

ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUALITY IN THE BOOK OF BEN SIRA

by

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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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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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