

ALMA BRODERSEN

The Beginning of
the Biblical Canon
and Ben Sira

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
162*

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

Edited by

Konrad Schmid (Zürich) · Mark S. Smith (Princeton)
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162



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and Ben Sira

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The prepress production of this book and the eBook were published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

ISBN 978-3-16-161599-3 / eISBN 978-3-16-161992-2
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-161992-2

ISSN 0940-4155 / eISSN 2568-8359 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was typeset by Martin Fischer in Tübingen using Minion typeface, printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen, and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier. Published by Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, Germany. www.mohrsiebeck.com.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

Questions about the beginning of the biblical canon and Ben Sira already came to my attention during my studies on Psalms which led to a doctorate at the University of Oxford in 2016 (published as *The End of the Psalter* by De Gruyter in 2017 and reprinted by Baylor University Press in 2018). The first steps towards the present study of the beginning of the biblical canon and Ben Sira were funded by the Agnes-Ament-Foundation Munich. Postdoctoral positions at LMU Munich from 2016 to 2019 and at the University of Bern since 2019 allowed me to complete it.

This book now presents a revised version of my *Habilitationsschrift* which was accepted by the Faculty of Protestant Theology of LMU Munich in January 2022. I am very grateful to Friedhelm Hartenstein (LMU Munich), who encouraged and supported the study in every possible way. He as well as Loren T. Stuckenbruck (LMU Munich), Markus Witte (Humboldt-Universität, Berlin), and Benjamin G. Wright (Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA) kindly served as its assessors for *Habilitation* at LMU Munich, and I am thankful for their detailed constructive feedback.

At LMU Munich, I took immense benefit from being a postdoctoral fellow at the Graduate School for Ancient Studies *Distant Worlds*, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), where I led an interdisciplinary group of doctoral students focussing on ancient norms. I am grateful to the scholars and staff at the Graduate School as well as the Faculty of Protestant Theology, the Faculty of Catholic Theology, and the Munich Center of Ancient Worlds (Münchner Zentrum für Antike Welten), especially Anne Friederike Becker, Katharina Herrmann, Martin Hose, Kathrin Liess, Jonathan Spanos, Verena Schulz, and Veronika Weidner. At the University of Bern, Andreas Wagner comprehensively supported my work even during a global pandemic. I am thankful for all the valuable assistance and feedback I received in and beyond the University of Bern's Faculty of Theology, especially by Judith Göppinger, Steffen Götze, and Nancy Rahn. Conferences and meetings in person and online allowed me to continue discussions with scholars worldwide, especially John Barton, Helge Bezold, Kylie Crabbe, Ekaterina Kozlova, Sonja Noll, Birge-Dorothea Pelz, and Laura Quick. My parents and my partner proofread the entire book, and all of my family and my friends gave me their constant and loving support.

The publication of this book was made possible by the editors of *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*, especially Konrad Schmid, and the staff at Mohr Siebeck, especially Elena Müller. The Swiss National Science Foundation made this book freely available online by funding its open access publication through Mohr Siebeck. I hope that the published book will help to further advance the scholarly discussions which shaped it.

University of Bern, April 2022

Alma Brodersen

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Abbreviations

BHQ	Biblia Hebraica Quinta (GELSTON 2010/TAL 2015)
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (ELLIGER/RUDOLPH 1997)
l.	Line(s)
LXX	Septuagint (RAHLFS/HANHART 2006, for Sir ^{LXX} ZIEGLER 1980; book titles as for MT in order to ease comparison)
MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible (ELLIGER/RUDOLPH 1997 [BHS])
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint (PIETERSMA/WRIGHT 2007, for Sir ^{LXX} WRIGHT 2007b)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (NRSV 1989)
Sir	Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew (RENSBURG/BINSTEIN 2013)
Sir ^{LXX}	Book of Ben Sira in Greek (ZIEGLER 1980)

General abbreviations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style: Second Edition, For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*. 2014. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

All translations are the author's unless specified otherwise.

1. The Beginning of the Biblical Canon and Ben Sira

1.1 Introduction

The Book of Ben Sira is usually regarded to show the beginning of the biblical canon. Dated to the early the 2nd century BCE, the Book of Ben Sira is taken as the earliest reference to the canon of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament.¹

Today, the canon of the Hebrew Bible consists of three parts, each of which contains a number of different books: the “Law” (Hebrew תּוֹרָה “law”, also called Torah or Pentateuch), the “Prophets” (Hebrew נְבִיאִים “prophets”), and the “Writings” (Hebrew כְּתוּבִים “writings”), in this order, with the “Prophets” subdivided into “Former Prophets” (Hebrew נְבִיאִים רְאִשׁוֹנִים “former prophets”) and “Latter Prophets” (Hebrew נְבִיאִים אַחֲרֹנִים “latter prophets”).² In the Old Testament, the division of books into three parts and the order of these parts differs: “Historical Books” starting with the Pentateuch are followed by “Didactic Books” and then “Prophetic Books”, with the “Prophetic Books” corresponding to the “Latter Prophets”, and the “Former Prophets” included in the “Historical Books”.³

The Book of Ben Sira (also known as “Jesus Sirach” or “Ecclesiasticus” based on the Greek and Latin traditions)⁴ is an ancient text which contains advice for a wise life and references to the God of Israel.⁵ Today, the Book of Ben Sira is a part of the “Apocrypha” or “Deuterocanonical Books” of the Old Testament and

¹ Today, the Old Testament in some Christian traditions includes books which are not included in the Jewish Hebrew Bible, but the two terms mostly refer to the same texts. Cf. for this and the non-pejorative use of the term “Old Testament” BERLEJUNG 2012a, 18–22.

² On this tripartite division of the Hebrew Bible today cf. FISCHER 1998, 1408; LISS 2019, 1–3; SCHMITT 2011; HUPPING et al. 2008, 2–4, 91–93. The three parts (without the subdivision of the “Prophets”) are named in the Babylonian Talmud in Sanhedrin 90b, cf. STRACK/BILLERBECK 1928, 417–418, 422. The Babylonian Talmud can be dated to a long period beginning in the 3rd and culminating in the 7th–8th century CE, cf. BECKER 2001, 626–627. For the history of the canon of the Hebrew Bible see Chapter 1.3.1.

³ For an overview of this division and order cf. BERLEJUNG 2012a, 18–22. The “Didactic Books” are also called “Poetic Books”, cf. SCHMITT 2011, 158–160, or “Wisdom Books”, cf. HUPPING et al. 2008, 6–7.

⁴ Cf. WITTE 2012b, 726; WRIGHT 2019, 187.

⁵ For the overall structure of the Book of Ben Sira cf. the suggestions summarized by UEBERSCHAER 2007, 25–27; BECKER/FABRY/REITEMEYER 2011, 2165–2168. The book’s advice for a wise life is also seen to be without any strict structure, cf. e.g. SNAITH 1974, 3; SKEHAN/DI LELLA 1987, 4.

thus forms a part of the Old Testament in some Christian Bibles (e. g. in Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholic traditions) but is not included in the Jewish Hebrew Bible and other Christian Bibles (e. g. in Lutheran or Reformed traditions).⁶ The ancient Book of Ben Sira can be dated with relative certainty compared to other books in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament.⁷ It was written in Hebrew in the early 2nd century BCE and translated into Greek probably later in the same century.⁸ In the ancient Greek translation of the whole Hebrew Bible / Old Testament called Septuagint (and abbreviated LXX),⁹ the Book of Ben Sira is transmitted in Greek on several manuscripts, and other translations are also extant.¹⁰ In spectacular rediscoveries in a Genizah near Cairo (from 1896) and in Qumran and Masada near the Dead Sea (from 1956/1964), fragmentary Hebrew manuscripts of the Book of Ben Sira came to light, and today many but not all parts of the book are also available in Hebrew. The Greek translation preserved in the Septuagint (LXX) remains the oldest complete source available today.¹¹ Therefore, the counting of 51 chapters and their verses in the Book of Ben Sira is based on the Septuagint.¹²

The Book of Ben Sira is the oldest book included in (some) later Bibles which mentions its author by name.¹³ In Hebrew, in Sir 50:27 the author is called שמעון בן סירא בן ישוע בן אלעזר בן סירא “Simeon son of Yeshua son of Eleazar son of Sira”. In Sir 51:30 the author has the same name but also, before that and additionally, שמעון בן ישוע שנקרא בן סירא “Simeon son of Yeshua who is called son of Sira”.¹⁴ In the Greek translation of the Book of Ben Sira, Sir 50:27^{LXX} mentions Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Σιραχ Ἐλεαζάρ ὁ Ἰεροσολυμίτης “Jesus son of Sirach, [son of] of Eleazar,

⁶ Cf. on Ben Sira WITTE 2012b, 726, 738–739; WRIGHT 2019, 189–191; on the “Apocrypha” or “Deuterocanonical Books” of the Old Testament generally BERLEJUNG 2012a, 15–22.

⁷ For the difficulties of dating texts in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament in general cf. BERLEJUNG 2012a, 8–9.

⁸ For details on the date of the Book of Ben Sira see Chapter 2.1, on the date of its Greek translation see Chapter 1.2.1, on the date of its Greek Prologue see Chapter 3.3.1.

⁹ On the Septuagint in general cf. BERLEJUNG 2012a, 15–16; BOYD-TAYLOR 2021, 13–14; ROSS 2021, 4–5. On the order of books in the Septuagint see Chapter 3 Note 256.

¹⁰ For details see Chapter 1.2.

¹¹ Cf. WITTE 2012b, 732–734; WRIGHT 2019, 192.

¹² For differences in counting regarding Sir 30–36 cf. WITTE 2012b, 726. MROCZEK 2016, 103–106, 112, notes that the concept of one unified and original “Book of Ben Sira” does not fit the idea of overflowing wisdom or the different extant manuscripts, and “project” would be a better term than “book”. However, since the manuscripts do mostly contain the same content, and preserve written texts, the term “Book of Ben Sira” is still a helpful summarizing term, while the textual sources are then differentiated in the present study, see Chapter 1.2.

¹³ Even if this name is not the actual name of the author, the book’s date and content still allow for a study of its relation to the biblical canon. WRIGHT/MROCZEK 2021, 213–218, take the name to be the actual name of the author, but argue that the use of the author’s name is unusual in contemporary writings and reflects the author’s claim to his own importance, and also that the author cannot simply be identified with the first person “I” in the Book of Ben Sira.

¹⁴ Cf. RENDSBURG/BINSTEIN 2013, Manuscript BXX recto, XXI verso. On the Hebrew manuscripts see Chapter 1.2.

the Jerusalemite”. Subscriptions after Sir 51:30^{LXX} on Greek manuscripts mostly include variations of Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Σιραχ “Jesus son of Sirach”.¹⁵ “Ben Sira”, a transcription of the Hebrew בן סירא “son of Sira” which is translated into Greek as υἱὸς Σιραχ “son of Sirach”, is a name that refers to an ancestor named “Sira / Sirach”.¹⁶ The names “Simeon”, “Yeshua / Jesus”, “Ben Sira”, “Sirach”, and “Jesus Sirach” all refer to the same person, the latter three are also used to refer to this person’s book.¹⁷ The Hebrew Book of Ben Sira was probably written in Jerusalem.¹⁸ The Greek translation of the Book of Ben Sira begins with a Prologue whose first person narrator claims to be the grandson of Ben Sira and the translator of Ben Sira’s book. This person (whose name is not mentioned) calls the author of the Book of Ben Sira ὁ πάππος μου Ἰησοῦς “my grandfather Jesus” (Prologue l. 7),¹⁹ and writes that he translated Ben Sira’s book in Egypt (Prologue l. 28).²⁰

The Book of Ben Sira is usually seen today as the starting point for the history of the tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament.²¹ For example, in the German encyclopedia *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, WANKE writes in the entry on “Bible”:

“In the work of *Ben Sira* (around 190) we have the oldest evidence of collections of writings which were included in the later Jewish canon. His Praise of the Fathers (Sir 44–49) is based on the collection of the normative, historical and prophetic tradition in the form of the Pentateuch, the books Josh – Kgs, Isa, Jer, Eze, and the Twelve Prophets. For Ben Sira we cannot yet talk about a canon in its strict sense, but the fact that these writings were seen as fundamental guidance moves them close to what was later called canon. In addition to the writings just mentioned, Ben Sira knew other Old Testament writings. This can initially be deduced from the numerous allusions to them within the book, and is then explicitly confirmed by the *grandson of Ben Sira*. In the Prologue which the grandson placed before his Greek translation of the book (after 117 BCE), he does not only state that many and great things are given διὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν κατ’ αὐτοὺς ἡγολοουθηκότων [through the Law, the Prophets, and the others which followed after them], but also highlights that his grandfather devoted himself to the thorough study τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πατρῶν βιβλίων [of the

¹⁵ Cf. ZIEGLER 1980, 124, 362, 368. On the Greek text see Chapter 1.2.

¹⁶ The Aramaic word סירא can mean “coat of mail” (i. e. armour), “thorn”, or “court”, cf. JASTROW 1903, s. v. סִרְיָה, סִרְיָה. The Greek χ at the end may be a marker that the word cannot be declined, thus SCHÜRER 1986, 201 (referring to DALMAN 1905, 202 n. 3), or a transcription of the letter ס, thus PETERS 1913, XXVIII (referring to NESTLE 1901, 332).

¹⁷ Cf. REITEMEYER 2011, 2159–2160; WITTE 2012b, 726.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2 Note 3.

¹⁹ DIEBNER 1982, 8–11, argues that the name Ἰησοῦς “Jesus” in l. 7 shows that the grandson is not who he says he is, i. e., not the grandson of Ben Sira, as not “Jesus” but “Simeon” was the grandfather’s real first name. However, as Diebner himself notes, the grandfather was not necessarily called by his own first name (“who is called son of Sira”).

²⁰ See Chapter 3 Note 15.

²¹ Cf. STEINMANN 1999, 84; SCHMITT 2011, 159–160; LISS 2019, 5. This is also noted by WITTE 2012a, 231–232.

Law, the Prophets, and the other traditional books]. He finally points out that Law, Prophets, and τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν βιβλίων [the remaining books] are often different when translated as compared to the original language. These remarks by the grandson mention for the first time another group of writings in addition to the Law and the Prophets, writings which were equated with them. We can, however, only speculate about the scope of this third collection. Nevertheless, the popularity and reputation which the Book of Ben Sira subsequently acquired led to the establishment of the tripartite division of the canon regardless of the question which books were in each case counted among the Prophets or the *k^ctûbîm* [Writings].”²²

Similarly, in the entry on “Bible” in the encyclopedia *Religion Past and Present* (translated from the German *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*), BECKER writes:

“The beginning of the prologue to Sirach (c. 130 BCE) is already familiar with the threefold division into ‘the laws, the prophets, and the other (books) which followed them,’ or ‘the other books of the fathers,’ ‘the other books.’ Not only ‘the law,’ but ‘the prophets’ too form a clearly defined group of texts with a fixed name. Sirach’s grandson probably had in mind here the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve prophets, which are presupposed in his ‘praise of the fathers’ (Sir 46–49). The third section, which complements the ‘law and the prophets,’ has no fixed name in the prologue to Sirach.”²³

²² WANKE 1980, 3–4 (square brackets and emphases in German original), German original: “Im Werk des *Jesus Sirach* (um 190) haben wir das älteste Zeugnis für das Vorhandensein von Schriftensammlungen, wie sie im späteren jüdischen Kanon Aufnahme fanden. Seinem Lobpreis der Väter (Sir 44–49) liegt die Sammlung der normativen, geschichtlichen und prophetischen Tradition in Gestalt des Pentateuchs, der Bücher Jos – Reg, Jes, Jer, Ez und des Dodekapropheten zugrunde. Von einem Kanon im strengen Sinn kann bei Sirach zwar noch nicht die Rede sein, daß jedoch die genannten Schriften als grundlegende Orientierung angesehen wurden, rückt sie in die Nähe dessen, was später unter Kanon verstanden wurde. Neben den genannten Büchern waren dem Jesus Sirach auch noch andere alttestamentliche Schriften bekannt. Das ergibt sich zunächst aus den zahlreichen Anspielungen des Buches auf sie und wird schließlich durch den *Enkel des Jesus Sirach* ausdrücklich bestätigt. Im Prolog, den der Enkel seiner griechischen Übersetzung des Buches (nach 117 v. Chr.) vorausschickte, stellt er nicht nur fest, daß Vieles und Großes διὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν κατ’ αὐτοὺς ἠκολουθηκότων [durch das Gesetz, die Propheten und die andern, die ihnen nachgefolgt sind] gegeben wurde, sondern hebt auch hervor, daß sein Großvater sich dem intensiven Studium τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πατρίων βιβλίων [des Gesetzes, der Propheten und der anderen überkommenen Bücher] gewidmet hat. Er weist schließlich darauf hin, daß Gesetz, Propheten und τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν βιβλίων [die übrigen Bücher] übersetzt oft anders lauten als in der Ursprache. Mit diesen Äußerungen des Enkels ist erstmals neben dem Gesetz und den Propheten eine weitere Gruppe von Schriften genannt, die jenen gleichgestellt wurden. Über den Umfang dieser dritten Sammlung können allerdings nur Vermutungen angestellt werden. Die Bekanntheit und das Ansehen, die das Buch Sir in der Folgezeit erlangte, haben aber dazu geführt, daß sich die Dreiteilung des Kanons unabhängig davon durchsetzte, welche Bücher jeweils den Propheten bzw. den *k^ctûbîm* [Schriften] zugeteilt wurden.”

²³ BECKER 2012, 2 (German original BECKER 1998, 1409).

That the tripartite canon starts with Ben Sira is also often stated in current textbooks on the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. For example, ARNOLD writes in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*:

“it is likely that already as early as the second century BCE the three-part structure familiar now in the Jewish Bible was set. The book of Ecclesiasticus (also known as the Wisdom of Ben Sira, or simply, Sirach) is a second-century book preserved in the Roman Catholic canon, and relying on the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The author’s grandson added a preface referring to ‘the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them.’ Of the three parts – Law, Prophets, Writings – the first two seem to have arrived at canonical status by the second century BCE. The third portion probably had not yet been given a name and likely was not yet a closed list of approved books.”²⁴

In the *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament* (translated from the German *Grundwissen Altes Testament*), WITTE in his introduction to Ben Sira emphasizes the importance of the Prologue for the history of the canon:

“the prologue refers to an existing collection of the sacred texts of Judaism (→ *canon*) consisting of the Torah, the Nevi’im and ‘other writings’.”²⁵

ZENGER explains in his German introduction to the Old Testament:

“The division into three parts as a theological concept is older than the completed canon whose scope was generally accepted around 100 CE, although after 200 BCE discussions and deviations were limited to the part of the ‘Writings’ [...] The *fundamental* division into three parts is first indicated in Sir 38:34b–39:1 (around 190 BCE); around 117 BCE this is presupposed in the prologue which the grandson of Ben Sira writes as an introduction to the Greek translation of the book which his grandfather wrote in Hebrew.”²⁶

As these examples from encyclopedias and textbooks illustrate, there are two main reasons for seeing Ben Sira as the first evidence for a tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. First, two key passages, the Greek Prologue to Ben Sira and Sir 38:34–39:1^{LXX}, are seen to contain mentions of this canon. Second, Ben Sira, especially in the the third key passage “Praise of the Ancestors”

²⁴ ARNOLD 2014, 22–23.

²⁵ WITTE 2012b, 728 (cf. the most recent edition of the German original WITTE 2019a, 558: “Der vom Enkel Ben Siras verfasste Prolog [...] verweist [...] auf eine zu seiner Zeit existierende, aus Tora, Nebiim und ‘übrigen Schriften’ bestehende Sammlung der heiligen Texte des Judentums (→ *Kanon*)”). In the same handbook, BERLEJUNG 2012a, 17, places Sir 44–50 at the beginning of the history of the canon.

²⁶ ZENGER 2008, 23 (emphasis in German original), German original: “Die Dreiteilung als theologisches Konzept ist älter als der abgeschlossene Kanon, dessen Umfang um 100 n. Chr. allgemein akzeptiert wurde, wobei sich die Diskussionen bzw. die Abweichungen nach 200 v. Chr. nur noch im Bereich der ‘Schriften’ abspielten [...] Die *grundsätzliche* Dreiteilung deutet sich erstmals in Sir 38,34b–39,1 (um 190 v. Chr.) an; sie wird um 117 v. Chr. im Prolog, den der Enkel des Jesus Sirach als Einleitung zur griechischen Übersetzung des von seinem Großvater auf Hebräisch verfassten Buches schreibt, vorausgesetzt.” The same quote is also found in the current edition ZENGER/FREVEL 2016, 24.

(Sir 44–50), is thought to refer to almost all books which today are included in the Hebrew Bible.²⁷

However, these examples also show that there are a number of problems in seeing Ben Sira as the oldest evidence for the canon of the Hebrew Bible. First, it is not always noted that Sir 38:34–39:1^{LXX} is only extant in Greek and not in Hebrew.²⁸ Second, the term “canon” is used to refer to the Hebrew Bible divided into Law, Prophets, and Writings, but it is unclear if this is a division existing at the time of Ben Sira²⁹ or, in hindsight, the beginning of a division known as a canon in later times,³⁰ while earlier only a bipartite canon may have existed.³¹ Third, it is unclear in which way Ben Sira actually refers to earlier texts. The following sections of the present study explain these main problems in taking Ben Sira as the earliest evidence for a tripartite canon: languages, canonical categories, and intertextual references.

1.2 *Languages*

1.2.1 *Versions of the Book of Ben Sira*

Today – following rediscoveries in a Genizah near Cairo (from 1896) and in Qumran and Masada near the Dead Sea (from 1956/1964) – large parts of the Book of Ben Sira are available in Hebrew, its original language.³² Most of the 51 chapters of the Book of Ben Sira are now extant, in part or fully, on Hebrew manuscripts, but seven chapters, namely Sir 1–2, Sir 17, Sir 24, and Sir 27–29, are not preserved in Hebrew at all.³³ The oldest extant manuscript of a part of the Book of Ben Sira is the fragmentary Masada Manuscript (Maslh, Mas Sir) which probably dates from the first half of the 1st century BCE and must have been written before 73 CE when Masada was destroyed. Maslh contains parts of Sir 39–44.³⁴ In Qumran, parts of the Book of Ben Sira are attested on 2Q18 (2QSir; second half

²⁷ The key passages of the Prologue and Sir 44–50 (specifically Sir 49:8–10 with “Ezekiel, Job, and the Twelve Prophets”) are also listed as the oldest primary sources for the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament canon outside the Hebrew Bible itself in McDONALD 2002, 580; McDONALD 2007, 431.

²⁸ Thus ZENGER 2008, 23 (see Note 26).

²⁹ Thus implied by BECKER 2012, 2 (see Note 23); WITTE 2012b, 728 (see Note 25); ARNOLD 2014, 22–23 (see Note 24).

³⁰ Thus implied by WANKE 1980, 3–4 (see Note 22); ZENGER 2008, 23 (see Note 26).

³¹ Thus implied by ARNOLD 2014, 22–23 (see Note 24).

³² For more details on Ben Sira in the Genizah cf. WÜRTHWEIN 1988, 13–14, 42–43; REIF 1997; in Qumran cf. SANDERS 1965, 3, 79–85, Plate XIII–XIV; in Masada cf. YADIN 1999.

³³ For a detailed list of passages extant in Hebrew in the order of chapters in Sir cf. BLACHORSKY [2014]. For a list of passages in each manuscript cf. BEENTJES 1997, 13–19.

³⁴ Cf. YADIN 1999, 157 (middle or late Hasmonean script, first half of the 1st century BCE, possibly 100–75 BCE), 212–225.

of the 1st century BCE), a fragment containing only a few letters of Sir 6,³⁵ and on 11Q5 (11QPs^a; first half of the 1st century CE), a longer scroll containing – amongst many psalms, most but not all of which are found today in the Hebrew Bible in a different sequence – parts of Sir 51.³⁶ Most of the Hebrew text of the Book of Ben Sira is extant on partly damaged manuscripts found in a Genizah near Cairo. These Genizah manuscripts are called Manuscripts A to F in modern research. They date from the 10th to 13th century CE: Manuscript B is dated to the turn of the 10th and 11th century CE, Manuscripts A, D, E, and F are dated to the turn of the 11th and 12th century CE, and Manuscript C to the 12th to 13th century CE.³⁷

The Greek translation preserved in the Septuagint (LXX) remains the oldest complete source of Ben Sira available today.³⁸ It is usually dated to the late 2nd century BCE based on its Prologue (see Chapter 3.3.1). The content of the Greek translation itself does not indicate a later date than the late 2nd century BCE,³⁹ but it may have been made in more than one stage.⁴⁰ The oldest extant Greek fragments for Ben Sira date to the 3rd century CE, and full Greek manuscripts are extant from the 4th century CE, especially Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (S).⁴¹

None of the extant manuscripts in Hebrew or Greek date as far back as the times of the Hebrew Book of Ben Sira in the early 2nd century BCE (see Chapter 2.1) or its Greek translation in the late 2nd century BCE (see Chapter 3.3.1). They may contain later influences, both in Hebrew and Greek, including harmonizations with the later Hebrew and Greek biblical canons.⁴² At the same time, the Hebrew text on the Masada Manuscript from the 1st century BCE is largely identical with that on Manuscript B from the turn of the 10th and 11th century CE,⁴³ which can be taken as a sign of a relatively stable textual transmission.⁴⁴ In any case, extant manuscripts are the only textual basis available today.

³⁵ Cf. BAILLET 1962, 75–77.

³⁶ Cf. SANDERS 1965, 5, 79–85.

³⁷ Cf. OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER 2018, 77, 85–86, 92 (against BEENTJES 1997, 5–6).

³⁸ For a critical edition of the Greek Septuagint text of Ben Sira in the Göttingen Septuagint cf. ZIEGLER 1980. For different placings and numberings for the chapters Sir 30–36^{LXX} cf. ZIEGLER 1980, 27, 29.

³⁹ Cf. for aspects of the Greek translation related to cultural differences UEBERSCHAER 2016, 450–451.

⁴⁰ Cf. MARBÖCK 2003, 112; UEBERSCHAER 2016, 442–444, 447.

⁴¹ Cf. ZIEGLER 1980, 7, 10, in combination with SEPTUAGINTA-UNTERNEHMEN 2012, 1, 15; CORLEY 2019, 214–215.

⁴² Cf. WRIGHT 2019, 195; REYMOND 2019, 207–208. On examples of possible “biblical harmonizations” in Hebrew which are reconstructed from different extant manuscripts as well as the difficulties of such reconstructions cf. AITKEN 2018, 148–151, 159. For examples of possible secondary assimilations in the Greek Septuagint see Chapter 3 Note 108 and Chapter 6 Note 196.

⁴³ Cf. YADIN 1999, 168–169; REYMOND 2019, 199. For examples of minor differences see Chapter 5.3.1.

⁴⁴ Cf. MORLA 2012, 19–23.

In research on Ben Sira, the Hebrew sources are sometimes divided into H-I and H-II, the Greek sources into G-I and G-II.⁴⁵ G-II is not actually found in any manuscript but its existence is deduced from different additions in some Septuagint manuscripts.⁴⁶ The Septuagint thus represents mostly G-I but also G-II. Similarly, the extant Hebrew manuscripts are thought to mostly represent H-I, with some additions belonging to H-II which may partly represent a basis of G-II.⁴⁷ For the key passages of the Prologue to Ben Sira, Sir 38:24–39:11, and Sir 44–50, the reconstruction of G-II overall is not relevant.⁴⁸ Additions in Hebrew manuscripts are discussed individually.⁴⁹

In commentaries on Ben Sira, the two languages of Hebrew and Greek are often mixed: where a Hebrew text is extant, this is used, and the gaps are then filled with Greek passages.⁵⁰ However, a separate interpretation of the two languages is desirable as it avoids mixing different linguistic, literary, historical, and theological backgrounds.⁵¹

In addition to Hebrew and Greek, the Book of Ben Sira is transmitted in other languages, especially in Syriac and Latin.⁵² The Syriac Peshitta translation dates from the 2nd or 3rd century CE, with manuscripts preserved from the 6th or 7th century CE onwards.⁵³ The Syriac Peshitta translation is probably based on a Hebrew text which cannot be reconstructed.⁵⁴ The Latin version, partly preserved in the *Vetus Latina* and fully in the *Vulgate*, is probably based on a Greek translation which is different from the extant Greek texts, and dates from the 2nd or

⁴⁵ Cf. WITTE 2012b, 732–734; REYMOND 2019, 205–206.

⁴⁶ Cf. ZIEGLER 1980, 69 (additions in Gr II printed in small print in the edition), 73–75 (Gr II not found on a single manuscript but deduced from different additions found in several manuscripts), 113 (Gr I = translation made by the grandson, Gr II = later translation); BÖHMISCH 1997, 87–89; KEARNS 2011, 47–52; CORLEY 2019, 221–223.

⁴⁷ Cf. KEARNS 2011, 49, 52–54, esp. 54 (H-II contains fewer additions than G-II); ZIEGLER 1980, 83 (there are examples where the Hebrew Manuscript B equals the Hebrew original of G-I and Manuscript A equals the Hebrew original of G-II). Cf. also BÖHMISCH 1997, 87–89. In addition to H-I/II or G-I/II, other text forms have also been reconstructed, cf. BÖHMISCH 1997, 87–92, esp. 92.

⁴⁸ Only the last two lines of Sir 50:29^{LXX} are printed in small print in ZIEGLER 1980, 362, to mark them as a reconstructed part of G-II, cf. ZIEGLER 1980, 69.

⁴⁹ See Chapters 4.4.1 and 5.3.1.

⁵⁰ Cf. WITTE 2015a, 26–28.

⁵¹ Thus also BÖHMISCH 1997, 87–92, esp. 92; WITTE 2015a, 28, 37.

⁵² For current work on a synopsis of the Book of Ben Sira in the four languages of Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, and Latin, with German translations for each version, cf. GESCHE/RABO/LUSTIG [2018].

⁵³ Cf. VAN PEURSEN 2007, 3–4, 12, 131–133; VAN PEURSEN 2019, 233, 235. Further studies on the date of the Syriac Peshitta translation would be desirable, cf. WITTE 2015b, 6–7; WITTE 2017b, 11–12. For a Syriac diplomatic edition of a facsimile of the Peshitta Codex Ambrosianus (6/7th century CE) with English and Spanish translations cf. CALDUCH-BENAGES/FERRER/LIESEN 2003, esp. 56, 60–61.

⁵⁴ Cf. VAN PEURSEN 2007, 16–18; OWENS 1989, 40–41; OWENS 2011, 177–179; VAN PEURSEN 2019, 239–240.

3rd century CE, with manuscripts of parts of the Latin version preserved from the 6th century CE onwards.⁵⁵ Later translations into Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, Arabic, and Palestinian-Christian Aramaic, are mostly based on Greek translations.⁵⁶ All translations except for the Greek translation postdate the Second Temple Period,⁵⁷ and come from different historical contexts which include Christianity in the Common Era.

1.2.2 Comparative Study of Hebrew and Greek

A separate interpretation of the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Book of Ben Sira is especially important when studying questions of canon since the later Hebrew and Greek canons of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament also differ.⁵⁸ The present study analyses Hebrew and Greek passages separately before comparing them to each other.⁵⁹

Other complete extant versions of the Book of Ben Sira, especially in Syriac and Latin, are not analysed separately in the present study for two main reasons. First, arguments relating to the beginning of the biblical canon of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament and Ben Sira are based only on the Hebrew and Greek text of the Book of Ben Sira.⁶⁰ Second, Syriac and Latin as well as other translations are much younger than the Greek translation. They postdate the Second Temple Period and come from different historical contexts which include Christianity in the Common Era. While it is possible that later translations preserve ancient details no longer found in the Hebrew and Greek sources available today, the reconstruction of such details is faced with problems including the later historical contexts of the translations.⁶¹ Studies of Syriac, Latin, and other translations of the Book of Ben Sira have to take these different historical contexts into account,⁶² and further studies would be desirable. Specifically regarding the beginning of the biblical canon, the different historical contexts for the time of Syriac, Latin,

⁵⁵ Cf. GREGORY 2019, 243–247. For Latin critical editions cf. THIELE 1987 and FORTE 2014/2021 (*Vetus Latina*, not yet complete) and *Biblia Sacra* 1964 (Vulgate).

⁵⁶ Cf. for an overview WRIGHT 2019, 187–188, 191–194.

⁵⁷ On the Second Temple Period see Chapter 2.1.

⁵⁸ Cf. WITTE 2015b, 10; WITTE 2017b, 18. On the Hebrew and Greek canon see Notes 2 and 3.

⁵⁹ This approach is also taken by MULDER 2003, 23–24.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1.1.

⁶¹ For example, for the Syriac Peshitta translation, OWENS 1989, 40–41, states that it “in some passages preserves the best text”, but also immediately notes several problems in reconstructing such a text. There are significant differences between the extant Syriac and Hebrew texts, see Note 54. VAN PEURSEN 2019, 240, argues that the “text-critical value” of the Syriac Peshitta translation is “considerably limited”, and it rather serves as a witness to the “textual history and reception of the book”, demonstrating “how the book was adapted to ever new views and circumstances.” For the complicated “text-critical value” of the Latin version with its Greek basis cf. GREGORY 2019, 254–255. For problems regarding rabbinic quotations of Ben Sira cf. LABENDZ 2006, 381. Also cf. MORLA 2012, 22–23.

⁶² Cf. VAN PEURSEN 2007, 97 (Syriac); WITTE 2019b, 5, 36 (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac).

and other translations also include different canons, especially a Christian biblical canon. For example, the Syriac Peshitta translation of the Book of Ben Sira was probably influenced by the Syriac New Testament.⁶³ In contrast, the present study assesses the question of the beginning of the canon of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament and Ben Sira in the Second Temple Period. It therefore uses the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Book of Ben Sira as its basis.

For the Hebrew texts, the transcriptions of the manuscripts found in the Cairo Genizah and in Qumran and Masada as presented in RENDSBURG/BINSTEIN 2013 (www.bensira.org) are used.⁶⁴ Where there are differences beyond spelling to photographs of the manuscripts supplied there, between extant manuscripts, or to the earlier edition BEENTJES 1997,⁶⁵ these are noted individually. For the Greek text, the critical edition of the Göttingen Septuagint ZIEGLER 1980 is used.⁶⁶ Where there are major differences noted in the critical apparatus there (including major differences in later translations), or differences beyond spelling to the text of the shorter updated edition RAHLFS/HANHART 2006,⁶⁷ these are noted individually. All translations into English are the author's unless specified otherwise. Comparisons with the modern English translations "New Revised Standard Version" (NRSV)⁶⁸ and "A New English Translation of the Septuagint" (NETS)⁶⁹ are specified in each case.

1.3 *Canonical Categories*

1.3.1 *History of the Canon of the Hebrew Bible*

For the canon of the Hebrew Bible, there is a prominent reconstruction of its history with a successive canonization of Law (5th/4th century BCE), Prophets (3rd/2nd century BCE), and Writings (end of the 1st century CE), in this order.⁷⁰ This reconstruction, however, is criticized in recent research for two main reasons.⁷¹

⁶³ Cf. OWENS 2011, 195–196. For example, in Sir 38:24 and Sir 48:10 (on the Hebrew and Greek see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.5.2), the Syriac Peshitta translation seems to be influenced by New Testament passages, cf. OWENS 2011, 187–190, 192–193; VAN PEURSEN 2019, 237. On a similar New Testament influence on the Latin translation cf. WITTE 2019b, 8–9.

⁶⁴ RENDSBURG/BINSTEIN 2013.

⁶⁵ BEENTJES 1997 with the corrections in BEENTJES 2002.

⁶⁶ ZIEGLER 1980. Also see Note 38.

⁶⁷ RAHLFS/HANHART 2006.

⁶⁸ NRSV 1989.

⁶⁹ PIETERSMA/WRIGHT 2007, for Ben Sira WRIGHT 2007b. NETS is also available online (<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition>).

⁷⁰ Thus STECK 1992, 16–17, 25; GRABBE 2006, 327, 336; SCHMID/SCHRÖTER 2019, 169, 199, 358. This view is found since the 19th century CE, e.g. in GRAETZ 1871, 147–173 (mentioned by LANGE 2006, 286–287) and RYLE 1892, xiii–li (mentioned by OSSÁNDON WIDOW 2019, 12).

⁷¹ On additional criticisms regarding the lack of evidence for a council in Yavneh in the 1st

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