STEPHEN ARDEN LONG

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To Kathryn

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List of Abbreviations

BDB	*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. *Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius as Translated by Edward Robinson*. Edited by Francis Brown, with the cooperation of S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon, 1952.
Gesenius	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch. Second English edition, revised by A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1902.
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 2 volumes. By Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. Revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
Jastrow	*A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. By Marcus Jastrow. 2 volumes. New York: G. R. Putnam's Sons, 1903.
LSJ	*Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*. Compiled by Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott. Revised by Henry S. Jones. Ninth, supplemented edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
Payne Smith	*A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*. Edited by J. Payne Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903. [Reprinted: Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998.]
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum; Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*. Edited by Theodor Klauser et al. Multiple volumes. Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1950–2021.
Waltke-O'Connor	*Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. By Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and *Status Quaestionis*

"Exchange is interesting," noted the British anthropologist John Davis,

> because it is the chief means by which useful things move from one person to another; because it is an important way in which people create and maintain social hierarchy; because it is a richly symbolic activity – all exchanges have got a social meaning; and because…it is an important source of metaphors about social relations, about social order, about the fundamental processes of nature.[1]

For modern Westerners, "exchange" has come to denote especially the realm of market transaction. This contrasts, anthropologists frequently inform us, with pre-industrial non-market economies, in which gift exchange played a more pervasive role in social interaction, involving the total social personalities of the exchangers.[2] It is not as if, in these "non-market economies," *nothing* can be alienated via transactions that foster no further personal ties between the exchangers: to the contrary, careful investigation reveals that such economies have concepts of "sale" much like our own. Rather, the point is that exchanges in such societies often mix considerations of "altruism" and "self-interest" in ways that are not identical with our own, and that such relations play a more extensive role in social organization. What characterizes such relations above all is "reciprocity": a remarkably slippery term in sociological and anthropological literature, but one that will be used in this study to emphasize that "the exchange is *overtly*, in ideology and in performance, motivated by generosity, even if, more or less covertly, enlightened self-interest or even outright egoism features quite largely."[3] In other words, gifts *oblige*, though it has proven remarkably difficult for modern social-scientific observers to explain just *why* they do so. Precisely this ability of gift exchange to produce social ties

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[1] John Davis, *Exchange* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 1. To offer just one example of exchange shaping thought about (divine-human) social relations, cf. the function of *debt* imagery in later biblical conceptualizations of "sin," as traced by Gary Anderson in *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[2] John Davis, *Exchange*, 6–7.

[3] Hans van Wees, "The Law of Gratitude: Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. Christopher Gill, Normal Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13–49 (here page 19).

and obligations makes it an extremely fertile field of social-scientific investigation.[4]

Tracing the symbolic, moral, legal, and ritual meanings of gift exchange can illumine much about a given society's social structure. Accordingly, studies of Greco-Roman literary sources – including the New Testament – focused on personal patronage, civic patronage ("euergetism"), friendship, "benefaction" and/or "gratitude" (and so on) have become a cottage industry.[5] Other periods and literatures have ridden the same wave of interest.[6] However, there is far less written about exchange or reciprocity in either pre- or post-exilic Israelite literature and society.[7] This is due in part to the different nature of the extant literary sources (i.e., there is no extant Hebrew oratory – such as we have from classical Athens – for scholars to mine), and perhaps also to other cultural distinctives as well.[8]

Given the relative dearth of biblical sources, one might have expected more interest in what the wisdom instruction of Ben Sira has to say about gift exchange and reciprocity: this Hellenistic Jewish author provides some of the most extensive literary evidence available for the period, and has a fair bit to say about these topics in particular. Moreover, the book of Sirach is a crucial source in the development of distinctively Jewish ideas about charity, so that the continuing presence of reciprocal expectations within its instructions raises

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[4] The literature is simply vast. See the bibliographies of the works cited in the next two footnotes.

[5] To cite only a few examples, cf. Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Sitta von Reden, *Exchange in Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 1995); Christopher Gill, Normal Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford, eds., *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Michael Satlow, ed., *The Gift in Antiquity* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and David Arthur deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: IntervarsityPress, 2000).

[6] Again, to cite just a few ready examples: see the work of Gregg E. Gardner (*The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* [Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2015]) on early Rabbinic sources, of Natalie Z. Davis (*The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000]) on early modern France, and of Peter J. Leithart (*Gratitude: An Intellectual History* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014]) for a general survey.

[7] There are some studies available: see, for example, the essays in the *Semeia* issue (volume 87 [1999]) devoted to sociological approaches to biblical literature. See also Roger S. Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, BINS 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[8] In his *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), Seth Schwartz has argued that the foundational document of ancient Judaism, the Pentateuch, actually aimed to reduce or neutralize the role of gift exchange. The claim is disputable, however, and will be scrutinized in more detail in Chapter 6 below.

some rather interesting questions about the relationship of charity and reciprocity. Surprisingly, however, very few studies are attentive to the dynamics of gift-giving and obligation in Ben Sira's thought. To my knowledge, there exists only one study of any appreciable length on gift exchange and reciprocity in Sirach: Seth Schwartz's 2010 monograph *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism*. Schwartz devotes one chapter to Ben Sira, but he examines the major texts in less than ten pages and omits a detailed text-critical discussion.[9] His attention to proper literary delimitation of the passages cited is somewhat loose, there is little effort to interpret any passage in terms of its larger literary context, and there is no serious attempt to investigate the overall coherence of the sage's thoughts on the topic (e.g., only two passing references are made to Ben Sira's important discussion of generosity in Sirach 29). Schwartz's exploratory essay cannot be the final word on the topic.

Oda Wischmeyer's monograph from 1995, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach*, contains a valuable entry on Hellenistic practices of gift-giving with reference to the interpretation of Ben Sira.[10] The discussion is brief and suggestive, but in no way comprehensive.

An interesting and highly relevant group of monographs are those addressing the topics of "generosity," "charity," and "redemptive almsgiving" in early Jewish tradition. Of most direct relevance for this study is Bradley Gregory's thorough and admirable study on the theme of "generosity" in Sirach, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach* (2010), which touches occasionally on gift exchange and examines several of the same passages that I do in the chapters below.[11] Gregory's exegesis of Sirach 29 is likely the definitive treatment of that chapter, and proves especially important for my discussion in Chapter 5. However, as I will observe in the course of my own exegesis, Gregory's thematic focus on relatively unilateral generosity ("charity") should be balanced by further attention to more *reciprocal* generosity: more remains to be said, I think, about "reciprocity" and "gift exchange" in the sage's wisdom instruction.

The treatments of Gary Anderson (*Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* [2013]) and Anthony Giambrone (*Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke's Gospel* [2017]) both cite and accept Gregory's exegesis, while using the results for purposes

[9] Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society*, 58–67.

[10] Oda Wischmeyer, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach*, BZNW 77 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 109.

[11] Bradley Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

uniquely their own.[12] While Anderson's work on charity will be used in Chapter 5 as part of my reflections on the relationship of intra-human reciprocity and charity, he pursues other connections than those of interest here. David Downs's recent *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (2016) pursues a cluster of interests resembling those of this study: building on the observation that gift-giving in antiquity presumed strong expectations of a return from the recipient, Downs attempts to trace how almsgiving came to have "atoning" connotations shaped by "scriptural traditions."[13] Downs is eager to emphasize that Ben Sira's teaching on "charity" is really about receiving a return on a purely human level, and thus he rejects what he sees as key claims of Gregory's exegesis. While I think that Downs is onto something with the claim that "normal" expectations of intra-human reciprocity do remain in place for Ben Sira, his treatment nevertheless underplays a key component of the sage's teaching: God is ultimately the one who repays, for Ben Sira, so that even "mundane" repayment is finally subsumed in a sacral logic.

In summary, although several monographs have provided brief entries or scattered remarks devoted to gift exchange in the book of Sirach, no thorough, text-critically grounded study has been carried out on this topic to date. Such a study remains a desideratum, since configurations of gift exchange shed light on social norms and structures. Since, as I will argue, both reciprocity and charity are operative in the "social imaginary" of Ben Sira, this study aims to illumine the relationship of two possibly conflicting ideals.

1.2 Historical, Social, and Sectarian Setting of Ben Sira

1.2.1 Date of Composition for Sirach

The writing of Ben Sira's wisdom instruction was complete by about 180 BCE.[14] This date is only a *terminus ad quem*: from the author's description of the scribal task, involving the assembly and study of proverbs, and also from

[12] Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); and Anthony Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke's Gospel*, WUNT 2/439 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck). Less relevant for my purposes here but still highly relevant with regard to issues of debt, forgiveness, and charity, see also Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, BZNW 196 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013).

[13] David Downs, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016).

[14] The paragraph above rehearses material set out many times in the secondary literature. See Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira. A New Translation with Notes, Introduction and Commentary*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 8–9; and Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 23.

statements about his own authorial and didactic activities mentioned at 24:30–34, 33:16–18, and 51:13–22, it seems likely that the book is the product of considerable labor, and parts of it may have been written much earlier in Ben Sira's lifetime. However, a date of completion by around 180 BCE is based on the following considerations. First, the praise for the high priest Simon in 50:1–24 probably refers to the Simon who held office from 219–196 BCE.[15] References to events taking place "in his generation" (בדורו) or "in his days" (בימיו) likely suggest that those days were past and that Simon was no longer alive when the panegyric was composed.[16] Further, nothing in the book suggests any knowledge of the rise of Antiochus IV, nor of the conflicts in Jerusalem that resulted (175–164 BCE). Thus, a date between 196 and 175 BCE seems reasonable. A similar date is suggested also by the grandson's preface to his Greek translation. Here the grandson states that he arrived in Egypt in the 38th year of Ptolemy Euergetes (i.e., 132 BCE), and he seems to imply that he translated the grandfather's book after the king's death (117 BCE). Assuming that the grandson was an adult when he moved to Egypt, and that the grandfather's prime was about fifty years earlier, we again arrive at a date of approximately 180 BCE.[17]

1.2.2 Historical Setting

Given the dating above, it is clear that Ben Sira finished his text in the early years of Seleucid control over Judea, while his early decades were likely spent in a Jerusalem whose political circumstances were conditioned by Ptolemaic rule. Unfortunately, only slender sources are available for the reconstruction of social and political life in Judea around this period.[18] The following is a rough outline of what seems probable.

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[15] Whether this was Simon surnamed "the Just" is open to question: cf. James VanderKam, "Simon the Just. Simon I or Simon II?," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells. Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. D. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 303–18. In light of VanderKam's argument, I acknowledge the tenuousness of the commonly held dating of Simon's priesthood (219–196 BCE) mentioned in the paragraph above.

[16] Differently Lindsey Askin ("Beyond Encomium or Eulogy: The Role of Simon the High Priest in the *Book of Ben Sira*," *JAJ* 9.3 [2018]: 344–65), who argues that Sirach 50 has features suggestive of a tribute to a *living* patron.

[17] Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 23.

[18] More specifically: the main literary resources at our disposal are the Zenon papyri, the "Tobiad romance" found in Josephus's *Antiquities* (Book 12.154–236), the decree of Antiochus III also recorded in *Antiquities* 12.138–144, and the Hefzibah inscription of about 195 BCE. See Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 2: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 52–53, 56–57, 68–78, and (especially) 322–29 for discussion.

Syro-Palestine was under Ptolemaic control during most of the third century BCE.[19] In contrast to the earlier Persian practice, the Ptolemies did not appoint governors specifically to supervise affairs in Judea with a military garrison at their disposal.[20] Nor did the Ptolemies *actively* back the temple-state: rather, they simply let it remain in place so long as revenues were forthcoming.[21] Though such decisions might appear to have strengthened the position of the high priest at the head of the temple-state in Jerusalem – since he could now operate without the direct oversight of an imperial governor – it also left more room for power struggles within the aristocracy of Jerusalem.[22] What kernel of historical truth is to be found in Josephus's embellished account in the "Tobiad romance" of *Antiquities* Book 12 concerns such jockeying for power. Two details in particular stand out: first, it appears that the prominent Tobiad family had intermarried with the family of the high-priestly Oniads. Second, the specific occasion for a power struggle arose from the Ptolemaic practice of "tax-farming," or taking bids from local power brokers who guaranteed a certain level of taxes and were allowed to keep the extracted excess as their "profit."[23] According to Josephus's account, the shrewd Tobiad Joseph outmaneuvered the high priest Onias – who had withheld tribute from the Ptolemaic king – and outbid all rivals for the tax-farming rights and *prostasia* in Judea.[24]

It may be that the proximate cause for this particular episode arose from imperial politics. Horsley has suggested that one plausible explanation for Onias's withholding of tribute was that he was actually pro-Seleucid: on the chronology that makes best sense of the episode (i.e., in the late 220s), Antiochus III was advancing into Syria-Palestine, and it was "simple political-economic realism for local rulers and other magnates to gauge the winds of imperial fortune, and to be prepared to shift loyalties with changes in imperial regimes."[25] On this particular occasion, the high priest calculated wrongly: Antiochus was rebuffed and the Ptolemies held on to their territory in Syria-Palestine for another twenty years. But in any case, the expansion of Tobiad power likely "relativized that of the high priest and prepared the way for further maneuvering by rival factions within the Jerusalem aristocracy, just at a time when the rivalry between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid imperial regimes was coming

[19] For the history of the third century BCE, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 288–301.

[20] Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 35.

[21] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 36.

[22] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 35–36.

[23] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 37.

[24] See Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 37–41. Note that *prostasia* may not be a technical term for a formal office, so much as it designates leadership or representation vis-à-vis the imperial regime (*Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 40).

[25] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 40.

to a head."[26] The unpredictable fault-lines in this aristocratic rivalry are illustrated by the second half of the Tobiad romance, where Joseph's youngest son, Hyrcanus, outdoes even his father's ambition and skill in jockeying for influence at the Ptolemaic court. Having lavished large amounts of wealth on gifts for the king and his advisers in order to gain favor for himself at court, Hyrcanus returns to Jerusalem only to meet open hostility from his father and brothers and is forced to retreat across the Jordan, to the traditional power-base of the Tobiads. This episode interestingly pits Oniads and Tobiads against a Tobiad, and it may be that the actions of the characters once again had causes in the larger imperial-political context:

> It is inviting to juxtapose this information gleaned from the Tobiad romance with that gained from other sources, especially because Hyrcanus's maneuvering in the Ptolemaic court and conflict with his brothers appears to have taken place just before Antiochus III's campaign to take control of Syria-Palestine. His brothers, who engaged him in battle when he returned from Jerusalem and made common cause with the Oniad high priest Simon, could hardly have displaced him in Ptolemaic favor. Indeed Hyrcanus's aggressive maneuvering in the Ptolemaic regime may have helped drive the other Tobiads toward the Seleucids even before it was clear that the latter would take over Syria-Palestine.[27]

These conjectures, if true, complicate characterizations of the third century as a time of relative peace and stability for the Jews of Ptolemaic Palestine.[28]

The victory of Antiochus III at Panium in 200 BCE finally secured Seleucid rule in the region, though Ptolemaic garrisons in various locations still had to be dealt with.[29] The Seleucids apparently reverted to the Perisan practice of explicit support for the Jerusalem temple-state as the principle instrument of imperial control.[30] It seems that after the Seleucid takeover, Judea was "ruled by the Jerusalem aristocracy, mainly priestly, and headed by a chief priest, only now with less rivalry from a powerful tax-farmer in charge of imperial revenues."[31] Josephus claims that the Jews went over to Antiochus during his advance into the region, admitting him to their city and supplying provisions for his army (*Antiquities* 12.3.3, sections 132–33). However, evidence derived from Porphyry also suggests that there had been, in reality, different factions

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[26] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 41.

[27] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 43.

[28] Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 313. In any case, at least three of the so-called Syrian Wars, fought between the Seleucids and Ptolemies, were carried out within the plausible dates of Ben Sira's lifetime. The relevant Syrian Wars are the third (246–241 BCE), the fourth (221–217 BCE), and the fifth (202–199 BCE). Note that Grabbe (*A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*) gives the dates of the fourth Syrian War as 219–217 BCE on pages 291 and 298, but 221–217 BCE on page 317.

[29] Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 322.

[30] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 44.

[31] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 45.

in Jerusalem, the bulk of Jews being pro-Seleucid but with some who favored the Ptolemies.[32] Damage to the city of Jerusalem, which a decree of Antiochus recorded in Josephus aimed to ameliorate, was perhaps sustained by fighting among these factions.[33] While it seems unlikely that precisely the same fault-lines continued to exist after the Seleucid take-over, we can infer from the combined evidence of the Tobiad romance and the events at the time of Antiochus's successful invasion of Palestine that the ruling aristocracy of Jerusalem could be divided into factions – a situation which the young Ben Sira might have known first-hand.[34]

1.2.3 Ben Sira's Social Location

According to the grandson's translation, Ben Sira resided in Jerusalem (50:27). Society as Ben Sira saw or projected it – as well as Ben Sira's own position within it – has to be inferred from comments scattered throughout his wisdom instructions. Above all, we are dependent on the sketch provided in 38:24–39:11. Here Ben Sira contrasts the vocation of various craftsmen – plowmen, engravers, smiths, and potters (38:25–30) – with the scribal profession (38:34b–11). Although the former are admittedly skilled, are indispensable to city life, and are assured of a stable livelihood,[35] they cannot compare with the scribe. The scribe alone has the leisure required for study and the attaining of wisdom (38:24; 38:34b–39:3). He serves in the midst of "the great," appears before rulers, and also travels (on embassies?, 39:4). In contrast with the artisans just mentioned, the scribe is sought out for participation in a "council of the people," is prominent in the assembly, and serves as a judge (38:32–33).

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[32] Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 323.

[33] For the various measures in the decree and their plausibility in terms of other documents that survive from the reign of Antiochus III, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 323–27.

[34] In some contrast to the paragraphs above, compare the revisionary account of the period offered by Sylvie Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochus IV* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 297–315. Honigman criticizes the supposed division of Judean society under Antiochus III into pro-Seleucid and pro-Ptolemaic "parties." Be that as it may, she nevertheless concedes that, "The political culture of Judea [of this period] may be characterized as aristocratic politics: powerful families feuding with one another for prestige and power" (page 313). For reservations about Honigman's project, see the review of her book by John Collins in *JJS* 66 (2015): 205–9.

[35] I.e., they will "not go hungry" as per the Syriac: cf. G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," in volume 1 of *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, with Introductions and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 268–517, here page 454 (note that this work is henceforth cited as "Box and Oesterley, *Sirach*," along with the relevant page number); and Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 446 and 448.

The glowing terms for scribal activity found in 38:34b–39:11, together with the apparent correspondence between the scribe's dual preoccupation (with "the law of the Most High" and with seeking out proverbial material, 38:34b–39:3) and the actual contents of Ben Sira's own book, have convinced most scholars that Ben Sira is describing his own profession. Thus, Ben Sira views himself as stationed above skilled artisans,[36] yet also distinguishes himself from the "rulers" (mentioned in 39:4).

This initial sketch can be supplemented with several further considerations. First, Ben Sira repeatedly implies that his addressees either stood or hoped to stand "before" or "in the assembly of" a ruling class designated as "elders" (6:34: πρεσβύτεροι, no extant Hebrew), "princes" (7:14: following the Hebrew שרים, where the Greek reads πρεσβύτεροι; cf. 8:8: שרים/μεγιστᾶνες), "rulers" (39:4: ἡγούμενοι, no extant Hebrew[37]), and "great ones" (39:4: μεγιστᾶνες). Elsewhere, the "great man" (איש גדול, 8:1) is also the *rich* one (איש לו הון, 8:2).[38] On the other end of the spectrum must have stood the great majority of the populace, occupied in agriculture like the ploughman mentioned in 38:25–26. It may be going too far to assimilate this majority of the populace with "the poor" mentioned in 8:1–10; yet it is likely that they normally made do with limited means (29:21–22), had the most need of financial assistance (29:1–8), and that it was from their land – and with the product of their labor – that the temple establishment was largely funded (7:29–31; 45:20–22).[39] Finally, somewhere between these extremes must be placed physicians (38:1–15) as well as merchants (26:29–27:2, 37:11, and 42:5).[40]

Ben Sira himself never clarifies how the figures designated by the various terms for rulership related to one another. It is likely, however, that the terms

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[36] It is appropriate to be at least a little cautious about accepting this picture: it may be as much projection as reality. See below.

[37] Cf. 38:33. In the last clause we read that artisans are not found ἐν παραβολαῖς. As Skehan and Di Lella (*Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 448) note, this is likely a misreading of *bĕmōšĕlîm* ("among rulers") as though it were *bĕmāšĕlîm* ("in parables").

[38] There are textual problems with the verse. Reading with the first half of 8:1 in manuscript A (the second half is a doublet), and reading with the marginal *qere* on verse 8:2 (לו rather than לא): cf. Box and Oesterley, *Sirach*, 342.

[39] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 58. Horsley's discussion lumps agricultural workers, slaves, and the poor together. In one sense, this is fair: these are all attested in texts of Ben Sira, and from comparative evidence it would seem that, in agrarian societies, such groups together constitute about 90 percent of a population. However, Horsley tends to *conflate* these groups, and stresses the precariousness of "peasant" life more than what I think the literary sources actually warrant.

[40] Contrary to statements sometimes encountered, there is no reason to think that the merchants criticized in 26:29–27:2 are the same as the wealthy mentioned in other contexts (rightly observed by Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 58).

all referred to the *same* aristocratic figures, and that this aristocracy was predominantly *priestly*.[41] The repeated intermarriage of the Tobiads with the high-priestly family supports the inference that the socio-political as well as the religious authority lay in that quarter: ambitious aristocracy had to intermarry *there* in order to advance.

Ben Sira's Judea was a predominantly agrarian society.[42] Politically, as sketched above, it was organized as a temple-state.[43] In understanding the social dynamics at work in a temple-state such as Hellenistic Judea, Richard Horsley has plausibly borrowed from the comparative sociology of Gerhard Lenski.[44] On this adapted model, the fundamental political-economic relation lies between the rulers and the agricultural producers ("the peasantry"), who comprise the great majority of the people in an agrarian society.[45] The rulers (for Lenski, the official ruler together with the governing class) use part of what they extract from the peasantry,

> (1) to support a staff of military and legal-clerical 'retainers' through whom the society is governed, (2) to organize or support traders who obtain luxury and other goods the rulers desire, (3) to pay or support artisans who make the various products needed by the rulers and their retainers and supporters in the cities.[46]

The upshot is that "the retainers, merchants, and even the artisans are dependent upon, as well as subordinate to, the ruling class."[47] Lenski's scheme has a

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[41] See especially Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 63–65.

[42] Cf. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism: The Early Hellenistic Period*, 314, summarizing the conditions prevalent in the third century BCE: "We have less direct information on the Jews of Palestine [sc. than on those in Egypt], but it seems likely from archeology and past practice that the vast majority of Jews in Judah were engaged in agrarian activities."

[43] To repeat what was sketched above: Judea as a temple-state was the *de facto* organization under the Ptolemies, and the more or less intentional and *de jure* organization under the Seleucids.

[44] See Richard A. Horsley and Patrick Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple" in *Second Temple Studies III. Studies in Politics, Class, and Material Culture*, ed. Philip R. Davies and John M. Halligan, JSOTSup 340 (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 74–107, here pages 87–92. The work of Lenski is primarily that found in Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). I rely on Horsley and Tiller for the claims of Lenski. For similar appropriation of the work of Horsley and Tiller (and of the subsequent modifications by Horsley) as that made here, see Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 56–61.

[45] Horsley and Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 90.

[46] Horsley and Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 90.

[47] Horsley and Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 90. That this applies to Ben Sira's Judea is supported by details mentioned in the text: the artisan of 38:27 is making *luxury* goods (seals with engraved imagery). The physician attends kings and nobles (38:2–3). And trade, being a "virtual monopoly of the imperial regime" in the Ptolemaic

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