I am grateful to the editors of this volume for the chance to write in celebration of Professor Maurice Gilbert, whose work on the book of Ben Sira has been so influential. Several years ago Prof. Gilbert wrote a programmatic article on Ben Sira in a collection of essays entitled *Jewish Civilization in the Hellenistic-Roman Period.*¹ In this essay, Gilbert posed two questions about the rabbinic citations of the book of Ben Sira. He wrote,

1. The rabbinic quotations from that book generally are not literal. Segal reasons that the rabbis quoted from memory.² According to M. R. Lehmann, literalness was not required; the quotations were adapted to suit the later context because the book of Ben Sira was not a biblical book.³ Which theory should we follow?
2. Were the quotations taken from a complete edition of Ben Sira without any additions? Or did the rabbis quote a florilegium?⁴

In an effort to begin to answer Gilbert’s queries I will look in this essay at one important rabbinic text, B. Sanhedrin 100b, which contains both an extended discussion of the acceptability of reading Ben Sira and a number of “quotations” from the book.

The section on Ben Sira in Sanhedrin 100b begins as a commentary on M. Sanhedrin 10:1 where Akiba notes that those who read the “outside books” (ספרים החיצונים) have no share in the world to come. The first section of the talmudic commentary reports that R. Joseph understood Akiba’s statement to forbid reading the book of Ben Sira. Abaye asks R. Joseph why this should be so since Ben Sira contains

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many things that the rabbis also say, and he adduces a number of passages as examples. The second section again begins with R. Joseph who says in reply to Abaye’s objections, “We may expound to them the good things it contains.” Another series of quotations follows. Altogether B. Sanhedrin 100b contains, depending on how one counts, ten different passages that purportedly come from Ben Sira. Each deserves some brief description.

1. “Do not strip the skin [of a fish] even from its ear, lest you spoil it, but roast it [all, the fish with the skin] in the fire and eat it with two loaves.”5 This Aramaic admonishment appears in none of the extant manuscripts of Ben Sira.

2. The second of Abaye’s examples comes originally from Sir 42:9–10, a passage about daughters. In both the Masada scroll and Ms B from the Cairo genizah, this passage contains eight cola. The rabbinic quotation, given in Hebrew, contains seven, only six of which parallel the Ben Sira manuscripts. The one colon not found in the manuscripts concerns keeping one’s daughter from witchcraft in her old age. In general the outlines of the thought are the same, but the wording and order of the lines differ widely between the rabbinic citation and the manuscripts.6

3. “Do not let anxiety enter your heart, for it has slain many a person.” This third of Abaye’s examples is an admonition in Aramaic that has no direct parallel in Ben Sira, although Segal argues that it “is a combination of several lines in our book.”7 Indeed some of the material from this quotation does occur in somewhat similar contexts in Ben Sira—30:21 “Do not give yourself over to grief”; 30:23c “For grief has killed [many]”; perhaps 14:1b, “Whose heart has not brought grief upon him” (as Segal corrects the Hebrew).8 The similar content of Prov 12:25 cited immediately after this passage may also have influenced the form of the quotation.

6 The Masada scroll and Ms B from the Cairo genizah have some textual variants between them. Although some terms are in common between the rabbinic passage and the manuscripts, the manuscripts are much closer to each other than to the rabbinic text.
7 Segal, “Evolution,” 143.
8 Ibid., 112.