

NEW HEBREW TEXT OF BEN SIRA CHAPTER 1 IN MS A (T-S 12.863) (1)

Summary

The article proposes a reading of some of the offset letters in Hebrew Ms A, that is, the letters that have transferred from the preceding and still missing first folio page of the manuscript. Among other things, the article proposes that the offset letters in Ms A I recto, lines 1-4 are the remnants of Ben Sira chapter 1, the Hebrew text of which is not otherwise known. Surprisingly, the Hebrew text matches closely the Syriac translation at the end of chapter 1 and not the Greek. The Syriac translation contains what are considered to be secondary, later additions. It is this additional material that is reflected in the offset Hebrew letters of Ms A I recto, lines 1-4.

1. Introduction

IN the Hebrew Ben Sira manuscript commonly titled Ms A, one finds traces of reversed Hebrew letters, letters which are the mirror image of how we expect them. These traces of letters are found above, beneath, and overlapping with the letters that are correctly oriented. The traces of reversed letters are the result of two separate phenomena: 1) ink bleeding through the paper from the opposite side of the same manuscript sheet and 2) ink being transferred from the opposite, facing page of the manuscript, what is called “offset” (i.e., ink is transferred from the verso of one page to the recto of the next page and vice versa). (2) Although both phenomena result in letter

(1) I wish to thank my many colleagues who offered observations and suggestions. Among them, Gary A. Rendsburg gave me some helpful general comments and Gerhard Karner spotted a mistake in the syntax of my translation. I especially wish to thank Jean-Sébastien Rey for looking over the paper in great detail and offering numerous suggestions.

(2) See the OED, sub “offset,” definition 10a (www.oed.com). I wish to thank Paul Grant-Costa and Tobias Glaza of the Yale Indian Papers Project for helping me to identify the correct term for this phenomenon.

forms that are mirror-images of the regular letter forms, the two types of reversed letters can be distinguished. Those that derive from the opposite side of the same page (i.e., bleed through letters) are often blurry; they occur on large sections of a manuscript page. Those that derive from the facing manuscript page (i.e., offset letters) have more defined edges; although they are often of a lighter color than the correctly oriented letters, sometimes the offset letters are as dark as or even darker than the letters that are correctly oriented. The traces of offset letters in Ms A recto 1-4 allow us the chance to recover portions of the lost Hebrew text of Ben Sira, chapter 1, which occupied (in part) the verso of the first folio page of Ms A, a page that is now missing. From these traces, I offer below a very preliminary and cautious suggestion about the nature of the Hebrew text of Ben Sira, chapter 1 in Ms A. The following observations are made only from looking at the digital photographs available at the website www.bensira.org, created by Gary A. Rendsburg and Jacob Binstein. I have not digitally altered the images in anyway to see them better (other than magnifying them through my Mac "Preview" application). Further study of this manuscript in person may reveal more text unreadable from the digital images online.

Ms A, written in continuous script, contains numerous interesting features. Like all the other Hebrew witnesses to Ben Sira, it contains many linguistic and textual problems. The Hebrew text appears to contain doublets of verses (Sir 4:19), misplaced verses (7:15), missing verses (6:18), and confused (almost incomprehensible) text (e.g., 13:22). The text sometimes reflects the Hebrew of the same passages found in other manuscripts (like Mss C and D), but sometimes not. It sometimes corresponds with the ancient translations into Greek and Syriac, but often it does not. Ms A also presents problems at a more mundane level. It attests a number of different scribal marks, Tiberian-type vowels, marginal notations, and cantillation symbols, some of which have defied any convincing explanation (e.g., the interlinear letters in 15:14). This is not to mention the various incidental holes, splotches, discolorations that further complicate the reading of the Hebrew text.

Certain features of the manuscript and its writing are important to bear in mind when considering the bleed-through and offset letters. The writing of individual letters in the manuscript is not entirely consistent. (I exclude in this consideration the occasional lengthening of letters at the end of the line [to create a roughly consistent length of line]). The letters differ both in size and shape. The size and shape do not seem to depend on a particular line of the text or the neighboring letters. So, for example, the length of the final *nun* can vary from

almost twice the length of a regular letter (as in און “ear” in I recto 19 [= Sir 3:29]) to approximately the same size as the other letters (as in אין “not” in I recto 18 [= Sir 3:28]). (3) Similarly, note the small *beth* of ביום “in the day of” in I recto 7 (= Sir 3:15) versus the much larger *beth* in בעונה “with humility” in I recto 9 (= Sir 3:17). Note also, that the base line of the *beth* of ביום seems not to extend beyond the vertical line to the right (similarly with the *beth* of בזה “one who despises” in I recto 8 [= Sir 3:16]), though it does extend to the right of the vertical line in the *beth* of בעונה. In still other cases, the vertical line of the *beth* is sometimes nearly perpendicular to the base line, as in מכאביו “his pains” I recto 16 (= Sir 3:27), though often it forms an acute angle with the base line, an extreme example being in the word כבוד “honor” in I verso 3 (= Sir 4:13). Similar variations can be found for most letters. Even the orientation of the words to each other is not consistent; in I recto 10 (= Sir 3:16), for example, the first word מויד “the one acting arrogantly” is quite a bit higher than the following word בזה. All of this is to say, that deciphering the traces of reversed, mirror-image letters is sometimes difficult.

The marks that are the result of ink bleeding through a single manuscript page are often blurry or fuzzy on their edges. They are generally difficult to read. More often, a very amorphous shape appears on the page. Sometimes an entire side of a manuscript page is filled with traces of these letters or the blurred outline of indecipherable text. Generally, because these are often illegible, they are of little help in reconstructing lost or damaged passages. Some examples of these blurry bleed through letters can be found on II recto. In the middle of the page and on the left hand side of the page, one sees many examples of these. Note especially the two adjacent mirror-image *taws* at II recto 14, between the words וברעתך “in your bad (state)” and יתנדה “he will separate himself” of Sir 6:11; the two *taws* correspond to the letters in תתקצר “do (not) be impatient” at II verso 14 (= Sir 7:10). Note beneath these two *taws*, at II recto 15, the *šin/šin* and *beth* that correspond to לאנוש במר “to a person in bitterness” (II verso 15 [= Sir 7:11]).

(3) See the photos at www.bensira.org. Photos are also available at the Friedberg Genizah Project website, <https://fgp.genizah.org>, under the various shelfmarks listed in 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* (VTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1997; reprinted with corrections Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 13-19. For the sake of convenience, I list here the relevant shelfmarks for Ms A: I recto/verso = T-S 12.863; II recto/verso = T-S 12.864; III recto/verso ENA 2536.1; IV recto/verso ENA 2536.2; V recto/verso = T-S 12.864; VI recto/verso = T-S 12.863.

In contrast to the marks that are the result of bleed through, offset letters have sharper edges and are easier to read. These usually have the same color as the letters that have bled through the page, as well as the same general appearance as erased or partially erased letters, which are relatively rare in Ms A, the scribe preferring to cross out mistakes (e.g., יגלה in I recto 10 [= Sir 3:20]) or to cancel/correct them with correction marks of one sort or another (e.g., I recto 6 [= 3:14]). (4) All the same, sometimes the ink has transferred so well from the opposing/facing page that the traces of the offset letters are as dark as or darker than the correctly oriented letters. Furthermore, it is significant to note that the traces of offset letters are usually located within the top five or six lines of the page.

The presence of reversed, mirror-image letters in the text is one that is not much discussed in the scholarly literature to the best of my knowledge. Jean-Sébastien Rey, however, has recognized the offset letters in relation to marks in Sir 10:13c-d, located on Ms A IV recto 2. (5) The passage is difficult to interpret, in part, because the manuscript contains a marginal reading that may be intended to replace another phrase within the text itself or to serve as an additional complement to the text as it stands. Sir 10:13c-d is located on IV recto 2. One finds in the middle of the line the following text: על כן מלא לבִי אלה[י]ם “Therefore, as for the presumptuous one (lit., the one full of heart = לב), God . . .” (6) Between and within these letters are traces of letters due to offsetting from III verso 2. Previous scholars have noted the possibility that the letter traces are erased text; this is clearly not the case, however, as Rey comments. (7) To the right of the *lamedh*

(4) The primary examples of erasure are the partially erased final *kaphs*. The scribe apparently first wrote a final *kaph*, but then corrected himself by erasing the long descender so that the letter now became a *resh* (e.g., I, recto, line 1 [= Sir 3:8] in עבור “because”; II, recto, line 17 [= Sir 6:15] in מהיר “price”; II, verso, line 23 [= Sir 7:20] in שוכר “employer” [mistake for שכיר “employee”]).

(5) Jean-Sébastien Rey, “Si 10,21-12,1: nouvelle édition du fragment Adler (ENA 2536-2),” *RevQ* 25/100 (2012): 581.

(6) The text is vocalized in the ms. The open circle above the *mem* is not present in the manuscript, but is an indication of the letter’s approximate readability. The translation is just one of several different possibilities (see Reymond, “Archaic Aspects of the Orthography and Morphology in the Hebrew of Ben Sira: The 3ms *Heh* Pronominal Suffix,” presented at the Seventh International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira, Strasbourg, June 22-25, 2014).

(7) See Beentjes, *Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 35. His observation has been repeated by Jan Liesen, *Full of Praise: an Exegetical Study of 39,12-35* (JSJSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 160; W. Th. van Peursen, *The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira* (SSLL 41; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 151 n. 56; Bradley C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach* (DCLS 2; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 41 n. 64. As noted above, Rey recognizes these traces as being due to offsetting

of לְבַי one can see the mirror-image of the *heh* of זֹנֶה “prostitute” (from III verso 2 [= Sir 9:3]). (8) Within the *lamedh* of מִלֵּא is the first *taw* of תִּסְתַּיֵּד “do (not) converse” (also from III verso 2 [= Sir 9:3]); one can see especially well the characteristic foot of the left leg of the *taw* (in the mirror-image it is of course the right leg). (9) Overlapping with the *mem* of מִלֵּא is the *samekh* of תִּסְתַּיֵּד; one can see especially well here what is the right angular side of the *samekh* (what is in the mirror-image the left side of the letter) joining to the more vertical left side of the letter (what is in the mirror-image the right side). Next, between מִלֵּא and the preceding word כֵּן one sees the traces of the second *taw* of תִּסְתַּיֵּד; here the right vertical line (what is the left line in the offset letter) is clear together with the horizontal bar. Overlapping with the *kaph* of כֵּן are what can be interpreted as the traces of the two *yodhs* of תִּסְתַּיֵּד. The *daleth* of this word has not left a trace in IV recto.

Not surprisingly, it is the case that portions of the text of IV recto have also been transferred onto III verso. Thus, just before the word תִּסְתַּיֵּד (III verso 2 [= Sir 9:3]), one finds the short particle אֵל, in its ligatured form. Between the *lamedh* of the particle and the initial *taw* of the verb, one finds the traces of the diagonal stroke of the *aleph* of מִלֵּא from IV recto 2 (= Sir 10:13c). (10)

From this single set of examples, we learn a couple of relevant details about the nature of these offset letter traces. First, sometimes only part of a letter is preserved in mirror-image, the other part having never transferred. Second, sometimes the traces of an offset letter are lost in the darker lines of a correctly oriented letter. Because of these factors the traces of offset letters will sometimes look like another letter, a letter that they are not. For example, note the appearance of what looks to be an erased *kaph*, i.e., a correctly oriented *kaph* that has been erased, in II verso 1 (between תַּעֲטֶרנָה and אִם). This *kaph*, however, is really the offset *kaph* and *heh* from the word כֹּהֲנִי “his

(“Si 10,21-12,1,” 581). He also notes that similar marks are found throughout the manuscript.

(8) In Ms A, the word זֹנֶה is vocalized; in addition, there is a cantillation mark (the *’ôlê wāyôrêd*) beneath the *heh* and a *raphe* bar above it.

(9) This word תִּסְתַּיֵּד is also vocalized with an *’atnāḥ* beneath the *daleth*.

(10) Another quite striking set of examples are found in I verso 2 and 3. In the middle of line 2 (= Sir 4:12), just above אֹהֲבֵיהָ “those who love her,” one sees in quite dark ink the mirror-images of all but the first letter of the words רֵעֶךָ וְאִם “your friend, and if” from II recto 2 (= Sir 5:12). One can also see in II recto marks from I verso, namely the *beth* of אֹהֲבֵיהָ between the *kaph* and *waw* of the words וְאִם רֵעֶךָ. Dark mirror-image letters are also found in II recto 3, beneath the words מִפְּלֹתוֹ אָדָם (= Sir 5:13), letters which correspond to the words יִמְצְאוּ כְבוֹד (from I verso 3 [= Sir 4:13]).

priests” on the opposing/facing page (III recto 1 [= Sir 7:29]). Essentially, the vertical line of the *kaph* did not transfer on to II verso; the vertical line that does exist is really the right most vertical line of the following *heh* (what is the left most vertical line in the offset letter). Furthermore, what looks like the bottom terminus of the erased *kaph* in II recto is really the foot of the preceding offset *taw* which corresponds to the *taw* of the definite direct object marker **את** in III recto 1.

Another example is found in I verso 1 (= Sir 4:10). In this line, there is an offset *heh* between the *mem* and *šin/šim* of **משהח** “from the pit” (the *heh* deriving from **ממהר** “one who is quick” II recto 1 [= Sir 5:11]). However, the offset *heh* looks more like a *samekh* due to the extending diagonal of the offset *mem* from **ממהר**. Such blurring in the offset letters only compound the other problems related to reading these reversed letters.

2. Orthography Explained

The purpose of studying these offset letters may, at first blush, seem like an academic exercise. However, it does have some useful results. Similar kinds of transfers from opposing/facing pages are found throughout Ms A. Some of the dark traces from offsetting can alter the expected forms of the correctly oriented letters. For example, in IV recto 3 (= Sir 10:13c), the final *mem* of **אלהים** bears what seems to be an extra *mem* on its upper left side. It seems at first as though the scribe wrote a small final *mem* at a strange angle, then caught his mistake and wrote the letter at the correct angle just beneath and to the side of the first attempt. But, in fact, the off-kilter *mem* is actually not a *mem* at all, but rather the offset *beth* from **בְּפִיָּתָם** “with their two edges,” from the opposing/facing page (III verso 3 [= Sir 9:4]).

Similarly, scholars often read the traces in the middle of III recto 3 as the words **יד זבחי** “hand, sacrifices of” (= Sir 7:31). Nevertheless, the marks on III recto do not easily reflect these words. For example, the *yodh* seems to have a foot, like the foot of a *taw* (branching down and to the left). The *daleth* has a clear crossbar, but its vertical line (descending from the right side of the crossbar) is barely visible in the photograph; much clearer is what appears to be another vertical line descending from the left side of the crossbar, making the letter look more like a *heth*. In fact, what has happened is that portions of the letters from II verso have transferred to III recto and become confused with the letters of **יד זבחי**. Thus, the “foot” of the *yodh* is really the trace from the *yodh* of **שיחה** from II verso 3 (= Sir 6:35); the line descending from the left side of the *daleth*’s crossbar is really the middle stroke of the *šin/šim* sign of **שיחה**. Traces of the right most

stroke of the *šin/śin* sign (what are in the mirror-image the left most traces) are also visible in III recto 3.

3. Reading Missing Text

In addition to making the existing text more comprehensible, cognizance of the transfer of ink due to offsetting also allows us occasionally to get a glimpse of missing text. Unfortunately, often the traces of offsetting are rather ambiguous (at least to the naked eye) and it is hard to be absolutely sure about which letters they derive from. One can see, for example, in the middle of VI verso 2 (= Sir 15:20; shelf mark T-S 12.863) an offset *lamedh* between the *šin/śin* and *waw* of שוא “emptiness, vanity.” See figures 1 and 2, at the end of the article. Overlapping with the *šin/śin*, one can also make out traces of what must be an offset *aleph*, the bottom left leg of which (the bottom right leg in the offset letter) is clearly visible. These traces could obviously correspond to the word לא “no.” If one considers that each line contains approximately 38-40 letters (which seems to be the case in most of the manuscript that is preserved, with some variability due to spaces between verses and extended letters), one can estimate that the offset letters in VI verso 2 may correspond to verse Sir 16:27. The reconstruction of Sir 16:27 by Segal (based on the Greek translation) contains several examples of the negative particle. (11) Based on the approximation of line length, and based on Segal’s reconstruction, the לא in question in VI verso 2 may be the one of 16:27d, which negates the following יהדלו in Segal’s reconstruction. Based on these assumptions, one can also make a conjecture as to some of the other marks in VI verso 2. The mark between the *aleph* of שוא and the following *waw* of ועל “and over” may be a *waw* and the marks to the left of this, overlapping with the *waw* and ‘*ayin* of ועל may be the remnants of an ‘*ayin*, specifically the diagonal mark of the ‘*ayin* as well the left most arm of the letter (what is in the offset letter the right most arm). These letters might help justify Segal’s reconstruction ייגעו “they will (not) weary.” Obviously, the reading of these latter marks (‘*ayin-waw*) is very tenuous and other possibilities could probably be found.

Nevertheless, it is surprising how well Segal’s reconstruction can be made to fit the offset letter traces. In a similar vein, following these assumptions, one can read an offset *resh* in VI verso 3 (= Sir 16:1) between the two *beths* of בבני “in the children of.” Possibly this could correspond to the *resh* of Segal’s reconstructed יצרו “they will cause distress” in 16:28a. The left most angular mark within the *heth* of

(11) See M. Z. Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1958), 102.

תשמח in VI verso 3 (= Sir 16:1) seems likeliest to be an offset *lamedh* corresponding to the first *lamedh* of the phrase לעולם from Segal's reconstruction of 16:28b. (Although Segal reconstructs a preceding *waw* conjunction, there does not appear to be room for it in the text.) The curved mark beneath the *heth* would be the offset '*ayin* of the same word; the left most vertical mark of this '*ayin* (what is in the offset letter the right most vertical mark) seems attested just to the right of the *heth*'s left vertical leg. The diagonal line of the '*ayin* is visible in the space beneath the *heth* and *mem*. The small offset mark between the *heth* and *mem* might be the horizontal bar of the second *lamedh* of לעולם. Given these readings, it is also possible to see at the end of the line, above the words פרו אל "they are fruitful, ... not," the offset marks reflecting איש of Segal's reconstruction of the beginning of Sir 16:28a. The offset *šin/śin* is above the *resh* of פרו; the top tips of the letter are preserved, as well as the bottom of the letter. The offset *yodh* is preserved just to the left of the offset *šin/śin*, above the *waw* of פרו. Traces of the offset *aleph* overlap with the ligatured אל.

In the next line, VI verso 4 (= Sir 16:3), the offset crossbar above the *taw* of תאמין "do (not) trust" may correspond to a *heth*; the apostrophe-like mark between the *taw* and the preceding ligatured אל "not" may be a *yodh*. These offset marks would correspond to the word חי "alive" in Segal's reconstruction of Sir 16:30a. The offset mark just to the right of the ligatured אל would then correspond to the upper diagonal line of the *mem* of Segal's מלא "he filled" in Sir 16:30a. At the end of this line one sees traces that might be an offset *řet*, corresponding to Segal's בטובר at the end of 16:29b.

In other cases, however, the offset marks are hard to read. At the upper left most corner of VI verso 1, we might expect to see the offset marks of the phrase Segal reconstructs as חלק חלקיהם "he apportioned their portions" (= Sir 16:26b), but the marks are too hard to read (at least for me). In a similar way it is regrettable that one cannot read the offset marks in II verso 4 that might confirm the reading הושט "stretch" in III recto 4 (= Sir 7:32).

Perhaps the easiest to read offset letters that may reveal previously unattested Hebrew text are those from the first page, I recto (shelf mark T-S 12.863). See Figures 3 through 6 at the end of this article. The offset letters are again preserved in the first lines of the page, especially in the middle of the lines. Beneath the '*ayin* and *mem* of ובמעשה "and in deed" in I recto 1 (= Sir 3:8), an offset *daleth* or *resh* can be read next to an offset *beth* or *kaph* beneath the *mem* of ובמעשה. There also is another mark overlapping with the baseline of the *beth* (what I read as *resh*), and the trace of another mark (what seems to be a *yodh*)

overlapping with the *waw*. These marks most likely correspond with דברי “my words.” (12)

The next sequence of letters seems to represent a different word. The first offset letter (beneath the *resh* of מאמר “word” [= Sir 3:8]) is likely *šin/śin*; note that there is a very faint trace of ink beneath the left side of the second *mem* of מאמר, corresponding to the left most vertical line of the *šin/śin* (what is the right-most vertical line in the offset letter). (13) The offset letter to the right of the *šin/śin* in I recto 1 is almost certainly a *mem*; no other letter has the characteristic bend on its right side (left side in the offset letter) combined with a diagonal line. The letter-traces to the right of the offset *mem* are most likely the sequence ‘*ayin-waw*, which can be written very closely together in Ms A (e.g., see שמעו “they heard” in III recto 17 [= Sir 8:9]; and שמעו “hear” in VI verso 27 [= Sir 16:24]). These offset marks would, then, correspond to the sequence שמעו.

In the following line, I recto 2 (= Sir 3:9), there is a slight mark beneath the right arm of the first *šin/śin* of שרש “root.” Due to the context, as explained below, I propose reading this offset mark as the head of a *waw*, though the mark is so small as to allow for many other conjectures. To the right of this mark, one finds a space and then what looks to be a *beth* and a *heh* beneath the *daleth* and *samekh* (respectively) of תיסד “will establish.” The other offset letters beneath the *yodh*, *taw*, *beth*, and *aleph* of אב תיסד are hard to make sense of initially. The left most letter under the *yodh* is likely the horizontal bar of an offset *lamedh*. (14) The offset letter to the right of this offset *lamedh*, beneath the *yodh* and *taw* of תיסד, may be a *beth* or *kaph*. If it is a *beth*, as I suspect, then it is of a slightly unusual shape, the top crossbar angling down. Nevertheless, a similar *beth* can be found in בברכת “in the blessing of” in I verso 3 (= Sir 4:13). The offset letter to the right of this, beneath the *beth* of אב “father” is either a small *beth* or a small *kaph*. As explained below, I read it as a *kaph*. Since the size of the letters seems to shift rather frequently, the smallness of

(12) Although the mark that may correspond with the offset *beth* has a curve in the transition between the vertical and bottom base line mark, which curve is more characteristic of the *kaph* and *nun*, the *beth* sometimes also has a curve, as in the *beths* of תעובהו in I recto 5 (= Sir 3:12); ביזם in I recto 7 (= Sir 3:15); and בני I recto 14 (= Sir 3:24).

(13) Cf. the *šin/śin* letter in לשמע “to hear” in II verso 3 (= Sir 6:33); ישן “old” in III verso 9 (= Sir 9:10); the offset *šin/śin* in IV verso 3 (= Sir 11:13) above the *beth* of רבים “many” (the *šin/śin* deriving from עשה “he did” in V recto 3 [= Sir 12:3]); and the offset *šin/śin* in the same line and verse, above the last *waw* of ריתמהו “they are amazed” (the *šin/śin* deriving from שנים “two” in V recto 3 [= Sir 12:5]).

(14) Cf. the offset *lamedh* between the *šin/śin* and *waw* of שוא in VI verso 2 (= Sir 15:20), mentioned above.

the letter is not unusual. What is unexpected is the fact that the crossbar of the preceding *beth* seems to intersect with the vertical line of the *kaph*. However, one can compare this with the *kaph* and *beth* in כבוד “honor” in I verso 3 (= Sir 4:13) where the crossbar of the *kaph* intersects with the vertical line of the *beth* (essentially since the *kaph* is higher than the following *beth*). The final offset letter of I recto 2, to the right of the offset *kaph*, between the *beth* and *aleph* of אב, may be a *kaph* or final *mem* (similar to the shape of the final *mem* in מושלים in I verso 15 [= Sir 4:27], where the right most vertical line [left most in the offset letter] is actually not perpendicular to the top crossbar, but forms an acute angle with it). (15) Together these letters can be interpreted as the preposition *beth* plus the 3fs pronominal suffix, בה, followed by the word לבכם “your heart” or by לבבכם [ם] “your heart.” I prefer the former, though the latter is clearly possible. (16)

In the next line, I recto 3 (= Sir 3:10), some offset letters can be clearly read. Between the *kaph* of כבוד “honor” and the *aleph* of לא “not” (= Sir 3:10) is an offset *ṣadeh*; the right arm or extension of the *ṣadeh* (what is the left arm or extension in the offset image) extends across the base line of the *kaph* of כבוד; the top swoop of the *ṣadeh* extends into the bottom left foot of the correctly oriented *aleph* of לא. (17) Directly beneath the correctly oriented *aleph* of לא is a very dark offset *aleph* that is extremely easy to read. Following this (i.e., to the right) is what looks to be an offset *waw*, blending with the ink of the *lamedh* above. A similar offset sequence of *ṣadeh-aleph-waw* is found in II recto 3 (= Sir 5:13) beneath the *taw* and *lamedh* of מפלתו “his downfall” (the sequence deriving from ימצאו “they will find” from I verso 3 [= Sir 4:13]).

To the right of this sequence in I recto 3 is a space. Then under the word כי “because” is an offset *ḥeth* with what appears to be two *yodhs* to the right, beneath and between the *kaph* of כי and the final *kaph* of אבך “your father.” To the right of the descender of the final *kaph* אבך is an angled vertical mark. Due to its angling, this can only be the left side (what is the right side in the offset letter) of a *samekh* or final *mem* (akin to the shape of final *mem* seen, e.g., in חיים “life” in I verso 2 [= Sir 4:12]; רחום “compassionate” I verso 24 [= Sir 5:4]; and אתם “you” VI verso 4 [= Sir 16:2]). Note, for comparison, the

(15) An even more dramatic angle is found two lines above, in I verso 13 (= Sir 4:25) in עם “with”; one can compare the similarity in shape to the *samekh* in the preceding word תסרב “do (not) act imperiously.”

(16) Rey (personal communication) suggests the reading לבבכם [ם] is preferable.

(17) Although the *aleph* is sometimes not written with a distinct bottom left foot, it is written with this foot sometimes, as in the *alephs* of הטאת in I recto 20 (= Sir 3:30); in במא I verso 4 (= Sir 4:14); in נבראה II recto 4 (= Sir 5:14).

similar crooked vertical mark in the offset *mem* in II verso 3 (= Sir 6:35) between the *waw* and *mem* of משל “proverb” (the offset *mem* deriving from להם “bread” in III recto 3 [= Sir 7:31]). Given the consonants, the most likely reading for the offset letters in I recto 3 is thus the phrase [תמ]צאו חיים “you will find life.”

In the next line down, I recto 4, one sees again what appears to be an offset *beth* (beneath the double dots indicating the end of the verse, end of Sir 3:11). To the right of this letter (beneath the *waw* of אמו “his mother”), one can see what might be the top tip of an offset *waw*. To the right of this, beneath the *mem* of אמו one sees the curve of a top horizontal crossbar turning into a vertical line, reflecting most likely an offset *resh* (though alternatively perhaps it could be an offset *daleth*). In addition, an offset mark exists beneath the *aleph* of אמו.

Although in VI verso the traces of offset letters seem to correspond to the reconstruction of the Greek text offered by Segal, the same cannot be said about the offset traces of this passage. However, these words and letters do correspond to portions of the Syriac translation, specifically to the extra Syriac verses (numbered 1:*9-11 or 1:20i-l) that do not correspond at all to the Greek translation or other translations derived from the Greek. (18) The relevant portion of the Syriac I give below, according to its poetic divisions for the sake of clarity (the Syriac manuscript has a continuous text):

<p>האחבאכ כפיוֹר ונינר ארעו כח לבי מלך הויל האעבט עני ליוסר רחמי לביא רחמי שלמח</p>	<p>כל תלך עבדך סבד זיבג ושלמח זוכר פיוס מלך האחבא סבו וסמח פיוס</p>
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- *9. Heed all my words and carry (them) out
and you will be inscribed in the books of life.
- *10. Love the fear of the Lord
and fix your heart on it and do not be afraid.
- *11. Draw near and do not tarry
and you will find life for your spirit.
- *12. And when you will be near
(be) as a hero and as a mighty man. (19)

(18) This observation, namely that the offset letters in Ms A I recto seem to reflect a Hebrew text that corresponds with the Syriac translation of Ben Sira chapter 1, was also discovered independently of me by Gerhard Karner, as communicated to me in a personal email. Karner revealed his discovery at a conference in Germany when this article was already accepted for publication. As of this writing, I am unaware of how specifically Karner reads the offset marks. Karner intends to publish his own findings in a later article.

(19) The Syriac text and translation are from N. Caldich-Benages, J. Ferrer, and J. Liesen, *La Sabiduría del Escriba / The Wisdom of the Scribe* (Biblioteca Midrásica 1;

The connection to the traces of offset letters in Ben Sira Ms A I recto is clearest in the correspondence of Syriac “heed all my words” with the proposed Hebrew דברי שמעו of I recto 1; and in the correspondence of Syriac “you will find life” with the Hebrew letters [תמ]צאו חיים of I recto 3. Given these similarities and considering the actual traces of offset letters, I propose reading and reconstructing the first four lines of the Hebrew of the verso of the missing first manuscript page of Ms A in the following manner:

[. . . דברי שמעו] ועשו ותכתבו
 [בספרי חיים : אהבו יראת יי ותנ]ו בה לבכם [ואל תיראו :]
 [קרבו ואל תאחרו ותמ]צאו חיים [לרוחכם : ובקרבכם]
 [אתם תהיו כאנשי חיל תהיו כנ]בו[ר] [י]ם : בני אל תכחש]
 . . . My words, hear [and do (them), (20) so you will be written]
 [in the books of life. Love the fear of the lord and set] your mind in it (21)
 [but do not fear.]
 [Approach and do not tarry and you will f]ind life [for your spirit. When
 you approach,]
 [you will be like valiant people, you will be like h]eroe[s. My child, do
 not deceive . . . (22)]

Several remarks are in order. First, that the text of the Syriac verses depends on a Hebrew original was theorized by past scholars, especially Rudolf Smend. (23) The above pages suggest that these verses do, in fact, derive from a Hebrew original (unless, of course, the Hebrew is a back translation from Syriac, in which case, they derive

Estella: Verbo Divino, 2003), 68-70. The verses are also sometimes numbered 1:20s-z. For more on this passage in Syriac, see Nuria Calduch-Benages, “Traducir-Interpretar: la versión siríaca de Sirácida 1,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 55 (1997): 313-340; and Thierry Legrand, “Siracide (Syriaque) 1,20C-Z: ‘Une addition syriaque et ses résonances esséniennes,’” in *Études sémitiques et samaritaines offertes à Jean Margain* (ed. Christian-Bernard Amphoux et al.; Histoire du texte biblique 4; Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 1998), 123-134.

(20) Note the similar sequence of ideas expressed as imperatives in Dan 9:19 (“hear [שמעה] . . . pay attention [הקשיבה] . . . do [ועשה]”).

(21) Note the use of נתן with the noun נפש and a *beth* preposition in Sir 51:20 (Ms B) “my soul I set in her (i.e., Wisdom).” It is not without interest that these verses in Sir 51 are sometimes considered to be a back-translation from Syriac. Could the same be true for the verses above from Ms A?

(22) This last sentence, beginning “My child,” is from the Syriac translation of Sir 1:27.

(23) Rudolf Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach, erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1906), 14. Similarly, G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, “Sirach,” *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (ed. R.H. Charles; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 1:320.

from the Syriac translator, as some have recently suggested). (24) Second, let me emphasize that the reconstruction of the missing portions (i.e., that which is in brackets) is only an educated guess based on the approximate number of letters per line in other parts of the manuscript as well as based on the text of the Syriac. The Hebrew very likely could have contained other words and expressions. In relation to the number of words per line, it might be remarked that sometimes the scribe of Ms A extended the length of certain letters and in other cases left large blank spaces in the text between verses. Either of these features could have been present in the lines from the missing page and this would affect how many letters were in each line. Despite these caveats, it seems extremely likely to me (given the close correspondence between the Syriac translation and the offset letters of Ms A I recto 1-4) that the Hebrew of the lost initial page of Ms A contained text that parallels at least some of the extra Syriac verses (i.e., what are labeled Sir 1:*9-*12 or Sir 1:20i-l). This implies, in turn, that the other extra Syriac verses might also have been present on the missing Ms A page. This is interesting, among other reasons, since the verses contain what are considered to be eschatological themes. (25) These are not specifically Christian in character. (26) Nevertheless, they are often associated with the expanded version of the Hebrew text (often labelled HII). (27) Although Ms A is recognized as containing other verses that are part of this expanded Hebrew text (like 11:15-16; 15:14-15; 16:15-16), the possible existence of a longer stretch of text associated with HII at the very beginning of the book in Ms A is striking. (28)

Eric D. REYMOND,
Yale Divinity School

(24) See, e.g., N. Calduch-Benages, J. Ferrer, and J. Liesen, *La Sabiduría del Escriba / The Wisdom of the Scribe* (Biblioteca Midrásica 1; Estella: Verbo Divino, 2003), 50-51.

(25) See W. Th. van Peursen, *Language and Interpretation in the Syriac Text of Ben Sira: A Comparative Linguistic and Literary Study* (MPIL 16; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 36.

(26) Smend, *Sirach, erklärt*, 14.

(27) See van Peursen, *Language and Interpretation*, 36.

(28) For HII citations, see W. T. van Peursen, *The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira* (SSLL 41; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 20; A. Fuchs, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zum hebräischen Ekklesiastikus* (Biblische Studien 12/5; Freiburg: Herder, 1907), 112-15.

עשה אלוהים אלהינו חסד ורחמים
 רבים לפני עולמינו ונעשה פדונו
 ואלהינו אלהינו בחיים ושלום

Figure 1. Portion of Ms A VI verso 2-4 with offset letters in black.

אלהינו אלהינו חסד ורחמים
 רבים לפני עולמינו ונעשה פדונו
 ואלהינו אלהינו בחיים ושלום

Figure 2. Portion of Ms A VI verso 2-4 with offset letters in black, reversed.

במאמר ובתענוגות
 אלהינו חסד ורחמים
 רבים לפני עולמינו ונעשה פדונו
 ואלהינו אלהינו בחיים ושלום

Figure 3. Portion of Ms A I recto 1-4 with offset letters in black.

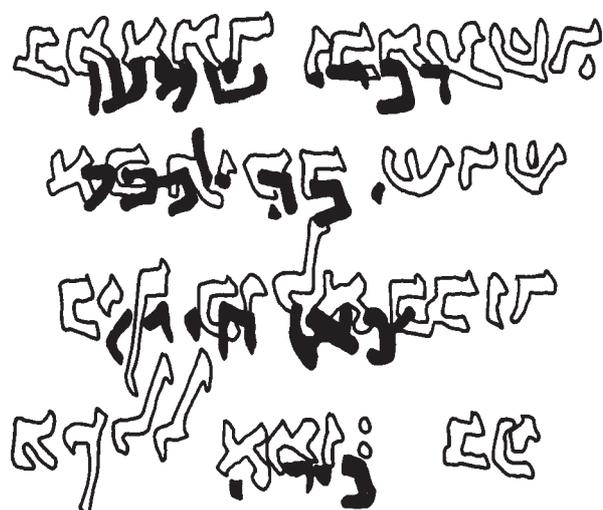


Figure 4. Portion of Ms A I recto 1-4 with offset letters in black, reversed.

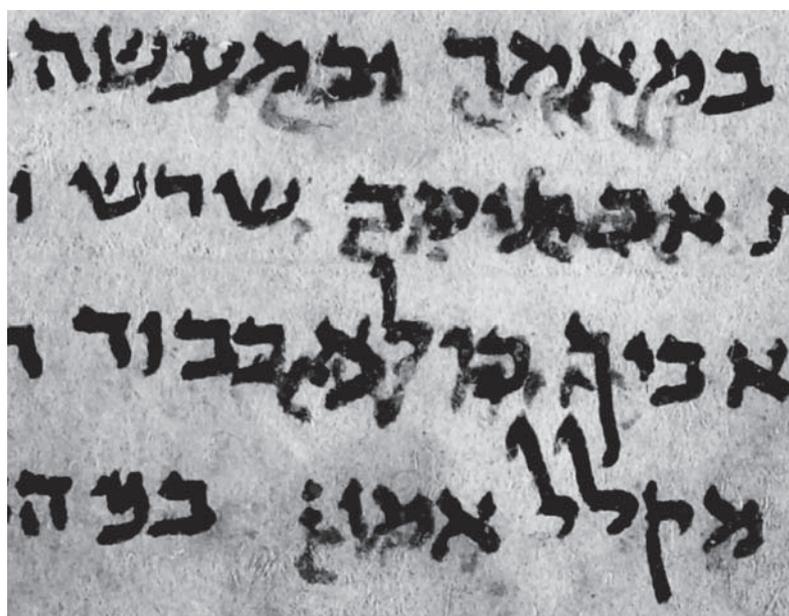


Figure 5. Photo of Ms A I recto 1-4 (printed with permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

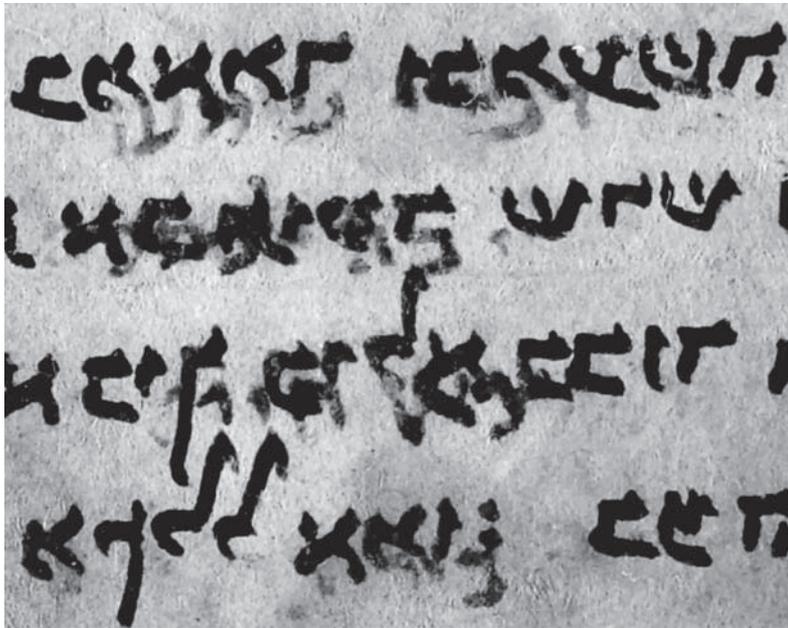


Figure 6. Photo of Ms A I recto 1-4, reversed (printed with permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)