ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUALITY IN THE BOOK OF BEN SIRA

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Ibolya Balla
ABSTRACT

The fact that Ben Sira seemingly has 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. First of all we have to make a distinction between the attitudes of the writer of the original Hebrew text of the book and that of the Greek translator. The two texts, produced in different social settings, circumstances, times and places, differ substantially at times in regard to sexuality. Therefore it is essential to treat them separately and to compare them. In addition, the Book of Ben Sira, the longest Jewish wisdom book, is a complex combination of carefully composed wisdom poems that structure the whole work, and of teachings on everyday issues including marriage, family life, self-control, desires and passions, and sexual promiscuity. The openness about issues of eroticism that characterizes some of the poems concerning personified female wisdom is unprecedented in the wisdom writings of Second Temple Judaism. Similarly, the sage dedicates a greater number of passages than other wisdom books, to the discussion of social relations especially in regard to family. 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, especially through sexuality. These all have bearings on the author’s and translator’s views of sexuality, including the position a person or situation under discussion might have in the sage’s social value system. Therefore the thesis examines the wisdom poems, and all sayings that concern sexuality found in discussions of passions, relations with
parents, daughters and sons, wives and husbands, and warnings against sexual
wrongdoing, including prostitution and adultery. All this is done with a special regard to
the differences between the Hebrew original text and the Greek translation.
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INTRODUCTION

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: Ben Sira's attitude towards sexuality, the topic of this thesis. In it the term "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.E.¹ The book assumes a situation in which Ben Sira, a sage, instructed young men to become wise, perhaps also preparing them to become scribes and public leaders (Sir 38:24 - 39:11).² Whether he had his own wisdom school is not certain (cf. Sir 51:23-30).

Within the Hebrew original text and the Greek translation there are different textual traditions that have shorter and longer recensions. The textual witnesses are usually

² Harrington, Invitation, 78.
designated as HT I (the original Hebrew of Ben Sira), HT II (the expanded Hebrew text of one or more recensions, also primarily the basis for G II), G I (the grandson's Greek translation of HT I, found for most part in the major uncial manuscripts ABCS and their cursive and their cursives) and G II (the expanded Greek translation based on HT II, represented by a number of minuscule manuscripts, especially in the O and L recensions). HT II differs from HT I primarily by additions. Within HT I the overlapping Hebrew manuscripts present considerable textual differences sometimes. G II, probably originating from 50–150 C.E., also has additions compared with G I. At times these additions reflect Christian interpolations. In some instances they emphasize doctrinal elements which may be in contrast to the G I 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 G I text of 18ab; 19:18–19; 24:24; 25:12). 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 G II and the Syriac translations.

The Greek translation at some points also differs substantially from the Hebrew text. One of the tasks of the present work is to identify these differences between the

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3 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, 1st century C.E.); see Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 51-53; Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Siras View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (BJS 38; Chicago: Scholars, 1982), 4, 186-87, nn. 29-33.


Hebrew and Greek texts, especially where they pertain to issues of sexuality. As will be demonstrated in the thesis there is a tendency in the Greek translation to depart from the Hebrew original regarding matters of sexuality, sometimes by way of toning down the erotic content of the text. As a result one may have to deal with not one, but two separate authors' views on sexuality.

Ben Sira was "deeply rooted" 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 and differences in the topics it addresses and in language and imagery. Skehan categorizes 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." 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.

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 –

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7 Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 33.
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.⁹

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".¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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 books"¹³ (Prologue), he was at least familiar with works of Greek literature, whose ideas and terminologies gained expressions in his work.¹⁴

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

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⁹ Collins, Jewish Wisdom, 44.
¹⁰ Coggins, Sirach, 50-53, 53.
¹² Harrington, Jesus Ben Sira, 24.
¹⁴ Skehan, Ben Sira, 46-50.
of Hellenistic culture as such".\textsuperscript{15} He also notes that Ben Sira attaches importance to honour and shame, which, he argues, were the core concerns of Hellenic society.\textsuperscript{16} There is a lengthy discussion dedicated to matters of honour and shame in Sir 41:13 – 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,\textsuperscript{17} 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).\textsuperscript{18}

As Sir 41:13 – 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 with Collins that despite the differences, some of the features of Hellenistic ethos may not have been as foreign to Ben Sira as some scholars assume.\textsuperscript{19}

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

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 33. \\
\textsuperscript{16} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 34. \\
\textsuperscript{17} However, the complexity of the Hellenistic world's attitude to issues of sexual morality, such as adultery, must be taken into consideration. Cf. also John J. Collins, \textit{Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 159. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 34-35.
\end{flushleft}
opposed to Hellenism, where fear of shame was sometimes a motivation for bold action.\textsuperscript{20}

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.\textsuperscript{21}

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) bear resemblance to a combination of ideals characteristic of Stoic and Cynic philosophy: αὐτόρκατος (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 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 often 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 or sometimes in an excursus.

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. Lévi's edition, however, will also be consulted at some points. Where only the Greek text appears, the Hebrew is not extant. The Greek text is based on Rahlfs's edition. Variations in Ziegler's work are also noted in a few instances. The

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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.\textsuperscript{26} 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.

\textsuperscript{25} Joseph Ziegler, \textit{Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach} (Septuaginta 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).

\textsuperscript{26} Wright, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation".
LITERATURE REVIEW

Beentjes's recent edition of all extant Hebrew manuscripts, with a synopsis of the parallel texts, was a much needed work. General introductions include those of Daniel J. Harrington, Richard J. Coggins and John J. Collins. None addresses the topic of the present work in detail. There have been few commentaries in recent years. The significant ones include the works of John G. Snaith and the more detailed book of Patrick W. Skehan. While the latter points out some erotic content in some of Ben Sira's/Sirach's sayings, it does not comment on many other references that also have sexual connotations, nor give detailed attention to differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts in this regard.

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. 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. None of these works discusses, however, what strangeness means for Ben Sira/Sirach, whether it is a personification, or the term "strange

27 Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew.
28 Harrington, Invitation, 78-91.
29 Coggins, Sirach.
30 Collins, Jewish Wisdom.
31 John G. Snaith, Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
32 Skehan, Ben Sira.
33 Alice M. Sinnott, The Personification of Wisdom (SOTSM; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
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.

There are six wisdom poems in the Book of Ben Sira (1:1-10; 4:11-19; 6:18-37; 14:20 – 15:10; ch. 24; 51:13-30). Most of these poems have received considerable scholarly
attention, especially ch. 24 because of its closeness in theme and imagery to Proverbs
8. The erotic overtone that characterizes most of these poems (especially 6:18-37;
14:20 – 15:10; parts of ch. 24; 51:13-31) is not always noted. Two articles that reflect
on the sexual imagery in Sir 6:18-37 are from Jane S. Webster and Jessie Rogers.
Judith E. McKinlay also makes passing comments on the erotic content of Sir 14:20 –
15:10 and ch. 24. Among others, J. A. Sanders, Andrew Angel and Celia
Deutsch have made valuable contributions to the interpretation of 51:13-30.

On gender issues and regarding Ben Sira's view of women, Warren C. Trenchard's
book is noteworthy. 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

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37 Judith E. McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink* (JSOTSup 216; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).
41 Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View.*
Jewish and earlier Biblical literature, but 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 on attitudes toward sexuality. Therefore the range of the passages to be treated is broader.

Claudia V. Camp adds another dimension to the gender issues present in the Book of Ben Sira/Sirach, namely the question on honour and shame.\textsuperscript{42}

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.\textsuperscript{43} Legal issues and transgressions of law are discussed not only by Archer but also in a number of other works. One of the recent and useful among them is written by John J. Collins.\textsuperscript{44} Both this writing and the books of Michael L. Satlow,\textsuperscript{45} Hilary B. Lipka\textsuperscript{46} and David Instone-Brewer\textsuperscript{47} provide a useful background to the discussion of issues such as marriage and divorce, and such as adultery and other kinds of sexual wrongdoing.


\textsuperscript{43} Leonie J. Archer, Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine (JSOTSup 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).


\textsuperscript{46} Hilary B. Lipka, Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible (HBM 7; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006).

\textsuperscript{47} David Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).
It is, however, difficult to find detailed analyses of passages concerning adultery and prostitution in the book, apart from a few articles. One of them is the aforementioned essay of Claudia V. Camp.\textsuperscript{48} Writings that deal with the question of honour and shame in Ben Sira\textsuperscript{49} 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.

Apart from Trenchard's aforementioned work, passages concerning mothers/fathers/widows, daughters and marital relationships are seldom the subjects of analysis that views them in the context of the author's attitude toward sexuality. The research I have undertaken will endeavour to provide an analysis of all the relevant passages that contain information pertaining to sexuality using the following categories:

- fathers, mothers and widows
- daughters and sons
- marital relationships
- sexual wrongdoing (either illicit or discouraged, including adultery, prostitution), sexual desires/passions
- wisdom poems

This work will not only offer a systematic detailed study of all the comments that betray something about Ben Sira's/Sirach's attitude toward sexuality, including the

\textsuperscript{48} Camp, "Patriarchy".
\textsuperscript{49} Camp, "Honor and Shame"; DeSilva, "Wisdom"; Sanders, "Ben Sira's Ethics".
differences between the Hebrew and Greek text versions, but will also present a basis for further studies on specific topics and issues in the book of Ben Sira.
CHAPTER ONE

FATHERS, MOTHERS AND WIDOWS

Some of the passages that follow here have very little or nothing to say about the author's attitude towards sexuality. For the sake of completeness, however, they all need to be discussed.

I.1. Fathers and Mothers

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.

1 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 40, 216, n. 21, suggests ממלך ("he who treats with contempt", from קָל). Cf. Skehan, Ben Sira, 153-54.
2 Both Lévi, Hebrew Text, 1, and Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 23, read with MS A שַׁמְשִׁית ("plant"), here probably meaning "be planted" or "takes root". The rest of the colon in MS C is incomplete (...xntt wtwnu tjtw), where wtwnu probably means "hardship", "suffering", and tjtw means "and in its place/instead of/for". The last word is mutilated.
3 MS C has: אַל שֶׁשֶׁהֵם ("will not be forgotten"); the rest of the colon agrees.
4 MS C has: קְרוּבֵךְ לְכָּל מְסֹכָנים ("and like heat on frost your sins perish").
5 Read this word with Lévi, Hebrew Text, 1. Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 23, reads קָם.
6 MS C reads בָּרוּךְ וּמַרְרָךְ וְלָךְ.
7 MS C has: אָמֶר לוֹ שֶׁוֶּלֶם אָמֶר (from מַשֵּׁה = "to drag") with מַשֵּׁה ("his mother") seems to be out of place here. אוֹרִים לְכָּל אָמֶר means "and cursing God".
8 MS C has: כְּמוֹ כְּנֶפֶךָּ לְשׁוֹנָה אָבִי: "like a blasphemer is he who forsakes his father".
9 A father’s blessing establishes the root and the mother’s curse uproots the young plant.
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.
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 to a father will not be blotted out, it will be as a sin offering (lit. substitute for sin), it will take root.
15 In the day of adversity 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, and he provokes his Creator who curses his mother.\footnote{G I 7a ὁ φοβούμενος κύριον τιμήσει πατέρα,}

\footnote{G I 7b καὶ ώς δεσπότας δουλεύσει ἐν τοῖς γεννήσασιν αὐτῶν.}

\footnote{G I 8 ἐν ἑργῷ καὶ λόγῳ τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου, ἵνα ἐπέλθῃ σοι εὐλογία παρ’ αὐτοῦ.}

\footnote{G I 9 εὐλογία γὰρ πατρός στηρίζει οἴκους τέκνων, κατὰ δὲ μητρός ἐκρίζεται θεμέλια.}

\footnote{G I 10 μὴ δοξάζου ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ πατρός σου, οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν σοι δόξα πατρός ἀτιμία:}

\footnote{G I 11 ἢ γὰρ δόξα ἀνθρώπου ἐν τιμής πατρός αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὄνειδος τέκνοις μήτηρ ἐν ἄδοξία.}

\footnote{G I 12 τέκνων, ἀντιλαβοῦ ἐν γῇρα πατρός σου}

\footnote{It may also be translated as "righteousness".}

\footnote{MS C has "will not be forgotten"; see notes on the text. G I supports it.}

\footnote{Trenchard, \textit{Ben Sira's View}, 40, 216-17, nn. 23-27, translates: "He who forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and he who provokes his mother is cursed by God." Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 154, has: "A blasphemer is he who neglects his father; he provokes God, who demeans his mother."}
καὶ μὴ λυπήσῃς αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ.
13 κἂν ἀπολείπῃ σύνεσιν, συγγνώμην ἔχε καὶ μὴ ἀτιμάσῃς αὐτὸν ἐν πάσῃ ἱσχύ σου.
14 ἔλεημοσύνη γὰρ πατρὸς οὐκ ἐπιλησθήσεται καὶ ἀντὶ ἁμαρτιῶν προσανοικοδομηθήσεται σοι.
15 ἐν ἡμέρᾳ θλίψεως σου ἀναμνησθήσεται σοῦ· ὡς εὐθίᾳ ἐπὶ παγετῷ, οὕτως ἀναλυθήσονται σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι.
16 ὡς βλάσφημος ὁ ἐγκαταλιπὼν πατέρα, καὶ κεκατημορέμενος ὑπὸ κυρίου ὁ παροργίζων μητέρα αὐτοῦ.

1 Listen to me (your) father, O 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 atones 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, and whoever obeys God will give rest to his mother.

G II

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

G I

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, but the mother's curse uproots the foundations.
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 to a father will not be forgotten, and instead of your sins it will be credited in your favour.
15 In the day of your adversity 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 provokes his mother.
Context

In the first chapter of the book of Ben Sira two of the main themes are established: wisdom and the fear of the Lord. In 1:1-10 there is an introduction regarding wisdom with at least three messages: wisdom is hidden;\(^{12}\) the source of wisdom is the Lord alone; and the Lord gives wisdom to those who love him. These thoughts are then further developed in 1:11-30 with the ever recurring theme of wisdom literature (the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom)\(^ {13}\) and also with an exhortation: one condition of receiving the gift of wisdom is to keep the commandments and to be a humble servant of the Lord. Sirach 2 calls for trust in God, especially in times of affliction.

Chapter 3 starts with the instruction regarding the honour of parents in 3:1-16 as if the author wanted to draw the reader's attention to the first group of people whom one has to respect as part of keeping God's commandments. In the following verses the teaching continues with a call for humility and modesty (3:17-24), and warnings against pride and stubbornness (3:25-29), a call for almsgiving and social conduct (3:30 - 4:6; 4:7-10), which culminates in 4:10. The latter verse concerning widows and orphans closes the chain of thoughts before the next larger unit, beginning with 4:11 on wisdom.

\(^{12}\) A thought not unique to Sirach; see for example Job 28:20.

\(^{13}\) See also Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10.
Form

The borders of this unit are more determined by content than by form. Within the 16 verses the first smaller unit consists of 3:1-6. The second unit begins with 3:7, where Ben Sira's recurring theme (the fear of the Lord) appears. The third unit is introduced with "My son" in 3:12 and closes with 3:16. Within each unit there are parallel thoughts, mainly determined by content. Within 3:1-16 there is not a distinct form that would set the verses of each unit apart.

Content

The instruction to honour one's father and mother is laid down in the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), which 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). 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. Ben Sira however elaborates this theme in the greatest detail.

In Sir 3:1 it is not clear what the translator means by ἵνα σῴζῃ. The most frequent translations of the word σῴζω in various forms in the LXX include "to keep", "to

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14 Deut 5:16 adds "and that it may go well with you".
15 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.
save"", "to free", "to 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 יָשֵׁן, מָלֵט and מָלַט. The salvation, deliverance or help a person can experience may come through people or through God. 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, 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. Similarly to Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16, there is no discrimination between father and mother in this comment. This is how Ben Sira in the first two verses of ch. 3 establishes the theme of the whole of 3:1-16. Sir 7:27-28, while not extant in Hebrew, in G I reflects 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. It is clear in Prov 1:8 or in Prov 6:20, where the parents' teachings have also the role to guide and protect someone from being led astray (for example by an immoral woman).

In 3:3 ἐξιλάσκεται stands for the verb "atone" (ὁ τιμῶν πατέρα ἐξιλάσκεται ἀμαρτίας = "Whoever honours [his] father atones for sins") and while it is widely used in the LXX, including Sirach, many times together with ἀμαρτίας, the word

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17 Fohrer, "σοφία," 974-78.
18 Cf. Sir 46:1, 8.
19 15 times, including noun forms.
ἀποθησαυρίζων (for "storing up treasures/ riches") cannot be found anywhere else in the LXX. The former verb in various forms is the predominant LXX translation for the Hebrew דָּמָם to denote "to expiate". Of the 15 occurrences in the LXX version of Sirach, where the Hebrew text is extant, 20 דָּמָם appears, but it is probable that in other occurrences where the Hebrew text is not extant the word דָּמָם was behind ἔξελάσκομαι. 21 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 English); 45:16, 23.

Excursus 1: Atonement, death and what comes after

It is not the purpose of the present work to detail the author's view on sin and atonement. 22 Some remarks, however, will be made here, which will also be relevant later in the chapter regarding widows and orphans. This excursus will also provide the opportunity to point out some characteristics of Ben Sira's thoughts on death. This is at least briefly necessary in understanding 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 ch. IV.1 and IV.3. 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

20 Sir 3:30; 45:16, 23.
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 35:4 (= 35:6-7 in English) and they are encouraged in 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. 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 righteousness follows the example of God who is the only protector of the weak. 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). The Psalms have admonitions to be righteous (Ps 68:6 [= 5 in English]; Psalm 82). Proverbs is similarly concerned with the cause of the needy (14:21; 15:25; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27).

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. Moreover,

24 Pss 10:14, 18; 68:6 (= 5 in English); 82; 146:9; Job 31:16, 18.
26 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. Robert Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," HUCA 18 (1944), 77-118, 81-82; Fröhlich Ida, "Ben Szira társadalma," in MIOK Évkönyv (szerk. Scheiber S.; Budapest, 1978), 152-58, 153-55. Whether the wisdom writers were from the upper, middle or lower class is a subject of scholarly debate. For an overview consult Mark Sneed, "Wisdom and Class: A Review and Critique," JAAR 62 (1994), 651-72.
sacrifice of the godless is rejected if it comes from the exploitation of the poor (34:18-20[= 21-24 in English]). The author's view of expiation is nicely summarized in a positive exhortation in 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.

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. 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). On the other hand death is a cause for anxiety (40:1-2). As death is final and inevitable, one should enjoy life. Life and death are set before humans and they can choose. 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. This is how Collins describes the qualitative meaning of life and death. For Ben Sira death is also the opposite of life, and he describes the netherworld as a place for pointless survival, where even the praise of God is

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27 See Prov 15:8-9; 21:27.
33 Also see Eccl 2:15-16.
35 Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 84.
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.

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

We may attempt to answer the question 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. The comments on death are sometimes contradictory. It is also uncertain, as noted in the above discussion, 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

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36 Cf. the praise of the fathers who were remembered for what they had done and left behind (Sir 44:1 - 50:24).
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.

In Sir 3:3-4 both father and mother are included as the ones towards whom one has to be righteous or good as part of atoning for sins.

It seems that the teaching in 3:5-6 reflects the author's self-interest in another dimension. On the one hand, in a restored relationship with God, a person's prayer is assumedly heard 37 and his present life is prolonged (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 (3:5a). It is also in line with the well attested message of wisdom literature (Prov 10:1; 15:20; 23:24-25; 29:3). With the exception of 3:7 the Hebrew text is extant from the second half of 3:6, where MS A has אומר. 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, אומר). The comment in G I ("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

37 Also cf. Prov 15:29.
expression ἀναστάω is part of Ben Sira's vocabulary
 and it usually renders the Hebrew מנוחה ("to have a rest", "to find rest", in Hiphil "to give rest to somebody"). If the verb εἰσακούων is regarded here as correct, then 3:6b and 3:7a are parallel stichs, since 3:7a reads: "Whoever fears the Lord will honour (his) father" (G II). 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. 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 3:7b (G I: "and he will serve his parents as masters"), even if the word δεσπότας is used here along with δουλεύει. It may refer merely to the fact that children ought to be obedient to their parents as slaves to their masters.

Sir 3:8 suggests that one's acts cannot contradict one's words. Honour of parents 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. 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. The metaphor of root is found in Prov 12:3, and the word נמחה is used in

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38 Used 19 times in various contexts.
39 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 214, n. 16.
40 See Skehan, Ben Sira, 154; Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 44, 214, n. 17.
41 Cf. Snaith, Ecclesiasticus, 21.
43 See also Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 214-16, n. 18.
similar sense in Job 14:9. Also the verb form יָדַע has other figurative meanings such as planting people (Jer 12:2) or establishing the people of God (Exod 15:17; 2 Sam 7:10; Ps 44:3). Similarly the word ὀικος can have meanings other than the literal. It is used to denote family or household. 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; 1 Sam 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 efficacious 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.

Sir 3:10-11 is self-evident. Ben Sira writes in 41:7-9 that an impious father is blamed by his children because "on his account they will be reproached" (41:7). Also, as discussed above in this chapter, a person's life is reflected in the name and the children he leaves behind (30:4-5; 41:11-13). A wicked person will leave a bad name in which the children will surely not glory (3:10). Whether the word להפלוטה ("to demean") or להלך ("to curse") is used here regarding the mother, either would be completely contradictory to the message of the whole section in 3:1-16. Also, the latter is prohibited in Exod 21:17. It is noteworthy that the Greek version is significantly different in Sir 3:11b. While MS A does not describe the qualities of the

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44 Skehan, Ben Sira, 156.
45 Györkösy Alajos, Kapitányffy István, and Tegyei Imre szerk., Ógörög-Magyar Nagyszótár (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), 717.
46 Skehan, Ben Sira, 156.
47 Wright, ”Sirach: Introduction and Translation,” 753.
48 As suggested by Skehan, Ben Sira, 154.
mother, G I depicts her as a mother in dishonour. It is not detailed what dishonour means in this context. We may only assume that it refers to an act of sexual nature, such as adultery, which could bring shame on the children, but that cannot be said for certain. It would certainly be a surprising comment in the context of honouring father and mother.

Sir 3:12-13 draws attention to a father who is ageing (3:12a), and getting frail also in mind (3:13a), and is in contrast with a son, who is in his full strength as reflected in the Greek version of 3:13b. The father in this condition needs not only obedience and steadfastness in honour from his children, but toward the end of his life, also care and patience. This idea is 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 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). As noted in the translation the terms "will not be blotted out" (MS A, 3:14a) and "will not be forgotten" (MS C and G I, 3:14a) make no significant difference in the meaning. The idea of atonement returns here, where the good deed to a father is expressed with the word ἡστάσεως, a derivative of ἱστάσεως and is usually rendered as "righteousness", "uprightness". The LXX translation can include among others the derivatives of δύναμις or ἐλεημοσύνη as in 3:14a. It can include kindness, mercy, generosity, honesty, or even pity (ἐλεημοσύνη).⁴⁹ Quarles suggests that the Greek term προσανοικοδομέω has an economic rather than a cultic aspect.⁵⁰ It is not specified, however, what he means by it and the word προσανοικοδομέω does not appear anywhere else in the

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⁵⁰ Quarles, "New Perspective," 49.
LXX. The idea of the day of adversity has been discussed above in this subchapter. The atoning efficacy of good deeds for sins is compared to the warmth (MS A, 3:15b)\(^{51}\) or good weather (G I, 3:15b) that destroys/melts frost.

In 3:16, G I, MS A and MS C have different versions. MS C and G I agree in 3:16a: "Like a blasphemer is he who forsakes his father". MS A in 3:16b reads "and he provokes his Creator who curses his mother".\(^{52}\) Both MS C and G I in 3:16a and MS A in 3:16b remind the reader of 3:2, where the authority behind the honour of parents is God himself.

In conclusion, it is evident that Ben Sira's comments on women as mothers are more positive than those on daughters or, naturally, prostitutes. Trenchard, however, observes that even though in six distichs mother can be found in parallel to father, she always appears in the second half of the distich.\(^{53}\) Father is concerned in a greater part of Sir 3:1-16. While honouring both father and mother equals with atonement according to 3:3-4, in 3:14-15 good deeds toward only the father have atoning efficacy. This way mothers receive less attention. It is also true that Proverbs mentions mothers independently (Prov 29:15; 31:1), but only twice, while it uses the parallel of father and mother together on numerous occasions. In all of them mothers are mentioned only in the second place.\(^{54}\)

In Sir 3:1-16 one comment that connects mothers with disgrace is 3:11b in G I, where shame may result from sexual misconduct on the mother's part. However, it is not

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\(^{51}\) "Heat" in MS C.

\(^{52}\) Cf. Exod 21:17. G I has a somewhat different idea in 3:16b: "and he is cursed by the Lord whoever provokes his mother".

\(^{53}\) Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 42-47.

certain. 3:11b is also an example where the translation has a more negative attitude toward mothers. Another may be found in 3:6b ("whoever obeys God will give rest to his mother"), where the action required toward the father in 3:6a (to glorify him) is more active than the passive "give rest to his mother".

**Sir 4:10cd**

Sir 4:10cd (in the context of 4:10) is part of the passages concerning widows and is discussed in the following subchapter. Since, however, its Greek version comments on motherly love, some brief remarks are made here.

**GI**

(10a γίνου δρφανοίς ὡς πατήρ
10b καὶ ἀντὶ ἀνδρὸς τῇ μητρὶ αὐτῶν·)

10c καὶ ἔσῃ ὡς υἱὸς υψίστου,
10d καὶ ἀγαπήσει σε μᾶλλον ἦ μήτηρ σου.

(10a Be like a father to orphans,
10b and instead of a husband to their mother,)

10c and you will be like a son of the Most High,
10d and he will love you more than your mother.

The context and form of this distich is discussed later in the chapter. We may note that it appears in the context of Sir 4:10 that concerns widows and orphans.
The author’s view on widows and works of charity is detailed in this and the following subchapter. The focus in 4:10cd shifts somewhat to the love of God, for which the love of a mother serves as a model. This is a significant evaluation of motherly love.

Sir 7:27-28

27 With your whole heart honour your father and do not forget your mother’s birth pains.
28 Remember that of them (lit. through them) you were born and what can you give them back for what they gave you?

Context

In Sir 7:1 - 9:16 the writer gives advice to his readers on social and religious relations, starting in 7:1-17 on how they should conduct themselves before the king, God, among the multitude of elders etc. In Sir 7:18-26 these aspects are narrowed down to one’s responsibility towards one’s friends, household, including servants, cattle and female members of the family, i.e. daughters and wives. The following section concerns one’s attitude towards parents (7:27-28), God and his priests (7:29-31) and the needy (7:32-35), closing with a statement which seems to summarize the previous 18 verses. Sir 8:1-19 calls for humble and modest conduct in relation to various types of people, i.e. the mighty, rich, old, quick-tempered, stranger, etc. Sir 9:1-9 has
teachings explicitly about women and the attitudes towards them; 9:10-16 is concerned with selecting companions or friends.

Sir 7:27 uses similar terminology to 7:29-30 which deals with one's attitude towards God and his priests.

Content

The issue of honour due to father and mother has been discussed above in detail. In Sir 7:27-28 the theme of gratitude\(^{55}\) appears, as the text points to the way one is born: through one's parents. As noted above it entails the parents' authority over their children. Also they are more experienced and so their teachings and instructions must be respected.\(^{56}\) In addition it is emphasized here that one must be grateful to one's parents for the greatest gift that can be given, one's life, and one must not forget the pains that a mother endures by giving life.

Sir 7:27-28 is followed by exhortations to honour the priests by providing them with sacrifices and offerings (7:29-31), and to act righteously (7:32-35). The author's view regarding the connection between sacrifices and works of righteousness has been described above. In the light of this, Sir 7:27-28 might be interpreted as an introduction in the line of the deeds that can have atoning efficacy. The author also stresses reciprocity: while good deeds to parents may serve as a means for atonement, if this idea is indeed present in Sir 7:27-28, they are urged for the benefits to one's father and mother. Since gratitude is more emphasized, self-interest is less stressed in

\(^{55}\) Cf. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 64.

\(^{56}\) Cf. Prov 1:8; 6:20.
Sir 7:27-28 than in Sir 3:1-16. 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.

**Sir 15:2a**

2a Στροφθήσεται αὐτῷ ὡς μήτηρ
2a She will come out to meet him like a mother

**Context**

The wider context is 14:20 - 15:10, within which 14:20-27 describes the search for wisdom. 15:1 restates the theme that was introduced in 1:11-30: the condition to find wisdom is the fear of the Lord. In 15:2-6 the reward for the search is detailed. Here the first statement is 15:2a ("She will come out to meet him like a mother"). It is followed by the other half of the parallel ("and like a young bride she will receive him", 15:2b). 15:7-9 attests that wisdom is not the lot of the unworthy. In 15:10 the wise are praising God.
15:2a is part of one of the wisdom poems of Ben Sira in 14:20 - 15:10. The previous verse (15:1) is closely connected with the search for wisdom described in 14:20-27. It opens the second part of the poem (15:1-10) within which 15:2-6 detail the rewards received by a person who has found wisdom. The first one is a parallel of two images employing women: a mother in 15:2a and a young bride in 15:2b. Both are the personifications of wisdom, but in these verses she is not the one who is sought, but someone who goes out to receive the person first as a mother (15:2a). The terms ἀνεχομένη and ὑπαντήσεται convey a similar idea, when a person goes out in order to meet or greet someone. They describe the mother who will receive the person with motherly care. The second half of the parallel (15:2b) depicts the bride who embraces him. The motherly care and the bride's eager and "passionate" awaiting are the comfort one can enjoy. This way Sir 15:2a assumes a positive image of being a mother, so much so that she is part of the personification of God's wisdom. The image of the bride is even more relevant as will be shown in chapter V. As Di Lella notes, these two images "would particularly attract notice in the male-oriented world of Ben Sira".

Sir 23:14

14 μνήσθητι πατρός καὶ μητρός σου,
ἀνὰ μέσον γὰρ μεγιστάνων συνεδρεύεις,
μὴ ποτὲ ἐπιλάθῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν

57 Skehan, Ben Sira, 265.
καὶ τῷ ἑτισµῷ σοῦ μωρανθῆς
καὶ θελήσεις εἰ μη ἑγεννήθης
καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ τοκετοῦ σου καταράσῃ.

14 Remember your father and mother, for you sit in council among the mighty,59 lest you forget60 in their presence, 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.

Context


Content

One of Ben Sira's recurring themes is to call for humility in the presence of influential men (7:5b, 7a, 14a). Another is the fear of being disgraced in front of other people (18:31; 42:11abcd). These concerns culminate in 23:14. One's insolent speech among men of influence (for example the local council) brings shame not only on the person who was insolent, but also on one’s parents. One must remember or keep in mind one's father and mother in order to avoid this serious mistake. Remembering in this

59 μεγιστάν: "great man", "important person". The genitive plural used together with συνεδρεύεις probably means: "sit in the council among great men".
60 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 222, n. 86, sees "stumble" as more probable here than "forget".
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. The idea 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. It is noteworthy that Sir 23:12-15 (the immediate context of 23:14) does not describe any affliction, but a situation where one can disgrace oneself among the mighty 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.

41:17a

MS B

17a Before father and mother be ashamed of sexual immorality

G I

17a αἰσχύνεσθε ἀπὸ πατρὸς καὶ μητρὸς περὶ πορνείας

17a Before father and mother be ashamed of sexual immorality

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61 For the idea "curse the day of your birth" cf. Job 3:1-10; Jer 20:14-18.
62 MS B* and MS M have על פאת.
Context

The wider context is 41:14 - 42:14 with lengthy comments on true and false shame, and on the father's concern for his daughter. Following an introduction in 41:14-16 we find in 41:17 - 42:1ab the list of all things of which one should be ashamed. 42:1ef is the introduction to those things of which one should not be ashamed. 42:2-8ab is the list itself. Both lists 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. These stichs have a distinctive form.

Form

Each of these 6 stichs starts with defining the persons before whom, or the context in which one should be ashamed. In 41:17a it is father and mother. Each set of objects is introduced by לַמִּי (MSS M, B). The stichs close with the definition of the shameful act, introduced by נָעַל (41:17a-18a, 18c in MS M; 41:17ab in MS B\textsuperscript{mg}; in 41:18a-19a in MS B; in 41:17ab, however, MS B has סְלִיל). The shameful act is sexual immorality in 41:17a.

Content

The extant Hebrew versions of 41:17a use different words to describe the act that one should feel ashamed of. MS B has מָה (from מָה), MS M and MS B\textsuperscript{mg} have מָחָה, which is used only in Gen 49:4 in the Hebrew Bible. The term מָה means "to commit prostitution", "to be or act as a prostitute". It usually describes the activity of a
prostitute, who is therefore a נַעֲרָה (נַעֲרָה) or אָשהַ נַעֲרָה (אָשהַ נַעֲרָה). Sexual wrongdoing is called פֶּרֶנֶיו. These terms, usually rendered as πορνέω/πορνεία or related forms in the LXX, may be used for someone who accepts payment for her services as a professional prostitute, or in individual cases such as the acts of Tamar (Gen 38:24), the rape of Dinah (Gen 34:31) or in case of promiscuity before marriage (Deut 22:21).

It appears, however, that they are used in a much broader sense in the Aramaic Levi Document 6:4 / 17 connecting exogamy with prostitution. In CD 4.15 – 5.12 the concern is also broader than mere prostitution: bigamy, sexual intercourse with a menstruant woman, and marrying nieces.

The term מָלֵךְ means "to be boastful", "to be insolent"/"loose"/"reckless" and with the latter meaning is used in Jud 9:4; Jer 23:32 and Zeph 3:4. The first meaning, "to be
boastful" is close to "to gush over" as water, used in Gen 49:4 to describe the actions of Reuben who defiled the bed of his father. Kugel suggests כְּמוֹ מים be translated as "wanton as water" in Gen 49:4, and he gives the account of Reuben's sin from T. Reu. 1:6 with the following translation: "I solemnly admonish you today by the God of heaven, that you not walk in the ignorance of youth and impurity to which I gave myself up and defiled the bed of my father, Jacob." Kugel continues the argument that the term "to which I gave myself up" literally means "in which I was poured out" this way describing Reuben's actions, and that Ps 22:14 (= 21:15 in LXX) has a similar idea about turbulent emotions, fear, described by the Psalmist as "I am poured out like water". The Greek word for "poured out" is the same in Ps 22:14 (21:15 in LXX) as in T. Reu. 1:6 (ἐξεχύθην). Loader points out that in Aramaic Levi Document 6:3 / 16, מזג מָזוֹזָאָם appears with תָּנוֹמָא, אָדוֹתָא and מַגְנָה, פּוֹרְנֶהא ("sexual immorality"), and indicates "illicit sexual intercourse", but not in the narrow meaning of prostitution. While 4Q202 3.1 (1 En. 8:2) preserves only מזג, it also appears in a sexual context. Similarly in the "Wiles of the Wicked Woman" מזג probably means "sexual wantonness" (4Q184/4QWiles 1.13, 15; 3.5).

To return to the usage within the book of Ben Sira, Greenfield gives the following translation for the passage under discussion (Sir 41:17a): "Be ashamed to be found guilty of fornication by your parents". Other forms are also used in Sir 4:29; 8:2;
19:2 and in Sir 42:10c (MS B\[^{\text{mg}}\]). Trenchard provides a different translation: "be ashamed of insolence to father and mother".\(^{76}\) He suggests that the shameful act is directed to one's parents and it is therefore unimaginable to speak about sexual immorality in this context.\(^{77}\) What form of sexual immorality is meant here by the author is not certain. The isolated comment on sexual misconduct, however, is significant since it is part of Ben Sira's long poem on the issue of shame. Numerous aspects are treated in this poem, such as possible adultery, consorting with a servant girl, and it seems natural that father and mother should be mentioned in the list that includes those before whom a person should be ashamed of sexual immorality. The parents of a person are also among the closest family members on whom someone's disgrace may reflect negatively.

Before we turn to the discussion of the comments on widows we may briefly conclude here that mothers, just as fathers, must be honoured and taken into consideration as people on whom a person's immorality (including sexual) may reflect shamefully. Motherhood is also regarded positively in the personification of wisdom.

### I.2. Widows (and Orphans)

**Sir 4:10**

MS A

10 בְּהֵי כָּאָב לַיְהוֹמִים

10 Be like a father to orphans and instead of a husband to widows, and God will call you son, and he will be kindly to you and will deliver you from the pit.

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\(^{76}\) Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 49.

\(^{77}\) Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 225, n. 100.
GI

10 γίνου ὀρφανοῖς ὡς πατήρ
καὶ ἄντι ἄνδρας τῇ µητρί αὐτῶν·
καὶ ἔσῃ ὡς υἱὸς υψίστου,
καὶ ἀγαπήσει σε μᾶλλον ἡ µήτηρ σου.

10 Be like a father to orphans,
and instead of a husband to their mother,
and you will be like a son of the Most High,
and he will love you more than your mother.

Context

The context is discussed in the previous subchapter (regarding Sir 3:1-16), where it is stated that 4:10 is part of the teaching on social conduct (4:7-10). Within it 4:10 is the final instruction on righteous deeds (4:8-10), and even though it is relevant to 4:7-9, in form it is different, partially because it has two distichs instead of one. There is no decisive pattern, however, within this subsection.

Content

In Sir 4:10 the author dedicates two distichs to the subject of widows and orphans as the culmination of the sayings on social conduct.

Before engaging in the discussion it is necessary to describe briefly the position and status of a woman termed נשים in the Hebrew Bible and then in the present context.
Excursus 2: Widows and orphans in the Hebrew Bible and in Ben Sira's view

To understand the status of a woman in Israel, at least the aspects relevant here, it is necessary to emphasize that in Israel’s patriarchal society a female child belonged only temporarily to the family into which she was born. After marriage she was transferred to her husband's family, where she was to help build up a household, not only by contributing with her work, but also through the children she bore to her husband.\(^78\)

If the woman became a widow and had adult sons from her husband, at least she had the provision that her sons would take care of her. If she were childless, an option to perpetuate the line of the deceased husband and also secure the life and maintenance of the widow was the levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). In the unusual situation of Gen 38 it was Tamar's father-in-law who, not knowingly, fulfilled the law.\(^79\)

If the levirate law was not fulfilled, the widow could go back to her father's house, if her father was still alive. If she had no living male adult to support her or if she did not remain in her father-in-law's house and did not return to her family, her maintenance was not secured. If she was still young and attractive, the possibility that she would remarry and be transferred to another household was not excluded. But if she was not young anymore and could not get married again she was left without any support, which in general meant a

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difficult life. Despite the laws that protected the widows and despite the 
prophetic condemnation of their exploitation they endured oppression (Ps 
94:6; Ezek 22:7), and without an adult male who represented their interest in 
court they could be defrauded of their possessions.

In references within the Hebrew Bible the widow is therefore probably a once married woman who does not have an adult male to support her financially and socially. She could, however, have minor sons, who were called orphans. The word "orphan" (דָּוִד) means a boy who became fatherless and is not of age. This term is never used of girls.

Fensham points out on the basis of Psalm 82, especially Ps 82:3-4, that the only one who can give justice and deliverance to the weak is God, as their only true protector. A similar role is attributed to him in Ps 68:6 (= 5 in English) as father to the fatherless and defender of widows. This role is transferred to humans in Sir 4:10, where the situation is probably that of a woman who does not have an adult male to support her, but probably has minor sons.

There was before Ben Sira the command from God to protect the weak and needy by charity and social justice, and the exhortation to fulfil this command

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80 See also Leeb, "Widow," 161.
81 Isa 1:23 presents a similar case.
83 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 415.
throughout the Hebrew Bible. Ben Sira was standing in this tradition when calling for the fulfilment of the same duties himself.

In Sir 4:10 taking up the role and duty of a father to the fatherless and husband to the widows (or the mothers of the fatherless in G I), means firstly obeying God's command, secondly providing for the weak and oppressed what they needed and thirdly, that the deeds of righteousness were the means of atonement for the righteous person's own benefit. One aspect of the latter idea of restoring a broken relationship with God may have been the rewards the author is referring to in 4:10cd. Whoever follows the example of God as protector of the weak (Ps 68:6[5]) deserves to be called God's son (4:10c).85 This idea appears in both the Hebrew and the Greek version. The Hebrew version of 4:10d differs, however. The Hebrew reads: "will deliver you from the pit" while the Greek renders it "and he will love you more than your mother".86 The former may refer to a form of atonement. The restored relationship with God as deliverance from the pit may involve God's delayed punishment by blessing a person with long life without afflictions, or saving him from anxiety over the inevitable death. These are the probable meanings of deliverance from the pit, the realm of not living. A similar idea represented by MS A in 4:10d is found in Sir 51:2 where the same term (תִּמְנָה) is used for pit. It is not certain why the translator deleted the comment on the pit from this line. As noted above in this chapter it is significant that motherly love is a model for God's love.

Concluding thoughts will follow at the end of this subchapter.

85 There are numerous examples in the Hebrew Bible for God as father and also in the book of Ben Sira: Sir 23:1, 4; 51:10; Deut 32:6; Prov 3:12; Wis 2:13, 16; 14:3; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Hos 11:1; Mal 1:6; 2:10.
86 Note the metaphor about God as mother in Isa 49:15; 66:13.
17 He does not reject the cry of an orphan,
nor the widow when she pours out (her) complaint:
18 Do not the tears go down (her) cheek
and sigh against [ ] .

G I

14 οὐ μὴ ὑπερίδη ἱκετείαν ὀρφανοῦ
καὶ χήραν ἐὰν ἐκχέῃ λαλίαν·
15 οὐχὶ δάκρυα χήρας ἐπὶ σιαγόνα καταβαίνει
καὶ ἡ καταβόησις ἐπὶ τῷ καταγαγόντι αὐτά

14 He does not ignore the supplication of an orphan,
nor a widow when she pours out (her) speech:
15 Do not a widow's tears go down on (her) cheek
and is not (her) cry against the one who causes them to go down?

Context

The wider context is 34:21 - 36:22, within which 34:21-31 deals with sacrifices and religious acts. 35:1-13 describes the observance of the Lord's commandments as the true worship. 35:14-26 attests that God is just and righteous and will respond to those who cry out for help. In 35:14-22a, the immediate context of the passage under discussion, it is the individuals who are oppressed, while in 35:22b-26 it is rather the nation, God's chosen people, whom he will save. 36:1-22 is a prayer for the salvation of Israel.

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87 Bmg reads אנקה ("sigh").
88 This word should probably read מדריעה ("her homelessness"). Lévi, Hebrew Text, 36 and G I suggest מדריעה ("the one who causes them to fall") from רד ("goes down", as in 35:18a).
89 Read 35:18b as "and sigh against the one who causes them to fall"; see note on the text.
Form

The place of 35:17(14)-18(15) in the setting is determined more by content, than by form.

Content

The status of widows and orphans and the author's attitude towards them has been discussed in this chapter. Sir 35:17(14)-18(15) has a message similar to that of Sir 4:10. It has an added significance because of its wider context, since it immediately follows the scribe's exhortation on the right conduct for atoning for sins. This includes righteousness and condemnation of ill-gotten sacrifices that are from the exploitation of the poor. God will not accept such sacrifices. He will also not accept offerings that would serve as a bribe and would result in oppressing the needy even more: God will not take sides against the needy (35:14[11]-16[13]). In 35:17(14)-18(15) God is the one who comes to the aid of orphans and widows, while in 4:10 it is the duty of the readers whom Ben Sira addresses. In 35:17(14)-18(15) the widow also receives more attention. 35:18(15) depicts her as she cries out for help.90 Trenchard sees a negative attitude in Ben Sira's use of "chatter", "complaint", as "empty talk".91 One could argue, however, that the emphasis is on the continuity of the widow's complaint and cry. It is not specified what caused the widow's tears to fall. As described above in this chapter, injustices may have made the life of the widows difficult. We may note here that there are no references to widowers.

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90 See also Jerusalem as a crying widow in Bar 4:12, 16, and also Lam 1:1-2.
91 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 55.
While Sir 4:10 and 35:17(14)-18(15) do not convey much about the author's view on sexuality, they exhibit a deep concern for widows and orphans in both text versions. Also the Greek translation of 4:10d shows a high evaluation of motherly love.

**I.3. Conclusion**

Regarding mothers and widows (and orphans) the sage is in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible in that acts of mercy and almsgiving are significant. We may point out that in some cases his attitude towards parents may have been motivated by self-interest in two aspects, firstly, because a person may expect to be honoured by his children if he honoured his own parents, and secondly because righteous acts serve as atonement.

In the case of the widows, however, it is quite probable that the author urged good deeds toward them because they were genuinely in need of compassion. Widows were vulnerable for many reasons. While it is not explicitly stated by the author, women who did not belong to the household of any man may have been sexually vulnerable. From the isolated comments on widows we may conclude that Ben Sira had a genuine concern for the defenceless and weak, and the basis for this concern was at least partially that he took the command of God seriously in this matter.

In his treatment of women who are mothers or widows, his usual anxiety regarding the conduct of women, and the way their conduct may reflect on men, seems to disappear. Only the Greek version of 3:11b refers to a disgraceful mother, where the writer may have been concerned with issues of sexual nature. In 23:14 and 41:17a one's own conduct may reflect on one's father and mother, even though in the former
the disgrace is caused by improper speech, and there is no indication that it was of a sexual nature. The latter example of shame (41:17a) is clearly of a sexual nature, but is not specified further.

In Sir 15:2a motherly love and care are praised and paralleled with a bride's love (15:2b). However, they are symbols of the rewards of personified wisdom for the person who seeks and finds her, as will be demonstrated in chapter V.
CHAPTER TWO

DAUGHTERS (THE ANXIETY FOR FATHERS) AND SONS

In the book of Ben Sira there are four comments that explicitly concern daughters, among which we can treat Sir 7:23-25 and Sir 22:3-5 as an introduction to Sir 42:9-14. The issues that are introduced in 7:23-25 and 22:3-5 are detailed in 42:9-14. All these have comments on sons too.\(^1\) For this reason the text, translation, form and context of all three passages will be given first, followed by the discussion of their content. The fourth passage dealing with daughters in the context of Sir 26:7-12 is an intriguing one with certain translation issues. Its discussion will follow separately at the end of this chapter.

Sir 7:23-25

\(^{23}\) Do you have sons? Chastise them and take for them wives in their youth.
\(^{24}\) Do you have daughters? Guard their chastity (lit. body) and do not let your face shine upon them.
\(^{25}\) Give your daughter (in marriage) and you finish a task (lit. business, affair), and unite/join her with a sensible man.

\(^1\) The Hebrew of 7:23a has בנים, the Greek has τέκνα.
\(^2\) Missing from MS C.
\(^3\) MS C has רון.
25 ἐκδοὺ θυγατέρα, καὶ ἔσῃ τετελεκὼς ἔργον μέγα, καὶ ἀνδρὶ συνετῇ δύρησαι αὐτὴν.

23 Do you have children? Admonish them and bow their neck from youth.
24 Do you have daughters? Be concerned for their chastity (lit. body) and do not let your face be cheerful upon them.
25 Give (your) daughter (in marriage) and you will have finished a great task, and give her to a sensible man.

Context

The wider context (Sir 7:1 - 9:16) has already been discussed in chapter I.1. where it was pointed out that in Sir 7:18-26 one's own responsibility towards one's friend, one's own household, including servants, cattle, and female members of one's family, i.e. daughters and wives, are the concerns of the writer. This is the immediate context of Sir 7:23-25.

Form

While Sir 7:23-25 is part of the larger context of Sir 7:1-36 in content, in their form these verses have both similarities and differences compared to the surrounding verses. In 7:1-21 the writer starts each bicolon with the prohibitive ἢ (“do not”) except in 7:2, in the second bicolon of 7:6, and in 7:17a, 21 (the prohibitive in the latter being in the second part of the verse).

Sir 7:22-25 have a distinctive pattern, with the author listing those who might belong to one’s own household, followed by γὰρ, then by positive instruction consisting of a verb and object, and finally by an additional instruction on how to treat them. In 7:24 the second line is not a positive exhortation as in 7:22b and 7:23b, but a negative one.
Also the theme of 7:24 receives more attention than other verses of Sir 7:22-25, as it continues in 7:25. It appears that daughters were a special concern for the author.

**Sir 22:3-5**

3 (It is) a disgrace of a father to produce a (son) who is uneducated/without discipline/without instruction, but a daughter is born to his loss.

4 A sensible daughter will inherit her husband, (and) a shameless one is a grief to him who begat (her);

5 An impudent daughter disgraces father and husband, and will be despised by both.

**Context**

The wider context of the passage is Sir 21:1 - 22:18, within which 21:1-28 deals with various kinds of sins and folly. 22:1-2 has comments on the sluggard. 22:3-6 concern discipline, within which 22:3-5 treats the issue of disciplining one's children. 22:7-8 (in G II only) attest that the ignoble or noble origins of parents are not always reflected in the upbringing and life of their children. Sir 22:9-18 has sayings on folly and wisdom.
Form

The section has no distinctive characteristics.

**Sir 42:9-14**

The numbers in brackets in the Hebrew text and its translation correspond to Skehan's verse numeration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS B</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>הב לאמ המסמהין 9a</td>
<td>rq?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>דגןת תמר 9b</td>
<td>tnmfm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בהנהל פן חגור 9c</td>
<td>bal tb</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מבחלילה פן מスーチה 10a</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בכניסת אמא פ 10b(10c)</td>
<td>9b</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נגי 10c(10b)</td>
<td>rwgt /p hyrwunb</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בא תבבב 10d</td>
<td>9c</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ … ] 11a</td>
<td>... /p hyba tybb</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ … ] 11b</td>
<td>.../p hyba</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ... ] 11a</td>
<td>.../p hyba 11b</td>
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<td>[ ... ] 11a</td>
<td>.../p hyba 11b</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 The word seems corrupt. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 477, 479, restoresטעק ("keep watch", "be wakeful") on the basis of G I.
5 MS M and B are: משמיר ("treasure").
6 Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 53, restores[טמאין שמה]. MS M is restored from G I and MS B:
7 נמצית משמיר ("drowsiness will part").
8 MS B are: דרמאנה ("and anxiety for her").
10 Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 54, reconstructs תමאת ("lest she be hated"). Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 479, offers:
11 נמצית, (lest she be) childless.
12 Probable ditography from 42:10; read: הצלחת ("married woman"). See also Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 54.
13 MS B are: הה_CLK ("deceive", "entice"). MS M: […] חל הכל ("defile").
14 MS M: […] שטא (where [сталו] can be surmised = "to be/prove unfaithful").
15 Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 54, reconstructs על ("on").
16 Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 54, reconstructs חל in the text and gives אל פוחה אלי in the notes. The latter is supported by MS B are. They suggest the following reading: "In her father's house lest she commit sexual wrongdoing". MS M: […] בח אמא פן ה으ני (In) her father's house lest she become pregnant.
17 MS M restored from G I: הב לאמ המסמהין ("and when married, lest she be barren"). See Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 477, 480, who notes that ms בח from 42:10c(10b) does double duty for.
18 MS M: […] על ("My son, keep a close watch on your daughter"). See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 477, 480.
9a A daughter is a treasure for a father [], 32
9b anxiety []]
9c in her youth lest she [] 35
9d and while unmarried, []]
10a while unmarried, lest she be seduced, 38

All versions are too fragmentary to use. Read with G I: "Lest she make you a laughingstock to enemies".

MS M has קָהֳל here.

Lévi, Hebrew Text, 54, reconstructs בְּעֶת. MS B has בְּהַר. MS M has a lacuna.

MS M omits אָשַּׁב. If the Aramaic הָלֵךְ אַל הָעַת ("commit adultery") is used here, then the following reading could be conjectured: "let there not be a place for adultery". Cf. the similar idea of John Strugnell, "Notes and Queries on 'The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada'," ErIsr 9 (1969), 109-19, 116. However, חָפֵץ is used in Sir 41:19a (MS B) in the sense "the place where you dwell".

MS M has קָהֳל.

MS M has a lacuna.

MS M: בֶּן from בֶּן ("to understand"), as "to expose, show, reveal" in the context. Skehan, Ben Sira, 480, reads זָרַף ("to reveal").

MS B 415: זָרַף.

MS B 415: מָרַת: "among", "in the midst"; see Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 146, 303, n. 156.

MS M has סָכַן, "moth".

Both מָסַם מַסְתִּיא and מָסַם מַסְתִּיא are supported; see Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 304, n. 164. The former would be closer to G I in meaning (םִשְׁתִּיא מָסַם = "than a woman who does good"), while the latter would read:

מָסַם מַסְתִּיא ("than a woman’s goodness").

Read with MS M and MS B 415: מַסַּב. רכָּב.

Both MS B ("and a house which disgraces pours forth a woman") and MS B 415: מַסַּב (where מַסַּב means "disgrace", מַסָּב means fear [also of God]). For suggestions to read מַסַּב instead of מַסָּב in MS M, see Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 304, n. 167. This way MS M would read: "But better is a God-fearing daughter than a shameless son". Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 304-305, nn. 165-66, offers the following translation for 42:14b: "And a daughter causes fear regarding disgrace more than a son". This way 42:14b would be the "culmination" of not only 42:14a, but the theme of 42:9-14.

Read "who keeps watch"/"who is wakeful"; see the note on the text.

Read "anxiety for her"; see the note on the text.

Read "takes away sleep"; see the note on the text.

Instead of "commit adultery" the more probable reading is: "(lest) she be rejected"; see the note on the text.

Read "when married"; see the note on the text.

Read "lest she be hated"; for the other variant see the note on text.
(10c) 10b and in the house of [\(\text{[]}\)]
(10b) 10c and in the house of her father lest [\(\text{[]}\)]
10d and in the house of [\(\text{[]}\)]
11a [\(\text{[]}\)]
11b [\(\text{[]}\)]
11c a byword in the city and the [\(\text{[]}\)] of the people,
11d I made you dwell\(^5\) in the city (lit. in the [congregation] of the gate).
11e In the [\(\text{[]}\)] of her dwelling let there be no window/lattice,
11f and place that overlooks the surrounding entrance/entrance round about.
12a Let her not give\(^4\) her beauty (lit. figure) to any male,
12b or consort/associate [\(\text{[]}\)] women.
13a For from a garment comes a moth,
13b and from a woman, woman's wickedness.
14a [\(\text{[]}\)] of a man than a woman who does good,\(^5\)
14b and a house which disgraces pours forth a woman.\(^5\)

G I

9a θυγάτηρ πατρὶ ἀπόκρυφος ἀγρυπνία,  
9b καὶ ἡ μέριμνα αὐτῆς ἀφιστὰ ὑπὸν·  
9c ἐν νεότητι αὐτῆς, μὴ ποτὲ παρακαμάζῃ,  
9d καὶ συνωκηκυῖα, μὴ ποτὲ μισηθῇ·  
10a ἐν παρθενίᾳ, μὴ ποτὲ βεβηλωθῇ  
10b καὶ ἐν τοῖς πατρικοῖς αὐτῆς ἐγκυος γένηται·  
10c μετὰ ἄνδρος οὖσα, μὴ ποτὲ παραβῆ,  
10d καὶ συνωκηκυῖα, μὴ ποτὲ στειρωθῇ.
11a ἐπὶ θυγατρὶ ἀδιαστρέφωστ στερέωσον φυλακῆν,  
11b μὴ ποτὲ ποιῆσῃ σε ἐπίχαρα ἔχθροῖς,  
11c λαλιάν ἐν πόλει καὶ ἐκκλητὸν λαοῦ,  
11d καὶ κατασχύνῃ σε ἐν πλῆθει πολλῶν.  
12a παντὶ ἄνθρωπῳ μὴ ἔμβλητε ἐν κάλλει  
12b καὶ ἐν μέσῳ γυναικῶν μὴ συνέδρευς.  
13a ἀπὸ γὰρ ἰματίων ἐκπορεύεται σῆς  
13b καὶ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς πονηρία γυναικός.  
14a κρείσσων πονηρία ἄνδρος ἢ ἀγαθοποιὸς γυνῆ,

\(^{39}\) Read "her husband"; see the note on the text. MS M reads: ":[lest] she prove unfaithful to her husband".

\(^{40}\) MS M reads: ":(In) her father's house lest she become pregnant". For other variants see the note on the text.

\(^{41}\) Read with MS M restored from G I: "and when married, lest she be barren"; see the note on the text.

\(^{42}\) MS M reads: "My son, keep a close watch on your daughter".

\(^{43}\) Read with G I: "Lest she make you a laughingstock to enemies".

\(^{44}\) Read "assembly"; see the note on the text.

\(^{45}\) It does not fit here. Read "and bring shame to you" on the basis of MS B\(^{\text{mg}}\).

\(^{46}\) Read "place"; see the note on the text.

\(^{47}\) Reading with MS M: "reveal", "expose": see the note on the text.

\(^{48}\) Read "among" on the basis of the corrected text. See the note on the text.

\(^{49}\) Read "Better is the wickedness"; see the note on the text.

\(^{50}\) For other variants see the note on the text.

\(^{51}\) On the basis of the corrected MS M text the most probable reading is "But better is a God-fearing daughter than a shameless son". See the note on the text.
14b καὶ γυνὴ κατασχύνουσα εἰς ὀνειδισμόν.

9a A daughter is a hidden sleeplessness to a father,  
9b and worry (over her) drives away sleep:  
9c in her youth, lest she overpass the prime of her life,  
9d and when married, lest she be hated;  
10a in virginity, lest she be defiled  
10b and in her father's house become pregnant;  
10c having a husband (lit. being with a man) lest she prove unfaithful,  
10d and when married, lest she be barren.  
11a Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,  
11b lest she make you a laughingstock to enemies,  
11c a common talk in the city and the assembly of the people,  
11d and bring shame to you in a multitude of many.  
12a Do not look upon anyone in terms of beauty,  
12b and do not sit in the midst of women:  
13a for from garments comes a moth  
13b and from a woman, woman's wickedness.  
14a Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good,  
14b and a woman brings shame leading to disgrace.

Context

As discussed in the previous chapter, the wider context is Sir 41:14 – 42:14 with lengthy comments on true and false shame in 41:14 – 42:8. This is followed by the most extensive passage on daughters in 42:9-14.

Form

The form and structure of the passage are primarily determined by content.

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52 The word "assembly" in the accusative seems out of place here. It may be that the accusative case of the noun is a mistake and the line should read: "a common talk in the city and in the assembly of the people". If however the accusative is to be expected we would have to assume that the text is not complete. The idea behind it would be something like this: the behaviour of the daughter, if she, for instance, committed a sexually illicit deed, would result in a public judgment, calling together those who are selected to judge in such matters. The following reading could then be surmised: "lest she make you a laughingstock to enemies… and cause the assembly of the people". Wright, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation," 754, translates "common talk in the city and summoned by the people", which reflects a related idea.
Prior to a detailed discussion it is necessary to summarize the situation and status of male and female children in the world of Ben Sira.

Excursus 3: The status of sons and daughters in ancient Israel

While it is difficult to find much detail about the life of both male and female children in ancient Israel, some light may be shed on the attitude towards them on the parents’ part. On the one hand children and a large family were a gift from God (Job 5:25; Psalms 127; 128; 144:12). It was emphasized that children not only had to submit to the authority of their parents but were required to honour them, as can be deduced from the commandments of the Decalogue (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) and from other related comments (Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 19:3; Deut 21:18-21; 27:16; Prov 20:20; 30:11, 17).

In ancient Israel their upbringing was mainly the responsibility of their mother until puberty. Pilch argues that in rearing the children daughters and sons were in different positions. While girls were taught from their early age to adopt the lifelong female roles as soon as possible, boys were indulged by their mother's love. Even after the puberty of the children the father had a role mainly in the instruction and discipline of the sons, who had to be regulated and sometimes

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Another aspect of the father's teaching role was to pass on knowledge of the history of Israel and of the law of Yahweh. Various forms of the term "sons" are used in the passages in which the father explains to the children the significance of certain events or institutions, or teaches them the law.

Although the term בָּנִים may be used as a collective for both males and females, as in many occurrences of the term בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, it is not certain to what extent female children were involved in this so-called "parental catechesis". Observance of the family Sabbath or attendance of religious festivals could include all the children.

It is not certain how common literacy was in Israel before the exile. Although there is not much information about schools, including wisdom schools, it seems that they were at least in some form present for the purpose of training scribes and priests. The term "my son" in Proverbs, especially in chapters 1 – 9, may be an address from a father to a son, or from a master to a pupil, as an example of the teaching in wisdom schools.

After the exile a great emphasis was placed on education to preserve and strengthen the national-religious identity of Israel and the knowledge of the

58 Wright, "Family," 765.
Teaching the Torah was no longer restricted to the priests. A professional class of scribes emerged who were also trained in the law and its interpretation, and this class was open to priests, Levites and laymen as well. There is little information available regarding the structure of public schooling of this period. One can only conjecture a situation of a "house of instruction" (בֵּית מָודְרֶשׁ), mentioned first in Sir 51:23b.

As noted above the term בֵּית מָדְרֶשׁ in the Hebrew Bible may denote both male and female. However, it is probable that those taught in schools similar to what Ben Sira mentions ("my house of instruction", בֵּית מָודְרֶשׁ) were males. He was standing in the tradition of Proverbs in the use of the address "my son" (sometimes "my children"), and in that his message suggests that his students were males. As noted in the discussion of Sir 9:1-9 Heijerman suggests, however, that the "strange woman" of Proverbs 7 may be the mother's rival, assuming therefore that the person instructing the son in 7:1-4 may be the son's mother. Van Dijk-Hemmes also argues that the speaker in certain parts of Proverbs 1 - 9 could be a woman, especially in ch. 7. One of his arguments is that in the Bible, looking through the window is an activity practised mostly by women, as in Judg 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16; 2 Kgs 9:30 and Prov 7:6. Even if

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some of the instructions come from females in Proverbs 1 – 9, and ambiguity regarding the gender of the speakers cannot be excluded, owing partially to the difficulties in determining the authorship of Proverbs, the same would be difficult to imagine about the book of Ben Sira.

The situation that seems to emerge from numerous comments in the book of Ben Sira is either a father admonishing his son, or a master instructing his student about everyday life issues, on how to live a successful life without getting into trouble.\(^{64}\) Sayings about a variety of women, including prostitutes, adulteresses, wives, and daughters, seem to confirm a male point of view regarding both the instructor and the instructed.

Kraemer argues that if women had any access to formal education after the exile, including the Hellenistic period, it probably consisted in preparation for marriage.\(^{65}\) This idea is supported by the custom of early marriage. Archer notes that one reason for exclusion of women from schooling may have been a concern with free mixing of the sexes which affected females at all stages of their lives.\(^{66}\) It does not mean, however, that they did not possess any knowledge of the Torah, and especially of the laws that were particularly pertinent to them. From a rabbinic comment (\textit{Sotah} 3.4) a picture emerges of fathers who are urged to teach their daughters about the Sotah, the trial by Bitter Waters, based on Num 5:12-31.\(^{67}\)

\(^{64}\) Also cf. Culpepper, "Education," 23.
\(^{65}\) Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers and Daughters in the Greco-Roman World," in The Jewish Family in Antiquity (BJS 289; ed. S. J. D. Cohen; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 89-112, 93.
\(^{66}\) Archer, Beyond Rubies, 95-99.
\(^{67}\) Archer, Beyond Rubies, 100.
Recent scholarly argument on a shift in the viewing of women and their roles in Israel's history may shed some light on some of the aspects of Ben Sira's attitude towards women and sexuality. Archer argues that before the exile Israelites were structured into extended families. Women enjoyed a certain freedom and involvement in religious affairs (1 Sam 2:19; 2 Kgs 23:21). Through the period preceding the exile, with the increased urbanization, a more complex economic system evolved that required the regulation of inheritance, debt-bondage and financial transactions. Although women still retained a public presence, the purity of daughters was given greater attention (Deut 22:13-21), and marriage became more formalized (Deut 22:23-29; 24:1-4). After the exile those who returned from Babylon considered the destruction of the temple, loss of the monarchy, and the exile itself, as God's punishment for the wayward life of the Israelites.

Many of the laws found in the book of Leviticus were composed after the exile, and regulated the life of the people. They include a significant number of laws concerning sexuality, especially in the Holiness Code (chs. 17 - 26). It appears that greater emphasis was placed on the question of purity and impurity in the postexilic community of Israel. The purity laws and regulations especially affected the life of women. As they were impure for a great length of their daily lives, they could not come into contact with anything sacred. Therefore they were excluded from the cult during the time of their impurity.

70 Archer, "Virgin," 5.
71 Archer, *Beyond Rubies*, 36-38, 104.
A greater concern with purity emerged not only regarding the cult but also in connection with sexual purity. Women who were still minors in their fathers' house were strictly guarded. This change in view had consequences in the attitude not only toward women but also toward sexuality, and some traces of this change may be discovered in the book of Ben Sira.

Discussion of Sir 7:23-25; 22:3-5; 42:9-14

We may note regarding Sir 7:23b that the Hebrew version reads "and take for them wives in their youth". This comment may seem out of context in a discussion of disciplining sons. From the teaching on daughters in the following verses, however, it appears certain that the author is concerned with marital issues, sexual issues, or issues of chastity. Therefore the sexuality and marriage of male children were similarly important matters. This argument may be supported in Sir 26:19-21. In the latter, a person is instructed to marry a suitable woman, who is chaste, and also fertile. There is not much evidence regarding the age at marriage for either men or women, and the reality may have been different from the ideal age at marriage as prescribed in various sources. In Palestine men may have reached the end of their twenties before their first marriage. Minor girls' marriages were undoubtedly arranged by their father, but it is not certain how often it happened. Sir 7:23-25 expresses that it was important for male children to marry early. If a young man marries at an early age there is less of a risk that he will engage in sexual intercourse with women, especially with women who are not

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73 Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 105-107.
appropriate partners as future virtuous wives.\textsuperscript{74} Sexuality is therefore a concern at another level. In the light of this, the Hebrew version of 7:23 is not out of context. It may be understood as a narrower aspect of training, or as preparing the male children for future life, or keeping them on the right "path". 1QSa/1Q28a 1.9b-11 prohibits approaching a woman for sexual intercourse until the man is twenty, which can suggest that twenty is the age at marriage for him.\textsuperscript{75}

The concern regarding the chastity of daughters is clearly expressed in 7:24. If the daughter was married at an early age, the possibility of becoming promiscuous or even pregnant in her father's house was less. On the one hand, Ben Sira's concerns regarding daughters reflect the society in which he lived. On the other hand, his anxiety seems extreme. No work among the wisdom writings of Second Temple Judaism, including Proverbs, where the discipline of children is an issue, places so much emphasis on the chastity of daughters, as we find in Sir 7:24-25; 22:4-5; 26:10-12 and 42:9-14. These passages depict a loveless relationship between father and daughter even to the point that in Sir 7:24b a father is urged not to shine his face upon her, or as the Greek translates, not to show a "cheerful" face to her. This idea may mean that if the father is too indulgent with the daughter she may make use of it. For instance she may use her freedom or the lack of the father's supervision to engage in sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{76} The term "shine" one's "face" upon somebody is used mainly in the context of God shining his face on a person in the Hebrew Bible. It is unlikely that this comment is a warning against a father's incestuous intentions since none of the uses of this term mentioned above has such implications.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Even in this case it is not certain that he will remain faithful to his wife.
\textsuperscript{75} Loader, Dead Sea Scrolls, 202-203.
\textsuperscript{76} Cf. Sir 26:10-12 below.
\textsuperscript{77} See discussion below in the chapter regarding Sir 42:9-14.
Sir 7:25a ("Give your daughter [in marriage] and you finish a task [lit. business, affair]") may refer to the reality that raising a female child placed a financial burden on the father, since the daughter was not a permanent member of his family and upon marriage was transferred to the family of her husband. The term employed here (אֶפָּר), among others, has the meaning "to depart" probably to suggest that the problem of finding a suitable husband for a girl will depart upon her marriage. Interestingly the same verb is used for the act of marriage itself since אֶפָּר also means to bring forth/out. The economic value a daughter represented in the institution of the bride-price given to the father by the future husband was only temporary, since it was returned with the daughter as part of her dowry. The term finish a "task" as "business" perhaps refers to this particular characteristic of the marriage. This comment, however, is not in the context of other financial transactions, as in 4Q271/4QD f 3.8-10 (CD). Sir 7:25a may also imply that the father's task to guard the daughter's sexuality in order to keep her chaste until marriage, will also be fulfilled and anxiety will depart.

In 7:25b ("and unite/join her with a sensible man") the term בְּרִית has the meaning "to join"/"to unite" and is not usually taken as a reference to marriage. Ben Sira uses it in this sense. What he means by sensible husband is not clear here. It may be a genuine concern for the daughter's welfare, even happiness or a warning that the husband, similarly to the father, should keep a close watch on the woman, whose sexuality now belongs to him. The idea that a daughter's chastity is the concern of the father even after the marriage seems to be expressed in Sir 22:3-5 and especially in 42:9-14.

78 See ch. III.1. on marriage laws and customs.
We turn here to the discussion of Sir 22:3-5. It has been noted above that the discipline of children by a father is encouraged in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes even using physical punishment (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17). In the Greek version of Sir 22:3a (where Hebrew is not extant) the word "son" is not present and the term ἀσκήσις ("unlearned", "undisciplined") could refer to both male and female. The word δέ in 22:3b in connection with a daughter, however, implies that the unruly child in 22:3a is a son. The father's grief over a foolish son is depicted in Prov 17:21. The law also goes as far as the death penalty in the case of a son who is rebellious and cannot be disciplined (Deut 21:18-21).

It is not clear in 22:3a what the consequences are of having an undisciplined son. The issue may be disobedience in several aspects, including sexual promiscuity, rejection of an arranged marriage with a suitable woman. What is certain from 22:3a is that the son's behaviour brings shame to his father.

To consider the daughter in general as loss to the father in 22:3-5 goes beyond the way daughters were perceived in the patriarchal society, as pointed out above, and it is also in contrast with other pictures of family life and of daughters (Tob 7:16; Jdt 10:12). In Sir 22:3b, apart from the financial burden connected to the raising of daughters, the term ἐξάπτωσις ("loss") could convey the idea of difficulties in finding a suitable husband for the daughter. It could also express the father's anxiety or loss of sleep over keeping the daughter chaste, as noted above. For 22:4a ("A sensible daughter will inherit her husband"), Trenchard offers the following variation: "A sensible daughter will receive her husband", meaning, that the daughter will accept

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her husband and will be faithful to him.\textsuperscript{80} It may also imply that she will accept any man as husband.\textsuperscript{81} It seems that 22:4a places the woman's value in the context of her husband. Also, as 22:4b suggests, it is the father's concern if she causes shame, possibly by engaging in sexual promiscuity. Sir 22:5 confirms the idea that a father is still concerned with the behaviour of the daughter even after marriage (42:9-14). Again, the term shameless is not specified here but misbehaviour could include sexual immorality. That she is despised by both husband and father suggests the gravity of her wrongdoing, possibly sexual wrongdoing.

The most extensive passage on daughters, as noted above, is Sir 42:9-14. In these verses the author deals with both unmarried and married daughters. Obviously if a daughter was not a virgin (42:10a, MSS B, M)\textsuperscript{82} or became pregnant in her father's house (42:10c[10b], MS M = 42:10b in G I), serious difficulties emerged. If she is barren (42:10d, MS M, G I),\textsuperscript{83} she might provoke the hatred of her husband. If she becomes unfaithful to him (42:10b[10c], MS M = 42:10c in G I), she brings shame primarily to her husband and to any children, and destroys another household if her lover is married. For Ben Sira, however, the father's shame is also a concern. According to MS M in 42:10ab, defilement (תֹּלֶל from לֶלֶל) is in close context with unfaithfulness (תֹּשֵׁש from מִשַּׁש). Thus sexual wrongdoing is presented in strong and broad terms as profanation.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{80} Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 138.
\textsuperscript{81} A similar idea may be behind Sir 36:21a(26a).
\textsuperscript{82} As noted above, the terms מַתָּן and מַחַמ (42:10c[10b], MS B\textsuperscript{mgs}) also suggest sexual immorality; see the note on the text.
\textsuperscript{83} Also 42:9d if Skehan's suggestion is accepted; see the note on the text.
\textsuperscript{84} Cf. Jensen, "Porneia," 171. G I (42:10a, c) follows the terminology on defilement (βεβηλουεῖ from βεβηλῶ) and unfaithfulness (παροδεῖ from παραβολέω, lit. "transgress").
If the daughter was divorced and returned to her father's house, perhaps because of childlessness, she would again be a financial burden on him. Her behaviour, if shameless, reflects not only on herself, but gives a bad reputation to her father, who can be faulted for failing to fulfil his duty by disciplining his children (Sir 7:23), and keeping his daughters chaste as instructed in 7:24, and in 42:11a: "keep a close watch on your daughter". The consequences include the father being an object of scorn, and shame before other people, including his enemies (42:11bcd). The issue of shame that is so important for Ben Sira, arises here again.

The solution for some of the problems detailed above is to keep the daughter's sexuality within the household and under the control of her father (42:11-13), physically locking her up in the house.

In the house of a family, women's domain could be the living room, where the family ate and slept, or did indoor work, or the kitchen, or the foyer which looked over the courtyard. All of them could be the location for spinning and the latter, for women's socialization. Perhaps the father is urged to prevent his daughter from looking on this courtyard through the window in Sir 42:11ef (MS B). Windows were usually small and rectangular openings. Sometimes they were covered with latticework, through which a person could look even when closed. Looking through a window in the Hebrew Bible is frequently the activity of women (Judg 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16; 2 Kgs 9:30; 1 Chr 15:29, 7:6).

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85 Archer, *Beyond Rubies*, 27.
88 Sellers, "Window," 848.
In 42:11ef the danger is not only that the daughter sees someone through the window but also that she is seen by a male. If her beauty is revealed to a man, as suggested in 42:12a, it could lead to seduction or even rape.\(^8^9\) An example of a man being enticed by a woman's beauty may be David (2 Sam 11:1-5), or the two lecherous elders in the story of Susanna (Sus 1:5-25, esp. 1:5-8). It seems that Ben Sira leaves no room for a woman to get into contact with a man and still remain chaste.

According to Sir 42:11-12 a daughter without the supervision of her father equals danger, which may be illicit sexual behaviour. Hence her father has to take the necessary precautions to prevent her bringing disgrace on herself, but more importantly on her father or husband. It is his responsibility to keep his daughter's sexuality within the household until it is transferred to the future husband. The idea in 42:12b may be that if a virgin daughter spends time among married women she may become aware of her own sexuality.\(^9^0\) It may also reflect the writer's concern that women who are living in a segregated world can use various ways including their sexuality to gain power over men, sometimes to bring shame to them.\(^9^1\) A daughter may learn this from married women and use it to harm her father's reputation. This attitude of women as a reaction to their segregation may be seen as wickedness in the eyes of Ben Sira, and it may be reflected in 42:13 regarding the wickedness of women.

For Ben Sira, as Berquist argues a daughter "is not the subject of her own sexuality; she possesses no possibility for self-control … she works by physiological instinct".\(^9^2\)

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\(^8^9\) Cf. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 156.
\(^9^0\) Collins, "Marriage," 143.
\(^9^1\) See the discussion of Sir 9:1-9.
Her sexuality may create tensions within the household, therefore raising the possibility of incest with other males in this context, perhaps with her father.\textsuperscript{93} This is a problematic issue in the book of Ben Sira. Even if the father depicted in Sir 42:9-14 is tempted by the sexuality of his daughter, there is no explicit evidence that the sage is concerned with fathers committing incest with their daughters. As stated in the discussion of 7:23-25,\textsuperscript{94} there are no traces in the latter to prove that the author instructs the student to avoid incest either in that passage or in 42:9-12. It is more likely that the admonition in Sir 42:9-14 to guard the chastity of the daughter is motivated purely by the fear that she will bring shame to the father.

While the precautions he takes seem extreme and reflect a very negative attitude to daughters, the sage also admits that men, too, can succumb to temptations and their sexual desires. A good example is the adulterer (Sir 23:18-21) who succumbs to his desires by committing adultery. One of the major differences between him and the daughter in Sir 42:9-14 is that men's own sexuality belonged to themselves. Therefore they were responsible for their own actions and could not simply be secluded, locked up like women. While Ben Sira is overtly anxious about sexuality and the ways the sexuality of men or women brings shame to a person, in one aspect he is not different from other wisdom writers, such as Proverbs. He admits that men need instructions especially in connection with adultery and prostitution and because examples existed of their falling to these temptations.

The negative comments of 42:9-13 are followed by an extremely misogynist statement in 42:14a ("[Better is the wickedness] of a man, than a woman who does


\textsuperscript{94} See above.
good", MS B). In Trenchard's reading 42:14b ("And a daughter causes fear regarding disgrace more than a son") would be the culmination of the previous line, similarly to the Greek translation of 42:14b: "and a woman brings shame leading to disgrace". The corrected version of MS M reads: "But better is a God-fearing daughter than a shameless son". This way 42:14b would have a surprising ending for three reasons: firstly, it has a positive comment on daughters; secondly, in the book this is the only example of a daughter being pious/religious; and thirdly, it has the only comment on sons within 42:9-14. Following the thoughts of Sir 16:1-2 where Ben Sira advises against rejoicing in godless children, it is possible to say that one can rejoice in pious children, including daughters. However, taking into account all the teachings on daughters, it appears that Ben Sira views daughters as women mainly in a sexual context, as if their main characteristic were their sexuality, and in this context his view is excessively negative. This, however, is not representative of his view on women, femininity or sexuality in general.

**Sir 26:7-12**

26:7-12 is an intriguing passage. Its first verses continue the theme of evil/wicked wives. The evil is first not specified (26:7). However, the evil wife later becomes a drunken wife (26:8a) and her drunkenness leads her into indecency (26:8b). In 26:9 she is explicitly described as the subject of sexual wrongdoing. Suddenly the subject becomes a daughter who indiscriminately engages in sexual encounter. Unfortunately
the text is not extant in Hebrew. In the discussion we will attempt to answer the
question whether the real concern here is indeed the behaviour of daughters, or the
Hebrew original may have had different ideas.

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7 βοοζύγιον σαλεύόμενον γυνὴ πονηρά,
δὲ κρατῶν αὐτῆς ὡς ὁ δρασσόμενος σκορπίον.
8 ὡργὴ μεγάλη γυνὴ μέθυσος,
καὶ ἀχχημοσύνην αὐτῆς οὐ συγκαλύψει.
9 παρνεία γυναϊκὸς ἐν μετεωρισμοῖς ὀφθαλμῶν
καὶ ἐν τοῖς βλεφάροις αὐτῆς γνωσθήσαται.
10 ἑπὶ θυγατρὶ ἁδιατρέπτω στερέωσον φυλακήν,
ἡμας μὴ εὐφρόσυνα ἀνεσίν ἑαυτῆς χρῆσηται;
11 ὅπισώ ἀναιδοὺς ὀφθαλμοῦ φύλαξαι
καὶ μὴ θαυμάσῃς ἓν εἰς σὲ πλημμελήσῃ.
12 ὡς διψῶν ὀδοιπόρος τὸ στόμα ἀνοίξει
καὶ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὤδατος τοῦ σύνεγγυς πίεται,
κατέναντι παντὸς πασσάλου καθῆσαι
καὶ ἔναντι βέλους ἀνοίξει φαρέτραν.

7 An evil wife is (like) a shaking ox yoke,
whoever takes hold of her is like one who grasps a scorpion.
8 A drunken wife is a cause for great anger
and she does not conceal her indecency/shame.
9 A wife’s sexual wrongdoing will be known by her haughty eyes (lit. lifting up of
eyes)
and by her eyelids.
10 Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
lest, finding an opportunity (i.e. relaxation of restraint), she make use of it.
11 Follow closely (her) bold eyes,
and do not be surprised if she commits an offence against you/sins against you.
12 As a thirsty traveller opens his mouth
And drinks from any nearby water,
(so) she sits down in front of every peg
and opens (her) quiver for (lit. before) an arrow.98

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98 Syr. has "before every arrow", and also adds: "So is an adulterous wife, who opens her womb
to every man"; see Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 296-97, n. 101. Skehan, Ben Sira, 344, takes "sits" as a
euphemism for "lies" in 26:12c and also translates "every arrow" in 26:12d.
Context

The context of the passage, as discussed in chapter III.1, is 26:1-27. Within it 26:1-4, 13-18 have positive comments on wives or marital relationships, over against the negative comments in 26:5-9. In the midst of these sayings is found 26:10-12 concerning daughters.

Form

There are no distinctive formal characteristics.

Content

After the numerical saying on rivalry between wives in 26:5-6, 26:7-9 continues the negative comments on marital relationships. In 26:7 the term γυνὴ πονηρά (evil/wicked wife) appears. As noted earlier, it is an expression characteristic of the translator.99 This is one example where the evil or wickedness of the wife is not specified and seems to be used in a broader sense. It may be that this verse is a continuation of 26:5-6, this way making it another reference to rivalry between wives. However it is also possible that 26:7 is completely independent from the preceding comment. The evil wife is compared to a "shaking ox yoke" and the person who marries (lit. takes hold of) her is compared to one who grasps a scorpion (26:7b). While it is virtually impossible to grasp a deadly scorpion, to tolerate a constantly moving, irritating yoke is possible, but difficult. Loader suggests that "Sirach appears to envisage the wife's producing instability and thus causing the yoke to rub and

chafe". If, as suggested above, the verse is related to 26:5-6, then the evil would be specified and the constant irritation could be the feuding of one or both rival wives either with the husband or with each other. It may involve jealousy in matters of sexuality, similarly to Gen 30:14-15, where Rachel and Leah argue about their rights to sleep with Jacob. If, however, the situation is not that of rivalry, the author may simply refer to a nagging wife, whose constant chatter or gossip is difficult to bear.

In 26:8 the wickedness either becomes specified (drunken wife) or the sage refers to a different wife who is drunken. It is a disgrace in itself if a woman (or a man) is drunk. The wife's state can have further implications, as expressed in 26:8b ("and she does not conceal her indecency/shame"): she may forfeit her sense of responsibility, or may undress herself literally and engage in sexual wrongdoing.

In Gen 9:21 Noah in his drunken state exposes his nakedness. In Prov 31:4-9 the king is advised against drinking intoxicants after he is instructed not to spend his vigour on women (31:3a). In T. Jud. 12:3 Judah confesses that he has become drunk "at the waters of Chozeb" and did not recognize Tamar, with whom he had sexual intercourse. Wine and sex are also associated in T. Jud. 13. Drunkenness and sexual desire are combined in Philo Agr. 37 and Ebr. 209.

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100 William Loader, Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 95, n. 103. See also discussion of Sir 25:8 in ch. III.1. for a possible image of yoke as marriage. For the yoke of wisdom see Sir 6:23-31; 51:23-27.
101 While women and drinking are associated in some passages of the Hebrew Bible, their contexts are different from that of Sir 26:8.
102 Cf. Sir 9:9; 18:30 - 19:3, where drinking and women are associated. See their discussions in ch. IV.1. and IV.3., respectively.
103 Cf. also Hos 4:11.
Unlike in Sir 9:9 and 19:2, in 26:8 it is explicitly the woman that may become intoxicated and may willingly expose herself sexually to other persons, for instance, by way of adultery, or even desire for adultery.

While in 26:8 there is only an allusion to indecency, 26:9 is more definite ("A wife's sexual wrongdoing will be known by her haughty eyes [lit. lifting up of eyes] and by her eyelids"). This is the only passage in the LXX that employs the term πορνεία γυναίκος ("a wife's sexual wrongdoing"). Here πορνεία can certainly have a meaning broader than prostitution. The characteristics of such a woman are her "haughty eyes" (lit. lifting up of eyes, μετεωρισμω οφθαλμῶν), the same term as used in Sir 23:4-6, and "her eyelids".

Various comments attest to the connection between eyes or sight, and desire. The eyes may simply be the avenue of desire. Prov 6:25 and 4Q184/4QWiles 1.13 are especially relevant to Sir 26:9. In all three instances the woman's instrument to captivate a man is her eyes. In 4Q184/4QWiles the "wicked woman" lifts up her eyelids wantonly. The eyelids are even more effective in the seduction if they are decorated (2 Kgs 9:30; Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:40).

The reasons for Ben Sira's condemnation of adultery, in the case of both men and women, are detailed in chapter IV.1. In summary, his main concerns include disobeying the law of God regarding both men and women, and in addition wronging the husband, and possibly bringing illegitimate children into the marriage, in the case of women. In Sir 26:8b-9 all these issues may lie in the background, but they are not

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104 Gen 39:7; Num 15:39; Job 31:1; Prov 6:25; Isa 3:16; Sus 1:8, 32; Jub. 20:4; 1 En. 6:1; T. Reu. 2, 3, 4; CD 2.16-17; 1Q28/1QS 1.6b-7a; 5.4b-5; 4Q287/4QBer 8, 13; 4Q435/4QBark 2; 4Q417/4QInstr 1.27; 4Q184/4QWiles 1.13; 3.5; see also Loader, Dead Sea Scrolls, 98, 188, 195, 255, 266, 311, 331, 333.
spelled out. A new concern appears here: the wanton wife is not even ashamed of her behaviour.

In 26:10 the subject of sexual wrongdoing suddenly becomes a daughter, according to G I. Skehan considers 26:10a a continuation of sayings concerning wives, and gives the following translation: "Keep strict watch over an unruly wife". He argues that, although the G I version of 26:10a is identical to the G I version of Sir 42:11a, which deals with daughters in the context (42:9-14), the idea of daughter comes to 26:10a from 42:11a, where in turn the term ἀδιακτρέπτω was added to the text. (Its Hebrew form is not present in the MS M version of 42:11a: "My son, keep a close watch on your daughter"). 26:10a is not extant in Hebrew, but Skehan conjectures the term בנה behind "unruly" (or "impudent", "insolent"), which, he argues, can be understood with regard to a wife rather than an unmarried person. This expression occurs in Prov 7:13 regarding the adulteress and a similar term describes the wicked man in Prov 21:19.

Trenchard on the other hand translates "daughters", assuming that the Hebrew versions behind 26:10a and 42:11a were identical except for בנה that is present in the latter, and also argues that other examples of using related material can be found in both ch. 26 and 42, pointing to 26:5c as similar in theme to 42:11c.

While it is true that G I reads "daughter" in 26:10, the idea of "adulterous wife" is present in the Syriac text of 26:12d. Further, if "wife" is assumed in 26:10 instead of "daughter", 26:10-12 would fit into their context not only by content, but this way the

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105 Skehan, Ben Sira, 344, 346.
106 Skehan, Ben Sira, 344, 346.
107 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 140, 295, n. 84.
number of the distichs on bad wives (26:5-12) and on good ones (26:1-4, 13-18) would be equal (10+10 distichs) in Sir 26:1-18. It is likely then that the Hebrew original had "wife" in this verse. If so, this would raise the question as to why the Greek translator has changed the text, which clearly does read "daughter".

The readers are advised in 26:10a to keep a close watch on a "headstrong" (or "insolent") daughter. Failing to take this advice has its consequences, as introduced in 26:10b: as soon as the daughter finds an opportunity, she will commit an offence against her father. The sexual nature of the offence is indicated by the use of the term "follow closely (her) bold eyes" (26:11a). The connection between the eyes of a woman and her sexual desires is already noted above. A negative bias is reflected in the allusion itself that an "insolent" or "headstrong" daughter will automatically be promiscuous when she finds an opportunity.

As was discussed above in this chapter, Berquist suggests that for Ben Sira a daughter cannot control her own sexuality. 108 Strict watch has to be kept over her, especially if she is headstrong. This seems to be depicted also in Sir 26:12. She is compared to "a thirsty traveller" who does not care from which water he drinks (26:12ab), 109 as if the daughter does not care where she lies down for the purpose of sexual intercourse. This is indicated by the symbolic use of the terms "peg" and "arrow" as penis, and "quiver" as vagina (26:12cd). 26:12 is also similar to Ezek 16:25 where unfaithful Jerusalem is described as promiscuous with anyone who passes by. To compare the idolatrous Jerusalem to one's own daughter would betray the author's great anxiety regarding the chastity of daughters.

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108 Berquist, Controlling Corporeality, 188.
109 For the connection between drinking water and adultery see Prov 9:17.
On the other hand, as noted above, if we assume that the concern of the writer was an adulterous wife in 26:10-12, the number of distichs on bad and good wives would be equal in 26:1-18. In this case the language of 26:10-12 is surprising. The anxiety reflected in it is more characteristic of comments on daughters, as shown in the discussion of Sir 42:9-14. Even though wives may commit adultery (Sir 23:22-26), this concern is not expressed in Ben Sira in language as obscene as the description of Sir 26:10-12 in Greek. This problem may be resolved if we surmise that the translator not only rendered "daughter" for "wife" but changed other parts of the passage, which may have originally lacked the obscene terminology completely. In summary, Ben Sira may have had a condemning but less negative comment on an adulterous wife, which the translator has changed significantly.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly Ben Sira has particularly negative comments on daughters and their sexuality. It seems that they represent a danger whether they are unmarried or married. A daughter is a person who can cause the most damage to the honour of her father, who is responsible for her sexuality. The passages discussed in this chapter imply that daughters cannot control their own sexuality. Therefore they need to be controlled by their father, if necessary by physical restraint. Even after marriage a daughter causes anxiety to her father, despite the fact that her sexuality belongs to her husband in the changed situation. Sir 26:10-12, with its extremely misogynous comment, describes daughters as if their main characteristic was their sexuality, especially uncontrolled sexuality. Passages concerning daughters reflect an extremely negative attitude to sexuality, but only the sexuality of daughters and not in general. While there are no explicit comments on the sexuality of sons, that it may have been a
concern seems to be certain in 7:23-25 and 22:3-5. If they engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage, especially with unchaste women, or jeopardized a future, possibly arranged, marriage with a suitable wife, they could have caused anxiety just as daughters did. They still do not receive such condemning remarks as daughters do.
CHAPTER THREE
MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter concerns the relation between husband and wife and includes discussion of comments regarding the issue of rivalry between wives.

III.1. Good Relations between Husband and Wife

Sir 25:1d; 25:8a

G I
1d καὶ γυνὴ καὶ ἄνὴρ ἑαυτοῖς συμπεριφερόμενοι.

1d and a wife and a husband who are adapted to each other, or who are in intercourse

MS C
אשרי בן אשה משכלה 8a

8a Happy is/blessed is the husband of a sensible wife

G I
8a μακάριος ὁ συνοικῶν γυναικὶ συνετῇ

8a Happy is whoever dwells with a sensible/intelligent wife.

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1 See the content for the problems regarding this word.
Context of 25:1d; 25:8a

Sir 25:1d and 25:8a are part of the numerical proverbs within the larger context of 25:1-11. This section has three numerical proverbs. The first is 25:1 about things that delight one's heart: good relations within family, between neighbours (25:1c), and finally harmony between wife and husband (25:1d). The second is 25:2 including 25:2d on people who are despicable. There is a section on the elderly in 25:3-6. The third numerical saying is in 25:7-10, including beatitudes about various persons. 25:8a belongs here. 25:11 concludes with Ben Sira's familiar theme on the connection between wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

Form of 25:1d; 25:8a

In the Greek text the form of the first and second numerical proverb is as follows: The introductory line (25:1ab, 2ab) states how many elements will follow in the saying itself. While the first and second elements of the sayings are expressed with a grammatical structure consisting of nouns, one in genitive case (25:1c) or a structure of noun and attribute (25:2c), the third element is more extensive, consisting of nouns, reflexive pronoun and a participle (25:1d), or an attribute, noun, participle and noun (25:2d). The motif behind it is perhaps to put emphasis on the last element which, interestingly in the case of Sir 25:1d and 25:2d, deals with marital (25:1d) and extramarital relationships (25:2d).

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2 25:12 (G II) is similar in theme to Sir 1:10cd (G II).
3 Note that the third numerical proverb has only nine elements in G I, which lacks 25:8b. Syr. has eleven elements, including 25:8b. The only extant verse within 25:7-11 in MS C is 25:8. Cf. also Skehan, Ben Sira, 340.
4 A similar form of numerical proverb is also used in Prov 30:7-9, 24-28.
25:8a is part of 25:7-11, which represents another form of numerical proverb used not only in Ben Sira, but throughout the Hebrew Bible with a concentration in wisdom literature. The components of the x/x+1 numerical proverb are mainly determined by content. The larger number serves to stimulate suspense and the interest of the reader. The first line of the introduction indicates how many elements will follow (25:7a). In the second line one more element is provided (25:7b). In Hebrew 25:8a and 25:8c have the term "happy/blessed" characteristic of beatitudes. In Greek, 25:8a and 25:9a have the introduction "happy".

Content of 25:1d

As has been discussed in the context, 25:1d is the third element of the first numerical proverb within 25:1-11, with a short comment about the relationship between wife and husband. The word used to describe their relationship (συμπεριφέρομενοι from συμπεριφέρω), literally means "to carry around along with/together" but it can also denote "to adapt oneself to circumstances", "to be well acquainted with things", also "to have intercourse with someone". It is used only three times in the LXX. In two of the occurrences there is a reference to marital relationship: one is 25:1d itself, and the other is Prov 5:19, where the reader is encouraged to enjoy only the love of his own wife (as is clear from the context in 5:15-20), or be captivated by it.

Skehan's translation ("and the mutual love of husband and wife") suggests that the term συμπεριφέρομενοι serves to imply the mutuality of love between wife and

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5 Other passages in Ben Sira employing this sequence are: Sir 23:16-17; 26:5-6, 28; 50:25-26.
7 The third occurrence (Prov 11:29) concerns one's household.
8 Skehan, Ben Sira, 339, 341.
husband, or to denote that they are suited to each other. Trenchard offers a slightly different interpretation: "and a wife and husband who share each other's company", understanding the word Συμπεριφερόμενοι to describe a state where "wife and husband maintain communication" "and live in each other's society". Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 31, 208, nn. 219-20, and p. 209, n. 230.

9 Snaith goes so far as to translate the text as "and a man and wife who are inseparable". Snaith, Ecclesiasticus, 126.

10 Συμπεριφερόμενοι however does not seem to carry this meaning. The expression "to have intercourse with someone" is a fairly broad one. In itself it may convey communication or some sort of dealings between people, and without the adjective "sexual" does not necessarily mean a sexual act. The latter certainly cannot be excluded in the case of a wife and a husband. The translation "a wife and husband who accommodate each other" may also have sexual connotation. If the idea of sexual intercourse is accepted, the message behind Sir 25:1d may be either that intercourse between wife and husband, i.e. within a licit relationship, is pleasing to the Lord and to humans, or that it is only pleasing in the above context. In this case the comment would be antithetical to Sir 25:2d, where the person who seeks extramarital relationships in his old age is despised.

Some scholars argue that this element is the climax of the numerical saying and therefore more important than the other elements. If so, this comment on marital relationship would rise to an even higher level by being not only a positive statement in itself, but a message whose importance is above that of the previous ones within the proverb. This is significant, as marital faithfulness and intimacy would be valued highly. Conversely the same would apply to the second proverb in 25:2, where prominence is given to sexual behaviour by its placement in the third element,

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10 Snaith, Ecclesiasticus, 126.
12 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 31-32, also 175-78.
reflecting the writer's contempt of the adulterous old person. Certainly the author's concern with marital or sexual matters would support this assertion. In the similar numerical sayings that are found in Proverbs, however, a progression is difficult to detect (Prov 30:7-9, 15a, 24-28) and it is possible that the elements are of equal value. Since Sir 25:1, 2 are the only sayings of this type in the Book of Ben Sira, they cannot be compared with other such sayings. In themselves as isolated examples of this type of numerical proverb 25:1, 2 are likely to be progressive, with the focus on issues pertaining to marital relationship (25:1d) and to sexuality (25:2d), since, as has been noted above, they are of great significance for the author.

Content of 25:8a

Sir 25:8a is followed by the following readings for 25:8b in MS C and Syr.: "and one who is not ploughing as (with) a bull, with an ass" (MS C), and "whoever is not ploughing with an ox and a donkey combined" (Syr.). A similar idea is found in Deut 22:10. Skehan argues that the prohibition of Deut 22:10 in the context of Sir 25:8 refers to an incompatible marriage, where a man is married to two incompatible women. It may also imply that husband and wife are unequally yoked in marriage. The idea of polygyny, if it is indeed present here, would certainly put the comment of Sir 25:8a in a different perspective. This way the marriage with a sensible wife would be compared with a marriage with two wives who are each other's rivals. Rivalry between wives can cause heartache to all parties of the marriage, including the

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13 Whether 37:17-18 is a saying of this type is debatable.
14 G I lacks 25:8b, as noted above.
15 Cf. also Skehan, Ben Sira, 340.
16 Skehan, Ben Sira, 340.
17 Cf. Sir 26:7 where the bad wife is compared to a chafing ox-yoke. William Loader, personal communication: "being yoked in unequal partnership occurs in 2 Cor 6:14". Unsuitable match is the theme of 4Q271/4QDf 3 9; see Loader, Dead Sea Scrolls, 157-59.
husband, as detailed in the discussion of Sir 26:5-6. Ben Sira may be referring to this bitterness in 25:8b. At least it is one possible interpretation.

Whether 25:8 is about polygynous marriage or not, it does not say why the wife is sensible. Ben Sira uses the term משכלה ("sensible") in two other comments (7:19, 40:23). The latter has the exact term אשה משכלה. None of them explains from what point of view the wife is regarded as sensible. It is noteworthy that Prov 19:14 uses the same term. In the first half of the parallel it is stated that "house and wealth are inherited from parents". With it is contrasted the "prudent wife" who is "from the Lord". It seems that while one's wealth is something that, in an ideal case, one may count on, the selection of a prudent, sensible or discreet wife is not up to humans: it is a blessing of the Lord. A similar message is found in Sir 26:23b. 25:8a is part of the list of things and behaviours that the author considers important: joy in children; justice in this life; avoiding sins of the tongue; wisdom; the fear of the Lord; etc. That the issue of marriage is included here is almost to be expected considering that it is an important concern for the sage. Marriage as a union has a sexual side. The author, however, does not make comment on it. The focus is on the husband having a sensible wife, whatever her sensibility might mean.

**Sir 26:1-27**

Sir 26:1-27 is the longest passage on various types of women and on marital relationships. The discussion of the context and form of the whole section, and the text, translation and content of 26:1-4, 13-18, are given here. 26:5-6 is discussed later in this chapter. Since the Greek version of 26:10-12 concerns daughters, the passage

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18 See the discussion of translation issues of 7:19 later in this chapter.
in the context of 26:7-12 is treated in ch. II. 26:19-21 is addressed in chapter IV.1.,
26:22-27, in chapter III.5.

Sir 26:1-4, 13-18

MS C

1 אָשֶׁר טוֹבָה אָשֶׁר בּוּטָלָה
הַמָּשָׁר יִמְּרָי כָּפָלִים.
2 אָשֶׁר חֲלַק הָרָשִׁי לִבּוּטָלָה
רוֹשֵׁי מְשָׁרִים מְשָׁרִים
3 בִּאְלֹק יְזָרִי יִתְנַח.
4 אָשֶׁר בּוּטָלָה
25 [...] יְשֵׁשׁ שָׁכָלָה
26 [...] יְשֵׁשׁ שָׁכָלָה
13 אָשֶׁר בּוּטָלָה
15 [...] יְשֵׁשׁ בּוּטָלָה
16 [...] יְשֵׁשׁ בּוּטָלָה
17 [...] יְשֵׁשׁ בּוּטָלָה

1 A good wife – happy/blessed is her husband,
and the number of his days is doubled.
2 A worthy wife/wife of worth will fatten her husband,
[...].
3 A [good]32 wife - [...].33 portion,
and [will be given]34 in the portion to him who fears the Lord.35

13 [...]36 of a wife [...]37 her husband,

19 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 5, reconstructs השממה ("gladdens").
20 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 5 has ויָיָיֶר ("his life").
21 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 5, reconstructs форме ("years").
22 Reconstructed by Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 7, as הנה.31
23 Reconstructed text, read יְשֵׁשׁ ("good"); see Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 6. G I supports it.
24 Read יְשֵׁש ("good") as reconstructed. See Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, n. 6, and G I.
25 Restored text, read כֹּבְּר ("his bones"); see G I and Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9, 189, n. 12.
26 Restored, read יְשֵׁש ("delights"/"pleases"); see also G I and Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9,
189, n. 10.
27 Restored text, read הָסָך ("charm"); cf. G I and Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9, 189, n. 9.
28 The text is restored, read תָּלָק ("upon charm"); cf. G I and Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9,
189, n. 16.
29 Reconstructed text, read אֲשֶׁר ("woman"/"wife"); see Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9, 189, n.
20.
30 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 189, n. 19, considers the text for this line equivalent with G I
except for MS C having מְשָׁר ("above") instead of מַעְלָי ("of the Lord"). In this light verse 16a would read "the sun rising in the heights above" (MS C).
31 Translate as "And the years of his life she will gladden" on the basis of the reconstructed text;
see footnotes on the text. Skehan, Ben Sira, 344, reads: "peaceful and full is his life".
32 See the footnote on the text.
33 Read "good"; see footnote on the text.
34 See the footnotes on the text.
35 Cf. also Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 188, nn. 7-8.
36 "Charm"; see the footnote on the text.
1 Happy is the husband of a good wife, and the number of his days is doubled.
2 A worthy wife gladdens her husband, and he will complete his years in peace.
3 A good wife – a good portion, (she) will be allotted in the portion to those who fear the Lord;
4 Whether rich or poor, (his) heart is glad, at all times [his] face is cheerful.

[...]

her prudence/skill will fatten.
15 Charm [...] is a modest wife
and there is no price (lit. weight) of a sealed mouth/a sealed mouth is priceless.
16 The sun [...] in the heights above,
a beautiful [...] in the chosen shrine.
17 (Like) a lamp burning on the holy lampstand,
(so is) the splendour of a face on the height of measurement.

G I

1 Υγναϊκός ἀγαθής μακάριος ὁ ἀνήρ,
καὶ ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν αὐτοῦ διπλάσιος.
2 γυνὴ ἄνδρεία εὐφραίνει τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς,
καὶ τὰ ἔτη αὐτοῦ πληρώσει ἐν εἰρήνῃ.
3 γυνὴ ἀγαθὴ μερίς ἀγαθῆ,
ἐν μερίδι φοβουμένων κύριον δοθήσεται.
4 πλουσίου δὲ καὶ πτωχοῦ καρδία ἀγαθή,
ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ πρόσωπον ἱλαρόν.

13 Χάρις γυναικὸς τέρψει τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς,
καὶ τὰ ὅστα αὐτοῦ πιανεῖ ἡ ἐπιστήμη αὐτῆς.
14 δόσις κυρίου γυνῆ σιγηρά,
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντάλλαγμα πεπαιδευμένης ψυχῆς.
15 χάρις ἐπὶ χάριτι γυνῆ αἰσχυνηρά,
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν σταθμός πᾶς δέξιος ἐγκρατοῦς ψυχῆς.
16 ἡλίος ἀνατέλλων ἐν ψυίστοις κυρίου
καὶ κάλλος ἀγαθῆς γυναικὸς ἐν κόσμω οἰκίας αὐτῆς.
17 λύχνοις ἐκλάμπων ἐπὶ λυχνίας ἄγιας
καὶ κάλλος προσώπου ἐπὶ ἡλικία στασίμη.
18 στύλοι χρώσει ἐπὶ βάσεως ἄργυρας
καὶ πόδες ὥρατε ἐπὶ στέρνοις ἐὐσταθοῦς.

13 Happy is the husband of a good wife, and the number of his days is doubled.
2 A worthy wife gladdens her husband, and he will complete his years in peace.
3 A good wife – a good portion, (she) will be allotted in the portion to those who fear the Lord;
4 Whether rich or poor, (his) heart is glad, at all times [his] face is cheerful.

37 Read "delights"/"pleases" on the basis of the restored text; see footnote on the text of 26:13a.
38 Read "his bones"; see the footnote on the text.
39 Read "upon charm"; see the footnote on the text.
40 The probable reading is: "the sun [rising] in the heights above"; see the note on the text.
41 Read "woman"/"wife"; see the footnote on the text.
42 Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 189-90, n. 21, sees it as corrupt together with the other variant:
"in the shrine of a young man".
43 Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 190, n. 23, suggests "Σ" ("beauty") instead of ἔμπ ("splendour").
44 Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 345, translates 26:17b as: "are her beauty of face and graceful figure".
"heels" or "feet" from πτέρνη, "heel").
13 A wife’s charm will delight her husband, and her skill will put fat on his bones.
14 A silent wife is a gift of the Lord and there is no price for a disciplined person/character.\textsuperscript{45}
15 Charm upon charm is a modest wife, and priceless is (lit. there is no weight worthy/equal of) her self-controlled person/character.
16 (Like) the sun rising in the heights of the Lord, (so is) a good wife’s beauty in the order of her house/home.
17 (Like) a shining lamp on the holy lampstand, (so is) a beautiful face on a firm figure.
18 (Like) pillars of gold on a silver base, so are shapely feet on the chest\textsuperscript{46} of the firm/stable (woman).

Context

The wider context of 26:1-27 is 25:13 - 26:27. 25:13-26 has negative sayings on women and marital relationships. 26:1-4 gives a detailed account of a good marital relationship. 26:5-6 concerns the rivalry of wives. Within 26:7-12 the comment on a bad wife (26:7) develops first into the picture of a drunken wife (26:8a) and then into the description of an unchaste wife (26:8b-9), then suddenly into a saying on a promiscuous daughter in the Greek text of 26:10-12, where the Hebrew is not extant. The theme of good wife returns in 26:13-18. 26:19-27 is extant only in G II and Syr. It advises the young to avoid contact with a strange woman and to establish a family with a good wife (26:19-21), and has various sayings on wicked and virtuous women (26:22-27).

\textsuperscript{45} Trenchard, \textit{Ben Sira's View}, 9, 189, n. 15, reads "priceless is a restraint voice", rendering מֵרָע מֵרָע (lit. disciplined throat). Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 344, translates: "and her disciplined virtue is of surpassing worth".

\textsuperscript{46} "Breast" or "chest" is not a likely word here. Πτέρνως from πτέρνη ("heel") would be more in context; see the footnote on the text.
Form

Although the first three verses of the section in the Hebrew version start with נוע ("wife") and continue with the characteristics of the wife (good in 26:1a, worthy in 26:2a, good in 26:3a), the rest of these verses do not share a common distinctive form. 26:13, 15-17 is also extant in Hebrew, but without a characteristic formal pattern.

Content of 26:1-4, 13-18

26:1-4, 13-18 contain the most extensive descriptions of the good wife or good marital relationships. Leaving aside 26:19-27, which occurs only in G II and Syr., 26:1-4 opens, and 26:13-18 closes, the material concerned with wives in 26:1-18 with positive comments. Between the opening and closing lines the comments are all negative, as indicated in the context. It is difficult to discern why the author has included some of the most positive and most negative comments in the book in the same passage.

The theme of 26:1 was already taken up briefly by Ben Sira in 25:8a. There the author declares: "Happy is whoever dwells with a sensible wife". Here the attribute of the wife is "good" in both versions of the text. After the opening statement itself ("A good wife – happy/blessed is her husband", 26:1a, MS C), 47 we find a detailed description of what effect a good wife has on her husband's life (26:1b-4). The first benefit is that his life is longer, which is expressed in MS C as "and the number of his days is doubled" (26:2a). Not only has the good wife an impact on the length of her husband's life, but also on the quality of his life, as related in the Hebrew version of 26:2a: a

\[\text{G I supports it.}\]
worthy wife can fatten (דֶשֶׁת from דָשַׁת = become fat, prosperous) her husband. Since in the Hebrew Bible the fat part of produce or land etc. was frequently the choicest part, being fat meant being prosperous, an idea present in Prov 11:25; 13:4; 28:25, expressed with the same word (דֶשֶׁת). Prov 15:30 uses the same term (דֶשֶׁת) (in a different form) as in Sir 26:13b. There is a similar description of the worthy wife in Prov 31:10-31, who provides everything for her household. The idea that the worthy wife gladdens the life of her husband is present in both text versions in Sirach 26, first in 26:2a (G I) and then in 26:2b (MS C). Another characteristic of the husband's life is that it is completed in peace (26:2b, G I). This seems to suggest that the benefits listed in 26:2 are the cause for the doubled number of the husband's days in 26:1b, because the length of one's life might be influenced by its quality: gladness and peace may extend it, distress and worry may shorten it. Gladness is a general idea here and it is not specified what the author of MS C or the translator means by it.

After 26:2 it seems that Ben Sira's familiar theme of the fear of the Lord in 26:3 interrupts the comments. However, it is combined with the idea of the good wife as the gift of the Lord. The wife as the gift from the Lord occurs in other passages with different attributes attached to the woman or wife. There is a concentration in Sir 26:1-27: good wife in 26:3a, silent wife in 26:14a and pious wife in 26:23b. Out of these passages 26:3a, 23b also assert that such a woman will be given to the God-fearing man. Prov 19:14 has a similar comment, where the "sensible" wife is compared to inheritance. While material assets such as inheritance are something a person may count on, a sensible wife is more difficult to obtain. It is not up to humans who will receive her since she is the gift of the Lord.

This idea also has some relevance for discussing Sir 26:4 ("Whether rich or poor, [his] heart is glad, at all times [his] face is cheerful", G I). It declares that a good wife is more important than wealth. This idea is articulated in a different way in Sir 25:20 where the message of the author in the context is similar: a good marital relationship is more important than the wealth of the wife. Conversely a bad but rich wife can make the husband’s life bitter. In 26:4 the message is conveyed in a positive way.

Even if a person lacks wealth, he may still be happy. This is one of the most positive comments of the author and it may also shed some light on the nature of Israelite marriage. Whether marriage in ancient Israel was an act of purchase and the wife became a property or not is discussed in detail later in this subchapter. 26:4 however, seems, to support the argument against the notion of purchase and property. Since the wife can make her husband happy even without wealth it implies that she is almost contrasted with property; she is more than that. She is not one of the properties a man can purchase.

26:1-4 may be contrasted with Sir 25:20-23 where the negative effects the bad wife has on her husband’s life, including his health, are detailed.

In summary, the wife is considered in connection with her husband rather than in her own right. However, Sir 26:3 ("A [good] wife – [good] portion, and [will be given] in the portion to him who fears the Lord")\textsuperscript{49} is a significant comment, taking into account how important the fear of the Lord is for the author. It is also noteworthy that the attributes of the wife and the description of the marital relationship are rather general. One exception may be the wife who "will fatten" (ירשת) her husband (26:2a, MS C). It is, however, rather an economic aspect. Neither of the text versions is

\textsuperscript{49} See notes on text and translation.
specific about the nature of the relationship and they are silent about the attitude of both the author and the translator to the sexual character of marriage.

Sir 26:5-9 has comments on negative marital relationships or bad wives and 26:10-12 inserts a short comment on daughters (on the basis of the G I text) in the midst of sayings on wives or marriage. After 26:10-12 the theme of good wife returns in 26:13-18.\textsuperscript{50}

Verse 13 ("[The charm] of a wife [pleases/delights] her husband") echoes the thoughts of 26:2 in MS C and 26:2a in G I. First the wife is viewed again from the husband's viewpoint. The words ἀράμ and χάρις can denote charm as attractiveness or as goodwill, favour. In this light it is possible that in 26:13a it is the beauty of the wife that pleases her husband rather than her kindness, or perhaps both. This would suggest a sexual aspect. The verbs used here (βλέπω and τευχεῖ) can mean "delights", "pleases". The latter can also be understood as "satisfies". This way 26:13a could read "the attractiveness of the wife satisfies her husband" (G I).

The second half of the verse returns again to the skill of the wife to make her husband fat, probably in the sense of prosperous, wealthy, as in 26:2a (MS C). Silence and discipline (26:14ab: "A silent wife is a gift of the Lord and there is no price of a disciplined person/character") can have related meanings in some contexts, as a disciplined person knows when and what to speak and when to be silent. These are both important if not priceless characteristics of a good wife, as through speech a wife can put her husband to shame. Ben Sira even advises the student to use a seal on an

\textsuperscript{50} See the discussion of 26:5-6 later in this chapter. 26:7-12 is treated in ch. II.
\textsuperscript{51} The text versions do not differ significantly.

The traits of a good wife in the Hebrew version of 26:15 are modesty (26:15a) and a "sealed mouth" (26:15b). The latter is translated by the G I version as "self-controlled person/character" which can refer to various aspects of self-control. In MS C the term "sealed"/"restricted mouth" or "shut up mouth" (לִשְׁרֵיהּ פָּה, from זָרְדַד, Qal I), need not refer exclusively to a closed mouth. The word, apart from meaning among other things "to shut up", "to wrap up" is said of women withheld from marital intercourse as in 2 Sam 20:3, where the concubines of David are condemned to live in a confinement until the day of their death as widows, without having sexual relations with David. Skehan also argues that the term "restricted/shut up mouth" is a euphemism for the closed vagina. This way 26:15 would be more than just a reference to being disciplined in a rather general and toned down sense as the G I version suggests. However, what it means exactly for the author of the Hebrew version is difficult to determine. It is hard to imagine that the writer describes a wife who is entirely unavailable for sexual intercourse. It is more probable that she is unavailable for other men. Her sexuality is reserved only for her husband. In this sense the word "modest" in the first half of the verse would reflect this concern.

Modesty of the wife here probably means being reserved only for the husband and not attracting other men's attention, or not exposing her sexuality to them.

26:16 is not unrelated to the previous verse since it has a comparison to describe the attractiveness of the wife. In the first half of this comparison MS C and G I differ only

52 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 818.
53 Skehan, Ben Sira, 350.
slightly ("The sun [rising]" in MS C; "Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord", G I). However, the second part of the comparison is significantly different. The mutilated text of MS C only refers to the beauty of the wife (אשת), while G I has κόλλος ἀγαθή γυναικός ("beauty of a good wife"). This is not the only passage where G I adds the word "good" to a description of a wife, where the Hebrew original only has "beautiful wife"/"beauty of wife" or "sensible wife". For the latter Sir 7:19 is an example (אשת אשה משכלת) = "Do not reject/despise a sensible wife", MS A; μὴ ἀστόχηι γυναικός σοφής καὶ ἀγαθής = "Do not depart from a wise and good wife", G I). This way in 26:16b the ethical aspect may call into question natural beauty. The remaining parts of this verse in MS C seem to be corrupt. The word רבי, "shrine" or "sanctuary" seems to be out of context whether it reads "chosen shrine" or "shrine of a young man" (בריר). G I reads 26:16b as "(the beauty of a good wife) in the order of her home". Skehan has a relatively free rendering reflecting G I ("the beauty of a virtuous wife is the radiance of her home"), and Trenchard also takes the Greek as the basis of his translation: "so is a beautiful woman in the arrangement of her home". All that is known from the Hebrew text is that the wife's beauty, which may include sexual beauty, in itself is praised and compared to the rising sun. In what context she is viewed is not certain. It appears that the Greek text emphasizes not only beauty but also goodness in her and places her in the domestic environment, where mainly her husband can delight in her beauty. This also suggests that only he can enjoy her sexuality. Perhaps this is why she is called good: her sexuality is only available for her husband. Unlike in the Hebrew, in G I physical beauty or sexuality appears to be connected with chastity, moral behaviour.

54 See the footnote on the text.
55 Skehan, Ben Sira, 345.
26:17a also starts with a comparison ("[Like] a lamp burning on the holy lampstand", MS C; "[Like] a shining lamp on the holy lampstand", G I). The second half in MS C in its present form seems to be awkward ("[so is] the splendour of a face on the height of measurement"). The word קֵרְם can mean height and also figure (Cant 7:8).

Assuming that the word הָמוֹן ("measurement") is an error here, the line could read: "the splendour of a face on the figure of […]"). This way the radiance of the beautiful face on a figure (not specified) is in comparison with the radiance of the lamp on the holy lampstand. G I ([so is] a beautiful face on a firm figure") may clarify what the last word of MS C could have been. Both the lamp on the lampstand and a beautiful face on a firm figure create harmony. The last simile is found in 26:18, only extant in Greek ([Like] pillars of gold on a silver base, so are shapely feet on the chest of the firm/stable [woman]”). The first halves of both lines demonstrate no problem.

However, in the second half of 26:18b "on the chest of the firm/stable (woman)" does not respond to the "silver base" in 26:18a. Instead, as suggested earlier 56 πτέρνας ἑστθμοί ("on firm heels") would fit better into the context.

We may draw a brief conclusion here. The good wife is given to the God-fearing man (26:3). Her attractiveness is worthy to be praised. It can delight, even satisfy her husband (26:13a). The comparisons on her beauty (26:17-18) probably refer to the temple, 57 which is worthy of note since the liturgical service was of high importance for the author (50:1-21). Since sexuality is an aspect of the wife’s attractiveness it makes 26:16-18 a very positive statement about sexual relations, especially since it is viewed in the context of sacred space. The wife's sexuality belongs solely to her

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56 See footnotes on the text.
57 See also 1 Macc. 1:22, 23; 4:49-50.
husband. The latter two observations can be discerned especially from the Hebrew text as indicated throughout the analysis.

Sir 26:13-18 starts with comments that view the wife in the context of her husband, including 26:15 where the probable reference to the closed vagina means that the wife's sexuality is reserved for the husband only. The last verses are different, especially in the Hebrew text. Apart from the Greek version of 26:16b ("the beauty of a good wife in the order of her home"), where there is already the addition of "good" compared with MS C, and where the Hebrew does not say anything about the wife's home, there is nothing in the concluding verses (26:16-18) to suggest that the wife or her beauty are viewed in the context of her husband. This idea only appears in 26:16b in G I, which on the one hand seems to confirm the message of 26:15 that the wife's sexuality is only available for the husband, and implies on the other that (only) such a wife can be called "good".

In summary, the tendency is that where Ben Sira has a positive evaluation and attitude to certain aspects of sexuality, the translator has neutral comments that tone down the meaning of the Hebrew, or additions for similar purpose. One exception, as noted above, is in 26:13a where in MS C the charm of the wife "delights" or "pleases" her husband, and in G I it "satisfies" him.

Sir 36:21(26)-26(31)

The figures in brackets represent the verse numeration used generally in English translations.
21(26) Any man will a woman accept, yet []  
22(27) The beauty of a woman [] the face and surpasses every desire of the eye.  
23(28) And if there is a healing tongue, her is not like other men (lit. "not of the sons of man").

58 Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 19, 198, nn. 100-101, reconstructs [ ] as "yet one woman is more pleasant than another". Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 424, reads: "yet some women are better wives than others". Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 38, has [ ] as "yet there is a beautiful woman".

59 36:21a(26a) is based on Lévi’s edition of the text, *Hebrew Text*, 38. Cf. the corresponding line in G I.

60 The mutilated text of MS C agrees.

61 MS B reads [ ] from [ ] ("to shine", "to be bright"). Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 198, n. 104, suggests the Hiphil form of the verb. Used together with the most probable meaning of 36:22a(27a) is: "the beauty of a woman brightens the face". In the place of the verb MS C has [ ] ("above all").

62 [ ] from MS C suggests [ ] ("her husband").

63 MS B has [ ] after [ ] (together meaning: "there is in her"), similarly to the MS B version in the synopsis of the extant manuscripts in Beentjes, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 152. MS C, though mutilated, is not significantly different from MS B for this line.

64 MS C, though mutilated, suggests [ ] as [ ] ("healer and fortification"). The term suggested by MS B [ ] ("fortified city") MS D, where extant, agrees for the rest of the verse). Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 19, 199, n. 114, uses the term [ ] ("a helper suiting him") employed also in Gen 2:18, 20. It is closer to G I. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 424, 427, also supports the Greek version, and conjectures the term originally means bone/s, but it also expresses identity (Exod 24:10); see Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, 728. Thus Skehan translates: "a help like himself". It can mean "best", "first", "beginning".

65 This form may be understood as imperative or a defective form of participle. Therefore the translation would be: "acquire" in the first case or "whoever acquires" in the second. MS B has the participle form: [ ] ("whoever acquires").

66 MSS C and D, though mutilated, agree, except they have [ ] instead of [ ] ("fortified city"), MS D, where extant, agrees for the rest of the verse). Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 19, 199, n. 114, uses the term [ ] ("a helper suiting him") employed also in Gen 2:18, 20. It is closer to G I. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 424, 427, also supports the Greek version, and conjectures the term originally means bone/s, but it also expresses identity (Exod 24:10); see Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, 728. Thus Skehan translates: "a help like himself". It can mean "best", "first", "beginning".

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68 MSS C and D, though mutilated, agree, except they have [ ] instead of [ ] ("fortified city"), MS D, where extant, agrees for the rest of the verse). Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 19, 199, n. 114, uses the term [ ] ("a helper suiting him") employed also in Gen 2:18, 20. It is closer to G I. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 424, 427, also supports the Greek version, and conjectures the term originally means bone/s, but it also expresses identity (Exod 24:10); see Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, 728. Thus Skehan translates: "a help like himself". It can mean "best", "first", "beginning".

69 The text of MSS C and D, where extant, do not differ significantly.

70 MS D is the same. MS C [ ] ("a helper suiting him") does not fit here.

71 The text of MS C and MS D do not have significant differences, except MS C has [ ] which does not fit here.

72 Read [ ] as [ ]; see the footnote on text.

73 See the footnote on the text. The correct reading is: "brightens".

74 Cf. the footnote on text. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 424, reads: "A woman's beauty makes her husband's face light up".

75 Note that the word [ ] means both "healing" (I) and "calmness" (II); see Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, 568.

76 Read "husband". See the footnote on the text.
24(29) Acquire a wife: the best/first/beginning of his possession, a helper and fortification and a pillar of support.

25(30) Without a fence/hedge the vineyard will be destroyed, and without a woman a homeless wanderer.

26(31) Who will trust a troop of soldiers that skips from city to city?

So is the man who has no nest, who settles where night sets in.

GI

21 πάντα ἢρρενα ἐπιδέξεται γυνή, ἔστιν δὲ θυγάτηρ θυγατρός κρείσσων.

22 κάλλος γυναίκας ἵλαρόνει πρόσωπον καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν ἀνθρώπου ὑπεράγει.

23 εἰ ἔστιν ἐπὶ γλώσσης αὐτῆς ἔλεος καὶ πραῤῥήση, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἄνηρ αὐτῆς καθ᾽ ὑίους ἀνθρώπων.

24 ὁ κτώμενος γυναίκα ἐνάρχεται κτήσεως, βοηθόν καὶ αὐτόν καὶ στόλον ἀναπαύσεως.

25 οὐ οὐκ ἔστιν φραγμός διαρπαγήσεται κτήμα· καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν γυνὴ στενάξει πλανώμενος.

26 τίς γὰρ πιστεύει εὐξώνως ληστή ἀφαλομένῳ ἐκ πόλεως εἰς πόλιν; 27 οὕτως ἄνθρωπῳ μὴ ἔχοντι νοσσίαν καὶ καταλύσοντι οὐ ἔδαν ὁψίσιν.

21 Any man a woman will accept, but one daughter is better than another.

22 A woman's beauty gladdens the face, and surpasses every human desire.

23 If on her tongue is kindness and humility, her husband is not like the sons of human beings.

24 Whoever acquires a wife begins a possession, a helper suiting him and a pillar of support (lit. "rest").

Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 199, n. 112, suggests that the word "begins" may be a misunderstanding in GI on the basis of the Hebrew term נأطفال which means "first, best" and also "beginning." See the footnote on the text.

Context

The wider context is 36:18(23) - 37:15, within which 36:18(23)-20(25) is about distinguishing between foods of different qualities and discerning a deceitful character. 36:21(26)-26(31)\(^{81}\) has comments on a suitable wife, including the parable of a man who does not have a wife in 36:25(30)-26(31).\(^{82}\) 37:1-6 is about false and true friends and 37:7-15 is concerned with the people to whom a person should or should not turn for advice.

Form

There is no distinctive formal pattern.

Content

There is more than one reference in this unit that concerns some aspects of Israelite marriage. For this reason it is necessary to look at least briefly, at the Israelite marriage laws and practices, especially those relevant in Second Temple Judaism. It should also be noted that, as evidence in the matter is scarce from the time of Ben Sira and Sirach, some comes from later Rabbinic writings.

\(^{81}\) 36:21-27 in G I.
\(^{82}\) 36:25-27 in G I.
Excursus 4: Israelite marriage laws and practices

According to the Hebrew Bible, the first step toward marriage was usually taken by the man's father (Gen 24:51; 38:6), sometimes at the request of the son concerned (Gen 34:4; Judg 14:2), or by the woman's father (1 Sam 18:21). Occasionally the mother might arrange the marriage (Gen 21:21). As Blenkinsopp points out, in the biblical period marriage for the vast majority was not a matter of individual decision or choice, especially for women. The choice of husband for an unmarried girl concerned the entire household of her father and then of her husband.

In the ideal case at the contraction of marriage, as Satlow argues, a father would suggest to his son that he betroth a particular woman, and his son would agree, similarly to Tobit 6:13. However Satlow contends, that while some marriages were indeed handled mainly or entirely by fathers, most real marriages were more difficult to contract, and they involved negotiations between the parents and the children themselves. Archer refers to rabbinic documents which attest that after the age of twelve and a half years, the betrothal's validity was dependent upon the girl's consent (Kidd. 2b, 44a). It is not certain to what extent this right was exercised. In summary, even if the marrying parties were involved to some extent in the contracting of their marriages, it is likely that in most of the marriages at the time of Ben Sira and

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85 Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 112.
86 Archer, Beyond Rubies, 50-51.
87 Archer, Beyond Rubies, 153-55.
his translator, the bride had little choice regarding the identity of the groom. It is also possible that what is expressed in Sir 36:21(26) depicts what is ideal in the eyes of the author and translator.

An exchange of monies took place at the marriage. There is an allusion to a certain "bride price" in Gen 34:12; Exod 22:15(16)-16(17); Deut 20:7; 22:29; Hos 2:19-20; 3:2; 1 Sam 18:25, 27. It is called רהמ in Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16[17], and 1 Sam 18:25. It always refers to gifts of bridegroom or his father to the bride's father or guardian.88 The bride price may have consisted of service or payment of various kinds (Gen 29:15-30; 1 Sam 18:17-27; Hos 3:2).

In the Elephantine contracts89 however the bride price, formally paid to the father or guardian of the bride, is then added to the dowry, perhaps to secure the wife in case of divorce or death of the husband.90 Satlow also concludes that in these documents the primary purpose of רהמ was probably a deterrent for "hatred" (divorce) and the more important marriage payment was the dowry. As he argues, it is difficult to determine the actual marriage practices among Jews at any given time or in any given place.91

The exchange of valuables, including the bride price, constituted the betrothal, which appears first in Exod 22:15(16). A betrothed woman was legally

91 Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 200-204.
considered a married one (Deut 28:30; 2 Sam 3:14)\textsuperscript{92} and, if married for the first time, probably lived in her father's house under his authority until the wedding. Adultery with a betrothed woman entails the death penalty just as adultery with a married woman (Deut 22:23-24). Satlow argues that by the Second Temple period betrothal has lost its legal significance and became rather a cultural event.\textsuperscript{93}

While the form and dating of written marriage contracts is beyond the scope of this work,\textsuperscript{94} we may briefly note that some scholars point toward the existence of a marriage deed before the exile. Epstein argues that if there was a writ for the dissolution of the marriage (Deut 24:1-4), then it is probable that a writ existed also for the contraction of the marriage.\textsuperscript{95} For the Second Temple period an indication of the existence of some sort of a written marriage instrument comes from the Book of Tobit (7:13), and it can probably be identified with the חתונה, the marriage settlement whose details and terms were elaborated in later rabbinic literature, and which developed over a long period of time.\textsuperscript{96} Without going into the details of the חתונה, it is suggested that the transition of the מידה into the חתונה was connected to Simon ben Shetah, a leading Pharisee in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C.E. In the final form of the development the חתונה was such a marriage settlement that not only contained the terms and conditions of the marriage but also had provisions for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{93}Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 69-73, 163-66.
\item \textsuperscript{94}See Epstein, Marriage Contract, 1-77. For a discussion of the development of the marriage contract, see Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 213-16; Chapman, "Marriage and Family," 197-98.
\item \textsuperscript{95}Epstein, Marriage Contract, 28-30.
\item \textsuperscript{96}Epstein, Marriage Contract, 1-77; Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 87, 200-204; Mordechai Akiva Friedman, Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza Study, vol. 1, The Ketubba Traditions of Eretz Israel (Tel Aviv: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980), 239-62; Archer, Beyond Rubies, 158-68, 171-88.
\end{itemize}
Some of the reasons of this transition are as follows: if at the time of the marriage the bridegroom was not able to pay, but only to promise the bride price, it was sufficient to pay it in the event of separation. On the other hand it was a security for the woman against divorce, as the terms of the דת קבע deterred the husband from sending the woman away quickly and easily.

In Sir 36:21a(26a) the author refers to one particular aspect of Israelite marriages. This line implies that the bride did not have much choice regarding the person of the groom (Sir 36:21[26]: "[Any] [man] will a [woman] accept"). As noted in the excursus it is difficult to determine what right the bride had in the selection of the groom or whether she had the right to refuse the union. 36:21a(26a) may depict either the real situation where unmarried women in the majority of cases did not have much choice in the arrangement of their marriage, including the identity of the groom, or the ideal case in the view of Ben Sira and his translator. It may be the expression of the sage's negative view that women are not discriminating and will put up with anything. Sir 22:4a may have a similar view, namely, that a sensible daughter will receive a husband, i.e. without discrimination. This would be in contrast with 4Q271/4QDf 3 9 where the father could deem someone unfit for his daughter as husband.98

In the second half of 36:21 ("yet [one woman is more] [pleasant] [than another]", 36:21b, MS B) the word יְנוּת can denote "to be pleasant"/"delightful"/"beautiful", which can include sexual beauty. This suggests that (sexual) attractiveness in itself is a criterion in finding a wife. It is probable from the following verse (36:22a: "The
beauty of a woman [brightens] the face", MS B), that refers to beauty rather than the more general attribute "pleasant" or "delightful". It is noteworthy that 36:21 in G I has the general κρείσσων ("better") without any specification. The Greek translation from "woman" to "daughter" is not significant in this case since one was usually marrying daughters.

Excursus 5: Attitude to beauty, especially to the beauty of women

The Hebrew Bible speaks about beauty naturally: Sarai, Abram’s wife is said to be beautiful (Gen 12:11, 14), and so is Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2). Beauty is an attribute of Rebekah, along with virginity (Gen 24:16). The word אשת is used to describe a person in Gen 29:17 (Rachel); 39:6 (Joseph); Deut 21:11-13 (beautification of a captive woman); 1 Sam 16:18 (David); 25:3 (Abigail); 1 Kgs 1:6 (Adonijah); Tob 6:12 (Sarah); Esth 2:7 (Esther); Isa 53:2 (the Suffering Servant, in negation).

The term אשת is found mainly in the preexilic literature and sometimes in literature close to the time of Ben Sira/Sirach, and none of the occurrences is from wisdom literature. The natural description of beauty seems to be lacking in the wisdom writings. It is known that at least some parts of Proverbs date from after the exile. Even if the dating of Prov 31:10-31 is not certain, it is noteworthy that even in the long description of the worthy wife, references to beauty are lacking. Instead the focus is on her work and wisdom. A woman should be praised for her fear of the Lord (31:30b) and for her works (31:31b).

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99 See the notes on text and translation.
In Canticles the beauty of the bride's various body parts is depicted in detail (Cant 4:1-7).

In the Book of Judith and Book of Esther the beauty of Judith and Esther is not a bad thing in itself and it is in the service of their nation. There is no doubt, however, that their attractiveness and "death-dealing female power" is dangerous.100

Loader points out that where Gen 6:1-2 simply reports that the daughters of men were fair, 1 En. 6:1-2 reads "beautiful and comely". It was their beauty that awakened the desire of the "Watchers", who, by sexual intercourse with the human women became defiled, entailing catastrophic consequences on the earth through the offspring of their union (1 En. 7:3-5).101 Loader also notes that, as 1 En. 8:1-2 suggests, the women played more than a passive role, for "their beauty and comeliness was in part the fruit of their fathers' producing cosmetics with the skills they had learned from Asael ... Thus the women contributed to the Watchers' going astray."102

In the Jubilees account of Gen 6:1-8 it is described how the angels of the Lord married beautiful human women and produced offspring (Jub. 5:1-12).

102 Loader, Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees, 10.
In Genesis Apocryphon 20.2-8a Sarai's "physical beauty is highlighted to the complete neglect of any of her moral characteristics". However, the ode to her beauty is summed up with a praise of her wisdom.

In rabbinic literature it is explicitly stated that beauty is important and a beautiful woman will find a husband more easily. Some of the rabbis even describe ways and means by which the appearance of their daughters may be improved.

Beauty represents danger in many comments within the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: *T. Reu.* 1:34, 37-41; 2:115-20; *T. Iss.* 1:35; *T. Jud.* 2:24; 3:6-8, 30.

Within the book of Ben Sira the comments regarding beauty are mixed.

Beauty is sometimes dangerous (9:8; 25:21a; 42:12 [רָאָה]). It is, however, above pearls in 7:19 (רָאָה) and is also praised in 26:16-18, especially in 26:16b (רָאָה).

In Sir 36:22(27) beauty (ראות, κόσμος) is not negative at all, as has been noted above. First it brightens (MS B^mg) or gladdens (G I) the face. One possible understanding of this line is that, even though lacking the reference to the husband, he

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103 Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 244.
106 The comments on the beauty of wisdom in Sir 24:13-17 and in 51:14 will not be discussed here, but only the beauty of real persons.
107 As has been discussed, the term can denote objective qualities such as charm in the sense of attractiveness, or subjective ones such as goodwill, favour.
108 See the notes on the text and translation.
is the one whose face is gladdened or brightened by the wife's beauty. This is supported by verse 36:23(28) where the effect of the wife's kindness on the husband is described. Another, perhaps less likely interpretation may be that the wife's beauty has an effect on her own face. A similar idea is found in Sir 25:17 ("The wickedness of a woman blackens her appearance, and darkens [her face] lit. to that of a bear." MS C). The latter would imply that if a wicked woman's face is dark, then a good woman's face would be glad or bright, assuming that the goodness or wickedness is reflected in the face. However, in Sir 36:22a(27a) the attribute of the wife is not goodness but beauty. This way its contrast with Sir 25:17 is weak. Finally it may be noted that MS C lacks the verb "brightens" for 36:22a(27a) and has מַלְכָּל ("above all"),109 resulting in a reading such as "the beauty of the wife is above all faces". While the text of MS B\textsuperscript{mg} and the slightly different G I seem preferable, MS C in this line could convey the idea that in the eyes of the husband the wife's beauty surpasses the beauty of all.

Beauty surpasses everything the eye can desire (MS B). This assertion not only places the desirable attribute "beauty" at the beginning of the list, but also states that in itself it can satisfy and even surpass what the human eye desires. The Greek text perhaps goes even a step further. It lacks the term "eye" and implies that beauty can satisfy not only the eye's desire, but every human desire. It is an important, however rather isolated, statement pertaining to sexuality: beauty in itself, as part of the woman's sexuality, brings pleasure to the husband.

In 36:23(28) the wife's description has characteristics without sexual connotation. If the wife has a "healing tongue" (מדמה לָשׁון, MS B), the husband is more fortunate

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109 MS B\textsuperscript{mg}. See also notes on the text and translation.
than any other man. The term מַרְאֶה may also be translated as "calmness", "peace", or "tranquillity". The latter translation may be closer to the meaning of the line. The wife is not quarrelsome with her husband, who can enjoy peace or tranquillity.\(^\text{110}\) He also does not have to worry that his wife brings shame on him with the content of her speech, by gossiping for instance. The terms "kindness and humility" (G I) seem to include another idea: she will not talk back to her husband; instead she will be obedient. In conclusion, according to 36:22(27)-23(28) a wife who is beautiful, or sexually attractive and satisfying, and is also peaceful, makes a husband the happiest among all men.

In 36:24(29) ("Acquire a wife: the best/first/ beginning of his possession, a helper and fortification and a pillar of support", MS B; "Whoever acquires a wife begins a possession, a helper suiting him and a pillar of support [lit. rest]", G I)\(^\text{111}\) the author describes the wife as a "possession" of the man, employing the words הָנָק ("to acquire", "to buy") and קֶּם ("property", "possession", "acquisition"). Therefore it is necessary at this point to look briefly at the basis of Israelite marriage.

Excursus 6: The term הָנָק and the basis of Israelite marriage

The primary meaning of the verb הָנָק is to "take possession of something"\(^\text{112}\) and primarily it refers to the acquisition of chattels or real estate, being therefore the antonym for מְכָר ("to sell").\(^\text{113}\) It is true that הָנָק is seldom

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\(^{110}\) Cf. the "silent wife" in Sir 26:14a (G I) and the "garrulous wife" for a contrast in Sir 26:27a (G II).

\(^{111}\) See the notes on the text and translation.


\(^{113}\) Lipiński, "הָנָק", 59.
used to convey the purchase of a wife (Ruth 4:5, 10), and Trenchard argues that the unusual usage of the terms נְקֵדָה and נֶהֱלָה together in order to describe the practice of marriage, shows that for Ben Sira, marriage is acquiring or buying a property.\textsuperscript{114} As noted above, however, the word for bride price (מְזַר) is only used three times in the OT, and it never means an actual purchase price.\textsuperscript{115} Burrows presents a detailed discussion of the arguments for and against the idea that the basis of the Israelite marriage was a purchase.\textsuperscript{116} While a certain bride price (either in money or in service) had to be paid to the father or guardian of the bride,\textsuperscript{117} it does not necessarily mean that she was purchased in the same way as any other property. The bride price may have been a compensation for the loss of the girl, or her work power in her family.\textsuperscript{118} Some scholars suggest that it may have served as a compensation for her virginity (Exod 22:16[17]: מְזַר הַבָּהוֹלָה). The term, however, does not always denote "virgin".\textsuperscript{119} Archer also argues on the basis of a rabbinic comment (Ket. 11a) that women who were non-virgins were accorded a bride price of a lower amount. She also asserts that marriage was not a case of outright purchase and that the husband did not own his wife. The bride price was a compensation payment to the woman's family and not the purchase price of the woman herself.\textsuperscript{120}

Even though certain parts of the marriage procedure may have been the same as that of a purchase of property, the result, however, was different. One of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Trenchard, \textit{Ben Sira's View}, 22-23.
\item Lipiński, "מְזַר," 143.
\item Millar Burrows, \textit{The Basis of Israelite Marriage} (AOS 15; New Haven: AOS, 1938).
\item See above the excursus on Israelite marriage laws and practices.
\item Lipiński, "מְזַר," 143.
\item Lipiński, "מְזַר," 144.
\item Archer, \textit{Beyond Rubies}, 164-65.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
aspects of this difference is that, while the sexuality of the woman was
transferred from the father to the husband, the latter did not have complete
authority over it: he could not alienate it, as Satlow points out in his argument
regarding the rabbinic interpretation of betrothal.\footnote{Satlow, \textit{Jewish Marriage}, 77-78. Two accounts from the Hebrew Bible demonstrate that this
may have been different regarding daughters and concubines. In the first one, Lot offers
the sexuality of his daughters to the wicked men of Sodom (Gen 19:8). In the second one, first the host of a Levite
offers the sexuality of his own virgin daughter and of the concubine of his guest to the wicked men of
Gibeah, then the Levite himself transfers the sexuality of his concubine to the men, who rape her (Judg 19:25).} Another aspect is that if a
man got tired of his wife, he could not sell or dispose of her in the same way
as he could sell his properties. Especially in later rabbinic times the
complications of the marriage settlement, as pointed out above, served as a
deterrent from divorce.

Even though in Sir 36:24a(29a) both הָנַּק ("take possession of something")\footnote{As seen above.} and
ןָנַק, which refers to personal property, or wealth in general,\footnote{Lipiński, "תֹּנַק," 64.} are employed, it is not
sufficient to conclude that Ben Sira or the translator regarded marriage as an outright
purchase and considered the wife to be owned by the husband. In Sir 26:4 it is implied
that the wife can make her husband happy even without wealth. This suggests that,
since the good wife is almost contrasted with property, she is more than that. She is
not one of the properties a man can purchase. The texts of Sir 26:1-4, 26:23b and also
Prov 19:14 together suggest that a wife cannot be compared to material possessions,
as the good wife is the gift of the Lord. The second half of Sir 36:24(29), as will be
shown below, also implies that the wife was more than mere property.

Before we turn to this line we may note that Trenchard considers the LXX version of
the first half, 36:24a(29a) to be a misunderstanding of MS B ("Acquire a wife: the
best/first/beginning of his possession", MS B; "whoever acquires a wife begins a possession", G I). The use of the term "begins a possession" in G I may be explained on the basis that when a woman, through marriage, entered the household of her husband, she began to build up a family for him by providing him with children. In this regard she may have been a beginning of possessions, even if not material possessions.

In the MS B version of the second half of 36:24(29) the wife is called "helper and fortification" (עָרָה מֵבָשְׂרָה). The word "helper" is supported by G I. "Fortification" seems perhaps out of place here, as it is usually and frequently used regarding cities (fortified city). It is not completely irrelevant, however, considering that the verses that follow use images of destroyed properties without fences. For the term "helper and fortification" the Greek provides the following reading: "a helper suiting him/according to him" (βοηθῶν κατ᾽ αὐτόν). In the creation account of the woman in Gen 2:18, the LXX uses exactly the same term βοηθῶν κατ᾽ αὐτόν, and in Gen 2:20 the similar βοηθῶς ὁμοίως αὐτῷ ("helper like him", translating the same Hebrew expression as in 2:18: עָרָה כְּנִינָרָה) appears. The term "helper" is applied to God in many occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. βοηθῶς itself is used in this sense, for instance in Exod 15:2; 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29. It does not imply in itself devaluation or inferiority of the woman. She is the helper of the man and she is made in the likeness of the man. It is noteworthy that she is termed βοηθῶν κατ᾽ αὐτόν and βοηθῶς ὁμοίως αὐτῷ before committing the transgression by eating

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124 Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 199, n. 112.
125 See the notes on the text and translation.
126 See below.
the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:6), after which the relationship of man and woman is expressed in the following way: the wife's desire will be for her husband; and he shall rule over her (3:16).

Nevertheless the companionship described in Gen 2:18, 20, 23-24 should also be understood within a patriarchal framework. The woman may be subordinated to the man but not necessarily inferior. Loader argues that the LXX version allows a reading which gives more emphasis to this subordination than the Hebrew. He draws attention to the way Gen 2:18, 20 were influenced by the language of Gen 1:26-27, with a result that "the forming of woman is being set more closely in parallel to the creation of ἄνθρωπος in 1:26". It may be suggested that as ἄνθρωπος (understood as the male) is in the likeness of God but subordinate to him, the woman is in the likeness of the male, and can be regarded as subordinate in the chain of being. While in the Hebrew the word רוח may signify a helping companion, βοηθός describes a woman who, while the helper of the man, is after the likeness of the man in the chain of being.

While this assertion may be correct, in Sir 36:24(29) the emphasis of the term βοηθόν κατ' αὐτόν is not on the inferiority of the wife. Rather it conveys something positive. This seems to be supported by the fact that for the author βοηθόν κατ' αὐτόν is "a pillar of support" 130 in the conclusion of the verse. It may be a confirmation that for Ben Sira and the translator, a wife, especially a good one, was more than mere property or possession. In what sense a wife is a helper and pillar of support is not specified. It may be understood generally in a broad sense, or

128 Loader, Septuagint, 35-36, 35.
129 Loader, Septuagint, 35-36.
130 In both the Hebrew and the Greek text.
specifically such as support in economic matters, or, since marriage includes the
spheres of sexuality, it may imply that the wife is a suitable sexual counterpart to the
husband. This seems to be certain from the last verses of the passage.

In the light of the content of 36:24b(29b) one might argue that 36:25b(30b) should
follow since the insertion of 36:25a(30a) seems somewhat unnatural. 36:24(29)
speaks about a man who has a wife as a "helper" and "pillar of support". 36:25(30)
reads "Without a fence/hedge the vineyard will be destroyed, and without a woman a
homeless wanderer" (MS B),\(^{131}\) and "Where there is no fence, the property will be
plundered, and where there is no woman/wife, he will sigh as he wanders" (G I). At
first it seems difficult to compare a wife (a supporting pillar, 36:24[29]) with the
fence of the vineyard (36:25a[30a], MS B; or "property", G I). These comparisons,
however, are not irrelevant. The man as a wanderer and the destroyed
vineyard/property may be relevant images of ruination, including the ruination of the
life of the man, if he becomes homeless.\(^{132}\) Wright points out that with the term יָדֵן
(deadly) (36:25b[30b]) Ben Sira makes a deliberate comparison with Cain (Gen 4:12, 14)
who is doomed to be a restless wanderer.\(^{133}\)

The last verse of the passage reads: "Who will trust a troop of soldiers that skips from
city to city? So is the man who has no nest, who settles where night sets in"
(36:26[30], MS B); "For who will trust a swift robber that skips from city to city? So
is the man who has no nest and who lodges wherever night falls" (36:26-27, G I). The

\(^{131}\) The subject is "a man".

\(^{132}\) Cf. the LXX addition in Prov 9:12 ("for he has forsaken the ways of his vineyard and has
caused the axles on his own farm to wander [πεπλάνανται from πλανάω], he travels through a
waterless wilderness and a land destined to drought, and gathers barrenness with his hands", 9:12bc).

\(^{133}\) Benjamin G. Wright, *No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to its Hebrew Parent Text*
(SCS 26; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 148; see also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 431.
"troop of soldiers"\textsuperscript{134} (MS B) and the man without a nest (home)\textsuperscript{135} are only similar in that they go from one place to the other and neither of them is reliable. The image of the soldiers also seems to convey the idea of plundering. Although there is no reference to women in 36:26(31) it is probable that as she is the "best possession" (36:24a[29a]) and "suiting helper" (36:24b[29b]) to her husband, thus affecting her husband's life in a positive way, it affects the man's life in a negative way when her support is missing (36:26[31]).

Satlow in his analysis of a Talmudic sugya concerning marriage (B. Yev. 62b) points out that almost every proof text given in the discussions of various aspects of marriage within the sugya is based on "the appearance of some word for 'house'", thus identifying a man's house with his wife, suggesting that marriage is not only about procreation but also about creating a household.\textsuperscript{136} Wives can be seen as persons who help to build up a family with their sexuality, thus creating a household for the husband. In the light of this, the image of the destroyed vineyard (MS B) or property (G I) fits into the context in Sir 36:21(26)-26(31).\textsuperscript{137} Without a woman a man is not able to build up the family, or create a household, of which he is the head. His family line is not continued.

On the other hand there may be another interpretation of the last two verses of the comment. It was noted above that the wife may be a matching helper, pillar of support, or partner in a sexual sense. Her husband will have sex with her rather than wander around, having sex wherever he settles. As such the wife stands at the border

\textsuperscript{134} Cf. Jer 18:22.
\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Sir 14:26a; Prov 27:8. Archer, Beyond Rubies, 124, suggests the word "nest" be understood as "wife".
\textsuperscript{136} Satlow, Jewish Marriage, 5.
\textsuperscript{137} 36:27 in G I.
of the property as the "strongest defence" against the husband's "shameful

tendencies". This way the Hebrew term "fortification" in 36:24(29) would fit the
context. The man himself who has no such "defence" may be the cause of a ruined
property, if he engages in sexual wrongdoing wherever and whenever he can. He may
wander from one household to the other, and by, perhaps, extramarital intercourse
may cross the familial boundaries, this way destroying other households as well. In
this context the man may be interpreted as a potential thief of another man's wife,
an idea especially relevant to the image of "swift robber" in the Greek text of 36:26a.

In summary, Sir 36:21(26)-26(31) gives one of the most extensive descriptions of a
good wife and a good marital relationship. The following observations may be made
about this account. The writers of both text versions consider the beauty of a woman
important in selecting a wife (36:21[26]). Their statement that the wife's beauty, as
part of her sexuality, can bring pleasure to the husband and can satisfy, even surpass
the desire he may have, is noteworthy (36:22[27]). On the one hand it is a positive
expression of the author's and the translator's appreciation for the wife's beauty as part
of her sexuality. On the other hand, however, this comment is fairly isolated. When G
I uses the term θηρόν κατ' άτόν (36:24[29]) employed in Gen 2:18, the
emphasis is not on the inferiority of the wife. She is a helper and a pillar of support.
Considering that Sir 36:21(26)-24(29) is a positive description of marital relationship,
relatively little is said about the sexual side of marriage. Even though it is likely that
the last verses of the passage (36:25[30]-26[31]) also refer to the wife as a support

138 Cf. also Claudia V. Camp, "Wife," in Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and
Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New
139 The image of a potential thief who may steal the wife of another man is the idea of William
Loader, personal communication.
140 36:27 in G I.
141 36:25-27 in G I.
and defence against straying away in a sexual sense, the emphasis is on the negative consequences of not having that defence.

In general there is relatively little reflecting positive attitudes to sexuality in relation to a real feminine person, compared to the detailed, erotic comments that characterize the poems about wisdom to be considered below in ch. 5. It appears that when it comes to a real person, both Ben Sira and the translator, especially the latter, only seldom depict a positive attitude towards sexuality, even in the context of the licit relationship of marriage.

Sir 40:19, 23

The last passage to be discussed regarding good relations between husband and wife is Sir 40:19, 23. As isolated comments within a list of joys of life these verses may or may not have issues pertaining to sexuality, as will be shown below. Some issues on the different text versions still deserve attention.

MS B

19a A child and a city will establish a name, 19b but better than both is he who finds wisdom. 19c Cattle and plantation make a name flourish,

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142 MS M, while mutilated, agrees.
143 The only extant word in MS M in 40:19cd is שָׁהָר ("flesh", "body", "self", also "flesh" as "food").
144 Lévi, Hebrew text, 49, reconstructs וַאֲרוֹב הַחֲבָרָה לַעֲצָה = "[A friend and a companion] … [at the right time]".
19d but better than both is a devoted wife.

23 [146] will lead [], 147 but better than both is a sensible wife.

G I

19a τέκνα καὶ οἰκοδομὴ πόλεως στηρίζουσιν ὄνομα, 148
19d καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀμφότερα γυνὴ ἀμωμὸς λογίζεται.
23 φίλος καὶ ἔταίρος εἰς καιρὸν ἀπαντώντες,
καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀμφότερα γυνὴ μετὰ ἀνδρός.

19a Children and the building of a city establish a name,
19d but better than both is a woman/wife regarded blameless/without blemish or defect.

23 A friend and a companion meet at the right time,
but better than both is a wife with (her) husband.

Context

The wider context is 40:1 - 41:13. 40:1-27 has teachings on the miseries (40:1-17) and on the joys of life (40:18-27). The latter is the immediate context of Sir 40:19, 23. 40:28-30 has comments on begging. 41:1-10 deals with death and the fate of the wicked and their children. 41:11-13 declares that a good name lasts forever.

Form

Sir 40:8-26b (and within it 40:19, 23) share the same formal pattern. Each distich in the first line has two items that are desirable and are usually related, and the third item in the second line is better than both the previous two items.

145 As noted above, MS M reads "κατακόρυφος" ("flesh", "body", "self", "flesh" as "food"), which is translated by Skehan, Ben Sira, 463, 467, as "person": "Cattle and orchards make a person flourish" (40:19c).
146 Read "A friend and a companion"; see the note on the text.
147 Read "at the right time"; see the note on the text.
148 40:19bc is not extant in G I.
Content

The idea that children play an important role in perpetuating one's name appears in Sir 16:1-3\(^{149}\) and now recurs in 40:19a as supported by both MS C and G I versions: a person's name might be known for posterity by the name he leaves to his children, be it a good or a bad name. This idea is expanded here by the notion indicated in the second half of 40:19a: a city that is named after a person may serve the same purpose in this context as the name.\(^{150}\) Placing wisdom above the two items of 40:19a (child and city) as something more desirable may convey the message that a man can be remembered the most if he was wise in his life. The line which affirms wisdom (40:19b) is missing from G I, as is 40:19c, which is the first part of another comparison ("cattle and plantation make a name flourish"). Together with the second line (40:19d, "but better than both is a devoted wife") this comparison is similar to the comment of Prov 19:14, where the author distinguishes between wealth and a sensible wife. The latter suggests that wealth is something beneficial to one, something one may count on as an inheritance, but a sensible wife is not so easy to acquire, for she is the gift of the Lord.

In Sir 40:19d (MS C) the attribute "sensible" is not used; instead the word "devoted" is found. If, as indicated earlier,\(^{151}\) the word רַאָשׁ and not בֹּשׁ stands in 40:19c, then it would read "cattle and plantation make a person flourish". In the light of this and of Prov 19:14, Sir 40:19cd may relate the idea that the devoted wife surpasses earthly riches, and makes a person "flourish" as she is from the Lord. The word "devoted" has its origin in פְּלַש, which means in Qal "to be attached to", or "to love".

\(^{149}\) Cf. Deut 25:5-6.
\(^{150}\) See 2 Sam 5:9.
\(^{151}\) See the footnotes on the translation of this verse.
While 40:19d in MS C simply makes a statement about a wife who loves her husband, or is attached to him, 40:19d in G I, depicts a woman who is "regarded blameless" or without defect or blemish. The word ἀμαρωτός ("blameless") is frequently used in the LXX. Most of the occurrences are references to the sacrificial animals in the Pentateuch and to persons who are without sin in the wisdom writings. While the Hebrew text's main concern is the relationship of the wife and the husband, the Greek shifts the focus to an attribute or virtue of the wife, namely to her blamelessness. What the Greek translator had in mind is not specified. What transgressions the wife did not commit is not clear. These transgressions could include a number of things, including those of sexual nature. From the husband's point of view a wife may be without blemish if she has not been unfaithful to him. This way Sir 40:19d may be another example among the passages where a simple statement concerning the beauty or love of the wife in the Hebrew text, which includes a positive allusion to sexuality, is changed to a comment pertaining to the virtue or goodness of the wife, by either introducing an independent rendering or adding to the Hebrew text.\footnote{See Sir 26:16b and also Sir 7:19 in this chapter.}

40:23 has different versions in MS B and G I: "[A friend and a companion] will lead [at the right time], but better than both is a sensible wife", (MS B); "A friend and a companion meet at the right time, but better than both is a wife with (her) husband" (G I). In Sir 40:23 having a sensible wife surpasses the guidance (from ἐπίσκοπος, "guide") of friend and companion. G I employs a different word (ἐπιστρέφω), "meet" or "come near" instead of "guide". It also omits the expression "sensible wife" and only has "a wife with (her) husband". Whether the translator did not find it conceivable that a sensible wife for the husband is more valuable than the guidance of friends, can only be conjectured. The comment "but better than both is a wife with (her) husband" is also puzzling. It
may be either that it values simply the marital relation between woman and man, or that it emphasises the wife as *solely* with her husband, not straying and looking for a (possible sexual) encounter with another man. This may also explain 40:19d: a wife is blameless as she *solely* belongs to her husband.

In summary, marriage receives attention and positive evaluation in these sayings, since their tertiary elements twice concern wives (40:19d, 23b, in both versions), and in 40:19b (Hebrew) finding wisdom may be paralleled with a devoted wife in 40:19d (Hebrew). It appears true, as Reymond argues, that the tertiary element is morally superior to the preceding elements. These comparisons connect moral behaviour "with a joyous, secure and profitable life".\footnote{Eric D. Reymond, “Sirach 40,18-27 as ‘Tôb-Spruch’,” *Biblica* 82 (2001), 84-92, 91-92.} GI especially seems to underline this with its idea of a blameless wife (40:19d). The passage suggests that living with a sensible, respectable wife, who, and whose sexuality, is only reserved for her husband, is of surpassing value.

III.2. Bad Relations between Husband and Wife

Sir 7:19, 26

Even though Sir 7:19 has a positive exhortation, it will be shown below that in the light of 7:26 even the message of 7:19 may not be as positive as it seems. Therefore these verses will be treated in this subchapter.
19 Do not reject/despise a sensible wife,\textsuperscript{154} for her grace\textsuperscript{155} is above pearls.

26 Do you have a wife? Do not abhor her. But do not trust a wife who is hated.

G I

19 μη διστάξεις γυναικός σοφής καὶ ἀγαθής· ἢ γὰρ χάρις αὐτῆς ὑπὲρ τὸ χρυσίον.

26 γυνή σοι ἔστιν κατὰ ψυχήν, μὴ ἐκβάλης αὐτήν· καὶ μισομένη μὴ ἐμπιστεύσῃς σεαυτόν.

19 Do not depart from a wise and good wife for her grace\textsuperscript{156} is above gold.

26 Do you have a wife who pleases you (lit. who is according to your soul)? Do not cast her out; but do not trust yourself to one who is hated.

Context

The context of these verses has been discussed in ch. I.1. It should suffice here to note again that the focus of 7:18-26 is one's responsibility towards one's friend (7:18), household, including servants (7:20-21), cattle (7:22) and family members: children in 7:23-25 and wife in 7:19, 26.

\textsuperscript{154} Translation issues regarding this term in the Hebrew original will be discussed in detail in the content.

\textsuperscript{155} The term פנים חסד may be a subjective attribute such as "kindness" or "favour", or an objective one, such as "beauty". This will affect the interpretation of Sir 7:19, and therefore more detailed discussion will follow in the content.

\textsuperscript{156} Similarly to the expression פנים דבורה, χάρις can also have various interpretations. See the content.
Form

While Sir 7:19, 26 is part of the larger context of 7:1-36 (and also of 7:1 - 9:16) in content, in form these verses have both similarities and differences compared with the surrounding verses. In 7:1-21 the writer gives negative advice starting each bicolon with the prohibitive לָא ("do not") except in 7:2, in the second bicolon of 7:6, and in 7:17a, 21. 7:19 is part of this pattern. 7:22-25 have a distinctive pattern of their own, listing the members of one's household, followed by רָא, then by positive advice, and finally by an additional instruction on treating them. 7:26 starts with the same pattern, but instead of the expected positive exhortation following רָא there is a prohibition, then a negative comment closes the distich.

Content

As noted in the context, 7:19 is part of the sayings on one's responsibility towards one's household and concerns the attitude towards wives. It is most probable that the Hiphil fem. participle form (משכלה) of the verb משכלה is used here to denote "sensible", "wise". It is, however, not specified further as to what being sensible or wise means. The translation ספְּחֵה in the G I version also supports it. The term אשה משכלה is part of Ben Sira's vocabulary. He uses it in 25:8a and in 40:23 for "sensible wife". The expression is also employed in Prov 19:14. Both in Sir 40:23 and in Prov 19:14 "sensible wife" is part of a comparison, and if the word "sensible" is accepted in Sir 7:19, the case is similar. In the latter she is compared with "pearls" (MS A). Even though משכלה in the Piel fem. participle form of the verb משכלה can

157 Reconstructed text; see the text above in this chapter.
mean "to prove barren", the only other explicit reference to a married woman being barren is in the G I version of Sir 42:10d, among the anxieties of a father for his daughter, where Skehan restores the text of MS M on the basis of G I to refer to "barrenness", using the verb נזר. He also offers the same word for "childless" in Sir 42:9d, where both MS B and G I have "hated".

Nevertheless, nowhere in the book of Ben Sira is the word משכלה associated with the idea of "barrenness", therefore the reading "barren" for משכלה in Sir 7:19 seems unlikely.

It should also be noted that the G I text adds to the word סופיה ("wise", "sensible") another attribute of the wife: ἀγαθή ("good"). Trenchard sees it as the translator's failure to understand רומאה ἡ (= a sensible and good wife). This is not impossible.

It would not, however, be the only case where the Greek translator adds the word ἀγαθή to the Hebrew original text. The text in Sir 26:16b (MS C, [...א]-wife) is mutilated, where [...]א is reconstructed to read נושא ("wife"), resulting in the following translation: "a beautiful wife". G I reads κάλλος ἀγαθή γυναικῆ (= "the beauty of a good wife"). We may attempt to find the reason for these additions if we turn to the interpretation of the terms רומאה ἡ in the Hebrew and χρώς in the Greek text of Sir 7:19b. In both cases their meaning "grace" can denote objective qualities that add delight or pleasure, such as charm, attractiveness, or subjective

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158 In some cases it also means "make childless" in Piel.
159 Skehan, Ben Sira, 477, 479, 480.
160 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 204, n. 178.
161 See Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 9, 189, n. 20.
qualities such as goodwill or favour.\textsuperscript{162} The addition of the attribute "good" in the G I versions of both Sir 7:19 and 26:16 may have the purpose of emphasizing that it is the subjective quality of the wife that is desirable. Especially in the latter the expression "a beautiful wife" (26:16) would have been sufficient on its own.

In Sir 7:19 the case is more complicated, though similar. In the Hebrew original the word "grace" may have referred to both objective and subjective qualities. Therefore it may have conveyed the idea that a sensible wife can be beautiful at the same time, or that the sensible wife has goodwill or favour. In neither case does it seem to be necessary to add the attribute "good". The translator, again, felt it necessary to make this addition. It seems that the Greek translator especially, was very concerned with the goodness of the wife, even more so than the author of the Hebrew original, as if to say that beauty should not be praised in its own right, at least in the examples discussed here. What goodness means exactly can be deduced, if at all, only from the context of the actual passages.

In the interpretation of the words "reject" or "despise", which render the Hebrew סמאס, and "depart from", "reject", which translate the Greek ἀποστέλλει in Sir 7:19, Sir 7:26 may assist us, since it has a similar concern. The Hebrew and Greek versions of the text of 7:26 differ at two points. Firstly, MS A reads "Do you have a wife? Do not abhor her. But do not trust a wife who is hated". G I renders "Do you have a wife who pleases you (lit. who is according to your soul)? Do not cast her out; but do not trust yourself to one who is hated". It seems that the exhortation "do not cast her out"

\textsuperscript{162} מרים in Nah 3:4 is more likely to belong to the first group describing the charms of the prostitute Nineveh negatively.
only applies to a wife who pleases her husband, but in other cases casting her out may be justified. One can only surmise what constitutes a reason for casting out a wife. Secondly, the Hebrew original uses ה的模样, which means "abhor" or "treat as an abomination". The usual word behind ἐκβάλλω ("to cast out") in the Hebrew Bible is רַעַש and not מְשֻׁב. Also the comment "Do you have a wife? Do not abhor her" seems either incomplete or illogical. Why would a husband abhor a wife without any obvious reason? Either something regarding the qualities of the wife is missing here or Ben Sira assumed an exceedingly negative attitude towards wives on the part of his readers. In any case, the choice of the Hebrew word ה的模样 is puzzling. The Greek text for this line departs from the Hebrew. It employs ἐκβάλλω ("to cast out"), the word used for divorce in the LXX. It seems that in this way Sirach is closer to the idea of divorce, even if it is expressed in a negation.

Sir 7:26b is ambiguous. The text literally says: "but do not trust a woman who is hated" (MS A). Collins notes that the word "hated" is used to denote "divorce" in Elephantine documents. Instone-Brewer, in his examination of Papyrus 5e = el 13 from the early second century C.E., cites the Elephantine documents, where the divorce clause is actually written into the marriage contract, according to which husband and wife "could divorce each other by publicly stating that they 'hate' their partner and paying them compensation". Instone-Brewer concludes that this form of divorce, practised as far back as the fifth century B.C.E., may have influenced the later

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163 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 1035.
164 מְשֻׁב is the term for divorce in Deut 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3, 4; Isa 50:1.
166 G I does not differ significantly.
167 Collins, Jewish Wisdom, 66. There are suggestions that the case of the loved and hated woman in Deut 21:15-18 is the same, i.e. שׁוֹנֵא actually means "divorced woman". See Jacob R. Rabinowitz, "Marriage Contracts in Ancient Egypt in the Light of Jewish Sources," HTR 46 (1953), 91-97, 92.
Papyrus Se’elim 13.\textsuperscript{168} In connecting Sir 7:26b with the language of the Elephantine
documents Collins renders it: "do not trust a woman who is divorced".\textsuperscript{169} Hence Ben
Sira's advice could be, according to Collins: "Be slow to divorce, but do not trust a
woman you have sent away".\textsuperscript{170} While this is only one interpretation of Sir 7:26b, it is
possible. Finally, 7:26b could also mean: "do not marry a divorcée".

\textit{If} 7:26b is about a woman who is divorced and \textit{if} she is remarried, which is not stated,
and is only conjectured at best, the concern of the writer may be that such a woman
cannot be trusted anymore. Also \textit{if} one assumes that, as suggested above, the text of
7:26a is incomplete, and that the complete original would have read "Do you have a
divorced wife? Do not abhor her", the advice of the whole of the verse could be: "If
you have a divorced wife, do not treat her as an abomination, but do not trust her".
The problem with this version is that it is not clear what other option is left for the
husband, since marriage with an untrustworthy woman is difficult, and that it is
merely a conjecture.\textsuperscript{171}

Even if the translation of 7:26b does not explicitly call for divorce, staying with a wife
who is not trusted is problematic in any context. Several other comments describe the
husband's relationship with a wife who for various reasons is bad or wicked. Sir 7:19
advises the reader not to reject (MS A) a sensible wife, or not to depart from a
sensible and good wife (G I). 7:26b may still be interpreted as saying that if she is not
sensible, she may be rejected even if that is not spelled out clearly. In this light

\textsuperscript{168} David Instone-Brewer, "Jewish Women Divorcing Their Husbands in Early Judaism: The
Background to Papyrus Se’elim 13," \textit{HTR} 92 (1999), 349-57, 354.
\textsuperscript{169} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 66.
\textsuperscript{170} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 66.
\textsuperscript{171} It is not the task of this work to interpret what the term "she has been defiled" means in Deut
24:4, in other words whether it is the same pollution as the shameful matter of Deut 24:1 for which the
wife has been sent away, or something that happened after the divorce. A possible interpretation is
provided by Loader, \textit{Septuagint}, 72-75.
perhaps even 7:19 could be taken as a reference to the act of divorce even though its usual terms are not used here. The ones that are employed (סמה and אמרות) suggest rejection or turning away. What their exact meaning is, or why Ben Sira and the translator have chosen them, are not certain.

Sir 25:13-26

13 Any wound but not [] the heart,
any wickedness but not [].

17 The wickedness of a woman blackens her appearance, and darkens lit. to that of a bear.

18 Among neighbours her husband sits and sighs unawares (lit. without his sensing).

19 Little wickedness can be compared to (lit. is like) the wickedness of a woman, may the sinner's lot fall upon her.

20 Like an ascent [], [] wife [].

21 Do not fall a woman, and [] her possessions (lit. what she has/owns).

22 For through [] shame:

a wife who supports (lit. maintains) her husband.

23 Feeble hands [and stumbling/tottering] knees (is) a wife who does not make her husband happy (lit. does not call her husband happy).

24 From a woman is the beginning of sin, and on her account we all die (lit. we die together).

G I

13 πᾶσαν πληγήν καὶ μὴ πληγήν καρδίας, καὶ πᾶσαν πονηρίαν καὶ μὴ πονηρίαν γυναικός.
14 πᾶσαν ἐπαγωγήν καὶ μὴ ἐπαγωγήν μισοῦντων, καὶ πᾶσαν ἐκδίκησιν καὶ μὴ ἐκδίκησιν ἐχθρῶν.
15 οὐκ ἔστιν κεφαλὴ ὑπὲρ κεφαλὴν θρόνως, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θυμός ὑπὲρ θυμόν ἐχθροῦ.
16 συνοικισάτως λέειν καὶ δράκοντι εὐδοκήσω ἢ συνοικισάτσαι μετὰ γυναικός πονηρᾶς.
17 πονηρία γυναικός ἀλλοιοί τὴν ὦρασιν αὐτῆς καὶ σκότωσι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ὡς ἄρκος.
18 ἀνὰ μέσουν τῶν πλησίων αὐτοῦ ἀναπεσεῖται ὁ ἀνήρ αὐτῆς καὶ ἀκούσως ἀνεστέναξεν πικρά.
19 μικρὸν πᾶσα κακία πρὸς κακίαν γυναικός, κλήρος ἀμαρτωλοῦ ἐπιπέσαι αὐτῇ.
20 ἀνάβασις ἀμιώδης ἐν ποσίν πρεσβυτέρου,
13 Any wound but not a wound of the heart,
and any wickedness but not the wickedness of a woman/wife.
14 Any affliction but not the affliction from those who hate,
and any vengeance but not the vengeance of enemies.
15 There is no head above the head of a snake
and there is no anger above the anger of an enemy. 197
16 I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon
than dwell with an evil woman.
17 A woman’s wickedness changes her appearance
and darkens her face like a bear.
18 Among his neighbours her husband will recline
and involuntarily sighed bitterly.
19 All wickedness is little compared to the wickedness of a woman,
may a sinner’s lot befall her.
20 A sandy ascent to the feet of the aged,
so is a garrulous wife to a quiet husband.
21 Do not fall down upon a woman’s beauty,
and do not yearn after a woman.
22 (It is) anger and impudence and great disgrace
when a wife supports her husband.
23ab Dejected heart and a saddened face
and a wound of the heart (is) an evil wife;
23cd feeble hands and tottering knees –
who will not make her husband happy/will not call her husband happy.
24 From a woman (is) the beginning of sin
and through her we all die.
25 Do not allow an outlet to water,

197 Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 58, 235-36, nn. 31-34, offers the following translation: ”There is no head worse than the head of a snake, and there is no wrath worse than the wrath of a wife” (25:15), where he sees 25:15 (with the image of a snake and the mention of a woman) and 25:24 as references to Gen 3:1-15. Skehan, Ben Sira, 343, 346, assumes the second meaning of the noun ποίημα (”poison”,
also πώημα) and not the first one (”head”) as Trenchard does in 25:15a behind G I’s κεφαλή (”head”), and
ποίημα (”venom”) behind G I’s θυμός (”anger”) in 25:15b. Both Hebrew terms are used in Deut 32:33.
Skehan takes G I as a misunderstanding and gives the following reading: ”No poison worse than that of a serpent, no venom greater than that of a woman.”
nor outspokenness in an evil wife.
26 If she does not go as you direct (or: according to your hands),
cut her off from your flesh.\textsuperscript{198}

Context

The context has been discussed earlier regarding Sir 26:1-4, 13-18, where it was noted that the wider context is 25:13 - 26:27, within which 25:13-26 has negative comments on marital relationships/wives.

Form

Even though 25:14 is not extant in Hebrew, from the similarities in content between 25:13 and 25:14, the following pattern can be discovered: the stich starts with "any" + the negative item + "but not" + the negative item of a certain quality. 25:15 represents an independent distich but has similarities in pattern to 25:13-14: "There is no" + the concern of the author + "above" + the negative item of a certain quality. 25:16 in G I is an independent distich in content and has no distinctive formal characteristics. 25:17, 18 are related in content but do not show similarities in form. 25:19 is an independent distich on its own, just as 25:20, both in content and form. 25:21, 22 are related in theme without formal characteristics. 25:23 is independent again both in form and content, and so is 25:24. 25:25, 26 are related in content, but without a distinctive formal pattern.

\textsuperscript{198} G 248 adds: "give and send (her) away"; also see the extended Syriac version of it: "give to her and send her from your house"; Trenchard, \textit{Ben Sira's View}, 245, n. 87. Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 344, 346, also includes the following idea: "cut her away from your flesh with a bill of divorce".
The most extensive comments that Ben Sira devoted to wicked women/wives can be found in 25:13-26. In the present form of 25:13-14 the theme and also the tone of the whole section is set in 25:13b ("any wickedness but not [like the wickedness of a woman]", MS C). The writer makes it very clear right in the beginning that it is a wife's wickedness that can cause the greatest wound to the heart of the husband, so much so that he uses the term wickedness of a wife/woman three times throughout the passage (רַע אָשֶׁר, 25:13; רַע אָשֶׁר, 25:17; רַע אָשֶׁר, 25:19), a construction not used anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. It is usually not specified what wickedness denotes; it seems to be used in a fairly broad sense. Only sometimes can we gather some ideas from the context, as will be seen. 25:14 is not extant in Hebrew. Trenchard considers the terms "those who hate" (25:14a) and "enemies" (25:14b) as another set of references to wicked wives. He also argues that 25:15, along with 25:24, was influenced by Gen 3:1-15, without specifying what he means by the "wrath of a wife".

It is not certain however that 25:15 is a reference to Eve's transgression in Gen 3:15. Skehan's interpretation may be more likely. He takes 25:14-15 as a unit that describes the negative consequences of polygyny. The basis for this is probably the fact that in 25:15b G 795 has γυναικός ("of a woman") instead of ἐχθροῦ ("of an enemy"). A situation of polygyny is not inconceivable. In this case the "affliction" (25:14a) and "vengeance" of the wives who cannot get along and become each other's

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199 G I is not significantly different.
200 See the notes on the text and translation.
202 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 58, 236, n. 34; and also 71, 250, n. 154.
203 See the notes on Sir 25:8b; cf. also Sir 26:6a; 28:15; 37:11a.
enemies affects not only them but also the husband. Skehan's reading ("No poison worse than that of a serpent, no venom greater than that of a woman") for 25:15 would make more sense in this context, than the literal translation of the G I text ("There is no head above the head of a snake and there is no anger above the anger of an enemy"). The rivalry and jealousy between the wives is worse than the poison of the serpent. The issue of polygyny is addressed in detail later in this chapter. It should suffice here to note that if 25:14-15 really depicts a polygynous marriage, then they may relate to matters pertaining to sexuality. Rivalry may have included rivalry about sexual issues, similar to the situation in Gen 29:31 - 30:24, especially in 30:14-16.

25:16 speaks for itself using an animal comparison. A similar idea is also expressed in Prov 21:9, 19; 25:24. In the latter cases the alternatives of living in a desert (Prov 21:19) or on a corner of the roof (Prov 21:9; 25:24) seem to be easier, or at least possible, compared with the alternative of dwelling with a lion and a dragon (Sir 25:16a), which is practically impossible. This way Ben Sira goes even beyond the Proverbs idea. To dwell with an evil woman/wife (Sir 25:16b) is just as much impossible and so to be avoided at any cost. The term evil woman/wife (γυναικὸς πονηρᾶς) is, similarly to the "wickedness of wife/woman", characteristic of Ben Sira who, apart from the present context (25:16), employs it in 25:25 (γυναικὶ πονηρᾷ), 26:7 (γυνῇ πονηρᾷ) and in 42:6a (γυναικὶ πονηρᾷ, or אשת רעה in MS B, the only extant Hebrew version for the term). It is not used in the Hebrew Bible.

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204 It is not extant in Hebrew.
205 Skehan, Ben Sira, 347.
206 For the image of lion see Ps 91:13.
207 The only similar form (אשת רעה) is found in Prov 6:24.
In this verse the writer speaks of the wickedness of the wife in relation to himself in the first person, while in 25:17, wickedness is seen in relation to the husband in the third person. This way 25:16 emphasises even more how difficult it is to live with a wicked wife. The meaning of wickedness itself seems broad in most of the occurrences. In the present context (25:16) there is no specification of the evil. The same can be said about the wickedness in 25:17 ("The wickedness of a woman blackens her appearance, and darkens [her face] \textsuperscript{208} lit. to that of a bear", MS C). \textsuperscript{209} It is not certain what the connection is between the woman and the looks of a bear. The emphasis is probably not on the colour, but on the seriousness of the look of the woman, when she is angry. This way, Skehan’s version ("makes her sullen") is closer to the point. \textsuperscript{210} The wickedness of the woman has affected her husband so much that even other people can see it: he sighs unawares (25:18b, also bitterly in G I) among his neighbours (25:18a).

25:19 returns to the theme of the whole section ("Little wickedness can be compared to [lit. is like] the wickedness of a woman, may the sinner's lot fall upon her", MS C). \textsuperscript{211} While 25:13 only asserts that women are capable of doing evils, 25:19b goes even further by stating that there is little evil like that of a woman. What "wickedness" means here is not specified. Whatever it may mean, Collins is correct in asserting that the statement is exceptional and its extreme quality "cannot be dismissed as simply part of the culture of the time". \textsuperscript{212} He suggests that the meaning of 25:19b is that a

\textsuperscript{208} See the notes on the text and translation.

\textsuperscript{209} G I does not differ significantly.

\textsuperscript{210} See also Sir 47:3; 1 Sam 17:34, 36-37; 2 Sam 17:8; Hos 13:8 (bear appears in a different context).

\textsuperscript{211} G I does not differ significantly.

\textsuperscript{212} Collins, Jewish Wisdom, 67.
sinner should marry a wicked woman, and he compares this idea to Eccl 7:26, where the sinner is taken by a woman who is a trap.\textsuperscript{213}

To climb a sandy ascent for an aged man is just as trying and frustrating (if not impossible) as for a depressed (פָל, MS C) or quiet (חָקִית, G I) man to live with a garrulous wife (25:20). It is not only annoying when a wife is constantly talking, but also there is a danger that with the content or the way of her talking she brings shame to her husband. She may not be trustworthy. In Sir 42:6a the wicked wife is untrustworthy, and the reader is advised to use a seal to avoid any trouble caused by such a woman.\textsuperscript{214} It is noteworthy, however, that the word נָשָׁה is used twice with שָׁרָה, in Sir 8:3 and 9:18. In Ben Sira's view men can also be garrulous or they too can cause problems through their speech. Therefore while this verse is a negative comment on a woman in this context, it merely conveys a truth that can be asserted in connection with men as well.

While in Sir 36:22(27) beauty is a desirable attribute in the selection of the suitable wife, here in Sir 25:21a it is something dangerous ("Do not [fall through the beauty of] a woman", MS C).\textsuperscript{215} The term fall נָפָל ("fall") is used in a negative context in Sir 9:3 I.\textsuperscript{216} The idea in the line under discussion is probably that if a wife is beautiful, but wicked, her wickedness can make her husband's life bitter. Therefore one should be cautious in selecting a wife, and beauty should not be decisive in the matter.

In 25:21b there is a significant difference between MS C and G I: "and [do not desire] her possessions (lit. what she has/owns)", MS C; "and do not yearn after a woman", G

\textsuperscript{213} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 67.
\textsuperscript{214} See the discussion later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{215} The two text versions convey the same idea in 25:21a.
\textsuperscript{216} See its discussion in ch. IV. 1.
I. The Hebrew may convey the message that just like beauty, wealth should also not be the decisive reason in selecting a wife. One should not marry someone for greed. Even if a wicked wife is rich, it will not compensate for the heartache she may cause to her husband. Another interpretation may be that the wife’s wealth might prevent the husband from seeking divorce, if the woman could take her possessions back with her.\textsuperscript{217} If the situation in Ben Sira’s time was similar to that of Rabbinic times, where the husband’s property was a lien and guarantee for the payment of the marriage settlement for the woman in case of divorce,\textsuperscript{218} it made divorce more difficult for the husband. If the woman was a wicked one, and the bride price paid for her was large, resulting in an expensive marriage settlement, the husband may have been trapped in an unbearable marriage.

The text of G I, as indicated above, is different and the reference to the possessions of the woman is lacking. One interpretation may be that, while the Hebrew refers merely to a financial technicality, and a universal truth that a rich but wicked woman can make the husband’s life bitter, the Greek advises against desiring a woman in general. While similar advice is found regarding women belonging to someone else (Sir 9:8; 41:21c[23b]), the context in 25:21 is most probably the selection of a wife. This line may mean that a man’s desire for a woman should not take control of him, so as to ensnare him in a bad marriage. Another possibility is that the financial aspect is missing somehow, perhaps by mistake, or maybe the writer did not consider it necessary to include, since it follows in both versions of 25:22.

\textsuperscript{217} Ps.-Phoc. 199-200; Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 67; Collins, ”Marriage,” 115.
\textsuperscript{218} See comments on marriage technicalities earlier in this chapter.
For 25:22 the most probable reading is: "For harsh is the slavery and great the shame: a wife who supports [lit. maintains] her husband". Its theme is closely connected with the previous verse, describing a bad relationship with a wealthy but wicked wife. The image of slavery ( avi, 25:22a) refers to the Israelites' oppression by the Egyptians (Exod 1:14; 6:9; Deut 26:6). While it is understandable that in the time of Ben Sira it was a shame to be supported by a woman, the comparison to the "harsh slavery" Israel had to endure at the hands of the Egyptians would be unreasonable.

25:23 has only one distich in Hebrew and introduces another aspect: the impact a marriage with a wicked wife can have on the health of the husband ("feeble hands and [stumbling/tottering] knees", MS C). The term "wicked wife" is not used in MS C. The woman is described as a wife who does not make her husband happy. However, G I employs the expression ( γυνη πονηρα) and the impact on the husband's health is more detailed ("Dejected heart and a saddened face and a wound of the heart … feeble hands and tottering knees"). Total deterioration is the result of such a marriage. This may be contrasted with the long, peaceful life in Sir 26:1-4, 13.

25:24 seems to be a reference to Gen 3:1-15, (especially Gen 3:6) where the woman is described as the one who, on the encouragement of the serpent, ate the forbidden fruit first and then gave it to the man. In this way sin and death came into the world. However, even though we may conclude that the author indeed refers to Eve here, and considers woman in general to be the cause of death in the world, it is necessary to look at other interpretations as well.

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219 See notes on text and translation. G I, though having the notion of "anger" instead of "slavery", is not significantly different.
220 See also the notes on the translation.
Levison attempts to address the question of sin and death and its influence on Sir 25:24 from a different angle. His argument is based partially on the fact that attribution of death to Eve conflicts with Ben Sira's view of the origin of death (41:3b, 4a; 40:11). Mortality is God's will for creation since the beginning (17:1-2a). Ben Sira does not associate either sin or death with Adam's and Eve's disobedience (14:17; 17:2a).

Also, Sir 25:24 in Levison's view interrupts the comments on wicked wives, because it has nothing to do with marital relations. He proposes the following interpretation: "From the [evil] wife is the beginning of sin, / and because of her we [husbands] all die." The term ἀπὸ γυναικῶν refers to the evil wife, and should be translated "from the wife", as the interest lies with women only in relation to men in this context. The evil wife is the beginning of sin because she causes her righteous husband to sin. The main issue is that a husband controls his wife (25:21-26). A husband should not be ensnared by the woman's wealth or beauty. A progression in the description of the husband who does not control his wife may be discovered in 25:22-24. Therefore the conclusion is: an uncontrollable wife should be divorced. Two general thoughts of Ben Sira lie behind this according to Levison. Firstly, women are the worst of all the sinners; they are "snares to men, for they have the ability to control them and to lead them to destruction (9:2-6, 9)". Secondly, one may be led to sin if one is in the company of sinners. In the passage under discussion an evil wife can lead a righteous husband to sin. Ben Sira speaks from the viewpoint of an experienced husband to other husbands; therefore the word "we" refers to husbands and not to humanity.

Death is a "hyperbolic expression" to describe the effects an evil wife has on her husband. Thus Sir 25:24 fits into its context, since these negative effects start to
appear from 25:22 with the weakness and deterioration of the health of the husband. An uncontrollable wife cuts short the husband's days by grief.\textsuperscript{221}

It is true that Ben Sira does not have a consistent theological system on the origin of sin.\textsuperscript{222} We should also note that in the whole of 25:13-26 he speaks as someone who either had a wicked wife himself, or has known someone who was married to one. That he may be speaking from experience could be assumed from 25:16 where the author of G I talks about the wickedness of the wife in the first person.

Neither of the interpretations can be excluded. Sir 25:24 may indeed be a reference to Eve, and it may also be practical advice from one husband, who had a lot to do with wicked wives in real life, to other husbands or young men.

In the immediate context of 25:24 the following verses (25:25, 26, not extant in Hebrew) are both references to the control of women by their husbands, using a parallel in 25:25. When the water finds an outlet from its place it will run away freely and very quickly. If an evil woman is not controlled by her husband, she will find the confidence (παραθησία, also "outspokenness") in speech and use it against her husband by being proud, arrogant with him, in this way questioning his authority. What the "outlet to water" means is not specified. It may be something other than outspokenness. A similar idea is found in Sir 26:10, where a daughter who is not watched over finds an opportunity and engages in sexual intercourse. In the latter


\textsuperscript{222} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 81.
passage the concern about sexual wrongdoing is explicit.\textsuperscript{223} However, in Sir 25:25 one can only surmise that the husband has a similar concern regarding his wife.

The theme of the husband controlling the wife is continued in 25:26 but in more general terms, and it has advice regarding the wife who does not obey her husband. The stich "cut her off from your flesh" has been understood as a reference to divorce, especially in the light of G 248 which adds the following line: "give and send (her) away".\textsuperscript{224} Thus Skehan gives the following reading: "cut her away from your flesh with a bill of divorce."\textsuperscript{225} The image "cut her off from your flesh" might be a reference to Gen 2:24, where a man and his wife "become one flesh". This way the argument for divorce would be founded.\textsuperscript{226} Even though G I does not employ\textsuperscript{227} the usual word for divorce (ἐκβάλλω), it is still possible that the reader was encouraged to divorce his wife in this case. On the other hand in Sir 7:26, if the translation "the one who is divorced", as suggested above, is accepted, the entire situation is different from that of Sir 25:26. However, the former (7:26) would be a support for the idea of divorce here in 25:26, for this way there would be two references referring to divorce in two separate comments.

If the term "cut her off from your flesh" does not mean divorce, it is very difficult to determine what it might have meant for the author. Sir 7:19 should also be considered.

\textsuperscript{223} In Prov 5:15-16 (in the context of 5:15-20), scattered water in the streets implies that a husband starts an extramarital sexual relationship, instead of enjoying his own wife's sexuality; William Loader, personal communication.
\textsuperscript{224} See the note on the translation.
\textsuperscript{225} Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 344, 346.
\textsuperscript{226} Collins, \textit{Jewish Wisdom}, 65, argues that divorce appears to have been widespread in Second Temple Judaism. The \textit{Temple Scroll} appears to assume the normality of divorce (54.4-5); CD 13.16-17 also attests that divorce was an accepted part of life in the Qumran community. However, both the Damascus Document for all, and the \textit{Temple Scroll} regarding only the king, were critical of polygyny (CD 4.20-21; 5.1b-2a; \textit{Temple Scroll} 56.18-19); Loader, \textit{Dead Sea Scrolls}, 29-30, 37-46, 38, 110-19, 168-70.
\textsuperscript{227} See also Trenchard, \textit{Ben Sira's View}, 83-84, 255, n. 239.
It uses ἐκβῆλλα, however, in a prohibition. The comment that a sensible wife should not be cast out, may imply that for Ben Sira it is conceivable to divorce a woman who is not regarded as sensible. This way, even if using a prohibition, 7:19 could be a third reference implying that it is possible for Ben Sira to advise his readers to divorce their wives. One can only surmise what the behaviour of an uncontrollable or insensible woman might include.

In the most extensive passage on bad marital relationship there is relatively little pertaining to issues of sexuality. Numerous aspects of such a relationship are examined. Surprisingly, only traces of comments concerning the sexual side of marriage appear. If 25:14-15 are understood as a reference to a polygynous marriage, then issues of sexuality in the rivalry and jealousy of the wives may arise. In 25:21 a woman's beauty receives a negative evaluation. While in the context of a good marriage beauty is a desirable criterion in selecting a wife (36:21[26]), and can be satisfying in itself (36:22[27]), in the context of a bad marriage it is negative. No beauty, (sexual) attractiveness, is worth the heartache an evil wife can cause. Sir 25:21 seems to confirm that Ben Sira does not have a negative attitude toward beauty or sexuality in themselves. His instructions depend on the context and may even stem from personal experience.

As indicated, in 25:25a the term "outlet to water" may refer to a wife who, if not controlled may go astray, and engage in sexual wrongdoing. However, it is merely a conjecture, as the comment is not specified.

While both the author of the Hebrew original and the Greek translation have much to say about the heartache of having a wicked wife and a bad marriage, the anxiety that
usually characterizes the comments on daughters is not as explicit in sayings about wives.

**Sir 42:6a**

MS B

על אשה רעה 6a

6a Upon an evil/wicked wife a seal is wise.

G I

6a ἐπὶ γυναικὶ πονηρᾷ καλὸν σφραγὶς

6a Upon an evil/wicked wife a seal (is) good.

**Context**

The context of Sir 42:6a has already been discussed regarding 41:17a, where it was pointed out that within the wider context of 41:14 - 42:14 there is a list of things of which one should be ashamed (41:17 - 42:1ab), and another list of things of which one should not be ashamed (42:2-8ab). The second list is the immediate context of 42:6a.

**Form**

Within 42:2-8 the formal pattern is as follows: in 42:2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, each stich starts with ἐπὶ 229 to introduce the things of which one should not be

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228 MS B צ[...] has מפסחי ("foolish") instead of רעה ("wicked"). MS M is mutilated: "על אשה מפסחיה[ [...]". From it the following text may be restored: "על אשה רעה: "Upon a woman who plays the fool a seal", which is understood together with 42:1e: "But of these things be not ashamed". See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 479.

229 MS B צ has א[...] in 42:2a.
ashamed. This pattern changes in the following distichs: 42:5b-5c, 6a-6b, 7a-7b, 8a-8b, since the introductory הלו is found only in the beginning of the distichs and not in the stichs within.\(^{230}\) 42:6a belongs to the second group.

Content

It is not specified what the author means by אשה ממסשת\(^{231}\) ("wife/woman who plays the fool") in 42:6a. The term comes from ממס, a word that has the meaning "to be stupid\(^{232}\) and occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, in Ps 119:70 as "unfeeling".\(^{233}\) ממס is not used in the Hebrew Bible. According to Trenchard it is possible that the meaning of אשה נצייתא is equivalent to that of אשה ממסשת ("foolish woman") in Prov 9:13, where it means, within its context, "prostitute".\(^{234}\)

Whatever the exact meaning of אשה ממסשת in MS B, such a woman should be placed under a seal according to the sage. Perhaps the concern is possible sexual wrongdoing.

It is also noteworthy that the Greek translator retained the meaning evil/wicked (רעה) from B\(^{\text{txt}}\) by using πονηρά rather than translating some form of ממס ("foolish").

As has been noted before, the term evil or wicked wife\(^{235}\) is very much part of the vocabulary of the book and is used in a rather broad sense, usually depending on the

\(^{230}\) Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 93, 263, n. 322, includes 42:8ab in the first group of stichs, noting that 42:8b is an exception.

\(^{231}\) Restored word; see the footnote on the text.

\(^{232}\) Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 356.

\(^{233}\) ממס occurs in Job 33:25 with the meaning "grow fresh", but the original form of the word is controversial. See also Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 888.

\(^{234}\) Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 264, n. 325.

\(^{235}\) Its Hebrew version is only used in the construct form in Prov 6:24 (asha רעה).
context. It is employed in 25:16 (γυναικὸς πονηρᾶς), in 25:25 (γυναίκι πονηρᾶ), and in 26:7 (γυνή πονηρά).  

The usual word for seal in the Hebrew Bible is <tj (or <twj as in the text, translated with σφραγίς). Apart from closing (or securing) and making a document legally valid it had several other uses, among them the closing of various other items such as vessels. The seal therefore made the contents of the vessel inaccessible or concealed. Thus the use of the seal in the case of the woman in Sir 42:6a may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, if such a woman is considered foolish or irrational, she should be kept at home so she cannot do harm to her husband by talking foolishly in public. It may be the case especially if the word "evil/wicked" and not "foolish" is accepted, for an evil wife may try to bring shame to her husband deliberately. Also she could be compared to the loud and scolding wife in 26:27ab (G II and Syr.), who, like a battle trumpet can turn married life into a "war" (26:27d). For Ben Sira, however, it is not only women who should be careful with their speech. He also has the same concern regarding himself, for example in his prayer in 22:27 - 23:1 where σφραγίδα is also used (22:27b).

Secondly, if she is not only foolish but, as suggested by Trenchard's comparison to the prostitute in Prov 9:13, also unchaste, therefore unreliable, sexually unfaithful, that is another reason to keep her at home: she should be concealed so that she cannot go out in search of illicit sexual liaisons. Her concealment would prevent her even from being seen by others, namely men other than her husband. This way her...

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236 The only Hebrew extant text in Ben Sira for this expression is Sir 42:6a.
238 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 93.
239 For other similar comments see 25:8c and 14:1a where there is no allusion to women.
inaccessibility to other men would be emphasized, together with the fact that she and
her sexuality solely belong to her husband. A daughter should be similarly kept away
in her room, under the close watch of her father in Sir 42:11ef. 42:12a in the same
passage even advises the reader not to let the daughter reveal her beauty to any
male. ²⁴⁰

Sir 42:6a may reflect anxiety regarding an untrustworthy wife, who should be
secluded and prevented from engaging in sexual misconduct.

III.3. Women Who Have Influence/Power over Men

Sir 9:1, 2

MS A

1 Do not be jealous of the wife of your bosom,
lest you teach (her) evil against you. ²⁴³
2 Do not be jealous yourself to a woman,
to cause her to tread upon your heights. ²⁴⁴

G I

1 μὴ γυναῖκα τοῦ κόλπου σου
μηδὲ διδαξῆς ἐπὶ σεαυτὸν παιδεῖαν πονηρὰν.

²⁴⁰ For the translation issues of this line, see the discussion of Sir 42:9-14 in ch. II.
²⁴¹ שִׁמְךָ can mean "soul", "breath = life", "person", "self".
²⁴² The word עָקָקִית from עָקָק ("to be jealous") does not fit here; it is probably the repetition of the
verb in Sir 9:1. דָעֵה from דָעַם ("to give") in G I makes more sense. Also Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12,
supports it with עָקָק. This way 9:2a should read: "Do not give yourself to a woman". See also Skehan,
²⁴³ This translation requires the Piel, 2d person, masc. form of the verb לָמַה which means "to
learn" in Qal, but "to teach" in Piel. If it is read as Qal, 3d person, fem., then the meaning would be:
"lest she learn evil against you". In the context, either version seems acceptable.
²⁴⁴ Read "Do not give yourself to a woman"; see the note on the text.
²⁴⁵ MS A reads "heights", "high places". Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View, 259, n. 265, refers to Deut
32:13a where the Hebrew הנב (“height”, "high place") is translated in LXX with ἑυτῆρα
("strength/power"). LXX also employs ἑυτῆρα in 9:2b for הנב. Skehan, Ben Sira, 215-16, 218,
translates "dignity", and argues that similar imagery is used in Deut 33:29.
2 μὴ δῶς γυναίκι τὴν ψυχήν σου ἐπιβήναι αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὴν ἰσχύν σου.

1 Do not be jealous of the wife of your bosom, lest you teach (her) an evil lesson against yourself.
2 Do not give yourself\textsuperscript{246} to a woman to cause her to tread upon your strength/power.

Context

The wider setting is Sir 7:1 - 9:16 on social relations. 9:1-9 has various sayings on women, treating wives (9:1 and probably 9:2), the "strange woman" (9:3 I in MS A, 9:3 in G I), prostitutes (9:3 II,\textsuperscript{247} 9:6 and probably 9:7),\textsuperscript{248} female musicians (9:4), virgins (9:5) and other men's wives (9:8-9).

Form

9:1 is similar in form to 9:3 I, 4, 5, 6 and to the extra bicolon (9:3 II) of MS A between 9:3 and 9:4. The first cola of 9:1, 3 I, 6 start with the prohibitive ἦλ ("do not") + verb; the second colon in each begins with Ἰπ (lest) + verb. In 9:3 II, 4, 5 the pattern is slightly different, with their second cola still starting with the construction of Ἰπ and the verb, but the prohibitive ἦλ + verb found at the end of the first cola and not at the beginning. 9:2 also starts with ἦλ ("do not") + verb but its second colon has Ἰλ (constructed with the verb that follows = "to …") instead of Ἰπ. 9:7, 8, 9 do not have a distinctive pattern.

\textsuperscript{246} The meanings of ψυχή include "soul", "life", "breath", "self", among other things.
\textsuperscript{247} Only extant in MS A.
\textsuperscript{248} The translation of 9:7 is mainly based on G I.
The author begins the admonitions on women with advice concerning the assumed reader's own wife. The first half of 9:1 does not say anything about either positive or negative qualities of the woman in question; only that she is the wife of the person addressed by Ben Sira. The root נַעֲרָּה is frequently used in various forms in the Hebrew Bible to convey the notion "to be jealous", sometimes "to excite one's jealousy". There is a concentration of the occurrences of this word in the prophets, where, with one exception, the subject is always God. In contrast, wisdom literature describes human jealousy in 19 occurrences.²⁴⁹

Jealousy may be a violent emotion that is caused by the fear of losing a person or an object.²⁵⁰ However in Sir 9:1 it is not clear whether the husband has any reason to be jealous or not. In other words, whether he is in danger of losing, even if temporarily, authority over his wife and over her sexuality that belongs solely to him. That the concern of jealousy here is rather theoretical and not real seems to be suggested by three facts. Firstly, if there was a real danger of adultery on the part of the wife, the negative advice in 9:1a ("Do not be jealous of the wife of your bosom")²⁵¹ would be in tension with the attitude of the author, who elsewhere so vehemently advises the readers to keep an eye on their women, wives as well as daughters, lest they be sexually promiscuous. Secondly, there is no rival party referred to in 9:1, who, with the jealous individual and his partner, might constitute the triangle that in a real case of adultery, even if suspected, represents the "fundamental constellation of

²⁵⁰ Reuter, "נַעֲרָּה," 49.
²⁵¹ MS A and G I agree in this line.
jealousy". Thirdly, the second part of the verse ("lest you teach [her] evil against you", MS A) suggests that the concern lies somewhere else.

It might be that the writer, who is aware that marriages can turn bitter because of jealousy, is simply trying to avoid behaviour that would produce a scorning, garrulous wife. Theoretically a woman should not be jealous of her husband who has a sexual relationship with another woman, for his actions do not constitute adultery unless the woman, i.e. the third party is married or betrothed. However, the fact that legally speaking the husband did not commit adultery and is not subject to punishment does not mean that what he has done is not considered infidelity in the eyes of his wife. In practice it is very much possible that the husband's actions raise jealousy in the wife, even if that is not the concern of the texts that deal with the issue of extramarital intercourse in the Hebrew Bible.

The concern of jealousy on the wife's part, however, is found in other contexts, namely in stories about polygynous situations (Rachel and Leah, Gen 29:31 -30:22), or in situations where the handmaid became the wife of the master (Sarah and Hagar, Gen 21:9-10). Also if the issue of regulating the fair treatment of the offspring of the unloved wife is dealt with (Deut 21:15-18), then it is easy to imagine that the wife who considered herself to be secondary or "less-loved" felt jealous fury. Nevertheless in the comment "Do not be jealous of the wife of your bosom" the main concern is the husband's jealousy. Therefore the idea of polygyny or rivalry between wives seems unlikely.

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252 Reuter, "םֵדֶך", 50.
253 The meaning of G I is the same with minor variations in the wording.
254 See more on adultery in ch. IV.
255 See more on rivalry between wives later in the chapter.
Another interpretation of Sir 9:1 suggested by Trenchard is that the husband himself has something to hide, and through his own jealousy he might be the one to give his wife some ideas regarding adultery; in other words she might find out if her husband was, in turn, being unfaithful to her. Camp takes this argument a step further by saying that, in the light of the context, Sir 9:1-9, which has instructions regarding various kinds of women, including loose women, the problem is perhaps not that the husband might teach his wife jealousy, but rather that he might teach her infidelity. A woman may be more inclined to going astray, especially if her attention is brought in any form to the issue.

In addition we may note the argument of Reuter, who understands \( \text{סנה} \) in Prov 14:30 and in Cant 8:6 as passion rather than jealousy, pointing out that jealousy is the actualization of passion if it is confronted by a threat. Perhaps the author's concern is the actualization of the wife's passion regardless of whether a real or imagined threat is involved: the husband should not be an accessory in any way in the wife's becoming aware of her own sexuality or passion, because he may not be able to control what the wife may use her sexuality for.

As noted above, the verb \( \text{סנה} \) does not seem to fit the sentence if translated "do not be jealous" (9:2). If however it is understood as the expression of sexual passion, as suggested above, it could convey the following idea: do not get over-passionate about a woman because it will cause you to lose control and she will tread upon your heights (\( \text{סנה} \)) or strength (\( \text{סנה} \)). This way the meaning is not far from the corrected reading: do not give yourself to a woman.

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258 Reuter, "\( \text{סנה} \)," 50.
The woman in 9:2 is not specified; thus several interpretations may arise concerning her person. She may be the wife of the person being instructed, or a woman other than a wife. Both possibilities are supported by the immediate context, as various types of women are concerned in Sir 9:1-9.

Both the terms "to tread upon heights" (MS A) and "to tread upon your strength/power" (G I) convey the notion of being in firm control. This idea is in contrast with what the author imagines as the ideal relation between a man and a woman. As ch. IV. 3. will show, Ben Sira's attitude to desire was probably influenced by the Hellenistic, especially Stoic and Cynic ideal of self-contentment, self-sufficiency (αὐτόκεισθαι) to a certain degree and it may have bearings on his view on women and sexuality.

It is also pointed out in the next chapter that a significant issue for the author was to avoid falling into the "hand" of desires, including sexual ones, gluttony, drunkenness, and committing sin as a consequence. Eron's argument is probably correct in the author's case, that, in order to lead a virtuous life a man needs to be autonomous, free from being controlled by any power other than the fear and love of God, both in mind and body.259 In Sir 9:2 the controlling power or danger is a woman, either one's own wife or someone else, as noted above. The situation of 9:2 may be compared to Sir 47:19-21, where Solomon through sexuality came under the control of his wives and let them rule over him.

Another interpretation of 9:2 may be that the woman in question is a person with whom one should not have relations, for example a prostitute. Similar concern is found in Sir 26:19-21 where the young men are instructed to find a woman who is both fertile and virtuous. Therefore the offspring born into the marriage will be the rightful heirs of the father. This situation is contrasted with someone who does not heed the advice and spends his strength or vigour on unchaste women, for example prostitutes. The possible consequences of consorting with prostitutes are detailed in ch. IV.1. One of them may be briefly referred to here. If a person frequently visits prostitutes he may lose his inheritance to them. This lifestyle may also ruin his health or even result in an early death.

In conclusion, the threat of being controlled and losing control may be a concern in 9:2. If it is in the context of marriage the passage reflects a negative attitude towards passions, which suggests that one should not get overly passionate even with one's own wife.

**Sir 33:20ab**

20ab A son and a wife, a friend and a neighbour, do not let rule/have power in your life.

G I

20ab υἱός καὶ γυναῖκι, ἀδελφῷ καὶ φίλῳ
μὴ δῶς ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ σὲ ἐν ζωῇ σου

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260 Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 88, 259, n. 273, has ἄδειφος (*"brother") here. G I also has "brother" in this place.

261 Also has the meaning "friend", "the other".

262 The term in G I ("over you" = בָּל) is missing from MS E.
20ab To a son and a wife, a brother and a friend
do not give power over you in your life.

Context

The wider context is 33:19-33 which has comments on attitudes towards one's property and servants. 33:19-24 calls the hearers to be independent and advises them not to give control over their lives to others. (The call itself is found in 33:19.) 33:20ab is found in this section as it contains the people to whom one should not give power over one's life. 33:25-33 conclude with teachings on the treatment of slaves.

Form

There are no distinctive formal characteristics.

Content

As pointed out in the context, Sir 33:20ab is part of the sayings in which the author advises the hearers not to give authority over their lives to others. The "others" are specified as "son", "wife", "friend"263 or "neighbour" (in MS E), people who are either close family members or important individuals in one's social environment. In Sir 9:2 a situation is depicted where a wife may have control over her husband, perhaps using her sexuality, perhaps in other ways. Whether or not this is the case in 33:20ab regarding the wife is uncertain. However, the immediate context may give some clues regarding "son", "friend" and "neighbour" in 33:20ab.

263 "Brother" in G 1.
It seems that the author's concern is a well known issue in wisdom writings in general. Natural orders should not be reversed by the rule of an inferior (wife or son) over the husband and father who is the head of the family. Also one should be entitled to enjoy the fruit of one's labour, as opposed to a situation where the man by losing or distributing his wealth too early, is left at the mercy of others, including neighbours and children.  

There is no implication that the wife's control is of a sexual nature. Therefore Sir 33:20ab does not betray much about the sage's attitudes toward sexuality.

III.4. Rivalry between Wives

Sir 26:5-6

G I

5 Απὸ τριών εὐλαβήθη ἡ καρδία μου, καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ τετάρτῳ προσώπῳ ἔδειθην.  
διαφοράν πόλεως, καὶ ἐκκλησίαν ὅχλου, καὶ καταψευσμόν, ὑπὲρ θάνατον πάντα μοχθηρά.  
6 Ἀθλος καρδίας καὶ πένθος γυνῆ ἀντίς ἡμοῖος ἐπὶ γυναικὶ καὶ μάστιξ γλώσσης πᾶσιν ἐπικοινωνοῦσα.

5 With three things my heart is concerned  
and of the fourth I need;  
slander in the city, and the assembly of the people,  
and a false testimony are all worse than death.  
6 A woman jealous (lit. rival) of another woman is heartache and grief  
and a scourging tongue is like all (the others).

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264 For similar concerns see Sir 14:15; Pss 109:11b; 128:2; Eccl 2:17-23; 3:13; 5:19.  
265 Literally means "I need" from δέω II; Györkösy-Kapitánffy-Tegyei, Ógörög-Magyar Nagyszótár, 228-29. Ziegler, Sirach, 246 has ἐφοβήθην from φοβέω meaning in the perfect "to be afraid"; cf. Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 57, 231, n. 3; also, he considers προσώπῳ unnecessary (231, n. 2).  
266 Read "and of the fourth I am afraid"; see the footnote on the text.
The context and form of the passage have been discussed earlier in this chapter regarding Sir 26:1-27. We may note here that 26:5-6 is in the midst of sayings on positive marital relationships (26:1-4, 13-18) and negative ones (26:7-9).

Content

In the context of Sir 26:1-27 following the positive exaltation of a good wife (26:1-4) the numerical proverb of 26:5-6 is one of the three passages that refer to a situation where a man is either married to more than one wife, or married to one and is about to take another wife. Sir 26:5-6, like Sir 28:15, probably belongs to the first group.

Excursus 7: Polygyny

Polygyny is well attested in the Hebrew Bible. The earliest reference is the marriage of Lamech to Adah and Zillah (Gen 4:19). In the stories about the patriarchs the most well-known occurrence is the marriage of Jacob to Rachel and Leah (Gen 29:16-30), and later to their handmaids, Bilhah und Zilpah (Gen 30:3, 9-13). Sarah also gave her handmaid Hagar to Abraham as his wife (Gen 16:3). One of the reasons behind taking more than one wife was to produce offspring in the case where the first wife proved to be barren.

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267 Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 344, understands 26:6b to be a reference to all the three elements of 26:5, this way comparing the fourth element in 26:6 to the three elements in 26:5. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 57, 233, nn. 11-12, gives a different translation for 26:6b: "And a tongue-lashing shares it with everyone".

268 Similar type of numerical proverb is found in Sir 23:16-17; 26:28; 50:25-26.

269 As discussed earlier in the chapter, Sir 25:8 may be another reference to such a situation, however, it is not necessarily so. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 347, takes Sir 25:14-15 also as a reference to a polygynous marriage, where the rival wives are each other's "foes" (25:14a) and "enemies" (25:14b).

According to Deut 21:15-18 polygyny was legislated for in the Mosaic period.\textsuperscript{271} The passage prescribed that the sons of both the favoured and non-favoured wife had to be treated equally by their father. One form of polygamy, namely polyandry, was the levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10),\textsuperscript{272} where the main purposes of the union were to raise a family for the deceased man to perpetuate his name, and to keep the inherited land in the family. However, it also kept the widows in the family, where their sexuality and work capacity were used, and on the other hand they belonged to a family where they were provided with a livelihood.\textsuperscript{273}

Polygyny in the history of the Davidic dynasty is attested by the marriages of David himself (1 Sam 25:43; 2 Sam 5:13-16) and by the famous harem Solomon kept (1 Kgs 11:3). The latter cases especially, indicate that there were other motivations behind a polygynous marriage than procreation: love, sexual desire (especially between David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11) and the need for political alliances.

It seems that the custom of taking more than one wife was still existent as a norm in Ben Sira's time; otherwise his comments on the issue would not be necessary.

The first three elements of the proverb in Sir 26:5-6 (26:5cd) do not contain any reference to women at all. Only the fourth element (26:6a) speaks of wives, who are rivals of each other. The term "rival" is expressed with ἄντιζηλος. Even though the

\textsuperscript{271} Harrison, "Polygamy," 901.
\textsuperscript{273} See also Harrison, "Polygamy," 901.
Hebrew version of 26:6 is not extant, the same term is found in the LXX version of Sir 37:11a ("[Do not consult] with a woman with regard to her rival"), another passage taken as a reference to rivalry between wives or between an existing and a prospective wife. Behind it the Hebrew uses the word רַעֲרָה ("rival wife", "other wife", "wife of a man who has another wife") in 37:11a, the root of which means "show hostility toward" (from רָה). It is also used in 1 Sam 1:6. If the word ἐπικοινωνοῦσα (used together with πᾶς) is understood in 26:6b as "is like all", i.e. "the others", then it expresses a comparison between the fourth element of the proverb ("a wife jealous [lit. rival] of another wife", 26:6a) and the three elements found in 26:5cd ("slander in the city, and the assembly of the people, and a false testimony").

The result of rivalry between wives in a polygynous marriage is not only "heartache and grief"; the activity of the wives ("scourging tongue", 26:6b) would be harder to bear than death for the husband. It is not specified what the "scourging tongue" means, or how the situation caused grief and heartache. Several assumptions may be made. It may have been that the husband loved one wife more than the other as in Gen 29:30 or in 1 Sam 1:5. Also one of them may have been barren, resulting in jealousy toward the other wife (Gen 30:1). The barren wife may have even been mocked by the other one (1 Sam 1:6). If both the wives had children who were not treated equally by their father, it may well have caused jealousy between their mothers. This may be reflected in the legislation in Deut 21:15-18. Rivalry could have also included sexual issues.

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274 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 818.
It is not certain what exactly caused the heartache for the husband in Sir 26:5-6. However, the story of Sarah and Hagar may be cited, where Sarah's intention to send Hagar away caused grief to Abraham (Gen 21:11). "Grief and heartache" are not restricted to the husband only in 26:5-6; it may be assumed that in such a marriage everyone suffered equally. The same applies to the "scourging tongue". Trenchard, however, on the basis of the translation of πᾶσιν ἑπικοινωνοῦσα as "shares it with everyone", suggests that the rival wife does not hide her quarrel with the other wife. On the contrary, she may openly criticize her husband, probably because her rival is favoured more than she. In this case it is the husband who suffers most from the "scourging tongue". The marriage depicted in 26:5-6 is compared with situations which are significant concerns for the author in the context of honour and shame. The honour of a person before others is a significant issue for the author.

In summary, even if not explicitly stated, rivalry could have included rivalry regarding issues of sexuality between the wives.

**Sir 28:15**

As will be discussed below, the subject of the following verse is not certain. However, as the term γλώσσα τρίτη may denote a rival wife, Sir 28:15 is included in this subchapter.

15 γλώσσα τρίτη γυναῖκας ἁνδρείας ἐξέβαλεν καὶ ἑστέρεσεν αὐτὰς τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν.

15 The third tongue has cast out courageous women and deprived them of the fruit of their labour.

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Context

The wider context of 28:15 is 27:22 - 28:26, where comments can be found on the following topics: 27:22- 28:1 concerns attitudes such as malice, hypocrisy, anger and vengeance; 28:2-7 calls for forgiveness; 28:8-26 reflects on the hurts one's tongue can cause. 28:15 is found here; its immediate context is 28:14-15, where 28:14 also has a comment on the "third tongue".

Form

There are no formal characteristics.

Content

In Sir 28:15 the term γλῶσσα τρίτη ("third tongue") refers to someone who is a slanderer, whose actions can lead to virtuous or courageous women being divorced by their husbands (cast out/driven out of their own home) as the verb εξέβολεν suggests. The reason for divorce may be false accusation regarding perhaps the virtuous women's chastity, this way depriving them from what they have the right to enjoy: appreciation from their husband, financial security or even wealth and the pleasure they have through their children.

It is not clear who the slanderer is in 28:15. One of the situations that might be supposed behind this verse is a polygynous marriage, where one wife is rival of the other, and she is the slanderer. As was noted above, marrying more than one wife may still have been the norm in the time of Ben Sira and the translator, and the word
behind "rival wife" originates in a term denoting "show hostility toward" (יִרְאַת). This term in itself betrays a lot about the nature of relationships that may have existed between rival wives in practice. The problems arising from such unions have also been detailed above. Sir 28:15 seems to affirm that there were cases in which one of the wives was actually sent away, probably by the husband, on the grounds of false accusation. It is not clear whether the wife in 28:15 had any children and whether they were cast out as well. In fact, there is hardly any comment on the circumstances; one can only conjecture what they might have been. The main concern in this comment is the wife who is sent away. In this aspect it is different from Sir 26:6a and 37:11a where all parties of the polygynous relationship are affected and concerned. However, the slanderer is not necessarily a rival wife in this situation.

Sir 28:15 belongs to those comments that view a good wife in a context other than her husband. Why she is considered courageous or good is not specified.

Although the author has much to say about bad wives, here we see him speaking of good ones and even of their rights. In 28:15 the implication is that she has rights to the fruit of her labour. The tone of the verse suggests that an injustice has been done to somebody, and this injustice is condemned by the writer. While the text is isolated and too general to reveal anything about the author's attitude to sexuality, it is still remarkable for the following reasons. It implies that the good wife should enjoy some sort of protection. This way the sage condemns an injustice that has been done to a wife.

Sir 37:11a

Sir 37:11a may have only an allusion to matters pertaining directly to sexuality. Therefore its discussion here is brief.

MS D

11a (Do not consult) with a woman with regard to her rival

G I

11a μετὰ γυναικὸς περι τῆς ἀντιξήλου αὐτῆς

11a (Do not consult) with a woman about her rival

Context

As noted regarding 36:21(26)-26(31), the wider context is Sir 36:18(23) - 37:15. The immediate setting is 37:7-15, concerning people whom one should or should not consult for advice.

Form

37:11a is the first among nine sentences which give instructions on persons from whom one should not seek advice. The introduction "Do not consult" is found only in 37:10. In Hebrew only eight sentences are found; G I and Syr. have a ninth and tenth

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277 The Hebrew text of MS B is the same except that it has "עלא ("concerning") instead of לא Bmg.

278 Supplied from 37:10.

279 Supplied from 37:10.
sentence. Among the four distichs, three start with מָצַּח ("with"), followed by the person with whom one should not consult. 37:11a fits into this pattern.

Content

37:11a in both texts depicts a situation where the husband either already has two wives, or being married to one woman, is going to marry another one, resulting in a polygynous marriage, where one woman is the rival (רָאָה) of the other. The problems that may arise from such a marriage have already been detailed regarding Sir 26:6a. There is another aspect added to these issues in 37:11a: the issue of seeking advice from one woman about her rival. The immediate context (37:11) already suggests that the persons listed as potential advisers should not be consulted because for some reason they are not in the position to give advice. Either they are not capable, or have no interest or, on the contrary, have too much interest in the matter to be discussed. 37:11a belongs to the last group. The woman not to be consulted is involved too much, especially emotionally, in the situation which would usually include sexual rivalry. Also, as pointed out above the word used for rival wife (רָאָה) comes from רָאֵל II, which means "to show hostility toward". If a relationship between the two women is characterized by hostility on one part, namely on the part of the רָאֵל, it can hardly be expected from the other wife to give an objective opinion about her. In conclusion, jealousy, rivalry could include rivalry regarding sexual issues.

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280 Lit. rival wife, other wife (wife of a man who has another wife).
III.5. Various Parallels on Good and Bad Wives/Women or Marital Relationships

Sir 26:22-27

G II

22 γυνὴ μισθία ἵηση σιάλω λογισθήσεται, ὑπανδρός δὲ πύργος θανάτου τοῖς κρωμένοις λογισθήσεται.
23 γυνὴ ἄσεβης ἀνόμω μερὶς δοθήσεται, εὑσεβής δὲ δίδοται τῷ φοβουμένῳ τὸν κύριον.
24 γυνὴ ἄσχημων ἀτιμίαν κατατρίψει, θυγάτηρ δὲ εὐσχήμων καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐντραπήσεται.
25 γυνὴ ἀδιάτρεπτος ὡς κύων λογισθήσεται, ἡ δὲ ἔχουσα αἰσχύνην τὸν κύριον φοβηθήσεται.
26 γυνὴ ἄνδρα ἵδιον τιμῶσα σοφὴ πάσι φανήσεται, ἀτμαξουσα δὲ ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ ἄσεβης πᾶσι γνωσθήσεται.
27 γυνὴ μεγαλοφύνος καὶ γλυσσώδης ὡς σάλπιγξ πολέμων εἰς τροπῆν θεωρηθήσεται.

22 A woman for hire/a prostitute is regarded as spittle, but a married woman as a tower of death to those who embrace her.
23 A godless wife will be given as a portion to a lawless man, but a pious wife is given to whoever fears the Lord.
24 A shameless woman wears out reproach, but an exemplary ("appropriate") daughter will be embarrassed even before her husband.
25 A headstrong wife will be regarded as a dog, but one who has a sense of shame will fear the Lord.
26 A wife who honours her husband will seem wise to all, but the one who dishonours him in her pride will be known to all as impious. Happy (is) the husband of a good wife, For the number of his years will be doubled.
27 A loud-voiced and garrulous wife will be regarded as a battle trumpet signalling attack, and every person like this will spend (his) life amid the turbulence of war.

The context and form of this passage, as part of Sir 26:1-27, have been discussed above in this chapter. It follows a combination of comments on good and bad marital
relationships in 26:1-18, including teachings on daughters (26:10-12), and 26:19-21 on selecting a suitable wife.

Form

There is no distinctive formal pattern.

Content

26:22-27 (together with 26:19-21) continues the section on wives, with loosely connected comments on various types of women, some of them repeating ideas already touched upon earlier within 26:1-18. 26:22 has a parallel of a prostitute (lit. woman for hire) and a married woman, who is, as the context implies, an adulteress. The word "spittle" in connection with the former suggests the contempt with which a prostitute was usually viewed in Ben Sira's time.\(^{281}\) As chapter IV.1. will explain, the consequences of associating with prostitutes were different from those of a sexual relationship with a married woman. In the former case the consequences may have included loss of money, loss of reputation, and deterioration of health. The lifestyle that accompanied this activity may even have led to the physical destruction of one's own life.

As the parallel in 26:22 implies, using the term "tower of death", the situation was different in the case of consorting with another man's wife. Skehan suggests, that the term πόργος θανάτου should be translated "deadly snare" instead of "tower of

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\(^{281}\) See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 351.
death”, since, he argues, in Eccl 7:26 women and snares are also associated.\textsuperscript{282} In the latter passage מֶטְרְדֵּם is used for "snares", the same term that is employed in Sir 9:3 in the singular מַטְרְד, and similar images of "snare"/"net" are frequently used in various forms throughout the wisdom writings of the Hebrew Bible. Also in the Damascus Document the three nets/snares of Belial, who is sent to Israel to lead the people to apostasy, are sexual wrongdoing, riches, and the defiling of the temple (4.14-18). According to 4.20a-21a the builders of the wall will be caught in two of the snares: sexual wrongdoing and taking two wives during their (masc.) lifetimes. These builders may be false prophets or teachers (Ezek 13:10).\textsuperscript{283}

According to Sir 23:23a, a woman who committed adultery has disobeyed the law of the Most High, which is the greatest offence. The second greatest offence concerning adultery is against the husband of the adulteress (23:23b). Thirdly, the woman has brought children into the marriage which were not the rightful heirs of her husband.

In Sir 26:22 there are no details about the circumstances of the adultery itself. Even though there is no reference to illicit children, the act itself was still an offence against both the law of God and the wronged husband. The death penalty was probably not in force in Ben Sira's time anymore. Nevertheless both parties of the adulterous relationship may have had to face some consequences: public shaming by stripping, perhaps even scourging, and divorce in the woman's case, and public apprehension (Sir 23:21b), and the revenge of the offended husband who may demand

\textsuperscript{282} Patrick W. Skehan, “Tower of Death or Deadly Snare? (Sir 26:22),” \textit{CBQ} 16 (1954), 154.

\textsuperscript{283} For the problems CD 4.20a-21a presents see Loader, \textit{Dead Sea Scrolls}, 107-25, 110-18.
compensation. Goodfriend even suggests premature death at the hands of God, or spiritual ruin.\textsuperscript{284}

In 26:23, in contrast to the good wife in Sir 26:3 who is a "good portion" or a gift to the man who fears the Lord, the lawless man's portion is a "godless wife", someone suiting him in wickedness.\textsuperscript{285} The thought of 26:3 returns in the second half of 26:23 as a promise to the man who fears the Lord, since he will receive a blessing in the form of a pious wife. The term "pious wife" implies that the woman herself is God-fearing. Similar is the thought in Prov 19:14 that a sensible wife is from the Lord. The parallel between riches and a sensible wife here implies that while financial assets are things one can count on, a sensible wife can only be allotted by God. This may also be true in Sir 26:23b, especially because the devout wife is only allotted to a God-fearing husband. With this comment Ben Sira acknowledges that there are both devout men and women, by setting the same standard for them.

26:24-25 does not have very tight parallels on bad and good women. A woman without shame (26:24a) cannot be helped, for the sense of shame she once might have had is gone; but a daughter who behaves appropriately (26:24b) does not lose her sense of shame even before her own husband. The term "headstrong" appears in 26:25a as, again, a characteristic of a woman. It is not specified why she is regarded as "headstrong", but the fact that she is compared to a dog (κόων) indicates that she is despicable in the eyes of the author, since the word "dog" (κόων in LXX and חל in BHS) is identified with a male prostitute in Deut 23:18. The theme of the fear of

\textsuperscript{284} Goodfriend, "Adultery," 85.
\textsuperscript{285} Cf. also Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 351.
the Lord returns in 26:25b in a different context, implying that a woman with a sense of shame, in contrast with the headstrong wife, will also have the fear of the Lord.

Another aspect of the wife’s relationship to her husband is found in 26:26, comparing a wife who honours (26:26a) and a wife who dishonours (26:26b) her husband: a respectful wife will seem wise to everyone, but a proud one is termed "impious".

Even though 26:26 is a positive comment on the wife, she is viewed in context of her husband: whether she is wise or impious depends on the way she behaves regarding her husband. On the other hand, as Skehan points out, the author again sets the same standard for both husband and wife regarding wisdom and the fear of God: the wise woman (26:26a) fears the Lord (26:25b). The thoughts of 26:26cd merely repeat the message of 26:1ab.

26:27 gives the picture of a woman whose traits are in contrast with those of the woman in 26:14a. The former is not only loud as a "battle trumpet" but also chatters and maybe even gossips. The image of the battle from the first half of the verse returns in the second half, comparing the life of the husband married to such a woman to the "turbulence of war".

In summary, while Sir 26:22-27 concerns good and bad marital relationships, it also has teachings on sexual wrongdoing. To some extent the themes of 26:1-18 (and 26:19-21) are repeated in loose parallels. While a negative attitude toward prostitution and adultery (26:22) is not a new topic in the book, it is placed in the context of the fear of the Lord. In the light of this, women may be called godless (26:23a),

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288 See the following chapter.
shameless (26:24a), and headstrong (26:25a), because they are unchaste or their sexuality cannot be controlled. Conversely, the pious (26:23b), "appropriate" (26:24b) women and those who have a sense of shame (26:25b) may be exemplary, for they are chaste and sexually moral women. Their behaviour is viewed with regard to their husbands (26:24b, 26). This suggests that sexuality is viewed negatively if it is illicit, and sexual misconduct is connected with godlessness. To place the comments about chaste/unchaste women, or shame/shamelessness in the context of the fear of the Lord is remarkable in the G II text of Sir 26:22-27.

III.6. Conclusion

The author has both negative and positive comments on marital relationships. Some of them are isolated and do not betray much about sexual attitudes. The idea of "evil wife" or "wickedness of wife" frequently appears in the book (esp. 25:13-26). It is not always specified what these "wickedness" or "evil" means in these contexts. As noted above, wives may be called wicked because they bring shame on their husbands or, perhaps through sexuality, try to gain control over them. This certainly seems to be one of the fears of the writer. This may be suggested in Sir 9:1-2 as well.

It is important to see that the wife's beauty as part of sexual attractiveness is not negative in itself. It can delight the husband. It is especially demonstrated in both Hebrew and Greek texts in 26:13, and in the Hebrew text of 26:16, while the translator of the latter views beauty in the context of the husband perhaps to confirm the message of the previous verse (26:15) that the wife's sexuality is reserved only for the husband. Remarkably, the wife's beauty is compared to sacred space in 26:17-18. According to 36:21(26) attractiveness appears to be a criterion in selecting a wife.
While 25:21 suggests that beauty is not worth the heartache a bad wife causes, and one should not choose a wife only for her beauty, the positive evaluation of beauty as part of sexuality shown in the above passages suggests that the sage views it in the context of good and bad marriages and does not consider it bad in itself.

On the other hand, while good marital relationships exist in the view of the sage, such as those where the wife can make her husband happy even without wealth (26:4), and by implication good marriages include good sexual relationships, it appears that sexuality that is dangerous for some reason receives more attention than sexuality that is safe, i.e. which does not cause anxiety. We may note here that a husband's sexuality may also be dangerous: first, if he teaches infidelity to his wife by being promiscuous himself (9:1); and second, in a case where he does not have a wife, if he wanders around and sleeps with other women, perhaps stealing other men's wives (36:25[30]-26[31], MS B; 36:25-27, G I). In this situation it is the wife's sexuality that can keep him at home, preventing him from straying away.

Nevertheless, the author's attitude toward sexuality is not negative in general. It seems to depend always on the context: it is dangerous, and worthy to be condemned, in bad marriages, especially if the wife is not chaste, such as in 26:9, where, in the term "wife's sexual wrongdoing", the word πορνεία is employed in a broad sense. In a good marriage attitudes toward sexuality are positive.
CHAPTER FOUR

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR THAT IS EITHER ILLICIT AND/OR DISCOURAGED, INCLUDING APPROACHING PROSTITUTES, VIRGINS, MAIDSERVANTS, AND THE ACT OF ADULTERY

Ben Sira has numerous comments regarding sexual wrongdoing. Some of them also fall into the category of sayings concerning the "strange woman" (הַר נְשָׁyan), a phenomenon that needs to be discussed in detail. In the light of this the passages of this chapter are divided into the following groups:

- warning against consort ing prostitutes and/or against adultery, with special attention to the problem of the "strange woman" (9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9; 23:18-21, 22-27; 25:2d; 26:19-21 [concerning the selection of a suitable wife]; 41:21c[23b], 20b[22a]; 42:8b); the idea of "strangeness" of Solomon's wives (47:19-21)

- attitude towards virgins and maidservants (9:5; 20:4; 30:[19-]20; 41:22ab[24ab])

- unruly/unruled passions (Sir 6:1[2]-3[4]; 18:30 - 19:3; 23:4-6)
IV.1. Prostitution, Adultery, and the Idea of "Strangeness" with Special Attention to the Problem of the "Strange Woman"

Sir 9:3 addresses the issue of the so-called "strange woman". It is found amid sayings concerning women of various standings and statuses in Sir 9:1-9. 9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9 will be discussed in this subchapter. 9:1, 2 are part of chapter III.3 regarding marital relationships. 9:5 is treated in chapter IV.2., concerning the attitude to virgins and maidservants.

Sir 9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9

MS A

166 166

[...]

1 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12, restores סֵחִי.  
2 Should be corrected to כָּשֵׁם ("like fire"), as in G I. Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12, agrees.  
3 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 108, 273, n. 118, suggests the correction to אָהֵב ("love") instead of אהבו ("her lovers") in MS A. G I supports it.  
4 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12, restores [תַּוְהַ].  
5 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12, has מביא ("through a woman's beauty"). G I supports it, as do Skehan, Ben Sira, 218, and Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 273, n. 116.  
7 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 13, restores [תַּוְהַ].  
8 Read ("do not stretch elbow") is suggested by Lévi, Hebrew Text, 13; Skehan, Ben Sira, 218; Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 109, 273-74, n. 121. A similar expression is found in Sir 41:19c.  
9 Read בְּתוּ הָאָזְנוּת ("married woman") with Lévi, Hebrew Text, 13; Skehan, Ben Sira, 215, 218.  
10 Read שִׂיחָה with Lévi, Hebrew Text, 13.
3 I Do not approach a strange woman, lest you fall into her snares.

3 II Do not associate/consort [] a prostitute,

The first half of this colon is clear: lest you get ensnared/caught; the second half does not make sense in its current form. For the argument about the translation "in her flattering/smooth speech" see the discussion on content.

4 Do not sleep with female musicians, lest they burn you with their mouths.  

6 Do not give yourself to a prostitute, lest you surrender (lit. "turn over") your inheritance.

7 This verse is corrupt; its translation is based on G I: Do not look around in the streets of a city, nor wander about in its deserted places.

8 Avert (lit. "hide") your eyes from a lovely woman (lit. "woman of beauty/charm"), and do not look intently at beauty that is not for you.

Through a woman many [] and thus her lovers kindles in fire.

9 With a mistress do not taste/eat/enjoy, [] with him at the table drunken, lest (your) heart incline/toward [] in blood you decline to the [].

G I

3 μὴ ὑπάντα γυναικὶ ἔταμιζομένη, μὴποτε ἐμπέσῃς εἰς τὰς παγίδας αὐτῆς.

11 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 13, has נשים. This translation is based on the use of the Aramaic verb behind יתאמרו ("to sleep"). Note that the term מנה is in the plural ("female musicians"). G I has singular. מנה is a plural masculine. For the correct translation see the detailed argument on the content.

12 "with"; see the note on the text.

13 This idea in 9:7b is supported by the correction of Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12: כך נמזרו נשים ("in the entryways of the city").

14 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12, has a similar idea: במני עלי ("in the entryways of the city").

15 This idea in 9:7b is supported by the correction of Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12: כך נמזרו נשים ("wandering in its wide places").

16 The probable reading is: "through a woman's beauty"; see the note on the text.

17 "have been ruined"; see the note on the text.

18 The corrected reading is: "thus love kindles like fire"; see the notes on the text.

19 Read "married woman"; see the note on the text.

20 "do not stretch elbow" is also acceptable; see the note on the text.

21 "and do not sit down"; see the note on the text.

22 Read "with her"; see the note on the text.

23 Read "toward her"; see the note on the text.

24 Read "pit"; see the note on the text.
4 μετά ψαλλούσης μὴ ἐνδελέχιζη, μήποτε ἄλως ἐν τοῖς ἐπιχειρήμασιν αὐτῆς.

6 μὴ δῴς πόρναις τὴν ψυχὴν σου, ἵνα μὴ ἀπολέσῃς τὴν κληρονομίαν σου.

7 μὴ περιβλέπεσαι ἐν ρώμαις πόλεως καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐρήμοις αὐτῆς μὴ πλανῶ.

8 ἀπόστρεψον ὀφθαλμόν ἀπὸ γυναικὸς εὐμόρφου καὶ μὴ καταμάθανεν κάλλος ἄλλοτριον· ἐν κάλλει γυναικὸς πολλοὶ ἐπιλήφθησαν, καὶ ἐκ τούτου φιλία ὡς πῦρ ἀνακαίεται.

9 μετὰ ὑπάνδρου γυναικὸς μὴ κάθου τὸ σύνολον καὶ μὴ συμβολοκοπήσῃς μετ’ αὐτῆς ἐν οἴνω, μήποτε ἐκκλίνῃ ἡ ψυχὴ σου ἐπ’ αὐτὴν καὶ τῷ πνεύματί σου ὀλίσθης εἰς ἀπώλειαν.

3 Do not meet a woman who is a prostitute, lest you fall into her traps/snares.

4 With a female musician (lit. someone who plays the harp or stringed instrument) The second half of 9:4a seems corrupt: do not (do something) constantly, regularly, lest you become caught in her endeavours.

6 Do not give yourself to prostitutes, lest you lose your inheritance.

7 Do not look around in the streets of a city, nor wander about in its deserted places.

8 Turn an eye away from a shapely woman, and do not gaze upon beauty belonging to another. By a woman's beauty many have gone astray, and from it love lights up like fire.

9 With a married woman do not sit together, nor revel with her at wine, lest your soul incline toward her and in your spirit you slip into destruction.

Context

We have noted in the discussion of 7:27-28 that the wider context is Sir 7:1 - 9:16 on social and religious relations. Among the various sayings on women (9:1-9), 9: 3 I (MS
A, or 9:3 in G I) treats the "strange woman", 9:3 II, 25 6-7 concern prostitutes. 9:4, female musicians and 9:8-9, other men's wives.

Form

Among 9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6 the first cola of 3 I and 6 start with the prohibitive ל ("do not") + verb, the second cola begin with ל (lest) + verb. In 9:3 II, and 4 the pattern is slightly different. Their second cola start with the construction of ל and the verb, but the prohibitive ל + verb is found at the end of the first cola, not at the beginning. 9:7, 8-9 do not have a distinctive pattern.

Content

In Sir 9:3 I (9:3 in G I) the sage advises his hearers against approaching a "strange woman" for the purpose of sexual intercourse. The verb used in MS A is קזרע from קרב ("to draw near", "to approach") 26 and is translated with ὑπαντάω, where the construction of ὑπα + ἀντα has the meaning of an act when a person goes out in order to greet somebody, to meet face to face. The Hebrew term קרב + אל is used in various forms in connection with women in the meaning "come near a woman for sexual

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25 Extant only in MS A.
26 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 851-52.
intercourse” in Gen 20:4; Lev 18:6, 14, 19; 20:16; Deut 22:14; Isa 8:3; Ezek 18:6 and functions as a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Excursus 8: The phenomenon of the ”strange woman”

The figure of the ”strange woman” is used in Prov 2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5 and 22:14. Among them Prov 2:16; 7:5 have הרז אשה. In Prov 5:3, 20 הרז stands alone. Prov 22:14 has the plural הרזות, which Murphy suggests is to be amended to its singular form compared with the similarly singular παρανόμου (“the transgressor”, “the treacherous”, in the Genitive case) from the LXX. In Prov 23:27a he also offers the word הרז (“translated as ἀλλότριος οἶκος, lit. house, household belonging to another, or foreign household in the LXX) in place of נכרה (”prostitute”), to create a parallel with נכרה in 23:27b, rendered as ἀλλότριον (lit. belonging to another or foreign) in the LXX. In Prov 6:24b נכרה stands without הרז as a parallel to אשה רע (“a woman of evil”, “evil/bad woman”) in 6:24a, understood also as an immoral woman, found in the context of a warning against adultery in 6:20-35.

The epithet that creates a parallel with הרז (“strange”, ”different”, ”heterogenous” or ”illicit”) is נכריה (“foreign, alien”). נכריה appears in Prov 2:16b; 5:20b;

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27 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 852; Skehan, Ben Sira, 216. It is also used in Sir 6:19, where the student is encouraged to ”draw near” wisdom. Here the sexual connotation is clear from the context (6:18-31).
28 Roland E. Murphy, ”Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9,” CBQ 50 (1988), 600-603, 600.
29 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 265.
30 Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 618.
7:5b; 23:27b. These epithets are used in various contexts and can have several connotations.

There are various attempts to determine in what sense the "strange woman" is strange and what her "strangeness" means. Some proposals are of potential relevance for our discussion. Streete argues that the "strange" or "foreign" women are non-Israelite women whom exilic and post-exilic writers blamed for turning Israelite and Judahite to "other" deities, angering Yahweh who eventually punished the nation with the exile. These foreign women, if they were adulterous, were a threat to community stability, providing Israelite males with not only illegitimate but non-Israelite children.\(^{31}\) The "strange woman" may be "strange" in another sense. The terms הָרָז and הָנְכִר describe her as an outsider, since, even if she is married, she "will never be completely mastered, and never belong completely within the boundary of the family and patriarchal community … She herself may however possess many men … and her sexual 'looseness' or lack of restriction is conveyed by the term נֵנֶז … Men who accept the invitation of this woman are merely her 'victims,' her 'prey,' and if she has a husband, he has no control over her, becoming himself her victim as she unmans him through public dishonour" (Prov 6:24-35; 7:6-27).\(^{32}\)

On the basis of the words of the הָרָז הָנְכִר herself in Prov 7:14 some scholars have concluded that her sexual act is in connection with the cult, not in terms of

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worshipping foreign gods, but fulfilling religious vows. It is assumed that the woman in Proverbs 7 turned to occasional prostitution in order to fulfil her vow, an offering, which she would not be able to complete without the money of her husband. While it cannot be denied that there is an allusion to offerings and vows in the passage, and even if it is a reference to occasional prostitution in order to pay for a vow that needs to be fulfilled, it seems unlikely that the woman in question has something to do with cultic prostitution.


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While it cannot be excluded that the epithets רכז and ירֵק in connection with the women in Proverbs 1 – 9 refer to foreign nationality, it seems that the main concern of the relevant passages is the woman’s status as an outsider to the prescribed familial or social boundaries. This appears true both in the Hebrew and the LXX Proverbs 1 – 9 and especially in Ben Sira.36

In Prov 2:16-19 a father warns his son about the "strange woman", who has left the husband of her youth, therefore has broken one familial boundary and might be a danger with her seductive words, to the man instructed in the passage. Prov 2:16-19 is found in the context of admonitions delivered by the father to the son to encourage him to embrace wisdom in 2:1-22, following the speech of wisdom herself in Prov 1:22-33. If the son listens and embraces wisdom she will protect him from the אשה רוד (2:16).

In Prov 5:1-11, 15-23 another speech is passed from father to his married son advising him against the "strange woman". The danger here is that the man may leave the wife of his youth for the "strange woman". Prov 5:15 confirms this idea:

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36 Even in LXX Proverbs 1 – 9, despite the additions and changes in the translation, some of which tone down the erotic content of the Hebrew original, the personifications of the strange or foolish woman, apart from serving as metaphors for folly, still concern real issues of sexual immorality, especially those of prostitution and adultery. Such warnings remain elaborated and concrete especially in chs. 5, 6, 7 and 9. For changes in the translation that tone down the erotic, see for instance 5:19, where in the MT the emphasis is on enjoying one's own wife's sexuality itself ("...May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love"), while the translation reads: "...let her be considered your very own and be with you on every occasion, for while indulging in her love you will be increased immeasurably"; see Johann Cook, "Proverbs: Introduction and Translation," in A New English Translation of the Septuagint (ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford University Press, 2007), 621-647, 627. This way the focus is shifted from passion and sexual enjoyment (in a licit relationship) possibly to offspring. William Loader, "The Strange Woman in Proverbs, LXX Proverbs, and Aseneth," in title and date forthcoming (VTSup; Leiden: Brill), aptly observes that in the translation of the relevant passages "positive descriptions of sexual intimacy are more demure", while detailed references to passion that is dangerous remain.
"Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well", where the running, fresh water symbolizes the sexual satisfaction the wife is capable of supplying. Yee in her analysis of the speeches of various persons or figures within Proverbs 1 - 9 makes the point that in Prov 5:20b the son is advised against embracing the bosom of another man's wife, as he is encouraged to embrace wisdom in Prov 4:8b.

As pointed out above in this subchapter, in Prov 6:24 the term אשה רעה does not appear. אשה רעה is used here, which literally means "woman of evil", in this context an adulteress, against whom the father's commands and the mother's teaching (6:20) are said to protect the son (6:24). The advice in the introductory lines of ch. 7 is very similar. The father "commands" his son to call wisdom his "sister" and insight his "intimate friend" (7:1-4), since they will keep him from the אשה רעה, who is an adulteress, as is clear from 7:19-20.

Finally, we may note that the mouth of the הרעה is compared with a deep pit (Prov 22:14), similarly to the נמוכה in Prov 23:27a, and נמוכה is said to be a narrow well (Prov 23:27b).

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37 Cf. Robert B. Chisholm Jr, "'Drink Water from Your Own Cistern': A Literary Study of Proverbs 5:15-23," BS 157 (2000), 397-409, 399. Cook, Septuagint of Proverbs, 284, and Cook, "ה económica," 465-67, argue, that the water imagery in Prov 5:15-20 (5:15-17), usually understood to symbolize male sperm, is also metaphorical and that the translator's concern in the context of Prov 5:1-6, 15-20 is the dangers of folly, things foreign, or foreign wisdom.


39 Heijerman, "Who Would Blame Her," 104-107, in the first paragraph of her threefold portrait of the "strange woman" of Proverbs 7, identifies her as a mother's rival, therefore assuming that the person admonishing the son in 7:1-4 may be his mother. This way the woman is "strange" from the viewpoint of the mother.
In Ben Sira the comment about the strange woman is found among sayings on diverse types of women. The latter fact also helps in affirming that "strangeness" describes a woman who is outside of the prescribed familial or social boundaries. Sir 9:3 I (9:3) is closely related to the following bicolon (9:3 II) and 9:4. 9:3 II and the Greek version (9:3) of 9:3 I clearly identify the woman in question as a "prostitute", or a sexually immoral woman (חננה and γυναικὴ ἐταριζομένη, respectively), with whom one should not "consort/dally" (בנה). In 9:4 the "female musician" can also be understood as a prostitute, as will be discussed below. These comments lack any reference to the "strange woman". 9:6-7 also concerns prostitutes, followed by the warning regarding married women in 9:8-9. In short, Sir 9:3 I (9:3) is surrounded by references concerning prostitution and in the wider context by comments on adultery. Even though there are suggestions that the prostitution of the "strange woman" of Proverbs 7 has something to do with the cult on the basis of 7:14, no similar allusion is found either in Sir 9:3 I (9:3) or in Sir 9:3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9. The theme of intermarriage that is an important issue in the work of Ezra and Nehemiah does not seem to be a concern for Ben Sira, so the concern seems also to have nothing to do with foreignness. In fact, in Sir 47:19-21, where an account of Solomon's sin is given, the author does not refer to intermarriage, or wives of Solomon as foreign. His main accusation is that Solomon gave dominion over his body to women in general.

40 The verb has the meaning "be confiding", "to confide a secret to someone", to gossip". The noun also means "secret", "confidential speech"; cf. also Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 651. The verb used here appears with medieval double * and Aramaizing at the end; cf. Skehan, Ben Sira, 217.
41 See the discussion later in this chapter.
Therefore it can be stated with a fair degree of certainty that Ben Sira's warning in 9:3 I (9:3) concerns either an ordinary prostitute, or a married woman, whose nationality or ethnicity is not clear, and does not seem to be his concern.

It appears that unlike in Proverbs 1 – 9, where the personifications of the strange or foolish woman serve both as symbols of folly and concrete warnings against extramarital sexual liaisons, in Ben Sira they only serve the latter purpose. In these warnings if the "strange woman" is a prostitute but not a married woman, she may be regarded strange as her way of life places her outside the prescribed social boundaries. If she is also a married woman, then her extramarital sexual activity makes her an outsider in relation to the prescribed familial boundaries, both in terms of her family and of the family of the man she consorts with, since compared with one's lawful wife she is an outsider, strange, different, the "other".42

Excursus 9: Prostitution and adultery43

Professional prostitutes in the literal sense were not only known in Israel but to a certain extent tolerated.44 However, Lev 19:29 prohibits prostituting one's

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daughter. Tamar achieved her goal by acting like a prostitute (Genesis 38), and Rahab (Josh 2:4-16) is an especially ambivalent example of the toleration of a prostitute. If a prostitute had children and their paternity was unknown they would not have proper inheritance, as property and status were normally inherited patrilineally. Streeter argues that a female prostitute's sexuality under the biblical law is not owned by any one man and is not dedicated to reproduce heirs within a patrilineal family. This explains the limited number of laws in the biblical codes concerning the behaviour of female prostitutes. This assumption of course could only be applied to professional prostitutes and not to persons in general who simply have had sexual intercourse before marriage. The sexuality of a daughter still living in her father's house belongs to her father until it is transferred to her future husband.

When a girl is neither betrothed nor married and an unmarried man initiates sexual intercourse with her he must pay fifty shekels of silver to the girl's father; he must also marry the girl and may never divorce her (Deut 22:28-29). When a married woman is found to have been promiscuous while living in her father's house she must be stoned to death by the men of her town at the door of her father's house (Deut 22:20-21). A strict standard applies to priests who must not marry a prostitute (Lev 21:7, 14) and also if the daughter of a priest is found to be licentious she must be burned, alive since she has desecrated the sacred person of

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45 Cf. also the prohibition in Deut 23:17-18 concerning temple prostitution.
47 Streeter, *Strange Woman*, 43.
48 Also cf. Erlandsson, "παραληπτόμενη," 100.
her father (Lev 21:9). The sons of Jacob killed Hamor and Shechem for treating their sister as a prostitute (Gen 34:31).

If a woman is within a formal union, that is, married or betrothed, and she has sexual intercourse with any man other than her husband, she is guilty of adultery (πόρνη). The marital status of a person committing adultery is only consequential in the case of the woman, as only a married or betrothed woman is bound to fidelity. She offends her husband and their mutual relationship. A married man, however, is only condemned if he commits infidelity with a married woman. He commits adultery against the woman’s husband, not against the woman herself or against his own wife. At one level adultery is viewed as a transgression against religious boundaries, a capital crime according to Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22 which entails the death of both parties. In Prov 2:17 it is noted that the adulteress has forgotten the “covenant” of her God, which may be a reference to the Decalogue or her marriage vows.

Adultery, however, is a transgression against communal boundaries as well, when it violates the rights of one or more members of the community, threatening the bonds that hold the community together. In this context the reason behind the graveness of the punishment may be found in the patrilineal nature of the society.

49 Hauck-Schulz, “πόρνη,” 585; Goodfriend, “Prostitution,” 505.
50 See Erlandsson, “πόρνη,” 100; Goodfriend, “Prostitution,” 505; Goodfriend, “Adultery,” 82.
52 For the categorizations of adultery as a transgression see Lipka, Transgression, 42-240, 45-47, 168.
in Israel, where the continuity of the family was dependent on acquiring legitimate heirs; therefore it was essential that a mistaken paternity did not occur.\(^5\) Streete argues that female sexual desire was only regarded as "appropriate" when it served to build up the patriarchal household and ultimately the community.\(^6\) Keeping the inheritance within the familial boundaries and not surrendering it to strangers was also an important issue. The latter idea might be behind the father's words in Prov 5:8-14, where the victim of the strange woman may suffer the loss of his sexual vigour and family wealth. Another aspect of the crime of adultery stemmed from the fact that a woman became her husband's property even before entering his household, at the time of her betrothal. From then on any violation of her was a form of adultery. The prohibition of adultery is in proximity to that of theft in Exod 20:14-15 and to the prohibition of coveting the neighbour's properties, including his wife (Exod 20:17). Adultery for a man did not mean the breaking of his own vows of sexual fidelity, but rather the violation of another man's property rights in his wife.\(^7\) Also, a woman who had received another man's semen was no longer of any use to her husband in producing legitimate offspring.\(^8\)

The offended husband could also ask for compensation. According to Prov 6:33-35 not only will the offender suffer beating, loss of honour and disgrace in the

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57 Countryman, *Dirt*, 153-54, who argues that adultery could become an issue for a woman even before marriage since before she became the property of her husband, she was the property of her father (154). This anxiety is apparent in Ben Sira's teachings on daughters; see ch. II.
community,\textsuperscript{59} but the wronged husband will seek revenge and will not be satisfied with compensation or bribe. The latter passage may imply that the treatment of the adulterers was at the offended husband's discretion,\textsuperscript{60} and perhaps also emphasizes that the husband turned against the adulterer instead of his own wife because he was powerless to control her.\textsuperscript{61}

There are also suggestions, that instead of the capital punishment for adultery, divorce was the established practice (Deut 24:1-4). Public stripping of the adulteress is mentioned in Hos 2:5, 12; Jer 13:22-26; Ezek 16:37, 39; 23:26, 29, but in these cases the faithless wife is the symbol of faithless Israel.\textsuperscript{62} In Prov 2:18-19; 5:5; 7:26-27 the reference to death or Sheol may be the revenge of the offended husband (although only in Prov 6:35 do we find an allusion to it), permanent disgrace or dishonour,\textsuperscript{63} execution, premature death at the hands of God, or utter spiritual ruin.\textsuperscript{64} It is not certain, however, whether physical death is meant here.

In Sir 9:3 I (9:3) the meaning of the expression "her snares" is not specified. The word comes from the imagery of hunting. The verb form is דָּחַד. The noun without the suffix can be both דָּחַד and דָּחַד ("hunting net", "trap" or "snare") and the term with this meaning is popular in wisdom literature in various forms (Job 19:6; Ps 116:3; Prov 12:12;

\textsuperscript{59} Lipka, Transgression, 162-63.
\textsuperscript{60} Goodfriend, "Adultery," 83.
\textsuperscript{61} Streete, Strange Woman, 108.
\textsuperscript{62} Goodfriend, "Adultery," 83.
\textsuperscript{63} Streete, Strange Woman, 108.
\textsuperscript{64} Goodfriend, "Adultery," 85.
Eccl 7:26; 9:12; but also found in Ezek 12:13; 19:8). In Sir 9:3 I the feminine מこともある is used. Similarly in Eccl 7:26 it also appears in connection with a woman but in the plural. The images of snares, traps, bonds or restraints are used in a positive sense in Sir 6:24-25, 29-30 regarding the snares of personified wisdom. Even though in Sir 26:22b the term παγίς that renders snares in Sir 9:3, does not appear, and the term πύργος θανάτου ("tower of death") is employed, Skehan translates it as "deadly snare" instead of "tower of death", since, he argues, in Eccl 7:26 "woman" and "snares" are also associated.

Ben Sira does not specify the consequences of being caught by the snare of the strange woman in Sir 9:3 I (9:3). Skehan suggests that the death penalty might not have been in force anymore in Ben Sira's time. If the woman is only a prostitute, then the consequence of the relationship can be for example loss of money, loss of one's inheritance through "the practice of purchasing sexual favours". If she is a married woman, the consequences appear to have been those referred to above, namely revenge of the husband, and again, loss of wealth. The sage may also be concerned that by being seduced and ensnared by a woman, a man may come under the woman's dominion.

66 Skehan, "Tower of Death," 154. In Prov 7:23 a different word is used for snares (πίθ). The context, however, is very similar (esp. 7:22-23), where the movement of the unsuspecting victim walking into his own trap is important. The danger of being captivated by the adulteress is the focus also in Prov 5:20 and 6:25. In the latter the woman's eyes play a role in captivating the victim. The connection between eyes and desire is discussed in ch. II regarding 26:7-12. Comments on the painting of eyelids are found in 2 Kgs 9:30; Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:40. Other seductive techniques and enticements that may be considered a snare with which the woman captivates her victim include "smooth words" (Prov 2:16), "lips (that) drip honey" and "speech … smoother than oil" (Prov 5:3). The adulteress is decorated as a prostitute in Prov 7:10. She looks out for unsuspecting men (7:7). Her house is adorned with linens and her bed is perfumed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon (7:16-17). Myrrh, aloes and cinnamon are also used in Cant 4:14 in the sensual description of the beloved and the combination of these spices is said to arouse sexual desire. Cf. McKinlay, Gendering Wisdom, 92.
67 Skehan, Ben Sira, 325.
68 See Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 121. He also assumes an unwanted long term relationship (120).
through sexuality. From the viewpoint of the man consorting with a prostitute, or committing adultery with the married woman, the shame is that he was captivated by her, succumbing to her seduction and to his own sexual desires, therefore letting the woman, even if temporarily, gain control over him through sexuality.

The verses that follow Sir 9:3 I (9:3), namely MS A's insertion of 9:3 II, 4 (in both versions), are most likely to be concerned with attitudes towards immoral women, as noted above.

In Sir 9:3 II ("Do not associate/consort with a prostitute, lest you get ensnared/caught…") the word בֵּלְכָּל הָרָה is problematic. Skehan sees it as a "jumble of consonants patterned after" מֶמְצַרְרָה used in 9:3 I for "net", "noose", "snare" (מֶמְצַר from מַצֵּר, to hunt). The verb הָלַךְ means "be smooth, slippery", while הָלַךְ is used as "flattering, smooth speech" in Isa 30:10. Various forms of הָלַךְ are used in the warnings against adultery/adulteress in Prov 2:16; 5:3; 6:24 and 7:5, 21. In all these references one of the instruments of the seductress is her smooth speech with which she may captivate her unsuspecting victim. It is not unlikely that the danger represented by the prostitute in Sir 9:3 II is that she catches her victim with her "smooth speech". Lévi also corrects the jumbled word found in MS A to בֵּלְכָּל הָרָה. Thus the following reading of 9:3 II would make sense: "Do not associate/consort with a prostitute, lest you get ensnared/caught in her flattering/smooth speech". This way it would certainly fit well with the previous line, creating a pattern: "Do not approach a strange woman" (9:3 Ia) // "Do not associate/consort with a prostitute" (9:3 IIa); "lest you fall into her snares" (9:3

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69 See the note on the text.
70 Skehan, Ben Sira, 217.
71 Cf. Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 305.
72 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 12.
Ib) // “lest you get ensnared/caught in her flattering/smooth speech” (9:3 IIb), where one aspect of the snares of the woman in 9:3 I may be her speech.

In 9:4 the woman to be avoided by a person is designated as someone (in feminine) who plays on a harp or stringed instrument, translated as a "female musician", which would be the preferred version over the plural form of the word in MS A (חניךת). The female musician here is probably a prostitute. In Isa 23:15-16 Tyre is compared to a forgotten prostitute (יהוֹנָה) playing a harp.\(^{73}\) The expression אל ת porno is translated as "do not sleep". However, the word תם, used in Sir 9:3 II, is also supported by Skehan, who argues that the verb מזר in the sense "make oneself familiar/associate" was part of Ben Sira's vocabulary (Sir 8:17; 9:14b; 42:12b).\(^{74}\)

In 9:4b, to burn with a double-edged sword (if וית, "double edge", "double edged" is read) seems to be out of place. Also as noted in the translation, the term "lest they burn you with their mouths" is not likely, especially as the subject is in plural masculine form. פי ("beauty", "charm") is suggested by Skehan.\(^{75}\) It would fit well with the images used in the immediate context, especially if the verb of this line is read with Skehan, who uses חלוד ("get ensnared", "caught") from 9:3 IIb.\(^{76}\) Trenchard also translates "lest you be caught"\(^{77}\) and אֵלָּֽגֶּ in G I (from אֵלָֽגוּ = "to get caught", "to fall into snare") also supports it. Thus the probable reading of the verse is: "Do not associate with a female musician, lest you be caught/captivated by her beauty/charm". This way after introducing

\(^{73}\) Cf. also Baab, "Prostitution," 934; Goodfriend, "Prostitution," 509.

\(^{74}\) Skehan, Ben Sira, 217. Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 651, also cites Sir 9:4.

\(^{75}\) Skehan, Ben Sira, 218.

\(^{76}\) Skehan, Ben Sira, 218.

\(^{77}\) Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 118, 280, n. 196.
another kind of "dangerous" woman as "female musician" after the ones already discussed in 9:3 I, II, another aspect of her snares, her beauty, would be listed here. Also the theme of a "woman's beauty" returns in 9:8abc as something that represents danger.

In 9:6 we find an allusion to the consequences of associating with a נזיר: "lest you surrender your inheritance" (MS A). As discussed above in this chapter, losing one's inheritance may convey the idea of paying money to a prostitute for her sexual favours. If the woman in question was married, even though there is no reference to it, keeping one's property within the familial boundaries, as suggested above, and not surrendering it to strangers, may be another notion behind Ben Sira's comment, as may be the case in Sir 26:19-21. Regarding the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26 the uncertain paternity of the children may cause similar concerns. As in Prov 6:35, the offending party may be asked to pay compensation to the wronged husband.

Sir 9:7 confirms that the danger lurking behind the author's comment might be an encounter with a prostitute, since prostitutes were known to frequent public places, such as crossroads (Gen 38:14; Jer 3:2; Ezek 16:25). Prov 7:12 also attests that the streets and squares of the city were the domain of a prostitute, here also an adulteress, where she looked for the "simple" and unsuspecting men.

Sir 9:8 is identifying the woman with whom one should not associate as beautiful, and belonging to another man. While in some contexts a woman's beauty is positive, and can

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78 G I has "lose".
79 Cf. Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 121.
80 Cf. again Prov 5:8-14, esp. 5:9-11.
81 See the discussion in this chapter below.
even satisfy/delight a husband in a good marriage,\textsuperscript{82} it can also be a source of danger or anxiety. The key in interpreting its role may be to analyse in individual cases what effect it has on other people, namely on the instructed men in Sir 9:8. It may contribute to awakening passion or love, which "burns like fire" (Sir 9:8d). Apart from the fact that the woman in Sir 9:8 is "lovely"/"shapely", her behaviour is not detailed. The emphasis is on the acts of the students advised by Ben Sira.

Another factor that may cause a man to forfeit his sense of shame is the consumption of wine. The probable reading of 9:9, as noted in the translation is: "With a married woman do not stretch elbow and do not sit down with her at the table drunken, lest (your) heart incline/turn toward her and in blood you decline to the pit" (MS A).\textsuperscript{83}

Wine is both praised and condemned in the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{84} Ben Sira attests that wine is a "delight" in moderation\textsuperscript{85} and at the proper time (31:28). However, it "destroyed many" (31:25). In the larger context of the latter passage the sage gives an extensive account of behaviour at banquets (Sir 31:12 - 32:13) where he touches the theme of sitting with guests at a dinner table. Feasts and banquets were customary in Israel, and while women and men ate together at ordinary meals, only men were invited to banquets, where the

\textsuperscript{82} See especially the discussion of Sir 26:1-4, 13-18 and 36:21(26). 26(31 = 27 in G I) in ch. III.1.
\textsuperscript{83} See the notes on the text and translation. G I is not significantly different.
guests usually sat on the ground (Gen 18:8; Judg 6:19). Exceptions, however, can also be found (1 Sam 20:5, 25).\textsuperscript{86}

Reclining at banquets in the Greco-Roman period had its dangers to Jews as these banquets were marked by hedonism and probably also by idolatry.\textsuperscript{87} Booth provides an account of the perils of reclining in antiquity, especially if the attendants of the banquets described were young men. He points out that eating, drinking and sexual indulgence were connected.\textsuperscript{88} The dangers of attending these banquets were not only excessive consumption of wine, but the practice of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{89} Ben Sira writes about the combination of wine and women in Sir 19:2a: "Wine and women make the heart/mind reckless". The text under discussion may also be cited here: "lest your heart incline/tturn toward her" (9:9c), indicating that just as a woman does not know shame when drunken (Sir 26:8), and may incline toward initiating an illicit relationship, a man under the influence of alcohol may do the same. It is not known if the hedonist nature of Greco-Roman banquets lies behind Ben Sira's advice in Sir 9:9 or not, neither is it clear whether the exclusion of women from reclining at table with men was an absolute rule for him. If it was, then it may be questioned in what circumstances men could drink intoxicants with a woman, a conduct that is condemned in 9:9b.

The comment about the pit in MS A and destruction in G I is not specified further. It can only be surmised that the consequences of consorting with a married woman are the same


\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Shimoff, "Banquets," 444.


\textsuperscript{89} If women were present, they were usually entertainers, courtesans; see Shimoff, "Banquets," 441.
as discussed earlier in this chapter. Premature death at the hands of God, or spiritual ruin may be alluded to here. The idea of the revenge of the offended husband, as noted above in this chapter, cannot be excluded. It may be stated, similarly to the comments on Sir 9:3 I, that through sexuality, in the case of both prostitution and adultery, a man may come under the influence and also dominion of a woman.

Yee describes how women within their sexually segregated world could use various ways, including their sexuality, to gain power over men, sometimes in order to put them to shame. Even though in Sir 9:3 I (9:3), 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9 the emphasis is on the husband's behaviour and on his approach to women with questionable virtues, it might be that Ben Sira, knowing how women can use their sexuality to dominate men, cautioned his students against succumbing to women's control in any circumstances, even when it was the man who initiated the sexual intercourse either with an ordinary prostitute or with a married woman. The fear of being controlled by a woman seems to be reflected not only in the verses discussed but also in Sir 9:2 and indirectly in 9:1.

It seems that Sir 9:3 I (9:3), 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9 are connected to Sir 9:1, 2 at yet another level. Seemingly 9:1, 2 have different concerns since they treat one's own wife. We may then ask why the comments on wives (one's own wife in 9:1, 2 and another man's wife in 9:8, 9) appear in a pericope that treats the strange woman and the issues of prostitution and adultery. Strotmann argues that the theme of the wife (9:1, 9) can create an inclusio. She also suggests that these verses may have been attached by Ben Sira to the poem that

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91 Gale A. Yee, Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 51-58.
92 See, however, their discussion for some other suggestions.
was already available to him in order to draw attention to another consequence of visiting strange women. Such conduct will raise jealousy in the wives (9:1), which in turn results in the same evil: they will get involved with a strange man at a public banquet. Therefore it seems that the list of women who present a danger for men is carefully composed by the author. Even in verses seemingly concerning merely marital relationships (9:1) the fear of extramarital liaison seems to surface: the husband is concerned that his wife will initiate a sexual encounter with a strange man. On the other hand men are also advised not to consort with strange women or married women. The mode of persuasion and especially the reasons behind it are more or less the same as in Proverbs: the fear of divine and/or communal punishment, including loss of social status and honour, public disgrace, loss of wealth and even sexual vigour, or fear of vengeance on the offended husband's part. It appears, however, that in Ben Sira there is more emphasis on the man's own responsibility than in Proverbs, especially contrasted with Proverbs 7, where the man seduced by the strange woman is naïve and unsuspecting. It seems confirmed in Sir 23:2-6, 18-21 that the author is aware that the men themselves are responsible for their deeds. This also explains the warnings to avoid contact with diverse types of women (Sir 9:1-9) as the best way of self-control.  

Sir 9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6-7, 8-9 seem to exhibit a negative attitude toward all kinds of extramarital sexual intercourse. This negativity probably stems from fear of losing self-control when in proximity to women by succumbing to one's own sexual desires and

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women's allurements, probably fear of public disgrace and the fear that one's own sexual wrongdoing may teach one's own wife the same conduct.

We may also conclude that nothing in these verses suggests that in either the Hebrew original or the translation the "strange woman" is viewed symbolically.

Sir 23:16-21, 22-27

G I

16 δῶς εἰδὴς πληθύνουσιν ἀμαρτίας, καὶ τὸ τρίτον ἔπαξε όργήν: ψυχὴ θερμὴ ὡς πῦρ καὶ ομή, οὐ μὴ σβεσθῇ ἐως ἃν καταποθῇ. ἀνθρωπος πόρνος ἐν σώματι σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ παύσηται ἐως ἃν ἐκκαύσῃ πῦρ: 17 ἀνθρώπῳ πόρνῳ πᾶς ἄρτος ἡδὺς, οὐ μὴ κοπάσῃ ἐως ἃν τελευτήσῃ.

18 ἀνθρωπος παραβαίνων ἀπὸ τῆς κλίνης αὐτοῦ λέγων ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ τίς με ὀρα; σκότος κύκλῳ μου, καὶ οἱ τοίχοι με καλύπτουσιν, καὶ οὐθεῖς με ὀρα; τί εὐλαβοῦμαι; τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν μου οὐ μὴ μνησθῆσεται ὁ υἱός σου.

19 καὶ ὅσπολοι ἀνθρώπων ὁ φόβος αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὔκ ἔγνω ὅτι ὅσπολοι κυρίω μυριοπλασίως ἥλιον φωτεινότεροι ἐπιβλέποντες πάσας ὀδοὺς ἀνθρώπων καὶ κατανοοῦντες εἰς ἀπόκρυφα μέρη. 20 πρὶν ἢ κτισθῆναι τὰ πάντα ἔγνωσται αὐτῷ, οὕτως καὶ μετὰ τὸ συντελεσθῆναι. 21 οὕτως ἐν πλατείαις πόλεως ἐκδικηθῆσεται, καὶ οὔκ οὔχ ὑπενόησεν, πιᾶσθησεται.

22 οὕτως καὶ γυνὴ καταλιποῦσα τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ παριστάσα κληρονόμον εἶ ἄλλοτρίου. 23 πρῶτον μὲν γάρ ἐν νόμῳ ψιθύστον ἤπείθησεν, καὶ δεύτερον εἰς ἄνδρα αὐτῆς ἐπλημμέλησεν, καὶ τὸ τρίτον ἐν πορνείᾳ ἐμοιχεύθη καὶ εἶ ἄλλοτρίου ἄνδρος τέκνα παρέστησεν.
16 Two types of people multiply sins,
and the third causes anger:
Burning passion is like blazing fire,
(it is) not quenched until it burns itself out/is consumed;
The man who commits sexual wrongdoing lit. in the body of his flesh,\(^95\)
ever ceases until the fire breaks forth;
17 To a sexual wrongdoer all bread is sweet,
(h) never rests until he dies.

18 The man who leaves his (marriage) bed/strays from his bed
says to himself: "Who can see me?
Darkness surrounds me and the walls hide me,
And no one sees me: why should I be afraid?
The Most High will not be mindful of my sins.\(^96\)
19 And he fears the eyes of humans,
and does not understand that the eyes of the Lord
are ten thousand times brighter than the sun,
looking at every way of men/humans
and observing hidden parts.
20 Before all things were created (they were) known to him
and so it is after they cease to be.
21 This man will pay the penalty in the public streets of the city,
and when (he) does not expect it, will be apprehended.

22 Such is also the woman, who leaves (her) husband
and provides (lit. brings into existence) an heir by someone else.
23 For first (she) has disobeyed the law of the Most High,
and second, (she) has offended her husband,
and third, (she) has committed adultery
and brought forth (lit. brought into existence) children by another man.
24 She will be dragged before the assembly,
and punishment will be upon her children.
25 Her children will not take root,
and her branches will not bring forth fruit.

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\(^95\) Behind the term έν σώματι σαρκώς αὐτοῦ Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View*, 96, and 266, n. 31,
conjectures the term ἔρως ἀνέφησιν to mean "blood relation". See discussion below.

\(^96\) Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 319, reads: "Of the Most High he (i.e. the adulterer) is not mindful".
26 (She) will leave an accursed memory, and her disgrace will not be blotted out.
27 and those who remain shall know that nothing is better than fear of the Lord
and nothing is sweeter than obeying the Lord's commandments.\(^\text{97}\)

**Context**

The wider setting (22:27 – 23:27) has been discussed in ch. I.1. where we have noted that this section has instructions regarding self-control and various kinds of sins. 23:16-21 is concerned with uncontrolled sexual desire resulting in sin. It includes the story of the adulterer (23:18-21) and the adulteress (23:22-26), concluding with one of the sage's main themes, the fear of the Lord (23:27).

**Form**

Only Sir 23:16-18 has a particular pattern determined by content. It is the x/x+1 numerical sequence. Both this type of numerical proverb and other various forms are found frequently in the OT,\(^\text{98}\) including other writings of wisdom literature.\(^\text{99}\)

**Content**

In Sir 23:16-17 the author sums up the persons or activities that are despicable and cause anger. The first comment on the burning passion that consumes everything is not further

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\(^\text{97}\) G II has 23:28: "It is a great glory to follow after God, and for you to be received by him is length of days". See Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 320, 326.


specified. Nothing indicates whether the person is married nor what is the object of his passion.\footnote{For fire as passion see the discussion below. Cf. also Prov 6:27-29.} In the second comment, as noted above, behind ἐν σῶματι σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ the Hebrew term שאר ברה is assumed to mean "blood relation", employed in Lev 18:6 and 25:49. The former is part of the incest laws in Lev 18:6-18 and similar instructions are found also in Lev 20:11-12, 14, 17, 19-21.\footnote{Incest is a concern in CD 5.7b-11; 7.1; 8.6b-7a; Jub. 33.9-20; 41.23-26 and in 4Q418/4QInstr\textsuperscript{d} ii.5.; cf. Loader, Dead Sea Scrolls, 121, 126, 311; Loader, Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees, 125, 182-83, 196-200.} In none of these instances does the LXX use the Greek term of Sir 23:16e. All these instructions deal with a punishable act of a sexual nature and assume that the transgressors are in kinship, whether they live in the same household or not. Lev 18:6 and 25:49 translate שאר ברה by ὀίκεία σαρκὸς (Lev 18:6) and τῶν ὀίκείων τῶν σαρκῶν (Lev 25:49) to express the idea of blood relation. Sirach uses ἐν σῶματι σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, which is found only in Sir 23:16e in the LXX. Since the author is nowhere else concerned with incest, it is not likely that he refers to it here in 23:16e. The form of sexual immorality is not specified, only that the consequences involve fire according to 23:16f. In Sir 23:16 the image of fire is employed a number of times.\footnote{Fire appears frequently in Ben Sira's vocabulary, but it is used in the context of destruction only in 7:17; 16:6; 21:9; 36:8; 45:19 and in 9:8 to depict burning passion.} While in 23:16c it describes passion, in 23:16d it is the very same fire that can destroy the person. It is, however, not clear in what way. It is also not certain whether the term "fire breaks forth" (23:16f) refers to a form of punishment for sexual misconduct, or simply to the burning passion that kindles in the person committing sexual wrongdoing in 23:16e.
The third element of the numerical saying is concerned with a "sexual wrongdoer" (23:17: "To a sexual wrongdoer all bread is sweet, [he] never rests until he dies"). Whether he or the person with whom he commits sexual wrongdoing is married or not is not specified. It may be suspected from the term "all bread is sweet" that he frequently commits sin. In Prov 9:16 Woman Folly invites men to her banquet. In the following verse (9:17) the statements, that "stolen water is sweet" and "bread eaten in secret is pleasant", refer to illicit sexual relations for which the punishment according to Prov 9:18 is death. For the sexual wrongdoer in Sir 23:17 the illicit sexual relation is sweet only until the bitter end, when he is finished or destroyed. The term "all bread is sweet" also seems to imply that he is not selective in his liaisons and is always looking for opportunities. In Prov 7:11-12 it is the adulteress who never stays at home and "at every corner she lies in wait", and in Sir 26:10-12 the woman is also not selective and is ready for a sexual relation with whomever she may encounter.

It is not clear what the consequences are in the first and third element of the numerical saying. The fire that consumes everything probably consumes the life of the person in 23:16cd. If it is not divine punishment or death at the hands of an angry offended husband should the woman be married, one can only surmise impoverishment resulting from licentious lifestyle, perhaps combined with spiritual ruin, and the same can be asserted regarding the man in 23:17.

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104 The lips of the adulteress drip with honey in Prov 5:3.

105 Unlike in Prov 9:17, where the "stolen water" and "bread eaten in secret" are both parts of the symbolism of folly within 9:13-18 and representations of real illicit sexual liaisons, Sir 23:17 only concern the latter.
After the numerical saying Sirach gives a lengthy description of the adulterer. Unlike in 23:16-17, in 23:18-21 there is no doubt that the person is married. Here the man is criticized for being unfaithful to his own marriage. "Adultery as sinning against one's marriage bed", as Loader argues, "must carry some sense of betrayal of one's female spouse" (23:18). 106 Usually an adulterous man commits an offence against the woman's husband, not against the woman or his own wife, if he is married. 107 Although it is not stated that he transgresses with a married woman, it seems to be the case. It is noteworthy that there is no word about wronging the other man by violating his exclusive right to the woman's sexuality which was reserved for him before and during marriage. 108

In Sir 23:18c the adulterer claims that darkness and walls will hide his acts. As Argall puts it, he enlists the created elements as accomplices in his sinful act of adultery. In Sir 16:17 (within 16:17-22) it is the multitude of people and the immeasurable creation that hide the sinner. 109 The latter text has another similar comment to Sir 23:18d ("and no one sees me; why should I be afraid"): "If I sin, no eye will see me" (Sir 16:21a). 110 While the adulterer in Sir 23:18-21 contemplates "The Most High will not be mindful of my sins" (23:18e), with this statement he acknowledges at the same time that what he is about to do is wrong in the eyes of the Lord. It was noted earlier in this chapter that adultery at one level is a transgression against the divine pronouncements, against religious boundaries (Decalogue: Exod 20:14 in the context of 20:2-17; Deut 5:18 in the context of

106 Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition*, 34.
107 Freedman-Willoughby, "תנש", 114.
110 Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach*, 234.
5:6-21; within the Holiness Code: Lev 18:20 in the context of 18:6-23).\textsuperscript{111} This is reflected in Sir 23:18a in a negation. While in Lev 18:20 a man who has sexual relations with his kinsman’s wife will defile himself, this motif is missing from Sir 23:18-21.

23:19a implies that the adulterer is aware that with his deeds he is about to cross communal boundaries (23:19a: "and he fears the eyes of humans").\textsuperscript{112} This, however, still does not keep him from sinning. It is likely that adultery was not always detected either in pre- or in postexilic times, including the time of Ben Sira. It seems, however, that the author anticipates a divine intervention when he points out that even if the man is foolish enough to think that his actions will not be discovered, the Lord, who created everything and therefore knows everything, will see his actions (23:19b-20b). God not only sees the sinful deed but knows it beforehand and long after it ceases to be (23:20). Therefore the adulterer should be afraid of his sins.\textsuperscript{113} Somehow or other the man is apprehended at the end. God’s judgment is perhaps not immediate but operates according to its own timetable.\textsuperscript{114} 23:21 does not disclose anything about the penalty. It was noted earlier in the chapter that the death penalty was probably not in force anymore. Even though there is no reference to the revenge of an offended husband or compensation for the offence against him, they cannot be excluded, accompanied maybe by public shaming, permanent disgrace, or loss of status.

\textsuperscript{111} Lipka, Transgression, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{112} Lipka, Transgression, 165, 169-99, 169.
\textsuperscript{113} Argall, 1 Enoch and Sirach, 234.
\textsuperscript{114} Argall, 1 Enoch and Sirach, 234.
The sin of the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26 is described in more detail, for her trespass is threefold: most importantly she transgressed the law of the Most High (23:23a, religious boundaries) that is laid down regarding adultery in Exod 20:14 and Deut 5:18.\textsuperscript{115}

Lipka argues that within the laws on marriage violations Deut 22:22, with its term בְּמִלָּה בְּשֵׂעֶל ("under the authority of [her] husband"), emphasizes the exclusive claim of the husband over his wife.\textsuperscript{116} While in the story about the adulterer (Sir 23:18-21) there is no word about the offended husband, in Sir 23:22-26 that is exactly the second aspect of the sin of the adulteress (23:23b): she, by initiating a sexual relation, violated her husband's exclusive right to her sexuality.\textsuperscript{117} Also she has exposed her sexuality which, in the case of a woman, is an act that comes under condemnation in Ben Sira's eyes (26:8-9), especially if the woman is not ashamed of behaviour that brings shame not only to herself but also to the man to whom her sexuality belongs (i.e. the father in Sir 26:10-12).

Thirdly, the woman, through her adulterous activity, brought forth illegitimate heirs (23:23cd),\textsuperscript{118} which, as discussed earlier in the chapter, was both socially and economically an important aspect of adultery.\textsuperscript{119} With an heir from someone else the family line would be defiled, the boundaries of the household as body would be crossed,\textsuperscript{120} and as a consequence the inheritance, name and status of the offended party,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[115] Cf. again Prov 2:17.
\item[116] Lipka, \textit{Transgression}, 64.
\item[117] The analogy between adultery and theft has been made earlier in the discussion.
\item[118] It is not known that the adulterer had children from his illegitimate relation.
\item[120] See Berquist, \textit{Controlling Corporeality}, 99-106.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
would go to the children from an illegitimate union.\textsuperscript{121} The latter two components of her sin reflect a transgression against communal boundaries: the woman wronged the husband's rights and profaned her relationship with him, and with the illegitimate heirs, threatened the identity and purity of her family as the smallest unit of the community. As noted above in this chapter, adultery is perceived by some scholars as a danger in another context as well. If an Israelite married woman commits adultery with a non-Israelite man she may bring non-Israelite heirs into the family. Also an Israeli man may produce offspring with a non-Israelite married woman. In this case the children are not only illegitimate but also non-Israelite.\textsuperscript{122} There is no indication, however, in Sir 23:23d that intermarriage with Gentiles is the concern of the author.

The activities of the adulteress are also discovered, and similarly to her sin, her punishment is also more detailed than that of the adulterer in 23:18-21. Some elements in it remain the same, as she too will pay the penalty in public. Behind the word \textit{ἐκκλησία} probably lies the Hebrew \textit{הלפ}, a judicial body, composed of elders,\textsuperscript{123} who were probably the senior males or heads of each household.\textsuperscript{124} It is not stated what the punishment may be in her case, but it was probably not the death penalty. Skehan offers scourging as an option,\textsuperscript{125} but divorce by the offended husband cannot be excluded either. Deut 24:1 allows a husband to divorce his wife. It does not explain, however, what the

\textsuperscript{121} See the comment in \textit{Ps.-Phoc.} 177-178: "Do not prostitute your wife, defiling your children; for an adulterous bed does not produce similar offspring" (\textit{μὴ προσαγωγεῖσθαι ἀγησον εἶπα τέκνα μου ὀφεῖται παίδας ὑμῶν ὧ γὰρ τὸ κατωτήρας ὑμῶν μοιχικὰ λέκτρα}, where children from an adulterous relation are not similar (ὁμοίως) to their legitimate father.
\textsuperscript{122} Streete, \textit{Strange Woman}, 6.
\textsuperscript{125} Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 325.
"indecent" or "displeasing" thing means. Ben Sira advises his students in 25:26 to divorce a wife who does not go according to the husband's direction. There is no allusion, however, to marital infidelity in this case.

In Sir 23:24b-25 the act of the adulteress has an effect on her children, who "will not take root" (23:25a). A similar image is used in Isa 37:31; Hos 2:4; Mal 4:1 and Wis 4:3-6. Wisdom claims in her self-praise in Sir 24:12a that she "took root among a glorified people": she is part of the community of Israel. As Deut 23:3 attests, a child born from a prohibited union, termed שפם ("bastard"), cannot enter the assembly of the Lord.

Lipka points out that in the context of the Decalogue (Exod 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21) it may be argued that God will visit the sin of those who violate his commandments, including the commandment that prohibits adultery, upon several generations of their descendents (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9). Similarly in Sir 23:24b-25 the punishment of the adulteress will go beyond her to affect future generations. DeSilva notes, that since the author does not seem to have a belief in life after death, one's name is continued in one's good reputation and family. This hope is also destroyed through adultery.

Another element of the punishment that is not found in the case of the adulterer is that the woman leaves an accursed memory. A similar idea is conveyed in a different context in Ps 9:6 where the memory of Israel's enemies has perished. Again, wisdom, in contrast to the adulteress, leaves a memory sweeter than honey. Finally a further parallel may be

126 Lipka, Transgression, 47-48.
127 Lipka, Transgression, 48.
128 DeSilva, "Wisdom," 441. However, as discussed above G II exhibits a belief in eternal life and judgment after death.

It is not clear from 23:22-26 why the woman committed adultery. One interpretation may be that she wanted to have children on her own. 130 Camp offers the idea that women from poor families engage in sexual relations with wealthy men in order to support their own families. 131 It cannot be excluded, however, that the adulteress had a forbidden sexual union and when she discovered her pregnancy tried to conceal the fact that the children were not from her husband.

The conclusion of Sir 23:16-27 returns to one of the recurring main themes of Ben Sira: "nothing is better than fear of the Lord, and nothing is sweeter than obeying the Lord's commandments" (23:27). This comment closes the first 23 chapters of the book preceding the wisdom hymn in ch. 24, and perhaps also echoes the hopes of Ben Sira that whoever fears the Lord and keeps his commandments will be kept from sinning in the way described in 23:16-21, 22-26. 23:27cd may also be interpreted as an answer to the questions and prayers of 23:2-6 about self-control in the wider context of 23:16-27.

While a sexual encounter in secret may temporarily be sweet for the adulterer/adulteress, the consequences will be bitter. What is really beneficial for a person is obeying God's commandments, which, in the present context, means to refrain from illicit sexual intercourse.

130 Cf. Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 99.
In the passage discussed above, Ben Sira, both in the numerical sayings and the accounts of the adulterer and adulteress that follow, draws a picture of sexual activities that are condemned by him. This picture becomes more detailed when it comes to the description of the adulterer, and especially regarding the adulteress. What is noteworthy here is that he condemns all forms of illegitimate sexual liaison. It is not certain whom he depicts in 23:16cdef, 17, but passion that is uncontrolled and desire that is not selective are equally condemned.

It is also important in 23:18-21 that adultery, regardless of whether it is committed by a man or a woman, is condemned. The sage gives more attention, however, to the adulteress. The descriptions in 23:18-21, 22-26 have something else in common. As pointed out above, the sin of adultery is an offence against the Lord even if expressed in an indirect way in 23:18-21. Apart from the sin of crossing the familial boundaries by bringing illegitimate heirs into the household, the transgression of the woman is that she initiates a sexual relation, therefore taking an active, instead of a passive, sexual role. In a society where women's sexuality belonged to a man, in this case to the husband, such conduct was highly criticized. A woman's sexual freedom was not something to be approved in a patriarchal society. We have noted in the discussion of Sir 9:3 I (9:3) that in the eyes of Ben Sira a woman's sexual initiative may have been an act of gaining temporary independence from the husband, and at the same time gaining control over both him, by bringing shame to him, and the man with whom she has a sexual encounter. In the case of the adulterer the shame is brought about probably by public shaming. Again, it appears that Ben Sira takes a pragmatic approach to the issue of extramarital intercourse, where transgression against the divine law is an important factor, but
transgression at communal level resulting in shame, and including the reversal of the normal order of things (female sexual initiative instead of male), seem to be equally important factors, if not more important in the practical everyday life of an individual.

Sir 25:2d

G I

2d γέροντα μοιχῶν ἑλαττούμενον συνέσει.

2d an adulterous old man who lacks sense.

Context

As discussed regarding Sir 25:1d and 25:8a, 25:2d is part of the numerical proverbs within the larger context of 25:1-11. 25:2d is the second proverb and it concerns people who are despicable. Among the despised are the poor proud, the rich liar, followed by the adulterous old man.

Form

The form of Sir 25:2d has been discussed in ch. III.1. We may summarize that similarly to 25:1d the third elements of both proverbs have a more complex grammatical structure than the first two elements, perhaps to put emphasis on the last element, which deals with marital (25:1d) and extramarital relationships (25:2d).
As noted in the analysis of Sir 23:18-21, Ben Sira condemns adultery in men, not only in women. However, unlike the account of the adulterer in 23:18-21, Sir 25:2d is silent on the aspect of breaking the law of the Most High. 25:2d does not refer to the other party involved either. It seems that the main motivation to avoid adultery is the fact that it brings shame on whoever commits it. It is especially the case if the adulterer is an elderly man, who by his age and experience should be an example, a model to the young, both in virtue and in being sensible, as expressed in detail in Sir 25:3-6 (especially 25:4-6).

The usual terminology πρεσβύτερος (translating 'priest') for elder is not employed in Sir 25:2d. Sirach uses γέροντα to indicate the age of the person. Normally in Israelite society the senior males or heads of their household, who had status and substance, such as land and family, had a judicial role in the local assembly. This assembly sometimes had to deal with issues like the prosecution of adultery. If a member of this assembly was leading a shameful life himself it was problematic to expect him to be the judge of similar individuals. Another passage which condemns the adulterous intentions of old men is found in the story of Susanna (Sus 1:5-25, esp. 1:5-8). There, however, the elders were punished not only because of their desire for sexual intercourse with a married woman, but because they were ready to corrupt her and expose her to the capital punishment for adultery. In Sir 25:2d the case seems more simple and, as stated before, the person in it is probably criticized because his licentious intentions made him forget his age and standing in society.

Sir 26:19-21

G II

19 τέκνον, ἀκμὴν ηλικίας σου συντήρησον υγιὴν, καὶ μὴ δώς ἀλλοτρίοις τὴν ἴσχύν σου.  
20 ἀναζητήσας παντὸς πεδίου εὐγενῶν κλῆρον, σπείρε τὰ ἱδία σπέρματα πεποιθῶς τῇ εὐγενείᾳ σου.  
21 οὕτως τὰ γενήματά σου περιόντα, καὶ παρρησίαν εὐγενείας ἔχοντα μεγαλυνοῦσι.

19 My child, keep intact (lit. healthy) the prime of your life, and do not give your strength to strangers/others.  
20 Seek from all the land a fertile field and sow your own seed confident in your fine stock.  
21 So shall you have your offspring around you growing up/great confident in their good breeding.

Context

The wider context has been discussed regarding 26:1-27 in ch. III.1. Sir 26:19-21 is part of it and has teaching on the selection of a suitable wife.

Form

There are no distinctive formal characteristics.

Content

Although there is no mention of women with questionable virtues in 26:19, the following verses (26:20-21) make it probable that the student is advised to select carefully a
virtuous wife for himself. The beginning of the stanza with "my son" resembles the counsel in Prov 5:1-23 where the father warns his son (5:1) against consorting with an adulteress. The image of fertile field and seed has sexual connotations and symbolizes the begetting of children with a wife who is a fertile woman.\textsuperscript{133} This woman has to be not only fertile but virtuous. Whether the reference to "others"/"strangers" denotes the strangeness of a woman in terms of ethnicity is not specified. This is one possibility. Since the author is not greatly concerned with the issues of intermarriage, the woman in question may be "other" because of her marital status as married or betrothed, therefore belonging to another family, or, as a prostitute, her way of life may have placed her outside the familial boundaries.\textsuperscript{134}

If the advice in 26:19-21 is not taken, and the young man associates himself with prostitutes or married/betrothed women, it may have certain financial consequences as detailed earlier in reference to Sir 9:3 I (9:3). A man may lose his inheritance in the former case by purchasing sexual favours. He may also lose his sexual vigour to prostitutes. In Greek and Roman antiquity there existed the belief that through a sexual act, by expelling their semen, living creatures deprived themselves of elements that were valuable for their own existence, the growth or renewal of their organisms. This has eventually led to the assumption that too much intercourse causes the loss of vigour or that in certain instances the misuse of sexual pleasure might even lead to death.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{133} Similar imagery is used in Sir 6:18-31.
\textsuperscript{134} Cf. also Heijerman, "Who Would Blame Her," 105.
\textsuperscript{135} Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality: Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure} (New York: Vintage, 1990), 130-33.
If the woman is married, then the case also constitutes adultery and is especially similar to that of Prov 5:1-23 (esp. 5:9-20). In the latter, the father encourages his son to enjoy the sexuality of the wife of his youth (5:15-19). In Sir 26:19-21, while the emphasis is not on the woman's sexuality itself, the sage advises the student to enjoy its fruits, the offspring. In both instances giving one's strength to others may convey the idea of giving one's sexual vigour to another woman's family instead of building up one's own, or surrendering the family wealth for instance by way of compensating the offended husband (as in Prov 6:35).

In Sir 26:19-21 marriage with a woman who is not virtuous and not faithful may result in the husband bringing up as legitimate heirs, children from an illegitimate relationship. Again, the certainty of the paternity, and keeping the inheritance within the family, were great concerns for the Jews. If a person heeds the admonishments and finds a virtuous wife, he may be confident that his heirs are his own children: his fine stock. The terms "offspring" and "their good breeding" confirm this idea in 26:21. The father can be certain that through these children his assets will remain in the family. He can also be proud of them instead of being shamed. The image of 26:20-21 is in sharp contrast to the comment on the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26 who provides heirs to her husband by another man.

Sir 26:19-21 confirms that for Ben Sira sex is safe within a licit relationship, especially if it is channelled into the right direction, towards building up one's legitimate family. It

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136 A similar term is found in Prov 31:3 in relation to women, where the word נָקָה is used for "strength".
137 Goodfriend, "Adultery", 82.
becomes a source of danger if, as a result of illicit relations (including consorting with 
prostitutes), it entails financial loss, loss of sexual vigour and shame. It appears that sex is 
only encouraged with one's own spouse. 26:19-21 suggests that even in this context the 
emphasis is not on the sexual satisfaction itself, as in Prov 5:15-19, but on the fruits of 
sexual relations: legitimate offspring. It probably does not represent a general idea within 
the book. 26:13a and 36:22(27) imply that a wife's sexuality can be enjoyed, and these 
passages do not have references to offspring.

Sir 41:21c(23b), 20b(22a), 22ab(24ab)

The translation, context and form of Sir 41:21c(23b), 20b(22a), 22ab(24ab) is given here, 
while the discussion on the content of 22ab(24ab) will follow later in the chapter among 
the comments on virgins and maidservants.

21c (Be ashamed)\(^{143}\) of looking [],\(^{144}\)

\(^{139}\) MS B is the same. According to Skehan, Ben Sira, 476, 479, the rest of 41:21c on the basis of the 
Greek may be restored: [ילא אשתו], "at a man's wife". Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 125, 287, nn. 260-
61, takes this stich to be 41:20b, and behind the mutilated text of MS B conjectures [רעה]. Although 
the word רעה is only included in B\(^{mg}\), it is fairly certain that the term means "strange woman". As 
discussed above רעה (taken as "strange woman") can mean a prostitute or adulteress.

\(^{140}\) MS B is mutilated here, but in B\(^{mg}\) רעה [...] is found, probably from רעה.

\(^{141}\) Skehan, Ben Sira, 479, reconstructs the text: [לעב שמה], "with a maidservant".

\(^{142}\) MS B only has two lines in 41:22. Parts of their mutilated text correspond to 41:22cd in MS M.

\(^{143}\) Supplied from 41:19b.

\(^{144}\) Read: "at a man's wife"; see the note on the text.
20b and of turning your attention to a strange;\textsuperscript{145}
22a Of meddling \[\textsuperscript{146}\] of yours,
22b and of violating her bed.
G I

22a ἀπὸ ὅρασεως γυναικός ἐταίρας  
23b καὶ ἀπὸ κατανοήσεως γυναικός ὑπάνδρου  
24a ἀπὸ περιεργίας παιδίσκης αὐτοῦ  
24b καὶ μὴ ἐπιστῆς ἐπὶ τήν κοίτην αὐτῆς

22a (Be ashamed of)\textsuperscript{147} looking at another woman\textsuperscript{148}
23b and of gazing at another man's wife,
24a of meddling with his maidservant,
24b and do not approach her bed.

Context

The wider context is 41:14 - 42:14 with lengthy comments on true and false shame, and on the father's concern for his daughter. As discussed regarding 41:17a, in 41:17-42:1ab we find the list of all things of which one should be ashamed. This is the immediate context of 41:21c(23b), 20b(22a), 22ab(24ab).

Form

The passage has a distinctive formal pattern as part of a larger section (41:19b-42:1b). All the stichs\textsuperscript{149} of the larger unit start with ἀπὸ ("of") to introduce the things of which one

\textsuperscript{145} Again, ἀμα, understood as "strange woman", can mean a prostitute or adulteress. See the discussion of Sir 9:3. In the light of this the translation for 41:20b is: "and of turning your attention to a strange woman". Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 125, 286, 287, nn. 259, 263, takes this stich to be 41:21c, and rejects MS M's suggestion for ἄρσεις. Instead he assumes the term παιδίσκης ("married woman"). This way his translation is: "And of gazing intently at a married woman".

\textsuperscript{146} Read "with a maidservant"; see the note on the text. Skehan, Ben Sira, 476, offers: "Of trifling with a servant girl of yours".

\textsuperscript{147} Supplied from 41:19b.

\textsuperscript{148} It also means "prostitute".
should be ashamed. In addition 41:19c, 21a, 20a, 20b, 22b, 22d and 42:1b have \textit{זַע} before \textit{זַע}, which is followed by the verb that expresses in each stich the action of which one should be ashamed. All the stichs conclude with the person or context regarding which the shameful act can have consequences. 42:1cd is also part of this section by content, but breaks the formal pattern of the previous lines (41:19b - 42:1b).

Content of 41:21c(23b)-20b(22a)

Skehan's restoration and translation of the first stich seems to be convincing in 41:21c(23b), since the term "strange woman" (from \textit{הַזֹּן}) returns in 41:20b in Hebrew, supported by Greek with the term \textit{γυναικός ἥθοερας} (41:22a) which may be understood as prostitute.\textsuperscript{150} If the idea of "another" or "strange woman" appears in the latter stich, then there is no need for its use twice, i.e. in 41:21c(23b), which makes \textit{שָׁנָה חָשַׁם} ("a man's wife", 41:21c) or \textit{γυναικός ὑπάνδρος} ("another man's wife", 41:23b) probable for this line.

The advice against looking at a man's wife or (somebody else's wife) is not unique to this passage. The sage has already dealt with the same topic in Sir 9:8, 9. Adultery, or the desire for a relationship which constitutes adultery, is also the concern in Sir 23:18-21, 22-26; 25:2d; 26:8-9 and 42:8b. It may also be the idea behind the comment in 23:17. Desiring another woman and the issue of the "strange woman" now reappears in the

149 The G I version of 41:22b is an exception; see below.
150 Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 476, 479; cf. also Eric D. Reymond, "Remarks on Ben Sira's 'Instruction on Shame', Sirach 41,14 - 42,8," \textit{ZAW} 115 (2003), 388-400, 393, terms her simply as "foreign woman".
context of various shameful behaviours in a long poem. It is, however, not only an accidental repetition of the topics.

Excursus 10: Honour and shame in the ancient Mediterranean world, in the Bible and in the book of Ben Sira

Honour as a core value (along with shame) in the Mediterranean world and also in the Bible is on the one hand the value of a person in his/her own eyes, his/her own claim to honour or worth. It is on the other hand corroborated by society, in other words publicly acknowledged. To have honour is to have publicly acknowledged worth, and to be honoured is to be credited with such worth.\textsuperscript{151} Social estimates shape the individual's claims to honour.\textsuperscript{152} Biblical references sometimes view honour as an object which is given to a person and therefore they emphasize those aspects or actions of a person that deserve such honour. In Proverbs, for instance, wisdom, graciousness, humility, righteousness, kindness, lowliness of spirit and fear of the Lord are all characteristics of the honourable person.\textsuperscript{153}

Shame as the opposite of honour, on the one hand, is positive if it means sensitivity to communal norms and social reputation, both of which are ignored by the shameless person. To have shame is to be concerned about a person's own


honour. On the other hand, to be shamed is always negative. It means that a person is denied or diminished in honour by public rejection of his or her claim to worth. The person is put to shame, humiliated or degraded and loses status. Plevnik writes that within the framework of kinship group and gender-based society, honour is a value embodied by adult males, while positive shame is a value embodied by adult females. Honour is associated with values such as strength, courage, daring, valour, generosity, wisdom, etc. Shame, which is embodied by females, is a concern for honour. Such shame cannot be won or claimed. It is presupposed and then maintained through sexual integrity. Shame in this context is associated with privacy, reserve and purity. Brayford argues that to have positive female shame means to control female sexuality. Camp goes a step further in arguing that in a man-woman relationship the woman is more responsible for causing shame for her husband and therefore she is the "weak link".

For Ben Sira, living sagely, maintaining honour and avoiding shame, means living cautiously. His book is characterized by a complex system of cautions that reflects a rather eudaemonistic desire for a good life, whether this desire is manifest in a good name (41:13), health and cheerful spirit (30:15) or in a concern

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155 Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," 96; Dianne Bergant, "'My beloved is Mine and I am His' (Song 2:16): The Song of Songs and Honor and Shame," *Semeia* 68 (1996), 23-40, 33-34, also argues that honour and shame are gender-based and have different meanings for men and women.
157 Camp, "Honor and Shame," 173.
with avoidance of shame. The latter, taken in the context of matters of sexuality, is our main interest here.

On the one hand the fear of the Lord, keeping his commandments and wisdom can prevent a person from sinning (18:27; 23:27; 45:5). On the other hand one is responsible for one's own actions. The context in which one is to feel shame is also ambivalent. It is either God (and/or his law, 1:27; 2:15-17; 3:18, 20; 17:15; 23:18e, 19b-20; 42:2a), or humans/ congregation (1:30; 15:5; 23:14, 19a, 24a; 26:5; 41:17-18; 42:11cd), which may include one's enemies (6:3[4]; 18:31; 23:3cd; 42:11ab), before whom one has to live one's life.

Some of the observations above, that honour and shame are gender-based and have different meanings for men, and that women seem to be the weak link in a man's intention to maintain honour, are supported in the work of Ben Sira. The description of good wives suggests that they are reserved, confined to the home and their goodness is mainly reflected in the benefits to their husbands (26:1-4, 13-18; 36:21[26]-26[31]). The comments on adulterous women assume that their conduct can put to shame their husband (23:22-26) or father (26:10-12). While their honour does not seem to be claimed or won, as pointed out above, it certainly can be lost. This situation, or in other words the lack of positive shame, is depicted in Sir 26:7-9, 24a. Also while the writer's anxiety regarding the

158 Sanders, "Ben Sira's Ethics," 73-106.
159 DeSilva, "Wisdom," 447, argues that the LXX translator of 41:19 ("be ashamed before the truth of God and his covenant") under the influence of 42:1-2a ("Do not be ashamed... of the law and covenant of the Most High"). may have misunderstood and refashioned the Hebrew original of 41:19 ("be ashamed of breaking an oath or agreement"). to point back to God and the Torah as those whose approval is of sole importance.
160 Probably also 23:21.
161 DeSilva, "Wisdom," 447-49.
162 36:27 in G L.
chastity of daughters and the need to control them and their sexuality (7:24-25; 22:4-5; 26:10-12; 42:9-14) may support the idea that women are the weak link that may jeopardize men's honour, this appears explicit only in the case of daughters, bad wives, prostitutes/adulteresses, and not regarding women in general. A good wife may even be a husband's strongest defence against straying away (36:25[30]-26 [31]).

Finally, a man himself is also responsible for his own actions and may also lose his honour on his own account. This is shown in the advice against sexual relations with prostitutes (9:3 I, 3 II, 4, 6-7; 19:2-3; 41:20b[22a]), with virgins or maidservants (9:5; 41:22ab[24ab]) and with another man's wife (9:8-9; 41:21c[23b]), in the story of the sexual wrongdoer and the adulterer (23:16-17; 18-21), in the comments on the adulterer (25:2d; 42:8b), and in warnings against being controlled by one's own sexual desire (6:1[2]-3[4]; 18:30 – 19:3; 23:4-6). While both the author of Proverbs 1 – 9 and Ben Sira know that men are not immune to temptations, it seems that in Proverbs 1 – 9 it is mainly wisdom, or the instruction of one's parents that keeps one from sexual wrongdoing, while in Ben Sira there appears to be more emphasis on a person's own responsibility.

When it comes to a lengthy discussion of negative and positive shame in 41:14 – 42:8, which is the wider context of our passage under discussion, and which also represents Ben Sira's complex, particular ethics of caution, it is almost expected that attitudes

\[163\] 36:27 in G I.
towards another man's wife, a strange woman, or maidservants would receive attention again. These attitudes betray a negative attitude toward sexuality, not in general but in certain contexts, i.e. when the consequences are negative too. These consequences are detailed in the discussion of Sir 9:3 and may include loss of wealth, early death resulting from self-destructive lifestyle in the case of consorting with prostitutes, and loss of status and honour in society, public shaming or revenge of the offended husband in the case of adultery.

**Sir 42:8b**

8b and (be not ashamed...) (of) ... the tottering [...]

who is occupied with sexual wrongdoing

G I

8b καὶ ἐσχατογῆρως κρινομένου πρὸς νέος. of the very old man who contends with the young

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164 See the discussion below in this chapter.
165 MS B has: ρέστα ῥιπτή τοις (κρατάις) νεοὺς ("and the grey haired and old man who weighs [asks] advice concerning sexual wrongdoing").
166 B⁴⁰ has ἐσχατός, but from the same word.
167 Read with B⁴⁰ ἀρχής ("and an old man").
168 Supplied from 42:1e.
169 On the basis of B⁴⁰ read "old man".
170 Ziegler, Sirach, 322, has καὶ ἐσχατογῆρως κρινομένου περὶ πορνείας ("and of the very old man guilty of sexual wrongdoing").
171 Supplied from 42:1e.
Context

As noted in the discussion of Sir 41:17a, Sir 42:8b is part of the list within 42:2-8b of things of which one should not be ashamed.

Form

Within 42:2-8 the following formal pattern appears: 42:2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a start with ליע to introduce things of which one should not be ashamed. This pattern changes in the following distichs: 42:5b-5c, 6a-6b, 7a-7b, 8a-8b, as the introductory ליע is found only in the beginning of the distich and not in the stich within. 42:8b belongs to the second group.

Content

Sir 42:8b is the last item on the list of conduct of which one should not be ashamed. A similar idea is found in the numerical saying of Sir 25:2, where the adulterous old man (25:2d) is criticized. In Sir 42:8b both MS M and B use the term תזונ ("sexual wrongdoing") which does not necessarily include adultery. תזונ (from תז) means "sexual wrongdoing". It is noteworthy that Rahlfs edition of the LXX text completely lacks the idea of sexual wrongdoing and depicts the old man as someone contending (or going to law) with the young. The textual witnesses to the term περὶ πορνείας in

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172 42:2a should read ליע; see B148
173 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 93, 263, n. 322, includes 42:8ab in the first group of stichs, noting that 42:8b is an exception.
174 However, in MS B the translation of the whole sentence is different.
Ziegler's edition are the Origenistic and Lucianic recensions (O-V, L\textsuperscript{248}). These later revisions bring the LXX translation into line with the original Hebrew text, which has the idea of sexual wrongdoing\textsuperscript{175}.

As noted in the discussion of Sir 41:17a, the terminology τησσεκους (and πορνείασ) may be used in the narrow meaning "prostitution".\textsuperscript{176} It is difficult to conclude what the sage means here. One interpretation that can probably be excluded here is that the activity of a professional male prostitute is described. No such concern appears anywhere else in the book. It is possible that the old man is consorting with prostitutes. However, in Sir 26:9 the term πορνείας γυναικός (wife's sexual wrongdoing) can be used in a sense broader than prostitution. It is conceivable that τησσεκους and πορνείασ have broader meanings in 42:8b as well. In the latter case this passage would be a remarkable example that both men and women are condemned for any illicit sexual activity, whether it is prostitution in the narrow meaning, adultery, or something else.\textsuperscript{177}

The fact that the persons described in Sir 25:2d and 42:8b are old makes the cases even more serious. They by their age and status in society should be examples for the young, as potential elders in the community.

It is also noteworthy that the long section on shame (41:14 – 42:8), which, as noted above in the chapter is a good example of the writer's ethics of caution necessary to live wisely,

\textsuperscript{175} Cf. also Antonino Minissale, La Versione Greca del Siracide: Confronto con il Testo Ebraico alla Luce dell'Attivita Midrascica e del Metodo Targumico (AnBib 133; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), 106.

\textsuperscript{176} See chapter I.1.

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. Sir 23:16-21.
includes a comment to chastise a man who is a sexual wrongdoer. Moreover, it seems to encourage men, probably the young students of the sage, to chastise an elder, who by his age and status should be wiser than them.

**Sir 47:19-21**

19 But you gave your loins to women and let them rule over your body.
20 [...] stain upon your honour and defiled your bed, [...] anger upon your descendants and groaning/sighing upon your bed.
21 [...] in two governments, and a violent/disobedient kingdom (arose) out of Ephraim.

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19 You laid your loins (beside) women,
and you became subjected through (lit. "in") your body/you were brought into subjection through your body.

20 You have put (lit. have given) a stain upon your glory
and defiled your seed,
to bring anger upon your children
and to cause distress over your folly,
21 thus the sovereignty became divided
and a disobedient kingdom arose out of Ephraim.

Context

Sir 47:19-21 is found in the wider setting of Sirach 44 - 47 which contains the praise of Israel's ancestors. Within it 47:1-22 has the praise of Nathan (47:1), David (47:2-11) and Solomon (47:12-22), which is the immediate context of 47:19-21. The structure of 47:12-22 is as follows: 47:12 is an introduction that links 47:12-22 about Solomon to 47:2-11 on the praise of his father, David; 47:13 recalls the peace and tranquility that characterized Solomon's reign (47:13ab) and his building of the temple (47:13cd); 47:14-17 describes his wisdom and 47:18 his wealth; 184 47:19-21 details Solomon's great folly (to give power to women over himself) and the consequences; finally in 47:22 the assurance is found that the Davidic kingship will remain forever despite what Solomon has done.

Form

Sir 47:19-21 does not have distinctive formal characteristics in Hebrew, and the structure of these lines is more determined by content than form.

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Despite the praise of Solomon in the beginning of 47:12-22, it is noted in 47:12a that all the king's success can be attributed to the merits of his father David and to God who made it possible for Solomon to reign in peace (47:13b). It seems that the depiction of Solomon's great fault starts in 47:19 ("But you gave your loins to women and let them rule over your body", MS B; "You laid your loins [beside] women, and you became subjected through [lit. "in"] your body/you were brought into subjection through your body", G I). However, it is likely, as Beentjes suggests, that the comment on amassing gold in the Hebrew of 47:18c is already the beginning of the criticism. It may well be that Solomon's accumulation of wealth could be understood as the beginning of his misfortune, a path leading to sin and not something to be praised. In the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-17) this activity is also considered dangerous for the kingship.

In Ben Sira's text Solomon's sin concerning women is elaborated in 47:19-21. The terms used in 47:19a allude to the sexual nature of Solomon's act. A related idea is reflected in the Hebrew of Prov 31:3a ("Do not give your strength [נייט] to women") and in Sir 26:19-21.

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185 Beentjes, "Countries," 138-41.
In 1 Kgs 11:1-10 Solomon's most significant fault is in turning to foreign women, whom God has told the Israelites not to marry, as they represented the danger of turning the heart of the Israelites to their gods, which later happened to Solomon himself (1 Kgs 11:4). In 1 Kgs 11:1-10 it is not purely the sexual nature of Solomon's act that is condemned, but the fact that for the love of his foreign wives he also followed their way of worship, this way committing idolatry and failing to worship the Most High exclusively. In the comment of Ben Sira, Solomon's main failure is that through sexuality, he became subjugated to women, came under the control of women in general. There is no specification of the women as foreign as in 1 Kgs 11:1-10; intermarriage does not appear to be an issue for the sage. If it were an important issue, Sir 47:19-21 would certainly be the place to discuss it.

In 1 Kgs 11:1-10 the king's sin was that he did not keep the Lord's command. In Sir 47:19-21, however, there is no allusion to disobedience to God on Solomon's part. This aspect is lacking in the comment. Also idolatry is not a concern in Sir 47:19-21 at all.

It seems that according to the present passage, Solomon committed a shameful act against his own honour (47:20a in MS B); the author is silent on offending God. Sir 47:19-21 is another example showing that men are subject to temptation as much as women and can bring shame upon themselves. In this regard the scribe blames Solomon perhaps even

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187 Exod 34:16; 1 Kgs 11:2.
188 Regarding the problem of intermarriage, see 1 Kgs 11:2; Exod 34:16; Ezra 9:2, 12; 10:44; Neh 13:25; Ps 106:35; also cf. Deut 7:3-4, 4QMMT B 39-48; 75-82; C 4-32); Jub. 20.4; 22.20; 30.11; Aramaic Levi Document 6:3-4 / 16-17; cf. also Loader, Dead Sea Scrolls, 60-64, 65-75, 76-89; Loader, Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees, 95-103, 157, 160, 170. Regarding children from intermarriage see Mal 2:15; Wis 3:16-19.
189 Cf. also 1 Esdras (3 Ezra) 3 - 4 on the relationship between the Persian emperor Darius and his concubine Apame, and T. Jud. 11 – 15 on the dangers of succumbing to women, sexual desire and wine.
190 GI is not significantly different.
more than the women with whom he committed his sin. Through the sexual nature of his acts he has defiled himself by having numerous relations. He has let women control his life through sex, which appears to be for Ben Sira a sign of weakness, a loss of self-restraint. Eron asserts that negative attitudes towards woman originate in negative attitudes towards sexuality.\textsuperscript{191} This would explain to a certain extent why the sage writes about women in general in Sir 47:19-21 and emphasizes the sexual nature of Solomon's subjugation to women. To lead a virtuous life a man should "remain autonomous"\textsuperscript{192} and should not let his mind or body be subject to any controlling power, especially that of women and especially through sex. The concern of women controlling men, even though temporarily, seems to recur throughout the book, as also seen earlier in this chapter. It does not necessarily mean, however, that Ben Sira had a negative attitude to sexuality in itself.

It seems that Solomon as the representative of the Davidic kingship has failed and despite the optimistic ending of the passage (47:22), it appears that, as Pomykala argues, Ben Sira expects the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant from the Second Temple high priesthood.\textsuperscript{193} In any case Solomon's kingship is described in very negative terms when it comes to his descendants.

Even though children born from multiple marriages may not be considered illicit heirs from a legal perspective, Ben Sira may have seen them as people squandering the inheritance of their father, just like children who are born from illegal relationships from

\textsuperscript{191} Eron, "Women," 45.
\textsuperscript{192} Eron, "Women," 45.
\textsuperscript{193} Kenneth E. Pomykala, The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism (SBLEJL 7; ed. William Adler; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 144.
persons who break the appropriate familial boundaries. These "heirs" similarly squander
their ancestors' property. This may be an interpretation of the "anger" (יָרָה, 47:20c)\(^{194}\) that
has consequences for the children as well.\(^ {195}\) In 1 Kgs 11:12 the expression of God's
anger may be that the kingdom Solomon has built would be taken from the hands of his
son.

The difference between 47:20b in MS B and G I is noteworthy. While the former reads
"(you) defiled (לְנָה) your bed", the latter renders "(you) defiled (ἐξεβήλωσάς) your
seed", introducing the theme of descendants earlier than MS B (in 47:20c). It appears
significant for Ben Sira to express that the cause of disgrace is Solomon's excessive
desire for many women and the fact that he lost his autonomy to these women. If a
woman controls a man it can result in the reversal of the natural domestic order that is
reflected in Gen 3:16.\(^ {196}\) In addition, even if the writer of the original text intended to
imply that Solomon's deed may have also meant the defilement of his own marriage,\(^ {197}\)
the translator has completely silenced it.

The groaning (or sighing) on Solomon's bed\(^ {198}\) (MS B, 47:20d) is also a consequence that
affects people other than himself, namely the Israelites, since it is most probably a
reference to the way the people reacted after hearing the reply of the new king, Rehoboam, to their plea for lightening the "hard service" and "heavy yoke" which

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\(^{194}\) MS B and G I are not significantly different.

\(^{195}\) According to Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 528, the "anger" regarding the descendants of Solomon may be
God's anger upon them because they were offspring from intermarriage. As noted above, however, Ben
Sira does not seem to be concerned with the issue of intermarriage.


\(^{197}\) Cf. Sir 23:18-21 and its discussion earlier in the chapter.

\(^{198}\) Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 523, reads "deathbed".
Solomon had imposed on them (1 Kgs 12:3-15). The divided nation, or two governments in 47:21a\(^{199}\)

seem to be the consequences of the harsh answer of Solomon's son Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 12:14, since only Judah remained faithful to him, while Jeroboam became the king of the "disobedient" kingdom Israel, here called Ephraim (47:21b).\(^{200}\)

We may conclude that the author in Sir 47:19-21 shifts the emphasis regarding the sins of Solomon from sexual relationships with foreign women to sexual relationships with women in general. The idolatry that resulted from Solomon's marriages in 1 Kgs 11:4 does not receive attention in Sir 47:19-21. It appears that Ben Sira was not concerned with these issues.\(^{201}\)

Instead he focuses upon the shame that was brought upon Solomon himself and on the sexual nature of that shame. This passage suggests that sexuality is evaluated negatively if it results in a man succumbing to women, losing authority over them, even becoming controlled by them, in other words a man is being "unmanned" by women.

\(^{199}\) MS B and G I do not differ significantly.


\(^{201}\) Cf. also the discussion of Sir 9:3 I (9:3).
IV.2. The Issue of Virgins/Young Women and Maid servants

Sir 9:5

Do not turn your attention to a virgin
lest you be ensnared/trapped in fines because of her.

The context and form of Sir 9:5 has been discussed in ch. III.3. regarding Sir 9:1, 2.

Within Sir 9:1-9, a section concerning various types of women, one distich is dedicated to the issue of virgins in 9:5. It is noteworthy that this verse is preceded and followed by comments on prostitutes.

Sir 9:5 is similar in form to Sir 9:1, 3 I, II, 4, 6. The first cola of 9:1, 3 I and 6 start with the prohibitive אֵל ("do not") + verb; the second cola begin with פַּל (lest) + verb. In 9:3 II, 4, 5 the pattern is slightly different, with their second cola starting with the construction of פַּל and the verb, but the prohibitive אֵל + verb is found at the end of the first cola and not at the beginning.
Content

In the midst of sayings on wives, prostitutes, and other men's wives, Sir 9:5 concerns another category of women. To describe this category the author uses the term הולהול, which is then translated as παρθένος in the LXX. Neither of these words functions as a technical term to denote exclusively "virgin" or "virgo intacta" in the Hebrew Bible or the LXX. The הולהול, παρθένος terminology is frequently used for "girl", or for a "girl" or "woman" who is of marriageable age, who, unless otherwise indicated, would have been presumed to be a virgin. Whether the term is intended to denote virginity therefore depends on the context.

Excursus 11: Virginity

Several texts in the Hebrew Bible are of particular interest here. Exod 22:15(16)-16(17) and Deut 22:28-29 describe two similar situations. A girl who is not betrothed is seduced in Exod 22:15(16), raped in Deut 22:28-29. In both instances the man who has violated her must marry her and pay a fine to her father. This

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202 The latter is used to translate the former in most of the occurrences, while it translates other terms as well.
204 Delling, "παρθένος," 832-33; also cf. Gordon J. Wenham, "הולהול: 'A Girl of Marriageable Age'," VT 22 (1972), 326-48, who, before reaching the above conclusion presents several possible interpretations for Deut 22:13-21 that one should view cautiously.
206 The perpetrator was, similarly to the adulterer, a thief, taking an unbetrothed girl's virginity in this case; see Countryman, Dirt, 154.
fine is specified in the latter as fifty shekels of silver. According to Exod 22:16(17) the father may refuse to give the girl to the man.

In Deut 22:28-29 there is no reference to the father's right of refusal. The fine is relatively small, because the girl in question was not pledged to marry, compared with the situation in Deut 22:23-24 and 25-27, where the girl who was violated was pledged in marriage. The punishment is death for both parties in the former and only for the men in the latter. The reason behind this harshness is that the case is similar to adultery where a man violates another man's right to the sexuality of his wife, thus in these cases his future wife.\textsuperscript{207}

Another passage which deals with similar issues is the case of the slandered bride in Deut 22:13-21. While the word \( \text{ holster } \) (\( \text{ παρθένος } \)) is found only in 22:19 and in the rest of the material other words are employed (\( \text{ ἡστρατίων } \)), from the context it can be established that it concerns the virginity or chastity of the girl.\textsuperscript{208} The punishment for the man in case of false charges is double the amount found in Deut 22:28-29, and the man may never divorce the woman. If the charge is true, the punishment for the girl is much greater as she was "promiscuous" in her father's house, by violating the father's authority over her sexuality.

Finally the passages where the word \( \text{ holster } \) (\( \text{ παρθένος } \)) is explicitly used to denote virginity are Lev 21:13-14 and Ezek 44:22. The former prescribes that the

\textsuperscript{207} Also cf. Streete, \textit{Strange Woman}, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{208} Tsevat, "\( \text{ holster } \)," 341-42, takes it as a reference to "virgin".
high priest may only marry a virgin of his own tribe, the latter, that the priest may marry only a virgin, or a widow of a priest.

In 9:5 nothing indicates whether or not the woman in question is pledged in marriage, whether the focus is on her chastity, or the word הלוות (παρθένος) merely refers to a woman of marriageable age. The reference to a fine, however, relates Sir 9:5 to either Exod 22:15(16)-16(17) or Deut 22:28-29. Therefore the fine probably refers to the payment of money and marriage. The terminology "be ensnared/trapped" (רחק) implies that the punishment is long term, i.e., a marriage, where the man is not allowed to divorce the girl. It is noteworthy that Sir 9:5 appears between comments on prostitution/adultery. The whole of Sir 9:1-9 reflects the viewpoint of a man, who details all the possible dangers posed by various types of women: wife (9:1-2), prostitutes (9:3 I, [9:3], 3 II, 4, 6-7), virgin (9:5), married women (9:8-9). One might not expect to see virgins in the list. It is, however, very telling that in the view of the sage in 9:1-9, looking at women, whether prostitutes, married women or virgins, inevitably results in sexual relations and negative consequences for the man.

Sir 20:4 and 30:(19-)20

As in Sir 30:20 parts of Sir 20:4 are repeated, the two passages will be discussed together.

20:4

G I

4 ἐπιθυμία εὐνούχου ἀποπαρθενώσας νεάνιδα,
οὕτως ὁ ποιῶν ἐν βίᾳ κρίματα.

4 a eunuch's desire to violate a virgin; so is the one who executes judgments by force.

30:(19-20)

MS B

20a With his eyes [...] 212
20b like a [...] 213 who embraces a young woman and sighs/groans.
20c So is the one who does judgment under compulsion.

G I

(19a τί συμφέρει κάρπωσις εἰδώλῳ;
19b οὔτε γὰρ ἔδεται οὔτε μὴ ὁσφρανθῇ
19c οὕτως ὁ ἐκδιωκόμενος ὑπὸ κυρίου.)

20a βλέπων ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ στενάζων
20b ὥσπερ εὐνοοῦχος περιλαμβάνων παρθένον καὶ στενάζων,

G II

20c οὕτως ὁ ποιῶν ἐν βίᾳ κρίματα.

G I

(19a Of what use is an offering to an idol?
19b For it will neither eat nor smell:
19c So is the one being punished by the Lord;)

20a seeing with his eyes and groaning
20b like a eunuch embracing a virgin and groaning;

G II

20c so is the one who executes judgments by force.

[209] Lévi, Hebrew Text, 29, restores בְּנֵי יְהוָה יְמָאָר. 
[210] Read בְּנֵי יְהוָה יְמָאָר; Lévi, Hebrew Text, 29.
[211] B has בְּנֵי יְהוָה (by "robbery", "violent taking away"); Lévi, Hebrew Text, 29, agrees. also means "rob".
[212] "he sees and groans"; see the note on text.
[213] Read "eunuch"; see the note on the text.
Context of 20:4

The wider context is 19:20 - 20:31 concerning wisdom and folly in word and deed. The immediate context of 20:4 is 20:1-8 where it does not seem to fit, since it appears to interrupt the sayings concerning timely and untimely speech and silence. Skehan suggests that it should be read before 19:28.214

Form of 20:4

No formal characteristics can be found.

Context of 30:(19)-20

The wider context is 30:14 - 31:11, which contains loose sayings on false and true riches and things that cheer or sadden a person's heart, therefore life. The immediate context includes 30:19 which has a parallel of an idol who cannot enjoy the offering brought before it.

Form of 30:(19-)20

The passage has no distinctive formal pattern.

Excursus 12: סירס and εὐνοῦχος

The word εὐνοῶχος in the LXX usually translates סירס. The etymology of both terms is complicated and a matter of debate. While they can describe officials at royal courts (1 Chr 28:1) or other officials who may also have been foreign (Esth 1:10-11), they do not always refer to a person who is "castrated". While the word εὐνοῶχος can also have the latter meaning, its traditional etymology, εὖνη + χεῦ ("bedkeeper"), allows for more possibilities. The only OT text where סירס and εὐνοῶχος explicitly refer to a physical condition is Isa 56:3-5.

The eunuchs' incapability of procreation may be caused by developmental defect, or damage to the testicles. Because of their condition society may have considered them as inferior. One of their functions was to guard the harem of a ruler as in Esth 2:3, 14-15; 4:4-5. While their sexual desire may have diminished, it did not necessarily disappear entirely.

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In Sir 20:4 it is probable that the eunuch, while emasculated, was still capable of sexual intercourse, and has violated a virgin. Even though the usual word for virgin is not used here, and we do not know anything about the woman's chastity, the deed of the eunuch is similar to rape, an abuse, and the betrayal of trust, considering the role of eunuchs as guardians of harems, where the women were necessarily not virgins. Judges also had responsibility towards others. If they executed judgment by force it was also an abuse.

The situation in Sir 30:20 is different. It describes a eunuch embracing a young woman, but probably not able to have sexual intercourse. Otherwise the analogy with the idol (30:19b) could not be played out. An idol who cannot enjoy the food offering (30:19a) that is brought before it (G I)\(^{220}\) is compared to the person who is "punished by the Lord" (30:19c, G I). It is not said why or how he is punished. Skehan suggests that he is ill. As a consequence, even though he sees the good things before him, he cannot touch them.\(^{221}\) This is the reason for his groaning (30:20a in both Greek and Hebrew). It seems that the focus in all three parts of the parallel is on incapability. This way, however, the analogy does not fit so well in 30:20c since even though executing judgment under compulsion in 30:20c (Hebrew) results in injustice it is not impossible to do. It suggests incapacity to resist and exercise justice properly.\(^{222}\) The Greek term "executes judgment by force" possibly means under forceful pressure\(^{223}\) and also implies the abuse of judgment that results in injustice.

\(^{220}\) A reference to drink and grain offerings for idols is found in Isa 57:6; cf. Dan 14:1-22 and Eccl 6:2. References to the condemnation of idols (and their makers) are found in Deut 4:28; Ps 115:47; Isa 44:9-11.

\(^{221}\) Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 382.

\(^{222}\) William Loader, personal communication.

\(^{223}\) William Loader, personal communication.
If the eunuch in 20:4 is capable of doing what he desires, i.e. intimacy with a young girl, and the eunuch in 30:20 is not, it is not clear why the author used two separate parallels. They certainly both refer to injustice and it is interesting that the sage chose a parallel in which a sexual abuse, possibly rape in 20:4, is the concern. On the other hand it is only a parallel and does not betray anything about what Ben Sira/Sirach thinks about sexual abuse in real situations. This is the only such comment. Nevertheless, even if only in a parallel, such an act is condemned by him.

Sir 41:22a(24a)-22b(24b)

22a (Be ashamed of) meddlin g [] of yours, 22b and of violating her bed.

G I

24a ἀπὸ περιεργίας παιδίσκης αὐτοῦ
24b καὶ μὴ ἐπιστῆς ἐπὶ τὴν κοίτην αὐτῆς

24a of meddling with his maidservant, 24b and do not approach her bed.

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224 As noted in the discussion of 41:21c(23b)-20b(22a), Skehan, Ben Sira, 479, restores "with a maidservant". His translation of the whole distich: "Of trifling with a servant girl of yours" (476). Supplied from 41:19b.

225 Read "with a maidservant" on the basis of the restored text; see the note on the text of 41:22a (MS M) above.
Context

The wider context is 41:14 - 42:14 with comments on true and false shame and on the father's concern for his daughter. In 41:17 - 42:1ab we find the list of all the things of which one should be ashamed. This is the immediate context of 41:22a(24a)-22b(24b).

Form

Sir 41:22a(24a)-22b(24b) has a distinctive formal pattern as part of a larger section (41:19b - 42:1b) in the Hebrew, while the Greek version of 41:22b (= 41:24b) is somewhat different. All the stichs of the larger unit start with "of" to introduce the things of which one should be ashamed, followed by the verb to express the action of which one should be ashamed. All the stichs conclude by referring to the person or context for whom or for which the shameful act can have consequences. While the MS A version of 41:22ab ("Be ashamed of meddling of yours, and of violating her bed"), and the G I version in 41:24a fit into this pattern, the G I version in 41:24b has a prohibition ("and do not approach her bed").

Content

In Sir 41:22a (MS M) the restored text employs the term נาง for "maidservant".

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227 41:19c, 21a, 20a, 20b, 22b, 22d and 42:1b have "t before "m.

228 On the basis of the restored text: "with a maidservant"; see the note on the text.
Excursus 13: Maidservants

Out of the 60 occurrences of נָעָם in the OT the only instance found in a legal text is in Lev 19:20. Otherwise legal texts primarily use נָעָם. The LXX translates the former as παταδίσκη and the latter as δούλη. נָעָם is a bondswoman with of comparable status. She can be a surrogate independent mother when the matriarch is childless, and always belongs to her mistress, even if she is owned by the patriarch to outsiders. At the time of marriage the daughter's dowry may include a נָעָם who is also transferred to the groom's family (Gen 29:24).²²⁹

In Sir 41:22a(24a)-22b(24b) "meddling" or "trifling" with one's own maidservant is condemned. There are examples in the Hebrew Bible where a person was not forbidden to approach his maidservant for the purpose of sexual intercourse.²³⁰ Lev 19:20-22 deals with a situation where a man sleeps with his unfreed maidservant (נָעָם). From a strictly legal point of view sexual intercourse with a betrothed female slave is not considered adultery or rape. However, a guilt offering for the wrong that has been done is still required.²³² The text also implies that if she were freed, it would be considered adultery.

In Sir 22a(24a)-22b(24b) there are two possible scenarios. In the first, the maidservant is a betrothed but unfreed woman, with whom a sexual relationship would be considered

²³⁰ The word used for "bed" is the same as in Gen 49:4, a passage that implies that the term is used here in a sexual context. It is also employed in 1 Chr 5:1. Cf. also Ezek 23:17; Cant 3:1.
²³¹ See Gen 30:4-5, 9-10.
²³² Reuter, "נָעָם," 409.
wrong by Ben Sira similar to Lev 19:20-22, because the future husband's sole right over the maidservant's sexuality has been offended and a certain punishment would be required. In the second, the sage applies stricter ethical standards, where a man is forbidden to approach a maidservant for sexual intercourse in any context. We may note here the differences between the text versions. MS M suggests that even one's own maidservant should not be approached for sexual intercourse. It would be expressed with the strong terminology "violation". In G I it is another man's maidservant who should not be approached. It is not clear why the translator has changed the original wording "yours" to "his". Perhaps it could mean that the translator is more lenient, condemning only sex with someone else's maidservant – in line with popular values of the time and values reflected in the law.

The passage is part of the sayings on proper and improper shame, where all the comments concern proper sexual conduct. This may indicate that they reflect a stricter ethical standard, where even if a sexual act does not entail severe punishment, it may result in unpleasant consequences, such as shame.

**IV.3. Unruly/Unruled Passions**

**Sir 6:1(2)-3(4)**

MS A

אֶלָּ קְפָל בָּר נְמַשְּׁךָ, 233 הָעֵבֶּהוּ הִילֶכֶל עַלְיוֹן 234.

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233 This word is taken from Lévi, *Hebrew Text*, 6. It is a dittography from 6:2.
1 Do not fall into the grip (lit. hand) of your desire, [...] your strength.  
2 Your leaves it will eat and your fruit it will destroy, and you will be left like a dry tree.  
3 For fierce/strong desire destroys its owner and an enemy's joy overtakes them.

G I

2 Μὴ ἐπάρῃς σεαυτὸν ἐν βουλῇ ψυχῆς σου, ίνα μὴ διαρραγῇ ὡς ταῦρος ἢ ψυχῆς σου.  
3 τὰ φύλλα σου καταφάγεσαι καὶ τοὺς καρποὺς σου ἀπολέσεις καὶ ἀφήσεις σεαυτὸν ὡς ξύλον ξηρόν.  
4 ψυχή πονηρὰ ἀπολεῖ τὸν κτησάμενον αὐτῆν καὶ ἐπιχρῆμα ἐχθρῶν ποιήσει αὐτὸν.

2 Do not rouse yourself by the will of your soul, lest like a bull it spoil/plunder your life.  
3 Your leaves you will eat and your fruit you will destroy, and you will leave yourself like a dry tree.  
4 An evil soul will destroy whoever owns her and will make him the laughingstock of enemies.

Context

The wider setting of 6:1(2)-3(4) is 5:1 - 6:3(4) within which 5:1-8 has warnings against being overconfident in one's own wealth and power, committing sins and forgetting the

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234 This word seems out of place here. Read בַּעַר (from בָּעַר: "to burn with fire", "to consume"); see Lévi, Hebrew Text, 6; and Skehan, Ben Sira, 180-81, who suggests the reading "lest (מן) like fire (שיש) it consume (זרוב) your strength (ניצחון)".

235 Other meanings of כָּלָה also include: "a living being" (Gen 2:7); "life" (Exod 21:23); "the inner being of a person" (Ps 42:6, 7) etc.

236 This word is from Lévi, Hebrew Text, 6.

237 It should read: "lest like fire it consume "; see the note on the text.
day of retribution; Sir 5:9-15d (G I)\textsuperscript{238} calls for practising self-restraint and avoiding duplicity in speech; and 6:(3)-2(4) has teachings on unruly/unruled passions.

Form

There are no distinctive characteristics.

Content

The three significant passages devoted to the issues of a person's own desire are Sir 6:1(2)-3(4); Sir 18:30 - 19:3 and the prayer of the author in Sir 23:4-6 (in the context of 22:27 - 23:27). While the latter two are more detailed in terms of describing the type of desires one should not follow, Sir 6:1(2)-3(4) is not so specific.

Sir 6:1a(2a) warns against following one's own desires. It reads: "do not fall into the grip (lit. hand) of your desire" (MS A). While the verb יפל (from נפל) is used by Ben Sira in different contexts, it conveys similar ideas. In Sir 9:3 I נפל depicts a man who draws near a strange woman and falls into her "snares". In Sir 25:21a another warning is found: "do not fall (_wf של נפל) through the beauty of a woman)."\textsuperscript{239} Both examples reflect the idea of a man succumbing to a form of temptation (strange woman or prostitute in 9:3 I, a woman's beauty in 25:21a) that represents a source of danger for the wise.

\textsuperscript{238} Rahlfs, Septuaginta, 385-86. 5:15cd = 5:16 in MS A.
In his analysis of the attitude towards women and sexuality in 1 Esdras (3 Ezra) 3-4, the book of Ben Sira and the Testament of Judah, Eron argues that in order to lead a virtuous life, a man needs be autonomous. His mind and body should remain free of any controlling power other then the fear and love of God.\footnote{Eron, "Women," 45-46.} That the fear of God was to be the governing principle in the life of the wise according to Ben Sira is expressed in countless references throughout his book. Not long before the time of Ben Sira, one of the most important virtues of Stoic and Cynic philosophy appeared as the combination of the ideal of αὐτοπρετέρα (self-sufficiency, self-contentment) and freedom from passions. The motivation behind the latter was probably the fact that the ancient meaning of passion is "suffering" or "anguish". In addition, Schüngel-Straumann suggests that in Greek popular philosophy, the woman is equated with corporeality and the man with the spirit; therefore sexual desire is identified with the woman who thus represents a danger to the man, because this desire is the doorway for evil into the world.\footnote{Helen Schüngel-Straumann, "'From a Woman Sin Had Its Beginning, and Because of Her We All Die.' (Sir 25:24)," \textit{TD} 45 (1998), 203-12, 204.} Some researchers argue that the idea that woman can be the source of danger found its way into the Israelite attitude towards women mainly after the exile. This development was due to a greater significance that was attached to the question of purity and impurity in the community of Israel after the exile. Women in their state of impurity during childbirth and menstruation, were restricted in their
participation in the cult and therefore also represented an obstacle for men in their participation in the cult.\textsuperscript{242} Perhaps this is the sentiment that Job 14:1-4 expresses. While Ben Sira does not have comments regarding women in the context of the cult, it is demonstrated in his book that certain women can be a source of danger or temptation (9:3 I,\textsuperscript{243} II, 4, 6-7, 8-9; 19:2; 25:21a; among these women and wine are combined in 9:9; 19:2). This is also implied in 41:21c(23b)-22b(24b) and in 42:12-13. Even though the term \textit{αὐτοκρατεῖα} is not employed, the advice given in the passage under discussion (Sir 6:1[2]-3[4]) and the other two relevant passages (18:30 - 19:3; 23:4-6) suggest that Ben Sira too was influenced by the Hellenistic ideal described above, to the extent that passions are dangerous when they are excessive. They are, however, not negative in themselves.

Sir 6:1b implies that the desire mentioned in 6:1a is the source of danger, as the consequence is depicted with a forceful image: "[lest like fire it consume] your strength."\textsuperscript{244} For the word "desire" \textit{ψῆφὶ} is used in the MS A, rendered with \textit{ψῳχῇ} in the LXX. The most common term \textit{ἔπιθυμία} is not employed here. It is, however, part of the translator's vocabulary, as 18:30-31 and 23:4-6 show.\textsuperscript{245} In the latter it is also established that "desire" can express various human wants, wishes or cravings, which are neutral, negative or positive depending on their context. This is true not only about Sir 23:4-6, but seems also reflected in 6:1-3 in Hebrew. The comment in Greek ("Do not

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\textsuperscript{243} 9:3 in GI.

\textsuperscript{244} See the note on the text.

\textsuperscript{245} The discussion of both passages will follow later in the chapter.
rouse yourself by the will of your soul, lest like a bull it spoil/plunder your life", 6:2) also suggests that the writer calls for self-control or controlling passions. The term "do not rouse yourself" perhaps emphasizes a more active role one plays in letting passions/desires control one's life.

The verb רנו ("to burn with fire") in Sir 6:1b is used elsewhere by Ben Sira (8:10; 40:30; 48:1). Especially in wisdom literature fire itself is known to express a variety of intense human emotions and desires such as anger (Sir 28:10-11), wickedness, sorrow, agony, sin (Sir 3:30; 8:10), love and lust (Sir 9:8; 23:16; Cant 8:6). It is also connected with adultery in Job 31:12; Prov 6:27-29.\(^\text{246}\) At the same time the fire that expresses these emotions/passions may be the symbol of destruction because of its consuming power. Sometimes it can punish the same desire/action it symbolizes.\(^\text{247}\) This idea might be behind Sir 6:1b-2ab in the Hebrew version of the text. One's own blazing passion is so intense that it can destroy one's own strength, as it can similarly destroy a living tree by eating its leaves and fruit, and the end result is a dry tree ( Heb יר, 6:2b, MS A; ξύλον ξηρόν, 6:3b, G I). The references to strength and dry tree may also depict a man who wasted his life – including his sexual potential – through sexual wrongdoing, and is unable to produce (legitimate) children anymore. It is not certain why the translator in 6:3a (G I)\(^\text{248}\) changes the subject from the 3d person singular to the 2d person singular. As in 6:2 (G I) here it may also show a stronger sense of bearing responsibility.


\(^{247}\) Lang, "πῦρ," 935.

\(^{248}\) 6:2a in MS A.
The expression in G I ("lest like a bull [ταῦρος] it spoil/plunder your life", 6:2b) is not as strong as the image of fire. This line, however, also suggests that the whole life (ψυχή) of a person can be destroyed.

Sir 6:3a is the same, almost verbatim, as Sir 19:3b (in Hebrew) and may also be translated as "a fierce/strong/mighty desire (יֵשָׁבֶת יָעַבְרָה) destroys its owner". In 6:4 the Greek version uses again the term ψυχή and not ἐπιθυμία where the Hebrew has יֵשָׁבֶת for "desire" ("An evil soul will destroy whoever owns her and will make him the laughingstock of enemies"). This sentence implies that one’s own soul, the seat of emotions, including desires, can cause one’s own ruination. Interestingly that soul is termed as evil. It seems that the translator has included a moral evaluation, where the Hebrew regards one’s desires "fierce/strong/mighty".

What the author might mean by destruction in 6:3a(4a) is not certain. 18:30 - 19:3, however, may provide more clues. If a person pursues desires that are not illicit, such as gluttony, drunkenness, association with prostitutes, they still can damage a person's health, lead to financial ruin or even early death by destructive lifestyle, if one considers that relationships with prostitutes may result in venereal diseases. If the object of desire is also illicit, for example as in the case of adultery, the consequences may include, as detailed earlier in the chapter, the revenge of the offended party, compensation etc. Finally, if the dry tree indeed symbolizes the person's loss of sexual potential in general, or loss of sexual potential (maybe through venereal disease) to beget legitimate children,

249 Except for the form of the verb ἔθησα. While 19:3b has יִשָּׁבֶת, 6:3a has כִּנְסָח as the beginning.
destruction may also mean the destruction of a family line. The terms שָׁבַע "by and" and זֶה לֵו וְזֶה לֵו ("dry tree") are used by the eunuch to describe himself in Isa 56:3.

While Sir 18:30 - 19:3 is completed with the line almost identical to Sir 6:3a, the latter has one more stich as a final comment within the unit. 6:3b(4b) is an idea that has been used by Ben Sira in other contexts. The Hebrew version, however, is slightly different from the Greek. While Hebrew has: "an enemy's joy overtakes them", Greek reads: "and will make him the laughingstock of enemies". These comments are stated about one's own desire (הֶזֶק שָׁבַע, "fierce"/"strong" "desire", MS A) and soul (ψυχή πονηρᾶ, "evil soul", G I). Also the idea occurs in Sir 18:31b ("she will make you the laughingstock of your enemies" in Greek), where again the subject is one's own desire in 18:31a, and in Sir 42:11b ("lest she make you a laughingstock to enemies", in Greek), where the subject is one's own daughter. It is a great concern for Ben Sira to become the laughingstock of others, especially his enemies, whether it is one's own daughter or one's own desire that makes him the sport of his enemies.

While in Sir 6:1(2)-3(4) the desires or temptations are not specified, unlike in Sir 18:30 – 19:3 and 23:4-6, the latter comments and the intertextuality with Prov 6:27-29 imply that in Sir 6:1(2)-3(4) sexual desires are meant here. Other reasons include the concern of not having offspring if the comment "dry tree" can be taken to mean the loss of sexual potential. It also seems probable that desires in themselves are not negative. The danger is when they take control of a person or when they are not controlled.

Cf. Proverbs 5 and the discussion of Sir 23:19-21 above in the chapter.

Hebrew is not extant.

Hebrew is not extant.
Sir 18:30 - 19:3

31 [...] enemy
32 Have no joy in the pleasure of the moment (lit. little pleasure), which doubles poverty.
33 Do not become a glutton and a drunkard and there is [...] in your purse.

19:1 Whoever does so [ ] not [ ], and whoever despises the little will be ruined.
2a Wine and women cause the heart/mind to be loose, and a fierce/strong desire [...] its owner.

G I

30 'Oπίσω τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν σου μὴ πορεύου καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν δρέξεων σου κωλύου·
31 ἐὰν χορηγήσῃς τῇ ψυχῇ σου εὐδοκίαν ἐπιθυμίας, ποιήσει σε ἐπίχαρμα τῶν ἐχθρῶν σου.
32 μὴ εὐφραίνου ἐπὶ πολλὴ τρυφή, μὴ προοδεθῆς συμβολὴ ἀντίς.
33 μὴ γίνου πτωχὸς συμβολοκόπων ἐκ δανεισμοῦ, καὶ οὐδέν σοι ἐστίν ἐν μαρσιππίῳ.

19:1 ἐργάτης μέθυσος οὐ πλουτισθήσεται, ὁ ἐξουθενῶν τὰ ὅλιγα κατὰ μικρόν πεσεῖται.
2 οἶνος καὶ γυναῖκες ἀποστημίζουσιν συνετούς, καὶ ὁ κολλώμενος πόρναις τολμηρότερος ἔσται·
3 σὴπῃ καὶ σκώληκες κληρονομήσουσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ψυχὴ τολμηρά ἐξαφθησεται.

30 Do not go after your desires,

253 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 26, reconstructs לֶוֶי.מָבָא.
254 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 27, restores רַשָּׁע[ן].
255 19:2b. 3a are missing.
256 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 27, restores חָטָע[ן].
257 Read "nothing"; see the note on text.
258 Read רַשָּׁע[ן] as "will not become rich".
259 Read "will destroy"; see the note on text.
and restrain your cravings.
31 If you give your soul the desire that pleases her,
she will make you the laughingstock of your enemies.
32 Do not revel in great luxury,
do not become impoverished by its expense.
33 Do not become a beggar by feasting (lit. taking part in the feast) from borrowed money,
and there is nothing in your purse.²⁶⁰
19:1 A workman who is a drunkard will not become rich,
whoever despises small things will fall little by little.
2 Wine and women will lead intelligent men astray,
and who joins/clings to prostitutes will become more reckless:
3 Decay and worms will inherit him,
and a reckless soul/life will be carried off.

Context

The wider context of 18:30 - 19:3 is 18:15 - 19:17. 18:15-18 has teachings on the correct
way of charity; 18:19-29 calls for consideration and self-examination; 18:30 - 19:3 warns
against following one's desires; 19:4-17 calls for examining the truth in what one hears,
and warns against gossipping.

Form

There are no formal characteristics.

²⁶⁰ G II adds ἔσῃ γὰρ ἐπίθουλος τῆς ἰδίας ζωῆς ("for you will be plotting against your own
life"), an idea also reflected in 19:4b: ὃ ἀμαρτάνων ἐίς ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ πλημμελήσει ("whoever sins will
do wrong to his soul/life").
Sir 18:30 ("Do not go after your desires [τῶν ἐπιθυμῶν σου], and restrain your cravings [τῶν ὑπεξεύων σου]") serves as an introduction of this short section on self control, which consists of two subsections: 18:30-33 and 19:1-3. It has been established in the discussion of the previous passage that the issue of desires and self-control is significant for the author, and his thoughts on the subject were probably influenced by Hellenistic ideals, at least to a certain extent. After the exhortation in 18:30, similarly to Sir 6:1(2)-3(4), the sage jumps immediately to some of the consequences of failing to take the advice given in the introduction. The Hebrew version only has the word "enemy" (ᾼρων) behind 18:31b in the LXX ("she will make you the laughingstock of your enemies" [ἐχορῶν]). It is a concern familiar to Ben Sira as seen in the previous discussion of Sir 6:1(2)-3(4), and it is noteworthy that in all three passages which concern desires and their control most extensively, one of the writer's fears is that others will also observe his failures or sins.

18:32-33 gives a detailed description of the dangers. The MS C version of 18:32 even more clearly expresses the contrast between the first and second half of the verse. While G I uses the terms "great luxury" (18:32a) and "impoverished" (18:32b), MS C also reflects on the temporary nature of the "pleasure" (18:32a) one enjoys, this way making the consequences in 18:32b ("doubles poverty") seem even more severe: a little luxury is not worth the great expense it involves, which is financial ruin. 18:33 continues the theme and adds another aspect to it: self control in eating and drinking (MS C) is always wise.

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261 See the discussion of Sir 6:1(2)-3(4) and 23:4-6.
262 Cf. again Sir 42:11b.
because gluttony and drunkenness can lead to poverty as seen in the previous verse, especially when someone does not have the means to take part in feasting. G I also inserts at the end of 18:33a: ἐκ δανεισμοῦ (from borrowing/borrowed money) to intensify the idea of taking part in a feast with borrowed money that has to be paid back.

The image of a "workman who is a drunkard" in G I is missing from the Hebrew version of 19:1a, which simply refers to the behaviour already depicted in 18:32-33 by confirming what is evident. The point of 19:1b is perhaps that if someone has been in a position when he had riches, he will have difficulty in appreciating small things, and it is emphasized again, that the result is poverty.

From 19:2 the author draws attention to another category of dangers of which one should be aware: women, especially the combination of women and wine (19:2a). Consumption of wine itself is not necessarily dangerous. On the contrary, Ben Sira considers wine life-giving, if drunk in moderation, and it was created to make people happy (31:27-28). Feasts that include drinking and music have a similar place in the thinking of the author (32:5-6). The key is always moderation. This is also clear from Sir 40:20, where the love of wisdom is placed above wine and music. What makes the drinking of wine dangerous in Sir 18:30 - 19:3 is the company of women, especially married women, as attested in Sir 9:9. Drinking, women and probable sexual wrongdoing are associated in Sir 9:8-9; 26:8-9. While G I in Sir 19:2a simply states that wine and

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264 Similar idea is reflected in Prov 21:17 and 23:21.
265 Cf. the call for self control in drinking wine in Sir 31:25-30; see also Prov 20:1, and for a warning regarding wine and women see Prov 31:3-5; Hos 4:10-12a.
266 Cf. also Sir 49:1.
women lead (intelligent) men astray, MS C seems to reveal more about how and why men can be led astray: wine and women (together) can cause one's heart/mind "to be loose". The term used here is from יָתִים which can mean "to be insolent, loose, reckless, wanton", "to gush over". The uses of this term in sexual contexts have been detailed in the discussion of Sir 41:17a, where it was noted that יָתִים can also mean sexual wrongdoing. In 19:2 it is wine and women also who can cause the heart to be reckless/loose. They as sources of temptation can arouse the desire of a man. In the present context the best way perhaps to interpret the term יָתִים is that the man's heart is stirred up by the woman. This effect is increased by the consumption of wine, which is capable of making a person forfeit his sense of responsibility, and he may get into contact with a woman more easily, especially if that woman has questionable virtues.

Only G I refers to the qualities of the woman in question, defining her as a prostitute (πόρναις, 19:2b). The second half of 19:2 in G I ("… will become more reckless") seems to intensify (τολμηρότερος) the idea related in the MS C version of 19:2a, but in the context of prostitutes. Trenchard suggests a reading for 19:2b that focuses on the consequences of consorting with prostitutes ("And he who clings to prostitutes perishes"), since it is more relevant to the following verse (19:3).

19:3a is extant only in G I, and MS C follows the train of thought with 19:3b ("and a fierce/strong desire [will destroy] its owner"; 19:3b, MS C; "Decay and worms will inherit him, and a reckless soul/life will be carried off", 19:3, G I). As observed earlier in the discussion, 19:3b with its term

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267 See chapter I.1.
268 It is not extant in Hebrew.
269 Trenchard, Ben Sira's View, 122 and 283, n. 228.
is almost the same as Sir 6:3a, where the result of following one's desires is depicted with the image of a dry tree (destroyed by fire) in 6:1(2)-3(4).

One can only surmise what the consequences described in 19:3 can imply. 19:3a together with a related comment in Sir 10:11, reveals the final and inevitable nature of death. As discussed in ch. I.1, it is difficult to determine whether Ben Sira believed in any sort of existence after death, or what he thought about retribution after death. Sir 19:3 with its imagery is rather ambiguous. First it states that life is final, and one inherits decay. In the second line, however, it has a mysterious comment: the reckless soul/life will be carried off. How and where one's soul or life will be carried is left unexplained.

If the woman referred to here is not married, the consequences may be loss of one's inheritance, a thought also expressed in Sir 9:6, especially if the person indeed attends prostitutes regularly as the Greek verb κολλάω suggests. Although the text does not allude to venereal disease, it cannot be precluded as a very plausible result of the behaviour condemned in 19:2b. This, together with regular drinking, can be destructive enough even to shorten one's life. This could be the most likely consequence the author refers to in 19:3.

Another possibility is that the woman in question is married. While there are various references to the consequences of consorting with an adulteress in Proverbs and Ben Sira, and most of these specify the consequences as death, its literal meaning is not certain.

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270 In Isa 56:11 שְׁמוּרִי refers to dogs with mighty appetite who are compared to Israel's blind watchmen.

271 Sir 26:22 (the married woman is "a tower of death"); Prov 2:16-19; 5:5, 11-12; 7:27.
as has been discussed earlier in this chapter. With a fair degree of certainty, the death penalty can be precluded, as it was probably not in effect in Ben Sira's time.\textsuperscript{272} In the story about the adulterer and adulteress in Sir 23:16-27 there is no allusion to it. In the case of the adulteress there the penalty was probably public scourging.\textsuperscript{273} The only reference that may allude to death is found in Prov 6:34-35 where the offended husband may seek revenge instead of compensation.

Sir 18:30 – 19:3 again does not state explicitly that passions or cravings are bad in themselves. They are dangerous if they are excessive and lead to negative consequences. It is noteworthy, however, that for the author of both text versions, passions can easily become excessive and have negative consequences.

**Sir 23:4-6 in the context of 22:27 - 23:27**

G I

4 κύριε πάτερ καὶ θεὲς ζωῆς μου, metewrisiμον ὄφθαλμων μὴ δύς μοι
5 καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν ἀπόστρεψον ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ·
6 κοιλίας δρέξις καὶ συνουσιασμὸς μὴ καταλαβέτωσάν με, καὶ ψυχή ἀναιδεῖ μὴ παράδως με.

4 O Lord, Father and God of my life, do not give me haughty eyes (lit. lifting up of eyes)  
5 and turn desire/passion away from me,  
6 let neither gluttony (lit. longing of the belly) nor sexual intercourse take hold of me, and do not surrender me to a shameless soul/life.

\textsuperscript{272} Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 325.  
\textsuperscript{273} Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 325.
Context

The wider context is 22:27 – 23:27, within which 22:27 - 23:6 consists of two prayers: to avoid the sins of the tongue (22:27 - 23:1) and the sins of passion (23:2-6). The latter is the immediate context of Sir 23:4-6. 23:7-15 is again concerned with the trespasses one's lips can cause. In 23:16-21, 22-26 we find the parallels of the adulterer and adulteress. The chapter concludes with 23:27 on the fear of the Lord. Beentjes also identifies these sections and points out that 23:7-15 and 23:16-26 are the more detailed elaborations of 22:27 - 23:1 and 23:2-6 respectively.274

Form

The text is extant only in G I. However, some distinctive characteristics in the structure of this version may be discovered if it is viewed in the context of 22:27 - 23:6. Beentjes regards the two prayers (22:17 - 23:1 and 23:2-6) as parallels, and he creates a diagram on the basis of particular expressions used in both parts.275 Both 22:27a and 23:2a start with τίς. Their second halves continue with καὶ (22:27b and 23:2b). The term ἵνα μὴ is used in both 22:27cd and 23:2c-3. κόρε πάτερ is the beginning of both 23:1a and 23:4a. Finally μὴ introduces both 23:1bc and 23:4b-6.

As noted above in the context, 23:4-6 is a prayer to avoid the sins of passion. As a prayer it is also a solution that the author finds to the distressing questions of 23:2-4, similar to the way 23:1 is the solution to the question of 22:27. These questions are great concerns for Ben Sira. The intensity of desire in general is described in Sir 6:3 as "fierce" (חזק), and the whole of Sir 6:1(2)-3(4) and Sir 18:30 - 19:3, together with 23:4-6, attests that desires and especially controlling them were serious issues for the author. 23:2-6 implies that the only way to avoid committing sin by pursuing these desires is with the help of God: it is beyond the ability and control of the person. This explains why Ben Sira addresses the Lord as Father both in 23:1a and 23:4a as an expression of confidence and trust. Also, the terms "Master of my life" (23:1a) and "God of my life" (23:4a) seem to confirm this idea: only God really knows the life and concerns of the author; only He can help.

As Eron observes, the detailed list of various human desires and their symptoms (23:4b-6) and the wish to be independent from them, resemble the Cynic and Stoic ideal. The list includes:

- 4b: haughty eyes (lit. lifting up of eyes)
- 5: passion (desire),
- 6a: gluttony and sexual intercourse,
- 6b: shameless soul.

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276 They are both discussed earlier in this subchapter.
277 God appears as Father in other references: Sir 51:10; 32:6; Prov 3:12; Wis 2:13, 16; 14:3; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Hos 11:1; Mal 1:6; 2:10.
The haughty eyes (μετεωρισμὸν ὀφθαλμῶν) in 23:4b is used not with the meaning "arrogant" as in Isa 2:11; 5:15; Ps 130:1 and Prov 21:4. In the light of the context of 23:4-6 the term "haughty eyes" should be interpreted as the look of a person who has (illegitimate) sexual passion in his heart, as in Sir 26:9; Gen 39:7 and Prov 6:25. This look may be the first step in alluring someone, or being allured by someone. The connection between eyes or sight and desire is widely attested, as noted in ch. II.

Excursus 15: ἐπιθυμέω/ἐπιθυμία

ἐπιθυμία is frequently used for "desire" or "passion" in the LXX, including wisdom writings. It denotes a variety of human wants, wishes, or cravings without intrinsic moral valuation. Whether it is used in a neutral, positive or negative sense depends usually on the contexts. Human desires are God-given, and their pursuit becomes sinful when God's will is ignored and the desire is uncontrolled. Ignoring God's will in the sexual context can also mean that the object of desire is forbidden. ἐπιθυμία (23:5) is most probably used in a sexual context here. It is employed also in Sir 3:29; 5:2 (in a sexual sense); 6:37; 14:14; 16:1; 18:30-31 (in a sexual sense among others); 20:4 (in a sexual sense);

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279 Isa 5:15 and Ps 130:1 employ different forms of the same term as in Sir 23:4b.
280 See the discussion of 26:7-12.
281 In the Decalogue in Exod 20:17 ("you shall not covet your neighbor's wife"), Deut 5:21 ("neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife"), ὁδὸν μεταφέρεται translates ὁπαντιν τὸν in both cases; cf. Loader, Septuagint, 10.
283 Herzog, "Desire," 929.
284 It is about desiring wisdom. However, in the context of 6:18-37, which has numerous references of sexual nature, "desire" may also be used in a sexual sense here.
24:19 and 36:22(27). As the last-mentioned refers to a good wife, in particular to her beauty that surpasses all desire, it may be taken as a sexual reference.

The term κοιλίας δρέξις (23:6a) literally means the longing of the belly, and if used in a negative context as here refers to another sin: gluttony or eating beyond control, or the desire to do so.

The word συνουσιασμός (23:6a) denotes "sexual intercourse". Apart from Sir 23:6a another occurrence is in the later 4 Macc. 2:3, a work that is dated between probably the 1st century B.C.E. and 1st century C.E. Some of the thoughts of Stoic philosophy are reflected in 4 Maccabees, a work which is very much concerned with desires. The passage in which συνουσιασμός appears praises Joseph because he controlled his sexual desire (4 Macc. 2:3). Later in the chapter we read that reason is able to control not only sexual but all desires (4 Macc. 2:4-6). As noted in ch. I.1., the Aramaic Levi Document, 6:3 / 16 mentions συνουσιασμόν in relation to "impurity" (አኔート, እካልሆሶስ) and "sexual immorality"/"wrongdoing" (የአባት, ከምርድ). 286

It would be difficult to imagine that the author rejects sexual intercourse as such. It is probable that he prays that sexual intercourse and the desire for it does not take him over or become an obsession.

285 Similarly to Sir 6:37, in the context of the author's wisdom poems, it can be taken as a sexual reference.

The word ἀναιδής means "shameless" and it is closely related to ἀναιδεία: lack of sensitivity to what is proper: shamelessness. It is noteworthy that it is widely used in wisdom writings. In two out of the four occurrences in Sirach (23:6; 25:22; 26:11; 40:30) it is in a sexual context. Apart from Sir 23:6 it describes the behaviour (in particular the eyes) of the adulterous woman (26:11). Prov 7:13 uses it of the adulteress ("impudent face"). The term ψυχὴ ἀναιδεία may mean "a shameless soul". In this sense the "haughty eyes" of 23:4b may also reflect to the outside what is inside of one's heart. It may also be interpreted in a broader sense: the term "shameless life" describes the life of the person who constantly pursues illicit desires.

The first and greatest concern in the prayer (23:4-6) and in its context is the fear of falling into the control of desires, to be given over to them. However another aspect may be added: the sins that are the consequences of the uncontrolled desires may be observed by others as well (23:3). This thought is characteristic of the writer. Becoming a byword or laughingstock to others (especially to the enemies) is also one of the sage's recurring fears. Even though the author seems to have found the answer to his concerns in the form of a prayer in 23:6, in the following verses he calls the readers to be cautious in order to avoid the sins of the lips (Sir 23:7-15) and again the danger of desires (23:16-26). Beentjes argues that the closing line (23:27) which functions as the conclusion of 22:27 - 23:27, is prepared by the formula παθεῖαν σοφίας in Sir 23:2b. This confirms the idea that wisdom and the fear of the Lord are necessary to avoid falling into the

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287 In Prov 21:29; 25:23 and Eccl 8:1 the context is not sexual.
289 See also Sir 6:4; 42:11bcd.
control of desires, and also that wisdom and the fear of the Lord should be the only controlling powers in the life of the wise. Again, this passage does not condemn sexual desires per se, only implies that they should not control one's life.

**IV.4. Conclusion**

In the passages regarding adultery and prostitution the students are discouraged from associating themselves both with ordinary prostitutes and married women. The comments on the "strange woman" probably refer to ordinary prostitutes and it is likely that the author's concern is not intermarriage. This seems to be confirmed in the passage dealing with King Solomon (Sir 47:19-21).

It is noteworthy that Ben Sira has sayings on adulterers, not only on adulteresses (23:18-21, 22-27). The consequences of adultery committed by a woman, however, seem to be more severe and their description receives more attention. One of the reasons behind it may be that an unfaithful woman may bring children into the family which are not rightful heirs of the husband (23:22-26, and possibly 26:19-21). The latter passage places an emphasis not on the sexual satisfaction itself within a licit relationship, but on legitimate offspring. This view, however, does not appear to be general in the book, since descriptions of good marriages which do not refer to procreation demonstrate that sex is not negative and can be enjoyed in itself (esp. 26:13a and 36:22[27]).

The warnings against consorting with prostitutes, virgins/young women, or one's own maid seem to represent a new development compared with what Mosaic law requires.
The motivation behind these instructions may either imply that the author applies higher ethical standards according to which sexual intercourse is only permitted or approved within marriage, or reflects the sage's eudaemonistic view. In the latter case the focus is on the avoidance of consequences, such as fines, punishments, financial ruination, and self-destructive life-style. The fear of some of these consequences may play a role in the sayings on adultery as well.

Finally through sexuality (in the case of prostitution) a man may come under the control of a woman, who otherwise in society is considered "inferior". Adulterous women with their illicit sexual conduct not only bring shame to the men responsible for their sexuality but may also appear to be in control. In many cases perhaps this is why they are called wicked when the author does not specify what he means by the wickedness/evil of women. Sometimes the motivation behind the teachings against prostitution and/or adultery may be to remain autonomous, in control and not let women gain control over men.

Self-control is also the concern of passages regarding unruled/unruly passions (Sir 6:1[2]-3[4]; 18:30 – 19:3; 23:4-6). These imply that desire in itself is not something wrong. It is the source of danger only when it is excessive and controls the life of a person.

In conclusion it appears that sexuality is only positive within the context of marriage. In every other context it is discouraged or condemned. Sexual desire is only dangerous when it is excessive and/or uncontrolled.
CHAPTER FIVE
WISDOM POEMS

It is necessary for more than one reason to turn our attention to the wisdom poems found in the book. Firstly, because despite some fairly obvious differences, they are related to other wisdom poems of Second Temple Judaism, and analysis of such poems will tell us what contribution Ben Sira/Sirach made to the existing tradition of feminine personification of wisdom, including sexual elements. Secondly, as will be demonstrated, the author's view on sexuality in these poems, at least in some aspects, seems to be very different from other comments pertaining to sexuality within the book.

As our main interest here lies in the phenomenon of personified wisdom, the basic texts to be discussed are Sir 1:1-10; 4:11-19; 6:18-31; 14:20-15:10; 24:1-22; 51:13-30, in relation to especially Job 28; Proverbs 8; Wisdom 7-9 and Bar 3:9-4:4. Sir 1:1-10 has only one possible sexual allusion. However, since it serves as an introduction to three of the main themes of the whole book, i.e. the fear of the Lord is wisdom, the origin of wisdom is from God, and wisdom is with God forever, it is necessary to address it at least briefly.

Personification is a known literary device in the Hebrew Bible. The same is true of the personification of wisdom. While discussion of the origin of a personified female wisdom figure in other Near-Eastern wisdom traditions lies beyond the scope of this

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1 See e.g. Pss 85:11; 89:14; 97:2b; Prov 20:1a; 23:31; cf. also Roland E. Murphy, The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 133.
thesis, it is widely agreed that the phenomenon is not unique to Israelite wisdom tradition.\(^2\) Sinnott observes that regardless of the background she now appears "indigenous to her biblical settings",\(^3\) and that a speaking figure of personified wisdom seems to be a uniquely Israelite characteristic.\(^4\) Similarly, the more general issue of whether Lady Wisdom is a form of hypostasis, a myth or simply a literary device\(^5\) used in order to captivate the readers' attention with a vivid poetic language using symbols, metaphors, similes, rhymes, parallels and repetition, is not our focus here.\(^6\)

The questions that cannot be overlooked here are: (1) what relation the authors of the wisdom poems have with Lady Wisdom; (2) what images they use to describe this relationship; and (3) in particular, what they tell us about attitudes towards sexuality. In the discussion wisdom is designated "she" or "her" when the focus is on personification within the poems. In every other case wisdom is designated "it".

Sir 1:1-10

\(\text{G I}\)

\begin{verbatim}
1 Πᾶσα σοφία παρὰ κυρίου
cαὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἔστιν εἶς τὸν αἰῶνα.
\end{verbatim}


\(^3\) Sinnott, *Personification*, 6-7, 52-87.


2 All wisdom is from the Lord, and is with him forever.
3 The sand of the sea and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity who can number?
4 The height of heaven and the breadth of the earth, and the abyss and wisdom who can explore?
5 Before all things wisdom has been created and understanding of prudence is from eternity.
6 The fountain of wisdom is God's word in the highest,
and her ways are everlasting commandments.

G I

6 To whom has wisdom's root been revealed and who knew her great deeds?  

G II

7 Wisdom's knowledge – to whom was it manifested? and her great experience – who has understood it?

G I

8 There is one wise, greatly formidable, seated on his throne.  
9 The Lord, he created her, and he saw and enumerated her, and poured her forth on all his works,  
10 among all flesh according to his giving, and gave (lit. provided) her abundantly to those who love him.

G II

10cd Love of the Lord is esteemed wisdom but to whomever he appears, he apportions her that they may see him.

Context

As pointed out above, Sir 1:1-10 is the first among the wisdom poems and introduces three key themes: the origin of wisdom is from God; wisdom is with God forever; the fear of the Lord is wisdom. The last of these is discussed in 1:11-30.

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8 Skehan, Ben Sira, 136-37, suggests “her subtleties” (מַעֲרֹמֶים) in 1:6b, since behind the word πανοργεutos in the only other occurrence in Sir 42:18, stands מַעֲרֹמֶים (MS B, or מַעֲרֹמֶים in MS M); cf. also Sir 51:20d (19f) in 11Q5/11QPo.
Form

The first and last verses have the words \( \pi\alpha\sigma\alpha \) ("all", regarding "wisdom", 1:1a) and \( \pi\alpha\sigma\eta\varsigma \) ("all", regarding "flesh", 1:10a), which together with the terms \( \mu\varepsilon\tau\' \omicron\omega\tau\omicron \) ("with him", 1:1b) and \( \mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha \pi\alpha\sigma\eta\varsigma \sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\delta\zeta \) ("among all flesh", 1:10a) create an inclusio for the poem.\(^{12}\)

Content

As pointed out above, Sir 1:1-10 introduces the issue of the origin of wisdom, before taking up the other main theme of the whole of the book in Sir 1:11-30, the fear of the Lord is wisdom. The opening verse immediately, though partially, answers the question that is raised in Job 28:12 ("But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?"). The answer is straightforward: "All wisdom is from the Lord, and is with him forever" (1:1). A similar idea appears also in Wis 8:3 and in 9:9a. Although Baruch is similar to Job 28 in that they both declare that only God knows where wisdom is, the former has an interesting development compared with the latter regarding the whereabouts of wisdom, when it states: wisdom has been given to Jacob/Israel (Bar 3:37 - 4:2).\(^{13}\) In this Bar 3:37 – 4:2 is similar to Sirach 24.

As it is impossible to number the sand of the sea and the drops of the rain and to fathom the abyss (1:2-3), it is equally impossible to know and possess wisdom, unless she is the gift of God, especially because she was created before all things (1:4a) from eternity (1:4b). Similarly she claims to be the first of God's work in Prov 8:22 and has

\(^{12}\) See also Skehan, Ben Sira, 137.

\(^{13}\) See also Murphy, Tree of Life, 141.
her origins in eternity (Prov 8:23). Wisdom in the G II text of Sir 1:5 is linked with the word of God and the everlasting commandments, i.e. in reference to the Torah.\textsuperscript{14}

1:6 reads: "To whom has wisdom's root been revealed and who knew her great deeds?". Skehan suggests that it is possible that behind \textit{πανουργεύματα} ("great deeds") the Hebrew may have read the term \textit{μνημεία}.\textsuperscript{15} The latter is also used in 2 Chr 28:15 to denote "nakedness". The mutilated text of Sir 51:20d (11Q5/11QPs\textsuperscript{a}) employs \textit{เทรmany} [...] , which probably comes from \textit{تراثך} ("naked", "undressed")\textsuperscript{16} and in the context denotes "nakedness" ("and I came to know her [nakedness]"). The latter statement, similarly to Sir 1:6b, concerns the relationship between the author and wisdom personified, and has sexual connotations as will be shown later in this chapter. If we assume that the Hebrew of Sir 1:6b read "and who knew her nakedness", then this comment, however isolated, would already exhibit some of the characteristics of the description of the author's relationship with wisdom, which is frequently depicted as a love affair in the poems.

Another root that deserves attention is \textit{נוהי}\textsuperscript{17} which means among others "to be crafty", "to be shrewd", "to be prudent" (\textit{כלך} = "craftiness", \textit{ nokhe} = "prudence") and its various forms are frequently translated with 

\textit{πανουργεύματα/πανουργος/πανουργία}, "to be cunning"/"clever", "crafty"/"capability for every work", "craftiness", "trickery" (Josh 9:4; 1 Sam 23:22; Prov 1:4; 8:5; 12:16; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 15:5; 19:25; 22:3; 27:12; Job 5:12; Sir

\textsuperscript{14} Also see Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Full Wisdom is from the Lord": Sir 1,1-10 and Its Place in Israel's Wisdom Literature," in "Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14,20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira (CBET 43; ed. Pancratius C. Beentjes; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 19-34, 25-26.

\textsuperscript{15} See the footnotes on the translation. \textit{πανουργεύματα} is used in Jdt 11:8.

\textsuperscript{16} See also Skehan, \textit{Ben Sira}, 575.

\textsuperscript{17} I am grateful to Prof Benjamin Wright for drawing my attention to this root in his examiner's report.
In Sir 42:18 interestingly πανουργεύματα (from πανούργευμα) translates מַעְרֵרִים (MS B; מעררים in MS M) from נָעָם, "naked", "undressed") which complicates even more the reconstruction of the word behind πανουργεύματα in 1:6. 42:18 does not seem to have any sexual connotation, but it connects the idea of "great deeds" with the term מעררים, נואם ("naked", "undressed"). מעררים (MS B; מעררים in MS M) in 42:18 is usually translated as "their secrets" and this would be the only passage in Ben Sira to support the idea of "nakedness" in Sir 1:6. Even if the latter does not have any sexual connotation, the reading "secrets" still can be assumed behind πανουργεύματα perhaps more so than "craftiness" since the latter (נואם) is mainly translated with πανουργεύσαι/πανούργος/πανουργία and not with πανουργεύμα in the passages listed above.

In this poem, however, the emphasis is on the fact that only God can understand wisdom and grant her to humanity (1:7 [G II], 8-10ab, 10cd, [G II]). Beentjes argues that in 1:7a the term ἐπιστήμη σοφίας should be understood as "an understanding of wisdom" rather than in the sense of "all that wisdom knows", since in 1:7 the subject is God. 18 1:8 confirms this: the Lord as subject is the only wise One; only he can understand and possess wisdom fully. Wisdom's essence as created being is highlighted again in 1:9, where the use of ἔξαρπθησεν creates an inclusio with ἔξαρπθησει in 1:2b, emphasizing that wisdom exclusively belongs to God's domain. 19

In Job 28, where wisdom seems to be distinct from the created world (28:14), 20 the search finishes on a rather negative note. Although it says that God saw and declared

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20 Murphy, Tree of Life, 134-35.
wisdom (28:27), the ending of Sir 1:1-10 is more positive, since wisdom is not
distinct from the creation, but poured upon all God's works (1:9c), she is among all
flesh (1:10a), and given abundantly to those who love God (1:10b). 1:10cd in G II
virtually repeats 1:10ab with the addition that it is through wisdom that humans may
see God. 1:9b-10ab (and also 1:10cd) complete the answer to the question in Job
28:12.

Compared with other wisdom poems that are discussed later in the chapter, Sir 1:1-10
does not betray much about the attitude of the author towards sexuality. Even if, as
suggested above, we assume the word מְרְמִיתָה  ("her nakedness") behind
πανουργεύματα in 1:6b, it would be only an isolated reference to the relationship,
reminiscent of a love-affair between wisdom and her follower, that is depicted in the
rest of the wisdom poems. If there is a sexual allusion in 1:1-10, it is positive about
sexuality. It is also significant that the writer established that all wisdom is from the
Lord and that only the Lord can fully possess wisdom. In the light of this Sir 1:1-10
may be an introduction in the sense that it declares: wisdom is from the Lord, who
gives it to those who love him. That humans have to take the initiative is expressed in
the other poems, where the depiction of this initiative in the image of searching,
finding, and seizing wisdom is developed.

Sir 4:11-19

MS A

סֶאָה מְרִיתָה בֵּינוֹּת הַיִּשְׁעָה מַלֵּךְ הָאַבֶּרֶךְ מֵאֵלָה בְּכִסָּה רַעָה מִיַּרְאֶה
אֲנָכְחַת אֲנָכְחַת יִירֵשׁ הָאוֹר מִיַּרְאֶה מְרִיתָה מְרִיתָה מְרִיתָה
רַעָה בְּכִסָּה מֶשְׁרִיתָה נִכְזֶר מְרִיתָה
אֲנָכְחַת אֲנָכְחַת יִירֵשׁ הָאוֹר מִיַּרְאֶה
21 Skehan, Ben Sira, 169, 170, suggests the omission of מְרִיתָה from 4:13a.
11 Wisdom teaches her children
and admonishes all who can understand her.
12 Those who love her love life,
and those who seek her out will win (lit. get) the Lord's favour.
13 Those who hold her will find glory from the Lord
and wherever they dwell (lit. settle) the Lord's blessing (is upon them).
14 Those who serve her serve the Holy One,
15 Whoever obeys me (lit. hears/listens to me) will judge truly/safely,
and whoever listens to me will dwell in my inmost chambers.
17 For I will walk with him in disguise
and first he will try/examine him with trials,
until his heart is fully with me.
18 I will return the straight path to him
and reveal to him my secrets (lit. secret place).
19 If he turns away, I will turn aside from him
and admonish him in fetters.
If he turns away from me I will cast him away
and deliver him over to the robbers.

G I

11 η σοφία υἱὸς αὕτης ἀνύψωσεν
καὶ ἐπιλαμβάνεται τῶν ζητοῦντων αὐτὴν.
12 οἱ ἀγαπῶν αὐτὴν ἄγαπάζων,
καὶ οἱ ὑδράριζοντες πρὸς αὐτὴν ἐμπληθῆσονται εὐφροσύνης.
13 οἱ κρατῶν αὐτῆς κληρονομῆσαι δόξαν,
καὶ οὐ εἰσπορεύεται, εὐλογεῖ κύριος.
14 οἱ λατρεύοντες αὐτῆς λειτουργήσουσιν ἁγίω,
καὶ τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας αὐτὴν ἄγαπα δύναται οὗτος κύριος.
15 οἱ υπακούων αὐτῆς κρίνει ἑαυτῷ,

22 MS A is jumbled here. The probable reading according to Lévi, Hebrew Text, 3, is: "אבות" ("Those who love her the Lord loves"). G I supports it.
23 This word is taken from Lévi, Hebrew Text, 3. Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 25, has קדימ. The word used here is קדימה ("truly"). Both G I and Skehan, Ben Sira, 169, 170, have קדימה ("nations").
24 Lévi, Hebrew Text, 3, corrects בחירת ("examine") to another verb meaning "examine, try". It fits the context better in the first person (ח簡單).
25 Read "Those who love her, the Lord loves". See the note on the text.
26 The correct reading would be in the first person: "...I will try/examine him...". See the note on the text.
27 The word דחיית used in Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 25, from the verb דחי, can have the meaning of "turn aside from" among others. The verb הושיע ("abandon") is more probable. See also Lévi, Hebrew Text, 3.
Wisdom raises/exalts her sons and takes hold of whoever seeks her.

Whoever loves her loves life, and whoever rises early for her will be filled with joy.

Whoever holds her fast will inherit glory and wherever he enters, the Lord blesses.

Those who serve her will minister to the Holy One, and those who love her, the Lord loves.

Whoever obeys her will judge nations, and whoever gives heed to her will dwell in confidence.

If he trusts her he will inherit her, and his descendants will be in possession (of her).

For at first she will walk with him by devious ways, she will bring upon him fear and faintheartedness, and she will test him with her discipline, until he trusts her with his heart, or: until she can trust him, and she will try/test him with her regulations/requirements/ordinances;

Then again she will return straight back to him and will gladden him, and will reveal to him her secrets.

If he goes astray, she will abandon him and hand him over to the grip of his fall.29

Context

Chapter 4 may be divided into 3 parts. The first belongs to Sir 3:25 - 4:10. The second is Sir 4:11-19, as the beginning of a larger section on sayings concerning wisdom in everyday life (Sir 4:11 – 6:17), and the third is Sir 4:20-31. Sir 4:11-19 has the following structure: 4:11-14 refers to wisdom in the third person in MS A and

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describes the rewards enjoyed by a person who holds wisdom fast. In 4:15, 17-19 it is wisdom who speaks in the first person in MS A\textsuperscript{30} about promises/rewards (4:15, 18 in MS A; 4:15-16, 18 in G I) and warnings (4:17abc in MS A; 4:17abcde in G I, then 4:19abcd in MS A and 4:19ab in G I) for the person who remains faithfully with wisdom.

Form

Apart from the wordplay on הַנוֹן ("her sons") and מָנוֹנִים ("who can understand") in 4:11, and the repetition of the formula אִם יָסְרֵךְ ("if he turns away") in 4:19 there are no significant formal characteristics. Certain patterns can be discovered in parts of the section in terms of content.

Content

Sir 4:11-19, compared with other wisdom poems (Sir 6:18-37; 14:20 - 15:10; 24:1-22 and 51:13-30), has both similarities and differences. The motif of search for wisdom that is an important characteristic of both 6:18-37 and 14:20 - 15:10 is not as significant in the passage. In an introductory verse (4:11) wisdom is already teaching and admonishing people in MS A. The ones she is teaching are termed "her children". While בָּנוֹי is not exclusively a reference to a male offspring and sometimes can denote "children" in general, בַּנוֹי in Sir 4:11a can be translated as "her sons" with a fair degree of certainty, especially in the light of the fact that the sage seems to be giving instruction primarily to men throughout the book.

\textsuperscript{30} G I retains the third person in the whole of Sir 4:11-19.
In 4:11 wisdom is pictured as a mother similarly to Sir 15:2a. While in the latter it is simply stated about wisdom that "she will come out to meet him like a mother", in Sir 4:11 one of the motherly qualities is specified: she gives instruction. Comments about real women who teach are lacking in Ben Sira's work. Even in the passages concerning mothers it is only implied, and not expressed, that by their experience and age they are able to give instruction. The author appears to attribute this role only to a woman who is not real: wisdom. Wisdom as a teacher is a recurring theme in other wisdom poems: Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-35; 9:1-12; Sir 13:5; 51:16, 20cd, 23-28. The people who are admonished in Sir 4:11b are those who "can understand her" (יְנִיָּה הַמְּבֻּנֵיָם).

Wisdom is hidden; she manifests herself only to "deserving subjects". This verse is not the only one in Ben Sira to imply that not everyone can benefit from wisdom's teaching. Only people who have intelligence can either understand or possess wisdom. Sir 6:20 has a similar idea: "Jolting is she to the foolish and cannot hold her who lacks intelligence" (MS A). The terms "fool" or "foolish" (נָאָוִיל) not only describe a person who lacks intelligence but in some cases can also denote "wickedness", "immorality" or "impropriety". Conversely, those who are not fools, not only have intelligence but behave morally or appropriately. It is certainly attested frequently throughout the wisdom literature that one who heeds wisdom's instruction will avoid dangers such as sexual wrongdoing. Also, the parallel of the first and second half of Sir 4:11 suggests that only people who understand wisdom may be called her children.

32 See similar interpretation in Skehan, Ben Sira, 171.
The G I version of 4:11 reads differently ("Wisdom raises/exalts her sons and takes hold of whoever seeks her"). The root word for ἀνώψει (ἀνώψ), is used 26 times in the LXX, of which 24 occurrences are found in Sirach. The idea that wisdom exalts those who follow her faithfully above others is also found in Sir 15:5, using the related word ὑψω. In the second half of Sir 4:11, ἔπιλαμβάνω appears. The same term describes the actions of the adulteress in Prov 7:13a who takes hold of the unsuspecting man. It is employed in a positive context in Sir 4:11 and seems to describe a close, if not intimate relationship of wisdom with those seeking her. We may even assume that the ones wisdom takes hold of will remain in her grasp forever.

This may be confirmed in the remaining parts of the poem.

 Certain patterns may be discovered in the rest of the first stanza (4:12-14) in both text versions. 4:12b, 13a, 14b in the first half start with the description of the action or intent which a person has towards wisdom ("seek her out", 4:12b, "hold her", 4:13a, "love her", 4:14b, MS A). Only the G I version of the first part of 4:12b is significantly different, where we read: "who rises early for her". The idea of seeking is not present here. Rising early for wisdom, however, can also mean an earnest intent to attain her. In all these comments the emphasis is on the human initiative in the search for wisdom, a search that uses similar imagery and language to that found in Cant 3:1-3 of the beloved’s search for her lover (شب and זウォ). 4:13, 14 also emphasize that constancy is necessary in the relationship with wisdom ("hold her", "love her"). The verbs יָם and κρατέω ("to hold", "to grasp" or "to

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rule"/"command", "to hold fast") in 4:13 probably symbolize the close bond between wisdom and her seeker.

The second half of the lines above conclude with the rewards of the person's action for wisdom: "win the Lord's favour", 4:12b, "will find glory from the Lord", 4:13a, "the Lord loves", 4:14b, MS A. The word "favour" ((MenuItem) is frequently used in wisdom literature. It is in the context of God (God's favour, pleasure or goodwill) in Pss 5:13; 30:6, 8; 51:20; 89:18; 106:4; Prov 12:2; 18:22 as it is in Sir 4:12b. Together with glory (Sir 4:13a), the latter understood in the context of honour, the rewards probably include long life, prosperity, offspring, or status in society. Regarding the divine love in Sir 4:14b Crenshaw notes that the verb ((MenuItem) is not often used with God being the subject and individuals or a people as objects. Ben Sira, however, boldly attests that those who love wisdom will be loved by the Lord. It may be noted that these rewards (4:12b, 13a, 14b, MS A) all come from the Lord. Only the G I version of 4:12b ("who rises early for her will be filled with joy") is broader: joy is not specified by Sirach, and may come from the Lord, from wisdom, or from humans. The word (MenuItem) ("joy") in itself need not have a sexual connotation; it is difficult to conclude what is really meant here. It is rather unlikely that when the Hebrew version of the text does not pertain to matters of sexuality ("win the Lord's favour", 4:12b MS A), the Greek would change it to the contrary.

4:12a, 14a have a pattern on their own. The former in the first half starts with an action towards Wisdom but the second half is not a reward in the sense of the above

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34 Crenshaw, Defending God, 105.
35 Also see Prov 8:35b and 12:2a.
36 Cf. also Crenshaw, Defending God, 103.
examples. Rather the stich as a whole ("Those who love her love life", 4:12a, MS A)\(^{37}\) means that wisdom is as dear to one as one's own life. This would be in line with the thought that wisdom can prevent a person from consorting with an adulteress, an act the consequences of which are said to be fatal in some comments in wisdom literature, even if death is not meant literally.\(^{38}\)

4:14a ("Those who serve her serve the Holy One", MS A)\(^{39}\) is similar to 4:12b, 13a, 14b, 12a in that it starts with the particular action towards wisdom, but the end of the stich is both an action toward God and a reward: the service of the Holy One is a great honour. The term for the Lord used in 4:14 is "Holy One" (יְהֹוָה). It is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible. Ben Sira himself uses it in the following way in 39:35: "bless his holy name" (MS B\(^{mg}\)). The Greek ἅγιος\(^{40}\) ("holy") also appears describing God in Sir 23:9; 43:10; 47:8; 48:20; Bar 4:22, 37 and 5:5. Sir 24:10a shows that one of the most significant parts of wisdom's activities is ministering in the holy tent. In Sir 4:14a serving wisdom is equated with serving God himself. Wisdom is endowed with a similar importance in Sir 1:11-30 ("wisdom's beginning is to fear the Lord", 1:14).

Sir 1:26 is a significant addition in declaring that attaining wisdom has a condition: to keep the commandments. Whoever loves wisdom must fear the Lord, and also only those who can attain wisdom who keep the commandments; therefore they are rewarded with the Lord's love ("those who love her, the Lord loves", Sir 4:14b).\(^{41}\)

\(^{37}\) G I is not significantly different.

\(^{38}\) For wisdom as "life-giver" see Prov 3:16a, 18a; 8:35a. Similar idea appears in a negation in Prov 8:36. Cf. also Wis 3:11; 10:3-6.

\(^{39}\) G I does not differ significantly.

\(^{40}\) In various forms.

\(^{41}\) Both versions agree if the corrected version of MS A is accepted as suggested above. See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 171-72; Deut 7:12-13; 28:1-14.
4:13b differs most from the rest of Sir 4:12a-14b. The whole stich is a promise or reward. We read in MS A: "wherever they dwell (lit. settle) the Lord's blessing (is upon them)". G I uses an even broader term: "wherever he enters, the Lord blesses". Blessing, similarly to the glory in the sense of honour in the first half of the verse, probably refers to long life, prosperity, offspring, or status in society.

The second stanza of the passage (4:15-16) continues with the list of rewards and blessing, but the speaker is wisdom herself. The verbs "obeys" (מְבָרַך) and "listens" (יָדָא) have very similar connotations. As noted above 4:15a is different in MS A and G I. MS A reads: "whoever obeys me (lit. hears/listens to me) will judge truly/safely", which is rendered by G I as "whoever obeys her will judge nations". The idea of judging the nations is not the concern of Ben Sira anywhere in the book and probably merely refers to integrity in judicial matters. Apart from Sir 4:15a the Greek translation does not deal with the issue either. It is not likely that eschatological judgment is meant here. A cosmopolitan character of wisdom, however, cannot be excluded on the basis of G I. It would also be supported by the comment of wisdom herself in Sir 24:6a: "in every people and nation I held sway". Wisdom claims to rule over nations, therefore those who walk with her will judge nations in this international sense (4:15a, G I).

The second half of 4:15 also differs in the two text versions ("and whoever listens to me will dwell in my inmost chambers", MS A; "and whoever gives heed to her will dwell in confidence", G I). According to MS A the listeners seem to be rewarded as lovers living in an intimate relationship with wisdom. Those who consort with folly in

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42 As was noted above G I retains the third person throughout the poem.
43 Also cf. the Greek version of Prov 29:9a; Wis 3:8; 1 Cor 6:2 and Rev 20:4.
44 Also see Crenshaw, Defending God, 105.
Prov 9:13-18 are doomed, but attending the house of wisdom means life and understanding (Prov 9:1-6). Ben Sira describes wisdom's house similarly in Sir 1:17, but none of these comments is as erotically charged as Sir 4:15b. The G I version of the stich, however, seems to tone down the meaning by leaving out the reference to "my inmost chambers". Crenshaw points out that, since the idea of judging nations is foreign to Ben Sira, some scholars read שמה for שמה in 4:15a which would result in the following translation: "whoever obeys me will dwell truly/safely". This way 4:15 would have a chiastic pattern: whoever obeys me will dwell truly/safely :: will dwell in my inmost chambers whoever listens to me. This would indicate that living in wisdom's chamber as a lover means safe dwelling, or we could even assume that only living with wisdom is true living.45

4:16 assures the reader that if his obedience is continuous, his descendants will also possess wisdom as their heritage.46 A similar idea appears in Sir 1:15.

The thought from Sir 6:18-37, that it is not an easy task to acquire and hold wisdom, is reflected in the first verse of the final stanza (4:17-19). According to the Hebrew text wisdom in the first person claims to test the faithfulness of her seeker, whether his heart is fully with her. This includes walking with him in disguise (4:17a). As the strangeness of the strange woman may appear alluring,47 wisdom uses strangeness (disguise) to enhance her seductive charm to allure students into her company.48 The trials in 4:17b are not detailed.

45 Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 105.
46 The verse is only extant in G I.
47 See the discussion on the "strange woman" in chapter IV.1.
48 See also Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 106.
The G I version depicts the relation of wisdom and the student as something characterized by "devious ways" (4:17a), "fear and faintheartedness" (4:17b), "discipline" and "regulations"/"requirements" (4:17c,e). Wisdom is identified with discipline in Sir 6:22. The word παιδεία occurs in the meaning "discipline" or "learning" in Sir 1:27; 21:19; 21:21; 22:6; 31:17a; 32:14a (MS B has מדר in 32:14c); 33:25; 42:5b, 8a (MS B has מדר, probably also MS M, but the text is mutilated); 50:27a (MS B has מדר); 51:23b.\(^{49}\) The verb used together with παιδεία is βασανίζει (from βασανίζω), which means to test whether something is genuine by rubbing it with a stone.\(^{50}\) The meaning of δικαιώμα can be a regulation or requirement concerning a just or right action, or the action itself which sets the wrong right, possibly including punishment or penalty. Perhaps it refers to wisdom trying to test whether her follower is righteous, or simply means a punishment for those who are unfaithful.

The tests last until the listener's heart is with wisdom. Here again there is a slight difference between MS A and G I. MS A reads in 4:17c: "until his heart is fully with me", while G I renders in 4:17d: "until he trusts her with his heart", or "until she can trust him". The statement of the Hebrew text seems to describe a more personal relationship than the Greek text.

When the trials are finished and wisdom's follower has passed the tests, wisdom will lead him upon the straight path (4:18a, MS A). It may mean that she is not disguised or strange anymore but revealed. She made herself known to her seeker. This notion finds confirmation in the following line: "reveal to him my secrets" (4:18b, MS A).

\(^{49}\)Discipline (or lack of it) is the theme of Sir 37:31a without using the word παιδεία, but using מדר.

\(^{50}\)See Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 172.
Another interpretation, which does not exclude the previous one, is that wisdom leads the person on the path of righteousness.\textsuperscript{51} The word behind "my secrets" in Sir 4:18b is מַסְחָר. Various forms of the word מַסְחָר are found in Isa 45:3 ("secret places"); Jer 49:10 ("hiding places") and Prov 27:5 ("hidden love"). In Sir 51:20d(19f) (11Q5/11QPs\textsuperscript{3}) the author himself claims to have come to know wisdom's secrets. The term used in the latter is מְצֹרְמָה from מְצֹרֶה denoting nakedness. While this word and the verse in which it appears have sexual connotations, מַסְחָר itself in Sir 4:18b need not have. Nevertheless together with the comment about revealing wisdom's secret place (inmost chambers, 4:15) it may refer to intimacy between wisdom and student.

The Greek version of 4:18 places the emphasis on wisdom herself returning to her follower. It also includes the notion of gladdening him before revealing her secrets to him.

The punishment for the unfaithful lover is the theme of 4:19 (MS A). There is a repetition of the expression "if he turns away". The idea behind it is perhaps that if the lover leaves wisdom first, there is still a chance to return to her. Punishment will nevertheless follow. Like a jealous partner wisdom will hold her lover in a close bond (多层次, "fetters", 4:19b). If he proves unfaithful again, there is no return. He will be delivered to the "robbers" (4:19d). The word שְׁרֹד, in various forms, is used frequently in the prophetic books. In Jer 49:7-10 the prophecy about Edom includes its ruination (lit. his seed's ruination, שָׁרְדָה) because of its lack of wisdom. Skehan suggests that the idea of robbers in Sir 4:19 may come from Jer 49:10, but, even

\textsuperscript{51} See also Sir 51:18a and Prov 8:20.
\textsuperscript{52} Reconstructed text; see the translation of Sir 51:13-30.
though the word "thieves" is used in the prophecy (Jer 49:9c), it is not expressed with the otherwise frequently used term שודר. 53 Another interpretation comes from Saracino who suggests that the use of the term לדרים in pluralis excellentiae may be a reference to Death. 54 The image in the G I version of this verse is not far from this: "If he goes astray, she will abandon him and hand him over to the grip of his fall". Wisdom can be life-giver. The end of the poem implies, however, that rejecting her can lead to ruination, as in Prov 8:36b, even if death is not meant literally here.

While Sir 4:11-19 may contain traces of a depiction of a love relationship between the author and wisdom especially in the Hebrew text (4:15, 18), it is not as erotically charged as Ben Sira’s other wisdom poems that follow it in the book.

Sir 6:18-31

MS A

18 55

כותרת וjadi, קרב אליה קבה לטובה: 19

כ הсталרה מים י estratégia: 20

לא יכללווה חסר לב: 21

לא יאחוזו לשלום: 22

כ המוסר קמשות, כ היא לdbName: 63

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53 Skehan, Ben Sira, 172-73.
55 Missing from MS A. MS C has only חקורות ומארא ("reach"/"attain wisdom"), the last two words of 6:18b.
56 MS C has לוור.
57 "and like reaping", also in MS C. Skehan, Ben Sira, 190-91, suggests "וּהָכְרוּר" ("and like sowing").
58 Lit. "on next day". Lévi, Hebrew Text, 7, suggests מַזֶּר ("soon", "hastily") with G I (and Syr.).
59 MS C is the same, except it has בְּנֵיההו ("labour"). For the word "labour" Skehan, Ben Sira, 191, suggests מָכַר.
60 Note that in the synopsis of the Hebrew extant manuscripts in Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 133, מַכַּר appears in both MS A and MS C.
61 2Q18/2QSir only has ב...[...].
62 2Q18/2QSir only has הב...[...].
63 Read הַנַּשָּׁה; cf. also Skehan, Ben Sira, 191.
64 Read כְּשָׁם ("like her name"); Lévi, Hebrew Text, 7.
Like ploughing and reaping draw near her and wait for her plentiful yield/crops, for in cultivating her you will labour little, and on the next day you will eat her fruits.

Jolting is she to the foolish and cannot hold her who lacks intelligence.

She will be like a stone of burden to him and he will not hesitate in throwing her away.

For discipline, like [], so is he, and to many she is not straightforward.

Stoop your shoulders and carry her and do not be irked at her steering.

Search her, discover her; seek her and find her, and when you hold her strongly, do not let her go.

For afterwards you will find rest in her and she will be transformed/changed for you into delight/comfort.

Her net will become your strong foundation and her noose/snare: a garment of gold.

Her yoke will be a gold adornment and her bonds: a purple cord.

(As) a glorious garment you will wear her, bear her (as) a beautiful crown.

G I

18 Τέκνον, ἐκ νεότητος σου ἐπίλεξαί σε παιδείαν,

"Steering", "skillful direction". הובלה ("at her snares"/"noose"/"cords") offered by Lévi, Hebrew Text, 8, fits the context better. Skehan, Ben Sira, 190, 192, suggests that it is behind the G I text of 6:24b and reads הדרכה ("at her bonds") in 6:25b, a term used also in 6:30b. 2Q18/2QSir only has ה[...] for 6:25.

2Q18/2QSir has ה[...] for 6:27.

On the basis of G I (and Syr.) Lévi, Hebrew Text, 8, suggests התמידה.

2Q18/2QSir has התמידה[...] for 6:28.

MS C has התמידה here, the rest of the verse is the same.

2Q18/2QSir has only בה ובר[...].

2Q18/2QSir has only הל[...].

Lévi, Hebrew Text, 8, suggests לוכדה ("her yoke"), as does Skehan, Ben Sira, 192. In this form it is used only in Sir 6:30a.

2Q18/2QSir has לוכדה ובר[...].

The correct reading is probably "sowing"; see the note on the text.

"soon" is also acceptable; see the note on the text.

Read: "her name"; see the note on the text.

Read "she". See the note on the text.

Read "bonds"; see the note on the text.

"Select", "choose". Skehan, Ben Sira, 190, suggests ἐπιλέξαί ("embrace").
καὶ ἔως πολλῶν εὐρήσεις σοφίαν.

19 ὡς ὁ ἄρτοτριῶν καὶ ὁ σπείρων πρόσελθε αὐτῇ καὶ ἄναμενε τοὺς ἁγάθους καρποὺς αὐτῆς· ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἐργασίᾳ αὐτῆς ὄλιγον κοπιᾶσεις καὶ ταχύ φάγεσαι τῶν γεννήματων αὐτῆς.

20 ὡς τραχεία ἔστιν σφόδρα τοῖς ἀπαιδεύτοις, καὶ οὐκ ἔμενει ἐν αὐτῇ ἀκάρδιος·

21 ὡς λίθος δοκιμασίας ἱσχυρὸς ἔσται ἐπ’ αὐτῶ, καὶ οὐ κρονίζει ἀπορρίψαι αὐτὴν.

22 Σοφία γὰρ κατὰ τὸ ἄνομα αὐτῆς ἔστιν καὶ οὐ πολλοίς ἔστιν φανερά.

23 ἄκουσον, τέκνον, καὶ ἐκδεξάς τινὶς γνώμην μου καὶ μὴ ἀπανάιν τὴν συμβουλίαν μου·

24 καὶ εἰσένεγκον τοὺς πόδας σου εἰς τὰς πέδας αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς τὸν κλοιὸν αὐτῆς τὸν τράχηλον σου·

25 ὑπὸθες τὸν ὦμόν σου καὶ βάσταξον αὐτήν καὶ μὴ προσοχθῆσαι τοῖς δεσμοῖς αὐτῆς·

26 ἐν πάσῃ ψυχῇ σου πρόσελθε αὐτῇ καὶ ἐν ὀλή δυνάμει σου συντήρησον τὰς ὀδοὺς αὐτῆς·

27 ἔξισχυσον καὶ ὕπτησον, καὶ γνωσθῆσαι σοι, καὶ ἔγκρατής γενόμενος μὴ ἀφῆς αὐτὴν·

28 ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων γὰρ εὐρήσεις τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν αὐτῆς, καὶ στραφῆσαι σοι εἰς εὐφροσύνην·

29 καὶ ἔσονται σοι αἱ πέδαι εἰς σκέπην ἱσχύος καὶ οἱ κλοιοὶ αὐτῆς εἰς στολὴν δόξης.

30 κόσμος γὰρ χρύσεως ἔστιν ἐπ’ αὐτῆς, καὶ οἱ δεσμοί αὐτῆς κλωσμα ὑικίνθινον·

31 στολὴν δόξης ἐνδύσῃ αὐτὴν καὶ στέφανον ἀγαλλιάματος περιθήσεις σεαυτῷ.

18 My son, from your youth choose discipline, and you will find wisdom with greying hair.

19 Like ploughing and sowing, draw near her and await her good yield/crops, for in cultivating her you will labour little and soon (lit. quickly) you will eat her fruits/crops.

20 (She) is like great/harsh jolting to the undisciplined and the fool cannot abide her.

21 (She) will be like the stone of great testing to him and he will not delay to cast her away.

22 For wisdom is like her name and she is not visible to many.

23 Listen, my son, and take my advice and do not refuse my teaching.

24 Put your feet into her fetters and your neck into her yoke.

25 Stoop your shoulders and carry her

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80 Read: "embrace"; see the note on the text.
81 Skehan, Ben Sira, 190, 192, suggests "net".
82 Skehan, Ben Sira, 190, 192, offers "noose".
and do not be irked at her bonds/straps.
26 With all your soul draw near her and with all your strength keep her ways.
27 Search and seek her and she will be known to you, and once you have grasped her do not let her go;
28 For in the end you will find rest in her and she will be transformed for you into delight.
29 And her fetters will become your strong shelter and her yoke a glorious garment.
30 For a golden ornament is upon her and her bonds/straps a purple cord.
31 You will wear her (as) a glorious garment and you will put (her) on as a joyful crown/wreath.

Context

Sir 6:18-31 is found among sayings that call the readers to seek wisdom in their life (Sir 6:18-37, eight stanzas). The five stanzas of Sir 6:18-31 are as follows: 6:18-19 calls for striving for wisdom from a young age; 6:20-22 states that wisdom is not revealed to everyone; in 6:23-25 a person is captivated by wisdom's yoke and bonds; 6:26-27 has more admonitions to seek wisdom; and 6:28-31 finishes by listing the rewards for those who find her.

Form

Sir 6:18-31 is extant only in parts in Hebrew. The address "my son" (τέκνον) is found in 6:18a, 23a and 32a (נeph in the Hebrew version of 6:32a, which is not part of Sir 6:18-31). These lines all represent the beginning of a new stanza. The five stanzas have the following number of distichs: 3+3+3+3+3 (+2+3+2 of 6:32-37). The whole section has a total of 22 distichs, as do Ben Sira's two other poems: Sir 1:11-30 and the speech of wisdom in Sir 24:3-22.

83 It seems that G I (with ἐν' ἀντρῆς) has mistranslated the Hebrew word for "her yoke" (נeph); the correct translation would be: "a golden ornament is her yoke". See the note on the text.
Similarly to a father's instruction to his son, the student is encouraged to embrace discipline in order to find wisdom in 6:18 (extant only in G I). This is another example where humans have to take the initiative in the search for wisdom. The term "greying hair" is an allusion to the fact that it is usually the aged, who have wisdom, knowledge and experience, as in Sir 25:3-6. Also, gaining wisdom and knowledge does not come easily or quickly; one needs patience and time. The process itself in 6:18-19 is described using images from agriculture and is compared with the hard work of ploughing (שָׇרַה) and the necessary sowing (םַרַּה) (6:19a).^84 The waiting is also necessary until the crop is ripe enough for harvest (6:19b). This also refers to the time factor of the effort one has to make to attain wisdom. If the harvest is plentiful, it is easier for one to forget about the hardness of the labour invested and the time that has passed waiting for the crops ("you will labour little, and on the next day you will eat her fruits", 6:19cd, MS A).^85

Behind these images, however, one may detect the efforts and desires of a person getting close to wisdom for the purpose of sexual activity. Drawing near wisdom (6:19a) may express the beginning of this sexual relationship which is concretized in the terms "ploughing" and "sowing" if the G I version of the latter word and Skehan's suggestion are accepted. ^86 Together these words can have the connotation of fertility,^87 in the present case wisdom being the fertile field, the ploughing and cultivation (6:19c) being the acts of sexual penetration by the person who embraces

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^84 See the notes on the text and translation.
^85 G I is not significantly different.
^86 As suggested above.
her (6:18a)\textsuperscript{88} and sows his seeds in her fertile soil. The fertility of the soil ensures that with little labour (6:19c) the fruit/crop, the offspring, will be plentiful (6:19b) and will be available soon (6:19d). The idea of a good field and sowing associated with the feminine is also used in Sir 26:19-21.

In 6:20 the imagery changes and a warning is found: one also has to be aware that wisdom is not for everyone, not everyone can hold her (6:20).\textsuperscript{89} For the foolish or for one who "lacks intelligence" she is like jolting, טָקְרַב,\textsuperscript{90} a "knobby ground" or "difficult ascent" on which a person can stumble. Another simile is used to convey the same message: a foolish person does not see her as treasure or value but as a "stone of burden" (הָאָמֶן מָשָּׁא),\textsuperscript{91} which he will therefore cast away (6:21).\textsuperscript{92} We have noted earlier in this chapter that foolishness may also denote wickedness, immorality, impropriety. This implies that one who strives to attain wisdom not only has to be intelligent but has to behave morally or appropriately. The final verse of the warning declares that, like the foolish person of 6:20-21, many people will not see her value, namely that she is identified with discipline, as the literal translation of 6:22 suggests: "For discipline, like [her name], so is she,\textsuperscript{93} and to many she is not straightforward."\textsuperscript{94} Casting her away also means casting away the possible intimate relationship with her.

6:23\textsuperscript{95} with the term τέκνον and its repeated emphasis on taking the author's advice opens a new stanza. The search for wisdom is expressed in forceful images of

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\textsuperscript{88} These images resemble courtship language; Rogers, "Ploughing," 372.
\textsuperscript{89} There is no significant difference in the text versions.
\textsuperscript{90} Cf. Isa 40:4.
\textsuperscript{91} חָאָמֶן is used in Sir 51:26b in the sense "her utterance"/"oracle".
\textsuperscript{92} There is no significant difference in the text versions.
\textsuperscript{93} See the notes on the corrected text and translation.
\textsuperscript{94} Cf. Wisdom claims in Prov 8:8-9 that her words are straight using the same word (חָאָמֶן).
\textsuperscript{95} Extant only in G I.
"fetters" (πέδας, 6:24a, only in G I) and "yoke" (κλοιόν, 6:24b, only in G I), which in this context should not be seen as burdens, but as expressions of the way a person abides with wisdom, holding on to her despite the difficulties it might mean for him. Fetters and yoke may also be the symbols of bonds between lovers. In this case wisdom is the dominating party. 6:25 further expands the idea of 6:24: wisdom and her lover journey together, the latter carrying the former. According to Rogers these images suggest that even though it is the person who pursues wisdom, he can never dominate her. On the contrary, he has to submit to her by serving her. ḥavátelōhā ("at her snares"/"noose"/"cords") in 6:25b also suggests this.

6:26-27 is a good example of the motif of seeking and finding wisdom so characteristic of the wisdom poems (esp. 4:11-19; 14:20 - 15:10; 51:1-22). The search must be done "with all your soul" and "with all your strength" (Deut 6:5). When one has achieved one's goal and found wisdom, one is urged to hold on to her "strongly", not to let her go, similarly to Prov 4:13a. In Cant 3:4a it is the beloved, who, after finding her lover, says with satisfaction, "I held him, and would not let him go", using the same verbs (חָזַק and דָּרָם) as in Sir 6:27.

Some rewards of the relationship were already introduced in 6:19 (plentiful crops, or, figuratively, offspring). More rewards appear in 6:28: "rest" and "delight". The search for wisdom is over and the one searching can enjoy the well deserved rest. Rest and delight may be another expression for love that is fulfilled. In this love while

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96 See again the notes on text and translation.
97 The corrected reading of MS A and G I agree.
98 Rogers, "Ploughing," 373.
99 6:26 is not extant in Hebrew.
100 See Rogers, "Ploughing," 372.
101 Both texts agree.
wisdom is the one who is being sought and found, eventually it is she who holds her lover in her bonds (6:25).

In contrast to the fool who only sees in wisdom a burden (6:20-21), the one who is worthy for her will see her net (תַּנְךָ), as "strong foundation" (תַּנְך, 6:29a, MS A; "fetters" [πέδα] as "strong shelter" [σκέτην ἱσχύος] in G I), and will feel as if he is clothed in "gold" (6:29b). This verse is also in contrast to the snares of the strange woman in Sir 9:3 and to the married woman of Sir 26:22 who is a deadly snare to "her lovers". The "strong shelter" may be the protection itself against women such as the בַּרְבָּרָה: the bonds of a legitimate relationship with wisdom will protect the man from straying away. The images of "gold adornment", "purple cord" (6:30), "glorious garment" and "beautiful crown" indicate that whoever wears them will be like a king or a high priest or someone wealthy. Skehan also suggests, that as the "purple cord" with the tassel on the corner of the Israelites' garment in Num 15:38-39 served as a reminder of the commands of the Lord, it may be understood in Sir 6:30b as a warning against forsaking the law of Moses for the more appealing Hellenistic culture, so that those who remain faithful to the law of Moses will have a reward that is only for royalty and priests (6:31).

In summary, some of the images used in Sir 6:18-31 potentially have erotic overtones and describe a love affair between wisdom and her lover. The translation does not differ significantly from the parent text.

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102 Both versions refer to gold.
103 Cf. Sir 50:11.
20 Happy is the man who meditates (lit. mutters) on wisdom and gazes at understanding, and who sets his heart on her ways and [\textsuperscript{117}] understands, 22 going after her [\textsuperscript{118}] and watches with hostility\textsuperscript{119} all her entryways, 23 who looks behind her window and listens at her doors, 24 who encamps near her house and drives [\textsuperscript{120}] into her wall,

\textsuperscript{107} The word does not fit here and seems to be influenced by the multiple uses of the verb בְּכִי ("understand") in 14:20-21. Lévi, Hebrew Text, 23, suggests הָעֵדָת ("path", "way").

\textsuperscript{108} The verb means "watch with hostility". Lévi, Hebrew Text, 23, offers הָזַב ("lies in wait for") from בָּז.

\textsuperscript{109} Lévi, Hebrew Text, 23, corrects it to כִּמְך ("like a scout") from כִּמְך ("search").

\textsuperscript{110} The word does not fit here. Lévi, Hebrew Text, 23, suggests גֶּב ("his tent peg") from גֶּב ("peg", "tent pin").

\textsuperscript{111} Read מָזְגוּם with MS B.

\textsuperscript{112} This word is taken from Lévi, Hebrew Text, 23.

\textsuperscript{113} MS B reads מָצֵאָה.

\textsuperscript{114} MS B has מַשֵּׁשָה.

\textsuperscript{115} MS B has מַלְתָּה.

\textsuperscript{116} MS B corrects it to בָּמָי.

\textsuperscript{117} On the basis of the corrected text the reading would be "her paths". See the note on the text.

\textsuperscript{118} Read "like a scout"; see the note on the text.

\textsuperscript{119} The corrected version reads: "lies in wait for"; see the note on the text.
25 who puts up his tent by her side
and dwells where it is good to dwell,
26 who builds his nest in her foliage
and in her branches spends the night,
27 who seeks refuge in her shadow from the heat
and dwells in her home.\footnote{Skehan, Ben Sira, 263, suggests /κ?μ ("and in her home") from /νιμ ("dwelling place"), rather than /νιμιμ from /νιμ. The latter, however, also has the meaning "hiding place", "dwelling".)

15:1 Thus he who fears the Lord will do this
and who deals with the law lays hold of the law will come to her.
2 She will come out to meet him like a mother,
and like a young bride she will receive him,
3 and feed him with the bread of knowledge (lit. insight, comprehension)
and give him the water of \footnote{Read "understanding" on the basis of the corrected text. See the note on the text.} to drink.
4 He will lean upon her and will make no missteps (lit. will not totter),
he will trust in her and will not be put to shame.
5 She will exalt him above his fellows
and in the midst of an assembly she will open his mouth.
6 He will find joy and gladness
and she will endow him with an everlasting name.
7 Worthless men will not attain to her
and insolent men (lit. men of insolence) will not see her.
8 She is far from the mockers
and liars (lit. men of lie) will not remember her.
9 Unseemly is praise on the lips of the impious,
for it is not apportioned to him from God.
10 Praise is offered by (lit. in) the lips (lit. mouth) of the wise
and the one who has dominion/rule over it will teach it.

G I

20 Μακάριος ἄνὴρ, δς ἐν σοφίᾳ μελετήσει
cαὶ δς ἐν συνέσει αὑτοῦ διαλεξθήσεται,
21 ὁ διανοούμενος τὰς ὀδοὺς αὐτῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ αὑτοῦ
cαὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀποκρύφοις αὐτῆς ἐννοηθήσεται.
22 ἔξελθε ὁ πίσω αὐτῆς ὡς ἱσχυρὴς
cαὶ ἐν ταῖς ὀδοῖς αὐτῆς ἐνέδρευε.
23 ὁ παρακύπτων διὰ τῶν θυρίδων αὐτῆς
cαὶ ἐπὶ τῶν θυρωμάτων αὐτῆς ἀκροάσεται,
24 ὁ καταλύων σύνεγγυς τοῦ ὀἴκου αὐτῆς
cαὶ πήξει πάσασαλον ἐν τοῖς τοίχοις αὐτῆς,
25 στήσει τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ κατὰ χείρας αὐτῆς
cαὶ καταλύσει ἐν καταλύματι ἄγαθῶν,
26 θῆσαι τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκέpsi αὐτῆς
cαὶ ὑπὸ τοὺς κλάδους αὐτῆς αὐλισθήσεται,
27 σκεπασθήσεται ὑπ’ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ κούματος
cαὶ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτῆς καταλύσει.
15:1 ὁ φοβούμενος κύριον ποιήσει αὑτὸ,
καὶ ὁ ἑγκρατὴς τοῦ νόμου καταλήμψεται αὐτήν·
2 καὶ ὑπαντήσεται αὐτῷ ὡς μήτηρ
καὶ ὡς γυνὴ παρθενίας προσδέξεται αὐτόν·
3 ψωμίει αὐτὸν ἄρτον συνέσεως
καὶ ὅψω σοφίας ποτίσει αὐτόν·
4 στηριξθήσεται ἐπ’ αὐτήν καὶ ὦ μὴ κλίθῃ,
καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς ἐφέξει καὶ ὦ μὴ καταισχυνθῇ·
5 καὶ ὑψώσει αὐτὸν παρὰ τοὺς πλησίον ἀυτοῦ
καὶ ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας ἁνοίξει τὸ στόμα ἀυτοῦ·
6 εὑροσώμην καὶ στέφανον ἀγαλλίαματος εὑρήσει
καὶ ἄνωμα αἰῶνος κατακληρονομήσει.
7 οὐ μὴ καταλήμψονται αὐτὴν ἄνθρωποι ἀσύνετοι,
καὶ ἄνδρες ἀμαρτωλοὶ οὐ μὴ ἱδώσιν αὐτήν·
8 μακρὰν ἐστὶν ὑπερηφανίας,
καὶ ἄνδρες ποιήσεται οὐ μὴ μηνισθήσονται αὐτής.
9 οὐχ ὤραίος αἷνος ἐν στόματι ἄμαρτωλοῦ,
ὅτι οὐ παρὰ κυρίου ἀπεστάλη.
10 ἐν γὰρ σοφία ῥηθήσεται αἷνος,
καὶ ὁ κύριος εὐδοκήσει αὐτὸν.

20 Happy is the man who will meditate on (lit. be occupied with) wisdom,
and will reason with his understanding,
21 who ponders her ways in his heart
and will contemplate her secrets.
22 Pursue her like a hunter (or tracker)
and lie in wait in her paths.
23 He who peeps through her window
will also listen at her door
24 who encamps near her house,
and will drive (his) tent peg into her walls,
25 will pitch his tent according to her hands
and will live where it is good to live,
26 will put his children in her shade
and will lodge beneath her branches,
27 who will take refuge by her from the heat
and will dwell in her glory.
15:1 He who fears the Lord will do this,
and who masters the law will come to wisdom.
2 Like a mother she will meet him,
like a young bride she will receive him.
3 She will feed him bread of understanding
and give him the water of wisdom to drink.
4 He will lean upon her and will not fall,
and he will rely upon her and is not put to shame.
5 She will exalt him above his neighbours
and in an assembly she will open his mouth.
6 He will find joy and the crown of exultation
and he will inherit an everlasting name.
7 Fools shall not attain to her,
and sinners shall not behold her.
8 She is far from arrogance,
and lying men will not remember her.

9 Unseemly is praise on the lips of the sinner
for it has not been apportioned by the Lord.
10 For in wisdom praise will be uttered
and the Lord will guide it.

Context

Sir 14:20 - 15:10 marks the beginning of a large section within the book (Sir 14:20 –
23:27). Van Peursen suggests that Sir 14:20 – 15:10 is one of the eight poems that
structure the book. Another one of the eight wisdom poems is ch. 24 which follows
14:20 – 23:27.123

Form

14:20 - 15:10 consists of 18 distichs divided into two large units of 8 + 10 distichs.
Certain patterns that can be discovered within the hymn are determined rather by
content, as will be briefly shown here. The poem, like a number of other poems in the
book, has the tendency to divide into two major parts, usually on the basis of
the search for wisdom. 15:1 has a theme similar to that of 1:11-30, expanding it with a
comment that those who master the law will come to wisdom. 15:2-6 treats the
benefits of the search. 15:7-9 attests that wisdom is not the lot of the unworthy, while
15:10 closes the poem with the idea of the wise who praise God.

123 Wido Th. van Peursen, “Clause Hierarchy and Discourse Structure in the Syriac Text of
Sirach 14:20-27,” in Text, Translation, and Tradition: Studies on the Peshitta and its Use in the Syriac
Tradition Presented to Konrad D. Jenner on the Occasion of his Sixty Fifth Birthday (MPIL 14; ed. W.
Th. van Peursen and R. B. Ter Haar Romeny; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 135-48, 137. The other poems in his
124 Eric D. Reymond, Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach (SBL
9; ed. Dennis T. Olson and Sharon H. Ringe; Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 132.
The first stanza (14:20-27) starts with a beatitude about a person who "meditates" (lit. mutters, MS A)\textsuperscript{125} on wisdom (14:20a) and "gazes at understanding"\textsuperscript{126} (14:20b). As becomes clear from the following verses, the person's "occupation" with wisdom means a series of persevering acts in the quest for finding and possessing her. This marks another example in the series of wisdom poems of human initiative taken to attain wisdom, similar to Sir 6:18-31, but using different metaphors. As in Sir 4:11-19 and 6:18-31 it is certain from the majority of expressions that the person who seeks wisdom is a male.

The two terms in 14:20, הָעֵדֵה ("wisdom") and הָבֶןְה ("understanding"), are used together in a similar context in Prov 3:13. "Understanding" is also in parallel with "wisdom" that cries out to the people, inviting them to listen to her in Prov 8:1. Ben Sira himself connects understanding with wisdom in Sir 50:27-28, where understanding refers to himself, and wisdom to those who take his teachings to their hearts.\textsuperscript{127} 14:21 (MS A) with its terms "sets his heart" and "understands" could be thematically linked with the previous verse. In van Peursen's view 14:21-25 represent a unit, which uses metaphors to depict that wisdom is dwelling in a house. In the light of this, 14:21 can also belong to 14:22-25, as it has references to wisdom's ways and paths.\textsuperscript{128} The G I version of 14:21, while referring to wisdom's ways, is not as explicit on the theme of wisdom's house, when it reads "secrets" in the second half. This way it has a stronger connection with 14:20.

\textsuperscript{125} G I is not significantly different here: "meditates", "ponders", "gives serious attention".
\textsuperscript{126} Διαλέχεθαι in G I originates from διαλέγομαι, which can mean "dispute", "discuss", but also "ponder".
\textsuperscript{127} The text in MS B is partially jumbled.
\textsuperscript{128} Van Peursen, "Clause Hierarchy," 145.
14:22-23\(^{129}\) depicts the person who draws near wisdom's house like a scout (from רוח = "search", "explore", "examine").\(^{130}\) In Sir 14:22a searching, or exploring wisdom is encouraged. The next image is that of a man who lies in wait\(^{131}\) at wisdom's entryway in order to see her (14:22b). In Prov 8:34 such a person is considered blessed.\(^{132}\) References are found to wisdom's house in Sir 1:17; 4:15b (only in MS A), 18b (only in MS A), always in a positive context and with a possible sexual connotation in the latter two passages.\(^{133}\) In contrast to Prov 8:1-36 (esp. 8:34) and 9:1-6, the lover in Sir 14:22-27 pursues wisdom without an invitation. Wisdom is so desirable that "she is virtually to be besieged".\(^{134}\) The series of motions such as looking behind wisdom's window (Sir 21:22-24), listening at her doors, is familiar from Sir 6:26-27a: "With all your soul draw near her and with all your strength keep her ways" (only in G I); "Search her, discover her; seek her and find her (MS A).\(^{135}\) These images may describe a lover desperately seeking his beloved, getting closer and closer to her until he finds the place where she dwells. The lover in Cant 2:9\(^{136}\) is gazing through the windows of his beloved and is peering through her lattice (Cant 2:9cd). While in Sir 42:11ef (MS B) a "lattice" in the room of a daughter is a source of danger since through the window she can cast her eye on a man and get tempted to start an illicit sexual relation, it is implied in Sir 14:23 that a person who peers through wisdom's window is happy.

\(^{129}\) Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon, 328. Cf. Judg 18:2; 2 Sam 10:3. G I, while using slightly different images, is not significantly different.

\(^{130}\) In Bar 3:31 no one knows the way to wisdom.

\(^{131}\) See the notes on the text and translation.

\(^{132}\) Another reference to wisdom's house is Prov 9:1.

\(^{133}\) While Sir 1:17 is not explicit, there is a connection between food and sex within biblical literature and elsewhere, so a sexual connotation is not excluded. See also the discussion below.

\(^{134}\) McKinlay, Gendering Wisdom, 145.

\(^{135}\) As noted above, 4Q185 also employs the language and imagery of seeking and finding.

\(^{136}\) See also Webster, "Sophia," 71.
Someone who has found wisdom should not leave her but should make his dwelling as close to her as possible. Sir 6:27b reads: "and when you hold her strongly, do not let her go".137 According to Sir 14:24-25138 the person who has found wisdom's dwelling will not leave it. He will encamp near it, and "and drives his tent peg into her wall" (14:24b). According to Niditch the tent peg (πᾶσαλος, as in Sir 14:24b) in the story of Jael killing Sisera in Judg 4:17-22 (esp. 4:21, also in the account of the story in the Song of Deborah, Judg 5:26) has sexual connotations.139 πᾶσαλος is known to have the figurative meaning, phallus.140 It appears in Sir 26:12, where the Hebrew word is not extant, regarding the woman who sits down before every tent peg and opens her quiver for the arrow. Even though the phallus is mainly represented by the word arrow (βέλος) in this passage, the term πᾶσαλος also has a sexual connotation, since the woman sits down before it for the purpose of sexual intercourse. It can be said with a fair degree of certainty that Sir 14:24 is understood in a sexual context as well. 14:25 attests that joy emanates from living near wisdom.141

The metaphors change in 14:26-27 and wisdom is pictured as a tree142 and her follower is a bird, who "builds his nest in her foliage, and in her branches spends the night, who seeks refuge in her shadow from the heat and dwells in her home" (MS

137 The beloved says about her lover in Cant 3:4: "… when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go…".
138 G I agrees.
139 Susan Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in Gender and Difference (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 43-57; also see Nicole Duran, "Having Men for Dinner: Deadly Banquets and Biblical Women," BTB 35 (2005), 117-24; Elie Assis, "The Choice to Serve God and Assist His People: Rahab and Yael," Biblica 85 (2004), 82-90; Elie Assis, "The Hand of a Woman: Deborah and Yael (Judges 4)," JHS 5 (2005), 1-12. In the latter Assis argues that part of Yael's seduction towards Sisera were her words with which she invited him into her tent winning his confidence and trust: "�� נרה, "turn into me" (or "turn [in] to me"). The same verb form ( الإنس) is used in Prov 9:16 in the invitation of Woman Folly: "You who are simple, turn in here". Wisdom's invitation in Prov 9:4 is the same verbatim (in Hebrew).
140 Györkösy-Kapitány-Tegyei, Ógörög-Magyar Nagyszótár, 807.
141 See Wis 8:2-16 and also Sir 15:6 below.
142 As in Sir 24:13-17.
A). The tree can be the site of cultic infidelity and idolatry as in Isa 1:29; 57:5 and Jer 2:20-21, but it can also represent beauty as in Cant 7:6-9, where the beloved is compared to a palm tree, her breasts to clusters of fruit (7:7). 7:8 is undoubtedly speaking of the lover's desire for sexual relations with his beloved: "I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches", 7:8ab. Similarly in Sir 14:26-27a the branches not only provide protection but spending the night among them conveys the idea of a man penetrating wisdom's space in order to have a sexual relationship with her. Sir 14:27b further confirms that the person no longer lives just close to wisdom but in her home as her lover or spouse.

The first verse (15:1) of the second stanza (15:1-10) is almost a summary of Ben Sira's main theme: "Thus he who fears the Lord will do this and who deals with the law/lays hold of the law will come to her", MS A). There appeared already an association between wisdom and the word of God in the G II version of Sir 1:5. In Sir 6:32-37 the person who desires wisdom is advised to follow the commandments of the Most High. In Sir 15:1 this association seems to be taken for granted.

15:2-6 lists the rewards which the lover of wisdom receives. The first one is a parallel of two images employing women: a mother in 15:2a and a young bride in 15:2b. Both are the personification of wisdom, but in these verses she is not the one who is sought but someone who goes out to receive the person, first as a mother (15:2a) and then (15:2b) as a bride. The motherly care and the bride's eager and

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143 G I is the same except at two points. It reads "will put his children in her shade" in 14:26a. The idea of children does not appear anywhere else in the poem and is not attested in the Syriac version either ("he reaches/grasps after their branches with his hands"). It also changes the term "in her home" (14:27b) to "in her glory". In the context of 14:26-27 there seem to be no need to make this change.
144 See also Webster, "Sophia," 71.
145 G I does not differ significantly.
146 McKinlay, Gendering Wisdom, 145.
147 G I does not differ significantly, except for the inclusion of the term of "crown of exultation", which, Collins, Jewish Wisdom, 49, considers to be the symbol of a blessed afterlife.
"passionate" awaiting are the comfort the person can enjoy. The nourishments offered by wisdom are food and drink ("bread of knowledge"/"insight", 15:3a, בַּלְוֵד בְּלִימָה) and "the water of [understanding]" (15:3b, מָיִם בְּרָאשִׁית). As noted above, wisdom's house is full of choicest fruits in Sir 1:17, where a sexual connotation cannot be excluded. In 24:16-22 wisdom, again, offers food and drink. 51:24 also refers to wisdom's food and the thirst of the "foolish" (Sir 51:23a) for her. Even though the motif of feeding is missing from Sir 6:19d, it is another reference to receiving wisdom's fruits, as in Sir 24:19b. As indicated above, in Proverbs the house of wisdom is also a place where one finds nourishment and security (Prov 9:1-6, esp. 9:2, 5). The contrast with the stolen water and the bread that is eaten in secret in folly's house is noteworthy (Prov 9:17). In Cant 2:3-5 food images symbolize the pleasure the man's body holds for the woman. In Canticles the fruit and vineyard symbolism draws on the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of "using agricultural images as metaphors for sexual activity while avoiding the seed/field imagery" common elsewhere in the Bible. "Seed and procreation give way to ripening, engorgement and taste." Sexuality is not just something useful for goals beyond itself, but it celebrates itself. It seems to be the case in Sir 14:20 – 15:10 as well, in contrast to Sir 6:18-31, where the field/seed image appears in relation to sexuality. There is no reference to producing offspring.

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148 Skehan, Ben Sira, 265.
149 See the discussion later in this chapter.
150 See the corrected text of Sir 51:24.
151 Cf. Prov 9:5. Also, thirst and hunger are quenched by God in Isa 55:1.
155 Bergquist, Controlling Corporeality, 84.
15:4 introduces wisdom as a firm support (Ps 22:5, 8; 25:2) for her followers. The term "will not totter" (ﾙﾏן) can be understood figuratively as a parallel to "will not be put to shame" (ﾊﾓ): whoever puts his trust in wisdom will not commit mistakes, shameful acts, which may include sexual wrongdoing. Another dimension of support is added in 15:5: wisdom's disciple will stand out among other people and will be able to talk in an assembly. Not only that, he will not have reason to be ashamed, but will be the speaker of wise things among others.  

The "joy and gladness" (ﾕﾒﾝ ﱧﾉ) can be the result of the above: a person who is wise and does not have to worry about shame, but, on the contrary, is able to teach others, surely has reason for joy and will also be remembered for his wisdom (15:6). Joy and gladness are also characteristics of a relationship between lover and beloved, and they may include sexual joy.

As is clear in Sir 4:11-19 (esp. 4:11b, 19) and 6:20-22 (esp. 6:20-21) not everybody is worthy of wisdom. The list of those who are unworthy is included in 15:7-8. The term "worthless men" (ﾏﾝ ﻜﾉ, 15:7a), is in parallel with "insolent men" (lit. men of insolence, ﱧﾉ ﺭﾉ, 15:7b). The distich begins and ends with the verbs that also create a parallel: "will not attain to her" ( ﻤﾉ ﺪﾉ, 15:7a); "will not see her" ( ﻤﾉ ﺪﾉ, 15:7b). The next category of people unworthy of wisdom includes the "mockers" (or "haughty") in 15:8a and "liars" (lit. men of lie) in 15:8b. The term (from ﻤ = "remember", "call to mind", "name") suggests that even

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158 Cf. with Ben Sira's own claim in Sir 24:30-33 (esp. 24:32-33) as a wisdom teacher.
159 For the idea of "everlasting name" see Isa 56:5.
160 G I does not differ significantly except that it uses the broad term "sinners" for "insolent" in 15:7b.
161 For the use of the term see Job 11:11 and Ps 26:4.
162 Cf. Sir 3:28a; 8:11a; 11:30a; 13:1b; 31:26b; 32:18b; Prov 14:6; Wis 1:4-5.
calling wisdom's name is not allotted to people who lie. The persons depicted in the above verses in a series of negations in relation to wisdom are the opposite of the person described in Sir 15:1. Even though there is a positive formula in 15:8a, it emphasizes the distance between wisdom and the "mockers".

The thought that liars are not allowed to call wisdom's name can be seen as a preparation for the theme of 15:9a ("Unseemly is praise on the lips of the impious", MS A),\textsuperscript{164} and the reason for it immediately follows: it is not apportioned to him (15:9b). The word הָלַךְ from חֲלֹךְ (lit. to divide, apportion, have one's share) indicates that the wicked cannot have a share in the praise of the Lord. In Psalm 148 the whole universe is urged to praise the Lord, as Skehan aptly points out. It is its purpose in creation.\textsuperscript{165} Therefore the comment in Sir 15:9b about the exclusion of the wicked is in sharp contrast. Another contrast follows in Sir 15:10, where the praise of the wise is paralleled with the praise of the impious in 15:9. Marböck argues that 15:10 is the high point and conclusion of Sir 15:7-10.\textsuperscript{166} While it is not allotted for the impious to praise the Lord, for the wise it is the highest task that can be given by the Lord.\textsuperscript{167} Only the wise can pass the instruction they received, on to others as "teachers" or "masters". The Hebrew text of 15:10b ("and the one who has dominion/rule over it will teach it") is somewhat puzzling. It may refer to a wisdom teacher who can master (rule) the instruction of others and is able to teach praise. It may also point to God himself, who is the ultimate teacher of praise. 15:10b in Greek ("and the Lord will guide it") could confirm this.

\textsuperscript{165} Skehan, Ben Sira, 265-66.
\textsuperscript{166} Skehan, Ben Sira, 268.
\textsuperscript{167} Marböck, "Sir 15,9f," 271-76.
Sir 14:20 – 15:10 is another wisdom poem that describes a person’s search for and love-relationship with wisdom. The description has images with erotic overtones in both text versions. The G I version did not make significant changes to these comments. However, as noted above, it changed the reference to wisdom’s house. It is also noteworthy that here sex does not have any goal beyond itself. There are no references to procreation or offspring as in Sir 6:18-31. In different ways both poems exhibit a positive attitude towards sexuality.

Sir 24:1-22

G I

1 Ἡ σοφία αἰνέσει ψυχήν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐν μέσῳ λοιδὸς αὐτῆς καυχήσεται.
2 ἐν ἑκκλησίᾳ ψυγίστου στόμα αὐτῆς ἀνοίξει καὶ ἔναντι δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ καυχήσεται.
3 ἐγὼ ἀπὸ στόματος ψυγίστου ἐξήλθον καὶ ὡς ὀμίχλη κατεκάλυψα γῆν.
4 ἐγὼ ἐν ψυγήλοις κατεσκήνωσα, καὶ ὁ θρόνος μου ἐν στούλῳ νεφέλης.
5 γύρων οὐρανοῦ ἐκύκλωσα μόνη καὶ ἐν βάθει ἀβύσσων περιεπάτησα.
6 ἐν κύμαις θαλάσσης καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῇ καὶ ἐν παντὶ λαῷ καὶ ἔθνει ἐκκηρίσμην.
7 μετὰ τούτων πάντων ἀνάπαυσιν ἐξήτησα καὶ ἐν κληρονομία τίνος αὐλισθήσομαι.
8 τότε ἐνετείλατό μοι ὁ κτίστης ἀπάντων, καὶ ὁ κτίσας με κατέπαινεν τὴν σκηνήν μου καὶ ἔπειν ἐν Ιακωβ κατασκήνωσον καὶ ἐν Ἰσραήλ κατακληρονομήθητι.
9 πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀπὸ ἄρχης ἐκτισέν με, καὶ ἔως αἰῶνος οὐ μὴ ἐκλίπω.
10 ἐν σκηνῇ ἄγια ἐνῷπον αὐτοῦ ἐλειτούργησα καὶ ὡς ἐν Σιων ἐστηρίξθην·
11 ἐν πόλει ἡγασίμην ὠμοίως με κατέπαινεν, καὶ ἐν Ιερουσαλημ ἡ ἐξουσία μου·
12 καὶ ἔρριζον ἐν λαῷ δεδωξασμένω, ἐν μερίδι κυρίου, κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ.
13 ὡς κέδρος ἀνυψώθην ἐν τῷ Λιβάνῳ.

168 Ziegler, Sirach, 237, reads ἡγασίμην ("I led").
καὶ ὡς κυπάρισσος ἐν ὄρεσιν Ἀερμών·
14 ὡς φοίνιξ ἀνυψώθην ἐν Αιγαγάδοις καὶ ὡς φυτὰ ῥόδου ἐν Ιεριχω, ὡς ἐλαία εὑπρεπῆς ἐν πεδίῳ, καὶ ἀνυψώθην ὡς πλάτανος.
15 ὡς κυνάμωμοι καὶ ἀσπάλαθος ἁρωμάτων δέδωκα ὅσμην καὶ ὡς σμόρνα ἐκλεκτή δέδωκα εὐωδίαν, ὡς χαλβάνη καὶ δνυς καὶ στακτή καὶ ὡς λιβάνου ἄτμις ἐν σκηνῇ.
16 ἐγὼ ὡς τερέμινθος ἐξέτεινα κλάδους μου, καὶ οἱ κλάδοι μου κλάδοι δόξης καὶ χάριτος. ἐγὼ ὡς ἀμπελός ἐβλάστησα χάριν, καὶ τὰ ἄνθη μου καρπὸς δόξης καὶ πλοῦτου.

G II

18 ἐγὼ μῆτηρ τῆς ἄγαπήσεως τῆς καλῆς καὶ φόβου καὶ γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ὅσιας ἐλπίδος, δίδωμι δὲ σὺν πᾶσι τοῖς τέκνοις μου ἀειγενεῖς τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ.

G I

19 προσέλθετε πρὸς με, οἱ ἐπιθυμοῦντες μου, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενημάτων μου ἐμπλήσθητε·
20 τὸ γάρ μνημόσυνόν μου ὑπὲρ τὸ μέλι γλυκύ, καὶ ἡ κληρονομία μου ὑπὲρ μέλιτος κηρίων.
21 οἱ ἐσθιόντες μὲ ἔτι πεινάσουσιν, καὶ οἱ πίνοντες μὲ ἔτι διψήσουσιν.
22 ὁ ὑπακούων μου οὐκ αἰσχυνθῆσαι, καὶ οἱ ἔργαζόμενοι ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐχ ἀμαρτήσουσιν.

1 Wisdom will praise herself, and among her own people she will boast.
2 In an assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth and before his power she will boast. 172
3 "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth, and like mist covered the earth.
4 In the heights of heaven I dwelt, and my throne (was) in a pillar of cloud.
5 A circle of the sky I encircled alone and in the deep abysses I walked (around).
6 In the waves of the sea and in all the earth, and in every people and nation I held sway.
7 Among them all I sought a resting place,

169 Ziegler, Sirach, 238, does not include δέδωκα ὅσμην.
170 Or τερέμινθος: Ziegler, Sirach, 239.
171 Ziegler, Sirach, 239, has ἐσθιόντες.
and in whose inheritance shall I find a lodging?
8 Then the creator of all commanded me
and he who created me put down my tent
and said: ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob
and in Israel let your inheritance be.’
9 Before the age, from the beginning, he created me,
and until the age I shall not cease to be.
10 In the holy tent I ministered before him,
and thus in Zion I came to be established.
11 In the beloved city in the same way he brought me to rest
and my authority (was) in Jerusalem.
12 And I took root among a glorified people,
in the portion of the Lord, (of) his inheritance.
13 Like a cedar I was raised up in Lebanon,
like a cypress on Mount Hermon.
14 Like a palm tree I was raised
and like rosebushes in Jericho,
like a fair olive tree in a plain,
and I was raised up like a plane-tree.
15 Like cinnamon, or fragrant thorn-bush I gave forth perfume
and like choice myrrh I gave forth a fragrance.
Like galbanum and onycha and stacte
and like the vapour of incense in the tent.
16 I spread out my branches like a terebinth,
and my branches were branches of glory and grace.
17 I put forth lovely shoots like vine,
my blossoms yield to fruits of honour and wealth.

G II

18 I am a mother of fair love, and of reverence,
And of knowledge and of holy hope,
And I give it together with all my children,
they are everlasting, to those who are named by him.

G I

19 Come to me, you who desire me,
and from my produce be filled.
20 For the memory of me is sweeter than honey,
and the inheritance of me is better than a honeycomb of honey.
21 Whoever eats me will hunger still,
and whoever drinks me will be thirsty still.
22 Whoever obeys me will not be ashamed,
and those who work with me will not sin."

Context

Sir 24:1-34 is found between the passages Sir 22:27 – 23:27 and Sir 25:1 – 26:27. Both these sections have concerns relating to matters of sexual sin, marital issues, and they include images of a good wife. In the midst of them is the self-praise of personified wisdom, who acts as a female figure, inviting men to attend to her.

Lebram, who considers ch. 24 the high point of the book, also notes that the passage immediately preceding Sir 24:1-22 is 23:22-26 (in the context of 23:22-27), which comments on the adulteress who is dragged before the congregation and punished (esp. 23:24). Sir 24:1-22, on the other hand, starts with wisdom praising herself in the congregation of the highest.180 As previously noted, van Peursen considers ch. 24 to be one of the eight poems that structure the book.181 It also follows a large section, Sir 14:20 – 23:37, which is similarly introduced by a wisdom poem (Sir 14:20 – 15:10).

I shall discuss Sir 24:1-22 in the context of 24:1-33. With regard to structure, 24:1-2 has wisdom sing her own praise. Her speech itself is found in 24:3-22 (5+6+5+6 distichs = 22 distichs),182 within which 24:3-7 comments on the origin of wisdom and her previous place of residence. According to 24:8-12 wisdom chose her new dwelling place among Israel by the command of the creator. In 24:13-15, 16-17 wisdom is described with various images of majestic trees and plants. In 24:19-22 wisdom invites those who seek her. Sir 24:23-34 is not part of the speech of wisdom.

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181 See van Peursen, "Clause Hierarchy," 137.
182 Other poems containing 22 distichs in Ben Sira are Sir 1:11-30; 6:18-37; 51:13-30.
The speaker is again the author, who identifies wisdom with the Law (24:23) and depicts her knowledge with images of rivers, sea, and the deep abyss (24:25-29). In 24:30-34 the sage claims to be the channel of wisdom by pouring forth instruction.\(^{183}\)

Form

The structure of Sir 24:1-22 is mostly determined by its content, but in some of its parts a formal pattern may also be discovered. 24:1-2 are introductory verses and have no distinctive formal characteristics. Skehan observes that the vocabulary of 24:1-2 is independent from that of the speech in 24:3-22. Therefore 24:1-2 is meant to stand alone.\(^{184}\) The wisdom speech itself is structured by its content in the following way: four stanzas have 5+6+5+6 distichs altogether. The first two verses (24:3-4) of the first stanza (24:3-7) start with the word ἐγὼ ("I"), which returns in the company of ὡς ("like") as the beginning of the first two verses (24:16-17) of the final stanza of the speech (24:16-22). 24:13-15 share a common form because all the verses start with ὡς ("like") to introduce the simile (24:13a, 14a [also 14c], 15a [also 15c]), and the second stich of each verse begins with καὶ ὡς ("and like"); 24:13b, 14b, (14d is an exception, where another word is inserted between them), 15b, 15d.

Content

As pointed out above, Sir 24:1-22 is preceded by 23:22-26, a passage that depicts the adulteress, whose punishment involves public shaming in the assembly. Sir 24:1-22,

\(^{183}\) Patrick W. Skehan, "Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24," CBQ 41 (1979), 365-79, 375-76, suggests that 24:34, even though Ben Sira's composition, is out of context here; its proper place is at Sir 33:18 (MS E, or 30:26 in the LXX). Without it the last two stanzas (24:23-29, 30-33) are determined by the pattern of five and six distichs, like wisdom's speech itself.  

on the other hand, starts with wisdom’s self-praise in the assembly of the Most High. The close proximity of these images resembles the comparison of wisdom and folly in Proverbs in as much as they both call out and invite people in public places (Prov 8:1-2; 9:3 for wisdom; 9:14-15 for folly). The juxtaposition of the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26 and wisdom in 24:1-22 may suggest an erotic background for the latter, which appears to be confirmed in the second half of the poem (24:13-15, 16-22). More similarities between wisdom and the adulteress will be demonstrated below.

Sirach 24 can indeed be considered the high point of the book in that wisdom is not only personified and described as singing her own praises (24:1-2), but she also speaks of her own glory (24:3-22) in the first person, similarly to Prov 8:4-36.185 The context in which she speaks of her own glory is the earth (“among her own people”, 24:1b), which is understood here as the people of Israel, and the heaven (“in the assembly of the Most High”, 24:2a), where God is pictured in a heavenly court.186 The allusion to heaven is missing from the introductory verses of Proverbs 8 (Prov 8:1-3), where wisdom addresses the people.187 However, the idea of wisdom being present both with Yahweh and humankind is found later, in Prov 8:30-31. In reference to wisdom’s location, Sinnott notes that a progression may be discovered in the poem,

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185 In the Hebrew of Sir 4:15-19, however, wisdom also speaks in the first person. The hymn of wisdom in Sirach 24 is compared with the aretalogies of the Egyptian goddess Isis; see Johannes Marböck, Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen, zur Wiesheitstheologie bei Ben Sira (BBB 37; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1971), 47-54.

186 See Ps 82:1; Isa 34:4.

187 Cf. 11QPs 154 18.12-15 (“From the gates of the righteous is heard her voice, and from the assembly of the pious her song”). As George W. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 211, observe, 11QPs 154 18.14 is on the verge of identifying wisdom with the Torah (“Their meditation is on the law of the Most High, their words on making known his might”). See more on the identification in Sir 24:23 below.
since even though wisdom starts her speech in the heavenly assembly, she addresses the people of Israel and is located in Jerusalem, leading the liturgy in the holy tent.\textsuperscript{188} The reference to lips or mouth is found in both poems. Wisdom "will open her mouth and … boast" according to Sir 24:2, and in Prov 8:6-8 four references to the mouth or lips of wisdom serve to draw the attention of the people to listen to her, for "my mouth will utter truth" (Prov 8:7a). This claim is not present in Sir 24:1-2 or in the rest of the poem.

Ben Sira has briefly touched upon the theme of the origin of wisdom in the beginning of his book ("All wisdom is from the Lord", Sir 1:1), but Sir 24:3 has more detail and here it is wisdom who speaks about her own origin in the first person, starting her speech with $\text{א"זט}^\prime$ ("I"). The comment that wisdom is said to have come out of the mouth of the Most High, as von Rad notes, is along the same lines as the first creation account, where creation by word is strongly emphasized (Gen 1:3-26).\textsuperscript{189} The mist that covered the earth (Sir 24:3) may be a reference to Gen 1:2, where "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters". Sinnott, however interprets, wisdom's role as a life-giving spring that watered the surface of the earth in Gen 2:4b-6, this way, even if not creating, nevertheless ensuring the fruitfulness of the earth.\textsuperscript{190} Miura equates wisdom with the Word of God proceeding from the mouth of God as in Isa 45:23; 48:3 and 55:11.\textsuperscript{191} While in Prov 8:22a ("the Lord created \text{יִשָׁב}^\prime me") and in 8:23a (\text{נָשָׁה} = "I was set up")\textsuperscript{192} the creation of wisdom is rather passive, in Sir 24:3

\textsuperscript{188} Sinnott, \textit{Personification}, 120.
\textsuperscript{190} Sinnott, \textit{Personification}, 121.
\textsuperscript{192} The primary meaning of the verb \text{נָשָׁה} is to "take possession of something" or "to acquire" and it refers to the acquisition of chattels or real estate. In some cases, however, it can also mean "to beget", "to create". \text{נָשָׁה} in Prov 8:22a received various translations and interpretations. The present work will not attempt to evaluate these translations.
\textsuperscript{193} My translation.
wisdom claims: ἐγὼ ... ἐξῆλθον ("I came forth", 24:3a). Both poems affirm, nevertheless, that wisdom was brought into being before the creation (Prov 8:22-23; Sir 24:9a).

From 24:4 to 24:6 wisdom speaks about her activities in the universe. 24:4 confirms what 24:2 in the introduction already mentioned: wisdom dwells\(^{194}\) where the Lord dwells ("heights\(^{195}\) of heaven"). The "pillar of cloud" may be a reference to Exod 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 33:9-10 and 40:38, where the Lord was leading the Israelites in the form of a pillar of cloud (or a pillar of fire by night) during their exodus. 24:5 is an allusion to the journey of wisdom from the heights ("circle of the sky")\(^{196}\) to the deep ("abysses").\(^{197}\) Von Rad points out that to walk around (24:5b) a place is an expression of legal symbolism and signifies the completion of a legal action. In the present context wisdom by walking around creation from heaven to the deep abyss assumed her proprietary rights over the world.\(^{198}\) Her authority extended not only to the heavens but to the sea (Prov 8:29a) and earth (Prov 8:25-26, 29b) with all the residents. The comment, "in every people and nation I held sway", suggests that wisdom is cosmopolitan. The reference that comes closest to this statement is Prov 8:15-16 where wisdom claims that by her, kings reign and princes govern. Another attribute of wisdom, that she can function throughout time and space,\(^{199}\) already appears in Prov 8:22-31. Her travels, both vertically and horizontally are even more strikingly described in Ben Sira in 24:3-6, 8, 10-12. As Marböck points out, she progresses on the one hand from God's mouth to the earth, and on the other hand from

\(^{194}\) Used in Prov 8:12.

\(^{195}\) Used also in Prov 8:2.

\(^{196}\) It represents the language of Prov 8:27-28 where wisdom claims to have been present at the creation of heaven.

\(^{197}\) An image from Sir 1:3b and also from Prov 8:24.


her throne on the pillar of cloud to the appointed place for her tent in Israel. Also another movement may be discovered: first vertically from heaven to the abyss and horizontally between sea and land in the human world, and then in space and in time, from before the ages to the time when she ministers in the tent and dwells among the people of Israel.200

While wisdom's speech in Sir 24:3-22 begins with the claim that she was present from the beginning of creation and her dwelling place was with the Lord (24:3-6), the speech in Prov 8:4-36 starts, as indicated above, with another claim: wisdom's words are worthy, righteous and straightforward (Prov 8:6-9). Therefore her instructions and knowledge are more precious than silver or gold (Prov 8:10), and she, herself, than jewels (Prov 8:11). The claim that she was present in history from the beginning only follows in verses Prov 8:22-30a.

While it is not the task of this thesis to find the most appropriate translation for the comment וָמָא ("I was beside him an אָמוֹן) in Prov 8:30a, some of the various attempts may be summarized here.201 Some interpret the word אָמוֹן as referring to some aspect of craftsmanship and translate it "artisan" or the like. A second possible translation is "one who is raised" or "nursed", depicting wisdom as a nurtured child, a darling. The third interpretation is only one step away from this:

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wisdom is someone "who is being raised", or "who is growing up" like a child in God's care. While God was creating the world, she was nearby, giving him delight (8:30b) by playing before him (8:30b). When humans are on the scene, she is the guardian and teacher (8:31b). Finally, there are arguments that the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 was based on a living Canaanite tradition in Israel, specifically the belief in the consort of the deity.\textsuperscript{202}

The notion of craftsmanship is not present in Sir 24:3-6 (in the context of 24:3-9) and the idea of a nurtured child, who delights God by playing before him seems even more distant. The same can be declared about the notion of wisdom as God's consort. The emphasis appears to be rather on wisdom's universal movement than on her close proximity to God (cf. Prov 8:30).

In Sirach 24, after her journey in heaven and earth, wisdom sought a resting place on the earth (24:7). Sheppard notes that the ideas of "rest" (ἀνάπαυσις) and "inheritance" (κληρονομία) form a thematic key in the whole of the poem. Their employment shows a careful selection of vocabulary, and the term κληρονομία links the poem with 24:23, where κληρονομίαν also appears.\textsuperscript{203}

The terms "creator of all" (ὁ κτίστης ἀπόντων, 24:8a),\textsuperscript{204} "who created me" (ὁ κτίσος με, 24:8b), and "he created me" (ἐκτισέν με, 24:9a) betray that, while wisdom is the first of creation and eternal (24:9b), she still has a beginning. She

\textsuperscript{204} See Prov 8:27-29.
herself is a creature, and she is told where to find a "dwelling" and "inheritance" 
(24:8cd).

By the command of the Lord (24:8a), wisdom settles "in Jacob" (24:8c). The latter is 
a clear reference that wisdom's dwelling place is among Israelites. 24:8d, 10-12, 13-
14 confirm this. 205

While wisdom claims in Prov 8:30a that she has witnessed the creation, her claim in 
Sir 24:9 is somewhat different. The emphasis is on the antiquity of her origin. It 
immediately follows that her activity on earth is in the service of the Lord, as the 
comment on the liturgical service shows. The terms holy tent (24:10a) and Zion 
(24:10b) are references to Exod 25:8-9 and 26:1-37 (Yahweh’s sanctuary or 
tabernacle), and to the Jerusalem temple (Sir 24:10b). 206 Schroer interprets this 
development as the narrowing of the wisdom-concept, since wisdom, being a servant 
of God, is subordinated to him. 207

24:11-12 confirms that the dwelling place of wisdom is among the Israelites. Ziegler's 
version of 24:12b (ἐν μερίδι κυρίου κληρονομία μου) is perhaps more fitting than 
ἐν μερίδι κυρίου, κληρονομίας αὐτού. 208 One comparison between the image of 
wisdom in this poem and the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26 has already been made above 
in this chapter, where it was noted that the adulteress is shamed in public, whereas 
wisdom praises herself in public. In Sir 24:12 wisdom's taking root among a glorified 
people may be contrasted with the woman in Sir 23:25a whose children will not take

205 Bar 3:37 – 4:2 also declares that wisdom has been given to Jacob/Israel. In J En. 42:1-2 
wisdom has found no dwelling place on earth, therefore she returned to heaven. See more on this 
below.
206 See also Skehan, Ben Sira, 333.
207 Schroer, Wisdom has Built, 92.
208 Ziegler, Sirach, 238.
root, who will not be part of the congregation of the Israelites. This comparison in itself does not suggest an erotic background for wisdom in Sirach 24. The other comparisons, however, and the third and fourth stanzas of wisdom's speech do, as will be demonstrated below.

In Sir 24:13-15 wisdom's greatness and majesty are expressed with a series of similes related to trees and plants, which are associated with famous cities or places, as the majestic trees of cedar in Lebanon and cypress on Mount Hermon (24:13), the palms of En geddi and roses of Jericho (24:14), olive tree and plane tree. These plants were important either because of their majestic appearance (greatness in size or beauty) as the cedar and cypress, or because of their use in everyday life as palms and roses, or for making cosmetics. The importance of olive trees need not be detailed. The use of the plane tree may be that it can give shade against the sun. In 24:15-16 another use of plants is emphasized, since cinnamon, fragrant thorn bush, myrrh (Exod 30:23-30), galbanum, onycha and stacte have a characteristic perfume, especially when the latter three were blended with pure frankincense to produce the incense used in liturgical services in the holy tent (Exod 30:34-35). Wisdom's own comparison to these fragrant plants is another reference to her connection with the liturgical service that was mentioned in 24:10.

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209 Maurice Gilbert, "L'éloge de la Sagesse (Siracide 24)," RTL 5 (1974), 326-48, 332, notes that the author marks not the centre but the boundaries (North, East and West) of the country where wisdom settled to express that wisdom, as a majestic tree, grew up in the whole land of Israel.

As noted earlier in the chapter, trees can be the sites of cultic infidelity and idolatry (Isa 1:29; 57:5; Jer 2:20-21). The tree imagery, however, can also evoke the memory of the Garden of Eden: a place of intimacy, joy, fertility. Their fragrance may also serve to awake one's desires. Myrrh, aloes and cinnamon are used as part of the adulteress' arsenal to seduce the unsuspecting man into her house in Prov 7:17. Throughout the Canticles images of fragrance are also symbols of sensuality (1:12-14; 4:6, 10, 13-14; 4:10; 5:1, 5, 13). They also play a role in attracting the lover to enjoy the fruits in the garden of the beloved (Cant 4:16).

Sir 24:16-21 continues with more similes on plants. The emphasis, however, changes from fragrance to food and drink. The terebinth (24:16) was known for its greatness in size, especially in the size of its branches. In 24:17 wisdom, similarly to the vine, produces fruits: "honour and wealth". Riches and honour are said to be wisdom's gifts in Prov 3:16, where it is connected with long life, and in 8:18-19, 21. These passages imply, and Prov 3:18; 8:35a; Sir 4:12a confirm, that what wisdom offers is life with her, life that follows her instructions. This may include prosperity but also honour in the sense of good reputation before others. Prov 7:4-5 suggests that wisdom can also prevent a person from engaging in sexual wrongdoing. Indirectly this may be implied in Sir 6:29a (especially in Greek), 15:4 and 24:22.

Sir 24:18 is extant only in G II ("I am a mother of fair love, and of reverence, and of knowledge and of holy hope, and I give it together with all my children, they are

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211 Cf. Webster, "Sophia," 73.
213 For honour, see Sir 4:21b. For riches and honour, see Prov 3:16; 8:18-19, 21.
214 See also Prov 8:10-11.
215 See below.
everlasting, to those who are named by him"). The sentence seems obscure. What wisdom gives according to the comment is either "fair love", or it and also "reverence", "knowledge" and "holy hope". The expression "with all my children" perhaps needs to be read with Skehan: "I am a mother of fair love, of reverence, of knowledge, and of holy hope; To all my children I give to be everlasting: to those named by Him".\(^\text{216}\) This way the verse could be rephrased as follows: I am a mother of ... and I give fair love, reverence, knowledge and holy hope to all my children, chosen by God, to be everlasting.

Those who follow wisdom can be called her children, but according to this verse not everyone can follow her, but only those chosen by God. The gifts of wisdom will also make them everlasting. The term "everlasting" may be a Christian interpolation, perhaps referring to afterlife.

A final way of interpreting Sir 24:18 is to consider fair love, reverence, knowledge and holy hope (24:18ab) as wisdom's children (24:18c). In this case it is not God's elect to whom wisdom's gifts are given, who are everlasting, but the gifts themselves.

24:19-20 returns to images of produce which wisdom offers to those who desire her. As noted earlier in this chapter, wisdom's house is full of choicest fruit in Sir 1:17. In Sir 6:19 her crops and fruits are available for those who cultivate her. The sexual connotation of the verse in the context of 6:18-31 has been discussed above. In Sir 15:3 she feeds her lover with the "bread of knowledge" and gives him "the water of [understanding] to drink" (Hebrew).\(^\text{217}\) Sir 51:24 also refers to wisdom's food.\(^\text{218}\) In

\(^{216}\) See the note on the translation.
\(^{217}\) See the discussion earlier in this chapter.
\(^{218}\) See the corrected text of Sir 51:24.
Prov 9:1-6, 13-18 two different invitations are found: one for the feast that wisdom presents and one set by folly. The latter clearly suggests an erotic background. In Cant 2:3-5, 13; 7:7-9 the enjoyment of sexual love is compared to the enjoyment of the fruits of the lover's garden: everything the beloved can offer (4:12 – 5:1). This includes, among others, honey (5:1) which also appears in 4:11 ("your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue"). It may be contrasted with the adulteress in Prov 5:3 whose lips "drip honey".

In Sir 24:17, 19-20 wisdom offers food and drink to those who take hold of her. Her invitation to be filled with her produce resembles the lovers in Cant 5:1 who drink their fill of love. To be filled with her fruits therefore also implies quenching one's desire for an intimate relationship with her. Sir 24:19-21 implies that wisdom herself is the food and drink. The image of honey also appears in 24:20 ("For the memory of me is sweeter than honey, and the inheritance of me is better than a honeycomb of honey"), to describe the sweetness of the relationship with her. While the adulteress in Sir 23:26 leaves an accursed memory, the memory of wisdom's love is so desirable that once a person has tasted intimacy with her, he will desire more and will never be satisfied (Sir 24:21: "Whoever eats of me will hunger still, and whoever drinks me will be thirsty still"). The love of the adulteress is condemned; the love of wisdom is exalted. This seems to be confirmed in 24:22 ("Whoever obeys me will not be ashamed, and those who work with me will not sin"). It conveys two messages at the same time. Firstly, as pointed out, the love of wisdom is a licit relationship. Secondly, as also discussed above, having wisdom can also prevent one from sexual wrongdoing that would bring shame on oneself. Moreover 24:16-21 and the preceding

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219 Also cf. McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom*, 141.
221 The poem finishes on a positive note, in contrast to Prov 8:36.
stanza as well (24:13-15), where references to procreation are lacking, convey the positive attitude of the author toward a sexual relationship that has no other goal beyond itself.222

While 24:23 is not part of wisdom's speech, it also calls for comment. As noted earlier, the speaker is the sage himself. This verse is found among sayings that describe wisdom's capacity and almost limitless knowledge (24:25-29), before the section finishes with the author's claim as wisdom teacher (24:30-33).223

In Sir 24:23-34 the author identifies wisdom with the Torah, as a "special possession".224 given to Israel. There are connections between the law and wisdom in 15:1; 17:11; 19:20; 21:11; 24:23; 34:8; 45:5.225 Sir 24:23, however, represents a culmination with their explicit identification. This also confirms that the dwelling place of wisdom is among the Israelites.

Pate notes that in the identification of wisdom and law the author presumes Deuteronomistic tradition.226 Sir 24:23 appears to be a clear reference to Deut 4:6-8. Sirach, as Rylaarsdam interprets it, made the law the core of Israel's heritage by bringing the wisdom movement, independent in its own right and universal in its

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223 Murphy, _Tree of Life_, 139-40, assumes on the basis of Ben Sira's claim in 24:30-33 that he understood his book as an "extension" of the Torah. Benjamin G. Wright, "Wisdom, Instruction, and Social Location in Sirach and 1 Enoch," in _Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone_ (ed. Esther G. Chazon, David Satran and Ruth A. Clements; JSJSupp 89; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 105-21, 114-15, notes regarding Sir 24:30-34 that Ben Sira "sees himself as the custodian and transmitter not only of the wisdom embodied in Torah, but also of an inherited tradition of scribal wisdom. Additionally, Ben Sira has acquired wisdom on his own by observation of human behaviour and the workings of the natural world".
224 Crawford, "Lady Wisdom," 357.
225 Beentjes, "Full Wisdom," 25-26, asserts that in the G II addition of Sir 1:5 wisdom is linked with "the word of God" and "the eternal commandments" which refer to the Torah, therefore from the very outset wisdom and Torah are identified here.
scope, under the domain of the law. This "Wisdom has become particularistic." This is, however, a matter of debate.

Sirach 24, especially 24:23, represents a twofold development compared with Job 28 and Proverbs 8. Job 28 declares that only God knows Wisdom's whereabouts and she is distant from the creation. While Proverbs 8 does not define wisdom's dwelling place, it does not consider her to be distant from creation: she rejoices in the world and delights in humankind (8:31). Sirach 24 not only clearly specifies wisdom's dwelling place (24:8, 10-12, 13-14), but also identifies her with the law (24:23). The later book of Baruch makes this identification as well in 4:1 (in the context of 3:37 – 4:2) and it states that wisdom has been given to Jacob/Israel (Bar 3:37 - 4:2). This development is missing from Wisdom 7 - 9. In I En. 42:1-2 wisdom has found no dwelling place on earth. Therefore she returned to heaven. The motif of wisdom returning to heaven is not found in either Job 28, Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Bar 3:9 – 4:4 or Wisdom 7 – 9. It may be noted here that several parallels may be made between the wisdom of these poems and other Ben Sira passages on the one hand, and the Logos of the prologue of John. Some of them are listed below. In the latter the feminine personification is missing. In the Johannine prologue Logos is mentioned in the context of the law but not identified with it (Jn 1:17). Wisdom was in the beginning (Prov 8:22-23; Sir 1:4; 24:9; Wis 9:9). Logos was also in the beginning (Jn 1:1). Logos similarly to wisdom was with God (Prov 8:30; Sir 1:1; Wis 9:4; cf. Jn 1:1). Wisdom was in the world, and Logos was in the world (Sir 24:6-12; Bar 3:37 – 4:2; Wis 8:1; cf. Jn 1:10). Finally Logos was rejected by its own (Jn 1:11) and according

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228 Rylaarsdam, Revelation, 36.
229 Cf. the debate and some bibliography on the issue in Pate, Reverse, 24-32.
230 If we accept that Baruch was written during or after the Maccabean period.
231 See also Murphy, Tree of Life, 141.
to 1 En. 42:1-2 wisdom similarly did not find a dwelling on earth and returned to
heaven.²³²

Following the identification of wisdom and the law in Sir 24:23, the author describes
her abundant knowledge, that cannot be fathomed by humans, with images of rivers
(24:25-29). The closing stanza (24:30-34) is Sirach's self-claim to be a wisdom
teacher, who, as a canal from the river channels wisdom's knowledge by pouring out
instruction like prophecy. Liesen argues that when the author speaks in the first
person as a teacher, it is to appeal for attention or to state the value of his teaching.
Similarly to Sir 6:18-37, in Sirach 24 personification and speaking in the first person
serve to instruct disciples in a certain way of life. It is not material knowledge the
author intends to pass on but a way of life. In so doing he can refer to his own life as a
point of reference for the students.²³³

In summary, Sirach 24 on the account of both wisdom's self-praise in the first person,
and her identification with the Torah, represents the high point of the book of Ben
Sira. The imagery and topics it contains relate most closely to Proverbs 8. Apart from
the identification of wisdom and Torah there are other differences between these two
poems and between Sirach 24 and the other hymns discussed above. There is much
emphasis in Proverbs 8, among others, on wisdom's claim to speak the truth and on
her instruction and knowledge (Prov 8:7-10), and to be present from the beginning at

²³² See also T. Francis Glasson, "Colossians 1:18, 15 and Sirach 24," JBL 86 (1967), 214-16. For
a probable identification of wisdom and law cf. Luke 7:35; 11:49-51; Matt 11:19, 28-30; 23:34-36, 37-
39. In 1 Enoch 42 both wisdom and iniquity are pictured as women seeking a dwelling place. The
former finds none among "the sons of men", echoing a tradition of the Epistle of Enoch 94:5. The
latter, iniquity, finds "those whom she did not seek". While wisdom and iniquity are pictured as
women, the focus is not on sexual relations or seductiveness on the part of either; cf. William Loader,
Philo, Josephus, and Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).
Sira and the Book of Wisdom: Festschrift M. Gilbert (BETL 143; ed. Nuria Calduch-Benages and
the creation (Prov 8:22-31). Sir 24:1-22 has a different agenda. The issues of wisdom's presence at the creation and of her origin are dealt with more briefly. It seems more important that she now resides in Israel and takes part in the cult. Two stanzas are dedicated to her description as being like trees, plants and produce (Sir 24:13-15, 16-17, 19-21). The images used here suggest abundance, fertility. Therefore she is depicted using sexual images. The fact that wisdom in Proverbs 8 (esp. 8:1-2) and her counterpart, the strange woman, as folly in Proverbs 1 – 9 are described with similar images, and the close association of Proverbs 8 and 9 suggest an erotic background for wisdom herself. However, sexual motifs seem much more developed in Sir 24:13-15, 16-17, 19-21. While Prov 8:19 refers to wisdom's fruits, images of abundance and fertility are lacking. In Sir 24:1-22 wisdom invites people to enjoy her fruits. It seems, moreover, that the food and drink she offers is herself. This again can suggest sexual intimacy between wisdom and her seekers/lovers. Several aspects seem to demonstrate the author's positive attitude to sexuality in the present context. Firstly, the relationship with wisdom is affirmed and its memory is sweeter than honey, in contrast with the memory of the acts of the adulteress in Sir 23:22-26. Secondly, wisdom is so desirable that one's hunger and thirst for her is unquenchable (24:21). Thirdly, the supposition that no shame is attached to the relationship with her – in fact, she may protect a person from shameful acts (24:22) – seems to be confirmed in that the poem is immediately followed by the reference to the law and its identification with wisdom (24:23). It is remarkable that language with a potential sexual connotation and the comment on the covenant of the Most High, are in such close proximity.
Sir 51:13-30

The numbers in brackets represent Skehan's verse numeration.

11Q5/11QPs

1. MS B is not significantly different, but lacks the motif "before I went astray", and adds "I desired her" (51:13: "-svg hvb hvkwhm").

2. The correct writing of the word in the masoretic text would be "hnrwda". See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 574. This verse is not extant in MS B.

3. The correct word behind "hrtb" would probably be "hratb" from *rat* ("form", "stately appearance"). See also Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 574.

4. MS B only has the second distich, which is almost the rephrasing of the text. Note the inclusion of the word "ynk" and the word "wisdom" itself.


6. This verse differs in MS B: "And I said a prayer (lit. prayed a prayer) in my youth and found much knowledge" (11Q5/11QPs). The word hkr in Prov 7:21 may be understood as "persuasive words". Cf. Prov 16:21. J. A. Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff," in *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPS)* (DJD 4; Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 79-85, 82, suggests "seductive words".


8. MS B reads: "her yoke became glory for me" (hlt hly lhm). The following stich is the same as 51:17b in 11Q5/11QPs' except for the corrupt word for "praise/glory" (hlt). For the word hlt Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff," 81-82, suggests "nurse" from hlt and gives the following translation: "And she became for me a nurse". Deutsch, "Sirach 51," 402, does not exclude the latter translation. Rabinowitz, *Qumran Hebrew*, 175, 177-78, gives a variation for the verse: "And for me she has been the reason I give thanks / to my teachers".

9. 51:18 is different in MS B: "I resolved/considered to do good and will not turn back for lit. I (will) find him" (v. 15cd: ytdml hmkj yrwunm ynya ylk). The following stich is masculine, the theme of the whole section is finding wisdom, and not finding God. This part of the stich seems to be corrupt.

234 MS B: "My heart/soul loved her/was attached to her" (v. 19a)

235 MS B: "and my face I will not turn from her" (v. 19b)
51:13 (When) I was young and before I went astray, and I sought her. 
14 She came to me [] until the end[].
15 Although a blossom drops in the ripening, grapes rejoice the heart. The way of my feet was in uprightness, for from my youth I knew her. 
16 I paid heed (lit. I turned/inclined my ear) (for) a little (time), and I found much instruction. 
17 And her yoke [], to my Teacher I will give my praise.
18 I resolved and wore her down, I have been jealous for the good and will not turn back. 
19a I burned with desire for her,

MS B: "I gave my heart/soul to her" (ではなくת אתוריה). This text appears in the synopsis of the Hebrew extant manuscripts in Beentjes, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 178; the text given on page 93 in the individual MS B manuscript is slightly different: " hanshatt אתוריה. 

Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 575, suggests ytrf from drf ("to pursue"). 

MS B is mutilated: "For ever and ever…" ([...][...][...][...]). The last word is probably "from her" (תמהלמה בנות מלאה), but without the verb the meaning of this stich is not clear. The word hymwrbw seems corrupt. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 575, corrects it to wymwrb ("of extolling her"). Sanders, *Sirach 51:13ff*, 81-82, translates "and on her heights I do not waver", taking as a basis wymwrb from the text for "and in/on her heights" alluding to wisdom's heights in Prov 8:2; 9:3, 14 (מער). 

Rabinowitz, "Qumran Hebrew," 175, 179, reads: "I have made myself toil over her, and on her heights I am not / at ease", understanding it without an erotic connotation. Deutsch, "Sirach 51.4", 402, reads "and on her heights I did not weary". 

Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 575, restores "springs of her gates" (יר פורשה למרה). This text appears in the synopsis of the Hebrew extant manuscripts in Beentjes, *Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 178; the text given on page 93 in the individual MS B manuscript is slightly different: "יר פורשה למרה.

Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 575, restores "springs of her gates" (ילימה שלמה ממות). Skehan, "Acrostic Poem," 396, and Rabinowitz, "Qumran Hebrew," 180, prefers the non-erotic sense of the word as in Sir 42:18 (MS M) over the notion of "nakedness". For 51:20d(19f) Deutsch, "Sirach 51.4", 402, gives a variation "My hand opened her gates, and I understood her subtleties". Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff", 81-82, renders "I opened my hand(s) … and perceive her unseen parts". In MS B 51:20d(19f) is incomplete, only the verb "springs" (fromשמש = look at, look on) is complete ([...][...][...]הלאה). 

Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 575, reconstructs אלילה, for the last word. 

The probable reading is "in her beauty"; see the note on the text. 

Read "I will seek her out"; see the note on the text. 

In order to read "became for me" the verb should read יר ("her yoke became glory for me"). For other variations see the note on the text. Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 572, 574-75, reads "since in this way I have profited". 

For other variations see the note on the text. 

Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff," 81-82, translates "pleasure".
19b and my face I have not turned away; 20a(19c) [256 her with my being 20b(19d) [257 I am not at ease. 20c(19e) My hand [258 I came to know. 20d(19f) [259 I purified my hand for 260 your reward in his time. 

MS B

20e(20b) I found (her) in pureness, 266
20f(20c) and I possessed (lit. acquired) a heart 267 (that was) for her from the beginning, 268

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256 Read "I pursued": see the note on the text.
257 One probable correction of the text is "and on her heights": for other variants see the note on the text.
258 Probable reading "opened": for variants for the whole line see the note on the text.
259 Read "and her secrets (lit. nakedness)": see the note on the text.
260 Read "for her": see the note on the text. Deutsch, "Sirach 51," 402, suggests "I washed my hand in her".
261 In the synopsis of the extant Hebrew manuscripts, Beentjes, Ben Sira in Hebrew, 178, the division of 51:20efg(20bcd) in MS B is different: לבל קניתי לפני מתחלה 261[...] הקיתי לפני מתחלה בעכוור כ קנייתה קניי טボ: 21 מתי י荤ה חמור ל כאן ב עבו כ קנייתה קניי טב: 22 נח🏀 לי שכר сфוהחרך בדלוגרים האורנים: 23 Melania שלמרות ציל ויאלו מפקק צמף מראדיה: 24 מי פתחו ויהיו בה כער לכמ המכח אל כסק: 25 מי פתחו ויהיו בה מרמאו הPrimaryKey: 26 מי פתחו ויהיו בה מספק צמף: 262 קרבה א לא ממקקורת נות נפש מחברות אדו: 27 ראי בטינכוס כ קסף הייח ויומדהו יماذا Wohn: 28 צמף יהנה תקף ביו: 263 קרבה א לא ממקקורת נות נפש מחברות אדו: 29 המספק צמה מראדיה: 30 מספק צמה בברקinals ידוה נזק אלה לפס🏼 שכרם בברקinals: בורכין לי לולסם מס/token ידוה ו: 264 hb "(through her)" would be the correct ending for this stich; see G I and also Skehan, Ben Sira, 573, 576. His translation of 51:28 is: "Hear but a little instruction; you will win silver and gold through her". 265 ytwrunb ("in my youth") does not seem necessary here.
266 Rabinowitz, "Qumran Hebrew," 175, 180, conjectures כפי יהוה כי食べた ("according as I kept myself pure I have received her") lacking any reference to the idea of "hand".
267 Deutsch, "Sirach 51," 402, translates "inclination".
20g(20d) therefore [].

21 My inner being (lit. belly) was stirred up like a fire-pot to look at her, therefore I acquired her as a good possession.

22 The Lord has granted me a reward, my lips, and with my tongue I will praise him.

23 Come to me (lit. turn towards me) you foolish, and spend the night in my house of teaching/instruction.

24 How long will you lack/be deprived of lit. his strength, and your souls are very thirsty.

25 My mouth I opened and spoke of her: gain yourselves wisdom without money.

26 (And) submit your neck to her yoke and let your mind (lit. yourselves) receive/accept her utterance/oracle.

27 She is close to those who seek her, and the one who gives himself finds her.

The following verses seem corrupt. Their meaning is something like this:

27 See for yourselves, that I have accomplished (lit. became, from the verb "to exist") little, and I served her/waited on her and found her.

28 Hear much of my instruction in my youth and silver and gold you will gain through me.

29 The first half of this verse also seems corrupt, where "my soul rejoices" makes sense, but the last word seems out of place, and the second half would sound probably like this:

and do not be ashamed of singing (praise).

30 Work at your tasks in righteousness and he (God) will give you your reward in his time.

(Blessed be Yahweh for ever, and praised be his name from generation to generation.)
13 When I was still young, before I went astray,
I sought wisdom plainly in my prayer.  
14 Before the temple I asked for her

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and until the end I will seek her out.
15 As the blossoms ripened to grape
my heart delighted in her,
my foot walked in uprightness,
from my youth I sought her.
16 I inclined my ear a little, and I received,
and I found for myself much instruction.
17 I made progress in her;
to him who gives me wisdom I will give glory/praise.
18 For I intended to practise her,\textsuperscript{282}
and I have been jealous for the good, and I will not be ashamed.
19 My soul has wrestled with her,
and I was scrupulous in the performance of the law,
I stretched out my hands on high
and lamented my ignorances of her.
20 I directed my soul to her,
and in purification I found her,\textsuperscript{283}
I possessed a heart (that was) with her from the beginning,
therefore I will not be forsaken;
21 and my inner being was stirred up to seek her,
therefore I acquired a good possession.
22 The Lord gave me a tongue as my reward,
and with it I will praise him.
23 Draw near me, (you) unlearned,
and lodge/dwell in the house of instruction.
24 Why do you admit to the lack of these things
and your souls thirst greatly?\textsuperscript{284}
25 I opened my mouth and I said:
acquire for yourselves without money.\textsuperscript{285}
26 Put your neck under a yoke
and let your soul receive instruction.\textsuperscript{286}
It is close to find.
27 See with your eyes that I laboured little\textsuperscript{287}
and I found for myself great rest.
28 Take your share in instruction with a lot of money,
and you will acquire much gold through it.
29 May your soul rejoice in his (God’s) mercy,
and may you not be ashamed in his praise.
30 Work at your task in due season
and he (God) will give your reward in his time.

\textsuperscript{286} For 51:26b cf. Wright, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation, 762.
\textsuperscript{287} For 51:27a cf. Wright, "Sirach: Introduction and Translation, 762.
Context

Following Ben Sira’s prayer in Sir 51:1-12, 51:13-30 is his closing of the book in the form of an autobiographical poem on wisdom. Its 23 lines\(^{288}\) are in acrostic order using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.\(^{289}\) As noted above, van Peursen considers it to be one of the poems that structure the book.\(^{290}\) Within the section the borders of small stanzas that are organized into larger units (2+2+2 distichs + 3+2+3 distichs + 3+2+2+2 distichs = 23 distichs) are determined by content. Chapter 1 speaks about the greatness of wisdom in the first person. There is a development in that in Sirach 24 wisdom speaks in the first person and then the first person belongs to the author in Sir 51:13-30.

Form

The acrostic poem uses the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each line starting with a letter from א to ו and an additional distich can be found at the end (ס line) according to Skehan’s reading.\(^ {291}\) The extant parts of 11Q5/11QPs\(^ a\) (from line א to first half of line ב, 51:13a-20e [20a]) all follow the order. MS B follows this order from line ל (51:20f[20c]) with the inclusion of י in front of the word לב ("heart"); the exceptions are line ס (51:23), which starts with ס, line ז (51:26)

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\(^{289}\) The fact that the book of Ben Sira already has a postscript in Sir 50:27-29 would indicate that the poem was not part of the original book. However, its vocabulary and use of images of a female personified wisdom in other parts of the book (1:1-10; 4:11-19; 6:18-31; 14:20 - 15:10; ch. 24) support its place in the original work. Cf. Deutsch, "Sirach 51," 401. Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff," 83, doubts it.


\(^{291}\) Skehan, Ben Sira, 574, 576. In some similar poems the reason for the addition is to form the word לא from the letters א, ל (this way the middle letter in the alphabet) and the closing ס. The word means in Piel "to teach", "to instruct".
starting with י, line ש (51:28) beginning with ר and the last line (51:30) which should start with ל has מ as the first letter. Before line ל only א and ב lines follow the acrostic order. Van Peursen argues that an explanation for the distortion of the acrostic form in MS B is that it is a retroversion from Syriac.

Content

Sir 51:13-30, as Sauer observes, represents a development in the sense that following Sir 1:1-10, where wisdom's greatness is praised in the third person, and Sirach 24, where wisdom praises herself in the first person, the first person finally belongs to the author of the acrostic poem. The expression "before I went astray" in 51:13a (using רוחני, 11Q5/11QPs; πλανηθηναί, G I) suggests that the author was sexually innocent. In comparison with Sir 6:23-27, where the search for wisdom is so significant (esp. in 6:26-27), the reading of 51:13b in both 11QPs/11Q5 and MS B reflects the motif better than the reading in G I ("I sought wisdom plainly in my prayer"), since desiring and seeking is more active than praying. The term בק is employed in both Sir 6:27 and 51:13. The idea of "youth" (נו in Hebrew) is also present in the Greek text of 6:18 and in 51:13. We noted earlier in the discussion of the wisdom poems that a person has to take initiative to search for wisdom. At times,


294 Apart from the physical sense והל and πλανάω can mean "going astray", "erring" mentally, morally, or spiritually (e.g. Pss 58:3 [58:4 in BHS, 57:4 in LXX]; 95:10 [94:10 in LXX], sometimes because of drunkenness (Isa 28:7).

295 Not extant in Hebrew.
however, she plays an active role in approaching a person, resulting in a "reciprocal longing and search" of the student and wisdom for each other.

In Sir 51:14, similarly to Sir 15:2 ("young bride"), wisdom appears as a beautiful woman (בורה corrected from בורה) who comes to those who seek her (11Q5/11QPs). In G I the motif of wisdom approaching in her beauty is completely lacking ("Before the temple I asked for her"). The second half of Sir 51:14 ("and until the end I will seek her out") is the same in both 11Q5/11QPs and G I and, like Sir 6:18, demonstrates that "finding" and "frequenting" wisdom is a commitment a person has to make in his youth for all his life ("greying hair", Sir 6:18b, G I).

Sanders suggests that the image of a young man reaching maturity lies behind Sir 51:15 (בע网站地图 ישמש לב, = "Although a blossom drops in the ripening, grapes rejoice the heart", 11Q5/11QPs). The rabbinic comment in m. Nid. 5:7 compares women's sexual maturation to the ripening of figs. The reference to joy may be a reference to youth itself or the relationship with wisdom, or both. The ideas of Sir 51:14-15 suggest that these images speak about the sage's intimate relationship with wisdom. The word רגיל (11Q5/11QPs and MS B) may simply refer to feet. Sanders suggests that it may be a euphemism for the genitalia. In 51:15c the meaning of the term "uprightness" (.uniform, 11Q5/11QPs, ρῆσθοςτη, G I) may imply that the seeker of wisdom walked the same path as she did, i.e. the path of "righteousness" and "justice" (Prov 8:20). After wisdom has tested the faithfulness of the wise, she rewards him by setting him on the straight path as in Sir 4:18a (MS A).

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297 Wis 8:2 refers to both the young age of the person seeking wisdom and wisdom's beauty. See also 1 Kgs 3:7-9.
298 Sanders, "Sirach 51:13ff," 81. For the image of ripening grapes see Gen 40:10; Isa 18:5. For a slightly different metaphor see Sir 14:18.
51:15d (כֵּן מֵעָתוֹר רַשָּׁה) = "for from my youth I knew her", 11Q5/11QPs³) may emphasize that the author had intimate sexual knowledge of her.³⁰⁰ G I with its expression "I sought her" is not so explicit.

The primary meaning of לֹטַח in 51:16 (11Q5/11QPs⁶, "I paid heed [lit. I turned/inclined my ear] [for] a little [time], and I found much instruction") is "instruction". It can also denote "seductive speech" as in Prov 7:21.³⁰¹ In contrast to the latter, the "seductive speech" of wisdom is attractive and good.³⁰² It may be that the author refers to the knowledge he gained from wisdom (Sir 51:16). However, it may also imply that wisdom, similarly to the adulteress in Prov 7:21, uses seductive words with which she can captivate the student. G I with the word πατείαν ("instruction", 51:16b) tones down the potential allusion to "seductive speech". As noted above, the reading of 51:17 (רַעָלָה הָיְתָה לְּלוֹמֵרִים אֲחָד הוֹדֵר) is problematic in 11Q5/11QPs³. MS B can suggest "Her yoke became glory for me" (רַעָלָה הָיְתָה לְּלוֹמֵרִים, 51:17a). "Yoke" in this case may refer to marital relationship, an intimate bond. It is also possible, however, to read the word לֹטַח with Sanders as "nurse".³⁰³ Wisdom's qualities as a nurturing woman (mother or wife) are known in Sir 15:2. If we read "progress" in the G I (προοκοπή ἔγένετο μοι ἐν σωτη = "I made progress in her", 51:17b), the glory/praise is given to the giver of wisdom, God himself (also in Sir 15:10a). If, however, לֹטַח is understood as "nurse", Sanders' suggestion for the word "ardour", "manhood" or "vigour" in 51:17b (רַדֵּר)³⁰⁴ instead of praise, is not far-fetched. The term is also employed in Prov 5:9 ("you will give your honor [רָדֵּר] to others, and your years to the merciless"), in the context of a

³⁰¹ Also see the note on the text.
³⁰³ See the note on the text.
³⁰⁴ See the note on the text.
warning against consorting with an adulteress. This way the following idea could be surmised on the basis of Sanders' translation: she (wisdom) became the student's nurse and he will give her (wisdom = teacher) his ardour/manhood. G I, as noted above, lacks the reference to both "yoke" and "nurse" as possible readings.

We may note on the other hand, that with the reading "praise" a certain pattern can be maintained, i.e. all the three stanzas end with a reference to the praise of the Lord.\(^{305}\) Also, Muraoka is correct in pointing out that in Sir 51:17 the one(s) to whom the author should not give his "manhood" or "vigour" is (are) masculine.\(^{306}\) Sanders' reading would certainly fit the larger context on wisdom pictured as his lover.

Except for the last verse (51:22) the second stanza (51:18-22) describes the relationship of Ben Sira and wisdom, using, at times, passionate images. The comment "I resolved and wore her down, I have been jealous for the good and will not turn back" (יוֹמָה אֲשָׁרָה קְנָאת בְּנוֹבַי אַשׁུר, 51:18, 11Q5/11QPs\(^a\)) is puzzling. It is either a metaphor with a sexual connotation or is out of context here. Angel offers another reading here. If שִׁפַּחְתָּן ("to play") replaces שׁפַחְתָּן ("wear down"), then the idea of playing as part of lovemaking fits in the context. Jealousy, especially jealousy for pleasure,\(^{307}\) turning away and then returning can also be part of a playful love relationship. G I is not so explicit (διενοθήσαν γὰρ τοῦ σοι ἄφησαι οὕτω καὶ ἐξηλώσα τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ οὐ μὴ αἰσχύνθω = "For I intended to practise her, and I have been jealous for the good, and I will not be ashamed"), although it retains the idea of jealousy. The terms "burning" (תֹּרְרָא, 11Q5/11QPs\(^b\)) for wisdom, or "attachment" (נפשח, MS B) to her, continue in 51:19a to describe the relationship.

\(^{305}\) In the third stanza it is found in 51:29.


\(^{307}\) If we accept Sander's translation for the term "good" as suggested in the note on the translation. Cf. also Angel, "Wild Men," 155.
Burning can be a sexual passion (Prov 6:27). A jealous person is attached to his beloved and is hesitant to leave her. This anxiety lies perhaps behind Sir 51:19b ("and my face I have not turned away", 11Q5/11QPs ה.ו.ו.ו.) and 51:20a(19c) ("[I pursued] her with my being", 11Q5/11QPs ה.ו.ו.ו.). The Greek text departs from it in 51:19b ("and I was scrupulous in the performance of the law"), and introduces the theme of stretching the hands in 51:19c. A probable reading for 51:20b(19d) in 11Q5/11QPs ה.ו.ו.ו., as discussed above, is "[and on her heights] (from מַרְבִּים) I am not at ease". Angel provides the following translation: "in the moments of her exaltation, I will not let up", where the "moments of her exaltation" is a reference to orgasm. G I reads in 51:19d: "and lamented my ignorances of her". Skehan suggests that the spreading of the hands (51:20c[19e]) is an act of a praying person, which in other contexts could be rewarded with the revealed secrets of wisdom (51:20d[19f]), the same reward as in Sir 4:18b. Here, however, a different word is used for "secrets", not מַסָּהוּ from Sir 4:18b, which mainly means "secret place", "hiding place". In Sir 51:20d[19f] ("[and her secrets, lit. nakedness] I came to know"), the word מַסָּהוּ (from מַסָּהוּ, מַסָּהוּ, מַסָּהוּ, "naked") is employed. With it the use of the hands to open wisdom's gate is more appropriate than the lifting up of hands in order to pray. If the reading of MS B (דר מַסָּהוּ שִׁירֵיָה) = "my hand opened her gate", 51:20c[19e]) is accepted, the line with the erotic connotation of the word "hand" would be another climax of the description of Ben Sira's love affair with wisdom: their love is fulfilled in sexual intercourse. To talk openly about a woman's nakedness would be exceptional, since

308 MS B is not significantly different.
309 MS B reads "I gave my heart/soul to her".
310 Angel, "Wild Men," 156.
311 Skehan, Ben Sira, 578. Cf. Exod 9:29, 33; 1 Kgs 8:22; 2 Chr 6:12, 13, 29; Ezra 9:5; Tob 3:11; Isa 1:15.
312 Cf. 1 Kgs 3:6-12; Wis 7:7.
313 See the note on the text.
female nakedness, especially in the Hellenistic era, could reflect on the woman's respectability, or rather on the lack of it.\(^{315}\) It is extraordinary that Ben Sira describes wisdom's nakedness. The explanation for this is probably that he speaks about personified wisdom and not a real woman.

Both 51:20c(20a) (בְּמֶשָּׁרַה מִזְמַה = "I purified my hand for [her]")\(^{316}\) in 11Q5/11QPs\(^{a}\), and 51:20e(20b) (בְּכֶם הַבִּירָה אֲלִיוֹ = "I found [her] in pureness") in MS B, refer to purity/pureness. While both lines may concern the purity of wisdom's lover himself, it is also possible that MS B describes wisdom. Regarding the latter Deutsch proposes that pureness is the state in which wisdom is ready to have sexual intercourse after her purification period.\(^{317}\) We may only conjecture that according to 11Q5/11QPs\(^{a}\) the person seeking wisdom must also be in a state of pureness before having intercourse with wisdom. ἡ φιλὴ in 51:20a could also be understood as "desire". The line would then read "I directed my desire to her" to describe the emotions of wisdom's lover. 51:20b in G I, similarly to 51:20e(20b) in MS B, also attests to the idea of cleanliness.

51:20f(20c) in MS B, similarly to 51:15d (11Q5/11QPs\(^{a}\)) affirms that the sage knew wisdom from an early age and goes a step further in declaring that his heart was always for her. 51:20g(20d) is mutilated. G I in this line ("therefore I will not be

\(^{315}\) Michael L. Satlow, "Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity," *JBL* 116 (1997), 429-54, 440-42, 451-52, who also points out that in the early books of the Hebrew Bible seductive women were not always naked (Tamar, Gen 38:14, in contrast to Bathsheba's nakedness, 2 Sam 11:2). Rabbinic literature has especially considered female nakedness as a marker of the woman's character and also a danger, as it can sexually arouse men.

\(^{316}\) See the notes on text and translation.

\(^{317}\) Deutsch, "Sirach 51," 406.
forsaken", 51:20d) implies that as wisdom was with the author from the beginning she will so remain until the end (cf. 51:14b in 11Q5/11QPs). 318

Whoever finds wisdom is urged to hold her fast ("do not let her go", Sir 6:27b), and whoever tasted wisdom's food and drink (Sir 24:21) will still want more (cf. Prov 4:6). Also, if anyone enters an intimate relationship with wisdom, the desire of that person will never be fully quenched. This passion is expressed again in Sir 51:21a, as wisdom is indeed a good possession, if not the best (51:21b, in both MS B and G I), that a person can have (cf. Prov 4:7). As indicated above, the term מטר נאם has sexual connotations in Cant 5:4. It is also the case in Sir 51:21. Angel notes that κοιλία in the LXX may refer to reproductive organs. 319 This way the sage's loins were being stirred up to seek wisdom, which is another sign of the burning desire for her.

Sir 51:22 closes the description of the author's and wisdom's relationship with a reference to the Lord, who has given the author reason to praise him with his "tongue" (cf. Isa 50:4). As a wise man he is worthy of praising God, as is clear also from Sir 15:10a, in contrast with the "wicked", who is excluded from the praise of the Lord. 320 The word רחמנין ("I will praise him", i.e. the Lord) concludes the second stanza (8 distichs) of the poem. According to Deutsch it is also the conclusion of the confession part of the poem, and with 51:23 the second part, the exhortation, begins. 321

318 In 51:20c G I repeats the idea of 51:20f(20c) in MS B.
In the third stanza (51:23-30) Ben Sira appears as a wisdom teacher, himself. As a disciple of wisdom he considers himself worthy and capable of teaching others. This idea occurred also in Sir 24:30-33 (esp. 24:32-33) and it culminates in Sir 51:23-30. He, the wise teacher, invites the "foolish" (скопιζευς) or "unlearned" (ἀπαθευτοι) in the first person to attend to him "in my house of instruction" (בְּבֵית מוֹדֵרִים) in 51:23.322

Ben Sira, similarly to wisdom, who exalted the wise above his fellows in Sir 15:5a, exalts himself above those who do not know wisdom. As noted above, wisdom's food according to Sir 15:3 is the "bread of knowledge" and her drink is the "water of [understanding]" (cf. Sir 51:24).323

As a wisdom teacher ("My mouth I opened and spoke of her", MS B, 51:25a) Ben Sira advises his disciples that it is not money that is needed to gain wisdom; it is possible even for the poor (51:25b, cf. Isa 55:1-3; Prov 4:5-7). What is necessary is the person's willingness for hard work combined with humility (Sir 6:19a), as expressed with the symbol of wisdom's yoke (παλν, ζυγίων, Sir 51:26a), similarly to Sir 6:24-25 (cf. Jer 27:8; 11-12), and attention to receive wisdom's utterance (משה, Sir 51:26b) or instruction (παιδεύαν, Sir 51:26b). Wisdom's yoke may be contrasted with the wicked woman in Sir 26:7 who is compared to a constantly moving, irritating yoke (cf. Matt 11:28-30). Only those who wholeheartedly strive for wisdom (נמשו נוחת = "and the one who gives himself")325 will find her (Sir 51:26cd, cf. 6:19-27; 14:20-27).

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322 G I reads "in the house of instruction".
323 See the note on the text.
324 Cf. Sir 24:19-21; Prov 9:5.
325 A similar term is used in 1 Chr 22:19.
In Sir 51:27 the writer uses his own example to encourage his students, again a thought familiar from Sir 6:19cd and Sir 51:16. "I paid heed … (for) a little (time)" (51:16a, Hebrew) is in parallel with "I have accomplished little" (51:27a, Hebrew). Similarly the expression "and I found much instruction" (or "seductive speech" as pointed out, 51:16b, Hebrew) could be paralleled with "and found her" (51:27b, Hebrew), i.e. wisdom. It is uncertain why G I changes 51:27b to "… I found for myself great rest".

Skehan's reading for 51:28a ("Hear but a little instruction; you will win silver and gold through her") seems to be more fitting than MS B's text ("Hear much of my instruction") since the former would create a parallel between 51:27 and 51:28 and a less tight parallel between 51:16 and 51:28. The mention of silver and gold in 51:28b may be a reference to "riches and honour", "wealth and prosperity" (Prov 8:18) which the wise will possess through finding wisdom.

Not only does the wise person have reason to rejoice and praise God for his gift, wisdom (cf. Sir 1:26; Wis 8:21 -9:18), but it is also his purpose and duty. In praising the Lord the sage leads his disciples by example as is reflected in Sir 51:17b, 22b; now in 51: 29 he encourages the readers to do the same. The 22-line poem would end with the call to sing praise to the Lord. The extra line also has a reference to God. The reading of G I for 51:30a ("work at your task in due season") seems more appropriate than MS B ("work at your tasks in righteousness"), since it

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326 Skehan, Ben Sira, 573, 579. "Take your share in instruction with a lot of money, and you will acquire much gold through it" in G I does not seem to fit into the parallel of 51:27-28.
327 Cf. Sir 35:25-26 in a different context.
329 See the possible interpretations for this line above.
creates a tight parallel with 51:30b: "and he (God) will give you your reward in his time" (MS B).  

In his invitation to the disciples Ben Sira's passionate voice has changed somewhat starting with 51:23. His persuasive attitude remained, but it is in the service of convincing his students to follow his example. Even though forceful language is used in 51:24b ("your souls are very thirsty", MS B), and the idea of submission to wisdom's yoke returns in 51:26, the erotic images are found mainly in the first and the second stanzas.

Ben Sira's acrostic poem in some aspects is similar to the previous five poems, but it has some unique elements. It employs personification to describe the love-relationship with wisdom. However, this description is more personal and more erotically charged than any of the preceding wisdom hymns in his book. One reason is the use of the first person. The sometimes surprising comments with their sexual connotations exhibit a positive attitude towards sexuality in the specific context of the relationship of the sage and wisdom. What is perhaps even more surprising is that the writer's own description of his love affair is interwoven with references to the praise of God, passages that appear to return at the closing of every major part of the poem. Remarkably, an openness on sexual issues, including intercourse, female nakedness, and orgasm, is found along with lines about praising God. Eros and the sacred are not separated. This is certainly one of the most revolutionary characteristics of Ben Sira's erotically highly-charged poem. On the other hand, the translation demonstrates a tendency of toning down the erotic content. Usually it does so by replacing the erotic content.

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330 G I in 51:30b agrees.
331 Cf. the discussion of Sir 24:1-22. Potentially erotic language (24:16-21) is followed by the comment on the Most High and the Torah in 24:23.
terminology used by the Hebrew text, resulting in an almost neutral description of seeking and finding wisdom for the purpose of learning.

Conclusion

The poems that contain the images of a personified female wisdom figure in the Book of Ben Sira differ in many respects, but some important similarities can be discovered among them. They also exhibit a development compared with other examples of the personification of wisdom. The book of Ben Sira begins (1:1-10) and ends with a wisdom-poem (51:13-30). In the middle of the book is found the most extensive passage where wisdom praises herself in the first person (ch. 24, esp. 24:3-22).

In Sir 1:1-10 one of the main themes of the author is established: firstly, that all wisdom is from the Lord and it will remain with him forever, and secondly, that only God knows her and her origin. Only he can give wisdom to his creatures, and make her accessible for humans. This accessibility is further developed in Sir 4:11-19, where wisdom teaches, tests, and gives promises to those seeking her. It is also a passage where she first speaks in the first person (in 4:15-19 in MS A). References to intimacy between wisdom and her seeker may be found in this poem (wisdom's inmost chambers and secrets), and in ch. 24 (especially fragrance – food – sex imagery), but they are mainly elaborated in Sir 6:18-31; 14:20 - 15:10 and in 51:13-30. Some of the symbolism celebrates love that has no other purpose beyond itself (14:24-27 in Hebrew, possibly 15:3, 24:16-21; 51:13-21), without using the field – seed imagery and without any explicit reference to offspring. 14:20 – 15:10 and ch. 24 not only retain sensual images, they also introduce new themes. Wisdom is first connected (15:1) and then identified with the Torah (24:23). Sirach 24, while very
dependent on Proverbs 8, is also different from it and from Job 28 in other aspects: wisdom's origin is clear, and she is commanded to take root in Israel. With its identification of wisdom with Torah, Sir 24:23 is similar to Baruch 3:9 - 4:4 (wisdom as Torah is also given to Israel). In Wisdom 7 - 9 wisdom is more abstract. In the latter, wisdom's description as "πνεῦμα σοφίας" (Wis 7:7) appears, showing Hellenistic influence. Images reminiscent of a love affair are also found in Wisdom 8. They are, however, not as sensual as the ones employed by Ben Sira, and a certain distance between the author and wisdom remains. Sir 51:13-30 is the final and most remarkable example of depicting a sexual affair/relationship between student/lover and wisdom/beloved. As noted above, erotic illustrations are interwoven with praises of God.

Sir 6:18-31; 14:20 – 15:10 and especially Sir 51:13-30 clearly attest to the author's positive attitude towards sexuality, especially in the Hebrew. Female sexuality, including female nakedness (51:13-30), is something to be affirmed. It is, however, surprising that this attitude is mainly demonstrated in the wisdom poems, where the object of desire is not a real woman. These comments do not seem to represent the sage's view on sexuality in connection with real women, even in the context of a licit relationship such as marriage. His view regarding real woman and their standing and status is very different.
Ben Sira is not shy about sexuality. His view on sex is, however, complex. It varies, for instance, depending on whose sexuality is the subject of discussion and what position that actual person occupies in the author's social world. In the previous chapters numerous comments were discussed that had something to say about either women/femininity or sexuality, or both. In others honour and shame played a particular role. In this conclusion we review these diverse contexts and stances and seek to identify the distinctive emphases which form the attitude towards sexuality preserved in the work and its translation.

Fathers, Mothers, Widows (and Orphans)

For Ben Sira, parents are to be respected, since it is commanded by the Lord (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16). While on the one hand mothers enjoy the same respect and care as fathers (3:2-3; 7:27-28), fathers are given more attention in 3:1-16 than mothers. While honouring both father and mother atones for sins (3:3-4), good deeds toward only the father have atoning efficacy according to 3:14-15. The G I text of 3:11b ("and for the children a mother in dishonour is a disgrace", καὶ δὲ γυναῖκα τέκνων μητρὶ ἔν ἀδοξία) may refer to sexual immorality of the mother. This comment is also an example where the translation has a more negative attitude toward mothers, or tones down the positive attitude. While the father is not connected explicitly with sexual wrongdoing in the
passages on mothers and fathers, Ben Sira writes about the immorality of old men (25:2d; 42:8b) in a condemnatory manner, as shown below.

A person's disgraceful activity, which may include sexual immorality, as the terms דָּוָה (MS B) and זַפ (MSS B mg, M) suggest in 41:17a, reflects negatively on both father and mother (23:14).

The author is silent on sexuality with regard to widows and orphans, who are an important concern for Ben Sira, since he is sensitive to social issues (4:10; 35:17[14]-18[15]). Widows' sexual vulnerability may have been an issue for the sage, but this is not explicit. There are no teachings on widowers.

**Daughters and Sons**

In Ben Sira's eyes daughters cause the most anxiety when it comes to sexuality (7:24-25; 22:5; 42:9-14). On the one hand these comments should also be viewed in the context of honour and shame. A daughter is a person who can do the most damage to a father's honour whether as an unmarried and seduced (42:10a, נָחַל וְפָתָה MS B; "defiled", נָחַל in MS M), even pregnant (42:10c, הַרְדִּי, MS M) girl, or as an unfaithful married woman (42:10b, [חֶשֶׁם, MS M]). Even her barrenness seems to be the father's problem (42:10d, נַעַר, MS M). When she is shameless, which may include sexual promiscuity, she is despised by both father and husband (22:4b-5, G I). She must accept her father's choice

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1 It is not detailed what disgrace (בַּקְלָל, MS A; בַּקְלָל, G I) means regarding one's father in 3:10.
2 The terms דָוָה (reconstruction) and זַפ (MS B mg) also suggest sexual wrongdoing.
as a husband (22:4a, "A sensible daughter will inherit her husband", θυγάτηρ φρονίμη κληρονομήσει ἄνδρα οὐτῆς, G I, and probably 36:21a[26a], "[Any] man will a woman accept", καὶ δόξα τοκείλ ἠσθ). On the other hand, however, the extremely negative attitude towards daughters and their chastity (7:24a, "Guard their chastity (lit. body)", Νιύρ Ναμ, MS A) is unprecedented in the Jewish literature up to that time and cannot be explained solely by the concern for honour and shame. Especially 42:11-12 and 26:10-12 suggest that a daughter possesses no capability of self-control, and therefore has to be controlled by her father. Without the supervision of her father she poses a danger. She is described as if her main characteristic were her sexuality, and getting in contact with a male would inevitably result in sexual promiscuity (42:12a, "Let her not give her beauty [lit. figure, ρατ] to any male", MS B; 26:10-11, "Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter [θυγατρὶ ἀδιαστρέπτῳ], lest, finding an opportunity (i.e. relaxation of restraint), she make use of it. Follow closely (her) bold eyes, and do not be surprised if she commits an offence against you/sins against you", G I). She seems objectified. The Hebrew text of 26:10-12 is not extant. The Greek explicitly treats daughters, although there are suggestions that the original text may have concerned wives since it comes in the middle of sayings on marital relationships (26:1-18). It is possible that the original writer had a less negative comment on wives, and that the translator has changed the theme to daughters, using the most obscene terminology in his whole work (26:12, "... she sits down in front of every peg [κατέναντι παντὸς πασσάλου καθήσεται] and opens her quiver for (lit. before) an arrow, [καὶ ἕναντι βέλους ἀνοίξει φαρέτραν]", G I). However, 7:24-25; 22:5; 42:9-3

3 Read this word with MS M: "reveal", "expose".
14 and the Greek text of 26:10-12 reflect the negative attitude of the writer or the translator only toward the sexuality of daughters, and not in general.

Remarkably, if after 42:14a ("[Better is the wickedness] of a man than a woman who does good", MS B) we read 42:14b with the corrected text of MS M ("But better is a God-fearing daughter than a shameless son", where, in the sentence הַנְּתָנָה מַמְּחֹר מַמָּכָל תַּרְפֶּה the word מַמָּכָל would be replaced with מַפְנָן), 42:9-14 would finish on a positive note by admitting that there are God-fearing (perhaps chaste) daughters and shameless (perhaps unchaste) sons. This would be very different from the reading of G I in 41:14: "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good, and a woman brings shame leading to disgrace" (κρείσσων πονηρία ἄνδρα ἡ ἀγαθοποιίς γυνή, καὶ γυνὴ κατασχύνουσα εἰς ὀνειδίσμον).

Neither the comment "and do not let your face shine upon them" (7:24b, רֹאֵל הָאָרִי אלהִים פִּנֵּם, MS A) nor other passages concerning the sexuality of a daughter, imply that the author warns against incestuous intentions toward one's daughter.

The Hebrew text of Sir 7:23b ("and take for them wives in their youth", רֶשהַל לֶחֶם נְשֵׂים בְּנוּטִיְרָה, MS A) implies that the sexual chastity of sons before marriage was also an issue, and that fathers had the responsibility of finding a chaste wife for them. 26:19-21 (G II) even attests that the woman not only had to be chaste, but also fertile, and so able to provide legitimate offspring for the husband. In 22:3 the comment on undisciplined sons is not specified. However, it may refer to the son's disobedience,
for instance in the arrangement of marriage. The shame he brings on his father may be caused by sexual promiscuity.

Marital Relationships

Ben Sira has an interesting mixture of comments on marital relationships. What is perhaps the most obvious feature one observes by reading these passages, is that there is relatively little advice to husbands on how they should conduct themselves. There is much more on what effects a wife has on her husband’s life. While there are concrete instructions to men concerning issues of sexuality, passions/desires, a number of them are not found in the context of discussing marriage and so will not be included here, but discussed in the next section.

In the selection of a wife, beauty is important (36:21b[26b], "yet [one woman is more] [pleasant] [than another]" from the reconstructed text אָרֶק רֵא שָׁאָה מַאֲשָׁה [טַנְטָנָם], MS B), while the wife does not seem to have a choice regarding her husband (36:21a[26a] and probably 22:4a). Attractiveness as part of a woman’s sexuality delights her husband (26:13a, "[charm] of a wife [delights/pleases] her husband, אִשָּׁה [מִסְיָר בָּֽעַל], restored from MS C; in G I beauty (χάρις) satisfies (τέρψει) him). It surpasses every desire of the eye (36:22[27], using רָאָה, MS B). The Greek text here (36:22) even states that beauty (κάλλος) in itself can surpass every human desire. This is an example where the translation does not tone down the sexual content but enhances it. It is remarkable that beauty is compared to sacred space in 26:16-18. Within it the remains of the corrupt Hebrew text of 26:16b praises a beautiful wife (שֵׁית אָֽשָׁה, MS C), while its Greek
translation fills the comment with a moral evaluation: "(so is) a good wife's beauty in the order of her house/home" (καὶ κάλλος ἀγαθὴς γυναικὸς ἐν κόσμῳ οἰκίας αὐτῆς), where her sexuality can be enjoyed only by her husband.

A woman's/wife's beauty, however, can also be negative. According to 25:21a a man should not be seduced by it (נפש, MS C, κάλλος, G I). Since this verse is found in the context of bad marital relationships it probably warns against selecting a beautiful but wicked woman who can make the man's life unbearable. In 26:9 the (probably painted) eyelids of a wife are responsible for arousing men's desire, which may lead to adultery.

Several conclusions may be drawn from these comments. Beauty in a good marriage is positive. In this context a husband is to enjoy his wife's attractiveness as part of her sexuality. Desiring one's own wife in a good marriage is encouraged. However, a man should not be caught in a bad marriage by falling because of the beauty of a wicked woman (25:21a). This seems confirmed by 25:21b (MS C) which probably refers to a husband who cannot divorce a rich and bad wife. As noted in ch. III.2. the Greek text of 25:21b lacks any reference to the financial aspect and reads "and do not yearn after a woman" (καὶ γυναῖκα μὴ ἐπισποθῆσης). One possibility is that in the light of the previous line it may suggest that a man should not desire a woman so much as to get ensnared in a bad marriage. When the Greek text adds the attribute "good" to the description "beautiful wife" (26:16b), it may not only reflect on the wife but also on the husband. It may imply that a husband is not to desire his wife for her beauty or sexuality only, but also for her goodness, and in the context of her home, where she is solely reserved for her husband, and where she is also a homemaker and mother. Perhaps for the
translator, beauty in itself, viewed in parallel with sacred space, was unacceptable and he
tried to direct the attention to "goodness". "Good" in the context of the sacred could read
"virtuous" or "devout".

Certain passages suggest that the sexuality of both the wife and the husband should be
reserved exclusively for each other. In 26:15b, it is the MS C text which suggests by the
use of the term לְפָרָה ("sealed"/"shut up mouth"), taken as a euphemism for
"closed vagina", that the wife's sexuality should be enjoyed only by her husband. In 40:23
אשה משכה ("sensible wife", MS B) is translated "a wife with (her) husband" (יוֹנָהִ
מֵעַתָּ הָנְדֹרָם). This can either imply in the Greek the positive affirmation of marital
relation between woman and man, or it emphasises that the wife is exclusively with her
husband, and that her sexuality belongs solely to her husband. When the term "sensible"
wife is not specified in other texts, it can include chastity: 7:19a, where אשה משכה
(MS A) is translated by יְנַנְּאָכָּס סְפֵּיָּהָ כָּא גַּיַּדְתַּה ("a wise and good wife", G I),
and 25:8a (אשה משכה, MS C; יְנַנְּאָכָה סְפֵּיָּה, G I). Husbands are encouraged to
place a seal (סְפָרָה, MS B; סְפָרָה כֵּס, G I) on a wicked/evil wife (42:6a) to prevent her
from foolishness, perhaps from sexual transgression. While 7:19 advises against rejecting
a sensible wife, a wife, who, or perhaps whose sexual passion cannot be controlled, may
be divorced (25:25-26). 7:26 may also be a reference to divorce.

For the husband, the wife is "a pillar of support" (רָמִילָר מַשְפִּת, MS B) in 36:24b(29b),
which may depict a partnership in a broad sense. However, read with the following verses
(36:25[30]-26[31], or 36:25-27 in G I) it can convey the idea that a husband's sexuality
should also be reserved solely for his wife. This way a good marriage is a guard against
prostitution or adultery for the husband. In 25:1d the only extant Greek text (καὶ γυνὴ καὶ ἀνὴρ ἐστιν συμπεριφέρομενοι) may reflect on the harmony of husband and wife, or, if συμπεριφέρομενοι is read as "who are in intercourse", it can affirm sex within marriage.

Rivalry between wives (26:5-6; 28:15; 37:11a) could have included rivalry in sexual issues, which could cause heartache for a husband. In 28:15 the focus is on the injustice done to the rival wife who is cast out, and not on the grief of the husband. This shows compassion on the writer's part.

Illicit Sexual Relations, Prostitution, Adultery; Unruly/Unruled Passions

Ben Sira has instructions concerning the unchastity of both men and women. In the passages where he uses the image of the "strange woman" (9:3 Ia, ἡ κυριακή, MS A; 9:3a, γυναῖκι ἐταυρίζωμεν, G I; 41:20b, ἡ γυναῖκα, MS M; = 41:22a, γυναικίς ἐταύρας, G I) his concern is not the symbolism of folly, as in Proverbs 1 – 9, or intermarriage. The only passage where the term "strangers"/"others" (ἄλλοις) may refer to non-Israelites is 26:19-21, but it focuses rather on the selection of a chaste wife who will provide legitimate children for the husband, and may also guard him against having sex outside of marriage. 9:3-4, 6-7, and 41:20b(22a) have concrete warnings for men to avoid prostitutes. These verses and the teachings on virgins/maidservants (esp. Sir 9:5; 41:22a[24a]-22b[24b]) suggest that the sage perhaps applied stricter ethical standards than those required by the law that tolerate prostitution or sexual intercourse with maidservants. In particular, the Hebrew text in 41:22a attests that one should not
approach even one's own maidservant (נַעֲמִיתָה יִתְהַזָּה, reconstructed from MS M).

Adultery committed by a man, or the desire for it, is also condemned. In the context of 9:8-9 the "woman of beauty/charm" (9:8a, נָשָׁה, MS A) is probably a married one, whom a man should avoid. In 41:21c(23b) it is similarly a shame to look "at a man's wife" (41:21c, נָשָׁה אָנָּא אֶנָשָׁה וְלָא, MS M). 26:22b (G II) emphasizes the gravity of adultery compared to consorting with prostitutes (26:22a). Adultery of an old man is especially condemned in 25:2d (γέροντα μοιχών) and in 42:8b. In the latter the term מִנַּה ("sexual immorality", MS M) is used in a broad sense.

In 23:16-21 the adulterer (23:16e, ἀνθρώπος πόρνος, G I) is viewed in the context of sexual immorality (23:16-17). In these verses the author admits that men can also lose their self-control, succumb to their desires and not be selective in their sexual liaisons. Sinning against one's own female spouse is an issue (23:18). This is remarkable since usually a married adulterous man commits an offence against the woman's husband and not against his own wife.

While the adulteress (23:22-26), similarly to the adulterer, commits an offence against God (23:23a, ἐν νόμῳ οὐφίστου ἡπείθησεν, G I) and her own spouse (23:22a, καταλιπώσα τὸν ἄνδρα, 23:23b, εἰς ἄνδρα σύτης ἐπλημμέλησεν, G I), she also brings, or may bring children into the marriage who are not rightful heirs of the husband (23:22b, παριστώσα κληρονόμον ἐξ ἄλλοτρίου and 23:23d, ἐξ ἄλλοτρίου ἄνδρος τέκνα παρέστησεν, G I). This threatens the keeping of the inheritance within the
husband's family, and appears to be Ben Sira's concern not only here but also in 26:19-21. 23:25 declares that the punishment also affects the adulteress' children. The latter and the motif of an accursed memory (23:26) are lacking in the description of the adulterer.

Sir 26:8-9 also refers to a woman who is drunk, and whose drunkenness can lead to sexual wrongdoing. The term πορνεία γυναικός ("wife's sexual wrongdoing") seems to be a new term introduced by the author in 26:9 and has a meaning broader than prostitution.

It seems that most of the passages that discourage or condemn extramarital sexual relations reflect an anxiety about the consequences: fines, unwanted marriage in the case of a seduced virgin, losing one's inheritance to prostitutes or perhaps through compensation of the wronged husband in the case of adultery, ruination of one's health, mistaken paternity, and also the shame before others.

On the other hand however, coming under the control of a woman through sexuality can also be an issue for a man, in the context of both licit and illicit relations. A husband should not let his wife have power over him, possibly through sexuality (9:2b, "to cause her to tread upon your heights", לְהוּדֶרֶיךְ על ברוּחַ, MS A; or "your strength/power", τὴν ἵσχυν σου in G I). 47:19-21, which is silent on the matter of Solomon's intermarriage, emphasizes the sexual nature of his sin. He did not have self-control and through sex with numerous women succumbed to his desires, resulting in catastrophic consequences for the country.
That maintaining self-control is an important concern for the writer is perhaps best expressed in 6:1[2]-3[4]; 18:30 – 19:3 and in 23:4-6. These passages suggest that Ben Sira was influenced by the combination of the Stoic and Cynic ideal of αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency, self-contentment), freedom from passions, only to the extent that a person should not be controlled by desires. It seems safe to conclude that passions are not negative in themselves. This is also reflected in the comments on good marital relationships. Passions are only dangerous when they are excessive and take control of one's life (23:6a, "let neither gluttony [lit. longing of the belly] nor sexual intercourse take hold of me", κοιλίας ὀρέξεις καὶ συνοισιασμός μὴ καταλαβέτωσάν με, G I). In 18:30 – 19:3 the combination of passions, drinking and women presents a temptation and also a danger. The motivation behind these passages is on the one hand the fear of negative consequences. Among them 6:2(3) refers to a person becoming like a dry tree (6:2b, ἅρπα ζυλον, MS A; 6:3b, ξύλον ξηρόν G I) as the result of following his desires. The term may describe a man who wasted his life, and his sexual potential, through sexual immorality, and is now unable to have (legitimate) children. On the other hand, the fear itself of being controlled by women through sexuality may also be a concern. The ultimate message of these teachings may be that one has to cope on the one hand with one's own inner desires, and on the other with the external temptations, including women.

**Wisdom Poems**

The wisdom poems occupy a very important place in the book (1:1-10; 4:11-19; 6:18-31; 14:20 – 15:10; ch. 24; 51:13-30). While building on the tradition of other wisdom books in the personification of wisdom, Ben Sira exhibits unique features in these poems. They
express perhaps the most clearly that Ben Sira is not shy about sexuality. 1:1-10 can be taken as an introduction to the rest of the poems to establish one of the main themes in the book: all wisdom is from the Lord, and only he knows her origin and can make her accessible for humans.

4:11-19 is more explicit on the issue. Living in wisdom's inmost chambers (4:15b, מַעֲרֹתָיוֹ, MS A) may refer to intimacy between the seeker and wisdom. The Greek version, however, lacks this idea and suggests that those who listen to wisdom will live in confidence (κατασκευάσει, πέποιθός, G I). In 4:18 wisdom reveals her secrets to her follower (4:18b, מַסְדֵּר, lit. "secret place", MS A), implying that their love is fulfilled.

In 6:18-31 the author uses agricultural images to describe the student's and wisdom's erotic affair. Wisdom as a fertile field is pursued by her lover. The images of ploughing (חָרָשׁ, MS A) and probably sowing (רָזָה, as suggested as the replacement for קָרָשׁ, "reaping" in MS A) symbolize the act of sexual penetration and ejaculation (6:19). In 6:23-25 the images of fetters and yoke may symbolize the lovers' bonds. On the other hand in 6:29a "fetters" (πέδαντα) as "strong shelter" (σκέπην ἰσχύος) may protect wisdom's lover from straying away. In 6:28 rest (מנתת, MS A; ἀνάπαυσιν, G I) and delight (نحن, MS A; εὐφροσύνη, G I) may also be characteristics of love fulfilled.

Sir 14:20 – 15:10 is also dedicated to the love relationship between wisdom and her seeker. The students are encouraged to seek her out and camp near her house (14:20-27). Wisdom is virtually besieged. The expression "drive his tent peg (חרון, MS A;
“pássalw, G I) into her walls” suggests sexual penetration (14:24b). This idea appears in both text versions. Wisdom is a tree in 14:26-27. Living among her branches also implies, especially in the Hebrew, that her space is penetrated for the purpose of sex. Among the rewards of the person who finds wisdom are motherly love (15:2a, בָּרָא, MS A) and the love of a young bride (15:2b, נְנָרֵּם, MS A). Wisdom offers food and drink in 15:3 (15:3a, "bread of knowledge", לֹאֵך, MS A; 15:3b, "water of [understanding]", תְבוֹנה, MS A). Food and vineyard images are connected with non-procreative sex in Canticles. In Sir 15:3 food and drink as nourishments may also represent non-procreative sexual pleasure. In 15:6a "joy and gladness" (שָׁלוֹם רַשָּׁמָה, MS A) may include sexual joy.

In Sirach 24 wisdom, as plants or trees, also offers food, and symbolizes fertility and abundance (24:13-15, 16-17, 19-21). She offers herself. She arouses unquenchable desire (24:21, "Whoever eats me will hunger still, and whoever drinks me will be thirsty still", οἱ ἐθαλάσσωσις με ἑτερόπλασσον καὶ οἱ πίνοντες με ἑτερόδεισσον, G I). Intimacy with her has a lasting memory (24:20). 24:22 ("Whoever obeys me will not be ashamed, and those who work with me will not sin", ὁ δισκοῦσιν μου οὐκ ἀδισκοῦσησαι, καὶ οἱ ἑργαζόμενοι ἐν ἑμοὶ οὐκ ἀμαρτῆσουσιν, G I) may imply that wisdom can prevent a person from committing a shameful, possibly sexual act. This is followed by the identification of wisdom and Torah in 24:23. Potential erotic language and comments on the Torah and the Most High are not separated.

Ben Sira’s most erotically-charged wisdom poem is 51:13-30. It is a description in the first person of seeking and finding wisdom, and of the love affair with her. In 51:13a the
expression "before I went astray" (בַּכָּרָה עֲנָיִית, 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup>) may refer to innocence. It is suggested in 51:14 that wisdom is beautiful (בַּחַרָה, as reconstructed, 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup>). G I lacks the reference to beauty. 51:15 in both versions uses the ripening of the grapes to depict a young man reaching maturity, who in 51:15d admits that he has known, probably sexually, wisdom from a young age (רֵעַת, 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup>). G I only reads "I sought her" (יִצְאָהָהּ עֵדַד). In 51:16 ("I paid heed [lit. I turned/inclined my ear] [for] a little [time], and I found much instruction", 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup>) the word used for instruction is לְקָה, which may also mean "persuasive words" as in Prov 7:21. Sir 51:17 is problematic. The reconstructed text may read "And she became a nurse (from שלץ) for me and to my teacher I will give my manhood/vigour (לְדוֹר)." The version in MS B without the erotic content may also be accepted for 51:17a ("her yoke became glory for me", שלח היה ילך) combined with the text from 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup> for 51:17b ("to my Teacher I will give my praise", לְלָלַמְדוּ. אִישׁ חֹדֶר). G I reads: "I made progress in her; to him who gives me wisdom I will give glory/praise".

Wearing down wisdom (51:18a), jealousy (51:18b) and burning with passion (51:19a), are also characteristics of a love affair. The image of "practising" wisdom (51:18a) in G I is less explicit. 51:20bcd seems to be the climax of wisdom's and the sage's relationship: their love is fulfilled. The reconstructed text "[and on her heights (from מרון)] I am not at ease" (51:20b[19d], 11Q5/11QPs<sup>a</sup>) can refer to orgasm. Sir 51:19d in G I reads: "and lamented my ignorances of her". 51:20c(19e) in MS B ("My hand opened her gate",...
hyru? hjtp ydy) has no corresponding verse in G I, similarly to the reconstructed 11Q5/11QPs\(^a\) text of 51:20d(19f) ("and her secrets [lit. nakedness] I came to know", [חמשה מציון] א혼ן). 51:20e(20b) in MS B ("I found [her] in pureness", [מצ入りיה] מאורט) may convey that wisdom is ready for sex after a period of uncleanness. G I is not significantly different here. 51:21 in both Hebrew and Greek has more images of burning passion for wisdom. In the whole of the passage the writer places affirmations regarding female sexuality and nakedness in close proximity with the praises of God (51:22, 29-30). This openness is remarkable.

**Concluding Assessment**

Within the work as a whole, attitudes toward sexuality depend on a number of factors. They are connected with issues of honour and shame. The people who can make the most damage to one's honour attract the most anxiety. In the eyes of Ben Sira they are one's daughters. Their sexuality needs male control (7:24; 26:10-11; 42:11-12). Controlling one's wife's sexuality may be the issue in 25:25-26 and 42:6a. Reserving the wife's sexuality solely for the husband (26:15b, possibly 26:16b, and possibly in 40:19, 23) is also a form of control. On the other hand, the sage admits that husbands and men in general can also bring shame on themselves by sexual wrongdoing. Mothers can also be connected with sexual immorality, especially in the eyes of the translator.

The context in which the teachings on sexuality appear also plays an important role. In a good marriage, desire and sex are not negative. There are even comments which refer to enjoying a wife's sexuality without making any mention of offspring (26:13a and
There are relatively few passages where the writer openly comments on desire or sexuality in the context of a bad marital relationship or concerning a wicked woman (25:21; perhaps 25:25; 26:8-9; perhaps 42:6a). Nevertheless they reflect a negative attitude. The instructions on both marriage and extramarital relations clearly suggest that for Ben Sira sex is only permitted and affirmed in the context of a licit relationship, namely, marriage. All forms of extramarital intercourse are discouraged or condemned. This probably stems from Ben Sira's fear of consequences, or the fear of being controlled through sexuality. 6:1(2)-3(4); 18:30 – 19:3 and 23:4-6 confirm that while passions are not negative in themselves, they should not control one's life. One of the main purposes of Ben Sira's instructions is to teach the young ones to cope with temptations.

On the other hand, following one's desires is not only legitimate but almost commanded in the wisdom poems, when a student is advised to pursue, find, and possess wisdom. Losing control is not a danger in these passages, which have remarkable erotic descriptions, where some of the symbolism celebrates love that has no other purpose beyond itself (14:24-27 in Hebrew; possibly 15:3; 24:16-21; 51:13-21). Being in wisdom's bonds may also protect her lover from sexual immorality (6:29a, G I; 15:4; perhaps 24:22).

It is obvious, however, that even the most positive descriptions of a good marriage are not as open on matters of sexuality as the wisdom poems. The remarkable openness of the latter does not reflect the author's attitude towards real women and their sexuality.
In contrast to the Hebrew Ben Sira, it seems that the translator exhibits more anxiety concerning matters pertaining to sexuality in certain passages. While there are exceptions where the translation enhances the meaning of the original text (26:13a; 36:22[27]), sometimes they tone down the erotic content of the Hebrew by way of additions or independent translations. In some comments where the sage speaks about beauty and desire naturally and positively, or about traits such as "sensibility", we find a moral evaluation in the grandson's text. Passages that are especially relevant, as noted above, are 3:11b concerning mothers, 25:21b probably in the context of selecting a wife, in the mutilated text of 26:16b, and in 40:19, 23 in the context of marriage. In 7:19a "sensible wife" is translated by "a wise and good wife". 26:9 is not extant in Hebrew. Its translator, however, seems to use the term πορνεία γυναικός ("wife's sexual wrongdoing") in a sense broader than prostitution. 26:10-12, which is also extant only in G I, uses extremely negative terminology regarding daughters. It is possible that the original Hebrew had comments on wives and they were less negative. The wisdom poems also have examples where the translation departs from the Hebrew text. The erotic content is toned down in 4:15b, 16-19; 51:14, 15d, 16, 17, 18, 19abcd (= 19ab-20ab in 11Q5/11QPs a), and possibly in 51:27b.

Finally we may note the book's lack of references to homosexual activity, an issue that was important in Hellenistic culture. In 16:8, the people's pride is the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sage is silent on this matter as he is silent on issues such as male prostitution, the sexuality of widowers, intermarriage with Gentiles, forbidden degrees of marriage in terms of kinship, and bestiality. There are no references to issues such as sexual intercourse during menstruation in the context of real relationships. There is only
one possible reference to it regarding the purity of personified wisdom (51:20e[20b], MS B = 51:20b in G I). Uncleanness, however, may be the concern in 7:26 if the hated wife is a divorced wife who has become unclean for her first husband. We find only one reference to sexual abuse, possibly rape in the parallel of the eunuch (20:4), where such an act is condemned. Nevertheless the work has much to say otherwise on attitudes toward sexuality. The present study has attempted to shed light on these as a basis for wider investigation of the matters discussed.
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