

## Ben Sira's Idea on the Role and Tasks of the Physician in the Process of Healing the Sick (Sir 38:12–15)

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**ABSTRACT:** The last part of Ben Sira's reflections on the activities of his contemporary physicians and the medicine of the time contained in Sir 38:1–15 is devoted to the attitude of the medical practitioner when healing the sick person (38:12–15). The pericope has a concentric structure with the attitude of the physicians towards God at its centre (38:13–14). The frame verses are devoted to the attitude of the sick person (38:12) and the sinner (38:15) towards the physician. According to the sage, it is not enough for a suffering person to turn to God alone asking to restore their health (Sir 38:9–11), but they should call on a doctor to help them recover (38:12a). The sick person needs a doctor's help (38:12b). The Greek text emphasises that one should not be afraid of a doctor because God created them (the Hebrew version omits this argument; see 38:12a). Therefore, physicians are desired by the Lord and, like all creatures, God has also assigned them a specific task. However, physicians cannot rely solely on their knowledge and skills while healing a sick person. They should ask (pray to) God to allow them first to make the correct diagnosis (as explicitly stated in the Hebrew version), and then to heal their patient. The last verse of the pericope (38:15) poses many difficulties, which are reflected in numerous interpretations of its content. According to the analysis made in the article, it does not contain a negative image of a medical practitioner because its main message is the link between the cause of illness and sin (traditional perception of illness expressed in the Old Testament based on the principle of retribution). In Sir 38:12–15, as well as in the entire reflection on the contemporary medicine (38:1–15), Ben Sira made an excellent synthesis between this field of science and Israel's faith in the divine Physician.

**KEYWORDS:** the Book of Sirach, physician, prayer, healing the sick, Sir 38:12–15, Sir 38:1–15

The Old Testament unequivocally portrays God as the only healer who can cure a sick person of their ailments.<sup>1</sup> He is the only one that can restore a sick person's full health and physical strength (cf. Exod 15:26), having first forgiven their transgressions and the evil they have committed. This belief stems from the theological principle of retribution,

<sup>1</sup> See M. Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," *Anton* 62 (1987) 176; W. Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii," *CT* 71/3 (2001) 51–57; G. Ravasi, "Malattia, guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento," *PSV* 40 (1999) 17–19; M.P. Scanu, "«Io sono JHWH, colui che ti guarisce»: Es 15,26. Considerazioni sulla metafora terapeutica in prospettiva teologica," *PSV* 40 (1999) 23–39; E. Testa, "Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia," *RivB* 43 (1995) 258–260.

according to which sickness and suffering are punishments for sin and wrongdoing.<sup>2</sup> Since illness and pain had a primarily religious rather than bodily dimension, physicians seemed unnecessary. The negative assessment of their activity in ancient Israel (see 2 Chr 16:12<sup>3</sup>) was also associated with the reliance of the contemporary medicine time on magic, which was prohibited for believers in the one God.<sup>4</sup> Only in the Hellenistic period was this very negative attitude towards physicians somewhat mitigated, as reflected in the Book of Tobit (see Tob 2:10).<sup>5</sup> In his sapiential reflection on human life, Ben Sira also recognised the problem associated with contemporary medicine and healing the sick of their ailments. He addressed this in Sir 38:1–15. This article is devoted to the final part of the Jerusalem sage's reflection on contemporary medicine (38:12–15). He focused primarily on the role and tasks that physicians should perform in the process of healing the sick.

First, the immediate context of Sir 38:12–15 and the delimitation of this section of Sir 38:1–15 will be presented. Then, the translation of its Greek text will be provided and the structure of the studied pericope will be outlined. In the final part of the article, an exegetical and theological analysis of the pericope will be carried out. Contrary to what could have been expected, the activity of physicians and its assessment in the Old Testament will not be presented at the beginning of the article, as this issue was discussed in an earlier article concerning Sir 38:1–3.<sup>6</sup>

2 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 180; N. Allan, "The Physician in Ancient Israel: His Status and Function," *Medical History* 45 (2001) 377–379; H. Duesberg, "Le médecin, un sage (Ecclésiastique 38,1–15)," *BVC* 38 (1961) 47–48; J. Gibley – P. Grelot, "Choroba-uleczenie," *Słownik teologii biblijnej* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 121–123; V. Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico* (El Mensaje del Antiguo Testamento 20; Salamanca: Sígueme 1992) 186; Ravasi, "Malattia, guarigione e medici nell'Antico Testamento," 13–14; L. Ryken – J.C. Wilhoit – T. Longman III (eds.), *Le immagini bibliche. Simboli, figure retoriche e temi letterari della Bibbia* (Dizionario San Paolo; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2006) 831–833; W.M. Stabryła, "Najlepszego nawet lekarza czeka Gehenna! Lekarz w starożytnym Izraelu," *AK* 160/1 (2013) 7–8; W.M. Stabryła, "Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu," *Więcej szczęścia jest w dawaniu aniżeli w braniu. Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Waldemara Chrostowskiego w 60. rocznicę urodzin* (ed. B. Strzałkowska) (Ad Multos Annos; Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Bibliistów Polskich 2011) III, 1317.

3 See I. Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit: King Asa Meets Ben Sira," *CBQ* 80 (2018) 231–237.

4 See Allan, "The Physician in Ancient Israel," 381–382; F. Gaiser, "'The sensible will not despise him': Healing Medicine, Human Wisdom and God (Sirach 38:1–15)," *Healing in the Bible. Theological Insight for Christian Ministry* (ed. F.J. Gaiser) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2010) 121–122; A. Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," *BibAn* 10/1 (2020) 33–34; Stabryła, "Najlepszego nawet lekarza czeka Gehenna," 8–9; Stabryła, "Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu," 1317, 1323–1325, 1327, 1333.

5 See Allan, "The Physician in Ancient Israel," 382–385; Stabryła, "Najlepszego nawet lekarza czeka Gehenna," 9; Stabryła, "Zdrowie i choroba w starożytnym Izraelu," 1325; J. Turkiel, "Septuaginta o lekarzu," *Nauki humanistyczne i socjologia. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Księdzu Profesorowi zwyczajnemu doktorowi habilitowanemu Józefowi M. Dołędze* (ed. J.W. Czartoszewski) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW 2010) 564–565.

6 See Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," 41–57.

## 1. The Immediate Context and Delimitation of Sir 38:12–15

The immediate context preceding Sir 38:12–15 is Ben Sira's reflection on modern medicine and healing of the sick (38:1–11). The pericope that is the subject of this article constitutes its final part, which concludes the sage's reflections on this topic. Sir 38:1–15 is divided into two parts. In the first part, the author focuses directly on medicine (38:1–8). First, contrary to the beliefs of the ancient Israelites, he positively assesses the physician and his work, calling for respect to be shown to him. He also explains why there is no need to fear using his services, as he too was created by God, and therefore is not a "representative" of magical forces – hostile to the Lord and dangerous to every believer (38:1–3).<sup>7</sup> Then, the sage directs his attention to the medicines used by the medical practitioners of his time. Like the physician, they too are created by the Most High and do not possess magical powers, so there is no need to fear or reject them. To the contrary, their healing power comes from the Creator, who endowed them with healing properties (38:4–8).<sup>8</sup> In the second part of Sir 38:1–15, i.e. 38:9–15,<sup>9</sup> Ben Sira first presents an instruction directed to the sick person concerning the attitude he should adopt towards God at the time of illness (38:9–11).<sup>10</sup> Then, in the section that concludes his reflections on the healing of a person suffering from pain and ailments, which is the subject of this article (38:12–15),<sup>11</sup> Ben Sira presents the role that the physician should play in this process.

Sir 38:12–15 fits perfectly into the preceding context not only from a logical (the author's train of thought) but also the formal point of view. It should be emphasised that these verses, along with Sir 38:1–3, form the framework for Ben Sira's entire reflection on medicine and healing from diseases. In both sections, the noun *ιατρός* ('physician'; see 38:1a, 3a and 38:12a, 15b)<sup>12</sup> appears in the first and last verses. Moreover, they express the same idea, written in exactly the same way, namely, that God created the physician (*αὐτὸν ἔκτισεν κύριος*; see 38:1b and 38:12a). The initial and final part of Sir 38:1–15 also speaks of

<sup>7</sup> See Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," 41–57.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Piwowar, "The Origin and Significance of Medicaments According to Ben Sira (Sir 38:4–8)," *BibAn* 1 (2021) 25–62.

<sup>9</sup> Many exegetes treat Sir 38:9–15 as a whole, without distinguishing two sections in this text: Sir 38:9–11 and Sir 38:12–15 (see J. Corley, *Sirach* [New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Old Testament 21; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2013] 104; D. Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum [Sir 38,1–15]," *WD* 15 [1979] 59; L. Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," *Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira* [eds. R. Egger-Wenzel – I. Krammer] [BZAW 270; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1998] 135; B. Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," *Bib* 92 [2011] 358, 362–366).

<sup>10</sup> See A. Piwowar, "The Sick Person's Relationship with God in the Healing Process According to Ben Sira (Sir 38:9–11)," *BibAn* 4 (2022) 473–501.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Fasce, *La lode del medico nel libro biblico del Siracide* (Genova: ECIG 2009) 87; G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira* (ATD 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 263; B.M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51* (NEchtB 39; Würzburg: Echter 2010) 255.

<sup>12</sup> See P.W. Skehan – A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York – London – Toronto: Doubleday 1987) 442.

the need relating to the physician (πρὸς τὰς χρείας αὐτοῦ – ‘in consideration of his [the physician’s] services’ in 38:1a, and γὰρ αὐτοῦ χρεία – ‘for his [is] need’ in 38:12b). Based on this, it can be stated without a doubt that Sir 38:12–15 is an integral part of Sir 38:1–15 and forms the conclusion of Ben Sira’s considerations on medicine at that time – the physician’s activity and the process of healing from diseases.

The beginning of the analysed pericope presents certain problems. In Sir 38:12, there are two forms of the imperative aorist tense (δόξ – 38:12aα and ἀποστήτω – 38:12bα), which means that from a formal point of view, this verse can be attributed to the previous section of the pericope concerning the physician and his activities (Sir 38:9–11),<sup>13</sup> because imperatives of this tense dominate in it.<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that although the first of them (δόξ) refers to the sick person, like the imperative forms in Sir 38:9–11, the μὴ ἀποστήτω prohibition applies not to the suffering person, but to the physician (ἀποστήτω is a third person singular *imperativus aoristi activi*). It is also important to observe that in addition to the aforementioned imperative forms, Sir 38:12 also includes *indicativus aoristi activi* (ἔκτισεν) and a nominal sentence in which ἔστιν was elided (γὰρ αὐτοῦ χρεία – literally: ‘for his need’ by implication ‘is’). The presence of other forms besides the imperative in Sir 38:12 weakens the possibility of attributing this verse to Sir 38:9–11, in which imperatives almost entirely dominated (seven verbs in the imperative out of nine verb forms in the entire pericope).<sup>15</sup> However, it should be noted that in Sir 38:12 (see above), a new character appears. In the previous section (Sir 38:9–11), it was the sick person. Although he was not mentioned *explicite*, the sage addressed him directly, giving him instructions and advice on what he should do and how he should behave at the time of illness. Starting from Sir 38:12, the dominant character is the physician. The Greek noun ἰατρός appears at the beginning and the end of Sir 38:12–15 – in the Greek version, it is the first and last word of this section of Sir 38:1–15. The figure of the medical practitioner thus unites verses 38:12–15 into a whole, creating the framework of this pericope section, which is devoted to the physician’s activities (Sir 38:1–15). Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that Sir 38:12 is a bridge connecting Sir 38:9–11 and Sir 38:12–15 (which is emphasised by the conjunction καὶ at the beginning of the first stich of this verse).<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, this verse retains the form (imperative forms) of the previous pericope, and on the other hand,

13 Silvana Fasce (*La lode del medico*, 86–87) seems to include Sir 38:12 more in the section of Sir 38:9–11 than in Sir 38:12–15 although he does not express this thought explicitly. Alexander A. Di Lella explicitly states that Sir 38:9–15 constitutes a coherent literary unit (see Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442). This is also what Sijbolt Noorda believes (“Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing: The Connection of Medical Treatment and Religious Beliefs in Ben Sira 38, 1–15,” *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* [ed. M. Vermaseren] [EPRO 78; Leiden: Brill 1979] 222).

14 See Piwowar, “The Sick Person’s Relationship with God,” 479.

15 See Piwowar, “The Sick Person’s Relationship with God,” 479.

16 Lindsey A. Askin (*Scribal Culture in Ben Sira* [Sir 38:1–15; 41:1–15; 43:11–19; 44–50] [Diss. Queen’s College, University of Cambridge; Cambridge 2016] 207–208) considers Sir 38:12 to belong to the penultimate section of Sir 38:1–15, forming Sir 38:9–12 as a separate literary unit. Cf. L. Alonso Schökel, *Proverbios y Eclesiástico* (Los Libros Sagrados 11; Madrid: Cristiandad 1968) 280–281.

it moves on to a new topic. The content of the previous section dealt with the attitude of the sick person towards God, while starting from Sir 38:12, the author focuses on the role and tasks of the physician in the process of healing and restoring the health of the sick person. Thus, the content also unites Sir 38:12–15, giving it thematic coherence.<sup>17</sup>

However, Pancratius C. Beentjes disagrees with the analysis presented above. Based on the notation found in Hebrew manuscript B, this scholar argues that Sir 38:12 belongs to the third section of Sir 38:1–15, i.e. to Sir 38:9–12. He notes that in this manuscript, after Sir 38:12, there is the letter <sup>18</sup>פ with three dots above it<sup>19</sup>. According to P.C. Beentjes, this symbol indicates that Sir 38:12 concludes the original teaching of Ben Sira on the subject of the physician and begins a later addition to the original text, which clearly does not fit the context preceding Sir 38:13–15.<sup>20</sup>

The conclusion of the section of Sir 38:1–15 in Sir 38:15 emphasises not only the noun *ιατρός* (see above), but also the vocative *τέκνον* ('child'), which appears at the beginning of the next verse (38:16). Very often in the work of the Jerusalem sage, this word serves a structural role, indicating the beginning of a new pericope or a new thread in teaching (see 38:9).<sup>21</sup> Starting from Sir 38:16, the author of the book introduces a new topic in his reflections. This topic is mourning the death of a loved one (38:16–23).<sup>22</sup>

All arguments and premises presented above clearly demonstrate that Sir 38:12–15 constitutes a separate and coherent literary-thematic section in Ben Sira's reflection on medicine and the process of healing the sick person,<sup>23</sup> fitting perfectly into the mainstream of the sage's thought on this subject and creating a cohesive whole with it.<sup>24</sup>

17 Affiliation of v. 12 to the last section of the pericope about the physician is also confirmed by Maria Chrysovergi (*Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature from the Third and Second Centuries BCE* [Diss. Durham University; Durham 2011]188, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3568> [access: 2.04.2023]).

18 For the alleged meaning of this clause, see P.C. Beentjes, "A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13. Short Note," *EstBib* 76/3 (2018) 454–454 (especially 454, n. 4).

19 See 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 – New York – Köln: Brill 1997) 66. Cf. *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023]. However, the issue of the Hebrew text of Sir published by the Academy of the Hebrew Language does not contain this sign (see Akademyah la-lashon ha-Ivrit (Jerusalem), *The Book of Ben Sira. Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary* [The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language; Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and the Shrine of the Book 1973] 39).

20 See Beentjes, "A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 455–459.

21 See Piwowar, "The Sick Person's Relationship with God," 478.

22 See L. Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," *PSV* 40 (1999) 67.

23 See Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii," 66; Gaiser, "The sensible will not despise him: Healing Medicine, Human Wisdom and God (Sirach 38:1–15)," 124–125; M.C. Palmisano, *Siracide. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Nuova Versione della Bibbia dai Testi Antichi 34; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2016) 342, 344; J.G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974) 184; A. Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," *Arzt und Christ* 1/11 (1965) 9–10.

24 Pancratius C. Beentjes ("A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 456–459) argues against this view, considering Sir 38:13–15 to be a later addition to the original version of the work of the sage of Jerusalem.

## 2. The Translation of the Greek Text and Its Structure

The Greek version of Sir 38:12–15 will be adopted as the base text for further analysis. The reason for this choice is that the translation of the work of Ben Sira into Greek has been recognised as the canonical text. Here is the translation of the analysed literary unit based on the critical edition of the Book of Sirach published by Joseph Ziegler<sup>25</sup> (the verse numbering of this edition has been retained<sup>26</sup>):

- 38:12 Give a place to the physician too, as he was also created by the Lord  
and let him not be too far from you, for his work is needed too,  
38:13 There is a time when success is in their hands.  
38:14 for they too will ask the Lord,  
to provide them with strength  
and healing for the survival.  
38:15 Let those who sin against the Creator,  
fall into the hands of the physician.<sup>27</sup>

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:12–15<sup>28</sup> contains significant differences, especially in its final section (38:14bc, 15b), when compared to its translation into Greek.<sup>29</sup> These will be presented in the exegetical part of the article.

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- 25 See J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, 2 ed. (Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum 12/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1980) 300–301.
- 26 Cf. R. Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira with a Synopsis of the Hebrew Manuscripts* (CBET 101; Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT: Peeters 2022) 480–481; F.V. Reiterer, *Zählssynopse zum Buch Ben Sira* (Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam Pertinentes 1; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2003) 200–201.
- 27 Translation of the Greek text of Sir 38:12–15; cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 171; Fasse, *La lode del medico*, 125; W. Kraus – M. Karrer (eds.), *Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2009) 1142; M. Wojciechowski (trans.), *Księgi greckie. Przekład interliniarny z kodami gramatycznymi i indeksem form podstawowych* (Prymasowska Seria Biblijna; Warszawa: Vocatio 2008) 648; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa’ posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 66; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; A. Pietersma – B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint. And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) 750; R. Popowski (trans.), *Septuaginta czyli Biblia Starożytnego Testamentu wraz z księgami deuterokanonicznymi i apokryfami*, 3 ed. (PSBib; Warszawa: Vocatio 2013) 1245–1246.
- 28 See Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 66; P. Boccaccio – G. Berardi, *Ben Sira. Textus hebraeus secundum fragmenta reperta* (Roma: PIB 1986) 25; Akademyah la-lashon ha-‘Ivrit, *The Book of Ben Sira*, 39–40; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access 5.02.2023]. Cf. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 187–188; Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira*; 480–481; I. Lévi, *The Hebrew Text of the Book of Ecclesiasticus* (SSS; Leiden: Brill 1904) 45; N. Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach oder Ecclesiasticus. Übersetzt und erklärt* (EHAT 25; Münster: Aschendorff 1913) 313–314; N. Peters, *Der jüngst wieder aufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1902) 158; R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer 1906) 341–342; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256–257.
- 29 For a translation of the Hebrew text of Sir 38:12–15, see: Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” 174; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 189; Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 173; Lüthmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 58; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa’ posto al Medico, perché ti

As indicated in paragraph 1, Sir 38:12 serves as a bridge connecting Sir 38:9–11 with Sir 38:12–15. In addition, with Sir 38:15, it frames the final section of Sir 38:1–15. The basis of this inclusion is the Greek noun *ιατρός* ('physician').<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that in Sir 38:13–14, that is, in the verses located in the centre of the analysed literary unit, the plural form of physicians is used (as personal pronouns refer to them: *αὐτῶν* in 38:13, *αὐτοί* in 38:14a and *αὐτοῖς* in 38:14b; therefore, it refers to all physicians), and not to one – a certain, indefinite – physician as in the fringe verses (38:12 and 38:15). Additionally, it should be noted that in the former verses, there is *explicite* talk about the relationship of the sick person (38:12) and sinner to the physician (38:15), as well as *implicite* to God, while the central verses focus solely on the role and tasks of physicians in healing the sick.

Based on the analysis presented in Sir 38:12–15 relating to the structure of this pericope, the following composition can be discerned in it:

A – the relationship of the sick person to the physician (Sir 38:12)

B – the role and tasks of physicians in the healing process (Sir 38:13–14)

A' – the relationship of the sinner to the physician and God (Sir 38:15).

However, some scholars of Sir 38:1–15 believe that Sir 38:15 forms a separate part of the sage's reflections on medicine and the process of healing a sick person.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Sir 38:12–15

The exegetical analysis of the pericope will be divided into three parts corresponding to its structure. After examining the content and message of each stich in the Greek version, a comparison of their meaning with the original Hebrew text will be made.

è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15), 66–67; C. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira* (Les dix paroles; Paris: Verdier 2003) 220–221; V. Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira. Traducción y notas* (Asociación Bíblica Española 59; Estella: Verbo Divino 2012) 222–223; Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing," 218–219, n. 9; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 438–439; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023]. Cf. Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; Peters, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach oder Ecclesiasticus*, 311; Peters, *Der jüngst wieder aufgefundene hebräische Text des Buches Ecclesiasticus*, 385; R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach hebräisch und deutsch* (Berlin: Reimer 1906) 65; J. Vella, "Eclesiastico," *La Sagrada Escritura. Texto y comentario. Antiguo Testamento. V. Eclesiástico, Isata, Jeremías, Ezequiel* (ed. A.T. Fernández) (Madrid: Editorial Católica 1970) 157.

30 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 209; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 96; Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 142; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 443.

31 See Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 59; J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BZAW 272; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1999) 154–155; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 255; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 358. Waldemar Chrostowski ("Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii," 66–67) refers to Sir 38:15 as the point of Sir 38:1–15. Although John G. Snaith (*Ecclesiasticus*, 184) includes this verse in Sir 38:12–15, he assigns it a specific role, which he describes as a conclusion.

### 3.1. The Relationship of the Sick Person to the Physician (Sir 38:12)

In the previous section of his reflection on medicine and the healing process, Ben Sira called on the sick person to renew his relationship with God (38:9–11).<sup>32</sup> Thus, he returned to the traditional Old Testament view of illness as a punishment for sin.<sup>33</sup> The Greek text of the first stich of the analysed verse begins with the conjunction *καί*, which indicates a connection to the sage's earlier reflections regarding healing. It can also be interpreted in an emphatic sense ('also', 'in addition'), which would further underscore the connection to the earlier context. Therefore, Sir 38:12 should be read in conjunction with the preceding verses. The continuation of the instructions expressed in Sir 38:9–11 emphasises, as already indicated in the delimitation of the literary unit under study (see paragraph 1), the first-person singular form of the verb appearing in Sir 38:12a. This is the *imperativus aoristi activi* of the second person singular (*δός* – 'give'), which extends the series of imperative forms appearing in Sir 38:9–11. The Greek version of the analysed section, Sir 38:1–15, skilfully highlights the continuity of the sage's thought through these two words, closely linking 38:9–11 with 38:12–15. It can be said that Sir 38:12a represents a transition from advice given to the sick person to instructions given to the physicians on how they should behave when healing an illness.

At the beginning of the first stich of Sir 38:12, the author calls on the suffering person to, after following the instructions regarding their relationship with God (turning to the Lord, prayer, repentance, and offering sacrifices; see Sir 38:9–11), surrender themselves to the care of a physician (*ιατρῶ δός τόπον* – 'give a place to the physician'). Being a person faithful to religious tradition and covenant with God, Ben Sira gives priority to the divine Physician in the healing process. In the first place, the sick person should put oneself in His hands and only then, in the second place, turn to the medical practitioner. In this way, the author returns to the belief expressed in the first part of Sir 38:1–15 regarding the value and usefulness of the medicine of his time, confirming what he wrote earlier.<sup>34</sup> In Sir 38:1–3, the sage called for respecting the physician and not rejecting his work, because he is not a representative of magical powers opposed to God but is an instrument in God's hand, through which He acts and offers to heal the sick person from their ailments. It should be emphasised that Sir 38:12a is a very clear reference to the initial section of 38:1–15 and a continuation of the evaluation of the activities of physicians expressed there. The call to "give a place to the physician" is a consequence of the appeal to show respect to the physician contained in Sir 38:1a (*τίμα ιατρόν*). Ben Sira calls on the sick person to show complete trust in the medical practitioner and not to be afraid of his intervention.

32 See Piwowar, "The Sick Person's Relationship with God," 482–491.

33 See Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 140.

34 See Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 9.



The syntagma δὲς τόπον does not refer to a place in space<sup>35</sup> but rather expresses an appeal to submit to the treatment recommended by a medical practitioner. This is confirmed in Sir 4:5, where a similar phrase appears with a slightly different (prohibition) phrase, μὴ δῶς τόπον (literally 'do not give place'). From the context, it can be inferred that it means 'do not give opportunity/chance,' 'do not let' someone curse you (καταράσασθαι σε). A similar (analogous) meaning is also assumed in 13:22 (οὐκ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ τόπος) and 19:17 (δὲς τόπον νόμῳ ὑψίστου). 'Giving someone or something a place' therefore means to allow – to allow someone or something to act.<sup>36</sup> The above sense of the analysed phrase fits perfectly into the context of Sir 38:12a as well. Ben Sira urges the sick person to turn to the physician and let him act, i.e. to undergo healing. The Greek text used a strong and unambiguous imperative (*imperativus aoristi*) to express this thought, which leaves the suffering person no margin for refusal or non-compliance. One could even say that the sage demands that his command be fulfilled immediately.

The second part of Sir 38:12a provides the justification for the initial call. Let the physician work, do not fear his activity because the Lord created him (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔκτισεν κύριος). Sir 38:12aβ is a literal quote from 38:1b.<sup>37</sup> In both texts, this sentence fulfils the same function – it gives the reason why one should first honour the physician (38:1b)<sup>38</sup> and then entrust oneself to him during illness (38:12aβ). In these words, Ben Sira justified the change he wanted to see in the approach of the believing Israelites towards medics. They should not be afraid of them or reject their activity. God created them, so they are not representatives of any evil forces opposed to the Most High. Moreover, they are His instruments – His collaborators in restoring health to the sick because, like any other creature, they are dependent on Him and subject to Him.<sup>39</sup> It can therefore be said that to recover, it is not enough to fulfil and implement all the instructions contained in Sir 38:9–11, but it is also necessary to seek the help of a physician.<sup>40</sup> Ben Sira thus clearly expressed his fidelity to tradition and faith in God – the only Physician, but at the same time, he expressed the acceptance of contemporary medicine. Although he combined both realities into one, it should be noted that medics are subordinate to the Lord and dependent on Him. He thus made, as in Sir 38:1–8, a perfect synthesis of the faith of the Israelites and an openness to the novelty brought by Hellenistic culture – medicine.<sup>41</sup> Silvana Fasce argues that the second part of Sir 38:12a (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔκτισεν κύριος) emphasises the initial call of this stich: 'give a place to the physician.'<sup>42</sup>

35 Cf. Sir 12:12; 36:12; 41:19; 46:12 and 49:10. In these texts, the noun τόπος takes on the meaning of a specific concrete place in space.

36 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 86, n. 135.

37 See Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 188; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 86, n. 136.

38 See Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," 43–44.

39 See Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

40 See Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 9–10.

41 See Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," 58.

42 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 86.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:12a has not been fully preserved in manuscript B. It is seriously damaged: מקום [...]ל [...]ג ('and place also for [...]'). Víctor Morla Asensio, relying on the Greek version, proposes to fill in the existing gaps in the following way: וגם לרופא תן מקום ('also give a place to the physician').<sup>43</sup> The original version, therefore, does not contain a subordinate causal clause that appears in the Greek translation of this stich: καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔκτισεν κύριος. It only calls for using the services of a medical practitioner but does not justify this appeal by referring to the work of creation. Similarly, the Syriac version of Sir 38:12a does not include this reference to God creating the physician,<sup>44</sup> which seems to suggest that the second part of Sir 38:12a is an addition introduced by the translator of the sage's work into the Greek language – the grandson of Ben Sira. Lindsey A. Askin believes that the Hebrew word מקום can refer to the payment that is due to the physician for his help to the sick person.<sup>45</sup>

The first part of the second stich of Sir 38:12 (μὴ ἀποστήτω σου – 'let him not withdraw/turn away from you') presents some difficulties. This is because the subject of the imperative form δός (38:12aα), which refers to the sick person that the sage was directly addressing, is changed to the third person singular in the prohibition μὴ ἀποστήτω ('let him not be too far from you'). The question arises as to who this new subject is: God (38:12aβ) or the physician (38:12aα)? The answer to this question depends on the form of the verb ἀφίστημι (ἀποστήτω), and, more specifically, on whether it is used in a transitive or a non-transitive sense in Sir 38:12bα. If it is transitive, it would refer to God ('to remove,' 'to distance,' 'to prevent,' 'to separate'<sup>46</sup>), but if it is non-transitive, it would refer to the physician ('to withdraw,' 'to step back,' 'to keep away,' 'to disconnect'<sup>47</sup>). It should also be noted that if the subject were God, it would be necessary to add a closer complement to the text, which would most likely be the physician ('let Him not withdraw [the physician] from you'). However, it should be emphasised that the very morphological form of the aorist imperative ἀποστήτω, if the translator consistently followed the principles of the Greek language,<sup>48</sup> is a non-transitive form of the verb ἀφίστημι.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the subject of the phrase μὴ ἀποστήτω σου is the physician. Sir 38:12b calls on the medical practitioner not to withdraw from a suffering person. This sentence is somewhat surprising, as the physician's withdrawal from the sick person would deprive him of the earnings he would

43 See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 2. Cf. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 220; Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 140, n. 99.

44 See N. Calduch-Benages – J. Ferrer – J. Liesen, *La sabiduría del Escriba. Wisdom of the Scribe* (Biblioteca Midrásica 26; Estella: Verbo Divino 2003) 218.

45 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 206.

46 See T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain – Paris – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2009) 107–108.

47 See Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 108.

48 An analysis of the aorist forms of the verb ἀφίστημι in the Greek version of Sir confirms that the translator consistently distinguished between the sigmatic, transitive forms of this tense (see Sir 30:23; 38:10, 20 and 47:23, 24), and the asigmatic, non-transitive forms (see Sir 2:3; 7:2; 10:12; 13:10; 15:11; 35:3, 3 and 48:15).

49 See A. Piwowar, *Greka Nowego Testamentu. Gramatyka* (Biblioteka "Verbum Vitae" 1; Kielce: Instytut Teologii Biblijnej Verbum 2010) 451, 453–454.

receive for the work he had done. On the other hand, it seems to suggest that the physician could make the decision himself whom to treat and whom to leave without help – whom to withdraw from. Perhaps this implicitly conveys the idea that ancient medics did not undertake to treat all who were suffering – for example, when they saw that the condition was severe or critical and they were unable to help such a person, they did not decide to start treatment. If this inference is correct, Ben Sira would refer in Sir 38:12b $\alpha$  to a disease that ancient medics were able to cure.

The second part of Sir 38:12b, just like in the previous stich, contains the justification of the prohibition expressed at the beginning (*καὶ γὰρ αὐτοῦ χρεία* – literally ‘because of his need’).<sup>50</sup> It is a nominal sentence in which the personal form of the verb εἶμί (‘to be’) has been omitted. It is highly likely that this refers to the third person singular of the *indicativus praesentis* – ἐστί(ν). The phrase αὐτοῦ χρεία (‘his need’) may initially suggest that it refers to some need that the physician himself has (*genetivus possessoris*). However, this would be completely incomprehensible in the context of Sir 38:12b. The personal pronoun αὐτός (‘he’) in the genitive case plays a different syntactic role in this phrase. The noun χρεία (‘need,’ ‘necessity’) is a substantive noun,<sup>51</sup> so *genetivus αὐτοῦ* can be interpreted either as *genetivus obiectivus* (‘need related to the physician/concerning the physician – someone needs a medic’) or *genetivus subiectivus* (‘need that the physician has – he needs something’).<sup>52</sup> Of course, in Sir 38:12b $\beta$ , the genitive of the personal pronoun should be interpreted in the first sense, as only this makes sense and is logical in the context of the analysed verse. The Greek version therefore states that the sick person also has (the conjunction *καὶ* in an intensified sense) a need for a physician’s help. It is not enough to rely only on God (38:9–11), it is also necessary to submit to the treatments that the medical practitioner will recommend.<sup>53</sup> Although the sage first appeals to the divine Physician, he does not exclude human support – the medic. Moreover, he states that the medical practitioner is indispensable in restoring the sick person’s health.<sup>54</sup> His help is not merely optional, but according to Ben Sira, it is essential – it cannot be omitted or disregarded.<sup>55</sup> The sage expressed this thought at the beginning of his teaching on physicians and medicine in Sir 38:1a $\beta$ .<sup>56</sup> A phrase (*τὰς χρείας αὐτοῦ*) almost identical as in Sir 38:12b $\beta$  appears there. The only difference is that in Sir 38:1a $\beta$ , there is an article before the noun χρεία (which is missing in Sir 38:12b $\beta$ ), and the pronoun in the genitive case αὐτοῦ is placed after the noun, not before it, as in the analysed stich. Attention should be paid to this last detail. The placement of the genitive αὐτοῦ before the noun to which it refers in Sir 38:12b $\beta$  seems to emphasise

50 See Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 140–141.

51 See R. Romizi, *Greco antico. Vocabolario greco italiano etimologico e ragionato*, 3 ed. (Bologna: Zanichelli 2007) 1487.

52 See A. Piwowar, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu*, 2 ed. (MPWB 13; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2017) paragraphs 44–45.

53 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 86.

54 Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 188.

55 See Chrostowski, “Lekarz i jego posługa w świetle Biblii,” 66.

56 See Piwowar, “Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3),” 43.

the role of the physician compared to τὰς χρείας αὐτοῦ in Sir 38:1aβ. If the above observation is correct, it confirms even more the necessity and indispensability of seeking a medic's help during illness. He is an integral part of the healing process that cannot be disregarded and omitted, as he occupies a place in it right after God.<sup>57</sup>

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:12b found in manuscript B reads as follows: וְלֹא יִמּוּשׁ כִּי גַם בּו צוֹרֵךְ<sup>58</sup> ('and let him not depart,<sup>59</sup> for there is also a need for him'<sup>60</sup>). The note in the margin suggests reading this stich as follows: וְלֹא יִשְׁמַשׁ מֵאֵה כְּגַב צוֹכִיךְ. Morla Asensio considers this reading to be untranslatable<sup>61</sup> and containing errors (using יִשְׁמַשׁ instead of יִמּוּשׁ, מֵאֵה instead of מֵאֵתֶךָ, and כְּגַב instead of כְּרַב),<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the B<sup>text</sup> of this stich does not differ from its translation into Greek – they express the same idea.<sup>63</sup>

Sir 38:12 is a clear reference to the verse that begins the sage's teaching on the activity of physicians and contemporary medicine (38:1).<sup>64</sup> This is particularly evident in the Greek version of these texts, as they contain identical formulations.<sup>65</sup> However, not only their literary form brings them closer to each other, but also their message – they complement each other. First, Ben Sira calls for maintaining close contact with the physician and not rejecting his medical activity, and then, if necessary, calling for his help in returning to full health.

57 "La novità di Ben Sira, visibile già nel v. 9 e, più ancora, nel v. 12, è piuttosto quella di affiancare alla preghiera al Dio di Israele l'opera del medico" (see Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» [Sir 38,1–15]" 71). Cf. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 206–207; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing," 220; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, 263; Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 140–141; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach* 25–51, 256.

58 See Aḳademyah la-lashon ha-ʿIvrit, *The Book of Ben Sira*, 39; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023]. Pancratius C. Beentjes (*The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 66) did not read the middle part of the stich: צוֹרֵךְ [.....] וְלֹא יִמּוּשׁ [.....]; cf. Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 3).

59 "The curious phrase 'let him not depart' in Sir 38,12b may be appropriate if the physician is also a priest or at least located in the Temple. Having made a flour-offering at the Temple, the priest or physician (or patient) may leave before the physician has prayed" (Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 207). Cf. Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 87.

60 See D.J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2011) VII, 162. Cf. Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 3. Maria Carmela Palmisano (*Siracide*, 345) translates the original version of Sir 38:12b as follows: "non tenerlo lontano, poiché anche di lui tu hai bisogno." Whereas Luca Mazzinghi ("«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» [Sir 38,1–15]" 66): "non ti abbandoni, perché ti è necessario."

61 Martin Abegg suggested the following translation of the text in the margin of manuscript B: "But do not let him minister to you more than your brother for you also have need of" (*The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023]).

62 See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 3.

63 Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 178.

64 Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442; Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 9. Beentjes ("A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 456) believes, as cited in the delimitation of the pericope analysed in this article, that Sir 38:12 forms an inclusion of Sir 38:1 with Sir 38:1–12.

65 In the Hebrew version of the text, Burkard Zapff ("Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 362) points out the occurrence of the term צוֹרֵךְ in Sir 38:1a and 38:12b, which he identifies as crucial to Sir 38:1–15. Cf. Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66.

### 3.2. The Role and Tasks of Physicians in the Healing Process (Sir 38:13–14)

In the verse that opens the central part of Ben Sira's reflection on the attitude of physicians in the healing process (38:13), the sage claims that there is a time (ἔστιν καιρός) when success is in the hands of physicians (ὅτε καὶ ἐν χερσὶν αὐτῶν εὐοδία). The noun εὐοδία ('success,' 'good journey') appears twice more in the Greek version of the work of the sage from Jerusalem, besides Sir 38:13. Sir 10:5 states that the success of a man is in the hand of the Lord (ἐν χειρὶ κυρίου εὐοδία ἀνδρός). Ben Sira, speaking of the strange contradictions in human life, notes that even in the midst of misfortunes or because of misfortunes, success can come to man (20:9a: ἔστιν εὐοδία ἐν κακοῖς ἀνδρὶ). Based on only these three places in the Book of Sirach where εὐοδία appears, one can conclude that this noun does not specify what kind of success is meant (material, personal, spiritual or other), but expresses the idea of prosperity and success in a general way without specifying the area of human life that it refers to. What is important for the analysis of this word in Sir 38:13 is the fact that success depends on God – He decides about it (10:5), and even in the most difficult situation, like failure and a series of misfortunes, success can come to man (Sir 20:9a). These two aspects characterising the Greek version of the work of the sage from Jerusalem, the word εὐοδία, perfectly fit into the context of Sir 38:13 and shed new light on its interpretation. Firstly, the success mentioned in this stich depends on the Most High and – He decides whether something will succeed or not. Secondly, thanks to this dependence of human life's success on God's will, even in the most difficult and hopeless situation, a radical change can occur – misfortune can turn into joy and success. In Sir 38:13, Ben Sira states that there is a time when success (εὐοδία) is in the hands of physicians. By making this statement, he gives hope to the sick for a return to full health – a successful end to their suffering, even if it seems that death is imminent, and the end of life is inevitable. The success mentioned in this stich introduces further teaching of the sage regarding the attitude of physicians in the process of healing the sick person – the success of their treatment depends not only on themselves but on God and His will. The success mentioned in Sir 38:13 undoubtedly refers to the healing process because it is related to physicians (more precisely, their hands – ἐν χερσὶν αὐτῶν). Based on this, it can be clearly stated that it means success in healing the patient, which is their recovery from disease and restoration to full health.

Ben Sira notes, however, that there is a time (ἔστιν καιρός)<sup>66</sup> when success is in the hands of the physicians.<sup>67</sup> This means that not every moment or time is suitable for healing. The noun καιρός does not refer to time in a general sense, but rather to a specific, appropriate moment – the right time.<sup>68</sup> It thus expresses a unique time or moment. The sage

66 The theme of proper time is characteristic of the wisdom literature (cf. Ecc 3:1–11; Sir 32:11 and 39:16). See Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit," 239; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 91–92; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 363–364.

67 See Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 141.

68 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 181–182; G. Dellling, "καιρός," *TDNT* III, 455–462; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 89; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," 71; R.C. Trench, *Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2000) 221–223.

therefore claims that success in the actions of physicians – expressed by the noun χεῖρ used in a metaphorical sense – has its proper time.<sup>69</sup> They are not always able to cure the sick and relieve them of their suffering, but they can do it only at a certain time.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the idea expressed here is that the medical practitioner is not always able to help the suffering and cure them. Most likely, this means that the patient cannot always be healed at every stage of the disease. Even today, when medicine has developed significantly compared to the times of Ben Sira, physicians are not always able to help the sick. It is much easier to do in the early stages of the disease than in the advanced stage of its development. Perhaps this is how Sir 38:13 should be interpreted. The time (καιρός), when success in fighting against the disease is possible, may refer to the initial phase of its development, when it has not yet taken on too much strength and has not yet overwhelmed the whole organism or done serious damage to it. It is easier to cure the patient then.<sup>71</sup> It is possible that the initial statement of the analysed stich refers precisely to this situation. However, it can certainly be stated that, according to Ben Sira, the sick person cannot be cured at any time of their disease, but only at the appropriate time.

If the above interpretation is correct, it means that the first task of a medical practitioner is to diagnose whether the time at which they begin healing the sick person is appropriate or not. In other words, at what stage of development is the disease? Is it at a stage where the patient can be cured, or has it already progressed to the point where the physician cannot help? The syntagma ἔστιν καιρός therefore refers to the situation in which the medical practitioner must determine whether they can cure the sick person or not. Therefore, Sir 38:13 refers to the limitations of medicine at that time, which could not heal many existing diseases.<sup>72</sup> It thus implicitly expresses the truth that physicians of that time could only help the sick in certain situations and at a certain stage of the development of the disease.

The noun 'hand' (χεῖρ) in Sir 38:13b, as noted above, is used in a figurative sense. It expresses human action, especially that which is manual – production, which results in some product or achievement<sup>73</sup> (cf. Sir 38:10<sup>74</sup>). Of course, in Sir 38:13 it refers to the activities associated with the medic's work, that is, the healing of the sick. It is significant that in the analysed stich, there is a transition from one physician (see Sir 38:12αα) to many medics (the personal pronoun in the plural αὐτῶν refers to them). However, this should not

69 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 90; D.P. Sulmasy, "The Covenant within the Covenant: Doctors and Patients in Sir 38:1–15," *Linacre Quarterly* 55/4 (1988) 21.

70 See Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," 71; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 363.

71 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 88.

72 "For Ben Sira [...] the diagnosis does not necessarily entail treatment, since treatment is separately in Sir 38:14b" (Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 208).

73 See M. Lurker, *Dizionario delle immagini e dei simboli biblici* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 1990) 121; E. Lohse, "χεῖρ," *TDNT* IX, 425–427; A. Ridouard, "Ramię i ręka," *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, 3 ed. (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 852; Ryken – Wilhoit – Longman III, *Le immagini bibliche*, 844–845.

74 See Piwowar, "The Sick Person's Relationship with God," 486–491.

be surprising, as in verse 38:12, the author addresses the sick person directly, urging them to call a physician (on the one hand, there was no need to call several medics immediately, and on the other hand, there were not so many of them at that time to convene a council immediately). Sir 38:13, on the other hand, refers to the work of all physicians and speaks of them as a group.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:13a is almost identical to the Greek version of this stich: *כי יש עת אשר מידו מצלחת* ('because there is a time when success [is] from his hand'<sup>75</sup>). A note in the margin of manuscript B proposes leaving out the first two words<sup>76</sup> and changing the preposition from *מן* to *ב* before the noun *ידו מצלחת*: *עת אשר בידו מצלחת* ('the time when in his hand [is] success'<sup>77</sup>). The original text preserves the singular when referring to the physician (*בידו* / *מידו*), through which it is fully consistent with the preceding verse (Sir 38:12), contrary to the Greek version (plural).<sup>78</sup>

Sir 38:14a demonstrates the dependence of physicians' actions on God, also confirming the earlier conclusion about the relationship between the success of their treatment and God. The sage states that they will ask God (*καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ κυρίου δεηθήσονται*). Attention should be paid to the first words of the Greek version of Sir 38:14a. The first word is *καί*, followed by *γὰρ*. The former is a conjunction that connects. It can have a reinforced meaning ('also,' 'even'). The latter is also a conjunction that generally appears in the second place in a sentence. It can introduce: a cause, conclusion, or extension of the previously expressed thought or explanation. It is difficult to determine unequivocally what function *γὰρ* serves in the analysed stich. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it connects the prayer of the physicians with the success of their actions toward the sick person. The most logical interpretation would be to recognise it as a conjunction introducing a cause ('because,' 'since'). If the presented interpretation of the initial words in Sir 38:14a is correct, then the Greek text, on the one hand, would emphasise the role of prayer in the healing process (not only should the sick person pray and ask God for healing [cf. Sir 38:9], but the medical practitioner must do so too<sup>79</sup>) and on the other hand, it would link the success and effectiveness of the therapy prescribed by the physician with God's will, upon which, as has already been said, it depends.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, V, 451; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 4.

<sup>76</sup> According to P.C. Beentjes ("A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 456), the omission of *כי* suggested by the note in the margin is appropriate. Also in the Greek version, the preposition *γὰρ* does not occur. Cf. Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 141, n. 103.

<sup>77</sup> See Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023].

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 178.

<sup>79</sup> See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 181; Beentjes, "A problematic symbol in Ben Sira 38,13," 458; Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit," 245; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 88; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256–257; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 364.

<sup>80</sup> See Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 364.

The verb δέομαι ('to ask,' 'to pray') appears thirteen more times in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira in addition to Sir 38:14a.<sup>81</sup> The subject of the action expressed by this word can be either God or a human (only three times: 4:5; 33:20, 22). Most often, as in Sir 38:14a, the request is addressed to the Lord, making it a prayer. Δέομαι is accompanied by the genitive indicating the person to whom the request is directed (in 38:14a it is κυρίου). It should also be noted that in the Greek text, the subject of the verb form (δεηθήσονται) is not implied, but rather explicitly given (αὐτοί – 'they'). Most likely, in the analysed stich, an emphatic personal pronoun should be noticed – thus emphasising the group of people (physicians) whom the sage advises to pray to God as they are healing the sick person. Perhaps also in relation to the object of the verb δεηθήσονται, which is *genetivus κυρίου*, the person of the Lord should be emphasised, because this noun is placed before the personal form of the verb to which it refers, while in other cases when the person to whom someone asks/prays is given after the verb δέομαι (see 33:22; 37:15 and 50:19). If the above syntactic analyses are correct, it should be stated that the translator of the original text into Greek emphasised the fact that the physicians themselves would pray to God for help in curing the sick person of his disease.<sup>82</sup> Sir 38:14a, recognising the need for medics to turn to God during disease, would emphasise in the Greek version that the success of their actions – healing – depends not only on them, but also on the One to whom they turn in prayer and whom they should ask for help in restoring the health of the suffering person.<sup>83</sup> Thus, it explicitly expresses the dependence of both medics themselves and the success of the healing process they undertake on the Lord. In this indirect (implicit) way, once again in his reflection on medics and their activities (medicine), the sage expresses the belief that the only true Physician on whom the health of the suffering person depends is God.<sup>84</sup>

Attention should be paid to one more detail indirectly contained in Sir 38:14a. Since the sage encourages physicians to pray to the Lord while healing the sick, it means that he is most likely referring to Jewish or proselyte medics who have adopted the faith in YHWH.<sup>85</sup> It would be rather absurd to think that he would do so with regard to physicians who do not believe in the one God. The conclusion that suggests itself is that in the times of the sage from Jerusalem, there were medics who were Jews or converted proselytes and, in any case, people who believed in the one and true God. Perhaps this is the first testimony of the development and practice of medicine understood in the proper sense of the word (as a science)

81 See Sir 4:5; 17:25; 21:1; 26:5; 28:2, 4; 33:20, 22; 37:15; 39:5, 5; 50:19 and 51:9 (see W. Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch. Zur Terminologie von Klage und Lob in der griechischen Texttradition* [Herders biblische Studien 60; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2009] 71–73).

82 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 181; Chrostowski, "Lekarz i jego postuga w swietle Biblii," 66; Testa, "Le malattie e il medico secondo la Bibbia," 261.

83 See Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 442.

84 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 95.

85 Isabel Cranz ("Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit," 240) agrees with the above thesis. It does, however, provide other arguments that the physician described in Sir 38:1–15 is not a Hellenistic medic; among other things, the poem says nothing about Hippocrates' rationalism or references to surgical procedures. Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 191.



by the Jews. According to Isabel Cranz, the description of the physician in Sir 38:1–15 is more similar to Mesopotamian medics than Hellenistic ones,<sup>86</sup> which may mean that the former cultural environment had a greater influence on the development of Jewish medicine than the latter. The truth of this conjecture could be supported by the presence of many (especially influential) Jews in Babylon. However, Maria Chrysovergi argues that even Hippocrates emphasised the importance of a physician's prayer in the healing process,<sup>87</sup> which would rather speak more for Hellenistic influences than Mesopotamian ones.

The message of the Hebrew text of Sir 38:13b (it corresponds to v. 14a in the numbering of the Greek version<sup>88</sup>) is consistent with its translation into Greek. Manuscript B in the margin contains the following words: <sup>89</sup>כי גם הוא אל יעתיר (‘for he also to God will pray’<sup>90</sup>). The only difference between the Hebrew version and the Greek translation is the number: the former speaks of one physician (הוא), while the latter speaks of many medics (αὐτοί).<sup>91</sup> This is due to the previous stich where the same textual problem is present. The Hebrew version consistently refers to one physician.

Sir 38:14b begins with the conjunction ἵνα, followed by *coniunctivus aoristi* (εὐδοῶση), the indirect object (αὐτοῖς) and the direct object (ἀνάπαυσιν), which concludes the subordinate clause. The construction ἵνα + *coniunctivus* can introduce both purpose and result clause.<sup>92</sup> If the syntagma ἵνα εὐδοῶση is interpreted in the first sense in the analysed stich, it would express the purpose for which physicians pray to God when healing a patient (‘that He would provide’). However, if it is considered a result clause, it indicates the result of their prayer (‘such that he will grant’). It seems that of these two possible interpretations of the syntagma analysed syntactically, it is more appropriate to recognise it as expressing a subordinate purpose clause. Giving it the meaning of a result clause would imply that the prayers of a medical practitioner are always heard and bring the expected and desired result. The relationship between prayer and its effect would be somewhat automatic and would leave no doubt as to what its result will be. Furthermore, the idea of prayer expressed in the pages of the Old Testament corresponds more to understanding ἵνα εὐδοῶση as

86 Cranz, “Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 240–242.

87 Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 191–196.

88 See Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira*, 480–481; Reiterer, *Zählsynopse zum Buch Ben Sira*, 200–201.

89 See Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 66. The issue of the Hebrew texts published by The Academy of Hebrew Language does not contain the conjunction וְגַם (see Akademyah la-lashon ha-‘Ivrit, *The Book of Ben Sira*, 39; cf. *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Verso, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=16> [access: 5.02.2023]).

90 Cranz (“Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 243), on the basis of the form יעתיר occurring in Sir 38:14b, notices a reference to Moses in the description of the physician’s activity. Cf. Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach,” 364–365.

91 See Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 178; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 222, n. 5.

92 See Piwowar, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu*, paragraph 478 and paragraph 490. Subordinate purpose clauses cf. Gen 3:3; 18:21; Exod 38:27; Isa 14:21. Subordinate result clauses cf. Gen 22:14; Jer 43:3 (cf. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 341).

a subordinate purpose clause than a result clause.<sup>93</sup> Physicians, and every praying person, ask God to listen to their pleas and grant them what they ask for.

According to the Greek version of Sir 38:14b, physicians pray “that he may provide (ἵνα εὐδοῶσῃ) for them in refreshment (αὐτοῖς ἀνάπαυσιν).” Of course, the subject of the aorist conjunction is the Lord because medics are praying to Him, and only He can hear their prayers and fulfil them. The verb εὐδοῶ (‘to lead successfully,’ ‘to grant as a favour/grace,’ ‘to bring about development,’ ‘to ensure success’<sup>94</sup>) appears four more times in the Greek text of the work of the sage of Jerusalem in addition to the analysed stich. Sir 11:17 states that the Lord’s favour brings success (εὐδοωθήσεται) to the righteous forever. In Sir 15:10, Ben Sira declares that the sage praises the Lord and He will grant them success. In Sir 41:1, *participium praesentis passivi* (εὐδοουμένω) describes the person who is successful in everything. And in Sir 43:26, it is said that, thanks to the Lord, the person He has sent is successful. Based on this, it can be concluded that the verb εὐδοῶ expresses the assurance – giving someone prosperity, happiness or success in their actions or assigned mission. In four out of five texts in which it appears, God is the one who ensures success.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the physicians will be praying to God to grant them success, i.e. positive effects of the healing they have undertaken. Thus, the sage believes that the healing of the patient’s ailments is not only the result of the physicians’ treatment but primarily the action of God Himself. Once again, the Greek version of Sir expresses the belief that the only – in the full sense of the word – physician is God Himself. Success of the healing undertaken by medics depends on Him, and they should therefore ask Him to restore full health to the sick person whose healing they have undertaken.

The last word of Sir 38:14b and the entire Sir 38:14c define the key to the success of the medics’ activity toward for the sick person. The first is ἀνάπαυσις (‘refreshment,’ ‘rest,’ ‘relaxation’). This word appears 16 times in addition to Sir 38:14b in the Greek version of Sir.<sup>96</sup> “The noun *anapausis* means rest by abstaining from work or ceasing it (cf. 11:19; 20:21; 31:3–4; 33:26; 40:5–6), relief, peace (cf. 18:16; 28:16; 36:24; 38:14) and may also refer to death (cf. 30:17; 38:23).”<sup>97</sup> In the context of Sir 38:14, it can be interpreted in different ways, depending on whether it refers to the sick person or the physician himself. If it refers to the sick person, then ἀνάπαυσιν would signify the first fruit of the expected success of the treatment undertaken by physicians. The Greek version would not immediately speak of the healing of the suffering person, but of a certain gradation in the healing results. First, there would be refreshment – strengthening of the sick person or partial relief – giving

93 See Urbanz, *Gebet im Sirachbuch*, 95.

94 See F. Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 2 ed. (Torino: Loescher 2004) 884; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 303.

95 See A. Piwowar, “Mędrzec – ideał człowieka poszukującego mądrości (Syr 14,20–15,10). Część II: Działanie mądrości i przestroga skierowana do grzesznika (Syr 15,1–10),” *BibAn* 6/3 (2016) 407–408.

96 See Sir 6:28; 11:19; 18:16; 20:21; 22:13; 24:7; 28:16; 30:17; 31:3, 4; 33:26; 36:24; 38:23; 40:5, 6; 51:27.

97 A. Piwowar, “Dwie drogi prowadzące do odnalezienia mądrości według Syracha. Analiza egzegetyczno-teologiczna Syr 51,13–30,” *BibAn* 4/1 (2014) 88.

him rest from the pain he had previously experienced. This would be an intermediate stage in the healing process, referring to the improvement of his health, announcing complete recovery, and indicating the first positive signs of the treatment – relief from suffering. ‘Refreshment’ could also refer to the physician, in which case it could signify the strengthening of his abilities or some additional – perhaps supernatural – gift, which would enable him to properly diagnose the disease afflicting his patient and thus make the correct diagnosis. The Hebrew text of Sir 38:14b (see below) unambiguously supports and confirms this interpretation of the Greek text of this stich.

In the Greek version of Sir 38:14b, there is a clear indication that ἀναπαυσιν should be attributed not to the patient but to the medic. The personal pronoun in the dative case (αὐτοῖς) refers to the physicians, not the sick because Sir 38:12–15 discusses medics, not people in pain and suffering. The latter are present in the analysed pericope only implicitly as objects towards which the medics’ activities are directed.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:14a (it corresponds to stich 38:14b in the numbering of the Greek text<sup>98</sup>) differs from its Greek version: <sup>99</sup>אשר יצלה לו פשרה (‘that the diagnosis may bring him success’<sup>100</sup>). A note in the margin of manuscript B proposes that instead of יצלה, one should adopt the ימנה reading (in *Piel* ‘will appoint,’ ‘will send’). According to the Hebrew version of Sir 38:14b, the physician will not ask God to give the sick person relief from suffering, but to ensure the success of his diagnosis (B<sup>text</sup>) or to provide the correct diagnosis of the disease (B<sup>marg</sup>).<sup>101</sup> The Hebrew text speaks explicitly not of the first positive results of the medic’s treatment, but of the recognition of the disease from which his patient suffers, so that by properly assessing it he can offer him the appropriate healing that will lead to the sick person’s complete recovery.<sup>102</sup> The original version emphasises, like the Greek version, the dependence of the efficacy of healing on God, but refers to the knowledge of the medical practitioner – it is God who gives him the correct diagnosis of the disease so that he can undertake effective healing of the sick person. Silvana Fasce argues that the translator’s omission of the word ‘diagnosis’ from Sir 38:14b was intended

<sup>98</sup> See Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira*, 480–481; Reiterer, *Zählsynopse zum Buch Ben Sira*, 200–201.

<sup>99</sup> The Hebrew noun פשרה derives from the root פשר (‘to interpret,’ ‘to translate,’ ‘to understand’; Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, VI, 796). Cf. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 208; Beentjes, “A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38,13,” 458; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 66, n. 57; Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 221, n. 1; Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 142. Cranz (“Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 241) believes that פשרה can mean ‘absolve’ rather than ‘diagnose.’ Lindsey A. Askin (*Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 208) and Lutz Schrader (“Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 142) believe that the noun פשרה can express a diagnosis made by a medical practitioner or refer to the interpretation of medical texts.

<sup>100</sup> See Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 178–179; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345.

<sup>101</sup> See Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 223, n. 1.

<sup>102</sup> “In both the Near East and Mediterranean, ancient medical literature is concerned with the initial diagnosis. In this framework, it is therefore very significant that Ben Sira mentions diagnosis” (Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 208).

to make the Greek version of this stich sound more religious. This is why, in her opinion, the sage's grandson omitted the technical expression פִּשְׁרָה.<sup>103</sup>

Sir 38:14c identifies the second effect of the positive treatment prescribed by the physicians, for which they will ask God. It is 'healing for survival' (ἰασιν χάριν ἐμβιώσεως). The noun ἰασις ('healing') in the Greek version of Sir occurs seven more times outside the analysed stich, including, among others, in Sir 38:2.<sup>104</sup> It was used three times in a metaphorical sense referring to: the restoration of greenery scorched by the wind (see 43:22) and pride (see 3:28) and sin (see 21:3) – there is no cure (healing) for the latter two human attitudes. The other four texts containing ἰασις explicitly link healing to God. Sir 1:18 states that the crown of wisdom is, next to the fear of the Lord, peace and 'health because of healing' (ὕγιεων ἰάσεως). Healing from disease must be sought from Him (see Sir 28:3), for it is He who gives, among other things, healing (see 34:7). And finally, Sir 38:2a confirms this truth by saying that 'from the Most High is healing' (παρὰ γὰρ ὑψίστου ἐστὶν ἰασις). In Sir 38:14c, the sage returns to the truth expressed in earlier texts, especially in 38:2a, that healing is a gift of God and only He can restore the sick person to full health and physical strength. Therefore, physicians should not only try to heal the suffering with their medical knowledge and skills but also ask God to heal their patients. Once again, Ben Sira implicitly expresses a thought relating to the Old Testament belief that the Lord is the only and true physician. Medics can only heal the sick if He grants them the grace of healing. In fact, therefore, they are only intermediaries for the return to full health coming from God, and not those who heal on their own, relying entirely on their own knowledge and skills.

The concluding Sir 38:14c syntagma (χάριν ἐμβιώσεως) poses some interpretative difficulties related to the syntax of the Greek language. The role of the word χάριν in it is problematic, as it can be read in two different ways. Firstly, it can be considered as a preposition derived from the noun χάρις, which combines with the genitive and expresses the purpose ('for,' 'on account of') or the reason – the cause ('for the sake of,' 'due to,' 'because of'). Secondly, χάριν can also be considered as the accusative from χάρις ('grace,' 'graciousness,' 'benevolence') and combined with ἰασιν (also in the accusative) by way of apposition, in which case the whole stich would have to be read: 'healing, that is, the grace of (or concerning) survival.' From a statistical point of view, in the Greek version of the work of the sage of Jerusalem, χάριν both as a preposition<sup>105</sup> and as the accusative form of χάρις<sup>106</sup> occur equally frequently. This contentious issue cannot therefore be resolved on the basis of a statistical argument, i.e. that the translator used the word more often in a particular sense.

103 "La traduzione greca preferisce un registro lessicale meno tecnico, essendo volta principalmente a spiegare che il ricorso al medico non esclude la prospettiva religiosa. Il nipote di Ben Sira, immerso nell'ambiente ellenizzato di Alessandria, non conosce riserve nei confronti della medicina né ritiene di dover insistere sull'importanza della diagnosi per terapia, poiché si rivolge ad un pubblico di buona levatura culturale" (Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 89–90).

104 See Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1–3)," 48.

105 See Sir 20:23; 27:1; 29:7, 9; 31:6, 17; 32:2; 34:12; 35:4; 37:5 and 38:17.

106 See Sir 3:18; 7:33; 8:19; 17:22; 19:25; 24:17; 30:6; 35:2; 40:22; 41:27 and 45:1.

In Sir 38:14c *χάρην* combines with *ἐμβιώσεως*. This is the *genetivus singularis* of the noun *ἐμβίωσις* ('experience'). If *χάρην* is a preposition then the syntagma *χάρην ἐμβιώσεως* should be translated in the sense of 'for survival.' But if it were an *accusativus* form of *χάρις*, this expression would have to be rendered with 'grace concerning survival' (*ἐμβιώσεως* as *genetivus obiectivus*). It seems that considering *χάρην* as a preposition is a simpler interpretation from the point of view of Greek syntax, which does not change the fact that also the second reading of the word is correct and appropriate in biblical Greek. Either way, Sir 38:14c expresses the idea that the purpose of healing is to ensure the survival of the sick person. Except that *χάρην* as a preposition expresses this explicitly, while *χάρην* as the accusative form of *χάρις* emphasises that healing is a grace (implicitly from God) that relates to the patient's experience.

The second effect of the treatment applied by the physician in healing the patient, for which he should pray and ask God, is the complete recovery and healing of the patient from his ailment.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:14b (which corresponds to verse 14c in the numbering of the Greek translation<sup>107</sup>) is consistent with the Greek version of this stich and confirms its message: *ורפאות למען מחיה* ('and healing to save life'<sup>108</sup>). The original version allows the doubts about *χάρην* to be resolved. Indeed, it confirms that this Greek word should be interpreted as a preposition and not as the accusative from *χάρις*.<sup>109</sup> Beentjes interprets Sir 38:14c, focusing primarily on the figure of the physician. In his view, the medical practitioner is asking for his patient to be healed so that he can earn a living and not suffer material losses if the treatment fails.<sup>110</sup>

To summarise the analysis and message of Sir 38:13–14, it must be said that Ben Sira, in recognising the necessity for the sick person to turn to a physician in his time of indisposition, does not absolutise the importance of medicine. He emphasises its usefulness, but attributes the healing to God, not to medics.<sup>111</sup> Since recovery is a gift that comes from Him, physicians are merely His helpers and intermediaries in passing it on.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, they do not have the power to restore the sick to health but can only be representatives of the divine power to heal. Consequently, recognising their limitations and dependence on the Lord,

107 See Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira*, 480–481; Reiterer, *Zählsynopse zum Buch Ben Sira*, 200–201.

108 Victor Morla Asensio (*Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 223, n. 2) translates the Hebrew text of Sir 38:14c as follows: "y las medicinas para la curación [o el alivio]" (cf. Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345). Cf. Beentjes, "A problematic symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 458; Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 221; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Verso, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=16> [access: 5.02.2023]).

109 See T. Muraoka, *A Greek ≈ Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (Lovain – Paris – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2010) 242.

110 See Beentjes, "A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38,13," 458.

111 See Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 207–208; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing," 220; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, 263; Stöger, "Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15)," 10.

112 See Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing," 222; G. von Rad, *La sapienza in Israele* (Genova: Marietti 1998) 128; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 256.

they should pray to Him that He may grant the sick person the grace of recovery. It can be said that medics are, in a way, visible signs of the action of the divine Physician insofar as they interact in communion with Him when healing the sick.

### 3.3. The Relationship of the Sinner to the Physician and God (Sir 38:15)

In the final verse of the literary unit under analysis, the figure of the sinner (ὁ ἁμαρτάνων) appears unexpectedly. It is defined by a substantivised *participium praesentis activi* derived from the verb ἁμαρτάνω ('to sin'). A person defined in this way is not someone who has sinned once or sins occasionally. It is about someone who sins again and again – continues to commit evil acts. Sir 19:4 states that ὁ ἁμαρτάνων acts against his own soul, that is to his own disadvantage and will not be justified (cf. 10:29). Therefore, the sage urges his student not to sin (cf. 7:7; 21:1; 32:12 and 42:1). He encourages him to remember the end of his life, which should prevent him from committing any iniquity (7:36). Those who act by/with wisdom will never commit any sin (24:22). For he is not from God, and he who sins opposes Him (cf. 15:20). An analysis of the use of the verb ἁμαρτάνω in the Greek version of the work of the sage of Jerusalem indicates that it refers in a general way to sins of various kinds – generally expressing the doing of evil to both men and God.

In Sir 38:15a, the persistent sinner is brought face to face with the Creator (ἐναντι τοῦ ποιήσαντος αὐτόν – literally 'in front of/before Him who made him'). The improper preposition ἐναντι usually determines the relationship of someone to other persons<sup>113</sup> – including God<sup>114</sup> – or things.<sup>115</sup> In most cases, it expresses a positive relationship towards the Most High.<sup>116</sup> Ben Sira, however, states that man's deeds are not hidden from the Lord and that all sins are before Him (Sir 17:20; cf. 18:26). Therefore, it will be easy for God to render to each according to his deeds on the day of death (cf. Sir 11:26). Thus, nothing is hidden from God. He knows every action of a person who will be judged by Him, and this is especially true for the sinner who cannot hide from the Lord or deceive him.

Defining God by means of the substantivised aorist participle of the active voice (ὁ ποιήσας – literally 'the one who did/does') occurs ten more times in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach in addition to Sir 38:15a. It is interesting to note that the Greek translation of the work of the sage of Jerusalem mentions the Creator only once (ὁ κτίσας; see Sir 24:8). Perhaps this is due to the addressees to whom it was directed. It can only be assumed that the grandson of Ben Sira, in translating his grandfather's work into Greek, considered it more understandable to designate God as the 'Maker' of the world (in the sense of a craftsman who made – did everything) than as the Creator (in the biblical sense). However, it should be noted that within Sir 38:1–15, the verb κτίζω appears three times: the Lord created the physician (38:1, 12) and medicine from the earth (Sir 38:4). 'The one who made' (ὁ ποιήσας) is synonymous with the Creator (ὁ κτίσας). It was He who

113 See Sir 7:33; 15:17; 23:3; 30:3; 34:20; 38:3; 39:4; 41:27; 42:8; 46:7; 50:13 and 51:2.

114 See Sir 3:18; 7:5; 10:7; 11:26; 17:20; 18:26; 24:2; 25:1; 35:5; 39:5; 46:19 and 50:16.

115 See Sir 26:12; 37:5 and 51:14.

116 See Sir 3:18; 7:5; 24:2; 25:1; 35:5; 39:5; 46:19 and 50:16.

created man (cf. 4:6). The sage urges everyone to love Him with all their soul (7:30) and to thank Him for everything (cf. 32:13). David is an example of such an attitude (cf. 47:8). A person seeking wisdom from early morning turns to the One who made him (cf. 39:5). When someone's heart turns away from Him, they fall into pride (cf. 10:12). People are in the Creator's hands like clay in the hands of a potter, and He will give them according to His judgment (cf. 33:13). God made the winds as instruments of vengeance (cf. 39:28); He also created the sun, which is obedient to Him (a reference to astral cults; cf. 43:5), and the rainbow – a sign of the covenant (cf. 43:11). Man should be grateful to the One who made them for the gift of life and for everything that was created, because it serves them in their life. Gratitude for the work of creation should also be manifested in obedience to the One who accomplished it. The man who desires to attain wisdom will seek it from Him. The sinner, however, is a contradiction of the attitudes that, according to Ben Sira's teachings, one should adopt towards their Creator. For he acts contrary to the covenant (breaks it) and does not give due glory to God. Pride distances him from the Lord and through this he breaks all ties with Him.

Sir 38:15a, speaking of the sinner being placed before the Creator, describes his confrontation with God. It expresses a very acute tension between the two figures (sin is always unrighteousness, i.e. a misappropriation of the covenant with God), and although it does not specify it or define it in more precise terms – it says nothing more than that the sinner is in the face of the Lord – one can sense the atmosphere of judgement and punishment of a man erring and rejecting the One who made him.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:15a is consistent with its Greek translation: אֲשֶׁר חוּטֵא לִפְנֵי עוֹשֵׂהוּ ('[he] who<sup>117</sup> sins [is] before Him who made him').<sup>118</sup>

The second stich of Sir 38:15 develops the atmosphere of tension outlined in a very general way by the first part of the verse ('the sinner in the face of Him who made him'). The Greek version, by means of *optativus aoristi*, expresses a wish addressed to the sinner: 'may he fall into the hands of the physician' (ἐμπέσοι εἰς χεῖρας ἰατροῦ). The verb ἐπίπτω ('to fall into') in the translation of the work of the sage of Jerusalem by his grandson occurs nine more times in addition to Sir 38:15b.<sup>119</sup> Whenever it is combined with the preposition εἰς, it defines a very difficult situation for a person, in which he or she is threatened with grave danger or great difficulties.<sup>120</sup> These include the snare of a debauched woman (9:3), a trap set by one's own self for another (27:26), fire as a metaphor for punishment (28:23), surety and punishment – a judgment (29:19). In addition, the syntagma ἐπίπτω εἰς χεῖρας occurs twice, as in Sir 38:15b. In 2:18, it is mentioned that it is better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of men, while in 8:1, the sage warns not to deal with

117 Josue T. Nelis ("Sir 38,15," *Von Kanaan bis Kerala. FS J.P.M. van der Ploeg* [eds. W.C. Delsman – J.T. Nelis – H.R.T.M. Peters] [AOAT 211; Kevelaer – New York: Butzon & Becker Kevelaer 1982] 174, 176–178) believes that the conjunction אֲשֶׁר in Sir 38:15a should be interpreted in a causal sense.

118 Cf. Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 179.

119 See Sir 2:18; 8:1; 9:3; 13:10; 27:26; 28:23; 29:19[x2], 20.

120 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 97.

the mighty, as one can fall into their hands.<sup>121</sup> While the first of these texts expresses a rather positive message because of God's great mercy, which is a guarantee of lesser punishment, the second already speaks of danger and threat to the one who has fallen into the hands of the mighty (cf. Judg 15:18; 2 Sam 24:14; 1 Chr 21:13). The text of Sir 29:19 is important for understanding the expression ἐμπέσοι εἰς χεῖρας in Sir 38:15b. This is because it states that those who abandon the Lord (οἱ καταλείποντες κύριον) will fall into the flames, will be consumed by them, and they will certainly not cease to burn. Those who abandon God are sinners because they break the covenant with the Most High and will therefore be punished. Sir 38.15b, on the other hand, says that he who sins will fall into the hands of the physician. In a very illustrative way, the Greek text of this stich speaks of the punishment meted out to the sinner. It is a disease. If the above interpretation of Sir 38:15b is correct and appropriate, it would mean that in the last stich of his reflection on the physician and modern medicine, Ben Sira once again expresses the traditional view of disease as a punishment for sin and evil deeds committed.<sup>122</sup> However, Ben Sira's positive assessment of contemporary medicine did not overcome the conviction expressed in the pages of the Old Testament relating to the perception of the causes of disease – sin and iniquity. It should be noted that in Sir 38:1–15, the main theme of the sage from Jerusalem's reflections was not the causes of disease (although he indirectly alluded to this), but the attitude of the suffering man towards medics and the medicine of the time. The sage encouraged the Israelites not to be afraid to use their services, as they are not representatives of evil – magical powers opposing God, but are merely agents of YHWH's healing power. In addition, it is also important to remember the instructions Ben Sira gave to the sick person regarding his attitude toward God during his illness: return to Him, prayer, repentance and sacrifice (see 38:9–11). Clearly, although not explicitly expressed, the dependence of disease on God and healing on conversion to the Lord is evident in this text. Sir 38:15, therefore, does not overrule the earlier calls for the use of physicians during disease<sup>123</sup> but merely restates what the cause of the disease is. He warns his student that if he sins<sup>124</sup> and turns away from the Most High, he will face the punishment for the evil he has committed – disease.<sup>125</sup> Thus, it can be said that Sir 38:15 offers a kind of protection against the disease by warning against committing sins. The Greek text does not, therefore, portray the physician in a negative light,<sup>126</sup> as some

121 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 96–97.

122 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 182; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 209; Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 196–197; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 97; Lührmann, "Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15)," 66; Mazzinghi, "«Poi fa' posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15)," 71; Morla Asensio, *Eclesiástico*, 186; G. Pérez Rodríguez, "Eclesiástico," *Biblia Comentada. IV. Libros Sapientiales*, 2 ed. (BAC 218; Madrid: Editorial Católica 1967) 1243; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 184; Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 358.

123 See Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 143.

124 According to Jan Turkiel ("Septuaginta o lekarzu," 568–569), the sin referred to in Sir 38:15 consists in regarding the physician as a deity, rather than as a being created by God and dependent on Him for healing.

125 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 98–99; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 257.

126 See Adinolfi, "Il medico in Sir 38,1–15," 182.



exegetes<sup>127</sup> claim but focuses on expressing the cause and effect relationship between sin and disease, which results in the need to go to the physician.

The Hebrew text of Sir 38:15b has a different tone from the Greek version: יתגבר לפני<sup>128</sup> רופא (‘he will be strong<sup>129</sup> before the physician’<sup>130</sup>). A note in the margin of manuscript B proposes that the opening words of the stich (יתגבר לפני) should be replaced by the על ידי<sup>132</sup> reading יסתוגר<sup>131</sup> (‘he himself will close towards the hands [of the physician]’<sup>133</sup>). The Hebrew text speaks of the attitude of a man doing wrong towards the physician, and not, like the Greek version, of disease as a punishment for sin.<sup>134</sup> The sinner does not follow Ben Sira’s advice to place himself in the hands of a physician in time of illness, and on the contrary, rejects the possibility of seeking his help.<sup>135</sup> Some exegetes draw attention to the parallelism in Sir 38:15 that exists between the Creator and the physician. On this basis, they conclude that he who rejects the physician sins against God, because He created him and gave him the task of participating in His healing power.<sup>136</sup> If the above interpretation is correct, the Hebrew version of Sir 38:15 forms with Sir 38:1 the perfect conclusion to the entire reflection of the sage of Jerusalem on the activities of medics and the medicine

127 See Beentjes, “A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13,” 457; Noorda, “Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing,” 221, n. 18; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 443.

128 See Chrysovergi, *Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 179–180; Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach,” 355.

129 According to Charles Mopsik (*La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 221, n. 2), the expression ‘to be/become strong/powerful’ means to reject the activity of the physician. Maria Chrysovergi (*Attitudes toward the Use of Medicine in Jewish Literature*, 196), on the other hand, interprets these words as an expression of rebellion and opposition.

130 On the various proposals for translating this stich see Nelis, “Sir 38,15,” 178–184. Cf. Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” 174; Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira*, 189; Beentjes, “A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38,13,” 457; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 94; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa’ posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 67; Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 221; Morla Asensio, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 223; *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023].

131 This is the only known form of the stem סגר in the conjugation *Hithpoel* (see Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, VI, 120). Morla Asensio (*Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira*, 223, n. 4) translates the form יסתוגר as ‘será entregado’. Josue T. Nelis (“Sir 38,15,” 173–174, 175) believes that the above Hebrew word should be translated ‘est livré.’

132 Josue T. Nelis (“Sir 38,15,” 175) considers that the על ידי reading does not correspond to the Greek expression εἰς χεῖρας. According to this scholar, the Hebrew syntagma expresses the idea of instrumentality or collaboration.

133 See *The Book of Ben Sira*, T-S 16.312, B VIII Recto, <https://bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=15> [access: 5.02.2023]. Cf. Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 143.

134 See Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 67; Stöger, “Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15),” 10; Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach,” 355–356, 358.

135 See Adinolfi, “Il medico in Sir 38,1–15,” 182–183; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 100–101; Lührmann, “Aber auch Arzt gib Raum (Sir 38,1–15),” 66; Mazzinghi, “«Poi fa’ posto al Medico, perché ti è necessario» (Sir 38,1–15),” 71–72; Noorda, “Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing,” 220–222; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, 263; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 443; Stöger, “Der Arzt nach Jesus Sirach (38,1–15),” 10; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 257. Cf. Schrader, “Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach,” 143.

136 See Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira*, 221, n. 2; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 345; Zapff, “Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach,” 355–356.

of the time. Those scholars who believe that Sir 38:15 (and more broadly 38:13–15) does not fit the preceding context are therefore wrong<sup>137</sup> (S. Fasce suggests noticing in Sir 38:15 a rhetorical figure referred to as *aprosdoketon*<sup>138</sup>). Burkard Zapff thinks that the Hebrew version of Sir 38:15 contains the original thought of Ben Sira, while the Greek translation is a modification of it.<sup>139</sup> Lutz Schrader, on the other hand, supposes that the Hebrew version of Sir 38:15b is the sage's reworked form of a saying that was originally intended to be directed against physicians ('Whoever comes into contact with a physician, [he] puts himself in his hands' – רעה רופא יסתוגר על ידי –), but that Ben Sira reworked it in such a way that it encouraged the use of a medic.<sup>140</sup>

## Conclusions

Ben Sira, in the final section (38:12–15) of his reflection on the physician and modern medicine (38:1–15), returns to the activities and tasks of the medical practitioner with which he began it. In Sir 38:1–3 he called for respecting the physician and not rejecting his help. On the other hand, in Sir 38:12–15, continuing this exhortation, he urges the sick person not only to turn to God (38:9–11), but also to call the physician and undergo his treatment. The sage reminds us that medics are created by God, i.e. that they are accepted and intended by Him. They are therefore not, as was commonly believed at the time, representatives of magical powers that opposed the Lord. In Sir 38:12–15, Ben Sira focuses on the physician's attitude and actions when healing a sick person. He should ask the Most High for the success of the treatment he has administered to the patient (the Hebrew text speaks explicitly about the correct diagnosis of the disease), so that the sick person can recover and return to full physical strength. In this way, the sage from Jerusalem expressed the traditional Old Testament belief that the only Physician who can restore health to a suffering person is God. Medics are merely His co-workers who are fully dependent on His will in their activity to cure the sick person of his ailment – it is not they who heal, but the Lord. In this way, the author of Sir 38:12–15, as in the earlier parts of his teaching on medicine and physicians, made a perfect synthesis of the developing field of knowledge of his time with the traditional belief of the Israelites concerning the causes of disease (sin and evil committed) and healing (God is the only physician). The sage thus appears as a man who is open to novelty coming from a foreign environment (most likely Hellenistic), but at the same time is faithful to the beliefs flowing from faith in YHWH.

137 See Beentjes, "A Problematic Symbol in Ben Sira 38:13," 457, 459; Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 94.

138 See Fasce, *La lode del medico*, 94. Cf. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 159; Noorda, "Illness and Sin, Forgiving and Healing," 221, n. 18.

139 See Zapff, "Sir 38,1–15 als Beispiel der Verknüpfung von Tradition und Innovation bei Jesus Sirach," 356.

140 See Schrader, "Beruf, Arbeit und Muße als Sinnerfüllung bei Jesus Sirach," 143.

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