

AGAINST MYSTERIES REVEALED OR GREEK SPECULATIONS? SIR 3:(17)21-24 IN ITS GREEK FORM¹

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Introduction

The short passage, 3:21-24, in the Book of Ben Sira has been an object of lively interest. It has been argued that in these verses Ben Sira shows his polemical attitude towards esoteric or apocalyptic knowledge, and even that he argues against a group behind the relevant parts of 1 Enoch or the Aramaic Levi Document.² It is generally considered as a fact that the social and ideological context of Ben Sira in Jerusalem in Palestine at the beginning of the 2nd century BCE was different from that of the Greek translator at Alexandria in Egypt at the end of the 2nd century BCE. The educated Egyptian Jews of the second century were already well versed in Greek literary conventions, as is shown, for example, by the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*.³ In this study my purpose is to investigate how cultural differences and the translator's objectives manifest themselves in this passage, how the translator interpreted these verses and why he made the changes he did.

The Prologue to the translation argues that the translator had a clear goal for his activity, to promote his idea of wisdom and law to his Greek speaking Egyptian Jewish audience.⁴ We know from various sources that there were

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² See my article "Is Ben Sira Opposing Apocalyptic Teaching".

³ See Holladay, "Jewish Responses to Hellenistic Culture".

⁴ For the goals of the Prologue and the translation, see my article, "For Those Who Love Learning".

divergent views on Law (and Wisdom) in Hellenistic Judaism in Egypt, although some of the sources preserved are fragmentary, difficult to date, and of debatable provenance.⁵ On the one hand, the translation of the Law into Greek in the third century BCE is an indication of its importance for the community. On the other, Demetrius the Chronographer, Artapanus, Ezekiel the Tragedian, and Philo and his predecessors all show divergent attitudes towards the Law.⁶ For this reason, the translator might have come to the conclusion that living among the Gentile majority had made some Alexandrian Jews give up those aspects of their traditional customs that were considered too odd or inappropriate for a Hellene: Jews educated in Greek might count as Hellenes in Ptolemaic Egypt,⁷ and to be counted as a Hellene brought privileges.⁸ Therefore, Alexandrian Jews needed encouragement to live according to the Law. The task of the present study is to detect signs of this sort of confrontation in the passage 3:17-24, which is argued to show, in its Hebrew form, evidence of dispute with those who did not share Ben Sira's ideas.

This is a complicated task. First, the textual history of the book is complex. Ben Sira composed his book in Hebrew about the year 180 BCE (in what follows this will be cited as HI). Then some time after the year 116 BCE it was translated into Greek (henceforth called GI). Unfortunately, H is preserved only in part, in a few manuscripts (MS(S)). The fragments of the oldest preserved MSS are from Qumran and Masada, but the largest fragments come from manuscripts found in the medieval storeroom (geniza)

⁵ For these problems, see the contributors' introductions in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (two vols; ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City/New York: Doubleday, 1983), Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, and Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*.

⁶ For these different ideas in Hellenistic Judaism, see Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, in particular 63, 158, 188-190, 191-195, 273; further, according to Rajak "it might be said that Greek-speaking Jews lived *with* Torah, rather than fully *by* or *through* Torah", Rajak, *Translation & Survival*, 256.

⁷ Clarysse, W., "Jews in Trikomia," 202; Thompson, "Census and Taxes in Ptolemaic Egypt," 247; Holladay, "Jewish Responses to Hellenistic Culture," 144.

⁸ Such as exemption from certain taxes, see Thompson, "Census and Taxes in Ptolemaic Egypt," 247-8.

of a synagogue in Cairo. Two of these medieval MSS have preserved the passage we are going to analyze: MS A, from the eleventh century, and MS C, which is older than MS A.⁹ MS C is a *florilegium*, i.e. a collection of selected verses. Although almost 1000 years separate the original Hebrew text and the MSS evidence we have today, the differences between the medieval MSS and those found at Qumran and Masada are astonishingly small.¹⁰ The other MSS from the Cairo Geniza are B, twelfth century, D, eleventh century, E, undated, and F, probably eleventh century. The difference of age among these medieval MSS is so small that it may not be considered as significant in itself. From Qumran are preserved MSS 2Q18, second half of first century BC, and 11QPs^a, first half of first century AD, containing 51:13-20, 30b, and MS M from Masada, first half of first century BC. In this study, we refer to Pancratius C. Beentjes' edition of the Hebrew manuscripts; Ziegler's edition serves as the nearest approximation to the original Greek text.¹¹

The medieval MSS are generally considered to be evidence of at least two versions of H: HI and HII. It is also quite possible that the medieval copyists resorted to the Greek and Syriac (S) translations for retroversion, whilst the Greek text is known sometimes to have served as a model for the Syriac translator.¹² The textual tradition of G demonstrates two versions as well: GI and GII. It is useful to postulate that the Greek translator, according to the Prologue the grandson of Ben Sira,¹³ rendered HI into Greek (GI); later HI was expanded into HII and this version was then translated into Greek (GII). Some additional material was also introduced

⁹ This characterisation is given by Di Lella, in Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, xx.

¹⁰ Nevertheless, 800 years fall out if it is correct to suggest that our MSS are copies made of MSS found in a cave in the vicinity of Jericho, presumably one of the Qumran caves, reported by the Patriarch Timothy I in the 8th century (about 800 AD), see Di Lella, "Qumrân and the Geniza Fragments of Sirach"; idem, *The Hebrew Text*, 81-97; most recently Puech, "Ben Sira and Qumran," 86.

¹¹ For further information, see the Bibliography.

¹² See Lévi, *Ecclesiasticus*, ix-x; Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom*, 54, 58; Nelson, *The Syriac Version*, 131; for examples of retroversions from Syriac, Di Lella, *The Hebrew Text*, 106-147.

¹³ I have written about the problematic nature of the claim made by the author of the Prologue to be the grandson of Ben Sira in Voitila, "For Those Who Love Learning".

into GII. GII is only partly preserved in some revised manuscripts, called in Ziegler's edition group O and L.

The grandson was evidently an ingenious translator even though he sometimes did not understand his grandfather's intentions.¹⁴ S is also important because it was made directly from a Hebrew *Vorlage*. In addition, the text contains theological readings, some pluses and unique omissions.¹⁵

The Hebrew manuscripts cover a little over 60% of the complete text and testify to a modified and expanded text that has been carelessly transmitted.¹⁶ Thus the possibility that MSS A and C have from time to time suffered from copying errors must be taken into consideration. When the other witnesses yield a perfectly acceptable text on the basis of which the A reading may be explained, the text of the other witnesses should be preferred: this is true of the text-critically confused situation in our extant witnesses to vv. 19-20, which will be discussed later in this study. It seems justified, however, for our purposes, to postulate that when MS A and the Syriac translation agree against the Greek and MS C, the MS A reading is the more original. It is often simpler to explain the divergent readings of MS C as retroversions or as influenced by the Greek tradition than as copyists' creations of new readings in MS A. Colon 3:17a (except the predicate) and v.

¹⁴ In his valuable study, Wright has characterized the grandson's technique as "the least consistent," "not representing the Hebrew closely," reflecting "more of a concern for the message than the medium," and avoiding "the addition of elements that were not in his Hebrew," see Wright, *No Small Difference*, 114-5. According to Wright and other translation technical studies that discuss Ben Sira, the book is among the most freely translated ones of the G. See also Soisalon-Soininen, *Die Infinitive*, 191-96; Sollamo, *Renderings of Hebrew Semiprepositions*, 290-297.

¹⁵ Michael M. Winter ("The Origins of Ben Sira in Syriac" and "Theological alterations") has suggested that the Syriac translation was made by Ebionites, and subsequently, orthodox Christians revised it. Skehan-Di Lella seems to follow this idea. However, Owens has found convincing evidence to the contrary; see Owens, "The Early Syriac Text of Ben Sira". For editions of the different text-forms used in my analysis, see the Bibliography.

¹⁶ Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Hebrew Text of Sirach* (Studies in Classical Literature 1; London-The Hague-Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966); Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (The Anchor Bible 39; New York: Doubleday 1987). Benjamin J. Wright, *No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to its Parent Hebrew Text* (SBLSCS 26; Atlanta: Scholars 1989) 1-10; Maurice Gilbert, "Siracide" in *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément*. Tome XII (Paris: Létouzey et Ané 1996) 1389-1437.

3:18 are examples of this kind in the passage discussed in this study, and in v. 22 MS A and the Syriac translation coincide against MS C, even though here the relationship between C and the Greek translation is more complicated than simple retroversion.

The variant readings in G often have their origin in the translator's different understanding of the source text. But of course all cases must be treated individually. Rüger has explained many such differences between MSS A and C as corrections towards the copyist's contemporary Hebrew, i.e., MS A reflects changes into Mishnaic or Rabbinic Hebrew while MS C has preserved the original text, consonant with biblical Hebrew.¹⁷ This view cannot, however, be sustained with certainty, because it is also perfectly possible, and even likely, that at least some features in the Hebrew that later became included in Rabbinic Hebrew already existed in the Hebrew of Ben Sira. It is more plausible that the copyist corrected the non-biblical expression of his *Vorlage* in the direction of the biblical idiom than the other way around.

Second, as regards the translator's interpretation, these different stages in the transmission of the text mean that in order to elucidate the translator's implied meaning we must reconstruct the original Hebrew text of Ben Sira and also the Hebrew source text of the translator. These texts were not necessarily the same. Third, in order to study the translator's interpretation we must distinguish among the meaning conveyed by the source text, the meaning understood by the translator (as a reader of the Hebrew source text), and the meaning understood by readers of the Greek text.¹⁸ To be able to do this we have to be acquainted with the translator's normal way of

¹⁷ Rüger, *Text und Textform*, 30-32.

¹⁸ As regards this principle, it is confusing to read the kind of presentation found in Silvana Manfredi's article "The True Sage or the Servant of the Lord (Sir 51:13-30 Gr)," in which arguments are made on the basis of the Greek text as far it is extant in our text editions, as if Ben Sira had written in Greek.

translating. Only when the translator deviates from his normal procedure, may we postulate interpretations.¹⁹ To begin with, the Hebrew text as well as the Greek must be studied text-critically, grammatically, semantically, and stylistically. Next, these texts are compared with each other to look for different changes that have been incorporated in the translation and the reasons behind these transformations. We are allowed to regard as demonstrating exegetical or ideological interpretation only those transformations that we cannot explain linguistically or in terms of translation technique.²⁰

The Larger Textual Context (Sir 3:17-29)

Verses 3:21-24 are not an independent whole or, for that matter, a series of separate proverbs, but form part of a longer section that may be considered as a short speech, i.e., 3:17-29²¹.²² Such a speech, in Ben Sira's text, often opens with the vocative בְּנֵי // τέκνον, as in 3:17 and again in 4:1. Vv. 3:17-18²³, 20 form the "introduction" to the discourse, presenting its main theme: "walk/conduct your duties in humility" (v. 17a). Humility is mentioned in all the verses in the "introduction": "Humble yourself more than all the greatness of the world," (v. 18 MS A) //"The greater you are, the more you should humble yourself" (v. 18 G); "For Great is the might of the Lord; but by the humble he is glorified" (v. 20 G)²⁴. The second part deals with what

¹⁹ The excellent articles by Aejmelaeus ("Translation Technique and Intention," and "What Can We Know," see especially 77-85), although discussing issues concerning the Pentateuch, is also applicable here. Nevertheless, I prefer to use the term 'interpretation' to 'intention' because, in my mind, interpretation may be detected from and proven by the text whereas intention is something that happens in the author's mind which is far more difficult, if not impossible, to verify.

²⁰ For the method, see also Austermann, *Von der Tora zum Nomos*, 32-40. Following him, interpretation is conceived as part of a process that leads to a translation. See also van der Louw, *Transformations in the Septuagint*, 90-92 (note the inventory of transformations, 62-89).

²¹ Vv. 30-31 form a sort of redactional bridge that combines 3:17-29 and 4:1-10.

²² I follow here the idea presented by Horsley (*Scribes*, 133-142) that the main part of the book of Ben Sira, outside the so-called eulogy of the ancestors in chapters. 44-50, is a collection of short speeches that have a single main theme.

²³ See the discussion on pp. 16-17.

²⁴ The Greek text of v. 20 reflects the original Hebrew text, for the discussion see p. 17f.

one should not do in order to avoid pride. The last part covers vv. 25-29 and discusses the disadvantages that follow if one does not, and the benefits if one does, show the right attitude. The unit in 3:17-29 has one main theme, which is humility (πραύτης, ταπεινοῦν, ταπεινός); the teacher invites the student to be modest rather than proud, modesty being one of the most important qualities of a wise man in traditional Near Eastern wisdom²⁵. This is the perspective from which the passage 3:21-24 has to be understood.

Sir 3:17

MS A	MS C ²⁶	G
בני בעשרך התהלך בענוה	בני את כל מלאכתך בענוה הלך	Τέκνον, ἐν πραύτητι τὰ
והאזהב מנותן מתנות	ומאיש מתן תאזהב	ἔργα σου διέξαγε, καὶ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον δότην ἀγαπηθήση.

In the first colon, in the Hebrew MSS, both imperatives of the verb הלך —although in different conjugations: the *hitpa'el* in MS A and the *qal* in C—appear in the same function, i.e. “to walk” as a metaphor for living one’s life (*hitp.* Gen 5:22-24, 6:9; Ps 26:3, 68:22, 82:5, 101:2; Prov 20:7; *qal* Is 33:15; Ps 15:2; Prov 6:12, 30:29). There are three indications that may be seen as evidence of the originality of the MS A reading. (1) The imperative in הלך is late (see Prov 13:20), the normal form being לך .²⁷ (2) Later, in Mishnaic

²⁵ See Prov 11:2, 15:33, 18:12, 22:4; Ps. 113:1; Skehan-Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 159; Goff, “Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine,” 148.

²⁶ Instead of בענוה Beentjes reads בענות in MS C according to his edition. But in my mind the last letter of the word is clearly *he*. There are good examples of the letter *taw* in the MS: the copyist’s *taw* has an evident hook under the left “foot” of the letter and the “foot” is attached to the horizontal upper line, having also a short stroke upwards in the upper left corner. All these features are absent in the *he* of the word בענוה . See The Taylor-Schechter Researcher Unit: TS 12.867 (recto): http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/GOLD/Or1102/TS12_867.html and Rüger, *Text und Textform*, 29.

²⁷ HALOT, *ad loc.* The Syriac translation read the verb as indicating a command by employing the *pe'al* imperative of the root לכ . It must be admitted though, that it is equally possible to interpret the form as an infinitive absolute used in place of an imperative, as do Peursen, *The Verbal Syntax*, 193, 282, and Elwolde in a private communication. However, neither interpretation helps to explain why the copyist of MS A would have changed the perfectly acceptable biblical Hebrew expression into a form (*hitp.* of הלך) that already had a different meaning in the literary Hebrew of the copyist’s time (see the following remark).

(Rabbinic) Hebrew, the *hitpa'el* of the verb no longer had the meaning “to walk” but “to go away, withdraw”,²⁸ which seems to indicate that the copyist replaced the original verb form with one that seemed more understandable to him.

(3) Although both verbs occur in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira, the *hitpa'el* is less common (הלך: 4:17a, 5:2ab²⁹, 8:15c and 30:20a; התהלך: 9:13f and 44:16a [Enoch passage, the originality of which is dubious³⁰]). The translator, however, renders the הלך with πορεύεσθαι (except in 5:2a with ἐξακολουθεῖν//הלך אחר־י), even in cases like 8:15c (נוכח פניו הלך, “to walk in accordance with one’s will”) and 5:2b (הלך בחמודות רעה, “to walk in accordance with one’s bad desires”), which is at least syntactically similar to the expression in 3:17a (הלך/התהלך בענוה, “walk about in humility”), whereas התהלך is rendered in 9:13f (ועל רשת תתהלך, “and you walk upon a net”) as διαβαίνειν and in 44:16a as εὐαρεστεῖν (“and he walked with the Lord”). Thus the translator seems to have resorted to more unusual renderings for התהלך, which may indicate that the meaning of the verb in this conjugation was already different from the one it had in biblical Hebrew. Consequently, διέξαγε in the Greek text may bear witness to a *Vorlage* closer to that of MS A. Against this possibility, it might be objected that the Hebrew phrase בענוה בעשרך/במעשיך התהלך—the prepositional phrases will be discussed in what follows—is an intransitive construction, “My son, in your wealth/when you are rich, walk in humility,” whereas the Greek translation is transitive, “conduct your affairs (in your works walk) in gentleness/mildness”. However, as indicated by Wright (see note 14, above),

²⁸ See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. New York: Judaica Press, 1985, ad loc.

²⁹ In 5:9b, MS C also reads הלך instead of פנה and the Greek translator renders with πορεύεσθαι.

³⁰ V. 44:16 (MS B: חנוך [נמצא] תמים והתהלך עם יי ו[ל]קח אות דעת לדור ודור) may be a later addition, it betrays similarities with the presentation of Noah in the next verse (Sir 44:17) and with the wording of Gen 5:24. The verse is also lacking in MS M (1st c. BCE) and in the Syriac version.

the translator is known to reflect more the message than the exact letter of the source text. Consequently, the translator is not following the precise wording of the Hebrew text but renders its intention as he understands it. The more literal ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου πορεύθητι would be rather awkward in Greek and its meaning might escape the “implied readers”³¹ of the translation, whereas τὰ ἔργα σου διέξαγε makes clear the point of the original as understood by the grandson. The phrase “walk about in your works in humility” corresponds at the level of content with the Greek “in humility conduct your works”.

4) There is less to be explained if the MS A reading is the original one, and a very clear line of development emerges: A > G > C. By contrast, if the reading in MS C were the original one, the wording of MS A would be left unexplained and would constitute a further complication in the argumentation: a) there would be two different Hebrew versions, one of which would be unrelated to the G ($G \neq A$); b) the A text could not be explained very easily through the C wording (the origin of בעשרך vis-à-vis מלאכתך and את כל מלאכתך and הלהלך vis-à-vis הלוך and the word order difference).

MS A, with the Syriac translation, reads בעשרך, “in your wealth,” which seems to contrast with the Greek τὰ ἔργα σου and with MS C (את כל מלאכתך). The Greek translator might have read במעשיך “in your affairs/works”.³² MS C would then have followed the Greek reading. Both מעשה and מלאכה occur in Ben Sira, even though מעשה is clearly more common (30 cases as against 6 for מלאכה). מעשה means “work, labour,” (3:8a) “God’s works,” and “(human) achievements” (6:17c, 14:19a, 15:19a),

³¹ For a discussion of the category of “implied reader” in narrative criticism, see Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 19. “The implied reader is distinct from any real historical reader but is a set of clues given in the text to the desired response to the text by real readers,” Schneiders, “Reexamining the Issue of Authorship,” 520.

³² Skehan (*The Wisdom*, XX) considers במעשיך as the reading in the *Vorlage*.

whereas מלאכה is more specifically “work” as “trade” and “occupation, task” (4:29b, 30b; 7:15a; 11:20b; 3:33b; 37:11). But there are also places where מעשה refers to the “works” of the student or the wise and can be interpreted as denoting “occupation, task, duty”; see, e.g., 7:36a, 31:22c, 33:31a. Furthermore, מעשה seems to have lost its sense of “work, labour” in later Rabbinic Hebrew and referred to something that has already been done or has happened, i.e., “deed, act, practice, event”.³³ This may have led the copyist of MS C to use what was to him a more familiar term. We are not able to determine which word appeared in the *Vorlage* on the basis of the Greek text, because the grandson usually employed τὸ ἔργον as an equivalent for both Hebrew words. However there is no equivalent for כל in the Greek text, which would seem to be additional evidence against C representing the *Vorlage*. In any case, it is orthographically easier to derive the A form בעשרך from במעשיך than it is the C form את כל מלאכתך.

Several points indicate that the translator read במעשיך and not בעשרך.³⁴ First, although humility may be seen as more necessary for a rich person, Ben Sira considers it as a necessary attitude of the wise (1:27; 4:8; 7:16-17; 10:6-18, 26-28). He looks askance at the rich and powerful (see, e.g., ch. 13). To wealth as such, his attitude seems cautious: one should be careful, riches can cause problems, as is seen in 31:1-11. However, there are also instructions to a wealthy person in the book (11:18; 13:24; 14:3, 11). The admonition in MS C and the G is applicable to the addressee not only if rich but in all situations. A tendency to generalize can also be found elsewhere in the book, e.g., in 9:17 the Hebrew “potter” (יוצר > יושר) is rendered as “artisan” (τεχνίτης) and in 11:2 it is said that nobody should be despised because of

³³ See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. New York: Judaica Press, 1985, ad loc. and Miguel Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*. Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999, 5.

³⁴ Sauer (2000, 65) and Veijola (2003, 8) regard the reading of MS A as original here.

an ugly appearance (מכ[וע]ר במראהו), for which the Greek refers only to the appearance (ἐν ὀράσει αὐτοῦ).³⁵

Second, ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου πορεύεσθαι was too concrete an image for Greek, whereas more abstract phrases, like πορεύεσθαι ἐν ἐπιθυμίαις καρδίας τοῦ δέινο, “to walk in accordance with the will of one’s heart” (5:2b) and ἐν ὁδῶ ἀντιπτώματος πορεύεσθαι, “to walk in the way of snare/obstacle” (32:20a) as metaphors of living one’s life, were acceptable to the translator. Consequently, the translator converted the metaphor to an expression of its explicit intention, adapting it to his understanding of the verse, and rendered it with διέξαγε, “bring to an end, carry out (your duties)”.³⁶

In the Greek text, there is a word order difference in 17a compared with the reading of MSS A and C. The prepositional phrase בענוה occurs at the end of colon 17a while in Greek its equivalent ἐν πραύτητι comes at the beginning, straight after the vocative בני//τέκνον. This transposition does not necessarily come from the translator, although he certainly is capable of such a move. The adverb בענוה//ἐν πραύτητι is also found in the same position (at the beginning of its sentence, after vocative בני) in Hebrew, later in the book, in 10:28 (MS A). The Syriac translation, in contrast, reads first בעשרך then בענוה, with the verb at the end of the sentence. The position in the Greek text underlines its function as the subject matter (theme) of section 3:17-24, the vocative, as noted above, serving very often to mark the beginning of a new section in Ben Sira’s text.

The translator employs πραύτης instead of ταπεινότης (ענוה is rendered by ταπεινότης only in Sir 13:20) in order to avoid misunderstanding. The noun

³⁵ This could equally well be explained as an interpretative addition in Hebrew; see the use of ἄνθρωπος/ἄνθρω and ἔργον below.

³⁶ This seems to be the idea Smend (Rudolf Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt*. Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1906, 27) suggests. Argall (*1. Enoch*, 73, 74) prefers the MS C reading for 17a but does not give any reason for his preference.

may evoke negative connotations in the context, “to commit your affairs in baseness/vileness”. *πραΰτης*, “gentleness, mildness”,³⁷ may reveal the actual situation of the audience implied by the Greek translation, given that in literary Greek *πραΰς* refers to an attitude of a superior towards a person of a lower social status: “Conduct your duties in gentleness”. The Hebrew word *ענוה*, “humility, meekness,” is translated as *πραΰτης* in 4:8; 10:28 and 45:4. *ταπεινότης* is only used in Sir 13:20, where *πραΰτης* would be inappropriate: *ταπεινότης* appears in contrast to the proud (*ὑπερηφάνης*) and parallel to the poor (*πτωχός*, as against *πλούσιος*).

In v. 17b, the Hebrew manuscripts again diverge (A: *והאזהב מנותן מתנות*, C: *במאיש מתן האזהב*). The C reading *יש מתן* has parallels in biblical and in Rabbinic Hebrew³⁸; the A wording is without parallel. But against Rieger I consider this evidence for the originality of the A reading. The Syriac version (“and you will be loved more than a man who gives gifts”) may be seen as a sort of combination of these two readings; “the man” is derived from C (or is a clarifying addition suggested by the G) and “who gives gifts” from A. The exact reading of the *Vorlage* escapes us since the Greek rendering for *והאזהב מנותן/נותן/יש מתן* does not seem to match exactly either of the readings in the extant MSS.

In the Greek text, on the other hand, interpreters see a problem in the reading of the majority witness.³⁹ The line goes *καὶ ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπου δεκτοῦ ἀγαπηθήσῃ*, “and you are loved by an acceptable man”. The translation sounds rather odd in the context: who is this acceptable man, and what is so special about him that he is referred to as particularly deserving of gentle behaviour. On the basis of VL, which reads *super hominum gloriam*, Smend

³⁷ Judge, “*πραΰτης*”, 169. De Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*, 227-30, 268-74; Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire III*, 570-82.

³⁸ See Rieger, *Text und Textform*, 30.

³⁹ There are only two variant readings in the Greek tradition, *ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων δοτικόν* 572 and *ὑπὸ πάντων* 575. VL reads *super hominum gloriam*.

proposes as an original reading ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον δότην or δοτικόν. ὑπέρ is a rather common translation of comparative ׀ in the Book of Ben Sira (13:2, 30:18, 40:18-26). ἄνθρωπος δότης corresponds to מנתן ׀. ⁴⁰ ἄνθρωπος (3:23, 4:27, 20:7, 51:7) or ἀνὴρ (14:3; 33:2; 37:19.24) ⁴¹ is sometimes used as a clarifying rendering when the Hebrew author refers to a person with only one word, in particular when it is an adjective or a participle used substantively as here, e.g., ׀ – אִנְח. / אִנְח. סוֹפֹס (20:7 [MS C]; 37:23[B/D], 24[B/C/D]). The preposition ὑπό was suggested to the copyist by the verb in the passive voice. δότης may easily be confused with δεκτός, which was more familiar to the copyist. δεκτός has 34 occurrences, but δότης appears only once, in Prov 22:8, in the whole Septuagint: Sir 2:5, ἄνθρωποι δεκτοί, and Sir 35:9, θυσία... δεκτή, in both instances, there is no Hebrew text preserved in the extant witnesses. The translator is known for his wide-ranging choice of words. ⁴² However, there seems to be no good reason why ἄνθρωπος δεκτός might not be accepted as an original translation, if the preposition is corrected according to the VL into ὑπέρ. It is a minimal correction, accords with a part of the textual tradition, the ἄνθρωπος δεκτός (pl.) is already attested in Ben Sira (2:15), and it makes perfect sense in the context: “he will be loved more than an acceptable (or, favoured) man”. This rendering is not too far from the Hebrew expression מנתן ׀, for ἄνθρωπος δεκτός is what a giver of gifts will become. It might have been used here to avoid any connotation of bribery, which would not be an amiable trait in any man.

The word order in the Hebrew differs from that of the Greek and the Syriac. In Hebrew, the predicate verb starts the sentence but in Greek and Syriac, it comes at the end. The most likely reason relates to the natural

⁴⁰ Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 27.

⁴¹ Smend (*Die Weisheit*, 27-8) presents all these cases with ἄνθρωπος or ἀνὴρ as “Zusatz” (addition).

⁴² See Smend, *Die Weisheit*, vii-viii, lxiv; Wagner, *Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena in Buch Jesus Sirach*.

place of the predicate in each language, in Greek and Syriac at the end of the sentence and in Hebrew at the beginning (MS C is influenced by the Greek).

As a result of the foregoing we may conclude that the *Vorlage* of the Greek text read most probably:

בני במעשיך התהלך בענוה – My son, conduct your affairs (in your works walk) in humility

והאהב *מתנות* מתנות – and you will be loved more *than a giver of gifts*
(* ... * = unable to reconstruct the exact reading of the *Vorlage*)

This was then translated as:

Τέκνον, ἐν πραΰτητι τὰ ἔργα σου διέξαγε, – My son, carry out your affairs (in your works walk) in gentleness/mildness,

καὶ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον δεκτὸν ἀγαπηθήσῃ – and you will be loved more than an acceptable (favoured) man.

The Greek text sets more emphasis on the general subject matter of the passage 3:17-29 by placing the ἐν πραΰτητι at the beginning of the sentence. The translator also explains the metaphor found in the Hebrew. He is inclined to use more acceptable Greek, particularly with regard to word order. The transformation of humility to gentleness and of the “giver of gifts” to a man of favour may indicate the grandson’s goal of adapting his text to the Greek environment of his audience in Hellenistic Alexandria.

Sir 3:18

MS A

מעט נפשך מכל גדולת עולם

ולפני אל תמצא רחמים

MS C

בני גדול אתה בן תשפיל נפשך

ובעיני אלהים תמצא חן

G

ὅσω μέγας εἶ, τοσούτω ταπεινῶ

σεαυτῶν, καὶ ἔναντι κυρίου εὐρήσεις
χάριν.

In v. 18a, the Greek translation reflects more closely the Hebrew text in MS C than in MS A. However, if MS C or a text closely resembling it⁴³ were the original text of Ben Sira, it would be rather difficult to explain the text in MS A. But when examined more closely, the translation may be explained on the basis of MS A as well. First, there are obvious similarities in all the text-forms: the addressee is urged to humble himself (מעט נפש, השפיל נפש, and ταπεινῶν σεαυτόν) before either worldly or personal greatness (גדולת עולם, גדול אהת, and μέγας εἶ). Second, the two units of the sentence in MS A (i.e., מפשך נפשך and מכל גדולת [עולם]) could have been in a different order already in the Hebrew *Vorlage* or the translator might have changed their positions. Third, the translator interpreted the preposition מן as indicating comparison (> ὅσῳ ..., τοσοῦτω)—MS A: “consider yourself humble before great matters/important things (of the world)”—and the noun גדולת, “greatness,” in reference to “human greatness” (i.e., high social standing) and not to “great matters/important things (of the world),” probably the meaning of the MS A text.⁴⁴ The translator considered the sentence to mean something like “be humble of yourself, i.e., humble yourself more than all the (human) greatness (you possess),” which he rendered freely as “the greater you are, the more you must humble yourself”.⁴⁵ This transformation is in line with the content of colon 17a, “carry out your affairs in gentleness”. The MS C text is, then, a literal rendering of the Greek.

⁴³ Skehan (*The Wisdom*, 159) suggests that the translator’s *Vorlage* read כמו גדולת כן השפיל נפשך.

⁴⁴ The Hebrew text of A as it now stands is most certainly a genitival construction in the singular: gedullat ‘olam; see DCH 2.230b. I thank Dr. John Elwolde for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁵ The content of 18a in MS A is rather faithfully rendered in Syriac, except that the preposition is כ not מן, i.e. “in all the great matters in the world”. However, the order of the aforementioned sentence units in the Syriac differs from the Hebrew and follows the Greek: “In all the great matters in the world, humble yourself”.

It is also possible that the translator actually understood the form as a verb, *qal*, 2ms, *גָּדַלְתָּ* (for biblical Hebrew *גָּדַלְתָּ*): “more than you have grown great at any time / more than you will ever grow great”.⁴⁶

Rüger argues that the MS C reading is the older form of the text in this verse because *השפיל* belongs to biblical Hebrew and *מעט* to Rabbinic Hebrew.⁴⁷ This argument is not very convincing, for both verbs appear elsewhere in Ben Sira: *השפיל* in MSS A, B and C (7:11b[MS A], 17a[A/C]; 11:6b[MS A/B]; 33:12c[MS E]), *מעט* in 19:1b[MS C]; 32:8a[B] and in 48:2b[B]. It is more plausible that the copyist corrected the non-biblical expression of his *Vorlage* in accordance with biblical idiom than the other way around. The argument does not explain, either, how the completely acceptable and understandable reading of MS C has been changed to the text of MS A, with its different meaning.

In v. 18b, the expression *מצא רחמים לפני* (MS A) “to find mercy with” is not known in biblical or Qumran⁴⁸ Hebrew, where *מצא חן בעיני* is common. Thus MS A seems to have retained the original reading of which the G is a rather faithful translation and MS C is either influenced by the G translation or corrected to match the biblical idiom.⁴⁹ The Greek text cannot be used as evidence for either of these readings. The semipreposition *ἐναντι* suggests a *Vorlage* that read *לפני* (but not necessarily; see 42:1d: *חן מצא חן בעיני* [M/B]//*εὐρίσκαων χάρις ἐναντι*),⁵⁰ and although *χάρις* serves as the normal equivalent for *חן* (4:21b [A/C], 7:19b [A], 26:15a [C], 32:10b [B],

⁴⁶ Dr. John Elwolde has drawn this possibility to my attention.

⁴⁷ Rüger, *Text und Textform*, 30. Further, according to Jastrow *השפיל* appears also in Rabbinic Hebrew whereas *מעט* is current in biblical Hebrew albeit not in the *pi'el*.

⁴⁸ The search of *מצא רחמים לפני* did not yield any result in Accordance; for *מצא חן בעיני* Accordance gave four cases (4Q504 3ii:18, 4Q506 125+127:3, 4Q509 99i:2) of which only 4Q509 99i:2 is not fragmentary.

⁴⁹ Rüger considers the C reading as the older text form for just the same reason (*Text und Textform*, 30).

⁵⁰ *לפני* is most frequently rendered with *ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς* (7 of which one is locative [12:16] and two instrumental [30:20, 51:27]), only once with *ἐναντι*, in 42:1d (MS M). By contrast, of the 31 occurrences of *לפני* 8 have been translated by *ἐναντι*, two by *ἐναντίου*, and one by *κατέναντι*. For these statistics, I rely on Barthélemy-Rickenbacher, *Konkordanz zum hebräischen Sirach*.

42:1d[M/B], 44:23g [B]) and ἔλεος for רחמים (5:6c; 16:11c, 12a, 16a, the last one GII), the grandson used χάρις because the expression מצא רחמים reminded him of the usual biblical idiom εὐρίσκειν χάρις (21:16, 42:1, 44:23).

Consequently, we propose the following *Vorlage* and its translation:

מכל גדולת [עולם] מעט נפשך – Before all the greatnesses/Because of all the great things [of the world], humble yourself

ולפני אל המצא רחמים – and you will find favour before God

ὅσω μέγας εἶ, τοσούτω ταπεινῶς σεαυτόν, – The greater you are the more you must humble yourself

καὶ ἔναντι κυρίου εὐρήσεις χάρις – and you will find favour before the Lord.

Ben Sira intended his text to carry the idea that the addressee should be humble before all the great things God has created and thus receive his favour. The Greek translator did not understand the text this way. For him the point being made concerned the addressee's social position; despite one's status the right attitude of the wise is gentleness/mildness. The Greek text equates more clearly the attitude of the wise as receiving both human esteem (17b, you will be loved more than the man favoured by all) and God's favour (18b, the Lord will love you too); in the Hebrew text this is not so evident (17b, loved more than the giver of gifts).

Sir 3:19-20

19 (only in late MSS in the groups O-S^c and L'-694-743) πολλοὶ εἰσὶν ὑψηλοὶ καὶ ἐπίδοξοι

ἀλλὰ πραέσιν ἀποκαλύπτει τὰ μυστήρια αὐτοῦ (cf. H 20)

20 (retroversion) כי גדולה גבורת יי וענוים יגדלוהו – ὅτι μεγάλη ἡ δυναστεία κυρίου καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ταπεινῶν δοξάζεται.

V. 20 MS A יגלה סודו {יגלה} = Syr., missing in MS C

In vv. 19-20, we encounter in the Greek text two verses that seem, at least in part, to be doublets of some kind. V. 19 is only included in rather late manuscripts containing material from the so-called GII translation. Hebrew MS C does not contain either of the verses and MS A has only one verse, v. 20 (in some previous editions v. 19). Moreover, v. 20b in MS A seems to correspond perfectly with the Greek v. 19b, which reveals its secondary character. It is most likely, then, that the original reading is found in the retroversion of G v. 20 while Hebrew MS A (followed by the Syriac) and G v. 19 represent its doublet created by a misreading of the original text (v. 20 in G).

The beginning of v. 20a, רבים רחמי אלהים, evokes the end of v. 18⁵¹ and might be caused by parablesis. The Greek translation πολλοὶ εἰσὶν ὑψηλοὶ καὶ ἐπίδοξοι suggests the Hebrew reading רבים רמים וגבהים. Retroversions are always problematic, but if רבים רמים וגבהים was the original Hebrew text, it is possible that the eye of the copyist skipped over the previous line with its אלהים and רחמים and produced רבים רחמי אלהים. The words ὑψηλός and ἐπίδοξος appear together only at Is 10:33. There they correspond to רם and גבה in Hebrew. ἐπίδοξος is not found elsewhere in the book of Ben Sira. In fact, it is a rare word in the Septuagint, occurring only at Prov 6:8β and Dan 2:11. Referring to persons, ὑψηλός does not appear elsewhere in the book of Ben Sira, and it is not a very common word in the Septuagint either (e.g., Ps 138:6 [137 LXX], Is. 24:4).

The rest of the verse “suggests a confusion between גדל and גלה in the transmission of line b”, as argued by Skehan. The object סוד was added later when it was realized that the verb occurs without an object. This word never refers to “divine secrets” elsewhere in Sirach. It appears 9 times and

⁵¹ Passaro (“The Secrets of God,” 156) seems to consider the MS A and G readings as independent traditions.

indicates a secret or secret counsel among people (a personal secret one should share only with a real friend). Also, the Greek translation τὰ μυστήρια only occurs in connection with personal secrets at Sir 22:22; 27:16, 17. 21. According to Skehan, the addition of סוד is influenced by a reminiscence of Amos 3:7,⁵² but the idea of God/Wisdom revealing divine secrets to the loyal ones also appears in Sir 4:18, where גלה takes מסתרו as its object. The verb גלה is found with סוד in Sir 15:20, and with רז in 12:11 with the same meaning. All this demonstrates the secondary character of the reading.

Thus we have established as the *Vorlage* and translation the following:

כי גדולה גבורת יי וענוים יגדלוהו – For great is the might of the Lord and the humble magnify him.

ὅτι μεγάλη ἡ δυναστεία κυρίου καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ταπεινῶν δοξάζεται – Because great is the might of the Lord and by the humble he is glorified.

The theme of the sage as humble continues in this verse. The Lord is mighty and powerful, so the humbleness of the addressee of Ben Sira includes the right attitude of praising. Now, the translator uses the common equivalent of ענו/עני (“humble, meek”/“poor, afflicted”), ταπεινός (3:20; 10:15; 11:1; 12:5; 13:21, 22; 25:23; 29:8; 35:21), not πρᾶύς, which would be expected on the basis of v. 17a but is used only once in the whole book (10:14). Ταπεινός has here a positive moral sense “lowly, humble”, which also appears in ordinary Greek (e.g., Plat. Leg. 716a, Xen. Cyr. 5.1.5). It is noteworthy that the translator does not seem to have always differentiated the two senses, “humble” and “poor,” of the Hebrew word but appears to consider them as

⁵² Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 159.

Anssi Voitila • University of Eastern Finland • Against Mysteries Revealed or synonyms of a kind,⁵³ ταπεινός being used in contexts that refer to the lack of wealth (12:5; 13:21, 22; 29:8).

Sir 3:21

MS A	MS C	G
פלאות ממך אל תדרוש	פלאות ממך אל תחקור	χαλεπώτερα σου μη ζήτει
ומכוסה ממך אל תחקור	ורעים ממך אל [..]רוש	καὶ ἰσχυρότερα σου μη ἐξέταζε

The Hebrew reads: “What is too marvellous for you, do not seek.” The noun פְּלֵא means “miracle, something unusual”. In Ben Sira’s Hebrew, the word is employed to indicate God’s creation in 43:25 (amazing creatures of the sea, the sea monster Rahab) and in 11:4, although in this last passage the marvellous thing God is doing is to elevate the oppressed to a position of power. The verb פָּלַא, particularly in the *nif'al* participle, serves to denote God’s creative work in 42:17, 43:29 and 50:22.⁵⁴ V. 3:21a seems to indicate that one should not try to make sense of God’s creation because it is something too difficult for the human mind; only God is able fully to comprehend his doings (11:4, 42:17, “even the holy ones cannot recount all the marvels of God”).

The translator either interpreted פלאות as “difficult, harsh” (χαλεπός) or already read נפלאות in his *Vorlage*. The verb נפלא (*nif.*) means “to be too difficult” in Deut 17:8 (ἀδυνατήση ἀπὸ σοῦ [it is impossible]), 30:11

⁵³ Other related terms and equivalents are πένης (11:21, 13:18, 29:9, 34:24) and πτωχός (4:1, 4, 8; 7:32; 10:22, 23, 30; 13:3, 19, 20, 23; 18:33; 21:5; 25:2; 26:4; 29:22; 30:14; 31:4; 34:25; 35:16; 38:19).

⁵⁴ See also Wright, “Putting the Puzzle,” 97-98.

(ὑπέρογκός [excessive]⁵⁵ ἔστιν ... ἀπό σου); Prov 30:18 (ἀδύνατά μοι [impossible]). However, both נִפְּלָא and נִפְּלָא (in *nif'al* or *hif'il*) are usually translated by θαυμάσιος (used as a noun in neuter, pl. θαυμάσια) and θαυμαστός (used as an adjective) in the Greek Book of Ben Sira. Both παράδοξος (48:14) and τέρας (43:25) are found.⁵⁶ Thus, these words signal the concept of something marvellous, wonderful, or unexpected for the translator. Even in 39:20, where the meaning of נִפְּלָא comes very near to what we have in 3:21 (וְאִין נִפְּלָא וְחֹק מִמֶּנּוּ (MS B)//καὶ οὐθὲν ἔστιν θαυμάσιον ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ, “nothing is too marvellous, i.e., too difficult and too strong, i.e., incomprehensible, for him, i.e., God.”), the translator adheres to his usual equivalent, but he dispenses with the comparison and renders it as a simple statement, “nothing is miraculous for him”. In one case this comparative meaning of נִפְּלָא מִן is rendered more explicit: in 48:13 it is said of Elisha that כֹּל דְּבַר לֹא נִפְּלָא מִמֶּנּוּ (MS B)//πᾶς λόγος οὐχ ὑπερῆρεν αὐτόν, “No word surpassed him”. Nevertheless, in 3:21a, the translator has not used θαυμάσιος or θαυμαστός to render פִּלְאוֹת, but χαλεπώτερός. This means that he did not interpret the word as “marvellous things” but as “things that are too difficult”. Χαλεπός indicates “difficult, hard to do or deal with”. It is used only once in the translated books of the Septuagint, in Is. 18:2, but it appears more often in books written originally in Greek, in 2 Macc 4:4, 16; 6:3; 4 Macc 8:1; 9:4; 16:8; Wis 3:19; 17:10; 19:13.

⁵⁵ This word is given the meaning “difficult” in LEH and in LSJ in 2 Sam 13:2 and Ex 18:22, “rather difficult” in Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, in Ex 18:22.26; 2 Sam 13:2; Deut 30:11 and Dan 5:12 (Septuagint). On the contrary, Le Boulluec and Sandevor (*L'Exode. La Bible D'Alexandrie 2*) translate “de très grande importance.” This meaning is not found outside the Septuagint.

⁵⁶ נִפְּלָא nif. 31:9 (hif. פִּלְאוֹת—θαυμάσια); 39:20 (נִפְּלָא—θαυμάσιον); 42:17 (פִּלְאוֹת—θαυμάσια); 43:29 (נִפְּלָאוֹת—θαυμαστή); 48:13 (נִפְּלָא מִמֶּנּוּ—οὐχ ὑπερῆρεν αὐτόν), 14 (פִּלְאוֹת—τέρατα), 16 (hif. מַעַל הַפִּלְאוֹת—ἐπλήθυναν ἁμαρτίας); 50:22 (hif. גָּרַץ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ—τῶν μεγάλα ποιούντι πάντη); נִפְּלָא 3:21; 11:4 (פִּלְאוֹת—θαυμαστά); 43:25 (פִּלְאוֹת—τὰ παράδοξα); תְּמָה 11:13 (וַיִּתְמָהוּ—ἀπεθαύμασαν); 16:11 (תְּמָה—θαυμαστόν); 36:6 (MS B מוֹפֵת; B^{mg} תְּמָה—θαυμάσια); 43:18 (MS M תְּמָה—ἐκστήσεται), 25 (תְּמָה—θαυμάσια); 48:14 (תְּמָה—θαυμάσια). 18:6 (τὰ θαυμάσια—Hebrew not extant); 38:6 (לִּהְתְּפֹאֵר בְּגִבּוֹרֶתוֹ—ἐνδοξάζεσθαι ἐν θαυμασίοις αὐτοῦ); נִוְרָא (?) 43:2 (כֹּל נִוְרָא—σκεῦος θαυμαστόν); 48:4 (וְהוּא אֵל יְהוָה [..] וְהוּא נִוְרָא אֵת—ὡς ἐδοξάσθη, Ἡλία, ἐν θαυμασίοις σου).

The idea that human beings should not seek inappropriate knowledge is continued in the next line (21b), “what is hidden from you, do not seek.” The *pu'al* participle of the verb כסה (מכוסה in MS A) functions as an expression analogous to the פלאה of the previous colon. It signifies in the Hebrew Bible “to be covered (with water, panels, garments etc.)”. In the Book of Ben Sira, the *pu'al* of כסה appears only in this verse and in Sir 12:8b, ולא יכוסה ברעה שונה “nor is an enemy hidden in adversity”. In 12:8, the idea is that something is covering the true nature of the alleged friendship, which is uncovered in adversity. The Greek translation in 3:21b should be understood along with the rendering of the foregoing line (21a). ἰσχυρότερα means “matters that are too hard for you, that overcome your personal strength”.⁵⁷ In the Hebrew of MS A, the terms פלאה and מכוסה may be seen as referring to different entities, i.e., to God’s miraculous acts past and present and to his secrets, especially of the future (42:19). Thus, it is natural that scholars have turned to the MS C reading and to the Greek text here. MS C reads ורעים “what is too evil for you.”⁵⁸ Skehan suggests ורם as the original reading,⁵⁹ which would bring the verse into line with Ps 131:1 and 139:6, as stated by Argall.⁶⁰ These biblical parallels speak in fact against Skehan’s suggestion, for ורם could be a harmonization with the Hebrew text

⁵⁷ Wright (“Putting the Puzzle,” 97) suggests that ἰσχυρότερα probably represents פלאה here. It has already become evident (3:21a) that χαλεπώτερος fits more easily into this function.

⁵⁸ Argall (*1 Enoch*, 74-75), although he could also accept ורם, supports the originality of רעים, for “the reading ‘evil things’... forms an *inclusio* with the ‘evil and erring imaginations’ in the last colon of the stanza (v. 24b). Therefore, the forbidden teaching is not *really* marvellous and ‘high’ (v. 21), it is evil and arouses the evil curiosity (v. 24).” (Italics are his) It escapes his reasoning that if רעים were the original reading, it would evoke the inadmissible idea that there are certain evil things that one should research. The idea in vv. 21 and 23 (things too marvellous, hidden from you, beyond you) is that there are also marvellous, secret and great things that are permitted. The parallel verse to v. 21 in this strophe (3:21-24), however, is not v. 23 but v. 24. V. 24 is a positive affirmation while v. 21 is negative, so the רעהה, in colon 24b, has a completely negative value—there is no such thing as “evil/wrong thoughts” that are permitted.

⁵⁹ Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 159. However, he does not say anything about MS C and claims that his reading is based on the G.

⁶⁰ Argall, *1 Enoch*, 74-75: “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high (רום, *qal*); I do not occupy myself with things too great (גדלוה) and too marvellous (נפלאה) for me.”

of these Psalms.⁶¹ Furthermore, colons 21a and 21b form fitting parallels, “too marvellous for you” and “hidden from you”, which are just two sides of the same thing. It could very well be that ורעים in MS C is an attempt to understand what ἰσχυρότερα indicates in the Greek text. We should, however, abstain from trying to determine the reading of the *Vorlage* here.

In conclusion, I would propose the following *Vorlage* and translation:

פלאות ממך אל תדרוש – What is too marvellous/too difficult for you, do not investigate,

ומכוסה ממך אל תחקור – and what is kept secret/hidden from you, do not research.

χαλεπώτερα σου μὴ ζήτηι, – What is too difficult for you, do not investigate,

καὶ ἰσχυρότερα σου μὴ ἐξέταξε – and what is too hard/powerful for you, do not research.

Had the translator employed the more usual equivalents for פלאות and מכוסה, i.e., τὰ θαυμάσια ὑπὲρ σε and τὰ κρυπτά ἀπὸ σοῦ it would have resulted in a somewhat awkward, unidiomatic, and misleading translation, given his interpretation; the aim was not to deny the study of God’s creation or his secrets, but the hubris of even attempting to cross the limits of human mental capacity. The Greek text is then to be seen as an interpretation of a rather elusive Hebrew text, and does not represent the only available understanding. The Syriac translation reads the Hebrew words פלאות and מכוסה as the Greek does (ܘܡܚܝܒܐ ...ܘܡܚܝܒܐ ...ܘܡܚܝܒܐ), which might indicate the influence of the Greek text or its tradition of interpreting the Hebrew text here on the Syriac, or a different Hebrew *Vorlage*.

⁶¹ Concerning this phenomenon, see Wright, *No Small Difference*, 125.

The rendering of פלאות and ומכוסה with the comparatives χαλεπώτερος and ἰσχυρότερος fits rather well in the context, which is directed against pride. To try to understand something that is beyond one’s ability is both futile and arrogant and demonstrates one’s intellectual pride. The idea has its parallels in the Hebrew Bible, in Ps 131:1 and Job 42:3 and it also has Hellenistic parallels in Eur. *Med.* 1225-26, Xenoph. *Mem.* 1.1.11-12.⁶² The translator discerned no reference to esoteric or mysterious knowledge in the text. He might also have anticipated the coming reference to the Law (vv. 22-23)—or this might have already been in his *Vorlage*—which is, according to Deut 30:11, “not too difficult” (לא נפלאה הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא) // οὐχ ὑπέρογκός ἐστιν οὐδὲ μακρὰν ἀπὸ σοῦ ἐστιν).

Sir 3:22

MS A	MS C	G
במה שהורשית התבונן	באשר הורשיתה התבונן	ἃ προσετάγη σοι, ταῦτα διανοοῦ,
ואין לך עסק בנסתרות	ועסק אל יהי לך בנסתרות	οὐ γάρ ἐστίν σοι χρεία τῶν κρυπτῶν.

In the first line, the disciple is told what he should contemplate/think (בין, *hitp.* // διανοεῖσθαι) instead. The verb διανοεῖσθαι means “have in mind, think”.⁶³ Plato argues that διανοεῖσθαι is a dialogue the soul engages in on any subject with itself (*Theaet.* 189e). It is a mental faculty, a process that results in knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) (Plat. *Republica* 508e; Arist. *De Anima* 414a; 429a; so also Sir 39:7, 32; 51:18). Again, in Gen 6:5 and 6 (LXX)⁶⁴, the verb

⁶² Middendorp, *Stellung*, 13-14; Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, 41-42, 44. See also, Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 159.

⁶³ The parallel with μελετᾶν in Sir 6:37 might, accordingly, also be “to ponder”; so Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. LEH also gives the same meaning but as an example Sir 21:17.

⁶⁴ καὶ πᾶς τις διανοεῖται ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας 6 καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ διενόηθη. In

(God as the subject) has a connotation of profound and attentive thinking that results in decision-making. This sense of the verb suits the context of Sir 3:22a very well, the idea being that the student thinks profoundly and continuously about the Law and Wisdom (i.e., studies them in a dialogue with them) and draws the necessary conclusions. This kind of mental activity is in fact what the life of the wise is all about (Law: Sir 6:37; 38:33, 34; Wisdom: 14:21; 39:7; 51:18; both: 39:32). Further, it is not without significance that the grandson makes the section end (3:29) with an admonition to think attentively/consider the discourse of the wise (the wisdom tradition), לב חכם יבין משלי חכמים ואזן מקשבת לחכמה תשמח // καρδία συνετοῦ διανοηθήσεται παραβολήν καὶ οὓς ἀκροατοῦ ἐπιθυμία σοφοῦ.⁶⁵ The translator has transformed Ben Sira's thought into his Greek Alexandrian, and perhaps more philosophically oriented, setting.

In the relative clause introduced by ש (אשר in MS C), the verb רשה is a lexical Aramaism and appears here in *hof'al*. According to HALOT, the phrase במה שהורשית means “for which cause power is given to you”.⁶⁶ The verb form may also be interpreted as “to permit, command, empower”. Thus we have at least two different possibilities for translating this phrase. The first one (“for which cause power is given to you”) fits very well with the interpretation of v. 21 given above, where the writer prohibits the disciple's exceeding the limits of the ability of the human mind.⁶⁷ The other possible reading is the one also given by the Greek translator, i.e. “what is permitted, i.e., commanded, to you”. The Greek translation (ἃ προσετάγη σοι) reminds one of the language of the Pentateuch where the authority of the Law and

Marguerite Harl, *La Genèse* (BA 1), “méditait” / “médita”; in NETS (Robert J.V. Hibert), “think attentively” / “thought over”.

⁶⁵ It is worth noting that the translator of 1 Enoch also uses this verb to encourage meditating on God's creative work in 2:2 and 3:1.

⁶⁶ Wagner, *Lexikalische Aramaismen*, 107: “über etwas Gewalt bekommen.”

⁶⁷ This reading is supported by the Syriac (ܒܪܫܐ ܗܝܥܘܒܝܢܐ).

its orders is often highlighted through the relative clause “which the Lord commanded you” (hence the noun πρόσταγμα, “ordinance, command”).⁶⁸ The verb is not especially common in the Greek Pentateuch, but then the grandson does not tend to imitate the wording of his predecessors in the Septuagint.⁶⁹ It might also reflect a common usage of royal Ptolemaic chancellery language, since this verb was frequently used in the formulation of the Ptolemaic προστάγματα (τοῦ βασιλέως προστάξαντος), especially when addressed to a group of people (so already in the LXX Gen 47:11 (Pharaoh), 50:2 (Joseph): in the *Letter of Aristeas* 22, 24, 29, 46, 52, 110).⁷⁰ The verb was also used for the orders given by God in Hellenistic Jewish texts written originally in Greek: *Letter of Aristeas* 158; Sibyl 3:258 (the law in Sinai); Demetrius the Chronographer 1:1; Eupolemus 2:6 (through an angel); 2:13, 23 (through the prophet Natan); Artapanus 3:22.

MS C seems to have substituted the more contemporary Hebrew construction of preposition and relative pronoun ψ במה for the more biblical one ψ באשר.⁷¹ The Syriac seems to reflect the A text here. It may be claimed of course that the copyist of the C text is again translating the G wording here, but then it is rather difficult to explain how the copyist happened to find the same rare verb that appeared in MS A.

In v. 22b, the Hebrew text of MS A has a nominal clause. Preceded by a clause with the imperative in v. 22a, this nominal clause invites a modal

⁶⁸ The relative appears in Sir 24:23, the famous citation from Deut 33:4, Ταῦτα πάντα βίβλος διαθήκης θεοῦ ὑψίστου, νόμον ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυσῆς.

⁶⁹ On this, see Wright, . . .

⁷⁰ See Holleaux, *Études d'épigraphie*, 211.

⁷¹ Again, Rüger (*Text und Textform*, 32) argues on account of the phases of Hebrew used in the MSS that MS C is the older text-form: ψ being the biblical and ψ the Rabbinic form of the relative pronoun; differently, Schrader, *Leiden und Gerechtigkeit*, 43. It is true that ψ is more common than ψ in Ben Sira, but as is rightly noted by Peursen (*The Verbal Syntax*, 321), there is fluctuation in the Hebrew MSS as regards the use of the relative pronoun in Ben Sira.

interpretation, “you should have no business in hidden things”.⁷² This use of a nominal clause is rather unusual which may have prompted the copyist of MS C to transform ׀ִאֵל into a negative jussive אֵל יְהִי.⁷³

The Greek translator has resorted to γάρ,⁷⁴ giving a causal interpretation to the clause, and to χρεία, “need, use, business, affair,” as an equivalent to עסק. עסק is found in both of the Hebrew MSS, albeit in different positions. χρεία usually corresponds to צָרְכָּהּ (צָרְכָּהּ), “need, necessity,” or צָרִיךְ, “needing, needed, (he/she/it) must,” in the Hebrew of Ben Sira.⁷⁵ עסק (or once עשק, v. 11:10) means “affair, concern, worldly occupation, business,” i.e., “it should not be your concern/you should have no business in hidden things”. χρεία, on the other hand, primarily means “need, use,” but also “business, duty, function.” Thus the rendering allows a more extensive interpretation: “for you have no need/use of hidden things”.⁷⁶ It seems unlikely that the translator would not have known the meaning of the word עסק.⁷⁷ We encounter another example of οὐ ἔστιν σοι χρεία in 11:9 where it appears in a warning not to meddle in struggles with strangers, περὶ πράγματος, οὐ οὐκ ἔστιν σοι χρεία, μὴ ἔριζε, “about a matter that is useless/pointless for you do not wrangle”. It may be that the *Vorlage* already contained עסק,⁷⁸ באין עסקך (reconstructed on the basis of preserved MSS: MS A: באין עצה אֵל⁷⁹ תתחר; MS B: אֵל תתור ׀[...]). It may be concluded that the use of χρεία

⁷² Peursen, “Negation,” 226; id., *The Verbal Syntax*, 196. Jüon-Muraoka, *Grammar*, § 154e.

⁷³ Although Rüger considers the MS C reading as original in this verse, he thinks that the ׀ִאֵל is the older form and the אֵל יְהִי is the “tendenziöse Änderung wie das אֵל von MS C 3:14a”.

⁷⁴ γάρ is the usual equivalent for ׀ in the Book of Ben Sira. It is rather difficult to always know when the translator read ׀ in his *Vorlage* or when the *Vorlage* had no conjunction and he resorted to γάρ only on the basis of his interpretation of the context. In MS A, there is no conjunction at all in the Hebrew when γάρ is used in the Greek, in 3:9, 14; 6:1; 10:11; 12:5; 15:10; 16:4 and coordinating waw in 7:19; 14:17; 16:17 as here.

⁷⁵ 8:9; 13:6; 15:12; 32:2, 7; 37:8; 38:1.12; 29:21, 31; 42:23.

⁷⁶ “Absence of advantage in intellectual activity,” Passaro, “The Secrets of God,” 157, 161.

⁷⁷ This word also appears elsewhere in the Book, at 7:25a (MSS A and C); 38:24b (MS B) and 40:1a (MS B). In these cases, the translation equivalents always signal labour, 7:25a ἐργον μέγα; 38:24b πράξις and 40:1a ἀσχολία.

⁷⁸ Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 237.

⁷⁹ Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 104; Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 237. Derived from Syr (ܐܠܝܢܝܢܐ) and G (ἐριζε).

demonstrates the translator's understanding of the clause as a whole: it was not a prohibition ("you should not"), but an attempt to persuade the disciple not to study matters considered to be inappropriate ("his effort would be for nothing"). The important things to be studied are the things given (προσετάγη, 22b) and shown (ὑπέδειχθη, 23b) in Wisdom and Law.

נסתרות, "hidden things," is translated by τὰ κρυπτά which means "the things that are covered, concealed, hidden, secret". What is actually meant by נסתרות//τὰ κρυπτά in Ben Sira and why is the study of them prohibited? According to Ben Sira, there are things in the world that are concealed from human beings, as is indicated in 11:4cd, פעלו [...] ונעלם מ[] // καὶ κρυπτά τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἀνθρώποις, or 43:32. This fact is already stated in Deut 29:28: "The hidden things [נסתרות//τὰ κρυπτά] belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things [הנגלת//τὰ φανερά] belong to us". God, however, may reveal secrets to human beings; it is explicitly stated in 4:18 that Wisdom reveals secrets to her children/disciples, וגליתי לו מסתרי // καὶ ἀποκαλύψει αὐτῷ τὰ κρυπτά αὐτήs. Further, it seems that often the secrets revealed concern creation, God's acts in the past, and particularly, events to come in the future (42:19 נסתרות חקר ומגלה // καὶ ἀποκαλύπτων ἵχνη ἀποκρύφων, "and reveals the meaning [G, course, ἵχνη] of hidden things"; in 48:25, Ben Sira praises Isaiah בואן ונסתרות לפני בואן [] // ὑπέδειξεν... καὶ τὰ ἀπόκρυφα πρὶν ἢ παραγενέσθαι αὐτά, "[Isaiah] proclaimed the hidden things before they happened"). Ben Sira does not regard this sort of revelation at all dubious or something that the disciple should avoid, and neither does the grandson.⁸¹

⁸⁰ In some instances, the Hebrew first-person form of address ("Whoever obeys me...", from v. 15 onwards) has been transformed into a third-person one ("Whoever obeys her, i.e., Wisdom).

⁸¹ Wright ("Putting the Puzzle," 98-99) sees here Ben Sira's ambivalent attitude toward revelation of the future.

In chapter 39, the author describes the wisdom of a scribe (σοφία γραμματέως, 38:24), although unfortunately we do not possess this text in Hebrew. This wisdom consists of an ability to “seek out (ἐκζητήσει [vv. 1 and 3; in Sir 3:21 ζητεῖν and ἐξετάζειν]) the hidden meanings of proverbs (v. 3, ἀπόκρυφα παροιμιῶν)” and “meditate on the mysteries of the Lord (v. 7, ἐν τοῖς ἀποκρύφοις αὐτοῦ διανοηθήσεται)”. A call to study the secrets of Wisdom is given in the Greek text at 14:21, but not in Hebrew: **על השם על** **ןתבונן** **לבו ובנתיבותיה יתבונן**,⁸² “who puts his heart upon her ways and her paths meditates”//ὁ διανοούμενος τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ, ἐν τοῖς ἀποκρύφοις αὐτῆς ἐννοηθήσεται, “who reflects in his heart her ways and her secrets meditates”. It is not impossible that the translator read **בנסהרה** in his source text. Note that in colon 22a, the verb **διανοεῖσθαι** appears as well.

Most interesting in this respect is the translator’s interpretation of vv. 16:20-22 where we also encounter polemical language (v. 23) against those who do not share this view. The Hebrew text deals with the sceptical questions of a senseless individual who thinks that he is so insignificant that God does not notice when he sins. In the Greek, in contrast, the questions concern not God’s inability to perceive the individual’s actions but the individual’s inability to think attentively (**διανοεῖσθαι**, vv. 20, 23) about God’s ways and works (vv. 20-22) by claiming that they are concealed (v. 21). In both versions, the meditation ends with a proclamation that these questions are presented by a senseless (**μοιρά**), misguided person (**ἀνὴρ ἄφρων**), one devoid of understanding (**ἐλαττούμενος καρδίᾳ**) (v. 23). Thus according to the reading of the translator, to think that human beings are unable to comprehend God’s secrets (**τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀποκρύφοις**) is as senseless as

⁸² In fact, MS A reads **ובתבונתיה**, which gives rise to the difficult sequence: “meditate on her understandings.” The reading may be considered as a dittography caused by the presence of **ובתבונתיה** in the same position in the previous line. The reconstructed word is based on the Syriac translation and suits well the parallel line with **דרכיה** (Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 137; Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 263).

not taking into account the coming judgement (διαθήκη, v. 22). Thus, the translator seems to interpret his source text to mean that to study God's secrets is the duty of the wise and not to do so is foolish.

If we compare the statement made in 3:22 about secrets with those mentioned above, we are able to notice an important distinction. The secrets the disciple is allowed to contemplate are those mediated through Wisdom and revealed in the study of Wisdom and the Law.⁸³ The Torah is not the only entity revealed but its interpretation is as well, according to Ben Sira's wisdom tradition.⁸⁴ Thus, in 3:22—if the context is taken properly into consideration—secrets are prohibited if studied in pretentious pride, i.e., to increase one's personal status (the same intent that was already found in v. 21; cf. Prov 25:27, 28:11), without the correct interpretation of the wisdom tradition taught by Ben Sira.

In the foregoing analysis there has come out nothing to suggest that the *Vorlage* was dissimilar to the text of MS A, yielding the following results:

במה שהורשית התבונן – Upon that which you are permitted, contemplate/
meditate

ואין לך עסק בנסתרות – and (but) you should have no business in hidden things

ὃ προσετάγη σοι, ταῦτα διανοοῦ, – Upon that which is commanded to you,
contemplate/meditate,

οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν σοι χρεία τῶν κρυπτῶν – for you do not need (to know) the
hidden things.

The grandson has transformed “the permitted things” into the things that have been commanded to the addressee. This clearly denotes the Law that

⁸³ So also Argall, *1 Enoch*, 53, 94-97.

⁸⁴ So also Argall, *1 Enoch*, 76.

has been commanded but also the wisdom tradition taught by Ben Sira and as such understood as authoritative by the audience. We have seen that this was already anticipated in the previous verse in the translation. Further, the study of secret/concealed/hidden things is not prohibited as such in the grandson's text but pronounced as futile/useless for the student of wisdom. This may be evidence of a change made to achieve the author's goal (i.e., to prevent the study of futile matters) more effectively in a cultural environment that was more familiar with the Greek art of persuasion.

Sir 3:23

MS A	MS C	G
וביותר ממך אל תמר		ἐν τοῖς περισσοῖς τῶν ἔργων σου μὴ περιεργάζου·
כי רב ממך הראית		πλείονα γὰρ συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων ὑπεδείχθη σοι.

The Hebrew word **יותר** means “the rest, what is too much” (< the verb **יָהַר** *hif.* “to leave over”). So the phrase **ביותר ממך** signifies “something that is too much for you, beyond you.” Judging by the context (vv. 17-22), Ben Sira has in mind the human ability to understand. The jussive of MS A **אל תמר** should be understood as derived from the verb **מָרַר**, “be bitter”, i.e. “do not be embittered because of what is more than you are able to understand”.⁸⁵ The addressee should not be embittered because he cannot understand everything. Instead, the translator perhaps read in his *Vorlage* **אל תתעסק**, “do not meddle”, for he rendered **μὴ περιεργάζου**. The correspondence between **περιεργάζεσθαι** and **עִשָּׂק** *hitp.* is further confirmed by their appearance in

⁸⁵ Here I follow the translation of Timo Veijola (*Sirakin kirja*, 8); also, without any comment, Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 65. Other possible interpretation would be that the verb is derived from the root **מָרַה**, “to be rebellious,” thus “rebel not”, see Wagner, *Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena*, 267; Argall, *1. Enoch*, 76. Skehan (*The Wisdom*, 159) suggests a text correction: the verb should be read as **אל תתעסק**, “meddle not”.

41:22 where *מִהַתְּעַשֶׂק* (MS M) has as a counterpart *ἀπὸ περιεργίας*.⁸⁶ *Περιεργάζεσθαι* connotes the exceeding of interest or wasting of efforts: “to take more pains than enough about,” “waste one’s labour on something more than enough”.⁸⁷ Thus *μὴ περιεργάζου* may be translated as “do not meddle with something, do not do anything unnecessary”.⁸⁸ Argall convincingly argues for a wordplay on true work here.⁸⁹ Interpreted this way, the phrase carries on the idea offered in v. 22b that the study of hidden things is useless/pointless.

περισσός (// *יִרְרֵר*), “beyond the regular number or size, out of common, superfluous,” raises again the idea of extending one’s efforts beyond one’s regular (accepted) boundaries. The addressee is urged not to waste time with undertakings that are not usual and thus inappropriate. Other equivalents with similar content have been applied to render the root *רִר* (part. of *περισσεύειν* 10:27a, 11:12b, 33:30c; *ὑπὲρ δύναμίν σου* 8:13a; *ποσαχῶς* 10:31a), with only one exception, in 40:18a, *αὐτάρκης*, “sufficient, independent”. Consequently, the translator has slightly adapted the message of the Hebrew text that there are matters that human beings cannot understand. Once again the disciple is reminded in the Greek text of the futile character of matters that are “too difficult”, “stronger than you”, and “hidden”. The second colon of the verse, affirms that this unnecessary and strange material is something other than the revealed (*ὑπεδείχθη*) things that have been presented to the addressee to master.

By attaching *τῶν ἔργων* to *περισσός*, the translator explains what the compact Hebrew expression means as he has interpreted it. Smend

⁸⁶ See Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 30; Wagner, *Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena*, 267-8.

⁸⁷ See LSJ *ad loc.*

⁸⁸ The Syriac translation is not very helpful here. The sequence *ܡܗܘܢܐ ܘܕܢܐ ܗܘܐ* can be transliterated in Hebrew as *לֹא תִתְעַשֶׂק* (thus appearing to reflect *περιεργάζεσθαι*), but this verb, pl. 2. *Ethpl.*, means either “to contend, resist, dispute” (i.e. reflects *מָרַר*) or “to be vexed, indignant, unhappy” (i.e. reflects *מָרַר*).

⁸⁹ Argall, *1 Enoch*, 76; Passaro, “The Secrets of God,” 157.

considers τῶν ἔργων (rendered as “duties”, in v. 17) as an addition made by the translator after περιεργάζου.⁹⁰ He cites two cases where ἔργον is “added”, in 11:27 and 16:21. The one in 16:21 is dubious because the translator obviously read something other than what we have in MS A. In contrast, what is expressed in 11:27 (יגיד עליי // καὶ συντέλεια ἀνθρώπου ἀποκάλυψις ἔργων αὐτοῦ) significantly resembles what we find in 3:23; the use of the common equivalent of עליי (יגיד) // (ἀποκάλυψις) αὐτοῦ or περὶ αὐτοῦ would have created confusion (“your revelation”, genitive of the subject, or “revelation concerning you”). In 3:23: the expression וביותר ממך, translated literally with ἐν τοῖς περισσοῖς σου, “with what is beyond you,” would have resulted in an ambiguous and opaque rendering. Although ἔργων did not convey the goal of the original author precisely, it occurs already in the Greek text of v. 17, in the “heading” of this section (ἐν πραύτητι τὰ ἔργα σου διέξαγε, “carry out your **affairs** [in your works walk] in gentleness/mildness”), and so now reminds the reader of τὰ ἔργα in that “heading” and conveys an interpretation that covers all activities, mental or physical, to which the wisdom student might dedicate himself.

We have already mentioned in passing the verb ὑπεδείχθη which renders הַרְאִיתָ (*hof*) in line 23b. This verb means in *hif'il*, “to let someone see something, show something to someone”. Here it indicates that something is made known by revelation. It is possible that yet another *hif'il* of this verb appears in 45:3, ...]וייר//καὶ ἔδειξεν, where God is said to have shown his glory to Moses. The Greek verb ὑποδεικνύναι has the sense “to show,

⁹⁰ Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 30; likewise Argall (*1 Enoch*, 76) speaks about wordplay (and refers to Bauer’s, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). The Syriac translation seems to follow the interpretation made in the G, ܗܒܘܬܗ, but the suffix is in the 3rd person plural, which must refer to God, so “with God’s works”.

indicate, teach”.⁹¹ Normally, ὑποδεικνύοναι renders נגנ *hif'il*, in 14:12; 46:20; 48:25 and 49:8. In two verses, 17:7 and 12, the Hebrew text is not extant. At 14:12, ὑπεδείχθη is used as a sort of divine passive: human beings are not shown/foretold the moment of their death. In chapter 17, the subject of the verb is God himself: he taught the human beings his commandments (v. 12) and to discern between right and wrong (v. 7). The last three occurrences deal with the proclamations of the prophets: Samuel, Isaiah and Ezekiel showed/revealed the future to the people. In this light, it is not uninteresting that Ben Sira equates his teaching (διδασκαλία) with prophecy (προφητεία) in 24:33. Thus it may be concluded that the verb—both in Hebrew and in Greek—denotes the making known of something by a divine revelation. It has this sense in Dan 10:14, 21; 11:2, but also in Jewish Hellenistic texts most probably originating from Egypt: T.Naph 8:1 (future), T.Asher 1:2 (right in the sight of God), T.Job 4:1 (things the Lord charged me to tell you), 47:9 (things present and to come). The object of the revelation in Sir 3:23 is the instruction⁹² the disciples have to learn: the Wisdom and the Law, in accordance with the interpretation of the sages, which Ben Sira preserves, develops, and transmits.⁹³

This revealed material/entity is characterized in Hebrew as רב ממך, “greater than you” or “more than enough for you”. This phrase repeats the form of expression encountered in v. 21, to remind the audience of the idea of

⁹¹ E.g., gods to human beings, οὔτοι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, Xenophanes 18.1; the addressee to the young, ὑποδεικνύοντες αὐτοῖς οἴους εἶναι χρὴ τοὺς ἀνδρας τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς, Isoc. 3.57; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.3.13.

⁹² Written or oral, most likely both.

⁹³ That the scribe-sage is not just a passive compiler of the wisdom of “all the ancients” becomes evident from various passages of the text of Ben Sira: in 24:30-34, Ben Sira compares his work as a scribe-sage to a canal that, first, became a river and then ended up a sea, which indicates, in my opinion at least, that the water of knowledge not only ran forth but grew in size as well; in addition, he employs verbs like φωτίζειν (“bring to light, make known, illustrate, instruct, teach”), ἐκφαίνειν (“bring to light, reveal, produce”), and ἐκχέειν (“pour out”) for his mission (vv. 32-33); in 34:8, the Law is fulfilled in the words, i.e., interpretations, of the sage; in 39:6, again the sage showers forth (ἀνομβρήσει) his words *if God fills him with the spirit of understanding* (ἐν πνεύματι συνέσεως). 35:1-15 may serve as an example of interpretation of the Law.

human limitations, but now with different purpose. The revealed wisdom is worth studying, not because it is too difficult, too powerful or too obscure, but because it is in itself magnificent, more than enough for you. The translator specifies the meaning of this compact phrase in his rendering. He has detected the comparative nature of the sentence, so he renders כּר with πλείονα (*neuter pl.*), “the more (i.e. things) than (*gen.*),” and כּמ with συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων (*gen. of comparison*). Both words have also served elsewhere to explicate his understanding of the meaning of the source text, σύνεσις in 5:12 and ἄνθρωπος in 3:17 (and other cases mentioned at pp. 12-13), both of which resemble the use of ἔργον in 3:23a. In 5:12, σύνεσις is utilized to render the Hebrew idiom כּתּוּב שׁוּב לּוֹ, “if it is with you, i.e., if it is in your power (to answer),” (see Jer 10:5, Hag 2:17) εἰ ἔστιν σοι σύνεσις, “if you have understanding”. In v. 23b, both transformations aim at clarifying the intent of the *Vorlage* as conceived by the translator: πλείονα γὰρ συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων expands the meaning of the source text; the revealed material (ὑπεδείχθη σοι) not only overcomes *your* understanding but *all* human intellectual ability (συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων), the plural of ἄνθρωπος denoting “mankind”.⁹⁴ The translator makes overt the dichotomy between human and divine knowledge. By translating ἀνθρώπων, Smend concludes, the translator anticipates the כּוּנֵי אֱלֹהִים of the next verse, a phrase that does not have a counterpart in the G.⁹⁵ Thus, its rendering by ἀνθρώπων in v. 24a, we may add, would have created unnecessary repetition. This is an interesting observation, for we shall suggest that the translator had Greek philosophical thinking in mind, whether or not Ben Sira had, when constructing the clauses of the next verse in Greek.

⁹⁴ Passaro (“The Secrets of God,” 157-8) points out as well that the revealed Wisdom/Law means that the student does not need to wear himself out with what is too great. This is certainly true even if true Wisdom also needs all the efforts of the student, according to Ben Sira.

⁹⁵ Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 30-31.

We have established as the *Vorlage* and its translation the following

תתעשק אל וביותר ממך – Into what is too much for you (to understand), do not meddle (?),

כי רב ממך הראית – for what is more than enough for you has been shown/revealed to you.

ἐν τοῖς περισσοῖς τῶν ἔργων σου μὴ περιεργάζου – Into what is not your affair/concern (work), do not meddle,

πλείονα γὰρ συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων ὑπεδείχθη σοι – for more than human beings' intelligence (is able to comprehend) has been shown/revealed to you.

The grandson has rendered this verse on the basis of his general understanding of the whole passage. He does not deny the possibility of gaining knowledge of things too difficult, powerful and secret, but proclaims the enterprise to be futile. He has transformed the motivation offered in the Hebrew text (v. 23b). What has been given to the addressee is not simply greater than him but something even more unvanquishable; the revealed matter (Law and Wisdom) overcomes human intelligence. The ἄνθρωποι here surely represent the others who do not possess the author's tradition. This idea is of course in opposition with the concept common in Hellenistic Jewish apologetics according to which truth and wisdom may be gained also through other traditions.⁹⁶ Ben Sira's teaching represents divine knowledge, whereas these ἄνθρωποι have only human suppositions. The idea of wisdom exceeding human comprehension evokes the prevailing mood of preserved Alexandrian Hellenistic literature, that Jewish wisdom is superior to that of the Greeks or the other nations.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For this idea in Jewish Hellenistic apologetic see Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 57.

⁹⁷ A specimen *par excellence* of such a view is the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*. See also Gruen, *The Heritage and Hellenism*, 292-3; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 24.

MS A

MS C

G

כי רבים עשהוני בני אדם

πολλοὺς γὰρ ἐπλάνησεν ἡ ὑπόληψις αὐτῶν·

ודמיונות רעות מתעות

καὶ ὑπόνοια πονηρὰ ὠλίσθησεν διανοίας αὐτῶν.

Verse 24 contains two nominal clauses of which the first (24a) starts with **כי**.⁹⁸ The second clause (24b) is coordinated with the first. The function of **כי** is open to interpretation. Here, it may be understood as a mark of (the beginning of) a *solemn asseveration*, “indeed” or “truly”⁹⁹, which serves as the concluding statement of the second section (3:21-24, as stated in the introduction) and constitutes a kind of “centre” of the whole speech (3:17-29): human beings have opinions (עשהוניים), but if not based on the correct interpretation of true Wisdom and the Law, they lead one astray. Verse 24 is, then, in the most appropriate place for the statement of the central idea and, rhetorically speaking, the most efficient one.

By rendering the Hebrew conjunction with γάρ, our translator shows that he has taken the **כי**-clause in v. 24 as a motive clause. Besides, being clearly the most usual equivalent of **כי** in the book, γάρ also matches with the content of the verse. However, a small problem, at least a stylistic one, is created in connection with the previous line, where γάρ also occurs. At the beginning of v. 24 the conjunction may be understood as introducing the motive for the whole of the preceding section.

⁹⁸ I realize that it is possible to consider the last colon as an attributive construction attached to the previous colon and to the sentence formed by it, and not as an independent sentence, i.e., “and misleading evil thoughts,” as was suggested to me by Elwolde in a private communication. Peursen (*The Verbal Syntax*, 216, 225) agrees with my interpretation. This was also how the translator interpreted the last colon.

⁹⁹ So, e.g., Joüon-Muraoka § 164b; Skehan, *The Wisdom*, 158, and Veijola, *Sirakin kirja*, 9.

The translator transformed the two nominal clauses into verbal clauses and, notably, resorted to verbs that have partly overlapping connotations (without being synonyms): πλανᾶν, “lead astray, mislead” and ὀλισθάνειν, (here in causative sense) “make to slip”. The overlapping part of their connotation is the outcome of the verbal action: the object is misled by bad reasoning. The grandson has, in both cases, employed the aorist indicative, which is not the most common equivalent of either the Hebrew participle or the nominal clause that has been rendered with a verbal clause. Along with the use of γάρ as the equivalent for כִּי, the transformation serves to present the actions of the verse as something past but *paradigmatic*, proverbial: this has happened before and will continue to happen, the aorists being almost *gnomic*.

In Hebrew, the *hif'il* participle of הַעִת in v. 24b has the meaning “to cause to err, mislead, lead astray”. Smend suggests that the translator, instead of בְּנֵי אָדָם, transferred the *hif'il* הַעִת from 24b to 24a.¹⁰⁰ Against this position, it must be noted that ἐπλάνησεν comes before ἡ ὑπόληψις not after it, as would be expected if ἐπλάνησεν were intended to replace בְּנֵי אָדָם. Besides, בְּנֵי אָדָם is not missing in the text but is represented in the possessive pronoun αὐτῶν, which refers to the ἀνθρώπων in v. 23b. In any case, it is plausible that the translator drew his inspiration for ἐπλάνησεν for מַתְעוֹת (hif. הַעִת) from v. 24b. In doing so he transformed the meaning of the Hebrew clause. The Hebrew phrase, “truly, many are the thoughts/opinions of human beings,” states that human beings have different opinions that may be good or bad; only the next sentence presents the option that bad opinions might lead astray.

¹⁰⁰ “Er nahm an Stelle von בְּנֵי אָדָם (s. z. v. 23) mit ἐπλάνησεν מַתְעוֹת aus b nach a hinüber und setzte in b synonym ὀλίσθησεν διανοίας (al διανοισαν) αὐτῶν hinzu,” Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 31. According to Skehan, the G is paraphrasing here.

עֲשָׂתוֹן, “plan, thought, opinion,” appears only in Ps. 146:4 (translated as διαλογισμός, “calculation, consideration, thought”) in the Hebrew Bible, with the meaning “plan”. Now the Greek text of Sir 3:24a does not convey the notion of human beings having different opinions; it states plainly that (wrong) suppositions (ἡ ὑπόλημψις αὐτῶν) lead “many,” πολλούς, astray. The translator has read רבִּים, at the beginning of the phrase in the source text, as referring to people; it appears in the masculine plural, although the noun it governs is a feminine—at least the translator here has produced the word order of the Hebrew text (as attested in MS A) closely.¹⁰¹ This transformation allows the possibility that not everybody lets himself be led astray. עֲשָׂתוֹן is rendered with ὑπόλη(μ)ψις, a *hapax legomenon* in the Septuagint, which means “conceit, supposition, speculation,” thus opinion that is not based on real knowledge of the actual state of affairs. In classical literature this word is sometimes parallel to concepts such as δόξα “opinion, conjecture, supposition” and opposed to νόησις or ἐπιστήμη “real knowledge, wisdom” (Plato, Aristotle). ὑπόλη(μ)ψις occurs in the singular while the Hebrew word is in the plural. This creates an interesting difference. In Hebrew human beings have different opinions/plans, but in Greek they share a common supposition that is not of real wisdom, which, in turn, is reached through the study (διανοεῖσθαι, v. 22) of Law and Wisdom (ἃ προσετάγη σοι; πλείονα γὰρ συνέσεως ἀνθρώπων ὑπεδείχθη σοι, v. 23).

In 3:24b, דמיון signifies “thoughts” and with רעות, “wrong thoughts”. דמיון also appears in Ps 17:12 and in 1QM 6:13, but in the meaning “similarity”. The translator renders this idea with ὑπόνοια (πονηρά), “(wrong) suspicion,

¹⁰¹ It occurs very rarely that in a nominal clause the adjectival predicate does not accord with the gender of its subject, as at Ex 17:12; see Joüon-Muraoka § 148b.

conjecture, guess,”¹⁰²—thus a word with a similar kind of connotation to that of ὑπόλη(μ)ψις in the preceding line—characterized then with πονηρά, “wrong”, thus reproducing faithfully the original.¹⁰³ There are only 3 additional occurrences of ὑπόνοια in the Septuagint (Dan 4:19, 33β; 5:6), where it renders the Aramaic word ܢܝܘܢܐ, “thought”. Again a Hebrew plural is converted to a Greek singular. ὑπόνοια has a connotation of real “meaning which lies behind the surface level of a thing,” i.e., the deeper sense, particularly the allegorical interpretation of the myths. This word corresponds very well to the goal of the text, which argues against the false revealing of covert meaning in the tradition (see for instance, Sir 15:7-8, 32:17, 34:7-8, 36:24).

The last term of the line, διανοίας αὐτῶν, seems not to have a direct equivalent in the *Vorlage*. The possessive pronoun αὐτῶν, however, refers again to the בְּנֵי אֱסָו of v. 23b. Meanwhile, διανοίας is the object required by the verb ὀλισθάνειν, in its causative sense (“cause to slip”),¹⁰⁴ derived from the context. ὑπόλη(μ)ψις and ὑπόνοια signify the way in which something is perceived or regarded, thus connoting “thought”—διανοία comes to mind—which is the most obvious entity on which these concepts bear.¹⁰⁵ As an object, διανοία occurs in the plural just as πολλοὺς does in the previous clause, which allows the reading that the singular concepts (even if interpreted collectively) ὑπόλη(μ)ψις or ὑπόνοια have an effect on the plural concepts, on each individual member of a class of διανοίας or πολλοὺς. As

¹⁰² The translator of the Greek Psalter has associated the root ܢܘܢܐ, “to be like, resemble; imagine, think, intend,” with the notion of assuming, understanding, while using as equivalent the verb ὑπολαμβάνειν, “to take up (Ps 16(17):12); to take up (a notion), assume, suppose (Ps 49(50):21), understand, conceive (Ps 47(48):10)”. I have followed here the translation of Albert Pietersma in his NETS translation of the Greek Psalter.

¹⁰³ One might suggest that the translator did not know the meaning of ܢܝܘܢܐ or of ܢܝܘܢܐ. However, this option does not appear to me to be plausible, seeing that the translator arrived at the translation we have seen.

¹⁰⁴ The translation without accusative object would have produced a nonsensical phrase. ὀλισθάνειν appears, in Greek Ben Sira, always as denoting action one should avoid (9:9), in particular, slips of the tongue (14:1, 19:16, 21:7, 25:8, 28:26).

¹⁰⁵ διανοία is also found in 22:17 and 29:17, of which no Hebrew text has been preserved.

noted already in regard to v. 22, the passage under discussion has some terminological reminiscence of the flood narrative in its Greek form; in this case, Gen 8:21, ὅτι ἔγκειται ἡ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ πονηρὰ ἐκ νεότητος, comes to mind (see also Gen 6:5).

In conclusion, we surmise the *Vorlage* and its translation to be as follows:

כי רבים עשתוני בני אדם – Indeed, many are the thoughts/opinions/speculations of the sons of man,

ודמיונות רעות מתעות – and wrong thoughts/opinions lead one astray (< are misleading).

πολλοὺς γὰρ ἐπλάνησεν ἡ ὑπόληψις αὐτῶν – For, their suppositions/opinions lead many astray,

καὶ ὑπόνοια πονηρὰ ὠλίσθησεν διανοίας αὐτῶν – and their wrong conceptions/assumptions/thoughts made one to slip on their thoughts.

The Greek translator carries on the theme of the preceding verse, that the knowledge of human beings other than that of the author and of the receptive members of his implied audience is inferior to the wisdom presented in his book (the one commanded and shown to the students of wisdom). He underlines the suspect character of their knowledge by applying terminology that is often employed to describe opposing views in Greek philosophical discourse. Here, again the interpretation of the translator is open to the Hellenistic Jewish environment of the contemporary Greek-speaking world of Egypt. He uses the vocabulary of an educated Greek of Egypt. The ὑπολή(μ)ψεις or ὑπόνοιαι of that world have a particular meaning for the translator. They differ to some extent from the ὑπολή(μ)ψεις or ὑπόνοιαι of contemporary Palestine or those of Ben Sira. To be able to tell more precisely the content of these ὑπολή(μ)ψεις or ὑπόνοιαι requires study of the rest of the book of Ben Sira for which there is no space in this study.

Conclusions

This study, I hope, has demonstrated that the *Vorlage* of the Greek translator resembles the Hebrew text of MS A in the passage under examination. On the other hand, although MS C does not represent a translation of the G text, the divergent readings of MS C (from those of MS A) are partly retranslations of the G and partly dependent on the Hebrew textual tradition (here represented by MS A). The differences in MS A and the G that we have encountered may be explained as copying errors, expansions in the textual tradition of the book, or the results of the translator's interpretation of his source text. It must, nevertheless, be kept in mind that this study is based only on limited material from the text of Ben Sira, and an analysis of more extensive material might change the results.

The translator has adapted his text to the Greek Hellenistic cultural environment of the Jewish community in Egypt. He endeavours to speak of the subject matter in more "Greek" terms, and his smoother and subtler use of language may be seen as an attempt to produce a forceful and persuasive text for the Greek speaking audience familiar with such an approach. This observation agrees with what is stated in the Prologue to the Greek translation, where the efficacy (22: δύναμις) of the text produced is seen as one of its intended results. The choice of equivalents shows familiarity with the language used in intellectual disputes in Greek. His rhetoric is not as absolute as in the Hebrew original; what in Hebrew was impossible is in Greek to some extent possible, although futile, undesirable, and marked by hubris, e.g., the search for secret and too difficult knowledge.

The translator is not very specific in his characterization of the matters the addressee should not study. Nor does he manifest a conception that his source text argues against esoteric or apocalyptic knowledge. Wisdom is

revealed to Ben Sira in the same way as the Law; the addressee should be humble and meek enough to study this wisdom and the Law and not the unnecessary knowledge that is mere human speculation, conjecture, and supposition, as well as being inferior to the Law and wisdom taught by Ben Sira. To be able to characterize his opponents and the cultural environment more clearly necessitates further study that examines all the material.

This study has also made clear how much, how delicately, and in such small detail the translation can differ from the meaning of the Hebrew source text. It has also demonstrated the problematic nature of the use of the Greek text as evidence for Ben Sira's thinking in the parts of the book where the Hebrew text has not been preserved. The Greek text does not necessarily reflect the original meaning expressed by Ben Sira: it is a translation and should be used as a translation.

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