

The Sick Person's Relationship with God in the Healing Process according to Ben Sira (Sir 38:9–11)

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ABSTRACT: Ben Sira's teaching on medicine and healing in Sir 38:1–15 is divided into two parts: the first (38:1–8) deals directly with the medicine of the time (doctors – 38:1–3 and the medicines they used – 38:4–8), while the second focuses on the healing process (38:9–15). In the latter, the sage first focuses on the attitude of the sick (38:9–11) towards God and the role and tasks of the physician in the process of healing the sick (38:12–15). The article addresses Ben Sira's teaching on the relationship of the sick man to the Lord (38:9–11). The sage, after positively evaluating and responding to modern medicine (a novelty in the Old Testament), returns in 38:9–11 to the *implicitly* expressed conviction found in the Bible that only God can restore health to a sick person – that He is the only physician. He therefore urges the sick person to turn to God. According to the sage, turning to the Most High (38:9a), prayer (38:9b), the rejection of sin and iniquity (38:10) and sacrifices (38:11) play an important role in the process of recovery. Sir 38:9–11 has a concentric structure with a call for a change in moral conduct at its centre (38:10). These are surrounded by appeals to turn to the Lord (38:9 and 38:11). According to Ben Sira, healing from illness is the work of God, so the sick person should make a conversion (abandon sin and turn away from evil) and renew his relationship with the Most High. According to him, conversion is crucial in the healing process – without it, the sick person cannot return to health and full strength. In this way, the sage expresses the Old Testament teaching about illness as the result of sin (retribution) and God as the only physician. What is new in Ben Sira's teaching is the call to offer sacrifices for the recovery of health and healing from suffering.

KEYWORDS: Ben Sira, Sir 38:9–11, illness, healing, treatment, sick person

Sir 38:9–11 is part of a larger literary unit (Sir 38:1–15) in which the sage of Jerusalem refers to modern medicine. He was faced with a difficult situation because, on the one hand, he perceived its positive value; on the other, as a man who believed in the one God, he had to oppose and reject the magical elements with which it was quite clearly associated in antiquity (they were even an integral part of the healing process). Already in the first part of his argument concerning attitudes towards the physician (Sir 38:1–3)¹ and medicines (Sir 38:4–8),² Ben Sira made a perfect synthesis between the medicine of his time and faith in God. In the second part of his reflection on the treatment of suffering people, he focused

¹ See A. Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," *Bib.An* 10/1 (2020) 31–62.

² See A. Piwowar, "The Origin and Significance of Medicaments According to Ben Sira (Sir 38:4–8)," *Bib.An* 11/1 (2021) 25–62.

first on the sick person's attitude towards God (Sir 38:9–11) – the only Physician who can restore health to the suffering person and cure him of his ailments.

In this article, the Greek text of Sir 38:9–11 will be analysed exegetically and theologically. The reason for choosing this version of the text of the work of the sage from Jerusalem is the fact that it, and not the Hebrew original, has been recognised as canonical. In the course of the analyses, references will also be made to the Hebrew text. Before discussing the actual pericope which is the subject of this article, the teaching of the Old Testament on the attitude of the sick man towards God will first be presented in a very synthetic way. Then a delimitation of Sir 38:9–11 will be made and its translation and structure will be presented. In the following part of the article, an exegetical and theological analysis of the examined text will be carried out, which will allow conclusions to be drawn concerning the teaching of Ben Sira on the attitude of the suffering man towards the Lord in time of illness.

1. The Relationship of the Sick Person with God during Illness in the Old Testament

Throughout the ancient world there was a belief that illness was the result of sin committed by man and a punishment for the evil done³ (cf. Num 12:11–12; Deut 28:15–69; Ps 38:4).⁴

3 “In the ancient East, illness was regarded as a punishment that was either brought by evil spirits or sent by the gods, who were angry because of certain transgressions in the offering of sacrifices. In order to regain health, exorcisms were practised to expel demons; attempts were also made to win over the gods through prayers and sacrifices” (J. Giblel – P. Grelot, “Choroba-uleczenie,” *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, 3 ed. [ed. X. Léon-Dufour] [Poznań: Pallottinum 1990] 121). “At all stages of life sickness makes a profound and at first incomprehensible incision. About the only thing that primitive man can understand as a cause of physical ailment is the wound received in battle. By way of analogy he comes to regard sicknesses which he cannot understand as ‘attacks’. The assailants suspected are more or less personally conceived evil powers which either strike man down, bombard him with less powerful but more artful shots, or even take possession of him. He expects healing through the overcoming of these hostile powers by magic, if necessary by countermagic, or by propitiatory offerings” (A. Oepke, “ἰάομαι, ἰάσις, ἰαμα, ἰατρός,” *TDNT* III, 195). Cf. L.A. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira* (Sir 38:1–15; 41:1–15; 43:11–19; 44–50) (Diss. Queen’s College, University of Cambridge; Cambridge 2016) https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/255388/Scribal%20Culture%20in%20Ben%20Sira_v2corrected.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [access: 9.06.2022] 212, 220; F. Graber – D. Müller, “ἰάομαι,” *NIDNTT* II, 166; Piwowar, “Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)” 32–38; D.P. Sulmas, “The Covenant within the Covenant: Doctors and Patients in Sir 38:1–15,” *Linacre Quarterly* 55 (1988) 17.

4 See M. Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” *Anton* 62 (1987) 180; N. Allan, “The Physician in Ancient Israel: His Status and Function,” *Medical History* 45 (2001) 377; J.L. Crenshaw, “The Book of Sirach. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflection,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. L.E. Keck) (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1997) V, 807; S. Fasce, *La lode del medico nel libro biblico del Siracide* (Genova: ECIG 2009) 34; Giblel – Grelot, “Choroba-uleczenie,” 122–123; L. Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa’ posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” *PSV* 40 (1999) 68; J.G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974) 184; W.M. Stabryła, “Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu,” *Więcej szczyścia jest w dawaniu niżeli w braniu. Memorial Book for Professor Waldemar Chrostowski on His 60th Birthday* (ed. B. Strzalkowska) (Ad Multos Annos; Warszawa: Adam 2011) III, 1317, 1318, 1323; A. Stöger, “Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15),” *Arzt und Christ* 11/1 (1965) 9; E. Testa, “Le malattie e il medico

The above conviction can still be seen in the time of Jesus (see John 9:2: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?").⁵ Physical suffering and pain was therefore not just a psychosomatic issue, but was more about religion and belief in God.⁶ Since the disease was the result of iniquity, its treatment also had a religious dimension and was closely related to faith. As a result of this conviction, in the Old Testament, before the Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.), the Jews believed that God was the only physician⁷ (cf. Exod 15:26⁸; Deut 32:39; 2 Kgs 20:5, 8; Job 5:18; Ps 103:3; 107:20; 147:1–3;

secondo la Bibbia," *RivB* 43 (1995) 256–257, 262–263. Maciej Münnich (*Obraz Jahwe jako władcy choroby w Biblii Hebrajskiej na tle bóstw bliskowschodnich* [Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2004] 233–305) lists as causes of exile among others: unfaithfulness to the Covenant and the Law, idolatry, disobedience to Yahweh and His messengers, worship offences, sexual offences, murder, social offences, census, sin, rebellion, etc. "Lo schema «delitto-castigo» può essere formulato anche come «peccato-malattia», ove i due piani, fisico e metafisico, s'incrociano senza imbarazzo" (G. Ravasi, "Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento," *PSV* 40 [1999] 13). "Gli autori biblici presentano una visione decisamente pre-scientifica della malattia, e immaginano che forse esterne abbiano un ruolo significativo nei fattori che la causano. Talvolta si dice esplicitamente che il malessere ha un'origine maligna, benché permessa da Dio" (L. Ryken – J.C. Wilhoit – T. Longman III [eds.], *Le immagini bibliche. Simboli, figure retoriche e temi letterari della Bibbia* [Dizionari San Paolo; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2006] 831). Cf. Ravasi, "Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento," 13–14; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 832; Sulmasy, "The Covenant within the Covenant," 19–20; M. Zakrzewska, "Choroba – zło dorykające człowieka," *Biblia a medycyna* (ed. B. Pawlaczyk) (Poznań: Księgarnia Świętego Wojciecha 2007) 17, 22–23; B.M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51* (NEchtB.AT; Würzburg: Echter 2010) 253.

- 5 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in *Sir* 38,1–15," 180; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 832.
- 6 See G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira* (ATD. Apokryphen 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 261.
- 7 "Solo Jahvè è Signore della malattia e della guarigione. Questa è la certezza biblica ininterrotta. Guarigioni naturali e miracolose non vengono fondamentalmente distinte nel Vecchio Testamento. Sia che cooperino-disposizioni umane e pratiche o no, è assolutamente essenziale il fatto che il malato incontra nella sua malattia e il convalescente nella sua guarigione Dio, il quale manda mediatamente o senza mediazioni la malattia e la guarigione" (H.W. Wolff, *Antropologia dell'Antico Testamento*, 4 ed. [Biblioteca Biblica 12; Brescia: Queriniana 2002] 191). Cf. Adinolfi, "Il medico in *Sir* 38,1–15," 176; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 213; W. Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii," *CT* 3 (2001) 51; Crenshaw, "The Book of Sirach," 807; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 31; F. Gaiser, "'The sensible will not despise him': Healing Medicine, Human Wisdom and God (Sirach 38:1–15)," *Healing in the Bible. Theological Insight for Christian Ministry* (ed. F.J. Gaiser) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2010) 122; Gibley – Grelot, "Choroba-uleczenie," 123; Graber – Müller, "ἰαομαι," 167; H.C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing," *ABD* IV, 659–660; D. Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (*Sir* 38,1–15)," *WD* 15 (1979) 56–57; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (*Sir* 38,1–15)," 68; Oepke, "ἰαομαι, ἰασις, ἰαμα, ἰατρος," 201; Ravasi, "Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento," 17–18, 20; W.M. Stabryła, "Najlepszego nawet lekarza czeka Gehenna. Lekarz w starożytnym Izraelu," *AK* 160/1 (2013) 8; Also, "Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu," 1323–1324; Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 5; Sulmasy, "The Covenant within the Covenant," 16; Testa, "Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia," 253–254, 256, 258–260; Zakrzewska, "Choroba – zło dorykające człowieka," 23–24; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 253.
- 8 "Many scholars point to Exod 15:26 as an explanation for the biblical silence on physicians and medical treatment" (I. Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit: King Asa Meets Ben Sira," *CBQ* 80 [2018] 233). Cf. Gaiser, "The sensible will not despise him," 118; M.P. Scanu, "«Io sono JHWH, colui che ti guarisce»: Es 15,26. Considerazioni sulla metafora terapeutica in prospettiva teologica," *PSV* 40 (1999) 23–39; B.M. Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," *Bib* 92 (2011) 349.

Isa 19:22; 57:18–19; 61:1; Jer 30:17; 33:6 and Hos 6:1; 11:3⁹). “He was the source of health and the root cause of disease.”¹⁰ He alone could heal man and free him from ailment and pain. “Any deviation from this rule was considered a betrayal of the purity of faith.”¹¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that a sick Israelite would turn first and foremost to God during his illness, asking Him to restore his health and relieve his pain.¹²

Since the only doctor – in the full sense of the word – was God, and people engaged in healing could only be considered as intermediaries and transmitters of His healing power,¹³ the healing process itself was dependent on the sick person’s relationship with God.¹⁴ The rejection of evil and sin, which were the cause of the disease, played an important role in it. It was nothing less than a conversion to the Lord.¹⁵ Prayers,¹⁶ sacrifices, fidelity to the Covenant, keeping the Law and deeds towards other people¹⁷ were also important in the process of recovery. Also important was the forgiveness from God and His mercy shown to the sinner – the sick person. Waldemar Chrostowski rightly notes that “healing also has a spiritual sense, coinciding with conversion.”¹⁸ God Himself sometimes sent illnesses to people so that they would convert (see 2 Sam 12:15; Job 5:17–18; Ps 32:3–5; 38; Hab 3:3–5).¹⁹

9 Waldemar Chrostowski (“Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 51–54) believes that also the second description of the creation of the world (Gen 2:4b–3:24) presents God as a doctor, a doctor of four specialisations: an anesthesiologist, orthopaedist, surgeon and plastic surgeon. In this role, according to this exegete, He was also shown on His way through the desert during the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 15:22–27). With regard to Exod 15:22–27 cf. M.L. Brown, “*נָפֵךְ rāpā*,” *TDOT* XIII, 601.

10 Stabryła, “Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu,” 1324. Cf. Münnich, *Obraz Jahwe jako władcy choroby*, 45–116.

11 Stabryła, “Najlepszego nawet lekarza czeka Gehenna,” 8. “In pre-exilic Israel, there was no place for the physician, healing being the exclusive preserve of God. Any attempt to infringe this preserve was regarded as a dereliction of faith in God’s power to heal” (Allan, “The Physician in Ancient Israel,” 393). Cf. Allan, “The Physician in Ancient Israel,” 379, 393; G. Pérez Rodríguez, “Eclesiástico,” *Biblia Comentada. IV. Libros Sapienciales*, 2 ed. (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 218; Madrid 1967) 1242; Stabryła, “Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu,” 1323–1324.

12 “Nelle culture antiche, la preghiera di intercessione nella malattia è una pratica universale e istituzionalizzata, con diversi presupposti ideologici e valenza non solo religiosa” (Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 82).

13 “Il Signore offre la sua guarigione spesso attraverso alcuni mediatori che sono investiti da lui e che quindi partecipano della sacralità. Innanzitutto c’è il profeta che può trasmettere l’energia sanante divina [...]. C’è, poi, il sacerdote che, soprattutto nei casi di malattie causa di impurità rituali, aveva la funzione di suggerire ufficialmente la realtà del morbo e la guarigione” (Ravasi, “Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell’Antico Testamento,” 18).

14 “Above all, help must be sought from God, for He is the Lord of life [...]. It is He who sends diseases and cures from them [...]. He is, in the full sense of the word, the physician of man” (Giblet – Grelot, “Choroba-uleczenie,” 123). Cf. Graber – Müller, “*ἰατροὶ*,” 166; Zakrzewska, “Choroba – zło dotykające człowieka,” 22.

15 “[...] although punishment was in the hand of God so was healing if the subject was contrite” (Allan, “The Physician in Ancient Israel,” 377). Cf. Zakrzewska, “Choroba – zło dotykające człowieka,” 24.

16 See Adinolfi, “Il medico in *Sir* 38,1–15,” 180; Oepke, “*ἰατροὶ, ἰατροί, ἰατροί, ἰατροί*,” 202; Wolff, *Antropologia dell’Antico Testamento*, 192.

17 See Chrostowski, “Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 60–62; Münnich, *Obraz Jahwe jako władcy choroby*, 305–337; Ravasi, “Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell’Antico Testamento,” 18–19.

18 Chrostowski, “Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 60. Cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 33.

19 See Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 832.

In the Old Testament, one can find many testimonies depicting the implementation of the above beliefs and convictions in the daily lives of individual people.²⁰ They are based on the belief expressed in Ps 103:3: “who [God – author’s note] forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases.”²¹ Moses prayed for his sister Miriam when she was stricken with leprosy because of her murmuring against Moses (see Num 12:9–14).²² Similarly, David asked the Lord to heal his son whom Bathsheba had borne him (see 2 Sam 12:15–23). Also King Hezekiah, when he fell ill, prayed to the Lord and was healed (see 2 Kgs 20:1–11; Isa 38).²³ Also some of the psalms contain prayers of suffering people, convinced that their suffering is a punishment for the sin they have committed. They express requests to the Most High for healing (see Ps 38; 41; 88²⁴; 107:17–20; 116:3–4).²⁵ Thanks to prayer, not only the sick recovered, but even the dead were raised and brought back to life (see 1 Kgs 17:8–24 and 2 Kgs 4:32–35). In a few cases, certain rituals and symbolic activities were also important in the process of curing the patient of his ailments.²⁶

Most certainly, the conviction of the ancient Israelites that sin and wrongdoing were the cause of illness (the principle of retribution) and their belief in the healing power of God, the only Physician who could cure a man who repented of his transgressions and wished to repent and thus be cured, are the background to the teaching of Ben Sira concerning the attitude of the sick person towards the Lord during his illness.

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- 20 “L'uomo di fede, che in prima risposta alla sofferenza eleva a Dio la sua preghiera personale, con sincerità e con l'impegno a praticare la giustizia, secondo il modello dell'Antico Testamento, può sperare legittimamente di essere esaudito. Colui che rivolge preghiere, promette offerte e compie sacrifici, ma insiste nell'errore, viene respinto” (Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 81–82). “W biblijnym Izraelu dobrze zdawano sobie sprawę z różnicy między lekarskim rozpoznawaniem i ustalaniem przyczyn chorób po to, aby im zaradzić i przynieść ulgę w cierpieniach, a poleganiem na Bogu i kierowanymi do Niego prośbami o zdrowie” (Chrostowski, “Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 59).
- 21 See Testa, “Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia,” 254.
- 22 See Testa, “Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia,” 262.
- 23 See Chrostowski, “Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 59–60; Ravasi, “Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento,” 16.
- 24 “The situation of the man described in this prayer is tragic. He has been seriously ill since his youth, but it is difficult to determine what kind of illness it is. Sensing death approaching, the suffering man trusts God to the end” (J. Turkiel, “Septuaginta o lekarzu,” *Nauki humanistyczne i sozologia. Jubilee Book Dedicated to Prof. Józef M. Dołęga, Doctor Habilitated* [ed. J.W. Czartoszewski] [Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW 2010] 565–566).
- 25 See H. Duesberg, *Le Psautier des malades* (BVC 3; Maredsous: Editions de Maredsous 1952); L. Manicardi, “Il Salterio dei malati,” *PSV* 40 (1999) 41–63; Ravasi, “Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento,” 18–19; K. Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament. Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen* (BWANT 99; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1973).
- 26 “Curiosi, anche per il loro valore apotropaico, sono i rituali di «transfer» come il serpente di bronzo nel deserto (Nm 21,8–9?) o il legno gettato nelle acque di Mara (Es 15,25). Significativo è il rito di immersione per sette volte nelle acque lustrali del Giordano imposto da Eliseo a Naaman (2Re 5,10)” (Ravasi, “Malattia, Guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento,” 19).

2. Sir 38:9–11 and the Closer Context of the Analysed Pericope

Sir 38:9–11 – as already stated in the introduction to this article – forms part of a larger literary unit (Sir 38:1–15) which is devoted to the sage’s teaching on contemporary medicine and healing. Ben Sira devoted the first part of his reflection in relation to these issues directly to medicine. He first encouraged the Israelites to use doctors and to reject the fear of them and their practices (Sir 38:1–3).²⁷ He then drew attention to the fact that the medicines they used were of natural and not magical origin, and that therefore their use for the relief of pain and for the healing process itself should also not be feared (Sir 38:4–8).²⁸ Immediately following these two sections of the sage’s teaching on medicine and the treatment of disease is the pericope examined in the article. It fits perfectly into the preceding context as it deals with the process of recovery and health of a suffering person. It is important to note, however, its slightly different nature in comparison to Sir 38:1–3 and Sir 38:4. Both of these sections refer directly to medicine (the doctor and the medicines he uses). The theme of Sir 38:9–11, on the other hand, is the attitude the sick person should take towards God during his illness. The verses immediately following the section of Sir 8:1–15 under study, i.e. Sir 38:12–15, are devoted to the role and tasks of the physician in the process of healing the sick. Sir 38:9–15, therefore, share a common theme, which is the answer to the question: what should a sick person do to recover and return to full health? On the basis of an analysis of the closer context, it can be concluded that Sir 38:9–11 fits perfectly into the theme of the sage of Jerusalem’s teaching on medicine and healing, forming an integral part of it.

Not only does the content of Ecclus 38:1–15 indicate that Sir 38:9–11 is a separate part of this text as an independent and distinct literary unit within it. This is also confirmed by the formal analysis of the text under study. Sir 38:9 begins with the exclamation τέκνον (“child”).²⁹ This is a very clear sign of the beginning of a new pericope³⁰ or a change of thought in the sage’s teaching.³¹ Therefore, all scholars of Sir 38:1–15 agree that in

27 See Piwowar, “Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3),” 41–57.

28 See Piwowar, “The Origin and Significance of Medicaments,” 25–62.

29 It is the vocative of the noun τέκνον, with which the sage very often addresses his disciples, wishing to emphasise the importance of the teaching he is imparting to them (see. A. Piwowar, “Wierność w czasie próby [Syr 2,1–6],” *VV* 11 [2007] 101). Cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 76; J. Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach. Ihre Religiöse Struktur und Ihre Literarische und Doktrinäre Bedeutung* (AnBib 30; Rom: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut 1967) 94, n. 17; L. Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” *Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira* (eds. R. Egger-Wenzel – I. Krammer) (BZAW 270; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1998) 139.

30 See Sir 2:1; 3:17; 4:1; 6:18; 16:24; 18:15; 21:1; 37:27; 38:16; 40:28 (cf. A. Minissale, *Siracide. Le radici nella tradizione* [Leggere Oggi la Bibbia 1/17; Brescia: Queriniana 1988] 17).

31 See Sir 3:12; 6:23.32; 10:28; 14:11; 31:22; 38:9 (cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 76; Piwowar, “The Origin and Significance of Medicaments,” 31–32; Piwowar, “Zdobycie mądrości według Syracha [Syr 6,18–37]. Część I: Przyjęcie wychowania prowadzi do osiągnięcia mądrości [Syr 6,18–22],” *Bib.An* 5/1 [2015] 113–114, 118; Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 134).

Sir 38:9 a new section of this larger pericope begins.³² Note also that in Sir 38:9–11 almost all verb forms are expressed in the imperative mode³³ (seven out of nine).³⁴ It is also noteworthy that all the imperatives are in the aorist. This makes Sir 38:9–11 a sequence of very strong (emphatic) exhortations addressed to the sage disciple/listener. It is true that also in Sir 38:12 there are two forms of the aorist imperative mode (δός in v. 12a and ἀποστήτω in v. 12b), which could argue for the inclusion of this verse in Sir 38:9–11,³⁵ but a new character appears in it – the doctor (ιατρῶ; v. 12a), who is the main protagonist of Sir 38:12–15 (his character ties the present verses together). It should therefore be considered that Sir 38:12, although identical in form to Sir 38:9–11, should be regarded as the beginning of a new – the last – section of Sir 38:1–15³⁶ because of the new protagonist introduced in it. The belonging of Sir 38:12 to the next section of Ben Sira's teaching on medicine and the process of healing from illness is also justified by the noun *ιατρός* ("physician") appearing in Sir 38:15b, which together with Sir 38:12 forms its framework. On the basis of the analysis carried out, therefore, it can be concluded that Sir 38:12 forms a bridge between Sir 38:9–11 and Sir 38:12–15,³⁷ and is a transition from the attitude of the sick person towards God to the role and task of the physician in the process of healing the sick.

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- 32 See L. Alonso Schökel, *Proverbios y Eclesiastico* (Los Libros Sagrados 14; Madrid: Cristiandad 1968) 280; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 202; Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego postuga w świetle Biblii" 65; Crenshaw, "The Book of Sirach," 808; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 59; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 76; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," 70; S. Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing: the Connection of Medical Treatment and Religious Beliefs in Ben Sira 38,1–15," *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (ed. M. Vermaseren) (Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans L'Empire Romain 78; Leiden: Brill 1979) 220; Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 134–135, 139; P.W. Skehan – A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (The Anchor Bible 39; New York – London – Toronto: Doubleday 1987) 442; Testa, "Le maladie e il medico secondo la Bibbia," 260; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung," 362.
- 33 Here is a list of all the imperatives from Sir 38:9–11: *παράβλεπε* (v. 9a), *εὗξαι* (v. 9b), *ἀποστήσον* *ἰ εὐθυνον* (v. 10a), *καθάρισον* (v. 10b), *δός* (v. 11a) or *λίπανον* (v. 11b). See P.C. Beentjes, "A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38,13. Short Note," *Estudios Biblicos* 76/3 (2018) 455.
- 34 In Sir 38:9b, there is a form of the future tense indicative mode (*ιάσεται* – "he will heal") which expresses the expected effect of turning to God in time of illness. In 39:11b, on the other hand, there is a present participle of the active voice (*ὑπάρχων* – "being") which, while not being a personal form and expressing a secondary action, does not play a major role in the section under review.
- 35 Pancratius C. Beentjes ("A problematic symbol in Ben Sira 38,13," 455–456) considers that Sir 38:12 belongs to the section of Sir 38:1–15 begun in Sir 38:9.
- 36 See Gaiser, "The sensible will not despise him," 124; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 64; J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BZAW 272; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1999) 155; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442; Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 9. Beentjes ("A problematic symbol in Ben Sira 38,13," 455–459) considers Sir 38:12 to be part of Sir 38:9–12 because, in his view, the verses following it, i.e. Sir 38:13–15, are a later addition.
- 37 In the Book of Sirach, there are often verses that can be described as bridges connecting parts or sections of his work. On the one hand, they continue the theme or subject matter of an earlier part of the teaching, while on the other they contain elements indicating a transition to another thought or theme. In this way, they constitute a smooth transition, often almost imperceptible between the different parts or sections of the book. They very often give rise to controversy relating to their affiliation with the preceding or succeeding literary unit. An example of this kind of verse being a combination of two sections of the work of Ben Sira is Sir 38:12.

To sum up, the delimitation study made of the pericope analysed in this article, it can be assumed that, on the basis of both content and form, Sir 38:9–11 constitutes a separate section within Sir 38:1–15.³⁸ Its coherence and literary distinctness are also confirmed by the structure of this text (cf. para. 3).

3. Text of Sir 38:9–11 and Its Structure

The translation of the text of Sir 38:9–11 is based on the critical edition of the Greek version of the Book of Sirach published by Joseph Ziegler.³⁹

- 38:9 My child, when you are ill, do not rebel,
but pray to the Lord and he will heal you.
- 38:10 Renounce your faults, keep your hands unsoiled,
and cleanse your heart from all sin.
- 38:11 Offer incense and a memorial of fine flour,
make as rich an offering as you can afford.⁴⁰

Essentially, the Greek text of Sir 38:9–11⁴¹ is identical in the essence of its theological message to its Hebrew prototype, i.e. there are no significant differences between them

38 See Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii," 65–66; V. Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico* (El Mensaje del Antiguo Testamento 20; Salamanca: Sigueme 1992) 186; M.C. Palmisano, *Siracide. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Nuova Versione della Bibbia dai Testi Antichi 34; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2016) 344–345; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 184–185; H. Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter. Eine Untersuchung zum Berufsbild des vor-makkabäischen Söfer unter Berücksichtigung seines Verhältnisses zu Priester-, Propheten- und Weisheitslehrertum* (WUNT 2/6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1980) 139–140; Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 8–9; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 255.

39 See J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, 2 ed. (Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum 12/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1980) 300.

40 For a translation of the Greek text of Sir 38:1–15 cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 125; W. Kraus – M. Karrer (eds.), *Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2009) 1142; *Księgi greckie. Grecko-polski Stary Testament. Przekład interliniarny z kodami gramatycznymi i indeksem form podstawowych* (trans. M. Wojciechowski) (Prymasowska Seria Biblijna; Warszawa: Vocatio 2008) 647–648; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; A. Pietersma – B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint. And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) 750; *Septuaginta, czyli Biblia Starego Testamentu wraz z księgami deuterokanonicznymi i apokryfami* (trans. R. Popowski) (Prymasowska Seria Biblijna; Warszawa: Vocatio 2013) 1245.

41 See P.C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew. A Text Edition of all Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of all Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 68; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1997) 66; P. Boccaccio – G. Bernardi, *Ecclesiasticus. Textus hebraeus secundum fragmenta reperta* (Roma: PIB 1986) 25; *The Book of Ben Sira. Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary* (The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language; Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and the Shrine of the Book 1973) 39; *The Book of Ben Sira*, <http://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=27> [access: 20.06.2019]. Cf. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 187; I. Lévi, *The Hebrew Text of the Book of Ecclesiasticus* (Semitic Study Series; Leiden: Brill 1904) 44–45; N. Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach oder Ecclesiasticus. Übersetzt und Erklärt* (EHAT 25; Münster: Aschendorff 1913) 310–311; Also N. Peters, *Der jüngst wieder aufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1902) 157–158;

that would change the meaning of individual stiches completely or significantly.⁴² The two forms of the text do, however, differ on the level of detail contained within them. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that the original text of the verses in question has not been preserved in its entirety to the present day (stichs 38:9ab, 10b and 11b have survived in their entirety, while the rest, i.e. 38:10a and 38:11a, contain more or less damage).

The structure of this short literary unit (only six stiches) is quite clear. Its first and third verses refer *explicitly* or *implicitly* to God. Sir 38:9 calls for turning to Him during illness, while Sir 38:11 encourages offering sacrifices to Him. The middle verse (Sir 38:10) focuses on the moral attitude of the sick person and encourages him to repent. This central exhortation is also motivated, albeit indirectly, by the Lord, and more specifically by the principle of retribution (God rewards for good and punishes for evil). The structure of Sir 38:9–11 is therefore concentric.

A – turning to God – personal prayer (Sir 38:9)

B – moral cleansing (Sir 38:10)

A' – turning to God – cultic sacrifices (Sir 38:11).⁴³

At the core is the central thought. It calls for a change of conduct – conversion (abandonment of evil and cleansing of previously committed sins). The fringe verses point on the one hand to God as the motivation for abandoning evil, and on the other hand to specific means to help achieve this goal (prayer and worship). It also should be noted that in Sir 38:9 God is mentioned explicitly (εὐξαι κυρίω), while in 38:11 He is mentioned indirectly (the sacrifices referred to here point indirectly to the Lord).

Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 440; R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer 1906) 340–341; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

42 For Hebrew text translation see Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” 174; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 188–189; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 58; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fà posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 66; C. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira* (Les Dix Paroles; Paris: Verdier 2003) 220; V. Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira. Traducción y notas* (Asociación Bíblica Española 59; Estella: Verbo Divino 2012) 221–222; Noorda, “Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing,” 218, n. 9; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 438; *The Book of Ben Sira*, <http://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=27>. Cf. A. Minissale, *Siracide (Ecclesiastico)*, 3 ed. (Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia 23; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2002) 179; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 344–345; Peters, *Der jüngst wiederaufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 384–385; R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach hebräisch und deutsch* (Berlin: Reimer 1906) 65; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 138; J. Vella, “Ecclesiastico,” *La Sagrada Escritura. Texto y comentario. Antiguo Testamento. V. Ecclesiástico, Isata, Jeremías, Ezequiel* (ed. A.T. Fernández) (Madrid: La Editorial Católica 1970) 156–157.

43 Cf. Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” 181; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 64; Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 140; Sulmasy, “The Covenant within the Covenant,” 22; Testa, “Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia,” 261; Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung,” 362; Also, *Jesus Sirach 25 – 51*, 255. Helge Stadelmann (*Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 139) divides Sirach 38:9 into two separate parts: 38:9a he identifies as an initial call to action, and Sirach 38:9b as a call to prayer.

4. Ben Sira's Advice for the Sick Person in Times of Illness (Sir 38:9–11)

The structure of this paragraph will be based on the construction of Sir 38:9–11. Each of its verses will be devoted to a separate part of it, since each of them constitutes its separate component.

4.1. Encouragement to Unite with God – the Role of Prayer (Sir 38:9)

At the beginning of his teaching on the sick person's attitude towards God in times of illness, the sage addresses his disciple/listener directly using the formula 'child' (τέκνον), traditional in wisdom teaching. On the one hand, this is a clear sign indicating the beginning of a new thought in Ben Sira's reflection (cf. para. 2). On the other hand, this phrase has an extremely important function in the transmission of knowledge by the sage to the adepts of wisdom. For it refers to the relationship that existed in the ancient world between the teacher (considered as a father) and his pupil (son – child). By addressing the listener with the vocative τέκνον, Ben Sira appeals to his personal authority, based on this relationship (father – son), to convince the pupil of the extraordinary importance and significance of his teaching. He does not use religious, rational or practical arguments, but puts his own authority at stake as the most important premise. With this phrase, he wants to inspire confidence in his pupil/listener, which was based on the relationship of master (father) – pupil (child – son), so that he is sure that the knowledge that is passed on to him is for his good and he should necessarily apply it – put it into practice in his life.⁴⁴

Ben Sira, having addressed the disciple and having gained his trust, proceeds to the actual content of his instruction. First, he describes in a very synthetic way the situation to which it would refer. He expresses it in just three words: ἐν ἀρρώσθηματί σου (literally: "in thy sickness"). The noun ἀρρώστημα ("weakness," "powerlessness," "sickness") occurs four more times outside of Sir 38:9a in the Greek text of the work of the sage from Jerusalem. Sir 10:10 refers to chronic illness (μακρὸν ἀρρώστημα – literally: "long illness"), and similarly in Sir 30:17 (ἀρρώστημα ἔμμονον – "ongoing/chronic illness"). Sir 31:2 refers to severe illness (ἀρρώστημα βαρὺ). On this basis it can be said that ἀρρώστημα does not express some minor ailment or pain that may pass on its own, but to a serious, prolonged and intractable illness that is a serious threat to the life of the sufferer. Important in the context of the analysis of Sir 38:9a is Sir 31:22. In this verse, as in Sir 38:9a, the sage also appeals to his authority (ἄκουσόν μου τέκνον – "hear me child") and urges the disciple not to reject his teaching (μὴ ἐξουδενήσης με), because it will ensure his proficiency and protect him from all disease (πᾶν ἀρρώστημα οὐ μὴ σοι ἀπαντήσῃ – "no disease will surely befall you") Although Ben Sira did not deal directly with healing – he was not a physician – following his wisdom could save a person from falling into a severe and life-threatening illness (Sir 31:22). On a similar

44 See Piwowski, "Zdobycie mądrości według Syracha (Syr 6,18–37)," 118; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira*, 263; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

note, it could help a man suffering from a serious ailment return to health (Sir 38:9a), if only he followed the sage's advice.

This introduction (τέκνον ἐν ἀρρωσθήματί σου) is followed by seven very specific indications as to what the disciple/listener should do during a serious illness to regain health and return to full strength. Note the number of these counsels. There are exactly seven of them. This begs the question, is this a mere coincidence – an unintentional coincidence, devoid of meaning – or is it a deliberate use of the number, which in the Bible is a symbol of perfection and fullness?⁴⁵ It does not appear to be unintentional and accidental, rather it should be seen as a deliberate and deeply considered detail by Ben Sira in his teaching that should not escape the attention of the recipient. Through it, he emphasised and indirectly made it clear that his instruction in the area taken up was valid and complete, and that putting it into practice would result in the sick person certainly recovering.

The first of the seven counsels is: μὴ παράβλεπε (Sir 38:9aβ) – “do not look away.”⁴⁶ This is a prohibition (μὴ) expressed by means of *imperativus praesentis activi*, so it refers not to a single action performed, but to a fixed attitude characterising sustained behaviour during illness. The verb παράβλεπω⁴⁷ is formed by adding the preposition παρά (“against,” “backwards,” “across,” “wrong”) to βλέπω (“see,” “look”⁴⁸). It can thus express not only averting one's gaze, as Takamitsu Muraoka believes, but also an attitude of anger, disdain, indignation and disregard (see Franco Montanari⁴⁹; Silvana Fasce, on the other hand, gives it the sense of “to be discouraged,” “to become depressed”⁵⁰). Sir 38:9aβ does not specify the attitude which the sage forbids, i.e. it does not directly indicate from whom the sick person should not look away. It is only from the context of the second stich of the verse (38,9b) that the disciple learns that it is God. Thus, the Sage warns the sick person not only not to turn away from the Lord during his illness, but also not to despise Him, disregard Him, or be indignant about what has come upon him. The symbol of this attitude is the averting of the eyes, and thus the breaking of the interpersonal relationship. Ben Sira thus calls on the sufferer in this indirect way to trust God and turn to Him – to establish or renew a relationship with Him.

45 See J. de Fraine – P. Grelot, “Liczby,” *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, 3 ed. (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 423; M. Lurker, *Dizionario delle immagini e dei simboli biblici* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 1990) 191–192; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 1329–1330.

46 See *GELS* 524.

47 In the LXX, it occurs three more times besides Sir 38:9a: Song 1:6; Job 20:9 and 28:7.

48 See R. Romizi, *Greco antico. Vocabolario greco italiano etimologico e ragionato*, 3 ed. (Bologna: Zanichelli 2007) 914. Cf. Z. Abramowiczówna (ed.), *Słownik grecko-polski* (Warszawa: PWN 1958) III, 391; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 79.

49 Sir 38:9a is translated by Franco Montanari (*Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 2 ed. [Torino: Loescher 2004] 1556) to: “Figlio, nella tua malattia non essere sdegnoso.” Cf. Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 2.

50 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 79.

The message of the Hebrew text of Sir 38:9a coincides in essence with the Greek version: *בני בחולי אל תתעבר* (“My son, in sickness do not be inflamed with anger”⁵¹) In this text, the problematic word is *בחולי* because it may be an *infinitivus Qal* from the stem *חול* (“to turn away,” “to spin” “to dance,” “to strike”) preceded by the preposition *ב* with a first person pronominal suffix (“when I turn/strike”) or the word may be considered a noun “disease.” The first form would be consistent with Biblical Hebrew, while the second meaning comes from the later development of that language, in which the Talmud and Mishnah were written.⁵² A note in the margin of manuscript B suggests that instead of *בחולי* we read *במחלה* (“in sickness”). According to Víctor Morla Asensio the two words are synonymous.⁵³ The inclusion of the proposal written in the margin makes the original text of Sir 38:9a clearer, since the possible meaning of *בחולי* in the sense of “when I turn away/hit” is too enigmatic and may refer to many other situations than just illness. Furthermore, the words recorded in the main text of manuscript B of the analysed stich would be those spoken by God rather than a sage, which changes the meaning of the content of the text. It should be noted, however, that the “turning away/hitting” done by the Lord referred to in the first stich of Sir 38:9 would agree with the Old Testament concept of illness as a punishment for sin and evil committed.⁵⁴ The lesson of *בחולי* in the sense of *במחלה* (“sickness”) is, however, confirmed not only by the Greek but also by the Syriac⁵⁵ version, and we should therefore take it as the original, and not *בחולי* in the sense of “when I turn away/hit.”⁵⁶ The Hebrew text confirms that the Greek *μη παράβλεπε* is to be understood in the sense of a negative attitude towards God (anger or indignation) rather than mere disregard or turning away from Him.⁵⁷

The second stich of Sir 38:9 indicates another attitude which Ben Sira urges the sick person to adopt during illness. It is prayer.⁵⁸ It is contrasted with the behaviour that the sage called for in the first part of the verse, namely, turning away from God and becoming angry with Him. This is clearly indicated by the opposing conjunction *ἀλλά* (“but”). The call to prayer in Sir 38:9bα is expressed with the *imperativus aoristi activi* of the second person singular (*εὔξαι*). It expresses a strong call for immediate prayer (literally: “pray,” “ask”).⁵⁹ From

51 Silvana Fasce (*La lode del medico*, 80) translates the Hebrew text of Sir 38:9a as follows: “Son, in sickness do not procrastinate/delay”, while Maria C. Palmisano (*Siracide*, 344): “My son, in sickness do not neglect yourself.” Cf. G.L. Prato, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira* (AnBib 65; Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1975) 256, n. 89.

52 See M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrasbic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press 1996) 468.

53 See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 2.

54 See Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 142–143.

55 See N. Calduch-Benages – J. Ferrer – J. Liesen, *La Sabiduría del Escriba. Wisdom of the Scribe* (Biblioteca Midrásica 26; Estella: Verbo Divino 2003) 218.

56 See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 2; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 344.

57 See Pérez Rodríguez, “Eclesiástico,” 1243.

58 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 80.

59 See A. Piwowar, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu*, 2 ed. (Materiały Pomocnicze do Wykładów z Bibliotyki 13; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2017) paragraph 372.

the point of view of Greek syntax, it can also be regarded as an ingressive aorist, and it is in this sense that it should be interpreted in this stich. Ben Sira thus calls for prayer to begin and continue (“begin to pray/ ask”)⁶⁰ during illness and suffering. The verb εὔχομαι (“pray,” “ask”) occurs three more times in the Greek version of Ecclus.⁶¹ In Sir 18:23, the sage encourages his disciple to prepare himself before he prays and not to be like a man who puts God to the test by praying. In Sir 34:24 he contrasts a man who prays with a person who curses the Lord and asks rhetorically: whose prayer will He hear? By calling for prayer during illness in Sir 38:9b, the sage indirectly expresses the ancient Israelites’ conviction that the only physician who can heal the sufferer and ensure his full recovery is God (see para. 1).⁶² He confirms this conviction in the second part of the stich by stating and justifying his initial exhortation: “and He will heal you” (καὶ αὐτὸς ἰάσεται σε). The attitude which Ben Sira calls the sick man to have the opposite of that adopted by King Asa. He preferred to turn to the doctors rather than to the Lord (see 2 Chr 16:12).⁶³

The conjunction καί, connecting the first part of Sir 38:9b (εὔξαι κυρίῳ) with the second (αὐτὸς ἰάσεται σε) may not only link them together (“and”), but also express a sequence approaching in its pronunciation to an effect (“so that”).⁶⁴ Werner Urbanz speaks of an almost immediate – direct response to prayer, which is healing.⁶⁵ In the concluding part of Sir 38:9b a reference to Exod 15:26 can be discerned.⁶⁶

It should be noted, however, that the verb εὔχομαι in the LXX in conjunction with the predicate (in Sir 38:9b, the syntagma εὔξαι κυρίῳ, expressed in this way, occurs) can also take on the meaning “to vow.”⁶⁷ If this meaning of the word was accepted, then Ben Sira would be calling in Sir 38:9bα for a vow. However, a problem would then arise relating to the content and object of this pledge. The final part of the stich would in a general way call for some more strictly undefined vow addressed to God, but would not indicate what it would be about – what its content would be. Perhaps the sage would deliberately not suggest to his disciple any specific proposal of a vow, but would urge him to make some – any vow, leaving him completely free in this matter. Accepting the understanding of εὔχομαι in the sense of “to vow” thus causes understatement and fits worse into the context of Sir 38:9 than “to pray/ask,” and must therefore be rejected.

60 See Piwowar, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu*, paragraph 332.

61 See W. Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch. Zur Terminologie von Klage und Lob in der griechischen Texttradition* (Herders biblische Studien 60; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2009) 29–30.

62 See Noorda, “Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing,” 220, n. 16.

63 See Cranz, “Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 234–237; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 344; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442.

64 See D.P. Béchar, *Syntax of the New Testament Greek. A Student’s Manual* (SubBi 49; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2018) 72; F. Blass – A. Debrunner, *Grammatica del greco del Nuovo Testamento*, 2 ed. (Introduzione alla Studio della Bibbia. Supplementi 2; Brescia: Paideia 1997) paragraph 442.2c.

65 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 47.

66 See Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt*, 340.

67 See GELS 307; Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 47.

The content of the Hebrew version of Sir 38:9b is almost identical to the message of the Greek translation of it: יהוה ירפא אל כי הוא ירפא ("pray to God because He heals/will heal"⁶⁸). A note in the margin suggests that the imperative *Hithpaal* התפלל ("pray," "supplicate") should be replaced by the commanding mode *Piel* פלל ("think" or "praise"⁶⁹). However, this correction should be rejected because it does not agree with either the Greek or Syriac versions.⁷⁰ The only difference between the Greek and Hebrew texts of the stich is the absence of the second person singular pronoun in the original version (the Greek translator added σε), which makes the Hebrew text express a general truth that applies to everyone, not just the disciple directly addressed by the sage.

Ben Sira believes that healing from illness is a process in which the sick person should cooperate with God.⁷¹ The first fundamental step in this process is not to take offence at the Lord, not to reject Him because one has fallen ill and is suffering. To the contrary, the sick person should turn to God and ask Him to restore him to health, because only the Most High can heal him.

Werner Urbanz draws attention to the parallel between Sir 38:9 and Num 21:7. Only in these two texts does the form εὐξαι occur in the entire LXX. Moreover, the imperative was used in the context of a prayer/request for rescue from imminent mortal danger (severe illness in Sir 38:9 and death from the bite of venomous snakes in Num 21:7; cf. Exod 8:4, 24; 9:28 and Jer 7:16).⁷² Furthermore, he sees a chiasmic structure in the construction of Sir 38:9: A: τέκνον; B: μὴ παράβλεπε; B': εὐξαι; A': σε.⁷³ At its centre, as the most important part of the message of this verse, are the two attitudes to which the sage calls the suffering man.

In Sir 38:9, the sage of Jerusalem refers directly to the faith of the Israelites, which held that God was the only physician who could heal the sick. This belief is the source of the first two pieces of advice, as well as the rest of the advice contained in Sir 38:10–11, concerning the behaviour of the sick during their illness. First of all, he should not turn away from God and become angry with Him (38:9a), secondly, he should turn to Him in prayer and ask for healing (38:9b).⁷⁴

4.2. Call for Cleansing and Rejection of Evil (Sir 38:10)

Sir 38:9 calls for the first two of the seven attitudes that the sick person should take during his illness. Both refer to God (not turning away from Him and prayer). The next two

68 See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 3.

69 See Peters, *Der jüngst wiederaufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 157; Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt*, 340.

70 See Calduch-Benages – Ferrer – Liesen, *La Sabiduría del Escriba*, 218.

71 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 48.

72 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 48.

73 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 47.

74 See Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 64–65; Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 140.

stichs – found in the centre of Sir 38:9–11 – concern a change in the moral conduct of the sick person.⁷⁵

First, the sage calls upon his disciple to remove the transgression (*ἀπόστησον πλημμέλειαν*) from his life (Sir 38:10a). He demands this in a very strong and unambiguous way, using the aorist imperative mode form. It is a firm call to fulfil this demand immediately. The verb *ἀφίστημι* (“to put away,” “to set aside,” “to remove,” “to dismiss,” “to detach”) occurs twenty-five more times⁷⁶ in the Greek version of the work of the sage from Jerusalem besides Sir 38:10a. Very often, as in Sir 38:10a, it is presented in a religious context, expressing departure from God or abandonment of sin and evil. In Sir 2:3, the author urges to cling to God and never to depart from Him. According to him, the beginning of pride is distancing oneself from the Creator (see Sir 10:12). It is not the Lord who makes man abandon Him (see Sir 15:11). The giants of old departed from God (see Sir 16:7). Despite the activity of Elijah and Elisha, the people did not depart from their sins (see Sir 48:15). In Sir 7:2, the sage appeals to his disciple to forsake iniquity, and then it too will move away from him. But the most important text for the analysis of the verb *ἀφίστημι* in Sir 38:10a are the words written in Sir 35:3: “To abandon wickedness is what pleases the Lord (*ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ πονηρίας*), to give up wrong-doing is an expiatory sacrifice (*ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ ἀδικίας*).” The Lord hates evil and sin, and therefore the man who wishes to please Him and be accepted by Him should depart from them, purify himself from them, and follow the commandments and the Law. Since the only true physician is God, therefore the sick person, if they wish to recover, should remove iniquity and all transgressions – sins – from their lives. Conversion is therefore an important attitude in the process of healing from illness.

The noun *πλημμέλεια* (“error,” “mistake,” “transgression,” “transgression,” “sin”) occurs five times in the Greek text of Sir, except 38:10. In Sir 7:31, Ben Sira commands that a portion of the sacrifice to be offered because of the transgression (*περὶ πλημμελείας*) should be given to the priest. The wise will be cautious in everything, in sinful times will take care not to offend (see Sir 18:27), while it is difficult for a merchant to avoid it (see Sir 26:29). Because of a transgression one should be ashamed before the judge and the superior (see Sir 41:18). Apart from David, Hezekiah and Josiah, all kings committed transgressions (see Sir 49:4). It is difficult to determine exactly what sin *πλημμέλεια* refers to, or what type of transgression it specifically means. It seems to denote some general transgression which may apply to any sphere of human life. However, it seems to denote a serious offence rather than a minor one that can be easily concealed and covered up from others. It may be moreover presumed that the word expresses an offence intended and willed by the one who commits it, and not a sin which someone has committed involuntarily, perhaps under the influence of human weakness. If the above conclusions drawn from the analysis of the use of *πλημμέλεια* in the Greek version of Sir are correct, it means that Ben Sira in Sir 38:10a

⁷⁵ See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 80.

⁷⁶ See Sir 2:3; 7:2; 10:12, 12; 13:10; 15:11; 16:7; 19:2; 23:11,12; 27:20,22; 30:23; 31:1, 2; 35:3,3, 8; 38:12, 20; 39:9; 42:9; 47:23,24 and 48:15.

calls upon the sick man to reject the evil consciously committed with premeditation. Such transgressions should be removed from the sick person's life in order to gain God's favour and through it, healing.

Although in the Greek text of Sir 38:10a the noun *πλημμέλεια* occurs in the singular form, it does not refer to a single morally reprehensible act, but on a *pars pro toto* basis expresses a category of human actions. It does not refer, therefore, to an individual act, but to the totality of sinful deeds.⁷⁷

The second attitude relating to the moral conduct of the sick person is the straightening of the hands (*εὐθύνων χεῖρας*; see Sir 38:10aβ). The verb *εὐθύνω* ("to lead straight," "to straighten," "to mend") occurs five more times outside of Sir 38:10a in the Greek text of the work of the sage from Jerusalem.⁷⁸ It is always used in a figurative sense, as is clearly indicated by the direct complements with which it is combined (heart in Sir 2:2,3; way/roads in Sir 37:15 and 49:9; and friendship in Sir 6:17). It expresses the idea of appropriate – righteous behaviour, which corresponds to God's will as expressed in the commandments and the Law. To act righteously means to act well, to do no evil to anyone, and to keep the covenant with God. Such is the meaning of the syntagma *εὐθυνεῖν τὸν ὁδόν/τοὺς ὁδούς* ("to straighten the way[s]"). Sir 38:10aβ refers to straightening hands, not roads. The hand symbolises human action.⁷⁹ Therefore, by analogy with "straightening the roads" we can say that to make one's hands straight does not express stretching them out so that they are straight (not bent at the elbow), but it refers to the appropriate – righteous behaviour of man, interpreted as doing something (action) rather than as a generally understood moral attitude.⁸⁰ Both of these expressions referring to human behaviour ("straightening of the road(s)" and "straightening of the hand(s)") can be considered akin, and perhaps even synonymous. However, it seems that straightening roads has a more general and broader meaning than straightening hands (action). This idea is also expressed in Job 17:9 and Isa 1:15–16.⁸¹

The two exhortations in Sir 38:10a complement each other. Ben Sira first calls the sick person to remove transgressions (negative attitude – they must get rid of something, reject something), and then to do good and act properly – in accordance with the covenant and the Law (positive attitude – they must do something, take a specific action).

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:10a is incomplete – its beginning has not survived. In the B manuscript it reads as follows *עול ומהכר פנים* [סו]ר⁸² ("Depart from injustice and

77 See Piwowski, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu*, paragraph 6.

78 See Sir 2:2, 3; 6:17; 37:15 and 49:9.

79 See Lurker, *Dizionario delle immagini e dei simboli biblici*, 121; E. Lohse, "χεῖρ" *TDNT* IX, 425–427; A. Ridouard, "Ramię i ręka," *Słownik teologii biblijnej* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 852; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 854.

80 Maria C. Palmisano (*Siracide*, 344) translates the expression *εὐθύνων χεῖρας* as: "agisci rettamente." Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442.

81 See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220, n. 4; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442.

82 Based on the publication of the texts of the Syriac Hebrew manuscripts published by P.C. Beentjes (*The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 66), the beginning of Sir 38:10a is even more corrupted: *עול ומהכר פנים* [...]. Cf. Peters, *Der jüngst wiederaufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 157.

from being partial⁸³). Lindsey A. Askin sees in the first part of this stich a reference to the synonymous expression עָרַם רוּם from Prov 3:7.⁸⁴ A note in the margin suggests that instead of מְצוּל וּמְהַבֵּר [סו]ר we should read מ' וְהִבֵּר⁸⁵ (“Depart from injustice and cleanse your face”). Morla Asensio believes that on the basis of the Greek version (χειρας) the noun פְּנִים should be replaced by כַּפַּיִם (“hands”).⁸⁶ If the marginal readings of manuscript B and the correction of the last word proposed by Morla Asensio are accepted, the Hebrew text of Sir 38:10a does not differ significantly from its translation into Greek.⁸⁷ Lindsey A. Askin sees in the original version of Sir 38:10a references to the language and wording contained in the Psalms (cf. Ps 24:4). On this basis, he concludes that through this reference, Ben Sira emphasises the importance of liturgy and prayer in the healing process.⁸⁸

In the second stich of Sir 38:10, the sage exhorts the sick man to purify his heart from every sin (ἀπὸ πάσης ἀμαρτίας καθάρισον καρδίαν). The verb καθαρίζω (“to cleanse,” “to purify”) occurs three more times in the Greek text of Sir apart from the verse in question. In Sir 23:10, the sage states that the individual who swears and calls upon the name of God in every situation will not be cleansed from their sin (ἀπὸ ἀμαρτίας οὐ μὴ καθαρισθῆ). In 34:4 Ben Sira asks rhetorically: “What can be cleansed by uncleanness?” And in describing the work of the potter, he speaks of cleansing the kiln in which the vessels are made (see Sir 38:30). In Sir 38:10b, as in Sir 23:10 and 34:4, this verb is used in a figurative sense to refer to man's sin. Just as the person engaged in doing the cleaning cleanses the rooms or objects from the dirt with which they have been covered (see Sir 38:30), so too must sin and iniquity be removed from man's life so that he may shine with purity (in the moral sense) and original splendour. The point of Sir 38:10b is not to free oneself from sins in the sense of forgiving them, since this can only be done by God (see Sir 2:11; 5:6; 34:19 and

83 Concerning the meaning of the syntagma פְּנִים וּמְהַבֵּר cf. Deut 1:17; 16:19 and Prov 24:13 (see Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 4; Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, 313). Cf. Lüthmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 58, 65; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 66; Noorda, “Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing,” 218, n. 9; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 138, n. 1; Vella, “Eclesiastico,” 157; Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung,” 355; Also, *Jesus Sirach 25 – 51*, 256.

84 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 203.

85 See *The Book of Ben Sira. Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary*, 39; *The Book of Ben Sira*, <http://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=27>. Another text of Sir 38:10a is contained in the publication of the Hebrew Sir manuscripts by P.C. Beentjes (*The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 66). Another version is proposed by V. Morla Asensio (*Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 4). Lindsey A. Askin (*Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 203–204) believes that the reconstructed final part of Sir 38:10a should read: וְהִבֵּר כַּפַּיִם. Cf. Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, 313.

86 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 203; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 4; Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, 313; Also, *Der jüngst wiederaufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 157.

87 See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 138. Maria C. Palmisano (*Siracide*, 344), on the other hand, favours the wording of this stich based on the main text of manuscript B and thus translates: “Fuggi dall'iniquità e dall'essere di parte verso le persone.”

88 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 204.

47:11), though according to the teaching of Ben Sira also almsgiving, respect towards parents and mercy towards others take away sins (see Sir 3:14, 30; 28:2). In this stich, the sage calls for the rejection of every sin, regardless of its type or the gravity of the transgression, and for not committing any transgression again. The thought expressed here approaches in its message those contained in Sir 17:25: “Return to the Lord and renounce your sins” (ἐπίστρεφε ἐπὶ κύριον καὶ ἀπόλειπε ἁμαρτίας; cf. 17:26: ἀπόστρεφε ἀπὸ ἀδικίας – “turn away from iniquity”) and in Sir 21:2: “Flee from sin as from a snake” (ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου ὄφεως φεύγε ἀπὸ ἁμαρτίας).⁸⁹ Ben Sira urges the sick man to turn away from sin, reject it and free himself from it. The content of this exhortation is reminiscent of the appeal expressed in the first stich of Sir 38:10 (“Renounce your faults and straighten your hands”), but it is important to note an important difference between the message of these two stichs. The first (v. 10a) of them refers – at least the second exhortation contained therein clearly indicates this – to the external sphere of the sick person – their moral conduct and actions. The second (38,10b), on the other hand, is directed at his interiority. The sage’s appeal expressed therein refers to the purification of the heart from all sin (cf. Ps 51:12). Ben Sira thus moves over from the external plane of the life of the suffering man to its interior. The conversion described in Sir 38:10 is to be expressed not only in a change of an external attitude (action), but also an internal one. Consequently, it should encompass his thinking and desires, that is, the whole volitional-intellectual sphere symbolised by the heart.⁹⁰ Ben Sira thus demands of the sick person a complete conversion consisting in the rejection of all sin committed not only in deed, but also in thought, as well as through wrong desire or lust.⁹¹ He demands fidelity to the covenant and fulfilment of the Law, not only in deeds, but also at the level of intentions that guide man.⁹² The call to repentance expressed in Sir 38:10 can be related to the attitude that the sage of Jerusalem condemned several times in other parts of his work, namely, adding sin to sin (see Sir 3:27; 5:5; 7:8), multiplying iniquity (see 23:3; 47:24; 48:16), and failing to repent (see Sir 48:15).

The message of the Hebrew text of Sir 38:10b is identical to the Greek translation: *לְבַבְךָ מִכָּל פְּשָׁעִים טָהַר* (“and from all transgressions cleanse your heart”). The only difference between the two versions is the number: *ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας* is singular, while *לְבַבְךָ מִכָּל פְּשָׁעִים* is plural.⁹³ Burkard M. Zapff further points out that the Hebrew verb *טָהַר* refers to, and indirectly links, the purification of the heart mentioned in Sir 38:10b with ritual-cultic purity.⁹⁴ By doing so, it creates a transition to Sir 38:11, where the cultic dimension of the sick person’s attitude towards God is mentioned.

⁸⁹ See Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 142–143.

⁹⁰ See J. de Fraine – A. Vanhoye, “Serçe,” *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, 3 ed. (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 871; Lurker, *Dizionario delle immagini e dei simboli biblici*, 67; Wolff, *Antropologia dell’Antico Testamento*, 58–79; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 357–359.

⁹¹ See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220, n. 5.

⁹² See Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

⁹³ See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 5.

⁹⁴ See Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256. Cf. H. Ringgren, “טָהַר *tāhar*,” *TDOT* V, 291–294; Stöger, “Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15),” 8.

In Sir 38:10 clearly reflects the prevalent conviction of the ancient Israelites – expressed as *implicite* by Ben Sira – that sickness is a punishment for sins and misdeeds of various kinds (cf. Deut 28:21–29; Prov 3:7–8).⁹⁵ Its basis was the retribution principle, according to which God responds to evil with punishment (cf. Sir 16:9 and 26:28), and rewards man for good by giving him His blessing and all the graces he needs.⁹⁶ The sage calls on the sick to abandon sin and to undergo a complete conversion – removing iniquity both in deeds and in the inner sphere, since transgressions are, according to him, the cause of his suffering and illness (cf. Ps 32:1–5). Without turning away from evil deeds and getting rid of them, recovery will not be possible.⁹⁷

In Sir 38.10, a concentric structure can be seen. It is framed by negative exhortations, i.e. exhortations to reject sin: “give up your faults” (38:10aα) and “cleanse your heart from all sin” (38:10b). At the centre is a positive exhortation, the content of which is an appeal to morally correct behaviour and action (“direct your hands rightly” – 38:10aβ). It would follow that Ben Sira mainly emphasises the process of healing – conversion – was not on giving up evil and the rejection of sin but on a change of conduct that involves living in accordance with the covenant and the Law – living righteously. This is logical because if one begins to act in a righteous manner, he will thereby reject sin and wickedness.

4.3. Call for Offerings (Sir 38:11)

In the last verse of the pericope dealing with man's attitude during sickness, Ben Sira returns to the sick person's relationship with God. In Sir 38:9, the sage called for a renewed personal relationship expressed by turning to God – not rejecting Him – and prayer. In Sir 38:11, the focus is on the cultic aspect of this relationship.⁹⁸ This phrase should not surprise anyone since a particular predilection for worship is evident in the work of Ben Sira.⁹⁹

In the first stich of the verse in question (Sir 38:11a), the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira calls for an incense offering (δός εὐωδίαν – “offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice”). The noun εὐωδία (“sweet perfume,” “sweet fragrance,” “incense”) occurs four more times in the Greek text of Sir besides Sir 38:11a. In Sir 24:15, he refers to the sweet perfume that Wisdom gave off like myrrh. It should be noted that in this text, εὐωδία forms synonymous parallelism with ὄσμη (“savour,” “fragrance,” “perfume”) and λιβάνου ἀτμής (“incense smoke”). The other three times it appears in a liturgical context (see Sir 35:5; 45:16 and 50:15). The noun refers to a sweet perfume – a sweet fragrance that is produced by the offering of sacrifices (see Sir 35:5 and 50:15) or is the result of an incense offering (see

95 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 203; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 65; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 70; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 344; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira*, 263; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 143.

96 See Scanu, “«Io sono JHWH, colui che ti guarisce»: Es 15,26,” 32.

97 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 80–81.

98 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 82–83.

99 See Minissale, *Siracide. Le radici nella tradizione*, 36–38; J.G. Snaith, “Ben Sira's Supposed Love of Liturgy,” *VT* 25 (1975) 167–174.

Sir 45:16). Thus, it means a pleasant aroma that spreads during the sacrifice of the cultic rites.¹⁰⁰ It is not about incense but the sweet fragrance produced during sacrificial rites. The etymological origin of the word also points to the above meaning. For it derives from the combination of εὖ- (“well”) with the stem ὠδ/ὀδ contained in ὀξω (“I smell”), to which the nominal suffix -ία indicating quality has been added.¹⁰¹ On this basis, we can surmise that Ben Sira in Sir 38:11aα does not call for an incense offering but for some sacrifice – strictly unspecified – that will give off a sweet fragrance.¹⁰² However, there is no doubt that it is linked to the sacrificial ritual. The above understanding of the analysed Greek word is confirmed by the fact that in the LXX, it occurs with few exceptions, almost always in the phrase *ὁσμὴ εὐωδίας*.¹⁰³ Ben Sira very often in his work proceeds in the same way as in Sir 38:11aα, i.e. he calls for some deed or action but does not specify it or define it precisely. It encourages him to take action to react and develop rather than stand still and maintain a state of decadence and passivity. The sage, however, does not impose a specific sacrifice but in a general way, leaving the sick man to choose according to his resources and possibilities. He calls in a general way for an offering that will give off a sweet fragrance.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps a reference should be seen here to the numerous texts, especially in the Pentateuch, that say that when God smelled a sweet fragrance, he changed his decision to one favourable to humans (see, e.g. Gen 8:21). If so, the task of making a sacrifice that gives off a pleasant fragrance would be to change God’s will regarding the sick person and forgive him for the faults for which he suffered, which would then result in healing.

Ben Sira calls unambiguously and very clearly for a sacrifice. This is not an encouragement or suggestion but, as in the earlier stichs, a strong injunction expressed using the aorist imperative mood (δόξ). It refers not only to εὐωδίαν but also to *μνημόσυνον σμιδάλεως* (literally: “an offering worthy of the remembrance of the choice wheat flour”). The noun *μνημόσυνον* (“memory,” “remembrance”) occurs sixteen more times in the Greek version of the work of the sage of Jerusalem, in addition to the style under analysis (Sir 38:11aβ).¹⁰⁵ It overwhelmingly refers to the reminiscence or remembering of someone¹⁰⁶ or something.¹⁰⁷ It also expresses the memory of persons, events or things that were or happened in the past that can be recalled to memory or remembered. It is important to stress that for the dead, remembrance is the only form of survival for them, i.e. life after death. Memory also plays an extraordinary role in building and preserving Israel’s religious and social identity. Five

100 Víctor Morla Asensio translates the Greek word εὐωδία as “ofrenda aromática” – “fragrant/aromatic offering” (Morla, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 221, n. 7).

101 See Romizi, *Greco antico*, 580.

102 See A. Stumpff, “εὐωδία,” *TDNT* II, 808.

103 See Stumpff, “εὐωδία,” 809.

104 See Vella, “Eclesiastico,” 157.

105 See Sir 10:17; 23:26; 24:20; 35:6; 38:23; 39:9; 41:1; 44:9; 45:1, 9, 11, 16; 46:11; 49:1, 13; 50:16.

106 These are the nations – the Gentiles (Sir 10:17), the adulterous woman (Sir 23:26), the dead (Sir 38:23), the scribe (Sir 39:9), some figures from Israel’s history (Sir 44:9), Moses (Sir 45:1), the judges (Sir 46:11), Josiah (Sir 49:1) and Nehemiah (Sir 49:13).

107 These are Wisdom (Sir 24:20), sacrifice (Sir 35:6) and death (Sir 41:1).

times, as in Sir 38:11aβ, *μνημόσυνον* occurs in a cultic and liturgical context.¹⁰⁸ The sacrifice of the righteous man will be accepted and the memory of it will last – it will not be forgotten (see Sir 35:6). The sons of Aaron, during the liturgy celebrated by High Priest Simon, made a great noise to be heard for remembrance before the Most High (see Sir 50:16). As many as three times, this noun appears in the description of Aaron in Praise of the Fathers (see Sir 45:9, 11, 16). The bells attached to his robe were to make a sound in the temple as a reminder to the people (v. 9). Also, the inscription engraved on the breastplate was intended as a memorial to the Israelites (v. 11). Aaron was chosen from among the people to offer fruitful sacrifices to the Lord, incense and a pleasing aroma as a remembrance to secure reconciliation for the people (v. 16). In the context of the analysis of Sir 38:11aβ, Sir 35:6 is particularly important. The verse states that the memory of the sacrifice of the righteous man (τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς; the pronoun αὐτῆς refers to *θυσία ἀνδρὸς δικαίου* – “the sacrifice of the righteous man”) will not be forgotten. It features a syntagma reminiscent of that in Sir 38:11aβ. In 35:6, the noun *μνημόσυνον* is combined with the genitive αὐτῆς, and in 38:11, with *σεμιδάλεως*. The genitive in this phraseme can, according to Greek syntax, be considered as *genetivus obiectivus* (memory/memorial concerning the sacrifice), *originis* (memory/memorial derived from the sacrifice), *causae* (memory/memorial because of the sacrifice) or *epexegeticus* (memory/memorial meaning sacrifice). In Sir 35:6, all three *genetivus obiectivus*, *causae* and *epexegeticus* seem best suited to the context of the verse. However, the situation changes in Sir 38:11aβ. In this stich, the noun *μνημόσυνον* does not refer to an intellectual act of recollection or remembrance, but to a sacrifice which is worthy of remembrance (= *ἡ ἄριστη*; cf. Lev 2:2, 9, 16; 5:12), therefore the genitive in the expression *μνημόσυνον σεμιδάλεως* is to be understood as a *genetivus materiae* (“a sacrifice worthy of remembrance from choice wheat flour,” i.e. the sacrifice is choice wheat flour).

The noun *σεμιδάλις* (“choice wheat flour”) forms the complement *μνημόσυνον* in Sir 38:11aβ occurs two more times in the Greek version of Sir. In Sir 35:2, it is mentioned that a man who wishes to repay God for His graciousness should offer choice wheat flour. According to Sir 39:26, flour of this kind belongs to the basic necessities of human life. Sir 38:11aβ thus refers to the use of the word in Sir 35:2. Choice wheat flour was one of the offerings made to God (see Lev 2:1, 2, 4, 5, 7; 5:11; 6:8,13; 7:12; 14:10, 21; 23:13, 17; 24:5 etc.). Its exceptional quality made it a worthy offering to the Lord made not of superfluous things or in excess, but of a product necessary for man's daily life.¹⁰⁹

Summing up the analysis of the syntagma *μνημόσυνον σεμιδάλεως* in Sir 38:11aβ, it should be considered a unique offering of choice wheat flour that will be worthy of remembrance. Thus, it is not about a simple food offering but a unique one that will be remembered and recalled by others. Here, in contrast to Sir 38:11aα (“give off a sweet fragrance”), the text specifies more precisely what kind of sacrifice the sick person should make to the divine Physician to be healed and return to full strength.

¹⁰⁸ See Vella, “Eclesiastico,” 157.

¹⁰⁹ See P.D. Wegner, “*ἡ ἄριστη*,” *NIDOTTE* III, 269.

The passage of Sir 38:11a in Hebrew is incomplete – one could even argue it is incomprehensible: אֲזַכְּרָה [...]. In Hebrew, the noun אֲזַכְּרָה means “memorial” i.e. the burnt portion of a food offering (see Lev 2:2).¹¹⁰ A note in the margin suggests replacing אֲזַכְּרָה with אֲזַכְּרָתָה, i.e. the same word but with a third person singular feminine pronominal suffix. The preserved part of the Hebrew version of Sir 38:11a is fully consistent with its translation into Greek. Morla Asensio reconstructs the missing first part of stich 38:11a as follows: הַגִּישׁ נִיחֹהּ (“give/bring a pleasant fragrance”).¹¹¹

Both the Greek version and the existing passage in the original text of Sir 38:11a make a clear allusion to Lev 2:2.¹¹² On this basis, it can be concluded that the sacrifice the sage urges the sick to make is probably a food offering.

The second stich of Sir 38:11 contains another indication relating to the attitude of the sick towards God. It too refers to sacrificial worship. The sage calls for a man suffering from illness to make the sacrifice fat (λίπανον προσφοράν). Much like the first command in this verse (δόξ), λίπανον is also a form of *imperativus aoristi* of the second person singular expressing a firm and unequivocal command that should be carried out immediately, without any procrastination or reflection. The verb λιπαίνω (“to grease,” “to oil”) occurs only once more in the Greek version of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem. The passage 35:5a mentions that the sacrifice of the righteous man shall make the altar fat (προσφορά δικαίου λιπαίνει θυσιαστήριον). Most likely the making the altar fat referred to here is to be understood in the sense that the offering of a righteous man is so generous and delectable that when it is burned, the fat flows out of it and covers the entire altar in abundance. The righteous person, in worshipping God, offers him what is best. He is not concerned with saving resources by offering a lean and meagre sacrifice, but offers to the Lord a gift of fat meat that is pleasing to Him. On this basis, we can surmise that also in Sir 38:11b the sage urges the sick person to offer a generous tribute for his healing and not to be concerned with the costs just to make any contribution/offer something. The sick should make the proper sacrifice without trying to deceive God through it. Moreover, it seems that making the sacrifice fat advocated for in Sir 38:11ba may refer to the special preparation of the sacrifice before it offering it, involving the greasing of the sacrifice (perhaps an adding more fat to it) so that it is even more generous and magnanimous, and thus more pleasing to the Lord.

The noun προσφορά (“gift,” “offering”) occurs eight more times in the Greek version of the Ben Sira’s work, besides 38:11b.¹¹³ It is difficult to determine what type of offering this word exactly means. It most likely does not refer to any particular type of sacrifice, but expresses the general idea of offering – giving something as a gift to God.¹¹⁴

110 See R.E. Averbeck, “אֲזַכְּרָה,” *NIDOTTE* I, 335–338; Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt*, 340–341.

111 See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 7. Cf. Peters, *Der jüngst wieder aufgefundenen hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 157.

112 See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220, n. 6.

113 See Sir 14:11; 34:18, 19; 35:1, 5; 46:16 and 50:13, 14.

114 See K. Weiss, “φέρω κτλ.,” *TDNT* IX, 68.

It would appear that the interpretation offered above on greasing the sacrifice expressed in Sir 38:11b α is supported in the second part of this stich ($\acute{\omega}\varsigma \mu\eta \acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$). The expression there is quite enigmatic as it is not specified *Participium praesentis activi* preceded by the negative participle $\mu\eta$ together with the relative adverb $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ (“as,” “as if,” “as if”) is of key importance in this expression. The verb $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega$ (“to exist,” “to be”; it is a synonym of $\acute{\epsilon}\iota\nu\alpha\iota$) expresses existence, but when combined with the dative case it can also denote possession (it is a Semitism – “to be for someone” i.e. that someone has/possesses something; cf. Sir 20:16). In the Greek version of the Sir, it occurs once in substantivised participle form meaning “property,” “possessions,” “riches” (see Sir 41:1). In Sir 38:11b β , it does not combine either with a dative case or have any object. Therefore, it expresses existence. Sir 44:9b includes practically the same syntagma as in Sir 38:11b ($\acute{\omega}\varsigma \sigma\upsilon\chi \acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\acute{\xi}\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$). They only difference is the form of negative participle ($\sigma\upsilon\chi$ in 44:9b, while $\mu\eta$ in 38:11b) and in the *participium* tense and its number (*auristi pluralis*) in 44:9b – $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\acute{\xi}\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, and *praesentis singularis* in 38:11b – $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$). Sir 44:9b states that throughout the history of Israel, in contrast to the great figures of the Jewish nation, there were also many people who did not make their mark – they left no memory behind and died as if they had never existed at all. On this basis, $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \mu\eta \acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$ is to be understood in the sense of “as if not being/existing.”¹¹⁵ The thought expressed in Sir 38:1b β seems to be incomplete, making it quite puzzling and mysterious. This begs the question about: “as if not being” who or in what state? Based on the context of Sir 38:9–11, we can surmise that the last stich of this pericope refers to the condition of its main character, i.e. a sick man. Therefore it stands to reason that Sir 38:11b should be interpreted as: “and make the offering fat as if as not being sick.” Perhaps the Greek text urges the suffering man not to make the sacrifice primarily because of his illness, as if in an attempt to “bribe” God (cf. Sir 35:11),¹¹⁶ but that he should offer it without any ulterior motives.¹¹⁷ However, we should not forget that Ben Sira urges the sick person to pray and offer sacrifices for his healing. This is why the second part of the last stich of the analysed pericope remains enigmatic and unclear.¹¹⁸ It is because of this mysteriousness that the final words of Sir 38:1b were omitted in some witnesses to the Greek text and in the Latin version.¹¹⁹

The Hebrew version of Sir 38:11 was preserved as: ודשן ערוך בכנפי הוניך (literally: “arrange/prepare fat within the reach of your wealth”¹²⁰). The first note in the margin,

115 Norbert Peters (*Der jüngst wieder aufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 158) believes that the Greek syntagma $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \mu\eta \acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$ is an arbitrary explication of the original text.

116 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 81–82.

117 “L’insegnamento del Siracide interiorizza l’atto di offerta, poiché non attribuisce valore al dato materiale, ma all’intenzione e alla qualità del cuore” (Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 84).

118 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 84, n. 132; Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt*, 341.

119 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 84, n. 132; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, 313; Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, 300 (critical apparatus).

120 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 205, n. 89; DCH IV, 439; VI, 559; *The Book of Ben Sira*, <http://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=27>; Vella, “Ecclesiastico,” 157. Cf. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 222; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*,

referring to this stich, suggests the lesson ערך (“spread”¹²¹) instead of ערוך, the second /הנך /הונך (“your wealth”) in the place of הונך. The first part of the stich, i.e. the words ערוך ודשן, can also have a different meaning: “grease the arranged/prepared [sacrifice].” Then דשן is *Piel* in imperative mode derivative from the stem דשן (“to grease”), while ערוך *participium passivi Qal* from the stem ערך (“to arrange,” “prepare”).¹²² This interpretation seems to be more in line with the Greek version than “arrange/prepare” the fat.

The original text from Sir 38:11b seems to be clearer than its version translated into Greek. Firstly, it clarifies that it is about offering a sacrifice of fat, secondly, it clarifies the message contained in the second part of this stich – it is about offering a sacrifice that is proportional to the wealth of the sick person (cf. Lev 5:7–13; 12:8; Sir 14:11).¹²³

Sir 38:11b certainly makes a reference to Lev 2:1–2 (cf. Lev 2:9,16; 6:8).¹²⁴ Both of these excerpts mention sacrificial food. It seems, however, that the intention in the Greek version of this particular stich was to make this reference to Lev 2:1–2 more clear and direct.¹²⁵ This is expressed through a number of words common to both texts: *σמידαλις* (Sir 38:11a; Lev 2:1, 2), *μνημόσυνον* (Sir 38:11a; Lev 2:2) and *εὐωδίας* (Sir 38:11a; Lev 2:2). Imperative of *λίπανσον* may also be reference to the olive oil (*ἐλαιον*) mentioned in Lev 2:1,2. Perhaps the person translating the original text into Greek wanted to be more specific about the kind of sacrifice Ben Sira had in mind.

It is no surprise that after the call to repentance, Ben Sira calls for sacrifice. Helge Stadelmann points out that the call for a healing offering is something unique and special in the Old Testament – cannot be found anywhere else. It could perhaps be reasoned only by the incredible bond the sage has for the worship, which can be easily noticed in his work.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Ben Sira, after expressing a change in his attitude towards modern medicine and accepting the actions of doctors (Sir 38:1–3), as well as the medicines they use in the healing process

138, n. 4. The last part of this stich (בכנפי הונך) can be translated in the sense of “to the best of one’s ability” (L. Kochler – W. Baumgartner – J.J. Stammn (eds.), *Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu* [Prymasowska Seria Biblijna; Warszawa: Vocatio 2008] I, 459). Cf. Pérez Rodriguez, “Eclesiástico,” 1243; Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, 313; Peters, *Der jüngst wiederaufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 158.

121 See DCH VI, 559.

122 See Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 138, 143.

123 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 205; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 83–84.

124 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 204–205; Cranz, “Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 244; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 65–66; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 185; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

125 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 205.

126 See Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 144–146. Cf. Cranz, “Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 144; Stöger, “Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15),” 8. Cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 85.

(Sir 38:4–8),¹²⁷ in Sir 38:9–11, he revisits the belief – traditional to the Israelite faith – that God is one and only healer.¹²⁸ It is true that he did not express this explicitly, but by outlining the attitude of the sick man towards God he clearly alludes to the conviction that recovery depends primarily on the Lord, although not exclusively, since in Sir 38:12, he encourages people to use the services of a physician. The Sage wants the sick person to turn to God, not to neglect Him (Sir 38:9a) and to renew his relationship with the Most High. Ben Sira believes it has to be expressed by prayer (Sir 38:9b), by a changing our ways – abandoning evil and sin (Sir 38:10), and by offering food sacrifices (Sir 38:11). Through these indications, he calls the suffering person to a radical conversion, i.e. not only to transform the external attitude, but also, and perhaps above all, of the internal one.¹²⁹ The fundamental condition for healing is a complete change of one's life, both in a religious and moral sense. It is not enough to renew or establish a spiritual relationship with God, changing one's ways is also necessary – to refrain from doing evil and wickedness (cf. Ps 51:18–19).¹³⁰ In the teaching of Ben Sira, both attitudes are equally important, although the structure of Sir 38:9–11 seems to emphasise and accentuate the change relating to the external attitude. These two dimensions (external and internal) condition each other – for it is not possible to turn to God without rejecting evil deeds, nor is it possible to abandon iniquity without renewing the relationship with God. The Sage of Jerusalem had already expressed this idea in the earlier parts of his work (cf. Sir 34:18–19; 35:5). Healing from illness and full recovery are therefore closely linked and depend on deep conversion. This way Ben Sira alluded, in an *implicite* manner, to the principle of retribution and the belief that illness and suffering are punishment for committed iniquity and sin.¹³¹ However, he does not merely repeat beliefs and convictions already known from other books of the Old Testament; he brings his own personal theological touch to them, which is expressed in the call for the sick to make a food offering in order to be healed of his ailments.¹³² Moreover, later in his advice on physicians and treatment, he encourages the use of a medic,¹³³ yet another *novum* in the approach to medicine of the time in ancient Israel.

127 See Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 140.

128 See Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 185; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 146.

129 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 78.

130 See Scanu, “«Io sono JHWH, colui che ti guarisce»: Es 15,26,” 35; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442.

131 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 85–86.

132 However, Luis Alonso Schökel (*Proverbios y Eclesiastico*, 280–281) points out that Ben Sira is quite arbitrary in his use of the vocabulary connected to sacrifice and worship, in a manner that does not make it possible to accurately determine which sacrifices he is referring to.

133 This matter will be further discussed in another article, entitled: “Ben Sira's idea on the role and tasks of a healer in the process of healing the sick (Sir 38:12–15).”

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