


## The Significance of Joseph's Posthumous Remains in Sir 49:15

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Praise of the Fathers* (Sir 44–49) presents the most outstanding heroes of biblical Israel's history. The final poem of this praise shatters the historical sequence by returning to the beginning of history. Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth (Enos in H) and Adam are mentioned in Sir 49:14–16. The article focuses on presenting the figure of Joseph (49:15) and understanding the significance of mentioning his posthumous remains. The question of the presence and location of this important character in the context of the entire praise and in connection with the other characters of 49:14–16 is first raised. The content of Joseph's praise in its textual versions (G, H, S) is then analysed, and an attempt is made to interpret their differences. Both the "bones" (49:15 G) and the "flesh" (49:15 H/S) of the patriarch Joseph play an important role in the presentation of this character, indicating his importance in the history of posterity, both in relation to the biblical tradition and comparing Joseph with Alexander the Great.

**KEYWORDS:** *Praise of the Fathers*, Sir 44–49, Sir 49:15, patriarch Joseph

The laconic mention of Joseph (Sir 49:15) in *Praise of the Fathers* (Sir 44–49) has not received much attention from researchers.<sup>1</sup> Commentators on the Book of Sirach generally and briefly interpret the astonishing record of the patriarch's posthumous remains, considering it the fulfilment of the foretold carrying of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan (cf. Gen 50:25–26; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32).<sup>2</sup> Why does the sage draw attention precisely to this? The story of Joseph of Egypt spans substantial chapters of the Book of Genesis (37–50) and is an important link to the subsequent history of the Hebrews in Egypt.

1 C.T.R. Hayward, "Mulum in Parvo: Ben Sira's Portrayal of the Patriarch Joseph," *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit* (eds. J. Corley – V. Skemp) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America 2005) 185–200; M. Witte, "Die Gebeine Josefs," *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum* (eds. M. Beck – U. Schorn) (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2006) 139–156.

2 Cf. W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus. Revised Version with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1912) 336; V. Hamp, *Sirach* (EB 13; Würzburg: Echter 1952) 136; J.G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary on The New English Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974) 248; A. Minissale, *Siracide (Ecclesiastico). Versione – Introduzione – Note* (Roma: Paoline 1980) 235–235; P.W. Skehan – A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York – London – Toronto: Doubleday 1987) 545; G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira* (ATD Apokryphen 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 335. Only B.M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51. Kommentar zum AT mit der Einheitsübersetzung* (NEchtB 39; Würzburg: Echter 2010) 373, based on an article by Markus Witte ("Die Gebeine Josefs") expands the possibilities of interpretation, as discussed below.

Joseph himself, on the other hand, is a model example of the biblical sage, a man faithful to God in the midst of adversity and in foreign lands; therefore, one would expect extensive praise of him in the Book of Sirach. The sparse mention of this distinguished character, according to Georg Sauer, is due to Sirach's ignorance of the life and significance of this patriarch.<sup>3</sup> However, it is difficult to agree with this, given that the Torah was a fundamental point of reference in the life and teaching of the sage of Jerusalem. Perhaps the way Joseph is portrayed in *Praise of the Fathers* was deliberate by the sage, who knew best which element of this long history to include in his work.

### 1. Joseph's Presence in the *Praise of the Fathers* (Sir 44–49)

In the introduction to the *Praise of the Fathers*, Sirach lists twelve categories of characters in general, which he will continue to write about in detail.<sup>4</sup> The introduction is intended to show who deserves praise and why. In Sir 44:3–6, the sage presents twelve (which may refer to the tribes of Israel) descriptions of characters from the past that can be attributed to specific individuals from history (e.g. traits) or even books (especially wisdom books when it comes to teachings). Although no names are referenced here, one can presumably place the patriarch Joseph among certain categories such as dominion, counselling or rulership of nations (cf. Sir 44:3).<sup>5</sup> Naturally, a more in-depth analysis leads to an exploration of the various features of the characters in more detail; however, their belonging to the categories mentioned turns out to be incomplete. There has also been an opinion that these synthetic descriptions refer to pagan characters.<sup>6</sup> This is not excluded, as the sage of Jerusalem skilfully drew on the rich and positive elements of Hellenism.

Sir 44:3 contains a reference to political functions.<sup>7</sup> The first two categories evoke the motif of earthly power, dominion and strength. Sir 44:3a refers to rulers: “those who ruled (H: over the earth) in their kingdoms.” The Greek term *κυριεύω* (“to rule”) refers to both Israelite rule (cf. Gen 37:8; Isa 3:12) and foreign rulers (cf. Judg 14:4; Jdt 1:14; 1 Macc 6:63). Therefore, according to Burkard M. Zapff, these words of praise could

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, 335.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 499; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 316.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 500–501; C. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira. Traduction de l'hébreu, introduction et annotation* (Collection “Les Dix Paroles”; Lagrasse: Verdier 2003) 274–275; J. Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15 as Introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors”, *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira. Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shimeon Centre, Pépa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006* (eds. G.G. Xeravits – J. Zsengellér) (JSJSup 127; Leiden – London: Brill 2008) 164–168.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. I. Lévi, *The Hebrew Text of the Book of Ecclesiasticus* (Semitic Study Series 3; Leiden: Brill 1904) 82; Renzo Petraglio (*Il libro che contamina le mani. Ben Sirac rilegge il libro e la storia d'Israele* [Teologia 4; Palermo: Agustinus 1993] 25–32) proposes the following division: In version H, 44:1 refers to the Israelites, 44:2–9 to the Gentiles, and 44:10–15 to the Israelites. In version G, however, 44:1a refers to the Gentiles, 44:1b to the Israelites, 44:2–9 to the Gentiles, and 44:10–15 to the Israelites.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Minissale, *La versione greca del Siracide. Confronto con il testo ebraico alla luce dell'attività midrascica e del metodo targumico* (AnBib 133; Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1995) 127.

refer to David and Solomon or even Alexander the Great.<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew participle דורר derived from the stem דרה (“to rule”), probably due to an incorrect spelling, was changed to the phrase דורר (“my generation” or “my dwelling”).<sup>9</sup> The term דרה appears in Gen 1:26–28 in the command of man’s dominion over creation and in 1 Kgs 5:4 of Solomon’s reign.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the general introduction to *Praise* and the references to the exercise of dominion present in it implicitly direct towards various manifestations of dominion.

However, these are very general, introductory mentions, while the description of the individual characters begins with the figures of Enoch (Sir 44:16) and Noah (44:17–18). Further on, Sirach praises the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (44:19–23abcde) before moving on to another character (44:23fg), whose name does not appear from the beginning. The phrase “the Lord brought forth” (καὶ ἐξήγαγεν) refers to the person and action of God himself, who here acts as the implied subject.<sup>11</sup> “From his descendants” (ἐξ αὐτοῦ) refers explicitly to the previously praised Jacob, from whom this figure is derived. The sage thus emphasises the connection between the individual stages of history in which God acts. Next, Sirach speaks of man (ἀνὴρ). The sage does not immediately reveal the name of the glorified character but offers his description. Sir 45:1 G calls him a man of mercy (ἀνὴρ ἔλεος), which is not included in the Hebrew version (שׂר; man).<sup>12</sup> The hallmark of this man is that he “found favour in the sight of all flesh” (εὕρισκοντα χάριν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς πάσης σαρκός). One might have expected Jacob to be followed by the figure of Joseph, whom the story of Gen 37–50 gives a prominent role, but who is surprisingly omitted here. Roderick A.F. MacKenzie suggests that Joseph’s praise may also have been initially present in this description but was then attributed to Moses. According to the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Gen 39:4, the expression “find favour in the eyes” applies specifically to Joseph: יִצְחָק בְּעֵינָיו יָצָא יוֹסֵף בְּעֵינָיו (“Joseph found favour in his eyes”).<sup>13</sup> This patriarch, however, only appears by name near the end of the *Praise of the Fathers*, only in Sir 49:15.

## 2. Context of Sir 49:15

The passage in Sir 49:14–16 seems to be the conclusion of earlier texts that dealt with biblical characters of the past in the *Praise of the Fathers* (Sir 44–49). The chronological sequence ends after the introduction of Nehemiah (49:13), and in verses 14–16, there is

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 317.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. N. Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach oder Ecclesiasticus. Übersetzt und erklärt* (EHAT 25; Münster: Aschendorff 1913) 375; R. Egger-Wenzel (ed.), *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira with a Synopsis of the Hebrew Manuscripts* (CBET 101; Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT: Peeters 2022) 584.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15 as Introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors,” 164.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Petraglio, *Il libro che contamina le mani*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Pudelko, “Użycie terminu éleos («miłosierdzie») w *Pochwale ojców* (Sir 44–49),” *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 29/1 (2016) 72.

<sup>13</sup> R.A.F. MacKenzie, “Ben Sira as Historian,” *Trinification of the World. A Festschrift in Honor of F.E. Crowe* (eds. T.A. Dunne – J.M. Laport) (Toronto: Regis College Press 1978) 318.

a surprising return to the beginning. Enoch, previously mentioned in 44:16, appears, followed by the first mentions of Joseph, Shem, Seth, Enos (in the H text) and Adam.<sup>14</sup> Theophil Middendorp pointed out that some passages in the Book of Sirach (e.g. about Elijah: 48:10–11) may be later additions because of overdeveloped ideas.<sup>15</sup> Hence, John G. Snaith expressed a similar idea about Sir 49:14–16: “These verses were probably added to do justice to certain early heroes whose reputations grew in later teaching outside the Bible.”<sup>16</sup> A similar view is presented by Burton L. Mack, who maintains that Sir 49:14–16 is not part of the original text.<sup>17</sup> It represents a later addition that does not allow one to see a direct parallel between the figure of Nehemiah (49:13) and the high priest Simon (50:1).<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, it is worth asking what role verses 14–16 play and what might justify their presence in the text. Perhaps it is a kind of conclusion of some part, both of the text and the story being told. The story of the “fathers of the past” comes to an end, so the narrative returns to the beginning to take up a new stage.<sup>19</sup> The juxtaposition of the final characters, however, is astonishing. While Enoch, Seth, Enos and Adam feature in the biblical stories before the Flood, Shem is the forefather of the Semites after the Flood, and Joseph is part of the story of the Patriarchs. However, one can try to find links between them.

The figure of Enoch appears at the beginning of the text of *Praise* (44:16), and his renewed presence points to an *inclusio* (49:14). Enoch’s friendship with God and his mysterious departure (Gen 5:24) became the reason for Jewish tradition to attribute to him special wisdom and visions. These are also important aspects of the figure of Joseph, who was recognised as a sage thanks to his ability to interpret dreams (cf. Gen 41:38–39). Shem was the forefather of the Semites (Gen 9:26), and Joseph was respected as the one who saved the children of Israel from death (Gen 41:57; 42:1–2). Seth was a “replacement,” born after the death of Abel (Gen 4:25). Thanks to Joseph’s “mission” in Egypt, further generations of the sons of Israel can be born, and their “posterity in the earth” will appear (Gen 45:7). The mention of Enos in Sir 49:16 H recalls the issue of prayer, as then the name of the Lord began to be called (Gen 4:26). The actions of Joseph in Egypt, his wisdom and skills were seen by all as a sign of his special relationship with God (Gen 39:2; *T. Jos.* 3:3).

14 Cf. T.R. Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50* (SBLDS 75; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1986) 10–11.

15 T. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden: Brill 1973) 135.

16 Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach*, 248; cf. J. Marböck, “Structure and Redaction History in the Book of Ben Sira. Review and Prospects,” *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research. Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference 28–31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands* (ed. P.C. Beentjes) (BZAW 255; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1997) 79; Hayward, “Multum in Parvo,” 185.

17 “The mention of Enoch in 44:16; the description of Elijah in 48,9–11 and the section on Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth, Enos, and Adam in 49:14–16 in my opinion, all three of these passages are additions to the original hymn that occurred in the course of the exceedingly rich and complex history of the manuscript tradition” (B.L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic. Ben Sira’s Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* [Chicago, IL – London: University of Chicago Press 1985] 199).

18 Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 197.

19 Cf. Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50*, 11; A. Goshen-Gottstein, “Ben Sira’s Praise of the Fathers: A Canon-Conscious Reading,” *Ben Sira’s God. Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference, Durham – Ushaw College 2001* (ed. R. Egger-Wenzel) (BZAW 321; Berlin: De Gruyter 2002) 260.

The perfection of Adam, created by God himself (Gen 5:1), is reflected in the spiritual beauty of Joseph.<sup>20</sup> The juxtaposition of these characters is the sage's own compilation, who chose and juxtaposed them to create a new text combining characters from Israel's history with more universal ones. However, these characters also feature in the Book of Genesis as a contrast to other characters, including those outside the Bible.

Gen 5 contains a genealogy of Adam's descendants, the line of Seth, including Enos (Gen 5:1–11). Enoch and a mention of his mysterious departure are featured (5:21–24). The final link in this description is Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. By this, the biblical author wished to show the connection between Noah and his sons and Adam, the father of mankind. As stated earlier, the poem in Sir 49:14–16 presents the following successively: Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth (Enos in H) and Adam. Thus, Joseph is juxtaposed with the characters of the Gen 5 genealogy. The vertical line of the genealogy runs from God-created Adam, through Seth, Enos, and Enoch to Shem, from whom Abraham is descended. Alongside the vertical line of the "chosen" ones, there are also "horizontal" genealogies, lateral lines of other inhabitants of the land. There is even some tension emerging. The descendants of Seth are shown in some contrast to the line of the Cainites (Gen 4:17–24). This division is not ethnic, nor does it concern lifestyle or place of residence. The contrast stems from moral choices. The biblical author does not deny the significant contributions to civilisation made by the descendants of Cain (building cities, musical skills, metalworking, cf. Gen 4:17–22). What comes to the fore, however, is the despicable act of Cain, which finds its reflection at the end of the genealogy in the vengeful attitude of Lamech (cf. Gen 4:24). The descendants of Seth are the answer, the first among them being Enos, who brings hope for the renewal of humanity as he "began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). Another sign of hope is Enoch, who, despite the progressive corruption of mankind, becomes known as a man who "walked with God" (Gen 5:22). "Shem," which means "name, position, reputation," is probably the firstborn son of Noah. This name somewhat foreshadows and anticipates his special role in the family and biblical history.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the lineage of the Semites is clearly distinguished from the descendants of Ham and Japheth. It is on him and his offspring that a special blessing is to rest because of his reference to God and his upright attitude towards Noah (cf. Gen 9:26).

Therefore, the showcased characters constitute a model of behaviour in relation to the inappropriate attitude of others. In the praise of Sirach, Joseph, the character of the later story, also appears in such a context. Will Joseph also stand out as a hero in this case, in contrast to the others? Will Joseph stand out from his brothers, those who sold him to Egypt? Surprisingly, the sage of Jerusalem does not refer to such significant achievements of Joseph as his appointment as the ruler of Egypt, who saved his brothers and others from

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Witte, "Die Gebeine Josefs," 142–143.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990) 259; K.A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2001) 319; G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Dallas, TX: Word 2002) 129.

starvation. Only the translator of the Greek version adds a reference to Joseph's rule and position among the brothers.

At the same time, the form of Sir 49:14–16 draws attention. In both the G and H texts, passive voice verb forms appear. Enoch (49:14) “has been created/formed” (ἐκτίσθη/נוצר) and “was taken up” (ἀνελήμφθη/נלקח). Joseph (49:15) “was born” (ἐγεννήθη/נולד), and his bones(G)/body(H) “were/was taken care of” (ἐπεσκέπησαν/נפקדו). Shem and Seth (H: and Enos) “were glorified/honoured” (ἐδοξάσθησαν/נפקדו). This indicates a special divine intervention, *passivum divinum*.<sup>22</sup> God “visits” the bones of Joseph as He “visits” Shem, Seth, and Enos (49:16 H), meaning He remembers them, and He is faithful, which is manifested in the covenant with Abraham, maintained during the life of successive patriarchs and Joseph.<sup>23</sup> The ending of the former narrative by returning to the beginning, to Adam, suggests the idea of a “new creation.” What follows next (Sir 50) is the description of the high priest Simon II and the temple, which, according to 50:1 H, is also “visited” (נפקד), and the high priest is described to possess, like Adam, extraordinary beauty (תפארת).<sup>24</sup> Sirach thus performs a synthesis, combining the ancient heroes of the Bible with a figure contemporary to his time. Thus, Joseph and his specific portrayal in the *Praise of the Fathers* may allude to times near Sirach's own lifetime, highlighting the special action of God in history, both ancient and the times of the sage.

### 3. Sir 49:15 and Its Textual Versions

The Book of Sirach poses many textual problems. It was written in Hebrew, but only the Greek version survived in its entirety and forms the canonical text. For this reason, the Greek version of the Book of Sirach will be the main, but not the only, text studied for this article.<sup>25</sup>

Thanks to the discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries, the modern exegete also has access to the Hebrew fragments of the Book of Sirach. These provide important testimony relating to the original version of the book and the sources of the Hebrew books from which its author may have drawn. For this reason, the study of the Hebrew version by Pancratius C. Beentjes<sup>26</sup> and Renate Egger-Wenzel<sup>27</sup> will be used in the analysis for support. However, it must be emphasised that the Hebrew text of the Book of Sirach also sheds new light on the Greek version, as it allows us to understand the approach of the translator, who,

22 Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 373.

23 Cf. Hayward, “Mulum in Parvo,” 191.

24 Cf. Hayward, “Mulum in Parvo,” 187.

25 Cf. J. Ziegler (ed.), *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, 2 ed. (Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis Editum XII.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1980).

26 Cf. P.C. Beentjes (ed.), *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* (VTSup 68; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1997).

27 Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira*, 660–663.

after all, had to interpret the Hebrew text.<sup>28</sup> The ancient Syriac rendition, an early Semitic translation of the original Hebrew, offers help in cases where the Greek and Hebrew versions differ significantly.<sup>29</sup>

The Greek text of Sir 49:15 reads: οὐδὲ ὡς Ἰωσήφ ἐγεννήθη<sup>30</sup> ἀνὴρ ἡγούμενος ἀδελφῶν στῆριγμαλαοῦ καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ αὐτοῦ ἐπεσκεπήσαν, “nor has any man been born like Joseph, a leader of his brothers, a support for the people. They took special care even of his bones.”

The Hebrew text of Sir 49:15 (H) is derived from Manuscript B, twelfth-century fragments containing Sir 30:11–33:3; 35:11–38:27b; 39:15c–51:30, found in the Cairo Geniza, written in columns, without spaces between words and sentences (stichometry).<sup>31</sup> The version of Sir 49:15 H differs from G and is as follows: בְּיוֹסֵף אִם נִוּלַד גְּבֵר וְגַם גְּוִיָּתוֹ נִפְקְדָה, “Was a man like Joseph born? Even his dead body was provided for.”

Both versions refer at the outset to the birth, the beginning of Joseph's life, indicating his uniqueness among men: “nor has any man been born like Joseph” (G); “was ever a man born like Joseph?” (H). While version G is a statement, version H suggests a question, introducing a comparison and juxtaposition of Joseph with other heroes.<sup>32</sup>

This is followed by an addition in G absent in H: “a leader of his brothers, a support for the people.” The verse ending in both versions refers to the hero's posthumous status, but there is a certain difference. The G text mentions Joseph's bones: “his bones were honoured,” while the H version refers to the body: “even his dead body was provided for.”

The Syriac version of the text differs from the others:

ܡܘܬܪܐ ܘܝܘܫܘܫܐ ܡܝܘܢ ܐܘܪܐܘܢܐ, ܘܝܘܫܘܫܐ ܢܐ ܥܘܢܐ ܠܦܘܪܐܘܢܐ,  
 “No mother has borne [one] like Joseph, and his body was buried in peace.” It is likely that the translator of the S text understood ܡܘܬܪܐ as ܡܘܬܪܐ (“mother”).<sup>33</sup> A clear difference between H and G is the use of two different terms: “bones” (G) and “body” (H). Although different from the others, the Syriac text confirms H's lesson: “his body” (ܡܘܬܪܐ).

28 A great help is the online platform that includes scans of the available Hebrew manuscripts of the Book of Sirach, their transcription and an English translation: <https://www.bensira.org/> [access: 9.06.2023].

29 Text based on the Codices Ambrosiani. Cf. A.M. Ceriani (ed.), *Translatio Syra Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere VI photolithographice edita* (Milano: Pogliani 1883) II. N. Calduch-Benages – J. Ferrer – J. Liesen (eds.), *La Sabiduría del escriba. Edición diplomática de la versión siríaco de libro de Ben Sira según el Códice Ambrosiano, con traducción española e inglesa. Wisdom of the Scribe. Diplomatic Edition of the Syriac Version of the Book of Ben Sira according to Codex Ambrosianus, with Translations in Spanish and English* (Biblioteca Midrásica 26. Estella: Verbo Divino 2003; 2 ed. 2015).

30 In Sir 49:15, according to the Joseph Ziegler version based on the Sinai, Vatican, and Alexandrian codices, ἐγεννήθη (“became,” “was”) appears. A. Rahlfs – R. Hanhart (eds.), *Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1979; 2 ed. 2006) 466 chooses the reading ἐγεννήθη (“was born”), which corresponds to the H version.

31 Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 52. The evaluation of manuscript B is presented by Alexander A. Di Lella in *The Hebrew Text of Sirach. A Text-Critical and Historical Study* (Studies in Classical Literature 1; London – Paris: Mouton 1966) 148: “Unless the contrary is demonstrated, the Geniza Mss contain the original text or something very near to original of Ben Sira.”

32 Cf. Hayward, “Multum in Parvo,” 194.

33 Cf. V. Morla, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira* (Asociación Bíblica Española 59; Estella: Verbo Divino 2012) 335–336.

The question then arises as to the purpose of this very representation of Joseph. Why does the sage refer to the beginning and end of the patriarch's life and link his bones/body to the visitation? What significance does the expansion of the text in the G version have?

#### 4. The Portrayal of Joseph in Sir 49:15 G

The text of Sir 49:15 G begins with a mention of Joseph's birth, indicating his uniqueness among other men. Whereas the H text posed a rhetorical question ("was ever a man born like Joseph?"), the G version has an affirmative statement ("nor has any man been born like Joseph").<sup>34</sup> Verse 15 is a continuation of the earlier one, describing Enoch. One can note the parallels between Enoch (49:14: "no one was created on the earth who was like Enoch"; οὐδεὶς ἐκτίσθη) and Joseph (49:15: "nor has any man been born like Joseph"; οὐδὲ ἐγεννήθη). Enoch's uniqueness was primarily associated with the wisdom attributed to him and his contact with the spiritual world, to which God mysteriously brought him (cf. Gen 5:24). This is mentioned by Sirach in both 44:16 and 49:14.

Joseph came into the world after a long wait by his mother, Rachel. His conception and birth are described in Gen 30:22 as a special intervention of God: "Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive." This fact highlights God's presence and intervention in Joseph's life. He was no more than the eleventh son of Jacob. However, when the reference to the "family line" (תּוֹלְדוֹת) of Jacob appears in Gen 37:2, the biblical author begins to tell the story of Joseph and his name appears: "This is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks." At the beginning of the story, there is no indication of Joseph's uniqueness. This will only be unveiled by the further narrative of the Book of Genesis, showing his extraordinary, God-given wisdom and his mission as the saviour of his brothers. The chronicler, however, in presenting the sons of Jacob, noted that, due to the sin of having intercourse with his father's wife (cf. Gen 35:22), Reuben was removed from his position of primacy among his brothers (cf. Gen 49:4), and his place was taken by Joseph (cf. 1 Kgs 5:1–2). The prominence of the figure of Joseph and the authority of the ruler of Egypt (cf. Gen 41:41) found expression in the Greek version of Sirach. The translator expanded the rather laconic Hebrew text by adding: ἡγούμενος ἀδελφῶν στήριγμα λαοῦ ("a leader of his brothers, a support for the people"). The text of Sir 50:1 H, which inaugurates the praise of the high priest Simon II, contains the expression עמו ותפארתו גדול אחיו ותפארתו ("the greatest of his brothers and the pride of his people"), which is absent in 50:1 G. One notes the link of the Greek addition 49:15 G with 50:1 H in the protagonist's reference to "brothers" and "people."<sup>35</sup> The text of 49:15 G indicates Joseph's special position among the brothers (ἡγούμενος ἀδελφῶν – a leader of his brothers)

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Hayward, "Multum in Parvo," 194.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hayward, "Multum in Parvo," 195; H. Langkammer, *Księga Syracha. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz, ekskursy* (Pismo Święte Starego Testamentu 8.5; Poznań: Pallottinum 2020) 427.



and among the people (στήριγμα λαοῦ – a support for the people). This may be a suggestion that, for the Greek translator, Joseph's special position is reflected in the mission of the high priest Simon, the visible sign of Israel's covenant with YHWH.

Although it is Judah, specifically chosen among the sons of Jacob, who is given the honourable title of "ruler" (ἡγούμενος, Gen 49:10), in Jacob's blessing addressed to Joseph, LXX version contains a term that alludes to ἡγούμενος ἀδελφῶν, namely ὧν ἡγήσατο ἀδελφῶν ("brothers of whom he took the lead" [Gen 49:26 LXX]). The Masoretic text reads here: "a Nazirite of his brothers" (נְזִירֵי אָחָיו). One is puzzled, then, by the LXX translation of the term נְזִיר, meaning someone "consecrated to God" as a "ruler" (ἡγούμενος). This may be because the noun נָדָב means "crown, tiara or headband," which may also refer to a particular blessing.<sup>36</sup> In the *Targums* (*Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*) to Gen 49:26, the phrase appears: כְּלִיל דְּרָבוּ ("crown of glory").<sup>37</sup> This may, therefore, explain the use of the term ἡγούμενος in Gen 49:26 LXX.

The verb ἡγέομαι means "to go in front, to pave the way, to direct, to lead, to reign"; in the Bible, it describes the leadership function of both the king (cf., for instance, 1 Sam 25:30; 2 Sam 5:20; 7:8; 1 Kgs 1:35; 1 Chr 17:7) as well as a military leader (cf., for instance, 1 Kgs 16:16; 2 Kgs 1:9.13; 1 Macc 5:6; 9:30; 13:53).<sup>38</sup> The Book of Acts uses this term to introduce the character of Joseph by calling him ἡγούμενος ἐπ' Αἴγυπτον ("ruler of Egypt" [Acts 7:10]). "Ruler" is also present in the Book of Sirach. The sage points out the necessary qualities of a good leader, such as wise speech (9:17), prudence (10:2, 20), humility (32:1), and in the introduction to the *Praise of the Fathers*, the sage enumerates the category of leaders (44:4). The aforementioned Gen 49:10 LXX, which referred to Judah as ἡγούμενος, had a strongly messianic character. Thus, its use by the translator of the Book of Sirach in relation to Joseph may indicate that God, through his intermediaries, can also act outside the promised land. The Greek version of Joseph's praise thus emphasises his leadership function in Egypt while remaining a faithful follower of the One God. The recipients of the Greek version of the Book of Sirach were Jews living in the Diaspora in Alexandria, subjected to Hellenisation processes. Joseph was thus able to serve as an example and inspiration for them to live a life of faithfulness to the Torah in exile. "Leading his brothers" was manifested by Joseph's care for their well-being, saving them from famine, as well as in forgiveness and the restoration of family bonds damaged by the sale of their brother. Joseph may thus have become, for Alexandrian Jews, a kind of "patron saint" for building a life in exile.

Sir 49:15 G also refers to Joseph as στήριγμα λαοῦ ("the support for the people"). The term στήριγμα ("support, prop") appears outside the analysed text 16 times in the LXX, including 3 times in the Book of Sirach. It can mean reliance on God (Sir 34:15–16) and His sanctuary (Ezra 9:8), reliance on the rest of the people (2 Sam 20:19; 2 Kgs 25:11),

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hayward, "Multum in Parvo," 196.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hayward, "Multum in Parvo," 196.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. F. Büchel, "ἡγέομαι κτλ.," *TDNT* II, 907–909.

reliance in times of danger (Sir 3:31), a husband's reliance on his wife (Tob 8:6), military support (1 Macc 2:43; 6:18; 10:23), reliance of an unrighteous man (Ezek 7:11), and supply of bread<sup>39</sup> (Ps 71:16 LXX; Ps 104:16 LXX; Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 14:13). According to the Book of Genesis narrative (cf. Gen 41:49, 53–57; 42:1–3) Joseph, on Pharaoh's instructions, gathered supplies for the famine and then sold the grain. Thus, he possessed provisions that became a support for the people – not only for his brothers but for the inhabitants of Egypt and other peoples. He was, therefore, a universal hero.

The praise of Joseph ends with the mention of his bones: *καὶ τὰ ὀστά αὐτοῦ ἐπεσκέπησαν* (“and his bones were visited”). The word “bones” (תִּמְצָוּ/ὀστά) denotes both single bones and the entire skeleton. The noun תִּמְצָוּ has two plural forms: תִּמְצָוּ, denoting the bones of the limbs, and תִּמְצָוּ, denoting the bones joined to form the skeleton. Bones were the most solid part of a man's body, something left after all his mortal remains are gone, so figuratively, bones signify the “essence, core” and even the man himself (cf. Ps 51:10; Prov 3:8; 15:30).<sup>40</sup> The Book of Sirach also uses bones to mean the person (Sir 26:13; 28:17).

In the *Praise of the Fathers*, there are two more (in addition to 49:15 G) uses of the word “bones.” When the sage praises the Judges (46:12) and the Twelve Prophets (49:10), referring to them collectively, he expresses a wish: “May their bones send forth new life from where they lie.” Like in the case of Joseph, the bones refer to the dead heroes. Here, however, Sirach awaits their coming alive. This can be viewed as an allusion to the resurrection of a man through contact with Elisha's bones (cf. 2 Kgs 13:20–21).<sup>41</sup> In this case, the bones demonstrated the ability to “prophesy,” i.e. communicate God's message of life.<sup>42</sup> Thus, even if the prophet was physically dead, he could pass on life through his message. This message, then, can be applied to both the Judges (cf. Sir 46:12) and the Twelve Prophets (cf. Sir 49:10). Although the message of the Twelve Prophets was varied, it ultimately led to the announcement of Israel's renewal. Therefore, Sirach must have been familiar with the message of the prophets and the announcements of renewal, which usually appeared in the final editions of the books. The bones of Judges and prophets can also flourish again by emulating their deeds and interpretations of their messages, which become relevant in new times and even yield fruit in new writings inspired by the teachings and lives of biblical heroes.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, does the mention of Joseph's bones in version G signify the relevance of Joseph and his mission in the Hellenistic era?

The reference to Joseph's bones appears three times in the Bible during significant events in the history of the people of Israel. The first event is associated with the death of

39 “Staff of bread” (στήριγμα ἄρτου) is a translation of תַּבְּטֵן-מִצֵּה (“stick of bread”). The expression derives from the custom of preparing breads with a hole in the middle, which were held on sticks. However, the stick not only indicates the fact of hunger, it is something used for support. “Breaking of the staff of bread” signifies the loss of stability, of a point of support, which resulted from the failure to secure food.

40 The idiom הִנֵּה עַל יְדֵי הַיּוֹם means “on that very day” (Gen 7:13). K.M. Beyse, “עצב,” *TDOT* XI, 305–308.

41 Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 520; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 371.

42 Cf. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus*, 328–329; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 361.

43 Cf. J. Pudelko, *Profetyzm w Księdze Syracha* (Studia Biblica Lublinensia 21; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2020) 344–347.

this patriarch. In his final words, he announced a special care, grace and intervention from God: *יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם יְפֹקֵד יְהוָה* / *ἐπισκοπή δὲ ἐπισκέψεται ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός* (“God will surely visit you” [Gen 50:24]).<sup>44</sup> This signifies the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their return to the promised land of their fathers. When this happened, the descendants of Jacob’s sons were obliged to take Joseph’s bones from Egypt as well (Gen 50:25).<sup>45</sup> The Book of Genesis concludes with the information about Joseph’s death and the embalming and placement of his body in a coffin in Egypt (Gen 50:26). When the Exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt is described in the Book of Exodus, Joseph’s bones are referenced again. Moses takes Joseph’s bones with him, fulfilling the earlier obligation. The author of the Book of Exodus recalls the promise of “God’s visitation” conditioned on the transfer of Joseph’s bones to Canaan (Exod 13:19). This story resurfaces at the end of the Book of Joshua, where Joseph’s bones are mentioned for the third time. Taken from Egypt by the sons of Israel, they are buried in Shechem (Josh 24:32).

All three references are very significant and not coincidental. The first one marks the conclusion of the Book of Genesis and Joseph’s life (110 years); the second is associated with Moses and opens a new stage for the chosen people – the journey through the desert; and the third appears at the moment of the ultimate fulfilment of God’s promises, as the Israelites take possession of Canaan, and Joshua concludes his life, having lived, like Joseph, for 110 years (cf. Gen 50:26; Josh 24:29).<sup>46</sup> The transfer of Joseph’s bones thus signifies the fulfilment of God’s promises, the realisation of His salvation. The Greek text of Sirach uses this term to recall these important events and make them relevant. However, why does a different term, namely “body/remains,” appear in Sirach 49:15 H in describing the transfer of the patriarch’s remains?

## 5. The Term *גִּבְרִי* (Sir 49:15 H) and *Translatio Alexandri Magni*

The Hebrew version (Sir 49:15) is shorter than the Greek one. The core message of this laconic text is to draw attention to Joseph’s uniqueness. The question that the text suggests may aim to compare Joseph with someone else: *גִּבְרִי כִּי־סָפָא אִם נִוְלַד* (“was ever a man born like Joseph?”).<sup>47</sup> In Sirach 49:15 H, there is no mention of “bones” in reference to their transfer from Egypt to Canaan and burial in Shechem (Gen 50:25; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus*, 336.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Kings 23:30 mentions the transportation of the body of King Josiah from Megiddo to Jerusalem on a chariot and his burial there. However, it is not precisely explained how the “relocation of Joseph’s bones” occurred.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Witte, “Die Gebeine Josefs,” 149.

<sup>47</sup> The Mishnah (*Sotah* 1:9) juxtaposes Joseph with Moses: “We have no one as great as Joseph, for only Moses took care of his [bones]. Moses had the merit of burying the bones of Joseph, and no one in Israel was greater than he, for it is said: *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him* (Exod 13:19).” Cf. S.J.D. Cohen – R. Goldenberg – H. Lapin (eds.), *The Oxford Annotated Mishnah. A New Translation of the Mishnah with Introductions and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022) I–III. According to this tradition, Joseph gives way to Moses. Perhaps this is an explanation why Moses is mentioned instead of Joseph in the *Praise of the Fathers* after Jacob (cf. Sir 45:1).

Instead, the phrase *וּגְוִיתוֹ נִפְקְדָה* (“even his dead body was provided for”) appears. So why does the sage deviate from the standard way of presenting the transfer of Joseph’s remains?

The term *גְוִיָּה* appears 13 times in 11 texts in the Hebrew Bible and can have various meanings: “body, living being, celestial being” (Gen 47:18; Ezek 1:11; 1:23; Dan 10:6; Neh 9:37), “corpse, dead body” (1 Sam 31:10.12[2x]; Ps 110:6; Nah 3:3[2x]), “carcass” (Judg 14:8; 14:9).<sup>48</sup> When describing a living person, the term emphasises their weakness and shortcomings. It signifies someone who experiences oppression, troubles, or even the agony of bondage. They find themselves in a situation where they “only” have their body left, which can also become the property of others. In Sir 47:19 H, this term is reversed. It describes the powerful King Solomon, who ultimately became enslaved to women: they seized his body (*בְּגִוִיתוֹ*).<sup>49</sup> Conversely, Joseph, experiencing the oppression of slavery, managed to keep his body from the temptation of sin (cf. Gen 39:7–10). In Sir 49:15 H, the term “body” refers to the dead body, the remains of Joseph, which were embalmed (cf. Gen 50:26) and thus buried according to the custom used for Egyptian rulers and dignitaries.

Sirach had a knowledge of Greek customs and culture. During his lifetime, they permeated the Jewish world peacefully. The Jewish sage recognised the value of Greek achievements, but they were to remind his Jewish disciples of the greatness of the covenant and the Torah that Israel received. Presenting covenant heroes, Sirach used a well-known Greek literary genre of *encomium*.<sup>50</sup> And the patriarch Joseph combined the reality of the covenant with YHWH with his rule in Egypt. His death and burial could have provided Sirach with an excellent opportunity to confront them with another great historical figure – Alexander the Great.<sup>51</sup> His death in 323 BC under mysterious circumstances is not without significance. After the ruler’s death, there was unrest among the Macedonian notables and soldiers. Disputes erupted over the succession to the throne, the division of state offices and satrapies, the inheritance of Alexander’s legacy and the takeover of control over his remains. The transfer of his body and his funeral were both extremely important and problematic. The propaganda value of the king’s body was too high to make a snap decision about the monarch’s burial.<sup>52</sup>

Claudius Aelianus (second/third century AD), a Roman rhetorician writing in Greek, described the trials and tribulations concerning the transfer of Alexander the Great’s remains and burial in the twelfth book of *Varia Historia* (*Ποικίλη ἱστορία*).<sup>53</sup> The remains of Alexander are referred to as *σῶμα* (“body”). The historian mentions that the monarch’s body remained unburied for 30 days while his associates quarrelled over ruling the kingdom.

48 For more information on the subject, see H.J. Fabry, “גְוִיָּה,” *TDOT* II, 433–438.

49 Cf. Fabry, “גְוִיָּה,” 435.

50 Cf. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 128–129; Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50*, 82–103.

51 Cf. Witte, “Die Gebeine Josefs,” 146; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 373.

52 Cf. J. Piątkowski, “Wóz pogrzebowy Aleksandra – arcydzieło sztuki orientalno-klasycznej,” *Almanach Historyczny* 19 (2017) 12.

53 Cf. Claudius Aelianus Praenestinus, *Varia Historia* (*Ποικίλη ἱστορία*) XII.64, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/aelian/varhist12.xhtml#chap64> [access 8.09.2023]; cf. K. Juszczyk, “Tajemnica grobowca alabastrowego,” *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie* 17 (2005) 30–31.

This changed after Aristander of Telmessos, Alexander's court soothsayer, predicted eternal prosperity and invincibility to the land that would receive the "body" in which the dead monarch's soul had previously dwelled. The late king's will was to be buried in the Siwa Oasis because it was home to the Zeus-Ammon oracle, which meant to confirm that Alexander's father was Zeus. However, the Macedonian general of Alexander, Perdiccas, intended to bury the king in his homeland, in the family tomb of the royal necropolis in Aegae. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian from the first century BC who lived in Alexandria between 60 and 56 BC, drew attention to the extraordinarily elaborate coffin and hearse to transport the body of the dead king.<sup>54</sup> The convoy set out after preparing this impressive hearse, which took two years. It was considered a temple on wheels.<sup>55</sup> Led by Arrhidaeus, it moved towards Damascus. In Syria, it was met by Ptolemy I, the satrap of Egypt, who persuaded Arrhidaeus to disregard Perdiccas's orders. This way, Ptolemy I abducted the hearse with Alexander's body to bury it in Egypt.<sup>56</sup> Perdiccas pursued him, but despite his efforts to "recapture" the stolen remains, he had to settle for a likeness of Alexander that Ptolemy I had made to deceive his opponent.<sup>57</sup> However, Alexander was not buried in the Siwa Oasis but was to be entombed in the city named after him – Alexandria.<sup>58</sup> It was, however, still under construction, and Memphis was still serving as the capital. Therefore, it is likely that the first burial of Alexander was to take place there.<sup>59</sup> It was only Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the successor of Ptolemy I, who transported Alexander's body to Alexandria, where Ptolemy IV erected a new tomb called the *Soma* ("Body") in 215 BC. Alexander's tomb was revered as divine for centuries and was visited by distinguished guests who came to Alexandria. The Ptolemies thus became the undisputed heirs of Alexander.<sup>60</sup>

The remarkable story of transporting Alexander's remains shares some common features with the narrative about Joseph.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the question posed in Sir 49:15a H ("was ever a man born like Joseph?") is a starting point for comparing and juxtaposing Joseph

54 Cf. Diodorus Siculus (Diodor Sycylijski), *De Aetate Diadochorum. Bibliotheca Historica XVIII (Czas Diadochów. Biblioteka Historyczna XVIII)* (trans. A. Pawlaczyk) (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza 2020) 26.

55 Cf. K. Nawotka, *Aleksander Wielki* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2004) 512; R. Waterfield, *Dzielenie łupów. Wojna o imperium Aleksandra Wielkiego* (trans. N. Radomski) (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis 2019) 92–93.

56 Diodorus Siculus omits the fact that Ptolemy abducted Alexander's body against the will of Perdiccas, and only informs about his decision to bury him in Alexandria. Diodorus Siculus, *De Aetate Diadochorum*, 28. Cf. Nawotka, *Aleksander Wielki*, 515.

57 Cf. Claudius Aelianus Praenestinus, *Varia Historia (Ποικίλη ἱστορία)* XII.64.

58 Cf. Juszczyk, "Tajemnica grobowca alabastrowego," 28.

59 Cf. Waterfield, *Dzielenie łupów. Wojna o imperium Aleksandra Wielkiego*, 93–94.

60 Cf. Nawotka, *Aleksander Wielki*, 515–516; Waterfield, *Dzielenie łupów. Wojna o imperium Aleksandra Wielkiego*, 94.

61 Cf. Witte, "Die Gebeine Josefs," 146; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 373. The Jewish Apocrypha from the first century AD, *Vitae Prophetarum (Lives of the Prophets)*, states that Alexander of Macedon was to carry the remains of the prophet Jeremiah and place them in a tomb in Alexandria with due honour (*VitProph* 2:5). Cf. D.R.A. Hare, "The Lives of the Prophetes," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. II. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament. Expansions of the «Old Testament» and Legends, Wisdom, and Philosophical*

with another great hero – Alexander. This is all the more so given that the transfer of the king's body from Memphis to Alexandria took place during Sirach's lifetime. Both cases involve outstanding rulers. Joseph was embalmed and buried in Egypt, and the same was done with Alexander. In both cases, there is a promise of exceptional prosperity associated with the presence of the dead "body." Although the Hebrew and Greek texts use the term "bones" (תִּמְצִיץ/ὄστᾶ), referring to the transfer and burial of Joseph in Canaan, the Hebrew version of Sirach does not seek coherence with this account. It chooses the term הָיִיג ("body, remains"), which is most often translated in the LXX as σῶμα ("body").<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the author was referring to embalmed remains. However, while the Hellenistic world extolled the significance and extraordinary prosperity associated with the presence of the dead king's "body," and his tomb was also called σῶμα ("body"), the Jewish sage reminds us of another "body." While the pagans admire the solemn procession with Alexander's body placed in an impressive hearse, Sirach draws attention to something else. Joseph's body is not "divine," nor does it have magical powers to bring prosperity. The sage refers to an event associated with a particular, salvific action of God, who was to "visit" Israel.<sup>63</sup> Joseph's "body," taken from Egypt, was therefore to become a "witness" to the salvific events: crossing the sea, the covenant, miracles in the desert, and finally, taking possession of the promised inheritance. Successive generations of the sons of Israel were to remember the constant value and relevance of the covenant, the faithfulness of God, whose silent witness remains the "body" of Joseph. Therefore, the Jews contemporary to Sirach considered themselves spiritual heirs of Joseph, just as the Ptolemies considered themselves heirs of Alexander. At the same time, Joseph achieved prestige during his lifetime by ruling and saving the mighty empire of Egypt and the peoples living nearby during the famine. But Joseph achieved another spectacular success – he brought about reconciliation with his brothers and reunited the family. The Israelites were the descendants of Jacob's sons, who were very different from one another. Joseph set out to find his brothers in Shechem (cf. Gen 37:11–12), where he experienced violence and was sold into Egypt. However, his life experience in a foreign land and culture led to reconciliation. Joseph, or rather his "body," with the help of Moses and Joshua, returned to Shechem, receiving special respect from his descendants. Therefore, the introduction of the term "body," while the biblical tradition mentions the "bones" of Joseph, has both a polemical and educational character. In concluding the *Praise of the Fathers*, Sirach once again explains, using outstanding figures, that Jews do not need to worry

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*Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth) (New York – London – Toronto: Doubleday 1985) 387.

62 He translates הָיִיג as σῶμα ("body"): Gen 47:18; 1 Sam 31:10, 12; Ezek 1:11, 23; Nah 3:3; Dan 10:6; Neh 9:37; as πτώμα ("carcass, corpse, carrion"): Judg 14:8; Ps 110(109):6 LXX. Cf. Fabry, "גויה", 438.

63 "Sir 49,15 scheint mir hier nun eine frühe Form der *interpretatio Judaica* des Auftretens Alexanders zu sein, insofern der Siracide der *translatio Alexandri* die *translatio Josephi* gegenüberstellt: Mögen die Heiden den Leichenwagen Alexanders und dessen Grabmal bestaunen, so können die Juden auf die Fürsorge Gottes selbst um die Gebeine Josefs verweisen." (Witte, "Die Gebeine Josefs," 146–147).

in the face of Hellenistic hero worship but instead should turn to their own, who not only accomplished great and famous deeds but also enjoyed God's special blessing.<sup>64</sup>

So why does the term "bones" appear in Sir 49:15 G? It seems fundamentally more natural when referring to the fate of Joseph's remains. Therefore, the Greek translator directly refers to the account in Gen 50:25; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32, omitting the suggestion conveyed in the Hebrew text of Sir 49:15. Perhaps for the Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria in the late second and early first centuries BC,<sup>65</sup> Alexander the Great's tomb was no longer seen as a significant, current issue, and the reference to the Torah and the tradition of the fathers, which required constant reminding, appeared more important. This is confirmed by the subtle change in the first line of the statement about Joseph. While the H version contained a question, the G text has a statement: "nor has any man been born like Joseph" (49:15a G), and therefore there is no need to compare or juxtapose him with other figures. The Jews living in Egypt may have become a sign of the "vitality" of Joseph's bones, strengthening themselves in the faith of their fathers.

## Conclusions

The entire mini-poem Sir 49:14–16, and especially 49:15, the praise of Joseph, indicates that the *Praise of the Fathers* is not another and obvious lecture on the history of biblical Israel. The sage has not only made a selection of the characters portrayed and a selection of the content. The structure of the praise, especially its conclusion, is an example of a highly thoughtful concept of interpreting scriptures and instructing future generations. The composition of 49:14–16, particularly the presence of passive verbs (*passivum divinum*), highlights the most important message of the entire *Praise*: the presence and intervention of God in history. The praise of Joseph is even more indicative of this. It is not a lack of knowledge of the history of this patriarch that prompted Sirach to make such a perfunctory, laconic statement. It is so startling that it forces one to ask fundamental questions about its meaning and placement in the text as a whole. It appears that the sage of Jerusalem did not want to merely list Joseph's outstanding achievements, which went beyond his own people's interests. Joseph became a universal figure to the extent that he could serve as an invitation to change thinking and values.

While it may have been in Sirach's interest to encourage his fellow countrymen to emulate Joseph's successes, something else becomes more important. Joseph's impact proved unimaginably more significant after his death than during his lifetime. The promise associated with his remains led to the realisation of the salvific action, the "visitation" of God: the exodus, the covenant and taking possession of the promised land. However, the key

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 373.

<sup>65</sup> The Greek translation of the Book of Sirach may have been completed around 117 BC. Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 38.

to changing one's thinking is the ability to read and interpret the Scripture that confirms the minor detail about Joseph's remains (cf. Gen 50:26; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:29). The differences in textual variants here can be a great help in discovering the continued freshness and vitality of Scripture for its audience. It was Scripture that became the vehicle for the memory of the promise connected with Joseph's remains. This great inheritance given to Israel continues to be a life-giving source that not only tells history but interprets the present and shapes the future. The descendants of the illustrious fathers are not so much to reminisce with nostalgia about history and splendour but to learn present cooperation with YHWH, the creator and main protagonist of the covenant that lasts. God's model of shaping history is so attractive that it infinitely surpasses Alexander's spectacular achievements and power. The heirs to his empire cannot compare with the power of YHWH, whose presence and faithful action in Israel's history is continually affirmed by the Holy Scriptures.

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