1. Introduction

This chapter discusses Ben Sira’s longest friendship pericope from the central portion of his book (22:19–26). Sirach 22:19–26 is the most problematic of the pericopes on friendship, not least because of its serious textual difficulties. G diverges widely from S; for example, S contains two bicola (22:20cd, 26bd) absent from G. Conscious of the integrity of these different textual traditions, I have based my reconstruction of the Hebrew text of Sir 22:19–26 largely on G, while the text-critical notes will indicate the divergent readings of S.

In addition to the ancient versions of the pericope, a Cairo Genizah MS (H3053) preserves a medieval Hebrew rhymed poem based on Sir 22:22cd–23:9b. This prosodic work exhibits some echoes of a Hebrew text of Sir 22:22cd, 24–26, though the date of its composition is unclear. Whereas Ben Sira uses rhyme occasionally, the later author has introduced rhyme into every line or couplet. Because the medieval poem extensively

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2 I use the notation H3053 to designate MS Adler 3053, one of the Genizah MSS housed at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. For the text of H3053 see J. Marcus, “The Newly Discovered Original Hebrew of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus xxxii, 16–xxxiv, 1): The Fifth Manuscript and a Prosodic Version of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus xxii, 22–xxiii, 9),” JQR 21 (1930–1931): 223–40. A transcription of the poem appears on p. 238, facing a photograph of the manuscript. For comparison with the ancient versions of Ben Sira, Marcus added the relevant text of S and contributed a retroversion from G with explanatory footnotes (238–40).
3 The MS dates from around the eleventh century C.E., although the poem could be older. In its free rhythmic form and use of end-rhyme, the poem has affinities to the silluk. See further B. Hrushovski, “Hebrew Prosody” (EncJud 13.1195–1239), esp. the section on “The Classical Piyyut” (cols. 1203–11).
4 E.g., 6:11ab, 37cd; 7:17ab, 18ab; 9:16ab; 13:1ab, 23abcd, 24ab; 44:3abcd, 4abcd.
reworks the thought of Ben Sira, its testimony to the sage’s original text is at best oblique.

For comparison, I give below the section of the poem based on Sir 22:22cd, 24–26, followed by a translation.\(^5\)

\[
\begin{align*}
22cd & \text{ The disclosure of a confidence is a great disgrace,} \\
& \text{ and a hidden blow will bring a curse.} \\
24 & \text{ Columns of smoke precede fire,} \\
& \text{ and distress will smoke before the shedding of blood.} \\
25 & \text{ One who hides his confidence will not be ashamed,} \\
& \text{ and one who buries malicious talk will conquer his evil.} \\
26ab & \text{ And if your companion has revealed to you his confidence,} \\
& \text{ do not reveal it,} \\
26cd & \text{ Lest you become like a fool by disclosing it,} \\
& \text{ and one who hears it will be wary of you.}
\end{align*}
\]

2. Delimitation

Sirach 22:19–26, a pericope united by literary features, is delimited from its context by the subject of friendship. Between 21:1 and 26:27 the word φίλος (“friend”) occurs only in 22:19–26 G (vv. 20, 21, 22 [bis], 25).

The surrounding material treats foolish and undisciplined behavior. Preceding 22:19–26 is a long poem on folly (21:22–22:18), marked off by the term μωρός (“fool,” “foolish”) in the opening and closing bicola (21:22a; 22:18c). Following 22:19–26 is a nonalphabetic double acrostic of forty-four bicola (22:27–23:27), concerning control of the tongue and of physical desires. Thus, external factors confirm the internal indications that 22:19–26 is a distinct pericope.\(^6\)

\(^5\) To facilitate comparison, I provide Tiberian (Masoretic) vocalization (except for final pause), although this MS is vocalized according to the Babylonian system. Note that H\(^{3053}\) lacks any equivalent to Sir 22:23.

3. Retroverted Text of Sirach 22:19–26

I

 поме́х: שֶׁנֶּאָר הַדּוֹמֶה. 19
 поме́ה, או́ה בִּבְרֵי אֲדֹמַת; 20
 אוֹלַ֔הְיוֹתָא כָּל נְעַשֶּׁהָ; 21
 אוֹלַ֔הְיוֹתָא כָּלָ֖הַדָּה; 22
 הנֶפֶשׁ שֶׁהָיָ֖ה מַעִיָּ֑הוּ; 24

II

 לְמַשְׁלוֹתָ֖הוּ שְׁפֵ֑חַ; דָּ֖הוּ; 23
 בּוֹשֶׁת גְּדוֹלָתָ֖הוּ שְׁפַחֹתָ֑הוּ; 24
 כָּלַ֔הְיוֹתָא אֵלָ֖ה יִתְּנֶֽה; 25
 כָּלַ֔הְיוֹתָא אֵלָ֖ה יִתְּנֶֽה; 26

4. Text-Critical Notes

My reconstruction of the Hebrew original of Sir 22:19–26 draws mainly on G, with some attention to S. Although 22:24 appears after 22:23 in G and S, I have placed it after 22:22 for the sake of the sense.

19a. So most MSS of G; to vary the participle in verse 19a, G¹ (except for G²⁴⁸) employs ὅ ὀφύτευς, “one who gives a dig to.” In both cola of verse 19, S presupposes יָקֹשׁ, “a blow.”

19b–b. So G with the present tense. S has “causes friendship to pass away,” from verse 22d.

20c. So G. S reads “one who cheats.”

20d. After verse 20b S adds an extra bicolon: “Do not be fickle toward your friend, but if you are fickle, do not suppose that you have friendship with him.”

21e. So G, L. S reads “a way out.”


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7 For text-critical notes on the ancient versions of 22:19–26, see Marböck, “Gefährdung und Bewährung,” 89–90 (Greek), 98–100 (Syrac), and 100–102 (Latin).

8 Thus Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 315–16; cf. Smend, Sirach erklärt, 202; Box and Oesterley, “Sirach,” 392. Other examples exist where verses have been switched in the course of textual transmission; for instance, in H¹ 12:1 precedes 11:34, while in H² (but not H¹) 32:24 comes before 33:1.
22g. After ὀνειδισμοῦ, “insult,” G adds καὶ ἦπερηφανίας, “and pride,” a gloss that is lacking in S and that overloads the colon; L adds a further noun, convicio, “taunting.”

22h–h. So S. G reads μυστηρίου ἀποκαλύπτειν, “the revealing of a secret.”

22i–i. So S with a participle. G paraphrases: “in the case of these things every friend will flee.”

24j–j. So H \textsuperscript{3053}; compare Joel 3:3. S reads “smoke billows up” (cf. Joel 3:3 S), while G has “there is vapor of a furnace and smoke,” presupposing ἄμια ἐκ τοῦ φωλιᾶ.

24k–k. So S ALW (cf. H \textsuperscript{3053}); S\textsuperscript{M} reads the participle: “one who sheds blood” (= ἀιμάτων, “blood”); the plural represents the Hebrew idiom for blood that has been shed.

23l. So S. G paraphrases: “acquire fidelity with.”

23m. Reading εὐφραίνεις, “you may rejoice,” with most MSS of G. Instead of ἐχθρός, “you may rejoice,” S presupposes νέος, “you may be united.” G\textsuperscript{S} (= Ziegler) paraphrases: ὁμοίως πλησιονέστερος, “you may be filled together.”

23n. After verse 23d the Lucianic witnesses add a gloss (absent in GI, S, and L) based on 10:23 and 11:2: “For one should never despise the appearance\textsuperscript{10} of someone, nor is a rich person lacking sense remarkable.”

25o–o. So S. G has, “To shelter a friend I shall not be ashamed” (cf. Sir 6:14a); note that Sir 22:25–26 G appears to be influenced by 6:12–14 G.


26q–q. Cf. G: “And if evil happens to me on account of him.”\textsuperscript{11} However, S presupposes a different reading: “If your comrade reveals to you a secret, do not disclose it”; possibly it misread ἀλλα, “of you,” as ἀλλά, “your companion.”

\textsuperscript{9} In 22:22cd the textual problems affect the interpretation. The text of G here is open to doubt because verse 22c is overloaded (Smend, \textit{Sirach, erklärt}, 201), whereas S presents a smoother text (Marböck, “Gefährdung und Bewährung,” 91).

\textsuperscript{10} Or “limited situation”; cf. Marböck, “Gefährdung und Bewährung,” 95 n. 16; Wagner, \textit{Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena im Buch Jesus Sirach}, 343.

26—7. Cf. G: “Everyone who hears will guard himself from him.” S has: “Lest everyone who hears you will be wary of you, and will consider you as a wicked person” (cf. 19:9 S).

5. Translation

I

19 One who strikes the eye will make tears descend, and one who strikes the heart will elicit pain.
20 One who throws a stone at a bird will scare it away, and one who disgraces a friend will make friendship vanish.
21 If you draw a sword against a friend, do not despair, for there is a way back.
22 If you open your mouth against a friend, do not be terrified, for there is reconciliation.
One who reveals a confidence is a disgraceful person, and a hidden blow will make friendship vanish.
24 Columns of smoke precede fire, and malicious talk precedes the shedding of blood.

II

23 Support your companion in his poverty, so that you may rejoice in his prosperity.
At a time of distress remain faithful to him, so that you may be an heir in his inheritance.
25 If your friend becomes impoverished, do not put him to shame, and do not hide yourself from his presence.
26 But if evil happens to him on account of you, everyone who hears will be wary of you.

6. Poetic Analysis

Sirach 22:19–26 consists of two stanzas: the first stanza (three couplets: vv. 19–20; 21–22b; 22cd, 24) discusses insensitive behavior that destroys friendship, while the second (two couplets: vv. 23; 25–26) speaks of preserving friendship with an impoverished friend. The first stanza is united by a triple inclusio between its first and last couplets.
22:19ab: מַחַץ ("one who strikes," bis); 22:22d: מַחְפֶּשׁ ("a blow")
22:20b: מַסִּיחַ ("one who disgraces"); 22:22c: מַסִּיחַ ("disgrace")
22:20b: נְבֵירוֹת אֲלֹהֵי; 22:22d: נְבֵירוֹת אֲלֹהֵי ("will make friendship vanish")

In my reconstruction the second stanza is marked off by rhyme in all four cola of its first couplet (22:23abcd) and the last two cola of its second couplet (22:26ab).


The opening couplet of the first stanza (22:19–20) consists of two aphoristic bicola; in each case the example in the first colon introduces a lesson in the second. Poetic features also unify 22:19–20, since each colon begins with a participle starting with מ, and rhyme exists between the first colon of 22:19 and the second colon of 22:20 (v. 19a: מַחַץ, “tears”; v. 20b: מַסִּיחַ, “friendship”). In my reconstruction the opening bicolon (22:19) exhibits alliteration and assonance, which are evident when its two cola are juxtaposed (“one who strikes” + [part of body] + [hip < il verb] + [feminine noun]):

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The second bicolon (22:20) contains further alliteration (v. 20a: מַשְׁלָל, “one who throws”; v. 20b: מַסִּיחַ, “one who disgraces”), as well as assonance (v. 20a: מַסִּיחַ, “will scare it away”; v. 20b: מַסִּיחַ, “one who disgraces”).

The second couplet (22:21–22ab) forms the center of the stanza, with parallel prescriptions on how to behave after acting “against a friend” (בֵּית אֲדֹנִי). Verse 21 adds alliteration by repeating ת and ס in the word-series: תָּשָׁלָל ... וּשְׁחֵרוֹת ... יָזִית הַשֵּׁכָּב ("if you open," v. 22a) and אל תּוּפֶר ("do not be terrified," v. 22b).


12 In Sir 32:10 ה the sage also juxtaposes two cola beginning with לפני ("before"): “Before hail lightning will shine out, and before a contrite person favor will shine out.”
As a whole, the first stanza exhibits chiastic features:

A (22:19ab): ...
B (22:20b): ...
C (22:21ab): ...
C (22:22ab): ...
B (22:22d): ...
A' (22:24ab): ...

The couplet (22:23) that opens the second stanza exhibits a fourfold
rhyme: /"in his poverty," v. 23a); /"in his prosperity," v. 23b); /"to him," v. 23c); /"in his inheritance," v. 23d); note also
that each colon in verse 23 has a word beginning with b. The antithesis
between “his poverty” and “his prosperity” (22:23ab) matches the con-
trast between “distress” and “his inheritance” (22:23cd). Indeed, verses
23b and 23d share a common structure.

... so that you may rejoice in his prosperity (22:23b)
... so that you may be an heir in his inheritance (22:23d)

By contrast, verses 23a and 23c form an a:b::b':a' chiastic pattern:

Support your companion : in his poverty :
At a time of distress : remain faithful to him.

Verse 23cd also exhibits alliteration, with \ occurring four times and other
letters three times (\, \, \, \, \).

The final couplet (22:25–26), warning against neglect of a needy
friend, also employs alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. There is
alliteration and assonance between דל והמישנ ("do not put him to
shame," v. 25a) and מוקッシュ ("if ... happens to him," v. 26a). The final
bicolon exhibits rhyme, which serves to mark the end of the pericope:
שליחון ("on account of you," v. 26a) and מוקッシュ ("of you," v. 26b).

7. Context

Sirach 22:19–26 occurs near the end of Ben Sira’s fourth part
(14:20–23:27), which consists of a theological segment (14:20–18:14) and
an ethical segment (18:15–23:27). While discussing the context of Sir
19:13–17 in the previous chapter, I already outlined the structure of 18:15–23:27. Just as throughout 18:15–23:27 the sage often contrasts wise and foolish talk, so too the use of speech is a theme of 22:19–26, since its first stanza mentions a verbal offense (22:22a), revealing confidences (22:22c), and malicious talk (22:24b).

b. Relationship with 21:22–22:18

While the preceding pericope (21:22–22:18) discusses folly of various kinds, 13 22:19–26 describes foolish behavior that can put an end to friendship, namely, negative speech (the first stanza) and a refusal to help a friend (the second stanza). Whereas 22:13bc G admonishes, “Do not go to a person lacking understanding; be on guard against him,” 22:26b warns that others will be on guard against someone who has failed to help a friend (“everyone who hears will be wary of you”). 14 In a comparable fashion, the theme of shame, occurring in 22:3–5, recurs in 22:19–26, which speaks of disgrace (22:20b, 22c), calumnious talk (22:24b), and shame (22:25a). Finally, the thrice-mentioned “heart” (or “mind”: καρδία) in 22:16–18 G serves as a mot crochet with “heart” (καρδίαν = בּ) in 22:19b. 15


8. Exegesis


In order to emphasize the delicate nature of human friendship, Ben Sira opens the poem with two comparisons from the natural world (the

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14 Both 22:13 G and 22:26 G use the verb φυλάσσομαι (“be on guard”).

15 So Marböck (“Gefährdung und Bewährung,” 88), who also notes that διαλύω (“dissolve”) occurs in 22:16b, 20b G.

eye [22:19] and a bird [22:20]). The first bicolon (22:19) compares the sensitivity of the human eye to the delicacy of the heart in friendship. Just as by its tears an eye indicates that it has been injured, so too a human heart wounded in friendship displays its feelings of hurt (sometimes also with tears).17

Elsewhere in his book Ben Sira mentions the “tears” (רמשה) caused by injustice (35:18) or grief (38:16). Speaking of the plight of the poor widow, the sage exclaims: “Do not tears [רמשה, collective] descend upon her cheek?” (35:18 Hן). In his advice on mourning for the dead, he counsels: “My child, over the dead make tears [רמשה] flow” (38:16 Hן).

According to 22:19a the cause of the tears is “one who strikes the eye” (הָּיִן). Here Ben Sira echoes an ordinance of the Exodus Covenant Code. Exodus 21:26 specifies: “And if a person strikes the eye of his servant [רָאָשׁ] or the eye of his maidservant and destroys it, he shall let him go free in exchange for his eye.” The Covenant Code stipulates that the destruction of the servant’s eye as a result of the slaveowner’s blow puts an end to the master-slave relationship. Similarly, Ben Sira uses the analogy of a blow to the eye (22:19a) when speaking of an emotional wound that puts an end to the relationship of friendship (22:19b).

The phrase הָּיִן (“one who strikes the heart,” 22:19b) refers to a person who hurts one’s feelings by an act of unkindness or betrayal.18 The same idea appears in the misogynistic statement of 25:13 Hן.

אף על פי כן הָּיִן раЗא כְּמוּם раЗא

Any blow but not like a blow to the heart; any evil but not like the evil of a woman!19

In 25:13 the sage parallels a physical blow with an emotional blow (v. 13a) and physical suffering with the emotional suffering that can be

17 Perhaps the saying derives from a traditional riddle: “What kind of blow causes the most weeping?” (Answer: “a blow to the heart.”) In the book of Tobit it is not so much the blinding of his eyes (Tob 2:10) as the emotional wound of his wife’s mockery (2:14) that causes Tobit to weep (3:1) and to pray for death (3:6). On the ancient Hebrew conception of weeping, see T. Collins, “The Physiology of Tears in the Old Testament,” CBQ 33 (1971): 18–38, 185–97.

18 A different nuance appears in the cognate phrase in 1 Sam 24:6 and 2 Sam 24:10: יִוָּעָן הָּיִן раЗא חָּיָה раЗא (“and David’s heart [= conscience] smote him”).

19 See Segal, בן סירה, 155, for the completion of the lacunae in Hן. The parallelism implies that раЗא אִשָּׁה раЗא (“the evil of a woman”) should be understood as “the distress caused by a wife.” On 25:13–14, see Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View of Women, 67–71.
caused by a wife (v. 13b); similarly, in 22:19 he parallels a physical blow (v. 19a) with an emotional wound (v. 19b).

A related saying in b. Šabb. 11a contains a kind of numerical proverb (similar to the 3 + 1 pattern of Sir 26:5–6): “Any sickness, but not sickness of the bowels; any pain, but not the pain of the heart [בְּלָבָּב]; any ache, but not the aching of the head; any evil, but not an evil woman.”\(^{20}\) A comparable statement occurs in 25:23ab G: “A downcast heart and a sullen face and a blow to the heart [πληγὴ καρδίας] [come from] a wicked wife.” Whereas Sir 22:19 uses the pair “eye-heart,”\(^{21}\) Sir 25:23 employs the series “heart-face-heart,” while the rabbinic aphorism utilizes the triad “bowels-heart-head.”

In 22:19b Ben Sira’s grandson employs the noun αἰσθησίας in the sense “feeling” or “pain,” as in Jdt 16:17.\(^{22}\) Although the Greek noun can mean “knowledge” or “discernment” as well as “pain,” the context here demands the latter meaning.\(^{23}\) Sirach 36:25 H\(^{b}\) connects the noun "πάθος" ("pain") with the “heart”: “A deceitful heart will cause pain” (ἡμών ἡμῶν). Similarly, Prov 15:13 asserts that “by pain of heart [ἡμών ἡμῶν] the spirit is stricken.”

The second bicolon of the first stanza (Sir 22:20ab) uses the image of a bird to express the fragility of friendship; a friend may be scared off as easily as a bird. Likewise, Sir 27:19–20 utilizes the imagery of a bird and a gazelle (both creatures that are easily frightened away) to convey the vulnerability of friendship.\(^{24}\) In 22:20a, too, the bird flying away is an image of broken friendship, whereas in 27:9a G the same creature serves to depict friends gathering together: “Birds will lodge with those that are like them.”

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\(^{21}\) For other instances of “eyes” and “heart” in parallel, see, e.g., Prov 4:21; 21:4; 23:33; Sir 14:3 H\(^{4}\); 43:18 H\(^{b}\). For a full discussion of this parallel word-pair, see W. G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (JSOTSup 170; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 284–92.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Marböck, “Gefährdung und Bewährung,” 92 n. 10. Judith 16:17 says that the hostile nations shall forever weep “in pain” (ἐν αἰσθήσει), while the same Greek phrase also means “painfully” in 1 Esdr 1:22 (24).

\(^{23}\) Though LXX Proverbs nineteen times translates ἡμών ("knowledge") with αἰσθησίας (e.g., Prov 15:14; 18:15), Ben Sira’s grandson never uses this rendering of ἡμών but instead employs γνῶσις ("knowledge": 3:25 G\(^{c}\)), σῶναςις ("perception": 5:10; 37:22, 23), or ἐπιστήμη ("understanding": 38:3). According to G. B. Caird the grandson was not acquainted with LXX Proverbs; see “Ben Sira and the Dating of the Septuagint,” in *Studia Evangelica 7* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; TU 126; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1982), 95–100, esp. 100.

\(^{24}\) See my exegesis of 27:19–20 in the previous chapter.
The throwing of stones (Sir 22:20a) indicates hostility (cf. Prov 26:27; 2 Sam 16:6); indeed, David actually caused a fatal wound to Goliath by sling ing a stone (1 Sam 17:49–50). In this stanza Ben Sira draws a parallel between throwing stones (Sir 22:20) and wounding someone (22:19). The same parallel appears in Sir 27:25 G: “The one who throws a stone upward throws it upon his own head, and a treacherous blow will open up wounds.”

The first couplet concludes by making the lesson explicit: “One who disgraces a friend will make friendship vanish” (Sir 22:20b). Similarly, in 41:22cd H M the sage warns his audience to be ashamed:

Before a friend concerning reproachful words,
and of insulting after giving a gift.25

The second couplet of 22:19–26 is an encouragement to maintain hope even if one has drawn a sword (22:21) or opened one’s mouth (22:22ab) against a friend. Whereas “opening one’s mouth” (v. 22a) appears anticlimactic after the hyperbolic act of “drawing a sword” (v. 21a), Ben Sira deliberately employs this juxtaposition for dramatic effect. Verse 21 speaks of an occasion when the sage thinks friendship can be mended, namely, a fit of temper that leads one to draw a sword.26 Whereas 1 Sam 17:51 describes David drawing the sword to kill the hostile Goliath,27 the tragedy of Sir 22:21 is that one draws the sword against a friend. Contrary to what one might expect, Ben Sira asserts that such a rash act (perhaps in response to a friend’s negative remarks or deeds) is not irreparable.

In such circumstances the sage counsels: “Do not despair” (לא תהיִּא). The same phrase occurs in m. Ḳebot 1:7, where it refers to a despairing attitude because of the evil in the world. The reason for Ben Sira’s

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25 An alternative vocalization of 41:22d H M yields the sense: “and before a stranger of giving reproach”; cf. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, 96. However, H preserves a text closer to G:

Before a friend concerning insulting [wo]rds,
and after giving a gift do not be contemptuous.


27 Similarly, Sir 37:5 speaks of a good friend fighting against one’s foes.
encouragement to hope here is the possibility of a “way back” (22:21b). Similarly, 17:24 G connects a “way back” with hope: “Yet to the repentant he [= God] gave a way back [ἐπάνωθν], and he encouraged those abandoning endurance.” The “way back” (חזרה) is presumably apologizing to one’s friend for the misdeed; indeed, the noun חזרה can also mean “repentance” or “conversion” in postbiblical Hebrew.28

The whole of 22:21 serves as an ironic contrast to 22:22cd. Although drawing a sword seems to be the worst possible thing one can do against a friend, Ben Sira asserts that as an impulsive overt act against one’s friend, it can be forgiven. The sage implies that such an extreme act is, ironically, not as harmful as revealing a confidence (22:22c) or inflicting a hidden blow (22:22d)—acts that are not impulsive but fully calculated, and all the more deplorable since they destroy friendship.29

Sirach 22:22 discusses occasions when friendship can and cannot be repaired. Whereas friendship can be healed after an offensive remark (22:22ab), revealing a confidence and injuring someone behind his back cause irreparable damage (22:22cd). While one can mend the harm created by offenses committed in a private conversation with a friend (22:22ab), the evil caused by publicly humiliating a friend in his absence cannot be undone (22:22cd). Hence, within a social system based on honor and shame, the dishonor done to a friend (22:22cd) makes the friendship break down irretrievably.30

Whereas 22:21a speaks of a physical threat with a sword (חרב), 22:22a mentions an attack with the mouth (פפ). Ancient Israelite literature (especially the Psalter) often compares verbal attacks to an assault with swords or spears or arrows.31 Ben Sira asserts that if one has made a verbal attack, reconciliation is actually possible. Whereas the idiom “open one’s mouth”

28 This derived meaning is not attested in the MT or the extant Hebrew MSS of Ben Sira but appears in certain nonbiblical Hebrew texts (e.g., CD 19.16; m. ‘Abot 4:13).

29 For this interpretation I am indebted to Professor Di Lella. Elsewhere Ben Sira employs comparable ironic hyperbole, such as in 19:10–11 G:

You have heard a story—let it die with you;
take courage—it will not tear you apart.
On account of a story a fool will be in as much labor
as is a woman giving birth on account of her baby.


31 See, e.g., Pss 57:5; 59:8; 64:4. Note that the second Servant Song in Deutero-Isaiah says: “He made my mouth like a sharp sword” (Isa 49:2). Hebrew also speaks idiomatically of “the mouth [= edge] of the sword” (חרב, e.g., Job 1:15).
can simply mean “speak,” here the context shows that the phrase refers to negative speech, such as an angry retort or a hostile remark.

Sirach 22:22b opens with the injunction ד’י תַּרְפְּא (“Do not be terrified”), a phrase that Ben Sira uses twice elsewhere in the context of death. Sirach 41:3a H⁴ urges, “Do not be terrified of death, the decree for you,” while Sir 9:13 H⁸ promises that if you keep far from someone authorized to kill, “you will not be terrified of the terrors of death.” In the case of a hostile or angry word (22:22ab), the sage teaches that there is no need to fear, because such talk does not necessarily mean the death of the friendship; there is the possibility of reconciliation.⁴³

The disgrace of revealing a confidence (22:22c) is a frequent theme of Ben Sira (6:9; 27:16–21; 42:1). Just as 22:22c declares that “one who reveals a confidence is a disgraceful person” (הֶרְפֵּא מִדְבָּר),” so 6:9 speaks of the former friend who “will expose a dispute to your disgrace” (דַבְרִי מִדְבָּר). Similarly, 5:14 H⁸ states: “For the thief shame was created, and evil disgrace [= הֶרְפֵּא מִדְבָּר] for the two-faced person.”³⁵

Sirach 22:22d speaks of the damage done to friendship by a “hidden blow” (הֶרְפֵּא מִדְבָּר). The parallelism of verse 22cd suggests that the revealing of the confidence in 22c is the “hidden blow” cited in 22d. Here Ben Sira adapts an idiom from the list of curses in Deut 27:15–26. While Deut 27:24 outlaws a physical attack on a neighbor—רָתָם אֵשׁ הַשַּׁמֶּשׁ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (“Cursed is one who strikes his companion in secret”)—Sir 22:22d alludes to an assault on a person’s character. A related saying occurs in Sir 27:25 G: “A treacherous blow [πληγή δολία] will open up wounds.”³⁶

³² See, e.g., Isa 53:7; Ps 39:10; Prov 24:7; cf. Sir 24:2 G. An inceptive meaning (“begin to speak”) is appropriate in Dan 10:16; Sir 51:25 H⁸, and perhaps also in Sir 22:22.

³³ On “reconciliation” (= יִהְיֶה = διάλλαγή) see my exegesis of Sir 27:21a in the previous chapter. Note the sage’s realistic and practical view of friendship, wherein reconciliation is possible (22:22ab; 27:21a). Theognis 325–328 also asserts that angry words, though harmful to friendship, are natural to human beings and hence must be forgiven: “If a man grow always angry with a friend’s offence, they will never be friends and at peace: for offences against men are natural to mortals” (Edmonds, trans., Elegy and Iambus, 1:267).


³⁵ Where H⁸ reads מִדְבָּר, I read מִדְבָּר (“evil disgrace”) with G and S.

³⁶ Smend (Sirach, erklärt, 201) observes that πληγή δολία (“a treacherous blow”) is equivalent to פָּרָת מִדְבָּר (“a hidden blow”) in Sir 22:22d.
The mention of “malicious talk” (תִּלָּד, 22:24b) develops the reference to “a disgraceful person” (22:22c) who perpetrates a slanderous “hidden blow” (22:22d). The comparison of 22:24 is like the English saying: “No smoke without fire.” Just as smoke precedes the flames when one lights a fire with green or damp wood, so “malicious talk” is often the prelude to fighting and bloodshed. Hence, to prevent bloodshed one must avoid speaking maliciously about one’s friend.

A proverb similar to Sir 22:24 appears in Ankhsheshonq 22.21–23: “Do not insult a common man. When insult occurs beating occurs. When beating occurs killing occurs.” The sayings of both Ankhsheshonq and Ben Sira see bloodshed as the consequence of insults. Likewise, 27:15 G cautions: “A quarrel of the arrogant means bloodshed, and their abusiveness is something distressing to hear.”

In Ben Sira’s poetry “fire” (שֵׁאֹר) often has a negative connotation. In 3:30 H^ “fire” (שֵׁאֹר) represents “sin” (טָעִים), just as “water” corresponds to “almsgiving.” The same kind of symbolism occurs also in 15:16, where the two options are “fire and water” (שֵׁאֹר וַתְּנַחְּלָה, H^), equivalent (in reverse) to the choice between “life and death” (15:17). In 22:24 too, “fire” symbolizes death caused by “the shedding of blood” (םַשְׁפִּי רָע). The imagery of 22:24 derives largely from Joel 3:3: “And I will place portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke” (וַיָּנָס עֲנָיִים וְאֶת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶת הָעָר, Joel). Whereas in Joel these signs indicate God’s punishment of the wicked, in Sir 22:24 they are the result of the sinful folly of human beings.

In his warning that the “shedding of blood” (םַשְׁפִּי רָע) is the result of “malicious talk” (תִּלָּד), Ben Sira may be echoing Ezek 22 and 1 Sam 25. After condemning the ruling class of Jerusalem for causing bloodshed (Ezek 22:6), Ezekiel links bloodshed with slander: “In you [Jerusalem] were those who slander for the purpose of shedding blood” (לְמִי יִשָּׂרֶאֵל שֶׁל לָעַד וְלָעַד יִשָּׂרֶאֵל; Ezek 22:9). In the story of Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25), Nabal’s rudeness

37 On תִּלָּד, see my exegesis of Sir 19:15a in the previous chapter. Fuß notes that 22:24b is connected semantically with 22:22c (“Tradition und Komposition,” 144). In view of this link I have moved verse 24 before verse 23.
38 Compare the proverbial saying in Luke 23:31: “If people do these things with the green wood, what is to happen with the dry?” The death of Jesus may be seen as an example of how malicious talk can precede the shedding of blood.
39 AEL 3:176.
40 The verb םַשְׁפִּי ("pour out," “shed”) also occurs in Joel 3:2, while the phrase מַשְׁפִּי תָּשַׁדְיָה (“columns of smoke”) appears in Cant 3:6.
41 Note that in Sir 6:5–17 the sage alludes several times to 1 Sam 25; see ch. 2 above.
would have caused David’s troops to kill, unless Abigail had urged moderation: “And this will not become for you a cause of stumbling or a mental obstacle for my lord, to have shed blood [םָדַּם צְפָנִי] needlessly” (1 Sam 25:31). Seeing the warning signs of impending conflict, Abigail wisely intervened to prevent bloodshed.

As a teacher of wise conduct, Ben Sira warns against various occasions or persons that might cause bloodshed. Thus, the sage counsels caution in dealings with an angry person, because “in his eyes bloodshed [םַּדְד] is something trifling” (8:16 H^a). Moreover, the sage warns against associating with an enemy; despite his friendly words, “if he has found an occasion, he will not have enough of blood” (םָדָם; 12:16 H^a).

As in 22:24, Ben Sira parallels fire and bloodshed when discussing the backbiter in 11:32 H^a: “From a spark he will multiply burning coals, and a worthless person will lie in wait for blood.” Likewise, 28:11 G parallels fire and blood: “A hasty dispute kindles a fire [πυρ], and a hasty quarrel sheds blood [οίμα].”

In 22:24 the first stanza reaches its culmination. Hitherto, Ben Sira has portrayed a series of violent attacks: striking the heart (22:19b), drawing a sword (22:21a), and a hidden blow (22:22d). Now, with its mention of “the shedding of blood,” 22:24 serves as a forceful climax for the stanza, illustrating the worst result of malicious talk against a friend.


In the second stanza the sage leaves behind the violent imagery of stanza 1 in order to speak of the value of fidelity in friendship. In 22:23 Ben Sira offers a utilitarian motivation for being faithful in friendship: one will be able to share in the friend’s subsequent prosperity. This advice accords with the sage’s eudaemonistic approach to life, whereby he regards ethical action as leading to success and unethical activity as leading to failure. Such a philosophy, though it may appear venal,
expresses the belief that God rewards good actions and repays evil.\textsuperscript{46} In fact, Ben Sira derives his brand of eudaemonism largely from the Deuteronomic scheme of retribution; those who obey God receive the blessings of “prosperity” (םֶתֶל, Sir 22:23b; cf. Deut 28:11; 30:9), as well as an “inheritance” (רֶסֶף, Sir 22:23d; cf. Deut 15:4; 26:1).\textsuperscript{47}

The verb מָסַל (“support”) may refer to financial assistance or emotional support. In 51:7 H\textsuperscript{8} the participial form מָסֵר (“supporter”) occurs in parallel to מַסָר (“helper”), while 13:21 H\textsuperscript{3} employs the same verb מָסַל to describe the support that a stumbling rich person receives from a companion.

Sirach 22:23ab creates an antithesis between “poverty” (לָוַד) and “prosperity” (מֶסֶר), just as 22:23cd contrasts a “time of distress” (גָּצָר) with an “inheritance” (רֶסֶף). Similarly, speaking of his pious predecessors in 44:11 H\textsuperscript{M}, Ben Sira places “their prosperity” (מֶסֶר) in parallel with “their inheritance” (רֶסֶף). The sage’s insistence on fidelity to one’s friend (22:23) contrasts with his earlier depiction of the fickle friend who is present “in your prosperity” (מֶסֶר) but who disappears “on a day of distress” (גָּצָר).

By means of the verb הָדוֹס (“rejoice”)\textsuperscript{48} and the noun מֶסֶר (“prosperity,” “good”), 22:23b alludes to the story of Moses’ friendship with Jethro. Whereas Jethro had formerly assisted Moses in his “time of distress” when he had fled from Pharaoh (cf. Exod 2:15–22), after the exodus Jethro was glad because through Moses the Israelites had been successfully delivered from Egypt: “And Jethro rejoiced [ים] over all the good [שם] that Yahweh had done to Israel” (Exod 18:9). Similarly, Sir...
22:23ab advises: “Support your companion in his poverty, so that you may rejoice [דְּרוֹחַ] in his prosperity [גַּלִיָּה].” Thus, Jethro’s friendship with Moses serves as a paradigm for Ben Sira’s teaching; because Jethro had supported Moses in his time of need, he was able to rejoice in his subsequent success.

The sage’s advice in Sir 22:23ab agrees with the Egyptian proverb in Ankhsheshonq 17.18: “If you have grown up with a man and are faring well with him, do not abandon him when he fares badly.” However, the worldly wise Theognis warns against hoping in the future kindness of an afflicted friend: “Never make friends with a man in exile, Cyrnus, with an eye to the future, for when he is come home he becometh quite another man” (Theognis 333–334).

Sirach 22:23cd develops the sentiment of the previous bicolon. Parallel to יִבְשָׂרָה (“in his poverty”) stands יִכְתָּב (“at a time of distress”). Both 6:8 and 37:4 employ similar phrases to describe times of difficulty when the false friend disappears. By contrast, 22:23c urges fidelity to one’s chosen friend precisely at such times. Moreover, 40:24 G speaks of the assistance given by kinsfolk and helpers in times of need: “Brothers and help are for a time of distress [אֵיָּשׁ קַאָרְפוּנ תּוֹלְפֶּהוֹ], but more than both almsgiving will rescue.”

The command to remain faithful to one’s friend in his time of need (22:23c) exemplifies the high value that Ben Sira places on fidelity within friendship (cf. 6:14–16). A similar counsel regarding friendship occurs in 27:17a: “Test a comrade—and remain faithful to him.” A comparable saying appears in Theognis 1083–1084, describing the fidelity of the good person: “So true is it that the good man, though he change his disposition, must for evermore keep it steadfast to his friend.”

49 AEL 3:172. According to Xenophon (Mem. 2.5.1), Socrates began one of his teachings when he “noticed that one of his companions was neglecting a poverty-stricken friend” (see Marchant, trans., Xenophon, 125). On the duty of reciprocal financial help expected in Greek friendship, see Konstan, Friendship in the Classical World, 78–82. The following Theognis quotation comes from Edmonds, Elegy and Iambus, 1:269.

50 As equivalent of the phrase יִכְתָּב (“at a time of stress,” 37:4 H<sup>St</sup>), G uses the exact phrase (אֵיָּשׁ קַאָרְפוּנ תּוֹלְפֶּהוֹ = “at a time of distress”) found in 22:23c G. Sirach 6:8 H<sup>St</sup> employs a synonymous idiom, יִבְשָׂרָה יֵשָׁרָה (“on a day of distress”), which G translates literally with אֵי הֲמֵרֶה תּוֹלְפֶּהוֹ.

51 H<sup>St</sup> partially preserves this saying (a free combination of Prov 17:17 and Prov 11:4), including the word יִכְתָּב (“distress”; cf. Prov 17:17). The point of Sir 40:24 is that giving alms is even more beneficial for one’s destiny than having helpful relatives.

52 See further my discussion of Sir 27:17 in the previous chapter. The following quotation comes from Edmonds, Elegy and Iambus, 1:359.
The prescriptions of 22:23 may echo the Jubilee Year legislation in Lev 25. Behind the verse may lie the thought of the impoverished friend recovering his inherited property in the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:41). Moreover, the call to “remain faithful” (בָּ רוּ ק הָ לָסְת) toward a needy friend (Sir 22:23c) may allude to the command to offer charity to a poor relative: “You shall hold him fast” (כָּלֵ ת הָ רֹ שָ כ), Lev 25:35; cf. Sir 29:1b). Sirach 29:1–3 G gives similar directions concerning care for an indigent neighbor.

One who performs mercy lends to a companion,
and one who holds [him] steadfastly with his hand keeps the commandments.

Lend to a companion at the time of his need,
and pay, a companion back again at the time.
Confirm [your] word and keep faith with him,
and at all times you will find what you need.

The command to keep faith with the impoverished friend (29:3) parallels 22:23c, which counsels faithful support of such a person.

As the motivation for staying faithful toward the needy friend, Ben Sira holds out the possibility “that you may be an heir in his inheritance” (22:23d). Inheritance (22:23d) is of particular concern to Ben Sira because of his respect for tradition and because his outlook has no place for an afterlife. In 33:24 H he advises: “On the day of death [i.e., not beforehand] distribute [הלשנ] an inheritance.” The inheritance of the priesthood is different from that of the rest of society, for Sir 45:22 H says of Aaron’s offspring: “Among the people’s land he does not inherit, and in their midst he does not divide an inheritance [הלשנ], because Yahweh is his portion and his inheritance.” The prescription of 22:23 thus implies that

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53 A stronger echo of the Jubilee Year law occurs in Sir 22:25. Although around 198 B.C.E. Antiochus III permitted Jerusalem to be governed “according to the ancestral laws” (Josephus, Ant. 12.3.3 §142), evidence is lacking that the Jubilee Year was ever practiced in Ben Sira’s lifetime. For the sage, however, its stipulations may have served as an analogy revealing the demands of social justice. It is also possible that the plea to regard a servant as a “brother” in Sir 33:31 may echo Lev 25:46.


55 Compare the phrase חָ לֶך הָ רֹ שָ כ ("to confirm every word") concerning the generous redemption given by Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 4:7). Note that the הָ לָסְת ("one who redeems") is also mentioned in Lev 25:25.

56 On the text here, see Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 508; cf. Segal, מְרֵד הָ לֶשֶנ, 312.
the sage’s students are not from priestly families and hence are able to share in a friend’s inheritance.

In 22:25 Ben Sira avers that it is no shame to associate with a poor friend. Indeed, the sage urges his students not to add to the disgrace of a friend already experiencing the shameful condition of poverty. The opening phrase of 22:25a (preserved in S) echoes the language of Lev 25 on the Jubilee Year. In particular, Lev 25:25, 35, 39 all begin with the phrase יִגְּדֶה יָנוּן יִשְׂרָאֵל (“if your relative becomes impoverished”). Leviticus 25:35–36 urges one to support such a person.

If your relative becomes impoverished and his hand shakes before you, you shall hold him fast; as an immigrant or a sojourner he shall live with you. Do not take from him interest or usury, but you are to fear God, while your relative lives with you.

The concern for an impoverished fellow Israelite found in Lev 25:35–36 is also echoed in Sir 29:2a G, “Lend to a companion at the time of his need,” and in 29:10a G, “Waste money for the sake of a brother or a friend.” Similarly, 29:14 G declares: “A good man will be a guarantor for his companion, but the one who has lost a sense of shame will abandon him.”

Our discussion of 22:20b, 22c has already noted the importance of the polarity of honor and shame in Ben Sira’s worldview. In 22:25a the sage urges his students not to add further humiliation to an impoverished friend by turning away from him. Ben Sira’s respect for the poor appears also in 10:22 H: “Immigrant, foreigner, alien, and pauper—their glory is the fear of Yahweh.”

As a sign of concern for an impoverished friend, Ben Sira advises: “Do not hide yourself from his presence.” Hiding from a troubled friend is a characteristic of false friendship, as noted in Sir 6:12: “When you are humbled he will turn against you, and from your presence he will hide himself” (מַכְסָה יַעַשׂ).

57 Some of the Qumran documents exhibit interest in the Jubilee Year, either for calendrical reasons (Jubilees) or from an ethical viewpoint (11QMelch, which quotes Lev 25:9, 13 and Isa 61:1); cf. P. J. Kobelski, Melchizedek and Melchiresa (CBQMS 10; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), 49. A concern for social justice appears in 11QMelch 2–6–7, which describes Melchizedek’s activity in the final age: “He will proclaim liberty for them, to free them from [the debt] of all their iniquities. And this will happen in the first week of the jubilee which follows the ninth jubilees” (García Martinez, Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, 139–40).

Sirach 22:26 warns about the social consequences for one “if evil happens” to the impoverished friend because of one’s neglect of him. The phrase רַע מִשָּׁתַן (lit., “if evil overtakes him”) uses an idiom found twice in MS H^ of Ben Sira (6:12 [where G and S differ] and 12:5). Just as Sir 7:1 H^ offers the advice אל תְּשַׁתֵּן”— (“Do no evil, and evil will not happen to you”), so Sir 22:26 suggests that helping a friend will enable one to avoid the ignominy of social disgrace.

The warning in 22:26 depends on public opinion for its effectiveness: a person who has refused to help an impoverished friend will be shunned in society. Elsewhere, Ben Sira invokes the same fear of public disgrace to discourage gossip (19:7–9). Sirach 19:7 S warns: “Never repeat a saying, and no one will reproach you.” Elaborating on this point (derived from Prov 25:9–10), Sir 19:8–9 G says:

Against friend or enemy do not recount it, and unless it is sin for you, do not reveal it; for he has heard you and became on guard against you, and in time he will hate you.

In the juxtaposition of the concepts of “hearing” (the verb שָמַע) and “being wary” (the nip‘al of רָמַע), Sir 22:26b (like 19:9) parallels Ezek 33:3–5. The divine message to Ezekiel employs the image of the sentinel:

If he sees the sword coming against the land, and he blows on the horn and he warns יָשַׁמֵּא the people, and the hearer hears שָמַע the sound of the horn and does not become wary רָמַע) and the sword has come and taken him, his blood shall be upon his own head .... But one who did become wary רָמַע will have saved his life.

Just as Ben Sira encourages his students to learn with whom to associate by observing their conduct, so too he assumes that others in society watch the conduct of people and learn from what they see. Hence, he warns his students to be vigilant in their behavior.

The advice to be wary occurs frequently in Ben Sira’s teaching (e.g., 6:13; 8:18–19; 12:10–12; 13:8–13). In 13:13 H^, for instance, he counsels: “Be careful and wary רָמַע, and do not walk about with lawless persons.” In 32:22, too, the second form of the saying in H^ reads: “Be wary רָמַע in your ways.” In 22:26b, however, the situation is somewhat different; instead of advising his students to be wary (13:13; 32:22), in 22:26b (as in

59 In the first form of the saying in 32:22 H^ the verb is the synonym רַמָּמַע (“be careful”), while 32:22 H^ reads רַמָּמַע רָמַע (“be wary”).
he states that others will be wary of them if they become known for refusing to help a needy friend.

9. Conclusion

Aside from its textual problems, Sir 22:19–26 is a thematically complex pericope, since it combines several messages about friendship. Whereas the first stanza focuses on sins of the tongue against a friend, the second concentrates on practical help for the friend at a time of need.

In the first stanza the opening couplet (22:19–20) employs imagery to speak of the fragility of friendship. Thereafter, the second and third couplets (22:21–22, 24) contrast offenses that may be pardoned (drawing a sword or saying something hostile) with unforgivable offenses (betraying a confidence and talking maliciously behind someone’s back).

The second stanza (22:23, 25–26) urges support for a friend in his adversity; one should not despise him when he is impoverished, since he may later prosper. The final bicolon (22:26) asserts that one who refuses to help a needy friend will be an object of public contempt.

Ben Sira emphasizes his message by the use of three didactic illustrations: wounds to eyes, throwing stones at birds, and smoke preceding fire (22:19–20, 24). He also seems to allude to the legislation for the Jubilee Year (Lev 25) to inculcate an attitude of responsibility toward an impoverished friend (22:23, 25).

In summary, Ben Sira teaches in 22:19–26 that what destroys a friendship is emotional wounding (22:19b), abusive or malicious talk (22:20b, 24b), and also betraying confidences (22:22c). By way of contrast, what builds up a friendship is the hope of reconciliation (22:21b, 22b) and faithful support of a friend even in his poverty (22:23, 25).