CHAPTER FOUR

TENDENCIES IN THE SYRIAC SIRACH NOT SHARED BY THE ‘EXPANDED TEXT’

4.1 ADAPTATIONS TO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Although we do not know exactly what the original Hebrew book of Sirach looked like, the material available allows us to conclude that Syr differs considerably from it. This is partly due to the transmission of the Hebrew text. In the earliest centuries of its history, the Hebrew text underwent many changes and this affected the cultural and religious profile of the book. In the scholarly literature the designations ‘expanded text’ and ‘SirII’ are used for the result of this process (§ 2.1). It is likely that the Hebrew source text of the Syriac translator contained many SirII readings (§ 2.4). This is the easiest explanation for the fact that Syr not only shares about 70 readings with GrII (§ 2.1), but also contains many unique readings that reflect tendencies and opinions that are typical of the expanded text.

The SirII elements in Syr contribute to its religious profile, but if we wish to determine the translator’s cultural and religious profile, we should focus on those elements for which the translator, rather than his Hebrew source text is responsible. This chapter will be concerned with some of these features, starting with adaptations that the translator made to the social and cultural conditions of his time.1 The following paragraphs will be concerned with features that may shed light on the translator’s religious profile.

(1) References to ‘the neglected one of two wives’ (Heb וַנְפֵלָה) and ‘rival wife’ (Heb גָּרָה), which both imply polygamy, are avoided.

7:26 שָׁפָתָה, מְסֻכָּבָה, מַעֲמָלָה ‘and if she is lawless’: A וַנְפֵלָה (= Gr).

1 Cf. Weitzman, Syriac Version, 28; idem, From Judaism to Christianity, 60.
3 Cf. 1 Sam 1:6 and Driver, Notes on the Hebrew Text of Samuel, 9–10.
26:6a Syr omits this half-verse; Gr 'A wife that is jealous of another wife is grief of heart and sorrow (γυνὴ ἀντίζητος ἕκτη γυναικί); ἀντίζητος reflects ἰδίαν 'rival-wife'.

26:22 ἀναπαινεῖται καὶ ἀναπαινεῖται 'An adulterous wife is considered as nothing'. Syr has ἀναπαινεῖται instead of Gr (Gri) μωσθία, which reflects ἀναπαινεῖται.

37:11 (Do not take counsel) with a woman lest you commit adultery with her; B ὑπερασπιζόμεθα ‘with a woman about her rival’ (= D+Gr).

(2) Ben Sira is notorious for his hostile attitude towards women. The Syriac translator slightly softens the hostile tone. Thus in some cases he adds 'evil', which restricts Ben Sira's negative remarks about women in general to 'the evil woman'.

25:17 τὸ κακὸν γυναικὸν ἠπατάμενον πάντα τὸ πρόσωπὸν τοῦ ἱδίου μεταβαλλόμενον ‘The evil of an evil wife makes pale the face of her husband'; C ἡ παράνομος γυνὴ (= Gr).

25:21 τὸ κακὸν γυναικὸν ἠπατάμενον πάντα τὸ πρόσωπὸν τοῦ ἱδίου μεταβαλλόμενον ‘Be not enticed by the beauty of an evil woman’. 'Evil' is a plus compared with Gr and C (the latter fragmentary).

36:26 Gr πάντα ἅρρενα ἑπιδέχεται γυνὴν, ἐστιν δὲ θυγάτηρ θυγατρὸς κρεατοῦν ‘A woman will accept any man, but one daughter is better than another daughter'; B[etteling] [...] pelo ὑπέρ τοῦ παραθετοῦ ἀληθείαν παρέχειν τῇ γυναῖκε. Syr omits this 'chauvinistic comment'.

(3) Syr omits 33:27 which contains the advice to use yoke, thong, racks and tortures for a bad slave.

(4) According to Winter, Syr reflects hostility towards the monarchy. He concludes this from the omission of the positive reference to kingship in 44:3. One could also refer to the omission of 'king' in 50:7.

44:3 B ἐπί τῶν βασιλευόντων τῶν ἀρχῶν τῶν ἔθελαν ἐπί τῶν ἐπιλυκτῶν βασιλευόντων τῶν ἐπίλυκτων βασιλευόντων τῶν βασιλευόντων. Syr omits.

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6 Winter, *Ben Sira in Syriac*, 142–143; idem, *'Ben Sira in Syriac'*, I, 244–245.

7 For the absence of 44:3a–b in M, which at first sight undermines Winter’s argument, see Winter, *Ben Sira in Syriac*, 143.