. The Armenian text translates the words ἐνυπνίους (in sleep) and κοτίᾳ (to work hard) as երազովք and աշխատի, (և յայսմիեւտէ երազովք իբրև ի տուընջեան աշխատի) ‘and after that he toils with dreams as in the day’. The Syriac version does not give any nuances of the meaning and as Henry Wace says, the ‘day of watch or of watching’ are unintelligible expressions.<sup>32</sup> So the Armenian translation clarifies the meaning: that the period during which he rests is short, lasting a moment; during the rest of the time he is as hard at work as in the daytime, ‘Խուն մի իբրեւ զոյինչ ի հանգստեան, եւ յայսմիեւտէ երազովք իբրեւ ի տուընջեան աշխատի’ [Xown mi ibrew zoč’inč i hangstean, ew yaysmhetê erazovk ibrew i towənjēan ašxati] (He rests like nothing (very short) and afterwards dreaming (meaning in the night) he works as [hard] as in the daytime).

Addressing the general lack of familiarity with the Armenian translations amongst scholars, Michael Stone in his book ‘The Armenian Version of IV Ezra’ observes,

It is interesting to note that even Issaverdens’ English translation had virtually no impact on European scholarly circles concerned with the study of the apocryphal literature. Yovsē-peanc’s edition [a reprint of Zōhrapēan Bible] was mentioned by M.R. James, and he also announced Sarghissian’s (then) forthcoming study. Yet Box,<sup>33</sup> in his edition of 1912, does not show knowledge of Issaverdens’ English rendering, nor does Violet nor Gry. All these scholars depended for their knowledge of this version not on the learned fathers of Venice, but on the edition known in Europe since the days of A. Helgenfeld.<sup>34</sup>

Recent developments in the study of the Armenian Bible have heightened the need for a new edition. A new committee is set to produce a new edition of the Modern Armenian translation in Etchmiadzin. In this context it is of particular importance to bring together significant MSS and printed editions to establish the most authentic text of Sirach. The six MSS that Norayr Połarean has found in the Library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and which are mentioned by Michael Stone in one of his pamphlets<sup>35</sup>, will of course be of great use in this task. These MSS are: MS 410 (N. Połarean, *Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts, II*, Jerusalem, 1967, p. 348), *The Lives of the Fathers*, 1631 C.E. pp. 775; MS 501 (Połarean, ‘*Grand Catalogue*’), p. 496; Bible, 17<sup>th</sup> c.

32 H. Wace, ‘*The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*’, p. 194.

33 G. H. Box, *The Ezra Apocalypse* (London: Pitman, 1962).

34 M. Stone, *The Armenian Version of IV Ezra* (USA: Michigan, 1979), pp. 4–5. Cf. J. Issaverdens, *The Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament found in the Armenian MSS of the Library of St. Lazarus* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1934).

35 M. Stone, *The Apocryphal literature in the Armenian Tradition* (Jerusalem, 1969), p. 62.

Fol. 564r-572r; MS 711 Połarean, *Grand Catalogue of St. James' Manuscripts*, III, Jerusalem, 1968, p. 154; Bible, 1619 C.E. Fol. 96–110; MS 724 (Połarean, 'Grand Catalogue'), p. 187; Bible, 17<sup>th</sup> c. Foll. 119v-149r; MS 840 (Połarean, 'Grand Catalogue'), p. 323; Book of Sermons, 1609 C.E. Fol. 514r. All these MSS are listed in Shahé Ajemian's 'Grand Catalogue'.<sup>36</sup>

Stanislas Lyonnet, in his valuable 1950 monograph, discusses the Armenian version of Sirach and concludes that the extreme complexity of the text does not allow one to establish a single source for the Armenian translation. Referring to Heinrich Herkenne,<sup>37</sup> Lyonnet argues that the Zôhrapean text is not close to the Peshitta and is even further from the Latin.<sup>38</sup> At the same time Lyonnet does not single out the Greek text as the main source for Zôhrapean. The lack of the famous transposition of two passages Sir. 30:25–33:13a and 33:13b-36:16a in the latter is presented as evidence for this. Another significant theory originating with Lyonnet is his assertion of an Armenian origin for the Georgian translation of the Bible, based on the obscurity of Sirach 4:13 in both Armenian and Georgian.<sup>39</sup>

In Western scholarship, Joseph Ziegler has so far been the most prominent author to examine the Armenian translation with its sources alongside other translations of Sirach.<sup>40</sup> In his passage on the Armenian versions, in order to differentiate the Armenian texts of various revisions, he uses 'Arm 1' for the texts translated before 431 (Council of Ephesus) and 'Arm 2' translated after 431. This differentiation had been put forward by S. Lyonnet.<sup>41</sup> Ziegler also speaks about an 'Arm 3' version which refers to the chapters found in 1927 in Jerusalem by Elišê Dowrean.<sup>42</sup> He also refers to Oskan's edition without placing it among the three versions, presumably because Oskan's version was translated from the Vulgate and is almost identical with its Latin parent text. Discussing the influence of different sources on the Armenian translations, Ziegler does not an-

---

36 Շ. Աճեմյան, Ցուցակ Աստուածաշունչ Մատենանի հայերէն ձեռագիրներուն [S. Adjemian, *Cowčak Astowacašownč' Mateani Hayerên Jeřagimerown*] [Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts of the Bible] (Lisbon: C. Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992).

37 H. Herkenne, *De Veteris Latinae Ecclesiastici Capitabus I-XLIII* (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 28–33.

38 S. Lyonnet, *Les Origines de la Version arménienne et le Diatessaron* (Biblica et Orientalia 13; Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1950), p. 11.

39 S. Lyonnet, 'Les Origines', p. 149.

40 *Sapientia Jesu Filii Sirach*, (ed. J. Ziegler, Göttingen, 1965), pp. 33–35

41 Cf. S. Lyonnet, 'Les Origines', p. 10, c. E. Cox, 'The Armenian Translation of the Bible' in *Proceedings of the conference "Where the Only-Begotten Descended: The Church of Armenia Through the Ages"* convened at Ann Arbor, Apr. 1–4, 2004 (ed. K. Bardakjian) [unixware.mscc.huji.ac.il/~armenia/articles/ArmBib\_tr\_AnnArbor.docx], Revised 20.06.2013

42 E. Dowrean, 'Noragiwł glowxner Sirakay grkin hin țargmanowtenên' in *Sion* (Jerusalem, 1927), pp. 246–50.

swer the question: which was the original parent text of the Armenian version of Sirach? The existence in some chapters of the (+) sign which, as said, combines two or even three bicola under one verse makes Ziegler think that Arm 1 used in many places not the Greek text but a totally different source. It could possibly be the Syriac because the (+) sign is characteristic for the Syriac and the Hebrew texts. If in some places Arm 1 resembles the Hebrew text it is not because of a direct dependence on the Hebrew but the influence of the Syriac parent text.<sup>43</sup> Other scholars, such as Di Lella and Stone, have generally used Ziegler's views as a source for certain details concerning the Armenian translation.

This study will show that the Hebrew text of Sirach itself was not a direct source of the Armenian translation. However, its value as a parent text must be taken into consideration when elaborating specifically on the Armenian witness to the Syriac text. In this regard, Zôhrapean's text as well as the study of the MSS that Zôhrapean used in preparing his edition can greatly benefit from using a comparison of Hebrew and Syriac.

It is difficult to come to a general conclusion regarding the textual sources of Sirach in Armenian as to which exact original text was used as a parent text. Claude Cox correctly points to this in the case of the whole Armenian translation of the Bible: 'Arm 1 and Arm 2 are not necessarily two distinct stages. There is a tendency to think of Arm 1 as Syriac-based and Arm 2 as a Greek-based revision of that earlier Syriac-based work of translation. But the textual situation is more complex than that'.<sup>44</sup> The correct order of the misplaced chapters in some ancient Armenian MSS proves that there was a version which was influenced by Syriac and not the Greek translation, which predates Codex 248.

One of the reasons why the Armenian translation has not yet been adequately examined in the West is that this version itself has numerous unresolved problems.<sup>45</sup> However, as in the case of Sir. 40:6, discussed above, even in this state some scholars regarded the Armenian text as an important witness and tool for solving some textual obscurities in meaning in the Greek text.

---

<sup>43</sup> J. Ziegler, *'Sapientia'*, p. 36. Cf. C. Cox, *Hexaplaric Materials Preserved in The Armenian Version* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> C. E. Cox, 'The Armenian Translation of the Bible' in *Proceedings of the conference "Where the Only-Begotten Descended: The Church of Armenia Through the Ages"* convened at Ann Arbor, Apr. 1–4, 2004 (ed. K. Bardakjian) [unixware.mscc.huji.ac.il/~armenia/articles/Arm-Bib\_tr\_AnnArbor.docx], Revised 20.06.2013

<sup>45</sup> The lack of the final eight chapters in the Armenian text as well as the many abbreviations and additions in Zôhrapean and Bagratowni texts and in single MSS are yet to be critically assessed.

The uncertainties regarding many issues show the urgent need for a critical edition of this book. This would entail referring to all extant MSS containing Sirach, dividing them according to the several families of MSS, and comparing them with the parent texts. Only after such an edition has been completed, will one be able to argue with certainty concerning textual and intertextual analysis of the Armenian Sirach, and only this kind of research can answer the question as to which families of the parent text the Armenian translation is a witness.

## 1.4 The Name of the Author and the Date of the Book of Sirach

The name of this book is preserved in a variety of versions depending on the language and the sources of translation (for secondary translations). The expanded Hebrew version of the name mentioned by the author himself in Sir. 50:27 is 'Yeshuah ben Eliazar ben Sira' (Yeshua son of Eliazar son of Sira). Some Hebrew MSS have a short version of this 'Hokma Ben Sira' (Wisdom of Ben Sira) or simply 'Ben Sira'. The Greek MSS have it as 'Sophia Iesou uiou Sirach' (Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach), or the short version: 'Sophia Sirach' (Wisdom of Sirach). The longer version is also used in the Septuagint. The Latin title differs significantly from that in Hebrew and Greek: 'Ecclesiasticus' which is translated as the 'Church Book'. The first use of this title is generally attributed to St. Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> c.), and presumably came about because of its frequent use in the churches for teaching purposes. Oesterley also mentions a second relatively less known name in Latin: 'Proverbs of Ben Sira', which, he assumes, derives from Jerome's preface to the Vulgate. Jerome speaks about a Hebrew copy of Sirach which had the title 'Parabolae', i.e. 'Proverbs [of Ben Sira]'.<sup>46</sup> The reason for calling the book 'Parabolae' could be the links between Sirach and the book of Proverbs. Richard Coggins speaks about St. Cyprian's *Testimonia ad Quirinum* 2.1 where the latter connects Prov. 8 with Sir. 24 in order to strengthen his argument that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God.<sup>47</sup> Also, the occasional attribution of Sirach to Solomon, which is found also in the Arm. MS 7 at the John Rylands library in Manchester, could be another reason behind this form of the name.

In all the extant Arm. MSS the name of the Book of Sirach appears in one of the following forms: 1. Girk' Sirak'ay, or koč'i/koč'ec'o Yesow (The Book of Sirach

---

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Oesterley, W. O. E., *An Introduction to the Books of Apocrypha* (London: S.P.C.K. 1935), p. 224.

<sup>47</sup> R. J. Coggins, 'Sirach', p. 15.

that is called Joshua), 2. Imastowt'iwn Yesoway Ordwoy Isak'aray (Wisdom of Joshua, the Son of Isakar), 3. Xrat Imastowt'ean mardkan i banic' Sirak'ay (Teaching of Wisdom for people from the words of Sirach), 4. Imastowt'iwn Sirak'ay Imastasiri' ar' hnazandean ordi (The Wisdom of Sirach the Wise addressed to an obedient son). As in the case of other translations, there are shorter versions for the title in Armenian as well. This is especially true for all the printed editions, which have either 'Imastowt'iwn Sirak'ay' (Wisdom of Sirach) or simply 'Sirak' (Sirach).

The issues related to the date of the book of Sirach have been discussed by most scholars who have ever written anything about the book. The dates proposed range from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to one century earlier, i.e. the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Reading the Prologue of Sirach written by the book's first translator, the grandson of the author, one might initially think that its date can be easily determined. But the ongoing controversies show that it is not as easy as it may look at the outset. In the Prologue, the translator states that he came to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of the king Euergetes and after spending sleepless nights he translated his grandfather's book from Hebrew into Greek. We also read in the 50<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book about the son of Onias or Johanan<sup>48</sup> Simon the High Priest. It is already known from the history of Israel that there was not one Euergetes but two: Euergetes I (Ptolemy III) and Euergetes II (Ptolemy VII) and there were two high priests with the name Simon or Simeon in the relevant period of the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE.

Thus, Simeon I the son of Onias, was the high priest in approximately 300 – 270 BCE, Simeon II the son of Onias approximately 225 – 200 BCE,<sup>49</sup> Euergetes I (Ptolemy III) 246 – 221 BCE and Euergetes II (Ptolemy VII known also as Physcon) 170 – 164 and 146 – 117.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious from the most preliminary research that the translator of the book could not have come to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Euergetes I simply because the latter reigned only 25 years. So the majority of scholars agree that Euergetes II (Ptolemy VII) must be the king who is mentioned in the book and if we deduct thirty-eight years from 170 we are left with 132. Thus, the translation of the book was after 132 BCE. There are other scholars, though, who do not agree with this date. For example, John Hart's opinion is that it is absolutely impossible that the translation was done

---

<sup>48</sup> Both names refer to one person because in some Greek manuscripts it is Onias and in some Johanan, cf. P. W. Skehan, A. A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (USA: Yale University 2010), p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Alternatively 196 BCE, cf. R. J. Coggins, 'Sirach', p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> W. O. E., Oosterley, 'An Introduction to the Books of Apocrypha', p. 225.



during the reign of Euergetes II because this king hated foreigners and it is hardly likely that anyone could come to Egypt during his reign and translate a Jewish book into Greek and spread it.<sup>51</sup> Hart also says that in the Egyptian dating system each king's era starts with the first year of his reign and ends with his death. However, Hart adds that Ptolemy Euergetes I came to power in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, i.e. the first year of the reign of Euergetes I was counted as the thirty-eighth year of the era of Ptolemy Philadelphus rather than the first year of his own reign. If we follow Hart's argument then we arrive at the year 247 BCE for the translation and accordingly around 300 BCE for its original composition by Ben Sira. Oesterley responds astutely to Hart's statement with an interesting question, 'If, according to the common Egyptian mode of reckoning, each king inaugurated his own era, why, in speaking of a particular king, should not the first year of his era be so designated, instead of being described as the last year of his predecessor's era?'<sup>52</sup>

If we were to accept that the king mentioned in the Prologue was Euergetes I instead of Euergetes II and the high priest in the 50<sup>th</sup> chapter was Simon I, then it may make more sense. However, the two facts remain: that the king Euergetes I did not reign as long as thirty-eight years; and also that Simon I could not be praised in the book of Sirach. These finally demonstrate that Hart's statement is incorrect. Why Simon I (the Just), mentioned by Josephus, is not the high priest Simon from the 50<sup>th</sup> chapter of Sirach, is answered by some old Hebrew manuscripts. Josephus tells us about Onias the high priest 'who was a son of Simon, called the Just'.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot guess from Josephus' passage whether it is Simon I or Simon II who is called the Just. However, some nuances found in rabbinic traditions may shed light on this question. According to these traditions preserved in rabbinic literature (Tosephta Sotah xiii. 6–8, Jerus. Talmud Yoma 43 c, Bab. Talmud Yoma 39 a, b, Menahot 109 b) the high priest Onias who built a temple in Egypt was the son of Simon the Just, and again according to the same traditions Simon the Just is not Simon I but Simon II.<sup>54</sup> This is one more very strong testimony which shows us that Simon the high priest mentioned in Sirach is Simon II the Just. Although in some parts of his history Jose-

---

51 J. H. A. Hart, *Ecclesiasticus: The Greek Text of Codex 248* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), pp. 253–6.

52 W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus*, (London: Haymarket, 1916), p. xxii.

53 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities: Books XII-XIII* (ed. G.P. Goold, transl. by Ralph Marcus, London: 1998), p. 38.

54 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, p. 465.