BEN SIRA 43:11b - "TO WHAT DOES THE GREEK CORRESPOND?"

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The book of the Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sir), written in Hebrew about 200–180 BCE, has survived in Hebrew in the fragments of five manuscripts discovered among the Cairo Geniza materials, in a fragmentary scroll from Masada, and in a few scraps from Qumran (2Q18). These extant fragments often show a broad diversity of text and consequently present a complicated and sometimes bewildering picture to the text critic.

Since the discoveries of the Hebrew fragments, attempts to reconstruct Ben Sira’s Hebrew have largely been based on these extant Hebrew materials used in conjunction with the Greek translation of Sir and the Old Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures. Indeed, the Greek of Sir, having been translated by Ben Sira’s grandson, witnesses to a form of the Hebrew text circulating within about sixty-five years of the composition of the book. It thus frequently provides valuable assistance in the process of retroverting Ben Sira’s Hebrew. However, one must proceed cautiously in this enterprise because the value of the grandson’s translation as a basis for retroverting the Hebrew can only be measured in direct relation to how closely the grandson follows his Hebrew Vorlage at any point.

1Part of Sir 51 survives in the Psalms scroll found in Cave 11 at Qumran. This text, however, is clearly not part of Ben Sira at Qumran and its text frequently is different from that of Cairo Ms B and from what the Greek seems to presuppose as its Vorlage. Further, some citations from the book survive in the Talmudic corpus, but these are mostly paraphrastic in nature. For 11QPatio see J. A. Sanders, The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11, DJD 4 (Oxford 1965). For the rabbinic quotations see Solomon Schechter, "The Quotations from Ecclesiasticus in Rabbinic Literature," JQR 3 (1890-1891) 682-706.

2For a detailed discussion of both the methodological and practical problems of retroverting the Hebrew Vorlage of a Greek translation, see E. Tov, The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research (Jerusalem 1981).

3The "free" or "literal" nature of the Greek translation of Ben Sira is discussed in my Uni-
In some cases, where the grandson provides a close rendering of his grandfather's Hebrew, the combination of his use of a Greek term and the use of the same term in the Old Greek scriptures may provide helpful clues in reconstructing his Hebrew Vorlage. One particularly interesting example in this regard is Sir 43:11b.

**TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS**

ראת קשת וברק עשהיך כי корד נמאד (Ms B)

"Behold the rainbow and bless the one who created it, for it is exceedingly majestic (in splendor?)"

נהדרת (Ms B[mg])

ראה קשת וברק עשהיך כי корד נמאד (Masada)

Behold the rainbow and bless the one who created it, for it is exceedingly splendorous (in splendor?)

לי תיתם ואלункциון יוהני פולייזנטא אומי, אוריאב וראיוın אינ תיה אונחיאמטי אנטוג

Behold the rainbow and bless the one who created it, extremely beautiful in its brightness.

Two manuscripts are partially extant for the Hebrew of this verse. Both break off near the end of the line and one (Cairo Ms B) has a marginal correction. Ms B contains the entire verse up until נמאד נ_HELPER[1]. Here the text breaks off although two letters, ד, extend past the lacuna. For colon b Ms B(mg) has נ_HELPER[1] instead of נמאד נ_HELPER[1]. The Hebrew Ben Sira scroll discovered at Masada, like Ms B, is partially extant for this verse. It also contains the entire verse up to the word נמאד נ_HELPER[1] where

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5The Masada text is that of Yigael Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada* (Jerusalem 1965).

6The Greek text follows that of J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, Vetus Testamentum Graecum, XII, 2 (Göttingen 1965).
the text breaks off. (See above for the full Greek and Hebrew texts.) The major quantitative difference between the Greek and Hebrew seems to be the lack of any Greek for ἴν. However, it appears that the grandson, rather than make a separate clause, turned Hebrew colon b into a Greek adjectival phrase describing τοῦ. The τοῦ at the end of the verse may be parallel to τοῦ at the end of the first colon. The final prepositional phrase in Greek, ἐν τῷ ἀψιματι τοῦ, represents the missing Hebrew in the lacuna of the two Hebrew manuscripts. In a review of Yigael Yadin's The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada, John Strugnell, after suggesting some possibilities for reconstructing the lacuna in the Masada scroll and seeming somewhat uncertain as to the Hebrew in this space, asks the question, "To what does the Greek correspond?" In the following paragraphs I hope to give a plausible answer to Strugnell's question.

Since the facsimile of Ms B7 clearly shows ב at the end of the verse, the major commentators and editions have reconstructed the lacuna with one of two Hebrew prepositional phrases, either דבכ or דוהב, usually paying little attention to the Greek text of the grandson and often without further substantive comment. A. E. Cowley and A. Neubauer in their initial publication of Ms B, as well as Rudolph Smend in his classic commentary, reconstruct דבכ. They are followed in this reading by M. H. Segal and Yadin. Smend thinks that he can reconstruct a bet in Ms B preceding the Hebrew letters ב but the facsimile only shows a small seraph on the lower left corner of the lacuna. However, given the style of the script, in which the he is made somewhat irregularly, this partial letter could be either a he or a bet and thus provides no conclusive evidence for a reconstruction. I. Lévi, followed by N. Peters and by G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley in R. H. Charles' Apocrypha, reconstructs דוהב. Of the more recent editions of the Hebrew, that of the Hebrew Language Academy has דבכ fol-


lowing Smend in reading a partial bet. F. Vattioni, who follows the text of I. Lévi, has נֶחָד in his text. Finally, Strugnell, accepting the reading בְּכֵנָד in Ms B, disagrees with Yadin’s reconstruction of this phrase at Masada and suggests חַנָּד or perhaps חַנָּד נֶחָד. Clearly, no consensus has been reached by scholars on what Ben Sira wrote at the end of this verse. However, Strugnell’s question, which focuses on the Greek, provides an important direction for resolving the problem. Whereas all the commentators seem to have an opinion on the reconstruction of the Hebrew text, the only substantial comment on the Greek comes from Smend who writes that the Greek “ist wohl freie übersetzung um nicht zweimal nach einander δήξα (vgl. v. 12) zu gebrauchen”. This conclusion, however, is totally based on Smend’s reconstruction of בְּכֵנָד in the lacuna of Ms B. Throughout his translation, the grandson uses δήξα almost exclusively to translate בְּכֵנָד. If were not the Hebrew Vorlage of the grandson, it would be unlikely that he would use δήξα at the end of 11b at all. Further, whereas Smend argues that the grandson used αὐξασμα to avoid using δήξα twice, I would argue that the appearance of the Hebrew בְּכֵנָד at the beginning of 12a (translated δήξας by the grandson) makes it unlikely that the same phrase appeared in Hebrew at the end of 11b. As a result Smend’s remark does not bring us nearer to a solution of what the Greek represents. Consideration of the use of the term αὐξασμα in the Jewish Greek scriptures will, I believe, ultimately provide the solution.

In the Old Greek αὐξασμα occurs only twice (Lev 13:38,39), with reference to leprous spots on the skin.13 There it is used to translate the Hebrew בהר which means "bright spots," the Hebrew noun being derived from the root בהר, "be bright, shine."14 I would argue that Ben Sira’s grandson had בהר in his Hebrew text which he took as either בהרי or possibly בהרי, a prepositional phrase

10F. Vattioni, Ecclesiastico - Testo ebraico con apparato critico e versioni greca, latina e sirica (Naples 1968) 233.


12Smend, 405.


describing the rainbow. This certainly would not be a difficult error to make. The mistaking or exchange of a daleth for a resh is a well known phenomenon in the Jewish Greek scriptures. The difficulty of distinguishing yod and waw in the Masada scroll has been amply illustrated by Yadin and the Geniza manuscripts of Ben Sira contain a Hebrew text apparently copied from manuscripts found in the Dead Sea area in which the yod and waw were indistinguishable.¹⁵

An examination of the manuscripts themselves also supports this conclusion. Even though Smend reconstructs ד"ה, a reconstruction which is followed blindly by many scholars, the lacuna in Ms B does not seem to allow for it. The word ד"ה is easily readable with the lower portion of the he visible under the beginning of the lacuna. The letters bet and kaph in Ms B are both elongated letters and the letters ד"ה at the beginning of ד"ה do not appear to fit in the available space. However, the letters ד"ה at the beginning of ד"ה would fit well. The inconsistent manner in which the left leg of the he is made in this manuscript could well account for the very small seraph visible at the left side of the lacuna. In light of this situation, I do not understand Yadin's unelaborated comment that after an examination of the facsimile of Ms B he does not think that the reconstruction of ד"ה is plausible.¹⁶ In the Masada scroll, the lacuna begins at almost the same place as in Ms B from the Geniza. I agree with Strugnell against Yadin that there seems to be a clear word break after ד"ה. Some traces of letters appear above the space, but they cannot be readily deciphered. Consequently, the Masada scroll supplies no additional evidence for any reconstruction of the Hebrew Vorlage of the Greek.¹⁷

In summary, the combined weight of the evidence from the Greek translation and the examination of the Hebrew manuscripts makes it more probable that the Hebrew text of Ben Sira had ד"ה rather than ד"ה. The Greek αὐτοῦ need not be summarily shunted to the side by claiming, with Smend, that the grandson was trying to avoid using δέξα twice. When one considers the number of times

¹⁵According to A. A. DiLella, the difficulty is the result of a medieval discovery of Hebrew manuscripts of Ben Sira at Qumran or its environs. The medieval scribes who copied these old manuscripts had trouble distinguishing yod from waw. See A. A. DiLella, The Hebrew Text of Ben Sira (The Hague 1966) 97-101.

¹⁶Yadin, 31.

¹⁷Yadin, according to Strugnell's note (117, n.19), "doubts the word break after ד"ה." See above for Strugnell's suggested reconstructions of the Masada Hebrew.
that the commentators on Ben Sira appeal to the Old Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures to try to reconstruct the Hebrew of Ben Sira, it seems unfortunate that they did not do so here. For Sir 43:11b, where the preserved Hebrew is fragmentary and ambiguous, the Greek of Ben Sira’s grandson gives the best clues from which to proceed.