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Ibolya Balla

BEN SIRA ON FAMILY, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

Ibolya Balla
Ben Sira on Family, Gender, and Sexuality

Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies

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Introduction with literature review and methodology

The Book of Ben Sira has received increased attention in recent years, both as the subject of general introductory works and in research dealing with specific issues and topics. One aspect, however, has not yet been the subject of detailed analysis. To my knowledge substantial research has not been carried out in order to identify and analyse all the passages that betray attitudes toward sexuality. Such a task is also quite a challenge. Ben Sira's work, the longest Jewish wisdom book, is a complex combination of carefully composed poems on personified wisdom, and of teachings on everyday issues including marriage, family life, self-control, desires and passions, and sexual promiscuity. The former are characterized by an openness about issues of eroticism unprecedented in the wisdom writings of Second Temple Judaism. The latter betray a certain anxiety at all levels of human interaction. This seems, at least partially, reflected in the fact that the sage dedicates a greater number of passages than other wisdom books to the discussion of social relations, especially to the treatment of daughters, sons and wives. In so doing his regular point of departure seems to be what benefits or damages these relations mean, and whether they bring disgrace to a person. Therefore, it is important what position a person or situation under discussion might have in the sage's social value system. The comments that are of interest to us are scattered throughout the book and appear in various contexts. One of the major observations of the present work has been – as will be demonstrated – that, while these teachings are very valuable, they do not amount to a comprehensive, overarching view on human sexuality.¹ These instructions needed to be treated in a certain order and to find that order has also presented certain difficulties. It has proved most helpful to explore the passages which concern various forms of human interactions and relationships thematically in the context of family relations and in the context of sexual misconduct with an eye to what they might betray about the author's attitude to gender issues, and to dedicate a separate chapter to the wisdom poems which reflect a very particular attitude to sexuality.

1 I am grateful to Professor Benjamin Wright who helped me articulate this observation in his examiner's report on the thesis forming the basis of present book.

Repetition of certain issues is not always possible to avoid. For instance, views on marital relationships and wives are closely related to those on gender issues, and on honour and shame.

The first three chapters of the present work discuss comments that concern sexuality in the context of different family relations: regarding fathers, mothers, and widows in chapter 1; in the context of the upbringing of sons and daughters in chapter 2; in the framework of marital relationships in chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with the author's attitude to various types of sexual wrongdoings, including adultery and prostitution. Chapter 5 examines the poems in which the emphasis is on a person's pursuit for and relationship with wisdom, personified as a female figure. The language used in some of these poems is characterized by erotic overtones and exhibit views on sexuality very different from those reflected in the comments that are subject of analysis in chapters 1-4.

In the book the word "sexuality" is used in a broad sense to cover all matters pertaining to sexuality, rather than more narrowly as referring to sexual theory or sexual orientation.

It is widely accepted that the Book of Ben Sira was written in Hebrew in Jerusalem at around 180 B.C.E. (between 190–175), not long after Palestine was transferred from Egyptian Ptolemaic rule to Syrian/Seleucid rule. The author's grandson translated it into Greek after his arrival in Egypt probably in 132 B.C.E. and also included a Prologue in 117 B.C.E. Some scholars suggest that both the translation and the Prologue were composed after 117 B.C.² The book assumes a situation in which Ben Sira, a sage, instructed young men on how to live wisely and according to the law, also preparing them to become occupants of important scribal or judicial positions in the society, probably to function as advisors, members of courts, students of law, possibly ambassadors (Sir 4:9; 11:7-9; 15:5; 21:17; 38:24-39:11; 42:2) and to serve the mighty (8:8).³ Both the speaker and the addressees in the book seem to stand beneath and somewhat vulnerable to the wealthy and powerful. They may have relative power, able to rescue the oppressed, for whose protection they feel responsible (4:9).⁴ Their authority comes from their knowledge of wisdom and their commitment and adherence to the law

2 See COGGINS, *Sirach*, 18-20; HARRINGTON, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, 79-80; COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 23; SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 8-10.

3 HARRINGTON, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, 78; HORSLEY/TILLER, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 80, 85.

4 HORSLEY/TILLER, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 80, 85-86.

of the Most High.⁵ Sir 51:23-30 (especially 51:23) suggests that the location of the instruction was a school, either in Ben Sira's home, or attached to a synagogue. It may also have been a centre for copying, studying, archiving and interpreting biblical books.⁶

Within the Hebrew original text and the Greek translation of the book there are different textual traditions that have shorter and longer recensions. The textual witnesses are usually designated as HTI (the original Hebrew of Ben Sira),⁷ HTII (the expanded Hebrew text of one or more recensions, also primarily the basis for GII), GI (the grandson's Greek translation of HTI, found for most part in the major uncial manuscripts ABCS and their cursives) and GII (the expanded Greek translation based on HTII, represented by a number of minuscule manuscripts, especially in the O and L recensions). HTII, probably dating back to the first century B.C.E., differs from HTI primarily by additions. Within HTI the overlapping Hebrew manuscripts sometimes present considerable textual differences. GII, originating from the second century C.E., also has additions compared with GI.⁸ At times these additions reflect Christian interpolations. In some instances they emphasize doctrinal elements which may be in contrast to the GI text. The longer Greek recension shows a belief in eternal life (possibly 19:19; 23:27; 24:18), salvation (possibly 13:14), judgment after death (probably 2:9c; 16:22c; 19:19), and an emphasis that fear of God and love, usually from or of God, go together (1:12cd.18cd combined with the GI text of 1:18ab; 19:18-19; 24:24; 25:12).⁹ The basis of the textual analysis in the present work is mainly the Hebrew Ben Sira text and the grandson's translation. In a few instances there will be brief comments on the text of GII and the Syriac translation.

Ben Sira was "deeply rooted"¹⁰ in the traditions of Ancient Near Eastern, including Israelite wisdom. Compared with wisdom writings such as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, the book of Ben Sira has similarities

5 HORSLEY/TILLER, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 102.

6 PERDUE, *Wisdom Literature*, 221.

7 Consisting of the medieval Cairo Geniza materials (MSS ABCDEF), the earlier Masada manuscript (MS M, 1st century B.C.E.), and the Qumran fragments (2Q18/2QSir, 1st century B.C.E., 11Q5/11QPs^a, 1st century C.E.); see SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 51-53; TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 4, 186-187, n. 29-33.

8 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 55-58; REITERER, "Review of Recent Research," 26; BEENTJES, "Prophets and Prophecy," 209.

9 GILBERT, "Wisdom Literature," 299-300; COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 43.

10 HARRINGTON, *Jesus Ben Sira*, 3.

and differences in the topics it addresses and in language and imagery. Skehan/Di Lella categorize Job and Ecclesiastes, and also the Wisdom of Solomon, as examples of existential wisdom that “attempts to provide meaning for one who is faced with such problems as natural disasters, untimely death, [...] the dilemmas of the innocent sufferer, and the anomaly of the prosperous wicked”.¹¹ Existential wisdom, however, is present in all wisdom writings to a certain extent. The same is true about “recipe wisdom”, which deals with everyday attitudes, beliefs, customs, manners one should have toward God, toward one’s fellows and the world at large. This form of wisdom is found in the largest measure in Proverbs and Ben Sira.¹²

While for Ben Sira Proverbs to a certain extent was the primary model in terms of literary forms as well, he also departed from it for instance in the use of autobiographical narratives (51:13-22), hymns of praise to God (39:12-35; 42:15-43:33), and prayer of petition (22:27-23:6). In contrast to the individual sayings of Proverbs, the book of Ben Sira consists of several short treatises.¹³

Scholars are divided on the question of the author’s attitude towards Hellenism. Coggins, in his treatment of different views on the issue, notes that while Ben Sira’s greatest debt was to the Jewish traditions, his attitude to Hellenism was nuanced. His “concerns were with true wisdom and the fear of God, and he was not afraid to range widely in his search for ways of inculcating these essentials”.¹⁴ Gilbert concludes that the author’s fidelity to biblical tradition and openness to Greek culture are expressed without the signs of the later conflict of the Maccabean era. As in most Hellenistic philosophy of the time, in Ben Sira more emphasis was on how to live, rather than on speculations about the nature of things.¹⁵ According to Harrington, the influence of Hellenism on the work is partially shown in the fact that the grandson felt compelled to translate the book into Greek.¹⁶ While Ben Sira has built on traditional wisdom and “had given himself increasingly both to the reading of the law and the Prophets and the other ancestral

11 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 33.

12 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 32-33.

13 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 44.

14 COGGINS, *Sirach*, 50-53, especially 53.

15 GILBERT, “Siracide,” 1389-1437.

16 HARRINGTON, *Jesus Ben Sira*, 24.

books"¹⁷ (Prologue), he was at least familiar with works of Greek literature, whose ideas and terminologies gained expressions in his work.¹⁸

Ben Sira's awareness of Hellenistic social mores is expressed in 31:12-32:13 where he deals with appropriate conduct at banquets. Collins argues that Sirach's "familiarity with, and acceptance of, Hellenistic banquets shows that he was no zealous opponent of Hellenistic culture as such".¹⁹ He also notes that Ben Sira attaches importance to honour and shame, which, he argues, were the core concerns of Hellenic society.²⁰ There is a lengthy discussion dedicated to matters of honour and shame in Sir 41:14-42:8. In this passage and in others, it seems that Ben Sira represents a sexual morality that is more strict than that of Hellenism,²¹ and even goes beyond the requirements of the law. It appears that not only is every breach of the law disapproved, but all forms of sexual wrongdoing, such as consorting with prostitutes, are discouraged. Matters of sexual wrongdoing are in the context of honour and shame. The concern does not lie solely with the punishment adultery entails, for instance, but also with the disgrace it brings to the person before others. According to DeSilva, what constitutes the "others", on the one hand, is the congregation or assembly of people (1:30).²²

As Sir 41:14-42:8 attests, on the other hand, it is God himself who also constitutes the "other" before whom one should feel ashamed. While it is true that in the writings of Ben Sira there is an immense emphasis on the fear of the Lord, and that the author is greatly concerned with honour or shame before the Lord and the people, perhaps it is more correct to point out that despite the differences, some of the features of Hellenistic ethos may not have been as foreign to Ben Sira as some scholars assume.²³ As Bradly notes "For Ben Sira, if a Hellenistic idea or social convention can be accommodated to 'the fear of the Lord' and the keeping of Torah, then he is not overly reluctant to adopt it. These ideals form the basic grid through which Ben Sira evaluates Hellenism and provide the essential content of how he defines wisdom.

17 WRIGHT, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation," 719.

18 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 46-50. See for instance Ben Sira's thoughts on death and dying, some of which resemble those found in *Iliad*; cf. REITERER, "Die Vorstellung vom Tod," 200-201.

19 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 33.

20 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 34.

21 However, the complexity of the Hellenistic world's attitude to issues of sexual morality, such as adultery, must be taken into consideration. Cf. also COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 159.

22 DESILVA, "The Wisdom of Ben Sira," 446-449.

23 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 34-35.

Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that Ben Sira himself associated with the intellectual elite of his day, and his life was financially subsidized by the wealthy. Thus, his critiques of certain Hellenistic practices are tempered in places, though not necessarily compromised."²⁴

Some of the differences between the author's ethics and Hellenistic mores were his insistence on the honour of the Torah and the caution that characterized his ethics, as opposed to Hellenism, where fear of shame was sometimes a motivation for bold action.²⁵

Another question that arises in relation to Hellenism is whether the author was influenced by ideas of Greek philosophy such as Stoicism. Again, scholarly opinion is divided on the matter. Some suggest that the author had at least some knowledge of Stoic philosophy and that his identification of wisdom and Torah is analogous to the Stoic identification of the universal law with λόγος, while others consider it unlikely that Ben Sira had really studied the works of Stoic philosophers, noting that despite some international characteristics of his work, it is marked by Jewish particularism.²⁶ While it is not the task of the present work to ascertain to what degree, if at all, Ben Sira was familiar with and influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, some of his comments regarding the need to control one's passions and desires (6:1[2]-3[4]; 18:30-19:3; 22:27-23:6) to a certain degree bear resemblance to a combination of ideals characteristic of Stoic and Cynic philosophy: αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency) and freedom from passions.

In summary, Ben Sira uses themes found also in wisdom writings such as Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Wisdom of Solomon and the

24 Cf. GREGORY, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 13. In his analysis of passages that suggest that Ben Sira was aware of the dangers Hellenism represented for Jewish society and economy (Sir 8:1-2.18-19; 11:29-31.34; 11:12.16; 29:22-28 and 36:1-22), REITERER, "Der Fremde bei Ben Sira," 64-85, concludes that Ben Sira's answer for these threats was not aggression, but education. UEBERSCHAER, *Weisheit aus der Begegnung*, 134, notes, that for the sage strong emphasis remains on the intellectual activity in the process of education; physical activity, the central element of Hellenistic education finds no echo with him. Education, becoming wise is always connected with the fear of the Lord and commitment to his commandments; STADELMANN, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 298-300. Some of Ben Sira's instructions may have had a polemical purpose directed at those who have succumbed to the temptations of Hellenism and have forsaken the law of Moses (Sir 3:21-24; 41:8-9; 42:1c-2); cf. BELLIA, "An Historico-Anthropological Reading," 56; MINISSALE, "The Metaphor of 'Falling'," 263-264.

25 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 75-78; SANDERS, "Ben Sira's Ethics of Caution," 73-106.

26 On the various assessments on the issue see MATTILA, "Ben Sira and the Stoics," 473-501, especially 500; COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 40-41, 84-89; HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 157-162; WINSTON, "Theodicy in Ben Sira," 239-249; CORLEY, "Wisdom Versus Apocalyptic," 280-284; MARBÖCK, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 160-173.

Book of Baruch, and exhibits at least some similarities to Hellenistic ethics. However, he is more concerned with matters of sexuality, honour and shame than the above works. His anxiety regarding the chastity of daughters is unparalleled in the wisdom writings of Second Temple Judaism. His comments, including his prayer regarding one's passions, including passions of men, deserve special attention. As noted above, all kinds of sexual wrongdoing meet with disapproval.

The wisdom poems found in the book are also unique in certain aspects, especially in that their language is sometimes erotically charged. While Ben Sira was influenced by moral values reflected in the law and perhaps shows similarities at some points to Hellenistic mores, he has his own system of ethics, and as part of it, a particular attitude towards sexuality that will be explored in the thesis.

There is a wide range of topics discussed in the book of Ben Sira, from creation to death, to issues of morality, to matters of everyday life. Not all the teachings in the book are relevant to the question of the thesis. Some of them are only marginally relevant. Therefore they will be discussed less extensively.

Throughout the work I use "Ben Sira" to designate the book in general and also the author of the Hebrew text, and "Sirach" when referring specifically to the Greek translation. The Hebrew text used as the basis for translation and analysis is that of Beentjes.²⁷ Lévi's edition, however, will also be consulted at some points.²⁸ Where only the Greek text appears, the Hebrew is not extant. The Greek text is based on Ziegler's edition.²⁹ The English translation of the Hebrew and Greek Ben Sira passages under discussion is my own. However, I have also consulted Benjamin G. Wright's English translation for certain Ben Sira passages from the LXX.³⁰ The biblical references are from the NRSV. The verse numeration will follow the Hebrew text and when the Greek numbers differ they will appear in brackets, unless otherwise indicated.

The original Hebrew and Greek text versions of the passages – where extant – are contained in an Appendix together with their respective translation and notes of textual criticism. Certain repetitions of the latter in the main text could not be avoided. In one instance the full Hebrew text of a passage (Sir 42:9-14) is given in the main text of the book due to the many corruptions of the Hebrew text. It is to aid the reader in following the text and translation together. Regarding all other passages the main text of the book contains only the English

27 BEENTJES, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*.

28 LÉVI, *Hebrew Text*.

29 ZIEGLER, *Sapientia*.

30 WRIGHT, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation".

translation of the Hebrew and Greek text, that will appear together for ease of comparison in order to identify those instances where the translation differs from the original text, especially with respect to issues of sexuality. These translations include key Hebrew and Greek terms that have significance for the discussion.

Recent Ben Sira research has been made easier through the publication of many valuable works, including the excellent bibliographical collection of Friedrich V. Reiterer and NÚria Calduch-Benages.³¹ The edition of all extant Hebrew manuscripts with a synopsis of the parallel texts by Pancratius C. Beentjes was also a much needed contribution.³² General introductions include those of Daniel J. Harrington,³³ Richard J. Coggins³⁴ and John J. Collins.³⁵ None address the topic of the present work in detail. There have been few commentaries in recent years. The most significant ones include the book of Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella,³⁶ which, while pointing out some erotic content in certain sayings of Ben Sira, does not comment on many other references that also have potentially sexual connotations.

One aspect of the discussion of attitudes towards sexuality in Ben Sira/Sirach pertains to female imagery associated with wisdom, and its opposite, folly. Alice M. Sinnott provides a valuable overview.³⁷ Regarding the issue of “strangeness” or “strange woman”, Gail Corrington Streete in her book tries to define strangeness through biblical and sometimes extra-biblical examples of both named, and unnamed or figurative women who, because of their strangeness, were transgressors of the social boundaries of their age.³⁸ None of these works discuss, however, what strangeness means for Ben Sira/Sirach, whether it is a personification, or the term “strange woman” refers to an ordinary prostitute or an adulteress. They also fail to consider the comments on the “strange woman” in the larger context of the work or to compare them with other sayings that may reflect on the author’s view towards sexuality. One of the purposes of the present work is to fill these gaps.

Most of the wisdom poems in which wisdom is personified as a female figure (1:1-10; 4:11-19; 6:18-31; 14:20-15:10; chapter 24, especially

31 REITERER/CALDUCH-BENAGES, *Bibliographie zu Ben Sira*.

32 BEENTJES, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*.

33 HARRINGTON, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, 78-91.

34 COGGINS, *Sirach*.

35 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*.

36 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*.

37 SINNOTT, *Personification*.

38 STREETE, *Strange Woman*.

24:1-22; 51:13-30) have received considerable scholarly attention, especially chapter 24 because of its closeness in theme and imagery to Proverbs 8. The erotic overtone that characterizes some of these poems (especially Sir 6:18-31; 14:20-15:10; parts of chapter 24; 51:13-30) is not always noted. Among the works that reflect on the sexual imagery in Sir 6:18-31 are the articles of Jane S. Webster³⁹ and Jessie Rogers.⁴⁰ Judith E. McKinlay also makes passing comments on the erotic content of Sir 14:20-15:10 and chapter 24.⁴¹ In a noteworthy article Friedrich V. Reiterer distinguishes between the wisdom poems that contain fundamental descriptions of wisdom in the form of personification, with which we are concerned (*Grundlagenweisheit*), and the poems that deal with applied or practical wisdom (*Angewandte Weisheit*) that is manifested in one's everyday life and conduct, including one's decisions.⁴² Valuable contributions have been made to the interpretation of Sir 51:13-30 by J. A. Sanders,⁴³ Andrew Angel⁴⁴ and Celia Deutsch⁴⁵.

On gender issues and regarding Ben Sira's view of women, Warren C. Trenchard's book is useful.⁴⁶ He provides extensive comments on the translation and analysis of numerous passages from the book of Ben Sira. Trenchard is correct in asserting that Ben Sira has some of the most negative comments on women in contemporary Jewish and earlier Biblical literature, but at times he fails to identify the positive comments, and despite his thorough textual analysis the differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts are not always emphasized. His five categories of women as "good wife", "bad wife", "mothers and widows", "prostitutes" and "daughters" will not be used in the same way in my thesis. While the attitude toward women is an important part of the discussion in the present work, its focus is wider than gender issues. Therefore the range of the passages to be treated is broader.

Claudia V. Camp not only treats gender issues but also explores Ben Sira's teaching in the context of honour and shame.⁴⁷

39 WEBSTER, "Sophia," 63-79.

40 ROGERS, "'As Ploughing and Reaping'," 364-379.

41 MCKINLAY, *Gendering Wisdom*.

42 REITERER, "Das Verhältnis der חכמה zur תורה," 97-133.

43 SANDERS, "Sirach 51:13ff," 79-85.

44 ANGEL, "Wild Men," 145-161.

45 DEUTSCH, "Sirach 51," 400-409.

46 TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*.

47 CAMP, "Honor and Shame," 171-187. An analysis of Sir 41:14-42:8 concerning proper and improper shame in Ben Sira's work is provided by BOTHA, "The Ideology of Shame," 353-371.

The social context has also been an important consideration for this investigation. In this regard Leonie J. Archer's work is useful in giving an insight into the life and status of women in the age discussed.⁴⁸ Legal issues and transgressions of law are discussed not only by Archer but also in a number of other works. One of the recent among them is written by John J. Collins.⁴⁹ Both this writing and the books of Michael L. Satlow⁵⁰ and Hilary B. Lipka⁵¹ provide a useful background to the discussion of issues such as marriage and divorce,⁵² and such as adultery and other kinds of sexual wrongdoing.

It is, however, difficult to find detailed analyses of passages concerning adultery and prostitution in the book, apart from a few articles. Writings that deal with the question of honour and shame in Ben Sira⁵³ similarly make only passing remarks about prostitution/adultery. There are, thus far, no works that provide a systematic analysis of all the sage's sayings concerning sexual wrongdoings and passions/desires. This thesis will address this need. It does not only aim to offer a systematic detailed study of all the comments that betray something about Ben Sira's/Sirach's attitude toward sexuality, in the context of family and gender, including the differences between the Hebrew and Greek text versions, but also to present a basis for further studies on specific topics and issues in the book of Ben Sira. The fact that many of Ben Sira's comments reflect a negative attitude towards women or femininity can easily lead to the assumption that the work has a negative attitude toward sexuality. However, this thesis will seek to demonstrate that the author's view on sexuality is complex, subtle, and depends on the context of the individual sayings.

48 ARCHER, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies*. Consult also WISCHMEYER, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach*; HORSLEY/TILLER, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 74-107.

49 COLLINS, "Marriage, Divorce, and Family," 104-162.

50 SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*.

51 LIPKA, *Sexual Transgression*.

52 Divorce in the Book of Ben Sira is also treated in CALDUCH-BENAGES, "Divorce in Ben Sira," 81-95.

53 CAMP, "Honor and Shame,"; DESILVA, "The Wisdom of Ben Sira,"; SANDERS, "Ben Sira's Ethics of Caution".

Chapter 1

Respect for fathers and mothers and the treatment of widows

1.1 Attitude toward fathers and mothers

The most extensive teaching regarding one's parents is found in Sir 3:1-16. The passage occupies a significant position in the whole of the book. It follows chapters 1 and 2, in which two of the main themes are established by the author: the origin of wisdom and the fear of the Lord. Sir 3:1-16, understood in the light of the commandment to honour one's parents in the Decalogue (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), and through the repeated connection between the divine and the parental throughout the passage, affirms the parents' authority over the children, and at the same time the authority of the father's teaching.¹ Placing Sir 3:1-16 after such significant topics, suggests that the wise of chapter one and the God-fearing of chapter 2 respect the parents (chapter 3).² It is as if through establishing early in the book that wisdom is from the Lord, and also the parents', especially father's authority is also from God, the sage intends to establish the authority of his own teaching for those "son/s" or "children" he will address throughout the work, even if they are most probably not his sons in the physical sense.³

With the exception of Sir 3:7 the text is extant in Hebrew from the end of verse 6 in MS A.⁴

Sir 3:1-16

MS A

6 [] glorifying/honouring his mother

8 My son, in word and deed honour your father
so that all blessings may come upon you.

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- 1 The importance of the connection between the divine and parental in the passage is also pointed out by WRIGHT, "From Generation to Generation," 317.
 - 2 WISCHMEYER, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach*, 32.
 - 3 WRIGHT, "From Generation to Generation," 315-318, argues, that through the form of father-son instruction the sage's authority is extended over the readers as well.
 - 4 MS C only contains the mutilated text of 3:14-16 and will be referred to in the footnotes.

- 9 A father's blessing establishes the root (שרש) and the mother's curse uproots the young plant (וקללה אם הנהש נטע).
- 10 Do not glory in your father's disgrace for he is no glory to you.
- 11 His father's glory is a person's glory and multiplies sin who curses his mother (ומרבה חטא מקלל אמו).
- 12 My son, be steadfast in honouring your father and do not leave him as long as you live.
- 13 Even if his mind fails him, be considerate of him and do not despise him as long as he lives.
- 14 Kindness/righteousness (צדקת אב) to a father will not be blotted out,⁶ it will be as a sin offering (lit. substitute for sin), it will take root⁷.
- 15 In a day of distress (ביום צרה) it will be remembered in your favour, as warmth upon frost, it will melt away (lit. destroy) your sins.
- 16 Who despises his father is one who acts presumptuously (כי מויד בוזה אביו)⁸, and he provokes his Creator who curses his mother (ומכעים בוראו מקלל אמו)⁹.

GI

- 1 Listen to a father's reproof, children, and act accordingly to gain salvation/to be safe.
- 2 For the Lord honoured/glorified the father above the children, and made firm the right of the mother over the sons.
- 3 Whoever honours his father will atone for sins,
- 4 and stores up treasures/riches whoever glorifies his mother.
- 5 Whoever honours his father will enjoy gladness over his children, and when he prays he will be heard.
- 6 Whoever glorifies his father will prolong his life (ὁ δοξάζων πατέρα μακροημερεύσει), and whoever obeys God will give rest to his mother (καὶ ὁ εἰσακούων κυρίου ἀναπαύσει μητέρα αὐτοῦ).

5 TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 40, 216, n. 21, suggests מקלה ("he who treats with contempt", from קלה). Cf. SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 153-154.

6 MS C has "will not be forgotten" (אל חשכח). GI supports it.

7 MS A reads הנהש. However, both LÉVI, *Hebrew Text*, 1, and BEENTJES, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 23, read with MS A^{ms}: נטע from הנטע ("plant"), here probably meaning "be planted" or "takes root".

8 MS C has: כמגדף העווב אביו: "like a blasphemer is he who forsakes his father".

9 MS C has: יסחוב אל זוועם אמו, where יסחוב (from סחב = "to drag") with אמו ("his mother") seems to be out of place. אל זוועם means "and cursing God". TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 40, 216-217, n. 23-27, translates: "He who forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and he who provokes his mother is cursed by God." SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 154: "A blasphemer is he who neglects his father; he provokes God, who demeans his mother."

GII

7a whoever fears the Lord will honour (his) father

GI

7b and he will serve his parents as masters.

8 In deed and word honour your father,
that a blessing from him may come upon you.

9 For the blessing of the father makes firm the children's houses (οἶκος),
but the mother's curse uproots the foundations (θεμέλια).

10 Do not glorify yourself in your father's disgrace,
for your father's disgrace is no glory for you.

11 For a man's glory is his father's glory,
and for the children a mother in dishonour is a disgrace

12 O son, help your father in old age,
and do not grieve him in his life.

13 And if his understanding fails him, show (lit. have) forbearance,
and do not despise him in all your strength.

14 For kindness/compassion (ἐλεημοσύνη) to a father will not be forgotten,
and instead of your sins it will be credited in your favour.

15 In a day of distress/affliction it will be remembered for you,
as frost in good weather, your sins will be destroyed.

16 Like a blasphemer is he who forsakes his father,
and he is cursed by the Lord whoever angers his mother.

The commandment to honour one's father and mother (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) is the first commandment among those concerning one's duty towards one's own fellow-beings and the only one to include also a promise: "Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Exod 20:12).¹⁰ References to honouring father and mother and to one's duty towards them can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. A number of them are included in Proverbs either in a positive exhortation or by way of describing how one should not conduct oneself toward father and mother.¹¹ Ben Sira however elaborates this theme in the greatest detail.

In Sir 3:1 (GI: "Listen to a father's reproof, children, and act accordingly to gain salvation/to be safe"; Ἐλεγμὸν πατρὸς ἀκούσατε, τέκνα, καὶ οὕτως ποιήσατε, ἵνα σωθῇτε) it is not clear what the translator means by ἵνα σωθῇτε. The most frequent translations of the word σώζω in various forms in the LXX include "to keep", "to save", "to free", "to

¹⁰ Deut 5:16 adds "and that it may go well with you".

¹¹ Exod 21:17; Lev 20:9; Prov 1:8; 6:20; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22-25; 28:24; 30:17 (also cf. 30:11); Tob 4:3-4; 14:12-13; the commandment is referred to in Matt 15:3-6; Mark 7:9-13; Luke 18:20; Eph 6:2-3.

deliver", "to help", "to save oneself", depending on the form of the Hebrew word behind it. It can render various Hebrew verbs among which the most significant ones are *ישע*, *פלט* and *מלט*.¹² The salvation, deliverance or help a person can experience may come through people or through God.¹³ Even though Ben Sira uses it with reference to conflict or adversity from which a person needs deliverance, or from which the author himself was saved, such as in Sir 2:11; 34:12-13; 51:8, where the deliverance is always connected with trust in God or with his mercy,¹⁴ the text in Sir 3:1 does not indicate any specific situation.

Sir 3:2 implies that one must both obey one's father and respect the mother's right (*κρίσιν*), as their parental authority is given them by God.¹⁵ Similarly to Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16, there is no discrimination between father and mother in this comment.¹⁶ Sir 7:27-28, while not extant in Hebrew, reflects in GI the way one comes into this world: through one's parents. This verse confirms that the parents have authority given by God over their children and they are also able to instruct them. In Prov 1:8 and 6:20 both father and mother have the role to teach. The latter also implies in its context (6:20-35) that the parents' instruction may protect the son from being led astray (for example by an immoral woman).

Self-interest seems to be the motivation behind righteous or good deeds toward parents as part of atonement in Sir 3:3-4.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that both father and mother appear here in the context of atonement. In verse 3 the word *ἐξιλάσεται* stands for the verb "atone" (*ὁ τιμῶν πατέρα ἐξιλάσεται ἁμαρτίας* = "Whoever honours his father will atone for sins") and while it is widely used in the LXX, including Sirach, many times together with *ἁμαρτίας*, the word *ἀποθησαυρίζων* for "storing up treasures/riches" (*καὶ ὡς ὁ ἀποθησαυρίζων ὁ δοξάζων μητέρα αὐτοῦ* = "and stores up treasures/riches whoever glorifies his mother", verse 4), cannot be found anywhere else in the LXX. The former verb in various forms is the predominant LXX translation for the Hebrew *כפר* to denote "to expiate". Of the 15 occurrences in the LXX

12 FOHRER, "σῶζω and σωτηρία in the Old Testament," 970.

13 FOHRER, "σῶζω and σωτηρία in the Old Testament," 974-978.

14 Cf. Sir 46:1.8.

15 According to Ps.-Phoc. 8 one must honour God first and then parents. In Tob 4:3 Tobit calls his son Tobias to honour his mother. The theme of 4Q416 2 iii 15b-19 is also the honour of parents; according to 4Q416 2 iii 17b God set the parents in authority over the children; see HARRINGTON, *Wisdom texts*, 44, 47-48.

16 *Plns* i22 also stresses that the God-fearer is good to both father and mother; see SANDERS, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, 81.

17 In Dan 4:24 (= 4:27 in NRSV) and Tob 4:10-11 atonement for sin is also associated with good deeds.

version of Sirach, where the Hebrew text is extant,¹⁸ כִּפָּר appears, but it is probable that in other occurrences where the Hebrew text is not extant the word כִּפָּר was behind ἐξιλάσκομαι.¹⁹ The latter word is used to convey the notion of atonement with either God or the great among the people either in a positive affirmation or in negation in Sir 3:3.30; 5:6; 16:7; 20:28; 28:5; 34:19(= 23 in NETS and NRSV); 45:16.23. The idea behind the term ἀποθησαυρίζων is probably not one of gaining wealth in a physical sense as a reward in the present life. As a parallel to Sir 3:3, Sir 3:4 should be understood – as Bohlen suggests – in the context of atonement describing a person who stores up riches on which he can confidently rely if, one day, that becomes necessary. While verse 3 concerns atonement that is currently effective for past sins, verse 4 only guarantees it for a yet undetermined future point in time, when one – for any reason – might need atonement.²⁰

Excursus: Ben Sira's view on sin and atonement

Without going into great detail concerning the author's view on sin and atonement²¹ some remarks will be made here, which will also be relevant later in the chapter regarding widows and orphans. To point out briefly some characteristics of Ben Sira's thoughts on death is also necessary if one attempts to understand his beliefs on what comes after death, since such beliefs may influence a person's conduct in the present life. That Ben Sira himself had such concerns seems to be clear from his comments on illicit sexual relations, especially when he speaks about death, decay or grave, as will be shown especially in chapter 4. Also these remarks will show us that despite the anxiety throughout the book regarding certain pleasures in a person's life, the author's outlook on life is not altogether negative, and not all pleasures in life are to be condemned.

Sacrifices were important for the author since they were commanded in Sir 35:4 (= 35:6-7 in NETS and NRSV) and they are encouraged in Sir 7:29-31. They do not seem to be efficacious on their own, however, in Ben Sira's view. To restore the relationship with God that is broken by sin, sacrifices have to be accompanied by righteous deeds. The Hebrew Bible is concerned with the attitude toward the needy.²² Wisdom writings within it also emphasize this aspect with their countless references to widows, orphans and the poor, sometimes indicating that the wise person who acts righteously follows the example of God who is the only protector of the

18 Sir 3:30; 45:16.23.

19 HERRMANN, "ἱλάσκομαι," 302.

20 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 167. Storing up good deeds for future time of need is also the theme in Sir 29:12.

21 Cf. BROMILEY, "Atone, Atonement," 352-360.

22 See Exod 22:22; Deut 14:28-29; 15:7-11; 24:13.17-22; 26:12; Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Isa 1:17.23; 10:2; Jer 7:6; 22:3-5; Amos 5:10-15; Zech 7:8-14; Mal 3:5.

weak.²³ The approaches they had toward the needy were charity and social justice. Malchow argues that the wise want not only to prevent social injustice but also to act justly. Job clothed himself in righteousness (Job 29:14).²⁴ The Psalms have admonitions to be righteous (Ps 68:6 [= 5 in NRSV]; Psalm 82). Proverbs is similarly concerned with the cause of the needy (Prov 14:21; 15:25; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27).²⁵

Ben Sira's attitude follows that of other wisdom writers on the subject, and Sir 7:32-35 suggests in the context of 7:29-36 that along with sacrifices and offerings, righteous deeds are also necessary for atonement.²⁶ The author's view of expiation is nicely summarized in a positive exhortation in Sir 35:1-8 where almost all the aspects necessary for atonement are included. The keeping of the commandments, works of charity and refraining from unrighteousness are especially important.²⁷

It is also noteworthy that Sir 7:36; 17:27-28; 18:21 and 28:6 all emphasize that death does not delay and it inevitably ends the time to do good to others and to hope in return for the forgiveness of sins.²⁸ It also seems that on the one hand, the author does not see death as a punishment for sin, but something that is decreed for humanity, and not necessarily something to be feared (Sir 41:3-4).²⁹ On the other hand death is a cause for anxiety (Sir 40:1-2).³⁰ As death is final and inevitable, one should enjoy life. Life and death are set before humans and they can choose.³¹ For the fool, even in life there can be death but for the wise there can be life even despite the fact that death is inescapable for both of them.³² This is how Collins describes the qualitative meaning of life and death.³³ For Ben Sira death is

23 Pss 10:14.18; 68:6 (= 5 in NRSV); 82; 146:9; Job 31:16.18.

24 MALCHOW, "Social Justice," 122-123.

25 On the other hand, while the wisdom writers encouraged deeds of righteousness, some also emphasized the maintenance of the status quo in society, at least to the extent of avoiding any dramatic or revolutionary changes (Prov 24:21, cf. also Eccl 8:2-6). Cf. GORDIS, "Social Background," 81-82; FRÖHLICH, "Ben Szira társadalma," 153-155. Whether the wisdom writers were from the upper, middle or lower class is a subject of scholarly debate. For an overview consult SNEED, "Wisdom and Class," 651-672.

26 Moreover, sacrifice of the godless is rejected if it comes from the exploitation of the poor (34:18-20 [= 21-24 in NETS and NRSV]). See also Prov 15:8-9; 21:27.

27 Cf. also SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 87-90.

28 The righteous deeds include almsgiving, kindness, and being righteous in general towards the weak and the oppressed. The idea found in Sir 3:1-16 about storing up treasure appears in Tob 4:5b-7.9-11. Cf. also QUARLES, "New Perspective and Means of Atonement," 43-47; NICKELSBURG, "Judgment, Life-After-Death, and Resurrection," 144-145; see also Tob 1:3; 14:9-11.

29 COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 93.

30 Cf. Sir 41:1-4.

31 COLLINS, "Root of Immortality," 179.

32 Also see Eccl 2:15-16.

33 COLLINS, "Root of Immortality," 179-180.

also the opposite of life, and he describes the netherworld as a place for pointless survival,³⁴ where even the praise of God is impossible. Sheol is the place of not-living. From there people would not rise again (Job 14:12; Sir 38:21). This belief has other consequences. Sheol cannot be the place for retribution: that has to come in the present existence (Sir 9:12). Whether the day of death is the day of judgment as well (Sir 11:26-28) is difficult to determine. Death itself ends the time of a person in this world and with it the time during which one can conduct oneself in an honourable or a disgraceful way in many aspects. For Ben Sira this conduct includes the attitude a person can have toward the weak of society, as discussed above. If the relationship is restored, even though not knowing what comes after death, one perhaps may hope that the inevitable end will be painless or free of suffering.

It seems that the only way of a person's survival is through his name and in his children.³⁵ It is important how one conducts oneself in the present life, leaving a good or a bad name (Sir 39:11; 41:11-13; 44:14)³⁶ and whether one's children are wicked or virtuous (Sir 30:4-5).

Whether Ben Sira's belief regarding death has bearings on the attitude towards illicit sexual relations such as adultery, or sexual conduct condemned by him, such as prostitution, is not easy to determine. The comments on death are sometimes contradictory. It is also uncertain, as noted above, what the author thinks about judgment or retribution, or what life after death means. Therefore it is difficult to discern what death means in passages on adultery or prostitution. It is most probable that death in these passages is not meant literally. The argument about the connection between one's conduct in the present life, and one's belief regarding death, should be settled probably with the modest assertion that in the book of Ben Sira, death ends the time for proper conduct, the time during which one still has the opportunity to avoid conduct that would put one to shame in the here and now and/or result in leaving behind a disgraceful memory. These are significant concerns for the author as can be seen throughout the book, for example in the passages on honour and shame (Sir 41:14-42:14) and in the simile of the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26. The importance of the memory one leaves behind is apparent in the latter passage. The former not only follows immediately Sir 41:11-13 which attests that while humans are mortal, a good name has lasting memory,³⁷ but in it proper and improper shame is also connected with the name or memory by which one is remembered. With a good name wisdom also transcends death, so not only

34 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 84.

35 Cf. the praise of the fathers who were remembered for what they had done and left behind (Sir 44:1-50:24); for the importance of leaving behind a good name and children see also Isa 56:5; Job 18:17 (in negation) and Gen 48:16; Deut 25:7, respectively.

36 Cf. Sir 37:26

37 See also Sir 44:14

one's name and memory will live on, but also one's wisdom.³⁸ Here the significance of one's wise teaching is again underlined.

In Sir 3:5-6 there seems to be another dimension to the author's self-interest. On the one hand, in a restored relationship with God, a person's prayer is assumedly heard³⁹ and his present life is prolonged⁴⁰ (Sir 3:5b.6a) as part of the evasion of divine punishment for sins. On the other hand, reciprocity with a person's own descendants is also suggested. Whoever honours his own father can hope that his own children will do the same to him (Sir 3:5a), thus providing a reason for joy. It is also in line with the well attested message of wisdom literature (Prov 10:1; 15:20; 23:24-25; 29:3). As noted earlier, since the author probably did not believe in a blessed afterlife, one form of continuation of one's life was having descendants. A father will rejoice over disciplined children throughout his life and at death will have no regrets, since he leaves behind him one like himself (Sir 30:1-5).⁴¹

While the Hebrew text is only extant in MS A from the end of Sir 3:6 and has only the words **מַכְבֵּד אִמּוֹ**, the idea of glorifying father could be surmised in the first half of 3:6a (MS A) to create a parallel with the idea of honouring/glorifying mother (3:6b, **מַכְבֵּד אִמּוֹ**). The comment in GI ("Whoever glorifies his father will prolong his life, and whoever obeys God will give rest to his mother", 3:6) could be part of another parallel. The expression ἀναπαύω is part of the author's vocabulary⁴² and it usually renders the Hebrew נָחַ ("to have a rest", "to find rest", in Hiphil "to give rest to somebody").⁴³ If the verb ἐἰσακούω is regarded here as correct, then Sir 3:6b and 3:7a are parallel stichs, since 3:7a reads: "Whoever fears the Lord will honour (his) father" (GII). If the Hebrew term behind the LXX translation however is not שמע ("to hear", "to listen"), but שלם ("to render", "to return", "to give back something"), then 3:6b would read: whoever gives rest to his mother, renders good to God.⁴⁴ In any case, verse 7a connects the fear of the Lord and the honour of father, as if to suggest that fearing the Lord and obeying his laws in general (Sir 2:15-16) finds a concrete actu-

38 Cf. See Sir 39:9-11 in the context of 38:34c-39:11; see also GREGORY, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 84.

39 Also cf. Prov 15:29.

40 The length of days is also a motivating factor for honouring one's parents in 4Q416 2 iii 19a, alongside with one's own honour (4Q416 2 iii 18b).

41 The students are told not to rejoice over impious or wicked children in Sir 16:1-3.

42 It is used 19 times in various contexts.

43 TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 214, n. 16.

44 See SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 154; TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 44, 214, n. 17.

alization in the honour of father in 3:7a.⁴⁵ The practical side of that honour includes what appears in verse 7b.8.12-13. Although Exod 21:7 and Neh 5:5 attest that a father had the right to sell his female children as slaves, it is not implied in Sir 3:7b (GI: "and he will serve his parents as masters"), even if the word *δεσπότης* is used here along with *δουλεύσει*. It may refer merely to the fact that children ought to be obedient to their parents as slaves to their masters.⁴⁶ Sir 3:8 suggests that one's acts cannot contradict one's words (MS A: "My son, in word and deed honour your father, so that all blessings may come upon you")⁴⁷. Honour must be manifested in both words and deeds. One of the examples of the significance of a father's blessing is confirmed in Gen 27:1-40 where Jacob was even willing (with his mother's help!) to trick his brother Esau to get their father Isaac's blessing.⁴⁸ The expression *ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ* in Sir 3:8 resembles the fullness of obedience required in Deut 28:1: *שמעו חסמעו*. Good deeds to a father include caring for him in old age and not forsaking him in any condition (Sir 3:12-13). An ageing father (3:12a) who is getting frail in mind (3:13a) is in contrast with a son, who is in his full strength (3:13b) as reflected in the Greek version. The teaching of these verses may be another example of self-interest and reciprocity on the author's part in the sense that a young person, who, in his vigour supports his ageing father, may, in his own old age hope for similar conduct from his sons. In the place of the prohibition of forsaking one's father in the Hebrew text (3:12b) the Greek testifies that an elderly father should not be given even a cause for grief (3:12b).

In relation to blessing and curse, Sir 3:9 uses different metaphors in the Hebrew and Greek to convey the same idea: the metaphor of root and young plant in the former and the metaphor of house in the latter.⁴⁹ The metaphor of root is found in Prov 12:3, and the word *נטע* is used in similar sense in Job 14:9.⁵⁰ Also the verb form *נטע* has other figurative meanings such as planting people (Jer 12:2) or establishing the people of God (Exod 15:17; 2Sam 7:10; Ps 44:3).⁵¹ Similarly the word *οἶκος* can

45 Cf. also BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 205.

46 Cf. SNAITH, *Ecclesiasticus*, 21.

47 GI does not differ significantly for this verse, except it reads "a blessing" for "all blessings".

48 Cf. Gen 9:26; 27:27-38; 28:1.6; 48:15-16; 49:25-26 for the importance of a father's blessing. See also Deut 28:1-14 and Sir 3:8.

49 See also TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 214-216, n. 18.

50 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 156.

51 In contrast to a dry tree that symbolizes a person without offspring, the metaphor of plant is used regarding Abraham in 1En. 93:5, who is said to be the progenitor of "the eternal plant of righteousness" (1En. 93:10). Cf. Jub 16:26; 36:6. For the metaphor of God's people as his plants see FUJITA, "Metaphor of Plant," 30-45.

have meanings other than the literal. It is used to denote family or household.⁵² Having many offspring or becoming a great family/nation is connected with a blessing in Gen 12:2; 17:16-20; 22:17; 26:3-4; 26:24; 28:3; 48:16; Deut 1:11; 7:13; 28:8-11; 30:16; 1Sam 2:20; Ps 115:12-18; Ezek 37:26; Heb 6:14. Sir 3:9 also reflects the belief that growing great or establishing a great nation depends on the blessing. It also suggests that a curse has the opposite result, even though it does not detail what uprooting the young plant/foundations means. The blessing of a parent was irrevocable and efficacious⁵³ regarding the descendants. It is attested in Gen 9:25-27; 27:30-38; Judg 17:1-4 and seems confirmed in Sir 3:9, which implies that the mother's curse is just as efficacious as the father's blessing. Sauer suggests, that the change from the image of root and plant to the image of house and foundation reflects a change in lifestyle. While Ben Sira seems to originate from the land, Sirach thinks in urban categories.⁵⁴

The focus of Sir 3:10.11a is the reputation of the father himself (MS A: "Do not glory in your father's disgrace for he is no glory to you. His father's glory is a person's glory"⁵⁵). Ben Sira writes in 41:7-9 that an impious father is blamed by his children because "on his account they will be reproached"⁵⁶ (41:7). Also, as discussed above in this chapter, a person's life is reflected in the name and the children he leaves behind (Sir 30:4-5; 41:11-13). A wicked person will leave a bad name in which the children will surely not glory (Sir 3:10). A surprising comment follows in 3:11b: "and multiplies sin who curses (מקלל)⁵⁷ his mother" (MS A). Whether the word קלה ("to demean")⁵⁸ or קלל ("to curse") is used here regarding the mother, either would be completely contradictory to the message of the whole section in Sir 3:1-16. Also, the latter is prohibited in Exod 21:17. It is noteworthy that GI has a significantly different reading in Sir 3:11b: "and for the children a mother in dishonour is a disgrace" (καὶ ὄνειδος τέκνοις μήτηρ ἐν ἀδοξίᾳ). While MS A does not describe the qualities of the mother, the GI depicts her as a mother in dishonour. It is not detailed what dishonour means in this context, or why the Greek has such a different emphasis for this line. The comment *may* refer to an act of sexual nature, such as adultery, which could bring

52 GYÖRKÖSY/KAPITÁNYFY/TEGYEI, *Ógörög-Magyar Nagyszótár*, 717.

53 SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 156.

54 SAUER, "Ben Sira in Jerusalem," 340.

55 GI does not differ significantly.

56 WRIGHT, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation," 753.

57 TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 40, 216, n. 21, suggests מקלה ("he who treats with contempt", from קלה). Cf. SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 153-154.

58 As suggested by SKEHAN/DI LELLA, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 154.

shame on the children, but that cannot be said for certain. It would certainly be a surprising remark in the context of honouring father and mother.

The idea of atonement returns in Sir 3:14-15: "Kindness/righteousness (צדקה אב) to a father will not be blotted out,⁵⁹ it will be as a sin offering (lit. substitute for sin), it will take root⁶⁰. In a day of distress (צרה ביום) it will be remembered in your favour, as warmth upon frost, it will melt away (lit. destroy) your sins." (MS A) In 3:14a the good deed to a father is expressed with the word צדקה, a derivative of צדק and is usually rendered as "righteousness", "uprightness". The LXX translation can include among others the derivatives of δίκη or ἐλεημοσύνη as in 3:14a. It can include kindness, mercy, generosity, honesty, or even pity (ἐλεημοσύνη).⁶¹ Quarles argues that the Greek term προσανοικοδομέω in the GI version of 3:14b ("and instead of your sins it will be credited in your favour"; καὶ ἀντὶ ἁμαρτιῶν προσανοικοδομηθήσεται σοι) has an economic rather than a cultic aspect.⁶² It is not specified, however, what he means by it and the word προσανοικοδομέω does not appear anywhere else in the LXX. In the context of the passage under discussion אב צדקה אב can describe for instance the attitude of accepting and helping an elderly father, or one with declining mental ability (Sir 3:12-13).⁶³ Such a conduct will not be forgotten by God.⁶⁴ In 3:14 the metaphor of kindness/righteousness taking root suggests that the effect of a child's good conduct is prolonged in the future, and it does so through an image of a plant growing to maturity bringing fruit in due time.⁶⁵ Sir 3:15 in the light of Sir 3:3-4 seems to convey the idea that for those who, through honouring their parents store up riches, this will come as an advantage when God will wipe out the very sins that cause the distress on the day of affliction, as warmth destroys frost (3:15).⁶⁶ The notion that on the day of distress God will remember the kind/righteous also corresponds to Sir 3:5 which contains the promise: God will hear the prayer of those who

59 MS C has "will not be forgotten" (אל תשכח). GI supports it.

60 MS A reads תנחש. However, both LÉVI, *Hebrew Text*, 1, and BEENTJES, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 23, read with MS A^{ms}: נטע from נטע ("plant"), here probably meaning "be planted" or "takes root". Cf. also BEENTJES, "Reading the Hebrew Ben Sira Manuscripts," 313.

61 KELLY, "Righteousness," 192-193.

62 QUARLES, "New Perspective and Means of Atonement," 49.

63 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 169.

64 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 170.

65 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 170-171.

66 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 169.

honour their father.⁶⁷ Prov 15:29 also attests that the Lord hears the prayer of the righteous.

In Sir 3:16, GI, MS A and MS C have different versions. The reading of MS C and GI 3:16a ("Like a blasphemer [מגדף; ὡς βλάσφημος] is he who forsakes his father") seems to fit the context better than MS A for this line: "Who despises his father is one who acts presumptuously". MS A in 3:16b reads "and he provokes his Creator who curses his mother".⁶⁸ Both MS C and GI in 3:16a and MS A in 3:16b remind the reader of Sir 3:2, where the authority behind the honour of parents is God himself. In addition, the different emphasis introduced by GI in Sir 3:16b ("and he is cursed by the Lord whoever angers his mother") could be on the one hand an antithesis to verse Sir 3:1 which promises salvation/safety for those heeding the father's reproof, and could mean on the other, that blessing and curse may come not only from parents (Sir 3:8b.9) but also from God.⁶⁹ In the context of 3:1-16, through the idea of the blasphemer and of the curse of God verse 16 suggests that the student should be aware of the choices: the son who does not fulfil his duties toward the father and acts contrary to his reproof (Sir 3:1) can be compared to a מגדף, who incurs God's curse, while the conduct of those who act according to the reproof will atone for sins (Sir 3:3-4.14-15).⁷⁰ Connecting the honour of parents which includes charitable conduct with the concept of atonement and using this teaching as an ethical motivation in education is a significant theological contribution in the work.⁷¹

In the wider context that deals with social and religious relations (Sir 7:1-9:16)⁷² Sir 7:27-28 also calls for the honour of parents, but here the theme of gratitude⁷³ is apparent:

Sir 7:27-28

GI

With your whole heart honour your father

67 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 171-172.

68 Cf. Exod 21:17. GI has a somewhat different idea in Sir 3:16b: "and he is cursed by the Lord whoever provokes his mother".

69 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 267.

70 BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 268.

71 Cf. also BOHLEN, *Die Ehrung der Eltern*, 165-180.

72 Sir 7:27-28 follows 7:18-26 which concerns the attitude towards one's friends, household, including servants, cattle and female members of the family, for example daughters and wives.

73 Cf. COLLINS, *Jewish Wisdom*, 64.

and do not forget your mother's birth pains.
 Remember that of them (lit. through them) you were born
 and what can you give them back for what they gave you?

The initial role that the parents have in starting a person's life is emphasized in these verses.⁷⁴ It does not only entail their authority over their children⁷⁵ but also the honour the children owe them for the greatest gift that can be given: life. Especially the mother's pain is in the centre of attention here: one owes one's life to her willingness to undertake the pain of giving birth. For this she must also be respected in parallel to the father, even if the honour that is required toward her is not spelled out.⁷⁶

While in Sir 3:1-16 self-interest seems more emphasized, in Sir 7:27-28 gratitude is the real motivation for respect of parents. This shows a more positive evaluation of mothers especially in the appreciation of the painful process of birth endured by them. This, however, does not reflect greatly on the author's attitude to sexuality.

One of Ben Sira's recurring themes is to call for humility in the presence of influential men (Sir 7:5b.7a.14a). Another is the fear of being disgraced in front of other people (18:31; 42:11abcd). These concerns culminate in Sir 23:14, where the context in which one is to feel shame is one's father and mother. Its wider context (22:27-23:27) concerns self-control and sins of various kinds: the sins of the tongue (22:27-23:1) and the sins of passion (23:2-6). 23:7-11 and 23:12-15 – the immediate context of 23:14 – have related teachings on the sins of the mouth or shameful speech. 23:16-26 describes the sexual wrongdoer and the adulterer (23:16-21) and the adulteress (23:22-26). The conclusion (23:27) contains one of Ben Sira's main themes: "nothing is better than the fear of the Lord" (23:27b, GI).

Sir 23:14

GI

Remember your father and your mother,
 for you sit in council among the mighty (μεγιστάνων),⁷⁷
 lest you forget⁷⁸ in their presence,

74 Cf. 4Q416 2 iii 17a; HARRINGTON, *Wisdom Texts*, 44, 47-48.

75 The authority of their teachings must be respected: Prov 1:8; 6:20.

76 There are similarities between this passage and the Egyptian *Teaching of Any* vii 19 with regard to the attitude toward one's mother; cf. RUFFLE, "Teaching of Amenemope," 41.

77 μεγιστάν: "great man", "important person". The genitive plural used together with συνεδρεύεις probably means: "sit in the council among great men".

and be regarded a fool because of your manner,
and you will wish you had never been born,
and the day of your birth you will curse.

One's insolent speech among men of influence brings shame not only on the person who was insolent, but also on one's parents. One must keep in mind one's father and mother in order to avoid this serious mistake ("Remember your father and your mother", μνήσθητι πατρός καὶ μητρός σου).⁷⁹ Remembering in this context may mean remembering the instructions of the parents, or being mindful of one's father and mother in order not to bring shame on them. This may help to avoid a situation where one has to wish that one had never been born or to curse the day of one's birth.⁸⁰ The notion of cursing the day of one's birth appears in Job 3:1-10 where the reason behind it is a great affliction in the life of the author. In the other occurrence the prophet Jeremiah also curses the day he was born because all he sees around him is sorrow and trouble (Jer 20:14.18). Sir 23:12-15 does not describe any affliction, but a situation where one can disgrace oneself among the mighty (μεγιστάνων) – whom one must respect (4:7) – with improper speech, this way bringing shame on one's parents as well. It is notable that the situation of 23:14 may be compared to times of affliction.

Ben Sira does not betray much about the role of the mother. Here, as in 3:1-16, mother is again mentioned together with father as the usual Hebrew idiom for parents. It is noteworthy, however, that a person must avoid shame before both father and mother, and disgraceful activity reflects negatively on both of them. This is also expressed in Sir 41:17a. Its wider context is 41:14-42:14 with lengthy comments on proper and improper shame, and on the father's concern for his daughter. Following an introduction in 41:14-16 we find in 41:17-42:1b the list of conducts of which one should be ashamed. 42:1ef is the introduction to conducts of which one should not be ashamed (42:2-8b). Both catalogues are concluded with a promise (42:1cd; 42:8cd). 42:9-14 is Ben Sira's most extensive comment on daughters. Within the first section the immediate context of 41:17a is 41:17-19a, which has 6 stichs. Each of them starts with defining the persons before whom, or the context in which one should be ashamed. In 41:17a it is father and mother.

78 TRENCHARD, *Ben Sira's View*, 222, n. 86, sees "stumble" as more probable here than "forget".

79 DI LELLA, "Ben Sira's Doctrine," 244, points out that Sir 23:14a is an aphorism of Ben Sira and is not found anywhere in the OT.

80 For the idea "curse the day of your birth" cf. Job 3:1-10; Jer 20:14-18.