

Verse 20 is an appropriate conclusion to vv. 18–19 (or 19 + 18!). The first half is a quotation from Ps 11:4, while the second half resembles Zeph 1:7, and “all the earth” again suggests the context of Babylon.

In sum, I propose that the recension addressed to Jehoiakim included 2:5a (+ ba?), 6–7, 9, 10abβ, 11, and 12, and that the recension addressed to Nebuchadrezzar added 2:5bβγδ, 8, 10ba, and 13–20.

If a recension addressed to Jehoiakim is appropriate at the time of the drought, is there a setting appropriate to a recension addressed to Babylon? If the material was added by Habakkuk himself (and there is no reason to think otherwise), then one wonders whether he was part of the first deportation to Babylon. Whether he was or not, an appropriate context would be the aborted uprising against Nebuchadrezzar that took place in Babylon in December 595/January 594, giving rise to the Jerusalem conference called by Zedekiah in the late spring or early summer of 594 (see Jer 27).

Whether a recitation in 595/594 took place in Babylon or Jerusalem, what would an audience have heard? The prophet is bewildered by Judean injustice (1:2–4); God responds that the Chaldeans will be the chosen instrument for punishment (1:5–11). But the prophet is still bewildered: the Chaldeans are themselves heartless (1:12–17). God reassures him of divine sovereignty and control, so that the Chaldeans will ultimately fall (ch. 2), and offers a vision of God’s march into the promised land to be sovereign over the covenant people (ch. 3).

The reconstruction presented here suggests plausible contexts for Habakkuk’s prophecy in four steps from 605 to 594. Though it falls short of certainty, I suggest that it at least fits the details of the full text we have before us.

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### BEN SIRACH 38:24–39:11 AND THE EGYPTIAN SATIRE OF THE TRADES: A RECONSIDERATION

“Scribal wisdom increases wisdom; whoever is free from toil can become wise” (Sir 38:24).<sup>1</sup> With those laudatory remarks, Ben Sira begins his pericope about the superlative aspects of the professional pursuit and dissemination of wisdom, that is, the scribal profession (Sir 38:24–39:11).<sup>2</sup> To paint the picture more graphically, he first describes the lives of the artisans: The farmer does not have the luxury of acquiring wisdom because “his objective is to complete the fattening (of the cattle) and his attention is turned toward the fields” (Sir 38:26).<sup>3</sup> The engraver does not acquire wisdom because the exigencies of his craft require that he “labor night and day” in order to “make a realistic likeness” (Sir 38:27). Similarly, the smith “contends with the heat of the furnace,” “sears his flesh,” and “deafens his ears,” so that he can “complete the projects” (Sir 38:28). Likewise, the potter toils endlessly at the wheel, employing both hands and feet, because he is compelled to “finish his work” (Sir 38:29). In short, Ben Sira affirms that the demands of an artisan’s life stifle the possibilities for the acquisition of wisdom. He does acknowledge the value and necessity of such trades: “All these are skilled with their hands . . . without them a city is not habitable, and wherever they stay, they do not hunger” (Sir 38:31, 32).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he observes that artisans, in contrast to the

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<sup>1</sup> This rendering is based on the Hebrew. Compare the Greek: “Scribal wisdom is dependent on the opportunity of leisure, and whoever is free from toil can become wise.” Manuscript B preserves much of 38:24–27a, but the remaining portion of the pericope under consideration is not extant in Hebrew. See Pancratius 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), 67; and Joseph Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 303–7.

<sup>2</sup> This pericope consists of two basic parts: 38:24–34 and 39:1–11.

<sup>3</sup> This rendering is based on the Hebrew (cf. the order of the Greek). The Hebrew of Ben Sira 38:26b is [ . . . ] לב ישוח לשר. I prefer to restore here something analogous to the following: שד, שדה, or שדמה. “Arable field,” “pastureland” is the basic semantic domain of these words. The Greek text has ἀλλοακας, meaning essentially “furrows (of a field).” חלמי שדי (“furrows of fields,” Hos 10:4; 12:12) is noteworthy in this connection because חלם is sometimes rendered ἀλλας in the Septuagint (e.g., Job 31:38).

<sup>4</sup> The clause “wherever they stay, they do not hunger” is a rendering of the Syriac, following Patrick Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 448.

scribes, "are not sought for the council of the people, are not prominent in the assembly," and they "do not deliberate about judicial regulations or expound on discipline and justice" (Sir 38:32, 33). The scribe, Ben Sira continues, "seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients," "is in the midst of the great," "travels in the land of foreign peoples," and "many praise his understanding" (Sir 39:1, 4, 9). Clearly, according to Ben Sira, the life of the scribe is far superior to that of the artisans.

## I

This pericope, with its extended comparison of the vocation of the scribe vis-à-vis that of the tradesmen, reflects a very distinctive motif, or topos, without precise parallels in (antecedent) Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, or Hebrew traditions.<sup>5</sup> However, biblical scholars consistently refer to the Egyptian composition known as the Satire of the Trades (hereafter Satire), often affirming Ben Sira's dependence on this Middle Kingdom composition (or one with "virtually the same content"). Thus, for example, Jack Sanders states that "the first and most obvious use of traditional Egyptian material by Ben Sira . . . is the *Satire of Occupations*."<sup>6</sup> The cogency of this conclusion is not normally questioned.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Several Mesopotamian texts refer to the importance and benefits of the scribal profession. See esp. Åke W. Sjöberg, "In Praise of the Scribal Art (Examination Text D)," *JCS* 24 (1972): 126–31; idem, "Der Examenstext A," *ZA* 64 (1975): 137–76; idem, "Der Vater und sein missratener Sohn," *JCS* 25 (1973): 105–69; Miguel Civil, "Sur les 'livres d'écolier' à l'époque paléobabylonienne," in *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot* (ed. Jean-Marie Durand et Jean-Robert Kupper; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985), 67–78; H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "School Dialogues," in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 588–93. While these texts laud the scribal profession, they do not contain an extended comparison of the lives of the artisans and scribes. Oda Wischmeyer cites Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.150–51 as an example of Greco-Roman parallels to Ben Sira (*Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach* [BZNW 77; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995], 44–45); however, in this case, several vocations are listed as acceptable, and none is singled out for laud.

<sup>6</sup> Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 61–62, 69. Similar statements are made, for example, by John G. Snaith, "Ecclesiasticus: A Tract for All Times," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (ed. John Day et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 40; Theophil Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesus Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 12; Johann Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BBB 37; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1971), 119. Cf. Peter Seibert, *Die Charakteristik: Untersuchungen zu einer altägyptischen Sprechsitte und ihren Ausprägungen in Folklore und Literatur* (Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 17; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 100 n. 100; and Joachim F. Quack, *Die Lehren des Ani* (OBO 141; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1994), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Otto Rickenbacher has argued that the Egyptian and Jewish texts are fundamentally different, although he accepts some slight dependence (*Weisheits Perikopen bei Ben Sira* [OBO 1; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1973], 192). Cf. Helge Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter* (WUNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 287–91; and Johann Marböck, "Sir. 38,24–39,11: Der schrift-

Reference to parallels in just a single Egyptian composition (namely, the Middle Kingdom *Satire*) is, however, problematic. For, although the Egyptian *Satire* is an early, paradigmatic example of this literary topos, it is by no means the only Egyptian example. Statements about the superiority of the scribal profession, accompanied by derogatory statements about artisans, are quite common in ancient Egyptian literature, from various periods. Hence, it is here argued that the *Satire* should be understood as being part of a rich literary tradition exemplified by, but not limited to, the *Satire*. This fact has not been sufficiently recognized by biblical scholars.<sup>8</sup> In short, Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 may be dependent on the *Satire*; nevertheless, the presence of additional Egyptian exemplars with the same basic topos cautions against limiting reference and comparative discussion to a single Egyptian text (i.e., the *Satire*).<sup>9</sup> Texts substantiating the breadth of the Egyptian tradition will now be considered.<sup>10</sup>

The Egyptian texts sometimes brandished the power and prestige associated with the scribal profession. For example, the *Satire* inaugurates its paean to the scribe by noting the place of importance to which the scribe rapidly ascends: "Barely grown, still a

gelehrte Weise," in *La sagesse de l'ancien testament: Nouvelle édition mise à jour* (ed. Maurice Gilbert; Leuven: University Press, 1990), 295. Note the convincing rejoinder by Waltraud Guglielmi, "Berufssatiren in der Tradition des Cheti," in *Zwischen den beiden Ewigkeiten: Festschrift Gertrud Thausing* (ed. Manfred Bietak et al.; Vienna: Institute für Ägyptologie, 1994), 69. For an early treatment, see Paul Humbert, *Recherches sur les Sources Égyptiennes Littérature Sapientiale d'Israël* (Neuchâtel: Université de Neuchâtel, 1929), 132.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., the treatments in even some of the very best secondary works by biblical scholars: Skehan and DiLella, *Ben Sira*, 449–50; John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 188; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 40; James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (2d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 22, but cf. 215. Sanders mentions "similar sections" in *Papyrus Lansing*, *Papyrus Sallier I* and *Papyrus Anastasi V*, but his discussion focuses exclusively on the *Satire* (Ben Sira, 61–62). Contrast this with Humbert's references to the *Satire* as "le plus célèbre échantillon," but also to "modèles égyptiens" and "prototypes égyptiens" (*Sources*, 128–32) and also the discussion of Guglielmi ("Berufssatiren," 69 n. 24 and passim).

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the *Satire* was, based on the large number of extant copies, a very popular composition in Middle, and especially, New Kingdom Egypt. Significantly, a fragment of the *Satire* was published and has been dated to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty by Richard Jasnow (*A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text* [Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 52; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992], 39 n. 53). Cf. Joachim F. Quack, "Ein neuer ägyptischer Weisheitstext," *WO* 24 (1993): 10 n. 30. This has implications for the comparative analysis of Ben Sira: see Jasnow, "Remarks on the Continuity in Egyptian Literary Tradition," in *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente* (ed. Emily Teeter and John A. Larson; Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 58; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1999), 201 n. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Lichtheim's three-volume work contains discussions of manuscript evidence and dates for most of the Egyptian texts cited in this article (*Ancient Egyptian Literature* [hereafter *AEL*] [3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–80]). Note that the *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* often contain versions (frequently almost identical) of the same text. See Richard A. Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* (hereafter *LEM*) (Brown Egyptological Studies 1; London: Oxford University Press, 1954); and esp. Guglielmi, "Berufssatiren," 44–72, for detailed references and manuscript data. The Egyptian texts cited in this paper are representative, and the number cited could be expanded.

child, he is greeted, sent on errands, hardly returned he wears a gown."<sup>11</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, however, also extols the scribal profession by affirming that the scribe "makes friends with those greater than he. . . . You will be advanced by your superiors. You will be sent on a mission."<sup>12</sup> It continues this theme by urging that the student persist in training and become a scribe so that "you may become one whom the king trusts; to make you gain entrance to treasury and granary. . . . To make you issue the offerings on feast days."<sup>13</sup> In addition, *Papyrus Lansing* notes that the scribe will have an entourage of those willing to assist him: "You call for one; a thousand answer you."<sup>14</sup> Ben Sira, as noted above, similarly declares that the scribe "is in the midst of the great," and is "seen in the presence of the ruler." He also "travels in the land of foreign peoples" (Sir 39:4). Naturally, an individual of such distinction would have a lasting reputation: *Papyrus Chester Beatty IV* declares: "Man decays, his corpse is dust, all his kin have perished; But a book makes him remembered. . . . Better is a book than a well-built house, than tomb-chapels in the west."<sup>15</sup> Again, Ben Sira similarly states that the scribe's "fame will never be erased" and "his reputation will live forever" (Sir 39:9). In short, one form of scribal propaganda blazoned the social status and legacy of the scribe. Most important for the purposes of the argument at hand, however, is the fact that this theme is attested in various Egyptian compositions, not just the *Satire*.

One of the most beneficial aspects of the scribal profession was the fact that it did not require "manual labor." In the *Satire*, therefore, Duauf's son Khety, while bringing his son, Pepi, to school, reminds him of the freedom from manual labor which the scribe enjoys: "I have seen many beatings; set your heart on books! I watched those seized for labor; there's nothing better than books!"<sup>16</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi II* contains an even more explicit statement about this:

Be a scribe. It saves you from toil and protects you from all manner of work. It spares you bearing hoe and mattock, so that you do not carry a basket. It sunders you from plying the oar and spares you torment, as you are not under many lords and numerous masters.<sup>17</sup>

*Papyrus Lansing* also alludes to the scribe's freedom from manual labor: "Set your sight on being a scribe. . . . You will not be like a hired ox."<sup>18</sup> One positive aspect of the scribal profession that was vaunted, therefore, was the fact that it did not require the same sort of physical toil that was part of the human existence of so many Egyptians. Although Ben Sira may have had less of an aversion to manual labor (and for him the primary virtue of this freedom was that it permitted one to pursue wisdom with more rigor), he does state, of course, that only those who "are free from toil can become wise" (Sir 38:24). For the purposes of the present argument, the important point is that the theme of "freedom from manual labor" also occurs in more Egyptian texts than simply the *Satire*.

<sup>11</sup> *Satire*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:186.

<sup>12</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:168.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:171.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Papyrus Chester Beatty IV*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:177.

<sup>16</sup> *Satire*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:185.

<sup>17</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi II*, sections 7,1-2, in Carinos, *LEM*, 51.

In order to aggrandize further the scribal profession, the vocations of other Egyptians were sometimes "disparaged" in the texts. In the *Satire* various professions are "denigrated," as the following selections indicate:

I have seen the smith at work, at the opening of his furnace, with fingers like claws of a crocodile, he stinks more than fish roe. . . . The jewel-maker bores with his chisel in hard stone of all kinds; When he has finished the inlay of the eye, his arms are spent, he's weary. . . . The potter is under the soil, though as yet among the living, he grubs in the mud more than a pig, in order to fire his pots. . . . The farmer wails more than the guinea fowl, his voice is louder than a raven's; his fingers are swollen and stink to excess.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately after relating these woes, the *Satire* concludes this component of the text by stating that:

There's no profession without a boss, except for the scribe; he is the boss. Hence if you know writing, it will do better for you than those professions I've set before you, each more wretched than the other. . . . The day in school will profit you, its works are forever.<sup>20</sup>

*Papyrus Lansing* too, however, contains components that not only aggrandize the scribal profession but also defame other professions:

See for yourself with your own eye. The occupations lie before you. The washerman's day is going up, going down. All his limbs are weak, from whitening his neighbors' clothes. . . . The maker of pots is smeared with soil, like one whose relations have died. . . . The carpenter who is in the shipyard carries the timber and stacks it. If he gives today the output of yesterday, woe to his limbs! . . . Come, let me tell you the woes of the soldier, and how many are his superiors. . . . He is hungry . . . he is dead while yet alive.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, *Papyrus Anastasi II* also includes a lengthy pericope that bemoans the existence of the practitioners of various other professions:

Be a scribe. . . it spares you . . . torment, as you are not under many lords. . . . The old man is put to be a cultivator, and the grown man to be a soldier. The lame is put to be a door-keeper, and the blind to be a fatterer of cattle. The birdcatcher goes onto the threshing platform, and the fisherman sinks into the water. . . . the baker regularly bakes and puts bread onto the fire, his head being inside the oven and his son holding fast his feet. In the event of slipping

<sup>18</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:171.

<sup>19</sup> *Satire*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:186-88 *passim*. The parallels between the pericopes of the *Satire* cited here and Ben Sira 38:24-34 are striking, but so are those with other Egyptian texts. Note the large number of additional professions (e.g., carpenter, barber, mason, weaver, arrow maker, cobbler, washerman, bird catcher, fisherman) included in the *Satire* but not in Ben Sira.

<sup>20</sup> *Satire*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:189, 190.

<sup>21</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:169, 170, 172. Note the reference to the "potter," a trade that is treated also in Ben Sira 38:29-30.

from his son's hand he thereby falls down into the oven's bottom. But the scribe, he is ahead of all manner of work in this world.<sup>22</sup>

*Papyrus Sallier* I contains a "letter" to a scribal student who has withdrawn from school and has begun farming. He is reminded of the miseries of the farmer:

Do you not recall the condition of the cultivator faced with the registration of the harvest-tax after the worm has carried off half of the corn and the hippopotamus has eaten up the rest? The mice abound in the field, the locust descends, the cattle devour. The sparrows bring want upon the cultivator. The remainder that is on the threshing-platform is almost at an end, and is for the thieves. . . . But a scribe, he is at the head of everybody's work.<sup>23</sup>

In short, the scribal profession is glorified exceedingly in school texts, and the artisans are denigrated.<sup>24</sup> The following quotation from *Papyrus Lansing* probably summarizes this best: "Writing for him who knows it is better than all other professions."<sup>25</sup>

It is readily apparent that this topos in Egyptian literature is certainly not limited to the *Satire*. For methodological reasons, therefore, it seems most prudent for biblical commentators engaging in a comparative analysis of Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 to refer not to a single text (i.e., the *Satire*), but rather to the *Satire of the Trades tradition*, upon which Ben Sira is certainly dependent.<sup>26</sup>

## II

Scribal views of artisans have been the subject of discussion by Egyptologists and biblical scholars. Commentators on Ben Sira have traditionally interpreted the *Satire* "literally" as indicative of actual Egyptian scribal attitudes. As a result, it has often been asserted that while the *Satire* "ridicules" the artisans, Ben Sira is far more amiable and has "removed from his own composition all traces of ridicule."<sup>27</sup> Following a number of

<sup>22</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi* II, in Caminos, *LEM*, 51. Note the very close parallels to "cultivator" and "fattener of cattle" in Ben Sira 38:25, 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Papyrus Sallier* I, in Caminos, *LEM*, 315, 316, but with "worm" for "snake," following Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert (personal correspondence).

<sup>24</sup> As Richard B. Parkinson has argued, the attempt by the *Satire* to imply a "great divide between its audience and the illiterate professions it mocks" was no doubt done "disingenuously" ("Individual and Society in Middle Kingdom Literature," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* [ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 140). See also Guglielmi, "Berufssatiren," 45; and Harold C. Washington, *Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs* (SBLDS 142; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 37–52.

<sup>25</sup> *Papyrus Lansing*, in Lichtheim, *AEL* 2:168.

<sup>26</sup> I suspect that there were numerous, varying exemplars of this topos in Egypt during the era of Ben Sira (as in earlier periods) and that Ben Sira probably learned of this topos during his travels (see Sir 34:9–13). It would be rather difficult to argue that "universal human experience" could account for the parallels between Ben Sira and the Egyptian *Satire of the Trades tradition*: the presence of the paired motifs of the "laud of the scribe" and the "denigration of the artisans" (which makes the tradition unique) is simply too striking.

<sup>27</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 449, 450. Snaith wrote that the *Satire* was written to

Egyptologists, I shall argue that the Egyptian texts, which are part of the *Satire of the Trades tradition* were intended to be understood not as indicative of actual scribal views but as humorous and hyperbolic texts, designed to assist in the recruitment and retention of scribal students. The Egyptian texts were scribal propaganda, tempered with humor. Understanding this aspect of the Egyptian texts reduces the presumed "chasm" between the perspectives of Ben Sira and the Egyptian scribal tradition.

Wolfgang Helck has indeed argued that the Egyptian texts under consideration reflect accurately the scribal views of the trades; thus, for Helck these statements are to be understood as serious, nonhumorous: "Ganz abgesehen aber von diesen mehr theoretischen Überlegungen kann ich beim Lesen des Dw3-Htjj [i.e., Duauf's son Khety] nirgends irgendetwas erkennen, was mir 'witzig' erscheint."<sup>28</sup> A number of other Egyptologists, however, view this corpus much differently. Lichtheim considers these works to be hyperbolic and humorous, a type of satire. She characterizes literary satire as "exaggeration and a lightness of tone designed to induce laughter and a mild contempt."<sup>29</sup> She then argues that the Egyptian texts achieve their "satiric effects by exaggerating the true hardships of the professions described, and by suppressing all their positive and rewarding aspects."<sup>30</sup> These exaggerations, she argues, cannot be taken seriously, for if they were meant to be taken seriously,

we would have to conclude that the scribal profession practiced deliberate deception out of a contempt for manual labor so profound as to be unrelieved by humor. Such a conclusion is, however, belied by all the literary evidence. For tomb reliefs and texts alike breathe joy and pride in the accomplishments of labor. Moreover, the principal didactic works, such as "Ptahhotep" and the "Eloquent Peasant," teach respect for all labor.<sup>31</sup>

Recognizing humor in an ancient text is a complex process. Lichtheim's approach is, as a point of departure, methodologically sound: she is arguing that the statements in the *Satire* about the tradesmen are so fundamentally different from all the statements normally made in the rest of the Egyptian textual and artistic traditions (produced by scribes as well), that they are most easily understood as hyperbolic and humorous scribal propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Leonard Lesko concurs and refers to the "gross exaggerations" in the school texts, such as the *Satire*, and indicates that they were not meant to be understood

"ridicule," but that "if Ben Sira used it he censored it of all ridicule" (*Ecclesiasticus*, 189). See also R. A. F. MacKenzie, *Sirach* (Old Testament Message 19; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 146; Eric W. Heaton, *The School Tradition of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14; cf. 54–55, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Helck, *Die Lehre des Dw3-Htjj* (Kleine Aegyptische Texte; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), 162.

<sup>29</sup> Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:184.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* For *Ptahhotep*, *The Eloquent Peasant*, and the *Loyalist Teaching*, see Lichtheim, *AEL* 1:63, 172; and Richard B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 70–72.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. a similar methodological point made by John R. Miles ("Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner [JSOTSup 92; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990] 204).

literally, "but as the work of a teacher. . . [they] must have elicited knowing smiles from students of his own and of succeeding generations."<sup>33</sup> Hellmut Brunner has also affirmed that there was not only a caustic but also a humorous component to the *Satire*.<sup>34</sup>

The school texts that were part of the *Satire* of the Trades tradition contained exaggerations, often humorous, which were not intended so much to ridicule professions other than that of the scribe, but, as Lesko has written, "to motivate . . . students and reinforce them in their commitment to study in order to attain a position in the Egyptian bureaucracy."<sup>35</sup> To be sure, the Egyptian texts were designed to suggest to the scribal students that they should view themselves as the "future elite," as Fischer-Elfert has indicated, but as he has also remarked, the scribes also knew very well that "there was no subsistence and well-being without the work of the artisans."<sup>36</sup> The grueling years of education would, the tradition suggested, one day provide rich dividends.<sup>37</sup> This point was made, in part, by caricaturing the artisans, but this was a literary device, replete with hyperbole and humor.

At this juncture, it is possible to reconsider the nature of Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 vis-à-vis that of the Egyptian texts. As noted above, commentators on Ben Sira have stated that the *Satire* "ridicules" artisans and presume that these statements are *realistic reflections of Egyptian scribal sentiments*. The textual evidence demonstrates that Egyptian scribes wished for their profession to be viewed as a superlative one (but so did Ben Sira!); moreover, they do lack statements about the "value" of the trades. However, it is here argued that these texts are humorous, satirical propaganda, intended to motivate scribal students. Most importantly, reading the Egyptian texts as hyperbolic propaganda reduces the presumed chasm between the attitudes of Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 and similar Egyptian texts regarding the artisans.<sup>38</sup> To say that the Egyptian texts "ridicule," without noting that they were probably humorous, satirical, hyperbolic propaganda, misconstrues the essential meaning and function of the Egyptian materials and thereby exaggerates the differences in tone and perspective between the Jewish and Egyptian compositions.<sup>39</sup>

One correlative point deserves consideration: the function of Ben Sira 38:24–

39:11. This text is often understood as one which describes the "ideal sage" and the value of the wisdom acquired and transmitted by such a sage.<sup>40</sup> Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 does indeed function as an ode to the scribe and things sapiential (and may even be autobiographical, as has been suggested); however, the Egyptian instructional texts functioned as motivational tools for scribal students, as argued above.<sup>41</sup> Because the book of Ben Sira contains an explicit reference to a school (i.e., בית מדרש or בית מוסר) and also includes exhortations to pursue the scribal vocation (e.g., 51:23–30), it seems probable that 38:24–39:11 may have also functioned as a similar motivational tool.<sup>42</sup> Just as the Egyptian texts vaunting the scribal profession functioned as pedagogical devices to increase recruitment, retention, and motivation in the scribal training program, so Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 also may have functioned in a similar way.

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<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 191; Marböck, "Sir., 38,24–39,11," 295; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 244; John G. Gammie, "The Sage in Sirach," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 365, 368.

<sup>41</sup> See Brunner, *Altaegyptische Erziehung*, passim, esp. p. 85. The Egyptian evidence does demonstrate the presence of "schools" (defined broadly), *pace* Washington, *Wealth and Poverty*, 29–36. See James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> בית מדרש is the reading of Cairo Geniza Manuscript B. Reading בית מוסר is sometimes considered preferable, based on the evidence of the versions (e.g., Greek: ἐν αἴσῃ παιδείας). Nevertheless, either could be understood as a reference to a school, as is also normally argued: Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 12, 403, 575; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 36, 37; Crenshaw, *Education*, 271, viii. But cf. Wischmeyer, *Jesus Sirach*, 175–77.

<sup>33</sup> Lesko, "Some Comments on Ancient Egyptian Literacy and Literati," in *Studies Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, vol. 1 (ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 659. Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert has appropriately noted that the younger scribal students were probably not old enough to "realize what sort of humor was to be found in the text" (personal correspondence).

<sup>34</sup> Hellmut Brunner, *Altaegyptische Erziehung* (2. Aufl.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 85.

<sup>35</sup> Lesko, "Some Comments," 661.

<sup>36</sup> Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert (personal correspondence).

<sup>37</sup> For the propagandizing element, see also William Kelly Simpson, "Belles Lettres and Propaganda," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 437.

<sup>38</sup> Guglielmi has stated that the *Satire* simply has a "spöttisch-satirische Einschlag" ("Berufsatiren," 46, cf. 69). In essence, Ben Sira preserved the topos but removed the *Einschlag*.

<sup>39</sup> I agree with Crenshaw (personal correspondence) that "an element of ridicule" was essential for the texts to achieve their motivational purposes. I also think that there was a strong element of mitigating humor.