

ERKKI KOSKENNIEMI

The Old Testament Miracle-Workers in Early Judaism

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Mohr Siebeck

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206



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Preface

I did not know where the path would lead me in 1983/84, when I prepared to leave Finland to study classical philology in Tübingen with the gentle help of the DAAD. After my master's thesis on Apollonius, which luckily was written only in Finnish and never printed, I was anxious about the theme of my further study. I could not find a way to approach Apollonius of Tyana, the primary target of my interest, and not Philostratus, who wrote about Apollonius in about A.D. 220. Shortly before leaving Finland I thought I had found a solution: I abandoned Apollonius and started to investigate Philostratus and his intentions. It took time before I – a young student of classical philology – realised that I had reinvented redaction criticism and done a lot of needless work seeking the method. Yet, I finally felt that I had advanced, and my time in Tübingen was a good one, during which I enjoyed and benefited from the deep knowledge of the philologists at the university. After my work was almost ready, I posted it to, among others, Professor Jukka Thurén (Åbo Akademi), who had been my teacher during the slow progress of my theological studies. Typically for him, he reacted immediately, realising that my ideas had direct consequences for New Testament scholars: If Apollonius in *Vita Apollonii Tyanensis* was mainly a product of the third and not of the first century A.D., he was to be used only cautiously as a parallel figure to Jesus, although this had been common.

After two enthusiastic weeks of work I could clarify my view on Apollonius in the New Testament exegesis to my teacher, and also present it to Professor Martin Hengel, who had kindly invited me to his *Oberseminar*, and now strongly encouraged me to continue on the course I had chosen. I then published my work on Philostratus (*Der philostratische Apollonius*, 1991), and wrote my theological dissertation on how Apollonius had been used in New Testament exegesis (*Apollonius von Tyana in der neutestamentlichen Exegese. Forschungsbericht und Weiterführung der Diskussion*, 1994). I challenged the view that Gentile miracle-workers were a common phenomenon among the Greeks and Romans and that they were a model for Jesus as he was presented in the Gospels. Scholars were never able to name these many alleged men, but uncritically used Apollonius when constructing the famous concept of “divine man”. I wondered why Jewish miracle-workers were so sorely overlooked by the scholars.

The present book investigates the way the biblical miracles of the Old Testament figures, such as Moses, Joshua and Elijah, are retold in early Judaism. Some stories appear often and they share common nonbiblical details, which leads to the supposition of a strong written and oral tradition. I hope to still publish a book on historical Jewish miracle-workers in Jesus' times, but even if that book is published someday, I still have no solutions to several fascinating questions on the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels, especially concerning the historical Jesus. This, then, is the third book by the anxious man who found a sudden solution to an impossible problem, and I do not know how many there will still be. It took about ten years before the first two were finished, and more than ten before the appearance of this volume. If anything, this process has taught me patience.

I owe my warm thanks to several scholars. Prof. Antti Laato generously gave of his time to help me, and Prof. Martin Hengel's advice has been of great value during the decade this book was written. The learned recommendations of Prof. Jörg Frey have improved this book. The warden of the Tyndale House in Cambridge, Dr. Bruce Winter, and Dr. David Instone-Brewer helped me during the most difficult phases of the work. Timo Nisula, M.A., M.Th. always combines friendship with a strong *iudicium*. The scholars at the Centre of Excellence of the Finnish Academy, especially professors Lars Aejmelaesus, Karl Gustaf Sandelin and Timo Veijola, have helped me greatly. My father, Prof. Heikki Koskenniemi, and brother, the Rev. Olli Koskenniemi, have offered many opportunities to discuss my views. Nancy Seidel, M.A. has corrected the language.

During the writing of my book on Apollonius and New Testament exegesis, our family grew by five sons. During the last ten years, Tuomas, Johannes, Antti, Jaakko and Pietari have grown up to be eager partners in discussions, and their love has given me strength and joy. My wife Marja has not only allowed me to work but also supported and encouraged me. "A wife of noble character who can find?" (Prov 31:10).

For a professor to lead an impatient young student of classical antiquity into the rich world of the New Testament and to become his *Doktorvater* should have been enough. However, during the most difficult phases of the writing of this book, Professor Jukka Thurén still guided a slightly older student into the world of early Judaism. It is a pleasure to dedicate this book to him, although, as with all my works intended for his desk, it comes terribly late.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
a. Preliminary definition of the task	1
b. What is a “miracle”?	1
c. Competing miracle-workers and a story about a modern category	3
d. Jewish miracle-workers in religious-historical study	5
e. A more precise definition of the task and method	11
2. Miracles and the Glorious Past: The Wisdom of Ben Sira	17
a. Introduction	17
b. Moses	19
c. Joshua	26
d. Elijah	31
e. Elisha	37
f. Isaiah	39
g. Conclusion	41
3. Miracles and the War between Powers: The Book of Jubilees	44
a. Introduction	44
b. Abraham	46
c. Moses	54
d. Conclusion	62
4. Dramatic Miracles: Ezekiel the Tragedian	64
a. Introduction	64
b. The dialogue at the burning bush	66
c. The plagues told in advance	69
d. The miracle at the Red Sea	73
e. A miracle-worker - but how much more?	81
f. Conclusion	86
5. Miracles in Popular Historiography: Artapanus	89
a. Introduction	89
b. The leader is called	92
c. The return, plagues and freedom	96
d. The Red Sea and the desert	103
e. Conclusion	105

6. Miracles in Literal and Allegorical Interpretation: Philo.....	108
a. Introduction	108
b. The literal interpretation of the miracle stories	110
c. The allegorical interpretation of the miracle stories	129
d. Miracles explained rationally?	146
e. Miracles of the prophet	148
f. God or Moses?	151
g. Miracles and legitimisation	155
h. Conclusion	156
7. Many Miracles: The Lives of the Prophets.....	160
a. Introduction	160
b. Isaiah	163
c. Jeremiah.....	165
d. Ezekiel.....	169
e. Daniel	177
f. Elijah.....	184
g. Elisha.....	186
h. Conclusion	187
8. Militant Miracles: Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum	189
a. Introduction	189
b. Moses	192
c. Joshua.....	203
d. Kenaz	206
Excursus: Magical practices in L.A.B.....	214
e. Samson	216
f. David	219
g. Elijah / Phinehas.....	224
h. Conclusion	225
9. Toning Down the Miracles? Josephus.....	228
a. Introduction	228
b. Moses	231
c. Joshua	249
d. Samson.....	255
e. Solomon	259
f. Elijah.....	264
g. Elisha	271
h. Conclusion	278

10. Conclusion.....	281
a. LXX.....	281
b. The texts retold	282
c. The themes	290
d. The Greek influence.....	292
e. Biases and functions of the miracle stories	293
f. The audience.....	297
g. The roles of God and man and Moses' extraordinary position	297
h. Geography and chronology	299
 Bibliography	 301
Index of References	321
Index of Subjects and Scholars.....	346

1. Introduction

a. Preliminary definition of the task

The task of this book is to study how the Old Testament stories about Hebrew miracle-workers were used in early Jewish literature. Everyone retelling a biblical story left his trace, making it possible to study what he retained, what he left, what he added and what he changed. The study also reveals the early Jewish tradition, as well as various biases reshaping the stories through nonbiblical details circulating in the oral and literary folklore of different eras.

b. What is a “miracle”?

Neither the Old nor the New Testament contains anything that could be characterised as a definition of a miracle, and the early Jewish texts do not help either. Moreover, the Old Testament uses a variety of terms. God's miracles are גְּדִלוֹת,¹ נִפְלְאוֹת,² אֲמוֹת³ or מוֹפְתִים:⁴ All these words have been used in different ways during the long history of the Jewish tradition and they may include things not usually covered by modern definitions of miracle. A definition can thus not be based on an ancient term. David Hume formulated possibly the most famous modern definition, which is very close to Aristotle's words:⁵ A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature. But even

¹ גְּדִלוֹת in the sense of God's 'mighty deeds' occurs in Deut 10:21; Jer 33:3; 45:5; Ps 71:19; 106:21; Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5. ² Kgs 8:4 uses it for Elisha's mighty deeds. On the word see Jenni 1984, 402-409.

³ נִפְלְאוֹת (from פָּלָא) points mostly to God's saving deeds in the past (Exod 3:20; Job 37:14). It does not necessarily mean a breaking of what we call the laws of nature, but that God helps in a hopeless situation, perhaps in a very "natural" way; see Albertz 1984, 416-420.

⁴ אֲמוֹת occurs 79 times in the Old Testament in all historical layers. On אֲמוֹת in the Old Testament see Stolz 1984, 91-95.

⁵ מוֹפְתִים occurs in Exod 4:21 when God speaks to Moses about the miracles he should make in Egypt. In Joel 3:3 it points to phenomena in the skies.

⁶ Aristotle said that a miracle was *παρὰ φύσιν* (GA 770b). The similarity is, of course, not a coincidence, since Aristotle's philosophy deeply influenced the medieval learned world. Spinoza symbolized a milestone on the road to the modern concept. He dealt with the possibility of miracles in 1670: God has created the world and its harmony and a

that is very problematic in the study of the early Jewish material. The idea of the laws of nature as separate from God's almighty power is seldom even alluded to in the Jewish texts. Generally there are no laws to be broken by an unusual event. God's help may come in a very natural way and still be praised as his "miracle". Since Jewish texts thus do not give a basis for a definition, and the modern view differs greatly from the world view of the writers, the use of the term "miracle" is difficult. Further, it is not always obvious whether, for instance, physical strength should be considered a miracle or not: David's unexpected triumph over Goliath may not have been supernatural in 1 Sam (although obviously in *L.A.B.* 61), but Samson indeed had superhuman powers in Judges and certainly in *L.A.B.* Some miracles are perhaps interpreted "rationalistically" in part of the tradition, but does a natural explanation mean that the writer has not believed in miracles? It is impossible to find an unambiguous definition covering the Jewish as well as the modern perspectives. It is understandable that most studies dealing with miracles define the miracle very briefly or even omit the definition altogether, as Barry Blackburn and Werner Kahl do.⁶ Actually, Eric Eve suggests a new terminology, reserving the word "miracle" for the biblical phenomenon and using the concept "anomaly" for a supposed exception to the laws of nature.⁷ Nevertheless, a sufficient definition is possible. Bernd Kollmann studies the New Testament terminology and observes that a modern view is incompatible with it. He uses a short definition:

"In dieser Untersuchung wird der Begriff Wunder im überkommenen Sinne als Sammelbezeichnung für außergewöhnliche, aufsehenerregende Taten Jesu wie anderer Gestalten der Antike verwendet."⁸

It may be considered problematic that a modern category including disparate material is applied to the ancient texts, but Kollmann's formulation provides a basis for the definition:⁹ A miracle is a fortuitous breaking of what we (although not the writers) call the laws of nature and which God

miracle breaking the good order is not only a positive thing. A miracle is against nature and against reason (see G. Maier 1986, 50-51).

⁶ On these works see below p. 4, 9, and 15.

⁷ Eve 2002, 1-2.

⁸ Kollmann 1996, 53-54.

⁹ John P. Meier (1994, 512-515) also uses a short definition: "A miracle is (1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by any interested and fair-minded observer, (2) an event that finds no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space, and (3) an event that is the result of a special act of God, doing what no human power can do." However, it should be emphasized that also this definition results in a modern, collecting category.

or his agent allegedly causes.¹⁰ The theme, of necessity, must be discussed several times in this study.

c. Competing miracle-workers and a story about a modern category

The study of the biblical miracles has held a central position in the New Testament exegesis from at least the early 20th century. Richard Reitzenstein (1906, 1910)¹¹ and Gillis Wetter (1916)¹² considered that the first Christians lived in an atmosphere of tough competition. This view is expressed in the work of Helmut Köster (1982):

“Miracles were performed not only by Christian missionaries, as described in the Acts of the Apostles and as Paul encounters them in the opponents of *2 Corinthians*, but also by Jewish preachers, Neopythagorean philosophers, and by many other teachers, physicians, and magicians. The entire scale of miraculous deeds of power was commonly used, from magical tricks to predictions of the future, from horoscopes to the healing of diseases and maladies, even the raising of dead people. In those circles which were addressed by these philosophers of the marketplace, the power of speech and the greatness of miracle would have more profound effects than the depth and dignity of rational, moral, and religious insight.”¹³

The competition with the “mob of divine or deified men”¹⁴ allegedly led the first Christians to remodel their image of Jesus according to a pagan pattern, and make him a Hellenistic divine man (θεῖος ἄνθρωπος). The accommodation to this model or the reaction against it allegedly colours all canonical Gospels, the pre-Pauline tradition, *Second Corinthians*, *First Thessalonians* and *Philippians*.¹⁵

¹⁰ There are several borderline cases, such as the exceptional military strength mentioned above. One of them is divination, either in dreams or through different particles or astrological skills. They are excluded from the present study, but if a text retelling the Old Testament miracles deals with these techniques with the aim of accepting (as Artapanus) or rejecting them (as *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*), they are briefly mentioned.

¹¹ *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (1906) and *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (1910).

¹² “Der Sohn Gottes”. *Eine Untersuchung über den Charakter und die Tendenz des Johannes-Evangeliums. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Heilandsgestalten der Antike*.

¹³ Helmut Köster, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age 1-2*, (1982, 1, 357).

¹⁴ “Mob of divine or deified man”, Morton Smith 1970, 184.

¹⁵ A survey of the history of the research is found in Koskeniemi 1994, 114-168.

The concept of divine men was rarely motivated by ancient sources and it is widely criticised today.¹⁶ The Graeco-Roman world knew famous figures with a reputation for being miracle-workers, but both the heroes such as Hercules and men from the past such as Pythagoras should be compared to the Old Testament figures rather than to historical Jewish miracle-workers. Scholars have been able to name very few pagan miracle-workers from the time of Jesus, although it has been somewhat easier to name miracle-working gods, rulers and anonymous magicians.¹⁷ Moreover, the concept is ambiguous in many ways. For example, Reitzenstein, Gillis Wetter, Otto Weinreich and Ludwig Bieler differed greatly from each other, and were all heavily influenced by the ideologies current in the late

¹⁶ The most important critique of the hypothesis of divine men comes from Klaus Berger, Otto Betz, Martin Hengel and Barry L. Blackburn (see Koskeniemi 1994, 232-233); my book *Apollonios von Tyana in der neutestamentlichen Exegese* (1994) is also very critical. David du Toit (1997) showed later in a detailed analysis that the words θεῖος ἀνὴρ (ἄνθρωπος) were not a fixed *terminus technicus*. See also the critical article of Aage Pilgaard (1995) and the review in Hans-Josef Klauck's *The Religious Context of Early Christianity. A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (2000, 174-177). On Bernd Kollmann's book see below p. 9.

¹⁷ See Koskeniemi 1994, 207-219. The last pre-Christian pagan miracle-worker known to us is Menecrates, who lived about 300 BC. Alexander of Abonuteichos is the first pagan miracle-worker known to us from contemporary sources after the time of Jesus. His *floruit* was in about 150 AD. The man mentioned in most studies is Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the first century AD. However, the main source is *Vita Apollonii Tyannis* of Lucius Flavius Philostratus, which was written in the religious world of the early 3rd century (see Bowie 1978, Dzielska 1986 and Koskeniemi 1991). The main lines of my dissertation (1994) have received mostly positive reviews so far (November 2003); see Pérès 1995, 447-448; Thümmel 1995, 801-802; Ziegenaus 1995, 154-155; Danker 1996, 757-758. Jaap-Jan Flinterman, however, criticised them in a long review (1996). He relies more on the sources on Apollonius than I do and considers it possible to deal with the historical Apollonius. Moreover, he claims that there were more miracle-workers in Jesus' time, especially since it is not easy to draw the line between miracle-workers and magicians. I fully agree with Flinterman that Apollonius was considered a magician before Philostratus (see Koskeniemi 1994, 211). However, although some prominent scholars have tried to define here the historical nucleus, the historical figure escapes us (Koskeniemi 1991, 58-69; I returned to the theme in an article, which is in print). Also, neither Flinterman nor other scholars (Werner Kahl was not yet aware of my book; see Kahl 1994, 58-61) have added many new figures to my list. Although it is not easy to differentiate between magicians and miracle-workers, I considered it important, after all the confusing discussion, to collect the names of the historical persons who acted as miracle-workers and to study the common magical practices separately. The θεῖος ἀνὴρ-hypothesis was constructed with very few sources and great ideological fervour, moreover, with no respect for Jewish sources. It now seems reasonable to study the religious-historical parallels carefully, step by step. Flinterman's article plays an important part in this work. On the discussion and open questions see also Klauck 2000, 168-177.

19th and early 20th centuries. Some recent scholars have regarded the model as a Hellenistic concept,¹⁸ while others have seen it as a modern concept.¹⁹ It is thus not possible to speak about *the* divine man model; it includes several different models, partly mutually exclusive. θεῖος ἀνὴρ should no longer be considered as a fixed and Hellenistic but as a modern concept. The best solution is to realise that the whole concept is rather part of the western history of ideas and to investigate the Graeco-Roman parallels to Jesus' miracles without this modern pattern, which has clearly hindered rather than helped scholarship.

d. Jewish miracle-workers in religious-historical study

The fact that we know of very few pagan miracle-workers makes Jewish men with such a reputation more significant than ever. They have been investigated, but often through the perspective of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ-hypothesis.²⁰ It is obvious that the old History of the Religions school did not show enough interest in them, but sought more parallels from the "Hellenistic" world.²¹ Although there is no reason to return to the old opposi-

¹⁸ H.D. Betz (1983, 235) considers θεῖος ἀνὴρ to be an ancient pattern, which is treated by the ancient writers in many ways and in many phrases and which could be interpreted in several ways (1983, 364). Kollmann agrees and cites H.D. Betz (1996, 58-59). It is rather problematic that the archetype of these interpretations seems to remain a platonic idea. H.D. Betz cannot convincingly show that θεῖος ἀνὴρ was an ancient category.

¹⁹ Unlike most supporters of the hypothesis, Corrington regards "the divine man" as a modern, hypothetical category (*The "Divine man". His Origin and Function in Hellenistic Popular Religion*, 1986; for a review see Koskenniemi 1994, 95-98).

²⁰ E.g. Willi Schottroff characterises Moses in Eupolemus, Philo, Josephus and Artapanus as θεῖος ἀνὴρ (1983, 229-233). Most scholars suppose that the Jews had learned the concept from the Greeks and then mediated it to the first Christians (the view of Ferdinand Hahn 1963; see Koskenniemi 1994, 121). Precisely this view is studied and criticised by Holladay in an early and important study of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ-hypothesis. According to Holladay, the Jewish writers did not remove the line between God and man, but drew it very clearly (*Theios aner in Hellenistic Judaism: a Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*, 1977; reviewed in Koskenniemi 1994, 88-90). Corrington criticises Holladay's work severely and claims that Holladay has overlooked the social factors in early Judaism (Corrington 1986, esp. 46-47). Louis Feldman's new and undoubtedly correct approach is to list the general virtues of the heroes in the pagan literature without constructing a fixed pattern (1998a, 82-131).

²¹ Bultmann offers a representative example in his famous *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1921, 147). According to him, scholars earlier considered the Old Testament the source of Christian miracle stories. Bultmann sees this as no longer credible, because the similarities are limited. Bultmann speaks now about a genealogy, but uses analogy to deal with the pagan stories (see Koskenniemi 1994, 45). Some scholars have always ob-

tion between “Hellenistic” and “Jewish”, it is strange how small a role the Jewish miracle-workers have had in the discussion about divine men. Simultaneously, characteristic Jewish features in the concept of miracle have been overlooked. The last decades have shown signs of better times, as the “new History of the Religions school” seeks the roots of Christianity in Judaism.²² However, neither the Jewish sources, which today are much wider than in the heyday of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ-hypothesis, nor the rich secondary literature is given enough attention even to date.²³

The pagan miracle-workers have thus won the interest of scholarship during the last century and provided most of the background for the New Testament study of Jesus’ miracles. Yet, there have always been scholars who have observed the Jewish parallels. Two of them in particular provided an impulse to scholarship and deserve to be mentioned.

Paul Fiebig (*Jüdische Wundergeschichten im Zeitalter Jesu etc.*, 1911) argued that many Rabbis made miracles in Jesus’ time, and that it was part of the Rabbi’s image. Only the echoes of the vivid discussion between Fiebig and his opponent Schlatter, which related to the miracles of the historical Jesus, can be heard today, but this debate was one of the most significant in this area.²⁴ These scholars opened the door for a study of the Jewish background of the New Testament miracles, but there were few who stepped in.

Vivid research followed the first edition of *Die Zeloten* by Martin Hengel (1961), in which he investigates the movements, which revolted against the Romans and their religious background. Hengel’s work has been subject to a discussion and severe criticism. Horsley and Hanson, for example, regard the zealots in his works as historical fiction.²⁵ According to them there was not a unified movement before the Jewish war, in which armed revolt and the Jewish religion were combined.²⁶ Hengel responds to his opponents in the preface

served the Old Testament material. Berger, a critic of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ-concept, emphasized the stories about Elijah and Elisha (Berger 1984, 305-306).

²² Hengel was the first to use the phrase when introducing a book written by Larry W. Hurtado (1988). The programme of the school is formulated in Jarl Fossum’s article “The New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule: The Quest for Jewish Christology” (1991). See also below, p. 82.

²³ Charlesworth (1995, 72) characterises the situation as follows: “In the sixties, when we considered the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha we usually meant 17 documents, but now we frequently mean at least 65. Then we examined about 12 Dead Sea Scrolls, but now well over 400.”

²⁴ See Becker 2002, 16-21.

²⁵ Horsley and Hanson 1985, xiii-xvii.

²⁶ Horsley (1994, ix-xi) underlines the political relevance of New Testament scholarship and openly expresses the political relevance of his own study: Observing the Jewish agrarian people and their problems leads to a better understanding of the South American theology of freedom.

and appendix of the English translation of his work.²⁷ The unanimity of the scholars is obvious in the articles in the *Cambridge History of Judaism III*. However, Smith, who considers the concept of Horsley and Hanson absurd, attacks Hengel even more strongly.²⁸ In contrast, Gabba is sympathetic to Hengel's position.²⁹ Schaper characterises the zealots as "the left wing of Pharisaism."³⁰ The present book, which must often deal with the combination of religion and politics, certainly illuminates the question.

During the discussion on the zealots, the research advanced in many ways. P.W. Barnett introduced the term "sign prophets", referring to men who tried to legitimate themselves as leaders by repeating Old Testament miracles (1981). Recently Rebecca Gray collected the evidence in Josephus (1993),³¹ and many figures have now been studied in detail. However, because, for instance, Atomus (Jos. *Ant.* 20,141-143) cannot be labelled either as a zealot or a "sign-prophet", he, as most men of his type, is usually not mentioned. The phenomenon of the historical figures has still not been studied thoroughly enough.

The Jewish miracle-workers were again drawn to the centre of New Testament scholarship by Geza Vermes (*Jesus the Jew*, 1973; *The Gospel of Jesus the Jew*, 1981), who could combine his studies with the newly awakened quest of the historical Jesus. Vermes underlined the Old Testament miracle-workers, especially Elijah and Elisha, and named many Jewish healers, exorcists and miracle-workers from the times of Jesus.³² He regarded the historical Jesus as one of the holy miracle-workers of Galilee.³³ This view can either be accepted or rejected, but Vermes' studies are cited even today in discussions about the historical Jesus.³⁴ Fiebig, as well as Vermes, dealt with historical, non-biblical Jewish miracle-workers, and several scholars have subsequently studied these figures. New Testament scholars can justly be criticised for what the Germans call *Steinbruchsmentalität*: historical Jewish miracle-workers have all too often been studied because of the needs of New Testament scholarship; and the passages on

²⁷ Hengel 1989b, xiii-xvii; 380-404.

²⁸ Smith 1999, 542-544, 566.

²⁹ "We cannot say with certainty exactly when this name (sc. Zealot) was first used, not least because the term was pregnant with religious and political significance the roots of which went back a long time", Gabba 1999, 154.

³⁰ Schaper 1999, 422.

³¹ *Prophetic figures in late Second Temple Jewish Palestine. The evidence from Josephus*. New York / Oxford 1993.

³² Vermes 1973, 58-85.

³³ Vermes 1973, 223. Goodman studied the differences between Judaism in Galilee and in Judea in the *Cambridge History of Judaism 3* (1999, 569-617), but he did not deal with the miracles.

³⁴ See Becker 2002, 291. 337-340.

Honi the Circle-drawer in Crossan's and Meier's books, for instance, lack the depth present in Green's and Becker's studies.³⁵ However, these figures are studied vigorously.

A further step was taken with Michael Becker's recently published dissertation on rabbinical miracle-workers.³⁶ According to Becker, the early rabbis were unwilling to tell about miracles made by men. This included biblical figures, as well as extra-biblical persons. Some miracles, however, were intimately connected to the history forming the Jewish identity, and were retold without reservation. That does not mean that they did not have to deal with miracles, but Becker's study reveals that the early rabbis wrestled long and hard with the problem. Statistics show the indisputable fact that the early collections contain fewer miracle stories, whereas the number grows markedly in the later texts.³⁷ Becker's study confirms that the development in the Jewish world corresponds with the Graeco-Roman world, where miracle-workers were numerous from the late second century AD.³⁸

Just as the Graeco-Roman miracle-workers known to us were either historical figures known from contemporary sources or great men of the distant past, their Jewish counterparts were either contemporaries of the early Jewish writers or figures known from the Old Testament. Much research must still be done on the historical, non-biblical figures for a clearer picture of the background of New Testament Christology. It is surprising, however, how little even the later traditions concerning the figures mentioned in the Old Testament have been studied. They are often noted simply in passing. On the other hand, scholars such as Martin Dibelius (1919) and Rudolf Bultmann (1921) tried to note the Jewish as well as the Graeco-Roman parallels, although their intention was to underline the "Hellenistic" world. Otto Böcher (1970, 1972) and Gerd Theissen (1974) have continued this kind of work. Some scholars have always pointed to the Old Testament³⁹ and some very recent works attest that the Old Testa-

³⁵ See Green 1979, 621-647; Crossan 1991, 142-148; Meier 1994, 581-584; Becker 2002, 291-337.

³⁶ "Wunder" und "Wundertäter" im früh-rabbinischen Judentum. Studien zum literarischen und historischen Phänomen im paganen und früh-jüdischen Kontext und seine Bedeutung für das Verständnis Jesu (2002).

³⁷ See the summary in Becker 2002, 406-414.

³⁸ See Koskeniemi 1994, 207-219.

³⁹ In 1978, Michael Goulder, in investigating the Gospels, made cautious observations on Elijah's and Elisha's miracles; see 1978, 266-281 and also 1989, 304-305. Richard Glöckner studied the connections between the *Psalms* and New Testament miracle stories (*Neutestamentliche Wundergeschichten und das Lob der Wundertaten Gottes in den Psalmen. Studien zur sprachlichen und theologischen Wundergeschichten und Psalmen*,

ment miracle-workers are being given more attention today than some decades ago.⁴⁰ However, Kollmann's book, mentioned above is a good example of an unbalanced way to deal with the texts:⁴¹ He closely studies the traditions about Pythagoras, but not the traditions about Moses, Elijah or Elisha, which were certainly very close to the early Christians. Moreover, here as so often, the characteristic feature of the Jewish area, the combination of miracles of the past with the hope of future miracles, is mainly overlooked. It is now time to pay attention to the traditions about the Old Testament miracle-workers.

Many studies contain valuable material on the Old Testament heroes in later Jewish literature, but the timeline between the Old Testament and rabbinic literature is long and includes a great number of sources. Some special studies and works cover some parts of this vast material, some more or less all of it. Some figures have always been eagerly studied. Moses offers a good example: The early parts of the tradition have been thoroughly investigated, but descriptions given by later writers, such as Ezekiel the Tragedian, Artapanus or Pseudo-Philo in *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, still offer extensive work for scholars. Other figures, such as David and Solomon, have received less attention.

Much of the research covers a part of this rich material. Some studies follow traditions about heroes. Willy Schotttroff, for example, investigated the images of the Old Testament miracle-workers in his RAC article

1983). Klaus Berger noted the Old Testament stories in his *Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments*, 1984, 305-306.

⁴⁰ Kahl is well aware that the Jewish side is neglected (see 1994, 21-22), and Craig Evans closely studies the Jewish miracle tradition (1995, 213-244).

⁴¹ *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter. Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum* (1996). Kollmann criticises some scholars, especially O. Betz and Glöckner, because they one-sidedly observe the Old Testament and Jewish traditions and forget the Hellenistic parallels (1996, 26-27). He tries himself to observe both sides when studying the miracles of Jesus and the first Christians. Nevertheless, he overlooks several Graeco-Roman parallels, such as Eunus (about 136/135-132 BC, Liv. *perioch.* 56; Flor. *epit.* 2,7; Diod. 34); Damigeron (second century BC, Apul. *apol.* 90; Arnob. *nat.* 1, 52; we have only fragments of his own work *de lapidibus*), Publius Nigidius Figulus (about 100-45 BC; for the sources see Koskenniemi 1994, 209); the eremite in Plutarch (first century AD, Plut. *mor.* 421a-b); Peregrinus Proteus (died 165 AD, Lukian *Peregr.*; Gell. 8,3. 12,11; Athenag. *suppl.* 26,3-5) Arnuphis (about 174 AD, Dio Cass. 71,8-9, *Hist. Aug. M. Aur.* 24,4); Julianus (in the time of Marcus Aurelius, Prokl. *Krat.* 72, 10; *rep.* 2, 123, 12; Arnob. *nat.* 1, 52; Iul. *epist.* 12), Apsethus (before Hippolytus' *haer.* [222 AD], Hippol. *haer.* 6,7-8); and Neryllinus (about 177 AD, Athenag. *suppl.* 26,3-5). I give a list of the known pagan miracle-workers in my book; see Koskenniemi 1994, 207-219. On the other hand, Kollmann carefully notes such historical figures as Theudas and the Egyptian, but shows no interest in the tradition of retelling new variants of the Old Testament miracles.

(1983). However, he only observes the “divine men” (“*Gottmenschen*”) of the Old Testament (Moses, Elijah, Elisha) and leaves aside even many later traditions about them.⁴² He also overlooks the Old Testament figures, such as David and Solomon, mentioned as miracle-workers only in the later tradition and not in the Old Testament. David L. Tiede (1972) and Carl L. Holladay (1977), two early critics of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ theory, studied many of the most important texts, and made observations still valuable today.

Some studies do not follow the tradition of an individual miracle-worker through different texts, but instead concentrate on a certain text and all its heroes. In his monumental work, Louis Feldman studied the way in which Josephus treated the Old Testament figures, including all the miracle-workers. This does not mean that the work is complete because Feldman’s work has been heavily criticised by Mark Roncace, who scrutinised his depictions of Deborah and Gideon,⁴³ and Christopher Begg challenges Feldman’s view in his study of Josephus’ description of Elisha.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Feldman has collected and discussed a huge amount of material, which has been helpful in this study. Although there are no such works on, for example, the *Lives of the Prophets* or *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, the commentaries of Anna Maria Schwemer and Howard Jacobson are an equal contribution to the study of these texts. Eric Eve’s book (*Jewish context of Jesus’ miracles*, 2002), in which the writer studies the role of the miracles in almost all relevant Jewish texts, deserves special attention. Eve has taken upon himself a huge task, because his work not only deals with the human miracle-workers, but also with the views on miracles, whether they be done by men or God, and he expands his investigation to historical figures such as Honi and the “sign prophets” in Josephus. The wide scope of the study necessarily means that he cannot investigate all the texts thoroughly enough.⁴⁵

Scholars are now eagerly investigating the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and many studies and articles are of valuable help to the present work. Becker covers the rabbinical literature in his dissertation mentioned

⁴² Schottroff 1983, 220-233. He does not deal with the passages in Ben Sira, Ezekiel the Tragedian and *L.A.B.*

⁴³ Deborah and Gideon are not presented as miracle-workers in Josephus, and they are not treated in the present work, but Roncace’s article may also affect other figures studied by Feldman. Roncace investigates Josephus’ passages, but notes none of the strong redactional biases found by Feldman, and concludes in his article: “A close reading of the stories does not produce the results that Feldman claims. ... If the stories of Deborah and Gideon are any indication, then it appears that much of this work remains to be done” (2000, 247-274). Feldman promptly responded (2001, 193-220), but did not remove all doubts concerning his work.

⁴⁴ See below p. 271-278.

⁴⁵ See below e.g. p. 19, 109 and 162.

above. However, there is still much to do before the Jewish tradition is observed as well as it deserves to be.

e. A more precise definition of the task and method

The present work concentrates on the early Jewish interpretations of the miracles made by Israelites mentioned in the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells about many men who saved the nation with their great deeds, or manifested with their miracles that Israel's God was with them. They could be saviours of the nation, as Moses, or its great leaders, as Joshua, or miracle-working prophets, as Elijah and Elisha. They also could be strange figures, as Samson, the fighter with superhuman powers. It is interesting to note how their stories were retold in the Jewish texts. Some things may be omitted, intentionally or not, some things may be emphasized, and some totally new traits may appear in the picture. Moreover, it is interesting to discover which figures still play a role in the later traditions and which are largely forgotten in the sources we have. Certain elements were apparently crucial in different periods of Jewish history. Miracles could be connected with deep wisdom, with physical strength, great leadership or even with entertainment. In Judaism, unlike in Greek thought, they also could be linked with the glorious past of the nation and with an eschatological hope. The Jewish writers do not only retell new variations of the Old Testament miracles (possibly adding totally new features such as the prince of demons, Mastema, in the events of Egypt in *The Book of Jubilees*). They also tell totally new stories about the Old Testament heroes. *The Lives of the Prophets* tells about Ezekiel, and some texts about men hardly mentioned in the Old Testament, such as Kenaz in *L.A.B.* The study of these stories and the traditions behind them is important, because they reveal the current values and hopes of the writers and their circles.

This study aims to cover all Jewish literature, from the Old Testament to *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* and Josephus. The early rabbinic literature is covered in Becker's book. The vast amount of material includes very disparate elements, as well stories and shorter passages. There are two ways to structure the material. One way would be to study all the traditions, for example, about Abraham; to collect every miracle-story we have about him and in so doing, track the history of the tradition. Some good studies of this kind have been done. I do not know of a study about Abraham as a miracle-worker, and the traditions about Moses have been collected only superficially.⁴⁶ Elijah, however, has been investigated more

⁴⁶ Many scholars have done valuable work. Willy Schottroff deals with Moses in his article "Gottmensch" in RAC (1983). Oberhänsli-Widmer has collected abundant mate-

thoroughly.⁴⁷ An alternative, which has been chosen here, is to study the most important texts containing miracle stories about the biblical figures. It seems to offer better opportunities to investigate the role of the miracles and the biases of the different writers, and to trace the historical development in Israel. It also enhances the collection of details that the tradition added to the biblical stories, and clarifies which stories passed into extinction in early Judaism. The shorter passages outside these writings, in which the miracles are mentioned or even briefly retold, will be observed to illustrate the texts receiving greater attention.

In the study of recounted passages from the Old Testament, a series of questions is asked concerning every text.

The writer has used either the Hebrew or the Greek text as the original. The first problem is the role of the Septuagint. Firstly, many books of LXX differ considerably from the Hebrew text, revealing the complicated history of the latter. In the texts studied below, the numerous deviations in the versions of the conquest of Jericho (Jos 5:13-6:27) make clear that the Hebrew original the translators used differed from the Masoretic text.⁴⁸ The study of the Greek translation is thus useful even if it is compared with texts written originally in Hebrew (such as *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* and *Jub.*). Secondly, the Septuagint is not merely a translation; it is the first stage in the midrashic tradition of contextualizing and applying the Hebrew original,⁴⁹ and the question is whether the intention of those translating the miracles-stories can be traced.⁵⁰ Regardless of whether the deviation is based on a different original or on an intentional change in the text, it may reveal a traditional, Hebrew interpretation. LXX is analysed in several chapters dealing with writers who used the biblical stories, and the results are collected and evaluated in chapter 10.

The task of identifying the biblical passages referred to is often easy and is part of the basic work of the editor or translator of the text (e.g. the Loeb editions of Philo and Josephus), but the passage that is paraphrased may

rial in her article in TRE (1994), but the material is too vast to be studied thoroughly in an article.

⁴⁷ On Elijah see especially Öhler 1997.

⁴⁸ See Hengel 2002, 84-85.

⁴⁹ See Hengel 2002, 85-90.

⁵⁰ Karl Ludwig Schmidt, for example, once expressed the common view that the Septuagint, in dealing with the fundamentals of the Jewish religion, was also strongly influenced by the Hellenistic spirit ("Und gerade durch die genannte Septuagintabibel, die ja mehr als eine bloße Übersetzung aus dem Hebräischen ins Griechische, nämlich auf weite Strecken hin eine Hellenisierung sogar des herben semitischen Monotheismus bedeutet, ist das Judentum eine der selbstsichersten und werbekräftigsten Religionen des römischen Reiches geworden" (1927, 48).

not be the only biblical text influencing the retold passage. It is a difficult task to identify the passages in Pseudo-Philo, for instance, because *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* often links several other texts (the Psalms, for example) with the narration.⁵¹ A careful study is needed to find all the texts used or referred to. The subject has been extensively discussed, but the discussion should be continued. How the writers used the biblical material, especially in the miracle stories, is always interesting.

A thorough study is also needed to reveal the new traits in the stories and the biases of the writers. They may include omissions, additions, clarifications or alterations, with some details occurring repeatedly in different texts and revealing a common tradition. In dealing with all major versions of the retold stories about the biblical miracle-workers, the present study should throw more light on these common and traditional traits, which are collected in chapter 10.

One important question involves the influence of Jewish and Gentile traditions. *De Sampson* 23-24, for example, attests the obvious fact that the biblical stories were recounted in Jewish meetings and reveals that there were different oral traditions. Philo also considered the stories told by the elders as a source to be used alongside the Scriptures:

"[I will] tell the story of Moses as I have learned it, both from the sacred books, the wonderful moments of his wisdom which he has left behind him, and from some of the elders of the nation; for I always interwove what I was told with what I read, and thus believed myself to have a closer knowledge than others of his life's history" (*Mos.* 1,4).

We thus know that there was an oral tradition, that we have only fragments of the written, and part of all that was merged with the later traditions and written down in the texts dating after the scope of this study. As a result, dating the tradition is often very difficult. Some scholars intend to emphasize the chain of the tradition and have often supposed that the traditions written down later were already known to writers such as Ezekiel, Philo and Josephus. Others have been more sceptical.⁵² On the other hand, some trait may resemble a Greek or Roman story. The versions of Moses' death are similar to the stories about the end of some Graeco-Roman famous men. The question is, did the writer himself borrow from the Gentile tradition, did he know it at all, or had the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions merged at an earlier stage? Although we may not be able to decide conclusively whether a writer introduced a new trait to the biblical story or borrowed it from an oral or written tradition, the question should be dealt with.

⁵¹ See below e.g. p. 195.

⁵² Feldman generally supposes that the traditions were early and influenced the way Josephus deals with his material; see below, for example, p. 263. Jacobson is more cautious and is well aware of the problems; see p. 75.

The writers did not live in a vacuum. They were writing for a certain audience. Some Jewish authors wrote their works almost exclusively for the Jews, as the writer of *The Book of Jubilees* or Pseudo-Philo in his *L.A.B.* On the other hand, Philo and Josephus also intended their works for Gentiles. Differentiation between Jews and Gentiles, however, is not enough. Both audiences should be further analysed. What kind of Gentiles or what kind of Jews were supposed to read the story? Did many Jews, as often supposed, rationalise the miracle stories because of sceptical Gentile readers?⁵³ It would be important to know more about each audience, and how it influenced the work. Moreover, since writers lived both in and outside Palestine, the geographical factor has to be observed, and finally, when all the texts are studied, some chronological lines can certainly be drawn in the final chapter.

Many Jewish texts were written during crucial periods in the history of Israel, but the writers rarely if ever considered the Scripture as belonging only to the past. Everyone retelling the biblical original could adapt the holy past to his own situation. We could ask how much this was done – consciously or not – in retelling the stories about the plagues in Egypt, the great exodus, the way in the desert and the conquest of the land in the times before and after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

Miracles are, of course, always only one piece of the picture a writer draws of a biblical hero. While some writers do not mention, for example, Moses' miracles at all, in Philo's and Josephus' texts he is a philosopher, general, statesman and miracle-worker. Although it is unnecessary to deal with all these features in this study, we should ask what role the miracles play in the picture and what their function is. It is not always easy to treat them separately. Do mighty deeds make somebody a divine being, as many supporters of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ hypothesis have supposed? What other features are linked with the miracles? It is important to ask these questions, especially if the stories are heavily remodelled on the biblical original. Why are the stories remodelled and what is the result?

It is clear that usually, if not always, in the Old Testament God performs miracles, but may use a man as his agent. Also, the later Jewish writers followed the same method of retelling Old Testament miracles. It is often questionable whether a man can be called a "miracle-worker" at all. God may not use any human agent in the Old Testament, as for example, when destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, but Moses' person is very closely connected with the plagues in Exodus. It is understandable that the roles of God and his possible agent strongly vary in such retold versions as the events in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the desert. In some Jewish texts Moses' role is reduced to the point of no longer being mentioned (The

⁵³ On Artapanus see p. 104, on Philo see p. 109-110, on Josephus see p. 228.

Book of Wisdom highlights divine wisdom and not Moses), but sometimes (as in Artapanus or Josephus) he may appear as a more independent actor. The texts that characterise a man as a miracle-worker, as well as the roles of God and his agent in these texts, are studied here. Kahl developed a useful tool for this work (1994): He tried to separate the different roles in the stories by identifying the “Bearer of the Numinous Power” (= BNP) actually causing the miracle, the “Mediator of the Numinous Power” (=MNP) used as the agent of the BNP, and the “Petitioner of the Numinous Power” (=PNP) asking the BNP to make the miracle.⁵⁴ Eve asked the question studying many Jewish texts in his book (2002), but there is certainly still work to be done.

As seen above it is not easy to define a miracle, and even the genre “miracle-story” is a subject under dispute. Scholars have long taken the existence of the genre for granted. In 1919, Martin Dibelius concluded (*Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*) that the early Christian stories were either short accounts (“Paradigmas”) or longer narratives (“Novellen”), and that the latter were close relatives of Hellenistic stories. The birth of the Christian miracle stories has been based on either an extension of a paradigm from the Christian or non-Christian tradition, or on a non-Christian novel adopted and applied to Jesus.⁵⁵ Rudolf Bultmann went on in his *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* to characterize the style of the miracle stories⁵⁶ and give a list of stories similar to ones included in the New Testament.⁵⁷ Gerd Theissen developed the methodology in his *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten* (1974, transl. 1983) connecting the study of the miracle stories with sociological aspects. Although all these scholars assumed the existence of the genre “miracle-story”, this view has been justly challenged. Glöckner pointed to the *Psalms* as the background of the New Testament miracle stories (*Neutestamentliche Wundergeschichten und das Lob der Wundertaten Gottes in den Psalmen*, 1983), abandoning the link between a miracle and a story. Fundamental criticism against the former scholarship came with Klaus Berger’s two studies, “Hellenistische Gattungen und Neues Testament” (=1984b) and *Formgeschichte* (=1984a), and radically new definitions of the central terms of form-criticism. They also concern the “miracle stories”: Berger flatly denies the existence of such a genre, claiming that it is not a classical genre but a modern description defining the material poorly. According to him the “miracle stories” of the

⁵⁴ Kahl 1994, 62-65.

⁵⁵ Dibelius 1919, 36-56, esp. 54-55.

⁵⁶ Bultmann 1921, 135-136.

⁵⁷ Bultmann 1921, 142-146.

New Testament belong to several narrative genres.⁵⁸ Recently, Kahl (1994) has also emphasized the variety of the genres in which the Gospel writers presented Jesus as a BNP.⁵⁹ The criticism is also justified concerning the material studied in the present work: Ben Sira, for example, may describe the miracles of the ancient heroes in *Laus patrum*, Philo uses them in his ethical discourses and Josephus retells the history of Israel. It is very difficult to include them all in a single genre. The genre of a “miracle-story” is thus not an assumption here. Miracles of an Israelite⁶⁰ could occur in very different kinds of texts, and they are all important. However, it is useful to study what kind of miracles occur in early Judaism, when the mighty deeds of the Old Testament figures were retold. A summary of “themes”, following mainly Theissen’s catalogue, is given in chapter 10.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Berger 1984a, 305-307.

⁵⁹ Kahl 1994, 237.

⁶⁰ The Old Testament also tells about miracles made by non-Israelites, but Balaam, for example, is not included in this study.

⁶¹ See below, p. 290.

2. Miracles and the Glorious Past: The Wisdom of Ben Sira

a. Introduction

As many other Jewish texts, the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, written in Hebrew in about 180-190 and translated into Greek in approximately 130,¹ has become newly current. While not even a fresh commentary had existed some decades earlier,² by the 1970s intensive research and even strong disagreement had arisen on the main lines and goals of the work. Since then many detailed studies have revealed interesting new features of the work and about 600 publications regarding it were published between 1980 and 1997.³ Nevertheless, many questions are still open, and although many of them are part of the background of the present study,⁴ some may be clearly significant. In particular, the impact of politics and the writer's attitude toward Hellenism, both of which are discussed vividly, are relevant problems when investigating the role of the miracles, and the question that should be asked is how much Ben Sira contemporized the biblical stories.⁵ Although many important themes in the text have been studied, the role of the miracles in the work has not. While the main target of this study is the Hebrew original, the Greek translation is an interesting reworking of it and may reveal some independent tendencies. However, for most parts of the

¹ Scholars agree almost unanimously on this date; for the older view, that the translator came to Egypt not in the 38th year of Euergetes II, i.e. 132, but already in the 3rd century, see Stadelmann 1980, 1-3 and Reiterer 1997, 37.

² We have now the commentaries of Snaith (1974), di Lella and Skehan (1987) and Sauer (2000).

³ Beentjes 1997, V.

⁴ Did Ben Sira belong to the upper or lower echelons of society? Some scholars, such as Smend (1906, 345-346) have considered Ben Sira a member of the wealthy class, but Reiterer (1997, 35-37), as Tcherikover before him, assumes that he came from the poorer class and then rose in status. The question of his profession is closely connected with this problem. Stadelmann considers him a priest and scholar (1980, 14-26) and follows the line of Schlatter: "Gelehrte, die nichts als Gelehrte waren, kamen für Jerusalem zuerst bei Sirach vor" (Stadelmann 1980, 17; cited also by Hengel 1991, 132 and Kieweler 1992, 53). Wright (1997, 189-222) underlines his support for the priests: "Ben Sira is a scribe, perhaps even a priest" (1997, 219).

⁵ See below p. 31-36.

text we have only the Greek version and are thus unable to compare it with the original.

The miracles of the Old Testament heroes are alluded to very briefly in some passages. Most of them⁶ are connected to the circle of exodus, the desert traditions and the conquest of the land⁷ (*Sir* 16:10; 38:5; 43:15-16).⁸ There was no need to retell or explain the stories, since it was assumed that the audience was familiar with the texts. The brief references are by no means uninteresting; on the contrary, they show how prominent the Old Testament miracles were in Israel. Moreover, the example in *Sir* 38:5 gives information about the writer's view.⁹ Nevertheless, although the miracles play a major role in only one part of the work, they are of notable significance. *Laus patrum*, *Sir* 44-50, is an important section that has been given a variety of interpretations,¹⁰ and in which Ben Sira apparently discloses the influence that both the Jewish and Greek traditions had in helping him shape the hymn, although many literary models were written in prose and not in verse.¹¹

On the other hand, the writer had many examples to follow in the holy writings. The Old Testament contains short presentations of Israel's history, such as Deut 26:5-11; Jos 24:2-25; Ps 78:105-106 and 135-136, Neh 9 and Ezek 20.¹² Von Rad, however, already recognised the difference between *Laus patrum* and the earlier presentations: It was no longer God and his hidden or open presence but the famous men of the past that were the subject of praise.¹³

The Greek tradition also offered a model for short biographies, explaining why *Sir* differed from the traditional Hebrew way of dealing with history.¹⁴ The most famous example of such biographies is Cornelius Nepos'

⁶ It is interesting that Ben Sira rejects divination in *Sir* 34:5 and prays for new miracles in *Sir* 36:5 (see below p. 31-36). In *Laus patrum* he refers to the deeds of David (*Sir* 47:3) and mentions that Enoch was taken to heaven (*Sir* 49:14).

⁷ The passages, together with passages dealing with Moses and Joshua, are disputed below.

⁸ The numeration follows Ziegler's edition of Septuagint, which is concordant with Beentjes' Hebrew text (1997).

⁹ See below p. 20.

¹⁰ Mack could still easily count the number of works on the hymn in 1985, 3, but since then the research has been prolific. On a history of the research see Reiterer 1997, 55-57.

¹¹ See Kieweler 1992, 59; Coggins 1998, 78-83.

¹² See von Rad 1989 (1962), 367-369; Mack 1985, 7. 217.

¹³ Von Rad 1970, 330-331; see also Lee 1986, 23-31. It is strange that Whybray seems to be unaware of the long discussion. He denies the influence of Greek historiography and Greek and Hellenistic models (1999, 139). Whybray cites several Old Testament texts which touched on the history of Israel, but fails to see (as von Rad did) that the view is now different.

¹⁴ On the historiographical and encomiastic influence see Mack 1985, 120-137.

De viris illustribus, although long before Nepos the philosophical tradition had created a way to briefly present a man and his deeds. Diogenes Laertius gives a good (although late) example of this genre in his work on the most famous philosophers. This type could be encomiastic,¹⁵ as Nepos' work was, but not necessarily. In the public and private libraries, especially, there was a need for works that briefly presented writers and historical figures to the broader, superficially educated population. Given the transition from prose to Hebrew verse, Ben Sira was – as far as we know – the first Jew who used the form of the Hellenistic short biographies to fulfil his task.¹⁶

Laus patrum is thus generally considered an important part of the work. Mack's analysis shows that it is carefully formulated and that the characterisation of the fathers follows a well-planned pattern. He names their office, election, covenant, virtues, deeds, historical setting and rewards.¹⁷ The pattern works well but is not used mechanically. As far as I know, the role of the biblical miracles in *Laus patrum* has never been thoroughly investigated, although von Rad, and subsequently Stadelmann noted important details. Eve deals with miracles in Ben Sira and makes many important observations, but he writes quite briefly and without reference to several important works.¹⁸

b. *Moses*

Ben Sira is not the first early Jewish writer to write about Moses,¹⁹ but the first known to us to discuss the role of Moses' miracles.²⁰ Moses occurs in

¹⁵ It is clear that the hymn shows encomiastic features, but, as he tries to show in his book (1986), it can hardly be labelled an encomium. The transition from prose to Hebrew verse means that the writer could not directly use any of the Greek genres.

¹⁶ Von Rad inquired about the Hellenistic genre helping Ben Sira to shape the picture of Elijah, but could not find the answer (1970, 331). Later, the problem was solved when the study advanced to the Greek short biographies; see Mack 1985, 124-128; Mack – Murphy 1986, 376-377 and Schwemer 1995, 43-50.

¹⁷ Mack 1985, 17-26.

¹⁸ Eve (2002, 106-114) does not refer to von Rad (1970), Tiede (1972), Middendorp (1972), Hengel (1974), Stadelmann (1980) or Beentjes (1989). Sauer's commentary (2000) and Ska's (1999), Whybry's (1999) and Höffken's (2000) important articles apparently came too late to be observed by him.

¹⁹ Many Jewish writers deal with Moses, but not necessarily with his miracles. We, for example, have only a few fragments of Demetrius' work, written about 221-204 B.C. (see Walter 1989, 387; Collins 2000a, 33-35). Alexander Polyhistor, who included these fragments in his lost work, has not cited the title (see Walter 1975, 280-283; Holladay 1983, 51-54). The method was *Aporiai kai lyseis*, common in the exegesis of Homer's works, in which the different passages were explained. Fragments F4 and F5 point to

Laus patrum, but also elsewhere in some passages which will be treated here.

The writer mentions the 600,000 soldiers only briefly (*Sir* 16:10). More interesting for the present study is how *Sir* cites a miracle performed by Moses. It is part of the famous praise of the physician (*Sir* 38:4-7):²¹

"God makes the earth yield healing herbs,
which the prudent should not neglect.
Was not the water sweetened by a twig
that people might learn his power?
He endows humans with the knowledge
to glory in his mighty works,
through which the doctor eases pain
and the druggist prepares his medicines."²²

Ben Sira clearly alludes to the story told in Exod 15:22-27, retold by several Jewish writers studied in the present book. Does the Septuagint already reveal some tendency in rendering the passage? The LXX translates the name מרה / Μερρα (Πικρία) in v. 23. עץ is translated as ξύλον in v. 25. God's words in v. 26 are given in the participle and not in the substantive אֱלֹהִים (כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה רַפְאֵל) / ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἰατρὸς (ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ θεός). Some of these details may be of some importance in the texts studied in the present book, although hardly in Ben Sira.

The role of the physician in early Judaism is certainly obscure, but the Graeco-Roman point of view is not easy to define either. A simplified view sometimes suggested is that the traditional Old Testament belief banned the medicine used by the Greeks. It is easy to quote many critical passages from the Old Testament to show that it may have been considered a sin to seek help from physicians.²³ According to Snaith and Sauer, Ben Sira is influenced by the Hellenistic view. The question is, however,

Moses' miracles, but contain no new interpretations. Apparently comparing Demetrius with Artapanus, Alexander Polyhistor claimed that the former wrote in accordance with the holy writings. Collins also includes Demetrius in the "faithful chroniclers" (Collins 2000a, 33). Aristobulus deals briefly with the miracles in Exodus in Fr. 2,8, rejecting all anthropomorphic interpretations. Moses' miracles are mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, sometimes briefly (as in 4Q226, 4Q422, 4Q434 and 4Q491), sometimes more extensively, but the text follows very faithfully the biblical original (4Q365). It is possible that even the mutilated 4Q377, which calls him "anointed", mentions his miracles (Zimmermann 1998, 332-342).

²⁰ On Moses in *Sir* see Tiede 1972, 181-182; di Lella – Skehan 1987, 509. 510-511; Sauer 2000, 306-307.

²¹ See Snaith 1974, 183-185; di Lella – Skehan 1987, 438-444; Sauer 2000, 260-263.

²² The English translations given are by di Lella and Skehan (1987).

²³ Sauer (2000, 260-263) quotes the biblical passages in which the Lord is called healer: Gen 20:17; Exod 15:26; Deut 32:39; Ps 30:3; Isa 57:18. In 2 Chr 16:12 Asa seeks help from the physicians and not from God. Only the last of these texts unequivocally criticises the physician as such, while the others have different targets in addition to the physicians.

clearly more complicated. We know that medical treatment could be combined with religious ideas in very different ways in classical antiquity as well as in early Judaism.

Classical antiquity knew several medical traditions: Some were the first steps in empirical science, and medicine advanced strongly in Ptolemaic Egypt.²⁴ Some traditions were related to religion, and healing gods were very popular.²⁵ These two branches of traditions could easily be combined. The temples of Asclepius, for example, were centres offering a variety of medicaments and even longer cures.²⁶ When magical treatments are added to the list of traditions it should be obvious that there is no "Hellenistic" view on the role of the physician, but many different views and their combinations.

Also the view that medicine was banned in early Judaism is hardly correct. Admittedly Asa is criticised in 2 Chr 16:12 for seeking help from the physicians and not from God, and 1 En. 7:1 considers magical medicine as something taught to men by the Watchers. Common sense, however, tells us that these passages are not the entire truth: Men were ill and also treated in the Old Testament times. According to Exod 21:18-19, a man hitting another has to pay the costs (רַק שְׁבַחַת יָתֵן וּרְפָא יִרְפֵּא) and "Elijah, the physician" is mentioned in a seal from the late seventh or early sixth century.²⁷ The Deuteronomistic belief explicitly rejected several arts of magical techniques (e.g., Deut 18:9-12), but Isa 1:4-9, Jer 8:22 and Jer 46:11 attest that a medical treatment was not always banned in Israel. Even Isa 38:21-22 / 2 Kgs 20:1-11 link God's help with a medical cure when a poultice of figs is used to heal Hezekiah's boil. We know of different ways in which God's help and medical treatment were later integrated. Philo (*Alleg. Interp.* 2,6; *Ios.* 11,63) or Josephus (*Vita* 404, 421) never found it problematic. The community in Qumran, despite its awareness of 1 En. 7:1, seems to have used healing herbs and exorcistic techniques and represented a view close to the one in *Jub.*²⁸ The most obvious parallel to *Sir* 38:1-15 is the book of *Tobit*, in which God's angel, who is ominously named Raphael, teaches the young Tobias to heal his old father (*Tob* 3:16-

²⁴ On the medicine of classical antiquity see Kollmann 1994, 61-72; Nutton 1999, 1107-1117.

²⁵ See van Cangh 1982, 264-269; Koskenniemi 1994, 220-221.

²⁶ Asclepius' cult cannot be regarded as a monolithic ideology. Chronological and possibly even geographical factors meant that the combination of religion and treatment was seen in different ways. Aelius Aristides writes that people stayed in sanctuaries for long periods (see LiDonnici 1995, 48-49).

²⁷ See Kaiser 2001, 12-19, who gives clear evidence of a positive attitude to medical cures.

²⁸ See below p. 51.

17; 11:7-8).²⁹ In this book the apotropaic technique and medical cure are combined with the idea that God is the healer. Becker observes that the early rabbis often mention physicians in the Mishna and Tosefta.³⁰ It is hardly a coincidence that Ben Sira, writing about the role of the physician, quotes Moses' miracle, because immediately after Moses casts the twig and makes the water sweet, God says to him: "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you" (כי אני יהוה רפאך).

Ben Sira thus reads Exod 15:25 very carefully, linking the miracle with verse 15:26: Moses acts skilfully, and this is precisely the way in which God acts as healer through his agent. But does Ben Sira rationalise the event? Sauer interprets the passage as displaying a marked rationalistic tendency, but offers no argument.³¹ Eve approaches the question briefly.³² It is obvious, though, that the term is problematic. Ben Sira hardly tries to rationalise the miracle. His concept of miracle differed from the modern one. According to Ben Sira, God helps his people in many ways. Philo later attests the view that the wood Moses cast naturally had such an effect,³³ and apparently Ben Sira was also aware of the explanation that the water miracle was analogous to a physician's treatment: According to him, God has created everything and is able to let his people know how to treat others. The methods God uses to help his people may differ, but it is always God the Creator who should be praised.³⁴ The combination of medical treatment and God's help differs somewhat from *Tob* or *Jub.*, but all of these texts link the two in some manner.

Ben Sira also retells other biblical stories without reservation. His linking of a biblical story with the work of a physician does not indicate rationalisation, but the merging of different views into one. Labelling this view as Hellenistic or Jewish is problematic, since both cultures clearly

²⁹ See Kottek 2000, 9.

³⁰ See Becker 2002, 385-388.

³¹ "Eine bemerkenswert rationalistische Einstellung verrät Ben Sira dadurch", Sauer 2000, 262.

³² According to Eve (2002, 108) Ben Sira does not make the work of the physicians more miraculous by association with the Mosaic story; he makes the Mosaic story less miraculous. However, the question is apparently not put properly, because neither of the two seems to be Ben Sira's intention.

³³ Philo mentions this as a possible explanation; see below p. 122.

³⁴ The Hebrew and the Greek texts differ markedly in *Sir* 38:15. The Hebrew reads אשר חושא לפני עושהו יחבר לפני רופא, but the Greek ὁ ἀμαρτάνων ἐναντι τοῦ ποιήσαντος αὐτὸν ἐμπέσοι εἰς χεῖρας ἱατροῦ. Eve (2002, 108) does not consider the text to be contradictory to a positive attitude towards the physician.

included several positions, most of which combined medical cures with religious beliefs.

Ben Sira's way of alluding to the biblical stories makes it generally difficult to speak about a "numinous power." Consequently, Moses is not a BNP ("Bearer of Numinous Power") or a MNP ("Mediator of Numinous Power") in Kahl's terminology; instead, he could be considered a PNP ("Petitioner of the Numinous Power"). The function presupposed in the story has changed: When Moses in Exodus rescues his people by mediating God's help, the goal of the narrative is to connect the work of the physicians with God's helping hand.

Ben Sira tells more about Moses' miracles in *Laus patrum* (Sir 44:23-45:5):

"From him he had spring the man,
who should win the favour of all the living;
Dear to God and humans,
Moses, whose memory is a boon.
God made him like the angels in honour
and strengthened him with fearful powers,
wrought swift miracles at his words
and sustained him in the king's presence.
He gave him the commandments for his people,
and revealed to him his glory.
For his trustworthiness and meekness
God selected him from all humankind.
He permitted him to hear his voice,
and led him into the cloud,
where he gave into his hand the commandments,
the law of life and understanding,
that he might teach his precepts to Jacob
his covenant decrees to Israel."

Ben Sira's brief summary of Moses' life does not allow a deeper study of its relation to the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Pentateuch (for a detailed comparison see pp. 20, 57, 66, 70, 74, 92, 99 and 123). However, one verse has played an important role in the scholarly debate, namely, Exod 7:1. In this verse (ראה נחיד אלהים לפרעה) a man is apparently honoured more highly than anywhere in the Old Testament, and Moses is called a god. Both Exod 7:1 and Exod 4:16 are highlighted in the studies investigating early Judaism. Scholars supporting the θεῖος ἀνὴρ hypothesis believed that the Jews were led to reinterpret their heroes as divine beings and half-gods.³⁵ Exod 7:1 opened the door to this kind of reinterpretation, and it is interesting to examine whether or not it was used. In any case, the LXX preserves the sense of the Hebrew text (δέδωκά σε θεὸν Φαραώ) without any trace that the words were problematic to the translators. However, here the Hebrew and Greek texts of Ben Sira differ (see below).

³⁵ This view occurred sporadically earlier but was formulated by Hahn in his *Chistologische Hoheitstitel* (1963, 292-308).

Ben Sira mentions Moses more briefly than Aaron or many other persons after him. As usual Ben Sira shows less interest in certain periods of history or events than in persons.³⁶ It is not easy to say which miracles precisely are referred to, especially because the Hebrew text is mutilated in 45,2-3:

: ויאמצוהו במרומים	להים[.....]	י"כ' (in margin)
: ויחזקו לפני מלך	בד[.....] מהר	בדברו (in margin)
: ויר[.....]	ויצוהו ל[.]	

The Greek text reads

ἐν λόγοις αὐτοῦ σημεῖα κατέπαυσεν
ἐδόξασεν αὐτὸν κατὰ πρόσωπον βασιλέων.

Skehan translates the Greek as “wrought swift miracles at his words”, which seems to be correct. According to Eve, Ben Sira only refers to the miracles that Moses performed in the presence of the Pharaoh, “that is, the signs with rod and hand and the plagues”, and he wonders why the miracles of the Red Sea crossing and wandering in the wilderness are passed over in silence.³⁷ However, it seems impossible to restrict the miracles referred to so precisely. The Pharaoh was of course present at the Red Sea, and unless the plural βασιλέων is a mistake it may even include the battle against Amalek or other nations. The fact remains, however, that although the water at Marah is mentioned in another context, Moses’ miracles are reported only briefly. According to Skehan – di Lella and Eve, the reason is Ben Sira’s desire to emphasise Aaron as the source of the Levitical priesthood.³⁸ Still, the brief mention of Moses does not mean that he is relegated to a minor role in the hymn.³⁹ On the contrary, in *Sir* 45:1-5, Ben Sira calls attention to two of his accomplishments: i.e., the miraculous leadership and the Law. These two aspects of his mission raise him above every other human being. Aaron may be the privileged heir, but Moses is the pioneer in Ben Sira.⁴⁰ The hymn usually mentions the office of the father, but it is now absent. This may indicate that Moses’ mission was not easy to characterise: He was teacher, prophet and ruler, and his office was, as Mack says, certainly *sui generis*.⁴¹ Neither the events in Exodus nor the

³⁶ See Mack 1985, 49.

³⁷ Eve 2002, 109.

³⁸ Di Lella – Skehan 1987, 510-511; Eve 2002, 110-111.

³⁹ Aaron is clearly given a larger role (*Sir* 45:6-26). The story about Dathan and Abiram and the “band of Korah” (cf. Num 16:1-17:31) is mentioned in this passage (*Sir* 45:18).

⁴⁰ Ska 1999, 186-187.

⁴¹ See Mack 1985, 30.

journey in the wilderness is reported extensively: An allusion is enough, here as well as in *Sir* 43:16.⁴²

Moses' miracles (σημεῖα,⁴³ *Sir* 45:3; the Hebrew text is mutilated) are alluded to very briefly, obviously because they were so well-known to the audience that they did not need to be retold.⁴⁴ His role is summarised in words apparently essentially different in the Hebrew and Greek texts. The Hebrew text in *Sir* 45:2 is fragmentary. MS B reads להים[.....] with יי in the margin.⁴⁵ Vattioni reads להים[איש א]להים, Tiede באלהים (his translation: "he made him [Moses] as glorious as God"),⁴⁶ but di Lella⁴⁷ reads באלהים כאלהים.⁴⁸ The Greek translation reads ὡςμοῖωσεν αὐτὸν δόξῃ αἰώνῳ.⁴⁹

Alan Lowe, who is working on the manuscripts of Ben Sira, kindly checked the reading in manuscript B (Oxford). In his view, more letters can be read than Beentjes indicates in his edition:

ויאמצוהו במרומים :	ו[יכ]נהו באלהים ⁵⁰	ויכ' יי (2a in margin),
במוראים (2b in margin)		
ויחזקוהו לפני מלך :	בדבר אותות מהר	בדברו (3a in margin)
כבודו :	ויצוהו אל העם ⁵¹	
וירא ל[א]ת		

Although the exact Hebrew words are uncertain, they apparently followed the thought in Exod 7:1 (נתתיך אלהים לפרעה). The LXX still follows the sense of the Hebrew text, but Philo as well as the Samaritan tradition and

⁴² in *Sir* 43:16 seems to point to Ps 114:4 and אמרת חזקת חיים in *Sir* 43:17a to Exod 14:21. A very similar allusion to Ps 114 is seen in Pseudo-Philo's *L.A.B.*; see below p. 195.

⁴³ On the word, see below p. 67-67.

⁴⁴ According to Mack, Ben Sira "recognised (the Pentateuch) as an epic and regarded it as significant mainly as an epic." The model is assumed to be the study of the Homeric epic in the Hellenistic schools "and especially among the Stoics" (1985, 114. 228-229). However, the view is hardly correct. Ben Sira shows very little signs of an allegorisation.

⁴⁵ Beentjes 1997, 78.

⁴⁶ Tiede 1972, 181-182.

⁴⁷ Di Lella - Skehan 1987, 509.

⁴⁸ Snaith (1974, 220-221) gives no Hebrew text, but according to him the Hebrew text compared Moses to a god, echoing Exod 7:1; the Greek translator misunderstood god to be angels. Sauer cites the manuscripts and gives a translation ("Gott ließ ihn hintreten", 2000, 306).

⁴⁹ The Vulgate reads *similem illum fecit in gloria sanctorum*.

⁵⁰ Ben Sira apparently wrote ו[יכ]נהו, but, as in 44:23b the scribe has confused the rare verb כנה with the familiar כן.

⁵¹ The small circles, which are in the manuscript, denote a variant reading. In ו[יכ]נהו (2a) ה is not sure, and both the initial ו and נ are still more uncertain. In 3a the second ו is not sure, and the ר in בדבר is still more uncertain. In 3c העם is uncertain, but fits the ink marks well. In 3d וירא is definite and the ל is fairly certain; all the following letters are very uncertain but do fit the remaining ink.

the rabbinic texts found it problematic.⁵² The Greek text of the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* seems to share the problem, rendering the text in a changed form, in which ὁμοίωσεν αὐτὸν δόξῃ ἁγίων apparently indicates angels.⁵³ Ben Sira himself seemed to have a problem with the Hebrew words. In neither Exodus nor in *Sir* do they mean deification,⁵⁴ but a legitimisation by miracles: Moses' nature is not divine; he is a messenger of God.⁵⁵ The Jewish tradition was, as Holladay noted, very careful not to mix the roles of God and man,⁵⁶ and the Greek text is evidence of this view.

The miracles certainly make clear in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* that Moses is God's agent, but his miracles can be treated briefly, because he no longer needs legitimisation in a work written for Jews. In the passage dealing with Joshua (*Sir* 46:1) Ben Sira refers to Moses as מֹשֶׁה בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים.⁵⁷ That he was a prophet (Deut 18:18) did not even need to be mentioned to the Jewish audience.

c. *Joshua*

After Aaron and Phinehas, Ben Sira summarises the miracles of Joshua:⁵⁸

“Valiant conqueror was Joshua, son of Nun,
aide to Moses in the prophetic office.
Formed to be, as his name implies,
the great saviour of God's chosen ones,
wreaking vengeance on the enemy
and giving to Israel their inheritance.
What glory was his when he raised his hand
to brandish his sword against the city!
Who could withstand him

⁵² See below p. 153 and Holladay 1977, 124-125.

⁵³ Di Lella and Skehan cite Exod 4:16; 7:1 but also Ps 8:6 and interpret the Hebrew text to mean angels (1987, 509). For Abraham, Philo uses the words ἴσος ἀγγέλους γεγονώς (*Sacr.* 5).

⁵⁴ Oberhänsli-Widmer (1994, 354-355) regards *Sir* 45:1-2 as the first example of Moses' divinisation in Jewish literature (1994, 354-355). However, she completely overlooks Exod 7:1 as the source of the verses as well as the difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts.

⁵⁵ See Tiede 1972, 181-182; Holladay 1977, 124-125.

⁵⁶ Holladay summarises his study as follows: “As to the question of whether in Hellenistic-Judaism it became easier for Jews to conceive of a *divine* man because the line of demarcation between man and God had become blurred, we have seen evidence that suggests that Hellenization among Jews, rather than bridging the gap, only widened it” (1977, 235).

⁵⁷ See below p. 27.

⁵⁸ On Joshua in *Sir* see Snaith 1974, 227-230; Stadelmann 1980, 189-192; di Lella – Skehan 1989, 517, 518-520; Sauer 2000, 313-316.

when he fought the battles of the Lord?
 Was it not at his same hand the sun stopped,
 so that one day became like two?
 He called upon the Most High God
 when he was hard pressed, with enemies on every side;
 And God Most High gave answer to him
 with the driving force of glistening hail.
 Which he rained down upon the hostile army
 till on the slope he destroyed the foe;
 That all the doomed nations might know
 the Lord was watching over his people's battles.
 And because he was a devoted follower of God
 and in Moses' times showed himself loyal,
 he and Caleb, son of Jephunneh,
 when they opposed the rebel assembly,
 averted God's anger from the people
 and suppressed the wicked complaint –
 because of this, those two alone were spared
 of the six hundred thousand infantry,
 to lead the people into their inheritance,
 the land flowing with milk and honey" (*Sir* 46:1-8).

The book of Joshua tells four stories about Joshua, which are clearly miracles: the crossing of the Jordan (*Jos* 3:1-5:1), the conquest of Jericho (*Jos* 5:13-6:27), the hailstones (*Jos* 10:8-14) and the stopped sun at Gibeon (*Jos* 10:12-13).

Ben Sira heavily condenses the extensive biblical material. The LXX does not attest to any clear redactional tendencies in these passages. On a detailed comparison between the Hebrew text and LXX, see below p. 249.

The last two events alone, which in Joshua are mostly miracles of God, are directly⁵⁹ mentioned in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, and possibly with some inaccuracies.⁶⁰ The omission of the first two, however, does not detract from the miraculousness of Joshua's leadership, especially because the hailstones are also mentioned in *Sir* 43:15. The Hebrew text uses the biblical words⁶¹ מִשְׁרָה מֶשֶׁה to characterise Joshua, but adds בְּנִבְיָאָה (G: δὲ δόξατος

⁵⁹ Joshua's mission, of course, was "to lead the people into their inheritance" (*Sir* 46:8). Yet, the crossing of the Jordan is not retold in detail.

⁶⁰ According to Snaith, Ben Sira erringly connects Joshua's prayer with the hailstorm, whereas *Jos* 10:14 links it with the halting of the sun and moon (Snaith 1974, 229). The note is correct, but apparently Ben Sira has presumed that Joshua prayed prior to God's words "Do not be afraid of them" (*Jos* 10:8). Di Lella and Skehan (1987, 517) observe another possible inaccuracy, when Ben Sira links the miracle of halting the sun with Joshua's hand and not with his voice (*Sir* 46:4). However, it is also possible that Ben Sira supposed that Joshua was praying with raised hands. On similar questions, see below p. 36.

⁶¹ *Jos* 1:1; *Num* 11:28.