Suretyship in the Teaching of Ben Sira (Sir 29:14–20)

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Abstract: The article is an analysis of the teaching of Ben Sira on becoming surety for individuals in need of that form of economic and material assistance contained in Sir 29:14–20. First, the way of functioning of suretyship in Israel and the approach to it is discussed, mainly based on the Book of Proverbs, which quite strongly and emphatically forbids that practice. This is followed by a delimitation of the pericope in the work of Ben Sira devoted to that issue and the presentation of its structure. The main part of the article is devoted to the exegetical analysis of Sir 29:14–20 based on the historical-critical method, taking into account elements of syntactic and semantic analysis. Ben Sira does not forbid becoming surety for those in need of such support; on the contrary, he encourages it (cf. 29:14a, 20a). However, influenced by abuses of that practice (cf. 29:16–19), he urges his disciple to be cautious and become surety only for acquaintances – neighbours (cf. 29:14a, 20a), not to risk and become bankrupt (cf. 29:16a, 17a, 20b) or be forced to leave the home country in case the borrower (cf. 29:18), for whom one had vouched, does not pay the obligations to the creditor. At the same time, Sirach reminds the person for whom someone has vouched of the need to fulfil the obligation towards the guarantor (cf. 29:15) as not doing so means becoming a sinner (cf. 29:16a, 19a). The main motive for Ben Sira's change in approach to suretyship, in relation to the Book of Proverbs, seems to be primarily drawing attention to the commandment to help one's neighbour, to which the Sage refers implicitly, and the desire to protect the Jewish community and strengthen it economically at a time when Hellenistic influence on it was increasingly stronger and more significant.

Keywords: the Book of Sirach, suretyship, becoming surety for someone, Sir 29:14–20

The Book of Sirach is characterised by the fact that, like the Book of Proverbs, it deals with, albeit in a different form, not proverbs but slightly larger and more complex thematic units, various theological issues, as well as matters related to everyday life. Obviously, it is done from the perspective characteristic of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Apart from discussing the problems concerning human life, in addition to topics related to faith, religion and morality, such as the creation of man, free will, sin, the fear of God, etc., the Sage of Jerusalem also gives his disciples/readers advice to help them in the ordinary matters of everyday life, including, for example, the choice of a wife, raising children, friendship and friends, etc.[1] Among the latter issues, there are also economic

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1   Cf. A. Bonora, "Siracide," *Libri sapienziali e altri scritti* (eds. A. Bonora – M. Priotto) (Logos. Corso di Studi Biblici 4; Torino: Editrice Elle Di Ci 1997) 90–96; A. Minissale, *Siracide (Ecclesiatico)* (Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia 23; Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo 1989) 17–24; Minissale, *Siracide. Le radici nella*

matters. Sir 29 deserves special attention, particularly its first part, i.e. vv. 1–20, where lending is discussed first (vv. 1–7), followed by almsgiving (vv. 8–13) and suretyship (vv. 14–20).[2] Ben Sira presents the above three forms of helping a neighbour in need from a sapiential perspective, not only from an economic and financial point of view, although he also takes that into account in his considerations and refers to it indirectly.

This article deals with the third form of assistance to a person in financial distress, i.e. suretyship (29:14–20). First, the way of functioning of that form of support for the needy in Israel in the times before Ben Sira is outlined. Later in the article, the delimitation of the text of the pericope devoted to becoming surety for others in financial difficulties takes place, then, the Greek text of Sir 29:14–20 is translated and its structure is determined. Finally, the pericope is subjected to an exegetical analysis to gain a better and deeper understanding of the Sage's teaching on suretyship. It is done based on a historical-critical method with elements of semantic and syntactic analysis.

In the biblical literature so far, apart from commentaries on the Book of Sirach,[3] only two authors have devoted a little more space to Sir 29:14–20 (those are M. Gilbert[4] and B.C. Gregory[5]). However, the texts are not comprehensive and exhaustive studies of that literary unit of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem.

In this paper, the analysis of the teaching on suretyship in the Book of Sirach is based on the Greek (GI), shorter version of the text, since the Hebrew original of Sir 29:14–20[6] has

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tradizione (Leggere oggi la Bibbia 1.17; Brescia: Queriniana 1988) 29–73; S. Potocki, "Mądrość uczonego w Piśmie (Księga Syracha)," *Mądrość starotestamentowego Izraela* (eds. S. Potocki *et al.*) (Wprowadzenie w Myśl i Wezwanie Ksiąg Biblijnych 6; Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej 1999) 173–178, 198–202; P.W. Skehan – A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday 1987) 4–6.

2   "Argomento delicato per il sapiente, molto più del prestito" (H. Duesberg – I. Fransen, *Ecclesiastico* [LSB. Antico Testamento; Torino – Roma: Marietti 1966] 223).

3   Cf. L. Alonso Schökel, *Proverbios y Eclesiastico* (Los Libros Sagrados 11; Madrid: Ediciónes Cristianad 1968) 249; J. Corley, *Sirach* (New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Old Testament 21; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2013) 83; H. Langkammer, *Księga Syracha. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy* (Pismo Święte Starego Testamentu 8.5; Poznań: Pallottinum 2020) 230–240; V. Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico* (El Mensaje del Antiguo Testamento 20; Estella: Ediciones Sigueme – Editorial Atenas 1992) 148–149; M.C. Palmisano, *Siracide* (Nuova Versione della Bibbia dai Testi Antichi 34; Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo 2016) 273–274; G. Pérez Rodríguez, "Eclesiástico," *Biblia Comentada IV. Libros Sapienciales, ed. 2* (BAC 218; Madrid: La Editorial Catolica 1967) 1207–1208; G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira* (ATD. Apokryphen 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 210–211; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 371–372; J.G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974) 145–146; G. Vigini, *Siracide* (Bibbia Paoline. L'Antico Testamento; Milano: Paoline 2007) 174; B.M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51* (NechtB 39; Würzburg: Echter 2010) 181–182.

4   Cf. M. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," *Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira* (eds. R. Egger-Wenzel – I. Krammer) (BZAW 270; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1998) 179–189; Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages* (Livre la Bible 129; Paris: Les Éditions du CERF 2003) 210–211.

5   Cf. B.C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring. Generosity in the Book of Sirach* (DCLS 2; Berlin – Göttingen: De Gruyter 2010) 151–163.

6   Cf. 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) 53–54, 182; P. Boccaccio – G. Berardi, *Ecclesiasticus. Textus hebraeus secundum fragmenta reperta* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio

not survived to our times, which makes it the oldest form of the text of that pericope currently known. Furthermore, the translation of the work of Ben Sira is the canonical version of the text of the book in question. The shorter Greek version (GI) was chosen because it is closer to the original Hebrew (HI) than the longer text (GII), which contains later additions to the original translation of the Sage's work into Greek.[7] Therefore, it is secondary in relation to the GI.

1. Suretyship in Israel

Suretyship, according to the dictionary of the Polish language, is "an undertaking towards the creditor to fulfil the borrower's obligation in the event that the debtor fails to do it on time."[8] It was, and still is, a practice by which the lender of money or other material goods is guaranteed the return of what was borrowed thanks to the guarantor's commitment to return the debt in the event that the borrower is unable or unwilling to return the borrowing to the lender. R. de Vaux claims that in Jewish legislation the guarantor "intervened" at the time of repayment of the debt in favour of the insolvent borrower, assuming the obligation to repay the borrowed money or return other material goods.[9] Most probably, although this is not certain, the guarantor derived some material benefits from the guarantee in the form of compensation for the risk of repaying someone else's debt.[10] Suretyship – as a way for the creditors to secure themselves against dishonest borrowers or their inability to repay the debt – was already known in ancient Mesopotamia and the neighbouring

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Istituto Biblico 1986) 16; R. Egger-Wenzel, *A Polyglot Edition of the Book of Ben Sira with a Synopsis of the Hebrew Manuscripts* (CBET 101; Leuven – Paris – Bristol: Peeters 2022) 353–357; C. Mopsik, *La Sagesse de ben Sira* (Les dix paroles; Lagrasse: Verdier 2003) 177; V. Morla, *Los manuscritos hebreos de Ben Sira. Traducción y notas* (Asociación Bíblica Española 59; Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino 2012) 160; *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) 25.

7 Cf. J. Marböck, *Jesus Sirach 1–23* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2010) 24–26; A. Piwowar, "La storia testuale del Libro del Siracide," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 1 (2008) 38–43; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 55–56. See also S. Bussino, *The Greek Additions in the Book of Ben Sira* (AnBib 203; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2013); C. Kearns, *The Expanded Text of Ecclesiasticus. Its Teaching on the Future Life as a Clue to Its Origin. Enlarged with a Bibliographical Sketch of Kearns by Gerard Norton, an Introduction to Kearn's Dissertation by Maurice Gilbert and Bibliographical Updates (1951–1020) by Núria Calduch-Benages* (DCLS 11; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2011).

8 E. Sobol (ed.), *Mały słownik języka polskiego,* ed. 10 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 1993) 675. Cf. E. Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement chez les Sémites du Nord-Ouest," *Šulmu IV. Everyday life in ancient Near East. Papers presented at the International Conference, Poznań 19–22 September 1989* (eds. J. Zabłocka – S. Zawadzki) (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 1993) 213–214; I.L. Seeligmann, "Darlehen, Bürgschaft und Zins in Recht und Gedankenwelt der Hebräischen Bibel," *Gesammelte Studien zur Hebräischen Bibel* (ed. E. Blum) (FAT 41; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004) 326–329.

9 Cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions* (Livonia: Eerdmans 1997) 172–173.

10 Cf. S. Potocki, *Księga Przysłów* (Pismo Święte Starego Testamentu 8.1; Poznań: Pallottinum 2008) 87, 179.

countries of Israel.[11] It can be assumed that it was from those circles that it penetrated and spread to the homeland of the Jews (cf. Gen 43:9; 44:33[12]). Prov 6:1–5 confirms that the practice of suretyship was abused and many borrowers failed to pay their debts, hence the creditor placed that obligation on the guarantor, who had to repay someone else's debt, thus losing some or even all of their property (cf. Prov 22:26–27).[13]

The provisions of the law say nothing about suretyship, but other biblical books, especially those described as wisdom books, refer to it, albeit not very often, which nevertheless confirms the existence of that practice in Jewish settings (cf. Prov 6:1–5; Job 17:3).[14] R.J. Clifford states that extra-biblical law codes also confirm the existence of that system, although he does not list or indicate which bodies of law he refers to.[15]

In the books of the Old Testament, a Hebrew word used to describe the act of becoming liable for someone else's debt is the verb I ערב (together with *qal*: "to act as a guarantor", "to vouch for", "to be responsible for someone", "to give as a pledge"[16]), the primary meaning of which was "to enter", "to intervene".[17] Based on the analysis of the use of that word in the Hebrew Bible, it can be concluded that suretyship and pledging were closely related and quite difficult to distinguish (cf. Ne 5:3[18]).[19] Two nouns are derived from the stem of that verb. The first one is עֵרָבוֹן ("security", "pledge"[20]; cf. Gen 38:17–18, 20; Job 17:3[21]) and

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11   Cf. E. Kowalczyk, "Lending in the Bible – Law's Exemplars and Social Practice," *Prawo i Religia* 1 (2007), 198; E. Lipiński, "ערב I *'ārab*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (eds. G.J. Botterweck – H. Ringgren – H.-J. Fabry) (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2001) XI, 327, 330; Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 213, 215–217; Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 328; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 172–173.

12   Cf. Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 329.

13   Cf. L.G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (IBC; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2000) 124; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 87.

14   Cf. B.L. Eicher, "Pożyczka," *Encyklopedia Biblijna* (ed. P.J. Achtemeier) (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Vocatio – Oficyna Wydawniczo-Poligraficzna "Adam" 1999) 992; Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 185; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 159; Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 222; R.E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Nelson 1998) 37; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 273; Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 327–328; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 172–173; C.R. Yoder, *Proverbs* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press 2009) 71, 135.

15   Cf. R.J. Clifford, *Proverbs. Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1999) 75.

16   Cf. D.J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2011) VI, 546–547; M.V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York – London – Toronto: Doubleday 2000) 212; L. Koehler – W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1995) II, 876–877; Lipiński, "ערב I *'ārab*," 327–328; R. Wakely, "ערב (*'rb* I)," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (ed. W.A. VanGemeren) (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1996) III, 512. Cf. Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 327; B.K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004) 331.

17   Cf. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 75; Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 214–215.

18   Cf. Lipiński, "ערב I *'ārab*," 329–330.

19   Cf. Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 213, 220. "Hebrew terminology establishes a close connection between pledge and surety. Both practices served the purpose of protecting a creditor against a debtor's inability to pay. It is easy to understand that a creditor would seek to minimize his risks by refusing to make loans that were not secured by a mortgage or pledge" (Lipiński, "ערב I *'ārab*," 329).

20   Cf. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* VI, 553; Koehler – Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, II, 881; Wakely, "ערב (*'rb* I)," 517.

21   Cf. Wakely, "ערב (*'rb* I)," 515–516.

עֲרֻבָּה ("security", "guarantee"[22]; cf. 1 Sam 17:18; Prov 17:18).[23] The traditional sign confirming the becoming of surety was the gesture of striking hands ("handshake"; cf. Prov 6:1; 17:18; 22:26).[24]

The Book of Proverbs, which contains the most references to suretyship – taking all biblical books into account, is very critical of that practice and warns against offering it too hastily.[25] It almost forbids vouching for others (cf. Prov 31:22).[26] L. Alonso Schökel and J. Vilchez Lindez say straightforwardly that the Book of Proverbs condemns suretyship as a dangerous and unreasonable act.[27] S. Potocki goes even further, interpreting Prov 22:26 as a prohibition to stay among people who provide guarantees to others.[28] The Book of Proverbs warns that the one who vouches for another person will fall into evil, while whoever refrains from doing so is "safe" (cf. Prov 31:22).[29] In Prov 17:18, a guarantor is explicitly called a fool,[30] who, when vouching for strangers, will be deprived of own property, therefore, to protect oneself from that risk, one must take a pledge from such a person as security for becoming surety (cf. Prov 20:16–27:13).[31] The guarantor is obliged to fulfil the undertaken obligation and to pressure the debtor until that person pays the creditor back

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22 Cf. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* VI, 553; Koehler – Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, II, 880; Wakely, "ערב (*'rb* I)," 517.

23 Cf. D.D. Brown – S.R. Driver – C.A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Brigs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1996) 786; Lipiński, "עָרַב I *'ārab*," 328–329; Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 218.

24 Cf. L. Alonso Schökel – J. Vilchez Lindez, *I Proverbi* (Commenti Biblici; Roma: Borla 1988) 245–246; Eicher, "Pożyczka," 992; M. Cimosa, *Proverbi. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento* (I libri biblici. Primo Testamento 22; Milano: Paoline 2007) 87; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 208; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 212–213; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 37; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 124; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 87, 179; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15*, 331; Yoder, *Proverbs*, 71.

25 Cf. D.J. Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem. A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely* (Interfaces; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2005) 97; Minissale, *Siracide*, 146; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 273; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 371; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15*, 331.

26 Cf. Cimosa, *Proverbi*, 87; Duesberg – Fransen, *Ecclesiastico*, 223; Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 185–186; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 161–162; A. Lelièvre – A. Maillot, *Commentaire des Proverbes. II: Chapitres 19–31* (LD. Commentaires 4; Paris: Les Éditions du CERF 1996) 125–126.

27 Cf. Alonso Schökel – Vilchez Lindez, *I Proverbi*, 246.

28 Cf. Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 179.

29 "This proverb encapsulates the warning of 6:1–5 about guaranteeing the debt of a stranger" (Yoder, *Proverbs*, 135). Cf. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 124; A. Lelièvre – A. Maillot, *Commentaire des Proverbes. Chapitres 10–18. Les Proverbes de Solomon* (LD. Commentaires 1; Paris: Les Éditions du CERF 1993) 74; M.V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB 18B; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2009) 536–537; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 115; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15*, 496.

30 Cf. Alonso Schökel – Vilchez Lindez, *I Proverbi*, 431; Cimosa, *Proverbi*, 191; Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 633; Lelièvre – Maillot, *Commentaire des Proverbes. Chapitres 10–18*, 249–250; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 131; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 149; B.K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 15–31* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2005) 57–58.

31 Cf. Lelièvre – Maillot, *Commentaire des Proverbes. II: Chapitres 19–31*, 57; Cimosa, *Proverbi*, 204; Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 669–670; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 164; A. Scherer, "Is the Selfish Man Wise? Considerations of Context in Proverbs 10.1–22.16 with Special Regard to Surety, Bribery and Friendship," *JSOT* 76 (1997) 63–64; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 15–31*, 144–145; Yoder, *Proverbs*, 212.

(cf. Prov 6:1–5).[32] In practice, a person guaranteeing someone else's loan becomes a co-borrower.[33] According to R.J. Clifford, the risk of the guarantor consisting in losing some or all of their property was the main reason for the Book of Proverbs forbidding suretyship. This is because the book supports human freedom and responsibility and demands the two qualities from the readers,[34] therefore it forbids providing that form of support to people in a difficult economic and material situation.

It is clear from the texts of the wisdom books referred to above that the sages had a very critical approach to guaranteeing any loan. They saw it as a huge risk to those guaranteeing the return of borrowed money in the event that the debtor was unable to return it or did not want to do so. In such a situation, the guarantor was in danger of losing some or all of their property and becoming impoverished, hence it was prudent to avoid that risk. Outlined in a very synthetic way, the attitude towards suretyship that dominated in the Jewish community and the assessment of that form of assistance for those in need constitute the background for Ben Sira's teaching.

2. Delimitation, Sir 29:14–20

Sir 29:14 begins a new literary unit of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem, which is devoted to indications relating to becoming liable for the debt of a neighbour in need of that form of economic and material support in obtaining a loan. The previous pericope (29:8–13) concerns almsgiving. There, the noun ἐλεημοσύνη appears in vv. 8b and 12a, it is also the implied subject of the sentence in v. 13. Thus, it forms the framework for that entire literary unit. The binding elements of the pericope are also the personal forms of the verbs, the great majority of which (with the exception of v. 13 being an addition referring to almsgiving and the μὴ ἰωθήτω form [v. 10b] and λυσιτελήσει [v. 11b]) are expressed in the form of the imperative of the second person singular of the aorist (μακροθύμησον [v. 8a], ἀντιλαβοῦ [v. 9a], ἀπόλεσον [v. 10a], θές [v. 11a] and σύγκλεισον [v. 12a]) or structures having the meaning of prohibition addressed to that person (μή + *coniunctivus aoristi*: μὴ παρελκύσῃς [v. 8b],

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32   Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 185; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 159–160; Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 329–330; Wakely, "ערב (*'rb* I)," 513; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 172–173. See also Alonso Schökel – Vilchez Lindez, *I Proverbi*, 245–247; Cimosa, *Proverbi*, 87; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 212–214; A. Lelièvre – A. Maillot, *Commentaire des Proverbes*. III. *Chapitres 1–9* (LD. Commentaires 8; Paris: Les Éditions du CERF 2000) 120–121; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 86–87; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15*, 331–335; Yoder, *Proverbs*, 71–72.

33   Cf. Alonso Schökel – Vilchez Lindez, *I Proverbi*, 246; Cimosa, *Proverbi*, 226; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 206; Eicher, "Pożyczka," 992; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 211.

34   "Proverbs normally prizes personal freedom and responsibility. The warning does not primarily arise from lack of sympathy with the poor, for the book elsewhere urges almsgiving" (Clifford, *Proverbs*, 75). "[...] the cautious avoidance of going surety in Prov 11:15; 17:18 and 20:16 has nothing to do with selfishness and does not contradict the general high esteem for charity in the Old Testament and even in Proverbs itself. Nevertheless, the responsible man cannot afford to risk his own existence and the existence of the family committed to his care" (Scherer, "Is the Selfish Man Wise?," 64). See also Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 161–162.

μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς [v. 27b]). The use of the above verb forms gives the whole pericope the character of a speech addressed directly to the disciple of Ben Sira. Furthermore, it is important to note the persons towards whom the action of the Sage's disciple encouraged to help those in need of support should be directed. These are a poor man (ταπεινός [v. 8a] and πενής [v. 9a]), a brother and a friend (ἀδελφὸς καὶ φίλος [v. 10a]).

In 29:14, the form of help that should be provided to someone in need of support changes. It is no longer almsgiving, as in the previous pericope (29:8–13), but suretyship expressed using the verb form ἐγγυάω – "to vouch", "to guarantee" (v. 14a) and the related adnoun ἔγγυος – a "guarantor" (vv. 15a,16a) and the noun ἐγγύη – "guarantee" (vv. 17a, 19a). The above Greek words give thematic coherence to the pericope 29:14–20.

Moreover, in 29:14 the Sage no longer addresses his disciple directly, but the subject of his teaching is a good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, v. 14aα). In turn, the person who should be helped is referred to as a neighbour (τὸν πλησίον, v. 14aβ). That character also appears in v. 20a (τοῦ πλησίον). Thus, the noun "neighbour" forms the framework of the pericope referring to suretyship.[35]

The ending of the literary unit on suretyship also emphasises the reference to the idea of help. In its first verse, the Greek text speaks of becoming surety (ἐγγυήσεται), while at the end, it addresses that idea directly by using the imperative form of the verb ἀντιλαμβάνω ("to help"; ἀντιλαβοῦ). M. Gilbert confirms the indicated ending of the pericope started in 20:14, referring to the Syriac text in v. 20,[36] which mentions becoming surety for one's neighbour.[37]

Based on the above arguments, it should be concluded that the literary unit initiated in 29:14 ends in v. 20. This is emphasised and confirmed by the change of subject in v. 21 (ἀρχὴ ζωῆς – literally "the beginning of life") and the theme of a man's economic independence and self-reliance.

3. The Text and Its Translation

The textual analysis of Sir 29:14–20 is done based on the Greek version of the pericope. The critical edition of the Greek version of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem published by J. Ziegler[38] is adopted as the source text, along with the proposed numbering of the verses.[39]

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35 Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 372; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.

36 Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 183; Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 211.

37 Cf. N. Calduch-Benages – J. Ferrer – J. Liesen, *La Sabiduría del Escriba / Wisdom of the Scribe* (Biblioteca Midrásica 26; Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino 2003) 184; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 152; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 369.

38 Cf. J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, ed. 2 (Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gotteingensis editum 7.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1980) 262.

39 In the middle part of the pericope, the numbering of the verses in Ziegler's edition (Z) differs from that proposed by A. Rahlfs (R) and concerns vv. 16–18: 16a (Z)=16a (R), 17 (Z)=16b(R), 18a(Z)=17a(R), 18b(Z)=17b(R), 18c(Z)=18a(R) and 18d(Z)=18b(R) (cf. A. Rahlfs, *Septuagint. Id est Vetus Testamentum*

29[14]   A good man becomes surety for their neighbour,
          only someone who has lost the sense of decency refuses to do so.
[15]   If someone does such a favour to you, don't forget it
          for they have risked their souls for you.
[16]   A sinner will destroy the guarantor's property,
[17]   and the ungrateful will deliberately leave the saviour.
[18]   Suretyship has ruined many prosperous people
          and shook them like a sea wave.
          Influential people have lost their homes over it
          and had to go wandering in foreign countries.
[19]   A sinner will get involved in the act of surety,
          and a profit-chaser will face court judgements.
[20]   So help your neighbour while taking your possibilities into account,
          and protect yourself so that you don't fall.[40]

4. The Structure of the Pericope

Three views on the structure of Sir 29:14–20 have been presented so far. These will be discussed in chronological order. M. Gilbert gave the first proposal on the structure of that literary unit. In 1998, in an article entitled "Prêt, aumône et caution", he divided the literary unit under discussion into two parts. The first one, according to the scholar, covers vv. 14–17. It focuses on the person benefiting from the act of surety, and v. 15 is the centre of it. Gilbert based the identification of these verses of Sir 29:14–20 on the use of the verb ἐγκαταλείπω ("to desert", "to abandon", "to leave"), which appears in v. 14bβ (ἐγκαταλείψει) and v. 17β in the same inflectional form (ἐγκαταλείψει). The second part of the pericope (vv. 18–20), in turn, is devoted to a deceived guarantor. It ends with an order containing an antithetical message addressed to the guarantor.[41] The use of the verb ἐγκαταλείπω in vv. 14bβ and 17β is a strong argument for recognising vv. 14–17 as forming the first section

      graece iuxta LXX interpretes [Stuttgart: Duetsche Bibelgesellschaft 1979] II, 427). See also F.V. Reiterer, *Zähl-synopse zum Buch Ben Sira* (FSBP 1; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2003) 172–173.

40   The Greek text was translated by the author of the article. Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 152; W. Kraus – M. Karrer (eds.), *Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2009) 1130–1131; M. Wojciechowski (trans.), *Księgi greckie. Przekład interlinearny z kodami gramatycznymi i indeksem form podstawowych* (PSBibl; Warsaw: Vocatio 2008) 613–614; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 273–275; 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) 743; R. Popowski (trans.), *Septuaginta czyli Biblia Starego Testamentu wraz z księgami deuterokanonicznymi i apokryfami* (PSBibl; Warsaw: Vocatio 2013) 1232.

41   See Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 184. "Bref, sont soulignés tout d'abord les devoirs de qui bénéficie d'une caution, (29:14–17 [verse numbering according to Ziegler's edition – author's note]), puis les risques courus par qui cautionne (29:18–20)" (*Ibidem*, 184).

of the analysed pericope. However, it should be noted that only four of the six stichs constituting that section refer to the person taking advantage of suretyship, these are vv. 15, 16, 17. The first two stichs, i.e. v. 15, reminds of the obligations towards the guarantor; while vv. 16–17 speak of a dishonest man – a sinner for whom someone else becomes surety and of the consequences of that person being unfair towards the guarantor. The first verse of that section (v. 14) does not refer to the person someone takes liability for but to the one who guarantees to take responsibility for the obligation of that individual. Therefore, it does not fit very well into the structure proposed by the Belgian exegete. As for the second part of the pericope, isolated in that structure by Gilbert, by analogy to the objection relating to the first part of Sir 29:14–20, i.e. vv. 14–17, it should be noted that the last verse of that section (v. 20) does not refer to a deceived guarantor but to the necessity of becoming surety for a person in need of that form of support. Based on that, it would be appropriate to distinguish the border verses in the structure of 29:14–20, i.e. vv. 14 and 20.

In 2010, a commentary was published by B.M. Zapff on the second part of the work of Ben Sira (chapters 25–51), in which he proposed dividing the pericope about suretyship into four parts. Verse 14 introduces the theme of the new literary unit that concerns suretyship. Then, vv. 15–18ab, according to the German scholar, present the conduct of the beneficiary of suretyship, and the following two verses (18cd–19) mention the risks that the person becoming liable for someone else faces. The final verse, i.e. 20, contains a warning addressed to the one becoming surety for someone else along with the encouragement to support someone in need despite the possible risks.[42] With regard to that proposal of the structure of Sir 29:14–20, it should be noted, first of all, that it does not take any determinants contained in the text of the pericope into account. It is based solely on the content of the individual verses. Moreover, in vv. 15–18ab, it does not distinguish between the duty to fulfil the obligation towards the guarantor (v. 15) and the dishonest conduct of the beneficiary of suretyship (vv. 16–18ab). Verses 16–19 are separated into two different sections of the pericope, while they all mention the dangers associated with being a guarantor if the person for whom someone vouches is dishonest.

In 2020, B.C. Gregory published a monograph on generosity in the Book of Sirach entitled *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring. Generosity in the Book of Sirach*. In chapter IV, discussing generosity shown through offering a loan and guarantee, he presented the structure of Sir 29:14–20 in section 4.3.2. He referred to the structure proposed earlier by M. Gilbert (see above), but noted that a more likely division could be seen between v. 18 and v. 19, since vv. 16–18 deal with the risks to which a guarantor is exposed when becoming surety for a dishonest borrower, which, according to Gregory, Ben Sira already warns about in v. 15. Based on the above, the scholar argues that the pericope under analysis consists of two sections. The first one (vv. 15–18) deals with the role of a person for home someone else becomes surety, while the second one (vv. 19–20) speaks of a guarantor.[43] The above

42   See Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.
43   See Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 153.

proposal of a structure is incomplete as it does not take into account the function of v. 14 in the pericope as a whole.

Reservations can be made regarding each of the structures of Sir 29:14–20 presented above, and the ambiguities contained therein can be pointed out. For that reason, a new structure of the entire pericope under study is proposed below, which takes both the content elements and those relating to the vocabulary of that literary unit into account.

Verse 14 is the introduction to the literary unit on suretyship, which, on the one hand, introduces its main theme, i.e. the provision of support in the form of becoming liable for the debt of someone else (ἐγγυήσεται – "will vouch"), and on the other hand, presents a person becoming surety for another person, based on anthropological criteria (goodness and shame). It can be said that it is an expression of a person's obligation to become surety for someone in need of such support. Verse 15 speaks of the obligation of the one for whose debt someone else becomes liable towards the one who becomes surety. Further verses, i.e. 16–19, outline the risks associated with suretyship. They are of a concentric structure, the framework of which, i.e. vv. 16–17 and v. 19, speaks of the conduct of the sinner, while the central verse (v. 18) mentions the dangers directly associated with the act of suretyship. The last verse of the pericope (v. 20) constitutes its conclusion, which is also a reference to the initial v. 14. Both verses framing the entire pericope express an encouragement to become surety for a person in a difficult economic and material situation.

In v. 14b, a reference is made to a shameless man who ignores those asking for becoming surety for them. The verb form ἐγκαταλείψει found in that verse also appears in the same form in v. 17. It is used to juxtapose the wrongful attitude of the one who refuses to become surety for someone else with the conduct of the sinful person to whom this is offered, i.e. the first section of the pericope under study (v. 14) with the third one (vv. 16–19). The juxtaposition is based on the principle of analogy relating to misconduct resulting in serious trouble for the ignored person, i.e. to whom the wrongdoing described in these verses refers. Although the occurrence of ἐγκαταλείψει in the mentioned verses is a strong argument for considering vv. 14–17 as an independent section of Sir 29:14–20, as Gilbert did, but from the point of view of the topics the verses discuss, it is rather difficult to accept that.

In turn, the second section of the pericope on suretyship (v. 15) is linked with the third one (vv. 16–19) by the genitive singular (ἐγγύου; vv. 15a and 16) of the noun ἔγγυος ("guarantor"). The initial verse of the literary unit under study (v. 14) is linked with the last one (v. 20) through the noun "neighbour" (πλησίον), which, as stated above, forms the framework of the entire pericope. The noun ἁμαρτωλός ("sinner"), found in vv. 16β and 19αα, forms the framework of the third section of the pericope that speaks of the dangers awaiting guarantors due to the dishonest conduct of the suretyship beneficiaries. The indicated words form important connections between the different sections of Sir 29:14–20.

To sum up, the structure of Sir 29:14–20 is as follows:
– v. 14 – introduction – encouragement to become surety for someone else;
– v. 15 – the need to fulfil the assumed obligations towards the guarantor;
– vv. 16–19 – dangers awaiting the one becoming surety for another person;

– vv. 16–17 – conduct of the sinner;
– v. 18 – risks associated with becoming surety for someone else;
– v. 19 – conduct of the sinner;
– v. 20 – conclusion – the order to become surety for someone else.

It should be emphasised that the structure of 29:14–20 is quite similar to the structure of the pericope devoted to a loan (29:1–7); although both are different, they contain many common elements, similarly arranged in both literary units. Both pericopes talk about the duty to help those in need, either by means of a loan (29:1–2a) or guarantee (29:14, 20). The risks in the event of the dishonesty of the recipients of the two forms of support are also presented (29:4–7 and 29:16–19). Moreover, both literary units indicate the obligations of those who are helped in relation to those who assist them (29:2b–3 and 29:15).

5. Exegetical Analysis of Sir 29:14–20

The exegetical analysis of the pericope being the subject of this article is conducted according to its structure proposed in section 4.

5.1. Introduction – the Order to Become Surety for Someone Else (v. 14)

Sir 29:14 is an introduction to a new topic that the Sage of Jerusalem intends to discuss in his wisdom teaching addressed to his disciple or listener. The new theme is the issue of becoming surety for someone else. It is expressed by means of the future tense form of the verb ἐγγυάω ("to vouch", "to assure"[44]) ἐγγυήσεται. It should be noted that the above verb form appears in the mediopassive voice, which should be interpreted as an indirect mediopassive voice,[45] i.e. mentioning the benefit for the one becoming liable for someone else. This is not certain though, since the verb always appears in the mediopassive voice in the Septuagint Greek text (cf. Tobit 6:13; 6:1, 3; 17:8; 19:28; 28:17; Sir 8:13.13[46]), which may suggest that in the Greek Old Testament, it should be regarded as *medium deponens*.[47] F. Montanari argues that the mediopassive voice of that verb takes the meaning of "to take as pledge" or "to accept as surety".[48] However, this is difficult to accept, because if the verb

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44   See G.A. Chamberlain, *The Greek of the Septuagint. A Supplement Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2011) 47; H.G. Liddell – R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. 10 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1996) 468; F. Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca* (Torino: Loescher ²2004) 615; T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain – Paris – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2009) 185.

45   Cf. A. Piwowar, *Składnia języka greckiego Nowego Testamentu,* ed. 2 (Materiały Pomocnicze do Wykładów z Biblistyki 13; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2017) § 285.

46   See E. Hatch – H.A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint. And the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (Including the Apocryphal Books)*, ed. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1998) 363.

47   See J. Lust – E. Eynikel – K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1996) I, 125. T. Muraoka also seems to confirm that view, since in his dictionary, he points out that the verb ἐγγυάω occurs only in the mediopassive voice in the Greek text of the Old Testament (cf. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 185).

48   See Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 615.

in the mediopassive voice were to take on the above meaning, Sir 29:14a would have to be translated: "A good man accepts his neighbour as a guarantee." If indeed ἐγγυήσεται were to be regarded as a form of the indirect mediopassive voice, it would mean that the man becoming surety for someone else derives some benefit from that act. This could be, for example, the gratitude of the person for whom responsibility is taken or some merit with God, since the person vouching for someone else is described by Ben Sira as being good (ἀγαθός). The benefit to the guarantor would have been some money, which the guarantor was likely to gain (earn) by becoming surety to the one in need of support, despite the existing prohibition of usury (cf. Lev 25:35–36). The remainder of the pericope, especially vv. 16–19, emphasises the risks and dangers to which the guarantor is exposed by becoming surety for another person, which is not consistent with the idea of deriving some benefit from that act, although it does not mean that this is ruled out. Based on the above considerations, it seems appropriate to consider the verb form under analysis as *deponens* rather than indirect mediopassive voice.

In the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira, the verb ἐγγυάομαι, apart from the occurrence in 29:14a, appears twice in 8:13 (ἐγγυήσῃ). In the first stich of that verse, the Sage warns his disciples not to take responsibility for liabilities exceeding their own material and economic capacity, i.e. to consider – whenever vouching for another person, whether this would not lead to bankruptcy or serious financial difficulties if that person is unable or unwilling to return the borrowed goods and there is the need for the guarantor to repay the debt and settle the obligations. This is confirmed by the second stich in that verse, in which Ben Sira says that those who become surety for others should consider themselves debtors. They are not obliged to repay the debt in the first place, for this is the obligation of the borrower, but if that person is unable to settle the debt or does not want to do so, the loan must be paid back by the guarantor. It should be emphasised that the statement of the Sage of Jerusalem in 8:13 follows the teaching of the Book of Proverbs on suretyship (cf. sec. 1).[49] Thus, the Sage recommends great caution and prudence, since recklessness in that area may result in serious consequences, very risky for the guarantor.

Bearing in mind the warning relating to becoming surety for someone else contained in Sir 8:13, Ben Sira, at the beginning of the pericope under review, encourages becoming liable for the debt of a person who is in economic distress and in need of such support. The form of the future tense, ἐγγυήσεται, may be considered as the future perfect tense ("will have vouched for"),[50] progressive, i.e. the future perfect continuous tense ("will be vouching for")[51] or the gnomic tense ("vouches for [implicitly, whenever asked to do so]").[52] It seems that the last proposal of the interpretation of that form of the future tense best fits the context, as it gives not only the first stich in 14, but the whole pericope, a general – universal – meaning.

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49   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.
50   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 356.
51   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 357.
52   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 360.

The direct object of ἐγγυήσεται is the substantivised adverb πλησίον ("near"), which takes on the meaning of "a neighbour". In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the resulting noun ὁ πλησίον always appears with an article,[53] so that it may refer to a specific, individual person with whom someone is related by some ties or it may have a general – generic meaning.[54] It is in the latter sense that one should understand the word in 29:14aβ. It may refer to a neighbour, friend, acquaintance or someone belonging to the Chosen People, i.e., to the same social and religious community.[55] It should be noted that the Sage of Jerusalem always encourages adopting a positive attitude toward one's neighbour. Relatives[56] are excluded from the group of people to whom the noun ὁ πλησίον may refer, but this does not mean that Ben Sira's teaching does not apply to them. Since he encourages becoming surety for a close person, it can be inferred that the call applies all the more to relatives in trouble and in need of help as well. The fact of knowing the neighbour, i.e. the person for whom Ben Sira recommends becoming responsible, may be considered the first manifestation of the caution that Sirach mentions in 8:13. Sir 29:14a does not refer to supporting any stranger or someone not known, but a close person, well known to the one offering the assistance. Knowing one's neighbours and being aware of what kind of persons they are (honest or not, dutiful or neglectful of their obligations, etc.) should allow the guarantor to make the right and prudent decision. Therefore, the awareness of who the borrower is should be the first limitation when it comes to suretyship since Ben Sira does not encourage becoming surety for anyone in need of that form of financial assistance, but only for a neighbour, i.e. a person linked by some close ties or known to the one offering help.

The one who vouches for their neighbour is called good (ἀγαθός) by the Sage of Jerusalem. In the Greek version of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem, that adjective most often appears in a substantivised form, in the neuter, in reference to material goods or prosperity[57] or to good understood as an abstract noun.[58] As an adjective, it refers both to items,[59] body parts (the heart and the eye)[60] and persons, especially to a wife.[61] It is often used in relation to the moral and religious sphere of man. In 12:7, a good man is contrasted with a sinner. Wealth is good, but only that acquired without committing a sin (13:24). Persons good

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53   See Sir 5:12; 6:17; 9:14; 10:6; 13:15; 15:5; 16:28; 17:14; 18:13; 19:14, 17; 22:23; 25:1, 18; 27:18, 19; 28:2, 7; 29:1, 2, 5, 14, 20; 31:15, 31; 34:22.

54   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 96.

55   Cf. J. Fichtner, "B. πλησίον in the LXX and the Neighbour in the OT," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) VI, 313–315.

56   Cf. U. Falkenroth, "ὁ πλησίον (ho plēsion), the neighbour," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown) (Carlisle – Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1986) I, 258; J. Fichtner, "B. πλησίον in the LXX," 312–313; X. Léon-Dufour, "Bliźni," *Słownik Teologii Biblijnej* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990) 75.

57   Cf. Sir 2:9; 6:11; 11:12, 14, 19, 23, 25b, 31; 12:1, 3, 5, 8, 9; 13:25, 26; 14:4, 14, 25; 16:29; 18:15; 20:16; 22:23; 28:3; 29:16; 30:18; 31:11; 32:13; 39:4, 27; 42:25; 45:26. See also 22:7a (GII).

58   Cf. Sir 7:13;17:7; 18:8; 33:14; 37:18; 39:25; 51:18.

59   Cf. Sir 6:19; 11:25a; 13:24; 18:17; 41:11; 44:11; 51:21.

60   Cf. Sir 26:4; 30:25; 35:7, 9. See also 26:26c (GII).

61   Cf. Sir 7:19; 26:1, 3, 16.

to themselves cannot be bad to others (14:5). From the beginning, good was intended for good people (39:25). All the works of the Lord are good (39:22). The name of a sinner is not good (41:11), while a good life is equivalent to a good name (41:3). Thus, calling someone a good man indicates their religious and moral value, not just their good attitude towards other people (humanitarianism). Good is therefore defined from a religious perspective. A good person is the one following the Law and staying in the right relationship with God. The two elements are essential for calling someone a good person.[62] Based on the above, the good man, being the subject of the sentence in 29:14a (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός), should be considered a religious person – pious and living in accordance with the indications of faith in God, i.e. someone who follows the provisions of the Law and implements them in life. Therefore, the ultimate justification for the action of such a person is not humanitarian but religious motives. Whatever the good man does is done because of the faith in God and the need to keep God's commandments, hence it is about a religious criterion in its deepest essence. Ben Sira, by encouraging becoming surety for another individual in 29:14a, does not refer to specific orders of the Lord, since there were no orders in the Torah relating to becoming surety for one's neighbour (cf. sec. 1), but urges one to do so based on the idea of helping one's neighbour in general, which stems from the commandment to love the neighbour (cf. Lev 19:18) and the order to be generous towards the poor (cf. Deut 15:10),[63] inter alia.

The second stich in 14 is a counterposition to the first one.[64] The conjunction καί, at the beginning of it, should be read in the opposite sense ("but", "however"). Both stichs in 14 form antithetical parallelism, in which a good person (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) is contrasted with the one who has lost shame (ὁ ἀπολωλεκὼς αἰσχύνην), while suretyship (ἐγγυήσεται) is contrasted implicitly (ἐγκαταλείψει) with not offering help. The third person singular pronoun in the masculine accusative αὐτόν (v. 14bβ) refers to the neighbour (τὸν πλησίον in v. 14aβ). B.C. Gregory claims that the second stich in 14 is unclear – ambiguous because, in his view, it could refer to a guarantor or to a borrower who took a loan and refuses to repay it making the whole debt attributable to the person who had vouched for the debtor (in which case the pronoun αὐτόν should refer to ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός in v. 14aα). In the opinion of Gregory, the second interpretation of v. 14b is supported by v. 17, which summarises possible problems related to becoming surety for someone else (both of these verses contain the ἐγκαταλείψει form).[65] M. Gilbert interprets v. 14b in the same way, i.e. as referring to a dishonest debtor for whom someone else becomes surety.[66] It is rather difficult to agree with Gregory's interpretation, according to which v. 14b refers to a dishonest borrower who

62   Cf. E. Beyreuther, "ἀγαθός," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown) (Carlisle – Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster 1986) II, 99; W. Grundmann, "ἀγαθός," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) I, 13–14.

63   Cf. Pérez Rodríguez, "Eclesiástico," 1205.

64   Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.

65   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 154.

66   Cf. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 206.

does not want to pay the obligations towards the creditor and, consequently, the obligation is attributed to the guarantor, since both stichs in v. 14 form antithetical parallelism and, based on that, it must be assumed that both the first and the second one relate to the moment when someone needs a guarantee, which the good man offers (v. 14a) and the person devoid of shame refuses, ignoring the one in need (v. 14b). Gregory and Gilbert's interpretations are acceptable but, in the view of the authors of this paper, less likely, as it would break up the content coherence (antithetical parallelism) of v. 14 – the first stich of which expresses the need to support the one in need of a guarantee and the second stich condemns the person who refuses to do so.

The character in v. 14b is identified in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira by means of a substantivised *participium perfecti activi* of the masculine singular of the verb ἀπόλλυμι – "to destroy", "to sevastate", "to annihilate", "to extirpate" (ὁ ἀπολωλεκώς), which means that the person is someone who has lost shame and does not possess that attribute (the article ὁ emphasises the substantivisation of the participle and, at the same time, gives the created noun a general – generic – meaning). Shame was not lost permanently (it may be regained), but the consequences last at the moment the man is referred to. Apart from 29:14, the verb ἀπόλλυμι appears 27 more times in the Greek text of the work of Ben Sira.[67] Due to its meaning, the word almost always refers to a negative situation or state (an exception is 46:6) of losing someone or something. These can be important goods, both spiritual and material (e.g. patience [2:14], gold [8:2], inheritance [9:6], trust [27:16], friendship [27:18], money [29:10]) or persons (e.g. the whole people [10:3], whole countries [10:16, 17], peaceful [28:13], prosperous [29:17] or many people [30:23; 31:25]). It can also refer to fools exposing themselves to some danger causing them to lose themselves (cf. 6:4; 20:22, 22; 22:27). In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the verb under analysis was used three times in the form of a substantivised *participium perfect*. In 2:4a, the Sage is sorry for those who have lost patience (τοῖς ἀπολωλεκόσιν τὴν ὑπομονήν). In 41:2d, in turn, he says that death is good for that type of people (ἀπολωλεκότι ὑπομονήν). In 8:12 the adnoun refers to a man stronger than the Sage's disciple (ἰσχυροτέρῳ σου), who was granted a loan. In such a case, the person is to be regarded as if lost (ὡς ἀπολωλεκώς), i.e. the relationship with that man is destroyed and the individual becomes a sort of stranger to the disciple of Sirach. The man referred to in 29:14b has lost shame (αἰσχύνην). It might seem that this is not a very great loss, bringing some serious harm and depriving of something important in life. This, however, is not the case, for in the teaching of Ben Sira, shame plays a crucial role in man's life and in the quest for wisdom. It should protect man from committing inappropriate acts that may bring the person into disrepute and deprive of a good name, thus depriving of respect from other people. The preventive role of shame is also to help man to keep God's commandments and to stop the person from committing offences on the one hand, and on the other, it is to be a motive for right behaviour (observance of

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67   See Sir 2:14; 3:26; 6:3, 4; 8:2, 12; 9:6; 10:3, 16, 17; 17:28; 20:22, 22; 22:27; 27:16, 18, 18; 28:13; 29:10, 17; 30:23; 31:25; 41:2, 6; 44:9; 46:6 and 49:7.

the commandments of the Lord) so that the person does not fall into disgrace.[68] Ben Sira confirms the above in 4:21, where he says that there is shame which brings sin (ἔστιν γὰρ αἰσχύνη ἐπάγουσα ἁμαρτίαν), but there is also shame that brings glory and is a grace to man (ἔστιν αἰσχύνη δόξα καὶ χάρις). Thus, shame plays a double role. On the one hand, it should protect man from committing injustice; on the other hand, it should motivate a person to behave properly (cf. 41:16). Shame lies in store for a thief (5:14), an evil man (5:15), a liar (20:26), a father of an ill-mannered son (22:3) and a man supported by his wife (25:22). In the consideration of 29:14b, an important passage is 20:22, which states that there are people who destroy themselves because of shame and foolishness (ἀπολλύων τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ). Shame is a very important category of human conduct because it motivates people to take (20:23) or refrain from some action, which brings to a person certain consequences – good or bad. In 29:14, the loss of shame has a negative outcome. A good man helps the one in need by becoming surety for them, whereas the one who has lost shame ignores that person, i.e. does not follow the commandment to love the neighbour.[69] Such a person is not explicitly called an evil or unrighteous man, but the context, based on antithetical parallelism, clearly and unambiguously suggests the above by contrasting the two attitudes.

The approach of a shameless person to a neighbour in need of support in the form of suretyship is expressed by the verb form ἐγκαταλείψει, derived from ἐγκαταλείπω ("to desert", "to abandon", "to leave"). The future tense of that verb form should be considered the same (i.e. *futurum gnomicum*) as the future tense of ἐγγυήσεται in v. 14a (see above). Both stichs in v. 14 form antithetical parallelism, hence both verb forms found there should be interpreted in the same way. The verb ἐγκαταλείπω is a compound and comes from λείπω ("to leave", "to abandon"). It was formed by adding two prepositions to the simple verb: ἐν ("in") and κατά ("downward"),[70] thanks to which it further emphasises the persistence of the state of being abandoned, as it were, "at the bottom" of some situation or state (literally, to leave in a situation of being down – below the average – normal state). Therefore, it does not mean just leaving someone to themselves, but it refers to the abandonment of a person who is in a very difficult situation, unable to cope and get out of it. That individual is not able to handle the situation on their own, relying only on own possibilities or material resources. In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the subject of that verb may be God or man. The Lord never abandons upright people who fear Him and strive to gain wisdom (cf. 2:10; 51:20). Therefore, one should beg Him and ask Him not to be forgotten in a difficult situation (cf. 23:1 and 51:10). The one who abandons their father is a blasphemer (cf. 3:16). If one goes astray in the pursuit of wisdom, that person will be abandoned by it 4:19). The ungodly are those who have abandoned the law of the Most High (cf. 41:8). The Sage urges his disciples not to neglect or forsake the priests (cf. 7:30) or an old friend (cf. 9:10). Leaving someone always has negative associations, and such conduct should be

68   Cf. A. Piwowar, *La vergogna come criterio della fama perpetua. Studio esegetico-teologico Sir 40:1–42:14* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Emmanuel 2006).

69   Cf. Pérez Rodríguez, "Eclesiástico," 1208.

70   Cf. R. Romizi, *Vocabolario greco italiano etimologico e ragionato*, ed. 3 (Bologna: Zanichelli 2007) 388.

seen as being in contradiction with the action of God, who never abandons people who are close to Him. Leaving a neighbour in need of support in the form of becoming surety for them is therefore, in a way, a double evil. First, the commandment to love and help one's neighbour is not fulfilled, and second, it is an action contrary to the conduct of God, who never abandons people in need and always supports them. Ben Sira does not explicitly express that negative judgement relating to the approach of a man lacking in shame towards their neighbour in distress asking for support and help and to become surety for them, but the immediately preceding context clearly speaks very negatively about such a person.

Sir 29:14 outlines the socio-economic tension relating to becoming surety for a man in a difficult material and economic situation. This is developed in the following verses of the pericope.[71] Already in the introduction to the pericope, the Sage indirectly states that not everyone asked to become surety for someone else agrees to do so.

5.2.   The Obligation Towards the Guarantor (v. 15)

After expressing, in v. 14, the encouragement to become surety for a person in need of that form of support, the Sage draws attention to the obligation of the borrower towards the guarantor. B.C. Gregory describes the content in v. 15 as an exhortation (a call, encouragement), which contrasts with v. 14.[72] Not only the one who is able to become surety for another individual is obliged to help the person in need of that form of aid, but also the one who receives such assistance assumes an obligation towards the guarantor. Thus, the act of suretyship connects them and brings them jointly into a difficult economic and material situation, into the position of the one in need of such support.

Ben Sira directly addresses the person in whose favour someone has vouched and urges that individual not to forget (μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ – "do not forget") the benefits received from the guarantor (χάριτας ἐγγύου). In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the order not to forget the kindness or favour received from another person is expressed by means of the syntagma μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ, which is equivalent to the expression μὴ + *imperativus aoristi*. It thus means a firm prohibition against forgetting any good, even one-off or experienced only for a short while, received from the guarantor. The one for whom someone else becomes surety should always – at every moment of their life – remember the received help. Therefore, the prohibition does not relate only to the period until the debt is settled, but also to the subsequent period, after the repayment of the loan obtained through the act of suretyship. The person for whom someone else becomes surety should always remember that gesture of kindness. Apart from 29:15aα, the verb ἐπιλανθάνομαι ("to forget", also in the broader sense "to neglect") occurs eight more times in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira. Kindness to a father will not be forgotten (cf. 3:14a). The Sage advises not to stay away, so as not to be forgotten (cf. 13:10b). One must not forget oneself in the presence of important people (cf. 23:14c). The offering of a just man and the virtues of a merciful

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71   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 154.
72   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 154.

man will not be forgotten (cf. 35:6b; 44:10b). Furthermore, there is a prohibition expressed three times using the same syntagma as in 29:15aα (μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ[73]). In 7:27b, the Sage asks his disciples not to forget the labour pain suffered by their mothers. In turn, in 37:6a, he asks not to forget friends in their hearts, and in 38:21a – he warns that while mourning the death of a loved one, one should not forget that there is no return to the world of the living once a person dies. Thus, the prohibition of not forgetting relates to relevant issues, i.e. attitude towards a mother, friend and death. Similarly, the Sage's disciple should not forget the good received from the guarantor, who showed kindness and trust by becoming their surety, helping to get out of a difficult economic and material situation.

The remaining two words of the first stich χάριτας ἐγγύου cause some difficulty from the syntactic point of view as the first of the nouns is in the plural accusative and the second in the singular genitive, and the verb ἐπιλανθάνομαι can be combined with both the first (cf. 3:14a; 7:27b; 35:6b) and the second (cf. 37:6a) of the two cases. When considering that it is connected directly with the accusative χάριτας as a direct object, the genitive ἐγγύου should be considered as *genetivus subiectivus* ("[do not forget] the good received from/done to you by the guarantor") or *originis* ("[do not forget] the good coming from the guarantor"). Whereas, if the prohibition μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ was combined with the genitive ἐγγύου, the accusative χάριτας would have to be considered as *accusativus relationis* ("[do not forget] the creditor as to/with respect to/with regard to the good"). From a syntactic point of view, both interpretations of the first stich of v. 15 are acceptable. It should be noted, however, that in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the verb ἐπιλανθάνομαι is more often combined with the accusative than with the genitive. Based on that premise, it should be assumed that it is combined with χάριτας as a direct object in 29:15a, while the genitive ἐγγύου should be regarded, as stated above, as a *genetivus subiectivus* rather than *originis*, since the former puts a greater emphasis on the involvement of the guarantor in helping the person in need of support (the person is, in a way, an acting entity, rather than merely a passive source of help in the form of becoming surety for someone else). It should be noted that neither of the two nouns found in v. 15aα is preceded by an article, which means that they do not refer to specific benefits and the individual person of the guarantor, but have a general – generic – meaning.[74] This makes the statement in the stich a general prohibition to be applied to any benefits received from any person becoming surety for another individual. M. Gilbert and G. Vigini claim that the best form of not forgetting the guarantor is to pay the debt.[75]

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73   Cf. Deut 4:9; 6:12; 8:11; 9:7; Ps 9:33; 73:19, 23; Prov 4:5; Jer 14:9. H. Langkammer emphasises that by means of this syntagma in the Book of Deuteronomy, Israel's forgetfulness of God is particularly condemned (cf. Langkammer, *Księga Syracha*, 240). Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.

74   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 118.

75   Cf. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 210; Vigini, *Siracide*, 174. "This remembering also naturally includes the timely repayment of the debt for which he stood surety, in conformity with the admonitions of vv. 2b–3" (Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 154).

The noun χάρις may refer to an aesthetic aspect of a person or item ("grace", "charm", "allure"; cf. Sir 7:19b; 24:17b; 26:13a, 15a; 40:22a), or may express kindness/graciousness towards someone ("mercy", "friendliness", "favour", "kind assistance").[76] In the latter sense, when referring to a particular expression of grace – kindness, it may take on the meaning of "boon", "kindness", "a gesture of graciousness". H. Conzelmann argues that the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira shows a certain preference towards that noun,[77] which occurs 31 times there, including the texts of various codices.[78] From the perspective of the interpretation of 29:15aα, an important text is 3:31, where the Sage states that the one who repays the received benefits finds support when falls. In 40:17b, in turn, the Sage states that charity is like a paradise abounding with blessings. He recommends adopting the attitude of benevolence towards the living and the dead (cf. 7:33). If one does good, one will receive gratitude for the good done to others (cf. 12:1). God protects man's benevolence like the pupil of the eye (cf. 17:22). It should be offered to friends (cf. 30:6b). Kindness done to another person or benevolence towards someone else are of great importance to the Sage. For it ensures respect and appreciation from others (cf. 41:27; 45:1) and, in a sense, can be considered one of the indicators of wisdom (cf. 20:13, 16; 21:16; 32:10; 37:21). The above statements can be applied to the guarantor who supports a person in need by becoming their surety. Not only the guarantor does something very positive and important for the other person but also gains something extremely important (respect and recognition), which is of great value not only in the eyes of others but also in the eyes of God. It should be noted that in the Greek version of Sir 29:15aα, the noun χάρις is used in the plural, which may mean that the good done by the guarantor is not a single act but many of them. The plural of the word may also refer to a one-time act with many positive gains for the person someone else becomes surety for (it has an impact on many aspects of life, e.g. economic, social, personal, family, etc.).

According to the interpretation adopted by the authors of the article, the noun "guarantor" denotes a subject who provides benefits to the one in need. Taking the Greek language into account, it is a substantivised adjective ἔγγυος, derived from the stem ἐγγυ found in the verb ἐγγυάω, to which a suffix is attached, with the use of which adjectives -οςare formed.[79] It does not occur in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, except in the pericope under study, where it appears once more in v. 16aβ.

The second stich in v. 15 indicates the reason for the attitude of gratitude (this is expressed by the conjunction γάρ, which in 15bα introduces the reason, cause or rationale for

76 Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1978–1979; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, II, 513; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 2337–2338; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 729. See also H. Conzelmann, "χάρις κτλ. C. Judaism," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) IX, 389; H.-H. Esser, "χάρις," *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, ed. 2 (Carlisle: Paternoster 1986) II, 116–117; C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1994) III, 500–506.

77 Cf. Conzelmann, "χάρις κτλ. C. Judaism," 389.

78 Cf. Conzelmann, "χάρις κτλ. C. Judaism," 389; Hatch – Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 1455.

79 Cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 386.

saying something beforehand) shown by not forgetting by the surety's receiver the one who supported that person in a difficult financial situation. For the guarantor did something exceptional, which the Sage of Jerusalem describes as giving one's soul/life away for a person in distress (ἔδωκεν γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ σοῦ). Except for the stich under analysis, the syntagma διδόναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ does not occur anywhere else in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira.[80] The Greek translation of the Book of Sirach, apart from 29:15b, also does not speak of offering something or someone for someone else (διδόναι τι ὑπὲρ τινός). The noun ψυχή ("life", "soul") in the context of v. 15b, refers to life rather than a soul, implying that the guarantors providing assistance to persons in financial distress and in need of such help and support give their life away with all its aspects, including those relating to the spiritual sphere.[81] The guarantors risk everything they have and who they are, i.e. not only material goods but also put their lives at risk. A.A. Di Lella claims that to speak of giving one's life away for the sake of the other person is an overstatement – an exaggeration of the guarantor's gesture.[82] However, this is not an exaggerated statement[83] because if the person the responsibility for whose debt is taken is unable to repay the loan or does not want to do so, the guarantor has to do it and, consequently, the one is deprived of some or even all of the property, which could result not only in serious economic difficulties for the guarantor but – in extreme cases – in the loss of life, and perhaps also the life of the family members, due to lack of means of subsistence. Indeed, by vouching for someone else, that person puts their life in the hands of the one who asks for it. Therefore, defining the act of the guarantor towards the receiver of the benefit may be called a hyperbole, but it should also be emphasised that there is a large dose of realism in the assessment of that gesture.

Ben Sira reminds the person for whom someone else becomes surety to fulfil the indirectly assumed obligation towards the guarantor. By borrowing some material goods from someone else, a person not only agrees to repay the debt to the creditor but also promises the guarantor to pay it back, who might have to repay someone else's loan if the one is unable or unwilling to do so. The guarantor, by becoming surety for another individual, shows great courage, for they risk not only own property[84] but, as the Sage states, also their life. Therefore, the receiver of the benefit in the form of liability for their debt must remember that extraordinary act of kindness and graciousness. One should make every effort not to

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80   In 7:20b, reference is made to the prohibition of doing evil to a hired servant who works diligently (literally giving their soul – μηδὲ μίσθιον διδόντα τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ). This text is most similar to the syntagma in 29:15b, but it clearly differs from it in the use of the verb δίδωμι. Ben Sira speaks three times of the prohibition to give oneself away (literally to give one's soul away) to a woman (9:2a – μὴ δῷς γυναικὶ τὴν ψυχήν σου) and to a harlot (9:6a – μὴ δῷς πόρναις τὴν ψυχήν σου), and in 30:21a – to sorrow (μὴ δῷς εἰς λύπην τὴν ψυχήν σου). In the last three texts, the giving of one's soul away metaphorically expresses the giving of power over oneself to someone or something else, allowing that person's life to be completely dominated by someone or something to whom/what the soul is given (met. inner life with all its aspects).

81   Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.

82   See Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 371.

83   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 155.

84   Cf. Palmisano, *Siracide*, 273; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 181.

create any problems for their guarantors, moreover, although the text of 29:15 does not say it directly, one should show a huge gratitude for the help and support,[85] proportional to the risk undertaken by the one becoming surety for somebody else.[86]

5.3.   Risks Faced by Persons Becoming Surety for Someone Else (vv. 16–19)

Having presented the general principles concerning suretyship, i.e. the encouragement to grant it and the need to fulfil the obligation towards the guarantor and repay the loan, Ben Sira moves on to show the risks associated with vouching for someone, i.e. assuming the obligation to repay the debt in the event that the borrower is unable or unwilling to pay the creditor back. It should be emphasised that the Sage devoted more than half of the pericope under study (eight stichs out of fourteen constituting the whole literary unit) to the description of the risks – they dominate Ben Sira's reflection on the issue of suretyship.

5.3.1. Attitude of the Sinner Towards the Guarantor (vv. 16–17)

The sinner in v. 16 contrasts with the good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) in v. 14a. The latter becomes surety for someone else even though it may expose that person to serious difficulties and dangers, hence the man does good and acts for the benefit of another person in a difficult economic and material situation. The sinner, on the contrary, as the very term indicates, acts with a completely different purpose. The person does not do good and is not concerned about the fate of the benefactor, i.e. the one who becomes surety for them, but undertakes acts that involve harm and damage on the part of the guarantor. The substantivised adjective ἁμαρτωλός, apart from the pericope under analysis (see vv. 16 and 19a), appears 38 more times[87] in the Greek shorter version of the text of the work of Ben Sira, and is found twice in GII (cf. 11:1a and 19:6a).[88] The man defined using that word is someone who opposes piety (cf. 1:25b; 33:14b), is double-faced (cf. 2:12b; 5:9b, 15d), full of anger and violence (cf. 27:30b), spreads discord (cf. 28:9a), multiplies sins (cf. 3:27b; 21:6a) and stays far away from wisdom (cf. 15:7b, 9a; 19:22b) due to avoiding admonition and interpreting the Law to their advantage (cf. 32:17a). The wrath of God will fall on such a person (cf. 5:6c), whom the Most High hates (cf. 12:6a), therefore the Sage warns his disciples to act in such a way that they are not included in the ranks of sinners (cf. 7:16b), who will bring evil upon man (cf. 11:32b) and whom God does not need (cf. 15:12b) and for whom He has created terrible things (cf. 39:25b). Furthermore, the Sage recommends not to have any contact with them (cf. 8:10a; 11:9b; 12:14a; 13:17b). He even advises ignoring and not helping them (cf. 12:4b, 7b). One should not envy them their glory

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85   Cf. Duesberg – Fransen, *Ecclesiastico*, 223.
86   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 154. "In the event that circumstances require the guarantor to satisfy the creditor, this gratefulness would then include the recompensing of the guarantor for the debt since he has now become the 'new' creditor" (*Ibidem*, 154).
87   Cf. Hatch – Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 64–65.
88   Cf. J.-M. Auwers, *Concordance du Siracide (Grec II et Sacra Parallela)* (CahRB 58; Paris: Gabalda et Cⁱᵉ Éditeurs 2005) 20.

(cf. 9:11a) nor show honour and respect (cf. 10:23b) or admiration (cf. 11:21a) because the destruction awaits them (cf. 21:10a; 25:19b; 39:27b; 40:8b). Their offspring also deserve the same fate because of them (cf. 41:5a, 6a). Even their names will be erased from human memory (cf. 41:11b). For they only strive to destroy and do evil (cf. 16:6a, 13a; 23:8a). The above-mentioned texts clearly show that the image of the sinner presented by the Sage of Jerusalem in his work is clearly negative. The persons thus described oppose God due to their lack of piety and wisdom, they do evil and iniquity, for which they will be punished severely. In 29:16β, the noun ἁμαρτωλός lacks an article, which indicates that it is used in a general – generic – sense. Therefore, it does not refer to a specific, individual man, but to any sinner, i.e. a godless person who strives to do evil and unrighteousness. In the event of suretyship, their actions will have very dangerous and negative consequences. For they will destroy (ἀνατρέψει) the goods of the one who helps them by becoming surety for them (ἀγαθὰ ἐγγύου). According to H. Langkammer, the character in v. 16 is called a sinner because the person forgot about the guarantor, thereby breaking the order to fulfil the assumed obligations.[89]

The verb ἀνατρέπω ("to overturn", "to knock down", "to destroy", "to overset"[90]), with which the act of the sinner involving the guarantor's goods is described in Sir 29:16β, occurs only two more times in the Greek translation of the work of Ben Sira. In 12:12, the Sage advises his disciples not to keep their enemies close to them, so that they, having destroyed the adept of wisdom, do not take that place. In 12:16, he warns that the enemy praises with their mouth, but in their hearts, they plot how to trap the man praised by them. In both texts, the verb under analysis refers to overturning – knocking someone down, which brings a certain disadvantage to that person – the loss of the held social position – and a fall, which is a metaphoric expression of defeat and failure – misfortune. In 29:16β, it should be rather understood in its second sense, derived from the original meaning of the word ("to overturn", "to overset"[91]), i.e. "to destroy". Destruction is equivalent to the annihilation of someone or something, in this case – goods, i.e. the guarantor's property. The action expressed by the form ἀνατρέψει can also be interpreted in a slightly less strong way compared to destruction. Sir 29:16 may also mean not a complete destruction of the guarantor's property but an introduction of serious perturbations into the economic and material sphere of life of the guarantor (almost turning "upside down"), which is also dangerous and risky for the one who becomes surety for the sinner. The *futurum* form of ἀνατρέψει may be considered as expressing the future perfect tense ("will have destroyed/knocked over"), the future imperfect ("will be destroying/knocking over") or the gnomic tense ("destroys/knocks over"). Each of those interpretations fits into the context of v. 16 perfectly well. The direct object ἀνατρέψει is the syntagma consisting of a substantivised adjective in

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89   Cf. Langkammer, *Księga Syracha*, 240.
90   Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 124; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 33; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 200; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 47; Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 107.
91   Cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 107.

the neuter plural accusative ἀγαθά, combined with the genitive of the substantivised adjective ἔγγυος (ἐγγύου). That genitive is to be regarded as *genetivus possessoris*, or possession, meaning that the goods in question belong to the guarantor. Both substantivised adjectives are devoid of articles, which supports their general – generic meaning (cf. ἁμαρτωλός). This, in turn, gives the whole v. 16 a universal meaning, i.e. it does not speak of the behaviour of a particular individual but of a popular in the Jewish community way of conduct. This statement seems to support the recognition of the form ἀνατρέψει as *futurum gnomicum*.

Sadly, the events described in v. 16 are not exceptions but a common practice of sinful and wicked people in their relations with their benefactors – those becoming surety for them and rescuing them from a difficult economic and material situation. This emphasises their ingratitude, baseness and meanness. Thus, Ben Sira presents to the reader a sad picture of the Jewish community of his time, or at least some part of it.

The dramatic consequences of the way of treatment by the sinner of their guarantor are also emphasised by the very structure of v. 16, in which the direct object is placed before the predicate (ἀγαθὰ ἐγγύου ἀνατρέψει), which should most likely be considered an emphatic emphasis on the disastrous results of the actions of an unjust person towards their benefactor.

Sir 29:16–17 constitutes synonymous parallelism, in which the sinner (ἁμαρτωλός; v. 16β) corresponds to the ungrateful man (ἀχάριστος; v. 17α), while the destruction of the guarantor's goods (ἀγαθὰ ἐγγύου ἀνατρέψει; v. 16α) means the deliberate ignorance of the saviour (ἐν διανοίᾳ ἐγκαταλείψει ῥυσάμενον; v. 16β).[92] Moreover, a concentric structure can be noticed there, at the centre of which there are expressions concerning its main character – the sinner, i.e. the ungrateful man (v. 16: direct object – predicate – subject // v. 17: conjunction – subject – adverbial – predicate – direct object).

The sinner referred to in v. 16β, based on synonymous parallelism, is defined in v. 17α as an ungrateful man. The noun ἀχάριστος ("ingrate", "ungrateful person") was formed through the substantivisation of the adjective. Like ἁμαρτωλός, it is not preceded by an article, which also gives it a general – generic – meaning, i.e. it does not refer to a specific, individual or an ungrateful person but to all people who do not express their gratitude for the good received from other people who have supported them and offered them some sort of assistance. In the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira, the adjective ἀχάριστος ("ungrateful") occurs only one more time – in 29:25aβ. The text of that verse speaks of the ungratefulness of a guest. The visitor eats a meal, quenches thirst and rather than being grateful for the kindness and hospitality, the person is ungrateful (literally εἰς ἀχάριστα) and, instead of thanking the host, says unpleasant (literally bitter) words to the one who offered the welcome. It should be noted that in that text, the adjective in question was also substantivised in the accusative plural of the neuter. Thus, it does not refer to persons, but forms the abstract noun – "ingratitude". It is worth paying attention to the fact that it is in the plural, which means that the act of ingratitude was not a single act but was repeated

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92   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 155.

many times, which increases the scale of the lack of gratitude for the experienced kindness and hospitality. Both the man who does not show gratitude and the very ungratefulness are judged negatively, even condemned *imlicite*, as there is a lack of gratefulness and the good offered to someone in need is not recognised. In the Greek version of Sir 29:17, the sinner, i.e. the man who is unrighteous and does evil, is defined as an ingrate, since the person does not show gratitude to the one becoming surety for them, which contributed to saving the man from economic and material hardship. The sinfulness consists in the lack of justice towards the saviour, who, by becoming surety for someone else, sacrificed their life for the one in need (cf. v. 15b). This is not about justice relating to the material sphere but to the spiritual one, i.e. the internal attitude. The lack of gratitude is also considered a sin because it is a lack of respect and appreciation towards the guarantor, i.e. forgetting about that person (cf. 15a). The one who becomes surety for another individual is deprived of the above and thus, one might say, is robbed in some way of what was rightfully theirs.

Verse 17, on the one hand, based on synonymous parallelism, explains how the sinner/ungrateful person destroys the guarantor's property and, on the other hand, shows what the ingratitude consists in. The one who becomes surety is forgotten by the one who received the assistance and thus becomes dependent on the mercy of the creditor (ἐγκαταλείψει ῥυσάμενον). The Sage emphasises that the ungrateful man does this deliberately and premeditatedly (ἐν διανοίᾳ). Thus, it is not some unfortunate coincidence or unintentional and ill-considered action, but a deliberate act on the part of a dishonest borrower who does not intend to pay the incurred debt, which makes the loan attributable to the guarantor. The verb ἐγκαταλείπω, meaning the action of an ungrateful person, was already noticed in the pericope under study. In 29:14b, it describes the attitude of a shameless person towards the one asking for help, looking for someone else to become surety for them. The shameless man ignores the person in need of that form of support. A sinner, i.e. an ungrateful person, treats in the same way the one who helps them and offers to take responsibility for them. The future tense form ἐγκαταλείψει, analogous to ἀνατρέψει in v. 16, may be considered as predicative *futurum* ("will ignore"), progressive ("will be ignoring" i.e. will continue ignoring the benefactor) or gnomic ("ignores"). The direct object of the predicate in v. 17 (ἐγκαταλείψει) is ῥυσάμενον – the substantivised *participium aoristi* of the mediopassive voice (the *medium deponens*), in the masculine accusative singular, making it refer to a person (the man who is the saviour – the one who saves/rescues). In the Greek translation of the work of Ben Sira, the verb ῥύομαι ("to save", "to rescue", "to deliver", "to liberate") occurs only one more time – in 40:24bβ. The verse says that brothers and helpers are good to have in times of trouble, but a better form of salvation is almsgiving/mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη). The context of both verses, in which forms of that verb occur, is very similar. Indeed, both verses speak of rescuing and delivering someone from a difficult position/situation. Although it should be noted that the context of Sir 29:17 is economic and material hardship, whereas the situation referred to in Sir 40:24 is, literally, the time of trouble (καιρὸς θλίψεως), which may mean the material sphere but generally

expresses a hardship of a social or personal nature (e.g. persecution, rejection, hatred, etc.). On the basis of the presumption based on v. 14a, the one who offers help (the guarantor) in 29:17 is the neighbour, not the brother from 40:24. Nevertheless, it is a person close to the one for whom someone else becomes surety, which makes the situation all the more dramatic. If this was a stranger or a person with whom the relationship was less close and intimate, one could still understand the fact of leaving to the guarantor the obligation to repay the debt to the creditor, although even in that case it would be reprehensible behaviour. Even more so in the case of a relative, this is absolutely unacceptable, given the close interpersonal relationship between those people.

The perfidiousness of the person for whom another individual becomes surety is emphasised by the syntagma ἐν διανοίᾳ ("deliberately", "intentionally"). It was formed by putting in front of the noun διάνοια ("thought", "mind", "intention", "aim"[93]) the preposition ἐν. The whole expression can be regarded as *dativus modi* ("intentionally", "deliberately") or *causae* ("following the intention/aim"). The first of the above interpretations of the syntagma ἐν διανοίᾳ emphasises the manner in which the person who becomes surety for someone else is abandoned and left alone, while the second one shows the reason why the sinful ingrate does so and abandons the saviour, following the intention/aim. Both interpretations of the syntagma under analysis emphasise the fact that the one who receives the benefit in question abandons their benefactor consciously and deliberately, which further increases their responsibility and the immorality of the conduct. B.C. Gregory believes that the behaviour of the ungrateful sinner is due to their internal tendency, i.e. the lack of gratitude, which results in not recognising and acknowledging the merits and good nature of the saviour, i.e. the guarantor, the man who saved them. The scale of ingratitude is so great that, having been saved by means of suretyship, through their conduct, the sinners bring upon their benefactors the trouble which they were rescued from.[94] The roles are reversed and it is the guarantor who becomes the debtor to the creditor.

Sir 29:16–17 indicates the first risk associated with becoming surety for someone else. If one vouches for an unrighteous person (sinner) or an ingrate, the guarantor may lose their property or some part of it, depending on the amount of the debt. This happens when dishonest debtors, having received the guarantee, ignore their benefactor who took pity on them and offered the assistance, i.e. they fail to give the creditor the money back and, consequently, the guarantor has to pay the debt. Thus, the first danger arising from becoming surety for someone else is the risk for the guarantor to lose their assets.

5.3.2. Other Risks Associated with Becoming Surety for Another Person (v. 18)

The first risk associated with suretyship is that on the part of the one being supported due to their difficult financial and material situation. The second group of risks, which Ben Sira

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93   Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 405; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 106; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 536; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 155.

94   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 155–156.

presents in his reflection, relates directly to the act of suretyship, and indirectly to the person who receives such support, since suretyship – a non-living entity, cannot act. The noun ἐγγύη ("surety", "guarantee", "warranty", "deposit") is, in fact, the grammatical subject of the three stichs of the verse under consideration (18a–c), while the subject of stich 18d is the guarantors, persons facing the consequences of becoming surety for someone else (in the previous stichs, they were referred to by the complements of verbs expressing the fatal effects of becoming surety for another person). The noun ἐγγύη is etymologically related to the verb ἐγγυάω (cf. v. 14a and 8:13a, 13b) and the adjective ἔγγυος (cf. vv. 15a and 16). It was derived from the same stem (ἐγγυ) as the above two words, to which the noun suffix -η was added to indicate the effect of the action.[95] Apart from the pericope under study, it does not occur in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira (cf. v. 19aβ), while in other books of the LXX, it is used two more times: Prov 17:18b and 22:26 (cf. sec. 1). It can be said that in the analysed stich of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem, the act of suretyship is personified since it is the subject of the predicate ἀπώλεσεν ("lost"). Obviously, in his text, the author does not mean the very act of suretyship, for it being an inanimate noun cannot take any action, but describes the effects that it may bring upon someone who offers support in the form of becoming surety for someone else. The verbal form constituting the predicate in the first stich in v. 18 should therefore be considered as the active causative voice, similarly to ἐσάλευσεν in v. 18b and ἀπώκισεν in v. 18c.[96] The verb ἀπόλλυμι means the annihilation of someone or something, i.e. death or destruction. The effect of the action expressed by this word is the death of someone[97] or the complete disappearance of something that has existed.[98] Among the things that can be lost, Ben Sira includes: patience (2:14a; 41:2d), the fruit of the tree (6:3a), material goods (8:12b), inheritance (9:6b; 41:6a), trust (27:16a), friendship (27:18b), money (29:10a), shame (29:14a). Loss befalls the one who lends to a stronger person (cf. 8:12), a prostitute (cf. 9:6), the one who reveals the secret (cf. 27:16), as well as the one who gives money to the poor (cf. 29:10), an old man (cf. 41:2) and the offspring of sinners (cf. 41:6). Therefore, it quite often concerns sinful people who act in an unrighteous or unreasonable manner. The exceptions here are the old man and the person giving money to the poor. The latter group includes people who support those in need by becoming surety for them. Their good, righteous and noble deed, which should not expose them to the loss of their property or part of it, nevertheless is the reason for the above due to the dishonest conduct of the person they vouched for.

The Sage emphasises that the loss of part or perhaps even all of the guarantor's property is not a one-off and rare case but it happens frequently and has affected many people (πολλούς).[99] Moreover, this concerns not only poor or not very wealthy people but also

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95 Cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 386.
96 Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 278.
97 Cf. 3:26b; 6:4a; 8:2c; 10:3a, 16b, 17a; 17:28a; 20:22a, 22b; 22:27d; 27:18a; 28:13b; 30:23c; 31:25; 44:9b; 46:6b.
98 Cf. 2:14a; 6:3a; 8:12b; 9:6b; 27:16a, 18b; 29:10a; 29:14b; 41:2d, 6a; 49:7c.
99 Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 156.

prosperous individuals (κατευθύνοντας), i.e. fairly rich ones, whose property does not allow them to worry about the future, as their possession ensures economic and financial security for them. Once again, it should be emphasised that the Greek text does not speak of specific prosperous people but of many from that group (the substantivised adjective πολλούς and the participle that serves as an adjective connected to it in the manner of an adnominal κατευθύνοντας are not preceded by articles, which makes them have a general – generic meaning). The verb κατευθύνω (in the transitive sense "to make straight", "to lead straight", "to guide" [cf. 39:7a; 49:3a; 50:20a][100]; and in the non-transitive sense "to achieve/be successful" [cf. 49:2a][101]) in 29:18aβ refers to those who are fruitfully engaged in a business activity, which is profitable and makes them rich. It can also be applied to the moral sphere of the guarantors. They may be people who live righteous and honest lives (the biblical metaphor of walking upright). It is important to note that both of the aspects expressed by that participle are not just temporary or realised over a given period of time, but are permanent and happen continuously in the lives of the many people referred to in v. 18a (this is emphasised by the *participium praesentis* form, which has an imperfective aspect, i.e. it refers an ongoing action, stretched over time). Although those people skilfully conducted their economic and financial activities and managed their businesses very well, which brought them certain wealth and possession, they got into trouble by becoming surety for someone else and their assets were destroyed, i.e. they went bankrupt.[102] The described outcome of becoming surety for another person is identical to that presented earlier, in v. 16 – the destruction of the guarantor's property.

   The second risk associated with becoming surety for someone else, which the Sage draws attention to, though less dangerous and not causing the downfall of prosperous people, is a major shake-up in their lives (ἐσάλευσεν αὐτούς, v. 18bα), which Ben Sira compares to the impact of a sea wave (ὡς κῦμα θαλάσσης, v. 18bβ).[103] The verb σαλεύω ("to rock", "to sway", "to shake", "to joggle", "to move") expresses the loss of a physical, inner or spiritual balance (cf. 16:18; 43:16; 48:19), which may have serious consequences in a person's life since it may lead to a fall in a physical sense (falling over; cf. 13:21) or in a metaphorical sense (some serious perturbations as a result of which someone loses important moral, religious or material goods – cf. 28:14; 48:12). In 29:18b it is a reference to a situation posing a significant danger that does not lead to a fall but is a shake-up to the lives of prosperous people (they are referred to by the third-person plural personal pronoun in the masculine accusative αὐτούς). It is such a strong shake-up of their entire lives that it may contribute to a great disaster, i.e. total destruction or bankruptcy.[104] Ben Sira compares that loss of

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100   B.M. Zapff interprets the participle κατευθύνοντας as referring to a person who steers a sinking ship (cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182).

101   Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 925; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, II, 249; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 1119; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 389.

102   Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 184; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 156.

103   Cf. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 211.

104   Cf. Vigini, *Siracide*, 174.

stability to the impact of a sea wave, which may lead to the destruction of the whole ship or serious damage (cf. 43:24a). In this case, becoming surety for another person does not destroy the guarantor completely but seriously affects their entire life and many of its aspects. They may come close to a fall, which it does not happen after all, and their life and property are saved.[105] The situation of the guarantor described in v. 18b may be compared to the fate and life of a man ignoring the Law, who, in 33:2b, is compared to a ship tossed by waves and close to destruction – annihilation.[106]

The third effect of becoming surety for another person mentioned by the Sage is the risk of being forced to leave one's home country and ending up in exile in foreign lands, among unknown people (v. 18cd). Once again, it is not the very act of suretyship that directly forces the guarantors to leave their home country (cf. vv. 18a and 18b). The necessity to leave one's homeland is the consequence of the dishonest attitude of the suretyship beneficiary towards the payment of their debt. The active voice of the form ἀπῴκισεν (from the verb ἀποικίζω – "to drive out of one's home, country", "to remove"[107]) should therefore be considered, like the predicates in the previous two stichs (v. 18ab), as the active causative voice.[108] Both the very meaning of the verb ἀποικίζω, from which the aorist form ἀπῴκισεν is derived, and the tense in which it is expressed emphasise the leaving of the homeland by the guarantors, who, in v. 18cα, are referred to as prosperous men (ἄνδρες δυνατοί). The syntagma ἄνδρας δυνατούς, which is the direct object of the predicate ἀπῴκισεν, is not preceded by an article (neither the noun that forms part of it nor the adjective linked to it in the manner of an adnominal have articles), therefore it has a generic meaning that emphasises the nature of those people. Its plural form, in turn, indicates again (cf. πολλούς in v. 18aα) that the fact of becoming surety for somebody else had negative consequences not only for some, i.e. individual people, but it had a widespread socio-economic impact on many people who became liable for someone else's debt and who used to be prosperous individuals. Apart from 29:18c, the adjective δυνατός ("having power", "great", "mighty", "strong") is found two more times in the Greek translation of the work of Ben Sira. In 21:7αβ, it is substantivised and used to denote a man "strong in speech", while in 47:5c, it is used to express the physical strength of Goliath defeated by David. In 29:18c, it is used to describe power associated with both financial and material resources, in which case the adjective would refer to the property and wealth of a mighty man and their position in the social hierarchy. Thus, it would be a reference to a man holding a high position or having some authority over a community (e.g. leader of the people, judge, etc.), which allowed that person to dominate others. In antiquity, it was quite common for these two types of power to

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105   Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 184.
106   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 155.
107   Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 200; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 50; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 290; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 74. The verb is derived from the stem ἀπ.οικ of the verb ἀποικέω ("to emigrate", "to colonise"), to which the causative suffix -ίζω - was added (cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 178).
108   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 278.

be held by the same person, therefore v. 18c might refer to someone who might have had both attributes described by the adjective δυνατός. Thus, it was not a "mere-ranking member of the community" but someone occupying an exceptional social position or somebody very wealthy – or both. If the negative consequences of becoming surety for someone else affected those performing such important roles in the Jewish community, it might have been even worse for ordinary people. They were much more exposed to the risk of having to flee their home country in order not to be deprived of their possession than wealthy and influential people who had connections in the circle of important people and were most probably protected in some way by their influential colleagues.

The fourth stich, v. 18, specifies and further determines the effect of becoming surety for another person, mentioned in the preceding stich (v. 18c). Having left their home and their homeland, the guarantors, who were once powerful people (rich and holding important positions in the social hierarchy), find themselves among strangers, far away from their country (ἐπλανήθησαν ἐν ἔθνεσιν ἀλλοτρίοις). In v. 18d, the subject is no longer the act of suretyship, but the mighty men who had to leave their own country as a consequence of once becoming surety for other individuals. Those are subjects in plural form connoted by the form ἐπλανήθησαν – the predicate in the fourth stich in v. 18. The verb πλανάω in the passive takes on the meaning "to stray", "to wander", "to be lost", "to get lost". In the passive voice, in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, it appears seven more times, apart from 29:18dα. A beautiful woman led many astray (cf. 9:8c). A man who is lost in his life wonders about silly things (cf. 16:23b). Whoever chases money will get lost looking for it, possibly because of it (cf. 31:5b). Whoever has travelled (ἀνὴρ πεπλανημένος) has come to know many things and matters (cf. 34:9a) and enriched their wisdom (cf. 34:10b). A man without a wife is a sighing wanderer (cf. 36:25b). Ben Sira began to travel while he was still young (cf. 51:13a). As can be seen from the cursory use of the analysed verb in the passive in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira, it may take on two meanings: first, it may refer to wandering – understood as morally wrong conduct, and second, it may mean travelling. It is in the second sense that ἐπλανήθησαν in 29:18dα should be understood, which should be regarded as a complexive aorist, i.e. determining an activity continued or repeated in the past that has come to an end.[109] Their wandering might have ended with their death or they might have finally found a new place to live, where they might have settled down and started a new life. Powerful people had to abandon their homeland, so they kept on wandering, unable to find a permanent place to stay in the distant places among foreign nations. In ancient times, this was associated with great risks, which involved – like travelling, even the loss of life.

It is worth paying attention to the syntagma defining the place to which the poor guarantors, forced to leave their homelands, went. It is described not by a reference to a space – a place – but to persons. They escaped and stayed, wandering, leading a non-sedentary lifestyle among foreign nations. The fact of changing the place of stay is emphasised by

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109   Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 331.

the plural dative ἔθνεσιν ("[among] nations"), which means that they constantly changed their place of stay in exile, moved over long distances, since the reference is made not to one but many nations. The syntagma ἐν ἔθνεσιν ἀλλοτρίοις highlights another aspect of the escape of the regrettable guarantors. They did not move far away from their homeland, but moved very far away from that place, since the Greek text mentions nations and yet foreign nations. Both the noun ἔθνος ("nation", "people", "foreign peoples" – in the plural, "pagans"[110]) in the plural form and the adjective linked to it in the manner of an adnominal ἀλλότριος ("belonging to another", "somebody else's", "foreign"[111]; cf. 8:18a; 9:8b; 11:34a; 23:22b, 23d) emphasise that the guarantors, who had to leave their homeland, radically changed their environment and were forced to stay among strangers, people not associated with Jews in any way. This highlights even more the tragedy of the unfortunate benefactors. The analysed words indicating the places of relocation of the unlucky guarantors are not preceded by articles, thus they do not indicate specific nations but emphasise their quality, i.e. the fact of being completely unfamiliar. Apart from 29:18dβ, the syntagma ἔθνος ἀλλότριος appears three more times in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach. In 36:2a, it refers to enemies – not only of God but also of Israel, while in 39:4c, it refers to people living in the vicinity of the Jewish state who have different customs and culture, although they are not hostile. Sir 49:5b, in turn, speaks of the last rulers of Judah giving their power and glory to a foreign nation, hostile to them. When mentioned in the Greek text of the Book of Sirach, foreign nations do not necessarily always mean enemies of Israel, as is the case in 36:2a and 49:5b. They may have had a tolerant attitude towards Jews (cf. 39:4c and 29:18b), but were always foreign, i.e. of a different religion, culture and traditions. There were no close relations between the two groups, except perhaps in the sense of geography, economy and commerce.

Commenting on the necessity for the one who has become surety for someone else to leave their country, H. Langkammer wonders whether in v. 18cd Ben Sira refers to the Babylonian Captivity. He states that this is not certain, however, in his opinion, "some similarities are noticeable."[112] Sadly, he does not specify the details, and based only on the necessity of leaving one's homeland is not enough to give a positive answer to that question.

When discussing the necessity for powerful people to flee from their country as a consequence of the suretyship referred to in Sir 29:18cd, the question must be asked why they had to leave their homeland and go to an unfamiliar place. The preceding context suggests that those people had to do so as they had been driven to bankruptcy, i.e., they lost

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110   Cf. G. Bertram, "ἔθνος, ἐθικός. A. People and Peoples in the LXX," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) II, 366–369; H. Bietenhard, "ἔθνος," *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, ed. 2 (Carlisle: Paternoster 1986) II, 791–792.

111   Cf. H. Bietenhard, "ἀλλότριος," *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, ed. 2 (ed. C. Brown) (Carlisle: Paternoster 1986) I, 684–685; F. Büchsel, "ἄλλος, ἀλλότριος, ἀπαλλοτριόω, ἀλλογενής, ἀλλόφυλος," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1995) I, 265.

112   Langkammer, *Księga Syracha*, 240.

their property and therefore had to go to a foreign land to start a new life there. There is, however, another possibility, i.e. that they did so in order not to be deprived of all their possession. They did not want to pay the debt of another person – whom they had become surety for, so they fled not to lose everything they owned, especially real property. If this was the reason for them leaving their home country, they would turn out to be dishonest towards the creditor to whom they had promised to pay the debt in question. In that case, the guarantors would be dishonest because they did not want to repay the loan they took responsibility for and run away so as not to go bankrupt. Ben Sira, however, does not seem to have had that kind of case in mind but speaks of people who paid off the debt of those who were unable or unwilling to do so, which ruined them and made them lose everything they owned, which led them to go to foreign lands to seek happiness and start a new life there. Thus, the Sage does not assume the dishonesty of the guarantors, which he does in relation to the suretyship beneficiaries, but speaks of reliable and upright people who fulfilled their obligation to repay the debt of another person whom they had vouched for, therefore they lost everything they had and were forced to go to foreign countries seeing no prospects for themselves in their current place of residence.

The central stichs (v. 18) of the section on the risks associated with suretyship, directly related to becoming surety for someone else, clearly show the dangers the guarantor was exposed to, even if that person was a man of wealth and prominence.[113] Even rich people, with power and extensive influence and contacts, were at risk of losing everything they owned, or just part of their property, if they became surety for a dishonest man who took advantage of their good heart and generosity. They once rescued a person in need, but following that gesture of support, they got into serious trouble and needed help themselves.[114]

5.3.3. Attitude of a Sinner Towards Suretyship (v. 19)

In the last verse of the section on the risks associated with suretyship, Ben Sira goes back to the figure of a sinner (ἁμαρτωλός; cf. v. 16β). Verses 16–17 and v. 19 form the framework of that section of Sir 29:14–20, the centre of which is the description of the dangers directly associated with becoming responsible for someone else's debt. It should also be noted that both verses concerning the sinner are constructed using synonymous parallelism. Based on that observation, it should be noticed that in v. 19, the sinner (ἁμαρτωλός) in v. 19aα corresponds to the profit-chaser (διώκων ἐργολαβίας) in v. 19bα,[115] while getting involved in suretyship (ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς ἐγγύην) in v. 19aβ is synonymous with being subjected to court judgements (ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς κρίσεις) in v. 1bβ.[116]

The sinner referred to in v. 19a may be identified with ἁμαρτωλός in v. 16 or it may be considered that it is about another person. That noun is not preceded by an article, hence it has a general – generic meaning in both verses, i.e. it emphasises the nature of that man

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113   Cf. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 206.
114   Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.
115   Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 371.
116   Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.

but does not indicate a specific person. If both words refer to the same category of people, then the punishment for the injustice done to the guarantor by not paying the debt would be for the one vouching for someone else to fall into the trap of suretyship. This can be understood in two ways. First, the guarantor would be forced to ask someone else to become surety for them, and second, that person would risk ruining their life as a consequence of becoming surety for somebody else. The syntagma ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς ἐγγύην (literally "will fall into the trap of suretyship") may be understood in the two indicated ways. According to the first possible interpretation, being in a situation where the person has to ask for help in the form of a guarantee is a punishment because it means that their economic and material position is so bad that without the loan and someone else becoming responsible for them one cannot handle it – the individual got into trouble and needs assistance. The situation is all the more risky since that person has betrayed their guarantor, therefore most probably no one will want to vouch for them and, consequently, there is no chance of getting a loan thus they will go bankrupt and will have to beg in the streets to survive. That person has to suffer as a consequence of being dishonest in the past. Based on the second way of interpretation of the syntagma ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς ἐγγύην, falling into the trap of suretyship means that the sinner became surety for someone else exposing themselves to the danger of being cheated on – just as they took advantage of the trust on the part of their guarantor and dealt with them in an unjust and treacherous manner. Both interpretations indicate that the sinner finds themselves in a difficult situation that poses a serious direct threat to their property and, indirectly, to their life.

If, in turn, the noun ἁμαρτωλός, having the generic meaning indicated by the absence of an article, does not refer to the character mentioned in v. 16, it would mean any person who commits any wrongdoing, not necessarily relating to the field of suretyship or economy. In this case, stich 29:19a would have a general meaning and would be a warning addressed to all sinners indicating that if they continue their wrong behaviour they will be punished with all the dangers involved in suretyship, described by the Sage in the previous verses (cf. vv. 16–18).

B.C. Gregory claims that the main character in v. 19, i.e. the sinner, can be considered either a lender who hopes to take over the guarantor's property in the event of the borrower's insolvency, or a guarantor who demands payment for becoming liable for the debt.[117] J. Corley confirms the latter possibility, arguing that the character in v. 19 is an ambitious guarantor who tries to gain some profit by getting involved in the suretyship, and who will be subjected to a lawsuit for that reason.[118]

Apart from 29:19, the verb ἐμπίπτω ("to fall into") occurs eight more times in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach (cf. 2:18a; 8:1b; 9:3b; 13:10a; 27:26a; 28:23a; 29:20b and 38:15b).[119] Aside from 13:10a, where it takes on the meaning of "to push, to

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117   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 156–157.
118   Cf. Corley, *Sirach*, 83. Cf. also Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 146.
119   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.

press", it expresses finding oneself in some difficult, risky situation. The object of the verb, expressed by the syntagma εἰς + *accusativus*, may mean the hands of God or a man/doctor, the snare of a woman of debauchery, a pit or a flame. The objects alone emphasise the extremely difficult situation of the person fallen into the trap since they express either a punishment or an imminent threat to human life. Also, the very construction of the object highlights the effective finding oneself in danger, since the preposition εἰς ("into" in the sense of towards the interior – inside) is used based on a "preposition competition"[120] instead of ἐν ("into", the use of this preposition would be expected since the compound verb ἐνπίπτω* should be combined with ἐν or the dative, not with εἰς). In 29:19a the sinner will fall into the trap of suretyship, which will be both a punishment for them and a threat to their standard of living so far. This emphasises the drama of their fate, since it means that their material and economic situation is very bad and they need help or may be deceived by the persons they have vouched for, just as they did to the one who had vouched for them, if ἁμαρτωλός in v. 16 and 19a is the same person. The first as well as the second interpretation indicates that they are on the verge of bankruptcy and losing their property. The analogous position of the sinner, which threatens their life, is referred to in 38:15. Although both situations in which the unvirtuous men find themselves are completely different (illness in 38:15 and the spectre of bankruptcy in 29:19), they actually pose a threat to their lives.

With the use of synonymous parallelism in Sir 29:19, the sinner is defined as a man chasing after gain (διώκων ἐργολαβίας[121]).[122] The *participium praesentis activi* διώκων poses a difficulty in its interpretation, since it may be regarded as having the function of an adverb – an adverbial referring to ἐμπεσεῖται (v. 19bβ; "chasing...will fall into") or it can be considered substantivised and expressing the subject of the second stich in v. 19 ("chasing [by implication a man]"). The lack of an article before this participle makes both interpretations acceptable. However, based on the construction of the entire v. 19, i.e. synonymic parallelism, it should be considered that the verb form under analysis must be interpreted as a substantivised participle that functions as the subject of the second stich in v. 19. Besides 29:19b the substantivalised *participium praesentis* of the verb διώκω occurs two more times in the Greek version of the Book of Sirach. In 31:5, the man who loves god (ὁ ἀγαπῶν χρυσίον) is compared to the one who chases after money (ὁ διώκων διάφορα). The former will not be justified (οὐ δικαιωθήσεται), while the latter will go astray because of material goods (ἐν αὐτοῖς πλανηθήσεται). Sir 34:2, in turn, says that the one who believes in dreams is like the one chasing after the wind (διώκων ἄνεμον) and trying to grasp

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120 Cf. Piwowar, *Składnia*, § 242.

121 The noun ἐργολαβία is *hapax legomenon* in the LXX (cf. Hatch – Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 541). In classical Greek, it can mean "profit", "contract (related to admission to work)" or "use" referring to the work of others (cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 682; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 180; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 841; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 289; also Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 184; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182). Etymologically, it means to employ someone (cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 545), but it may also relate to receiving/obtaining the fruits of labour, i.e. profit/earning.

122 Cf. Vigini, *Siracide*, 174.

the shadow. In the context of the interpretation of Sir 29:19b, the aforementioned quotation of Sir 31:5 is very telling and important. For this verse states that the pursuit of and attachment to the greatest possible wealth and riches leads to destruction, manifested by lack of justification and going astray. A similar bad fate awaits the profit seeker in 29:19b. Thus, Ben Sira condemns the pursuit of profit and increasing one's wealth as dangerous for man.[123] For facing court judgements is to be understood as being guilty of some crime. In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, apart from 29:19bβ, the noun κρίσις ("judgment", "conviction", "condemnation", "punishment", "court") is found eleven more times[124] in GI and one more time in 19:25c (GII).[125] When it refers to a court judgment or the act of judgment in the sense of legal proceedings against the accused, it is generally associated with the wrongdoing of someone and finding that person guilty, especially if the judge is God (cf. 33:13d; 35:18b, 23a). Why will a profit seeker be subjected to legal proceedings? From the context of the entire pericope on suretyship, it can be concluded that such a person, while chasing after profit, helped someone else, i.e. became surety for somebody else, not selflessly – as the Law required (prohibition of lending at interest and usury; cf. Ex 22:24–25; Lev 25:36; Deut 23:20; 24:12–13; and Amos 2:8), but demanded from the person being in a difficult material and economic situation, who asked for such support, money or some other goods in return. By doing so, that individual violated the provisions on selfless help to one's neighbour, therefore was handed over to the court for breaking the Law.[126] The person got into trouble due to the desire to make a profit and become rich by taking advantage of someone else. B.M. Zapff believes that v. 19b may also refer to various types of suretyship-related schemes leading to the seizure by the creditor of the guarantor's property or some part of it.[127]

The rather enigmatic v. 19, because of the difficulty of identifying the sinner to whom it refers,[128] summarises the risks associated with suretyship. Any malpractice in this regard may turn out to be a disaster for the one who committed it and was dishonest. Ben Sira indirectly condemns self-interest in suretyship, i.e. the demand of some form of compensation by the guarantor who wants to make a profit and gain something for incurring the risk in the form of taking responsibility for someone else's debt. At the same time, he warns against that kind of iniquity. According to the Sage, assistance should be selfless because it is not acceptable to enrich oneself at the expense of others in need of support and who are in a difficult material situation. Such unworthy conduct will be punished and the one who acts that way is a sinner as they break the Law.

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123 Cf. Langkammer, *Księga Syracha*, 240.
124 Cf. Sir 3:2b; 11:9b; 16:26a; 18:20a; 25:4b; 33:13d, 30b; 35:18b, 23a; 38:16c.
125 Cf. Auwers, *Concordance du Siracide*, 50.
126 Cf. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 210–211; Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 184; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 156; Langkammer, *Księga Syracha*, 240; Palmisano, *Siracide*, 274; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 371–372; Vigini, *Siracide*, 174; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.
127 Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.
128 Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 156–157.

5.4.   Summary of the Sage's Teaching – The Order to Become Surety for Someone Else (v. 20)

Verse 20, ending the teaching of Ben Sira on suretyship, clearly refers to v. 14, which is the introduction to the pericope 29:14–20. The two verses are linked by a noun τὸ πλησίον ("neighbour"; cf. vv. 14aβ and 20aα)[129] and the idea of helping a person in need – expressed by ἀντιλαβοῦ ("help", v. 20aα)[130] and ἐγγυήσεται (literally "will vouch/will become surety for", v. 14aβ).[131] It should be emphasised that the opening verse of the pericope on suretyship does not order getting involved but states that a good man supports a person in need by becoming surety for them, whereas v. 20a explicitly orders the reader, despite the associated risks (vv. 16–19), to support the one asking for assistance in the form of becoming their guarantor.

The predicate in the first stich in v. 20 is a form of the aorist imperative mode (ἀντιλαβοῦ), the implied subject of which is the Sage's disciple/listener. The wise teacher addresses his disciple directly with a firm command to support their neighbour. Indeed, the *imperativus aoristi* is an order for the immediate performance of the action it refers to. The Sage leaves his disciple no opportunity to discuss the command; the order should be performed with no hesitation, without questioning it, and with no further negotiation. The verb ἀντιλαμβάνομαι ("to grasp", "to secure", "to help", "to stand up for someone"[132]) in the LXX and the Greek version of the Book of Sirach is *medium deponens*, i.e. it is in the mediopassive voice but with the meaning in the active voice. It is of great importance as the mediopassive voice of the imperative aorist ἀντιλαβοῦ does not relate to the action of the subject for their own benefit, but the object of the action is the neighbour (τοῦ πλησίον). Based on the etymology of that verb (the improper preposition ἀντί ["instead of", "in exchange for"] and the verb λαμβάνω ["to take"][133]), it is about acting for the benefit or in the place of someone else. Apart from 29:20a, that verb occurs five more times in the Greek version of the work of Ben Sira. God is its subject only once (cf. 2:6a). In all other cases, it refers to the action of man. It should be emphasised that whenever its subject is a human being, it means an order (ἀντιλαβοῦ, cf. 3:12a and 29:9a) or a prohibition addressed to a sinner (μὴ ἀντιλάβῃ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ, cf. 12:4b, 7b) and the message is dedicated directly to the Sage's disciple (second person singular, as in 29:20aα). In the context of the analysis of 29:20a, 29:9a is a very important text speaking of the necessity to help another person, since it urges coming to the aid of a poor person, following the commandment (χάριν ἐντολῆς – literally "for the sake of/because of the commandment/order", "because of the commandment/order"). Thus, helping another person is not based solely on compassion or mercy but, first and foremost, it is the fulfilment of the commandment of the Lord. This confirms

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129   Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 372.

130   Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.

131   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.

132   Cf. Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 157; Lust – Eynikel – Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 40–41; Montanari, *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, 242; Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 59.

133   Cf. Romizi, *Vocabolario*, 139.

the intuition expressed earlier that becoming surety for another person in economic and material distress is the fulfilment of the commandment to love the neighbour.

The command to help expressed by Ben Sira in 29:20a is not universal, i.e. always valid, in any circumstances, or applicable to every person. It has some limitations and applies only to a neighbour, i.e. a person with whom the Sage's disciple has some sort of relationship. The same limitation applies to suretyship (cf. v. 14a). It is necessary to help, that is, in the context of the whole pericope, to vouch only for one's neighbour, i.e. for a person whom one knows and has a certain relationship with – some kind of closeness. This is to avoid the risks associated with suretyship. By vouching for a stranger, one cannot be sure whether that person will act in an appropriate way and won't ignore their guarantor in the future driving them to bankruptcy and forcing them to go to a distant country (cf. vv. 16–18). By assisting someone familiar, one risks much less than in the case of helping a stranger, although even then one may be deceived by the person whom one supports and trusts.

Therefore, the first limitation relating to suretyship is the individual one assists. The second, but no less important, is the property of the guarantor. Based on the above, V. Morla Asensio concludes that the message in 20a – compared to v. 14a, is more neutral,[134] i.e. there is more prudence and caution. This is expressed by the syntagma κατὰ δύναμίν σου. In the Greek version of the Book of Sirach, the noun δύναμις ("power", "might", "strength") in the sense of "possibility/ability" is found only in 8:13a (μὴ ἐγγυήσῃ ὑπὲρ δύναμίν σου – literally "do not vouch beyond your ability"), which is a reference – like the whole pericope under study – to suretyship. Uttering these words, Ben Sira warns his disciples not to vouch beyond their ability, i.e. not to provide a guarantee that would exceed their financial capability and assets, which could lead to trouble or cause serious economic and financial problems for them (cf. Tob 4:8). Taking one's possibilities into account is a call not to overestimate one's wealth and property, and thus – not to provide a guarantee exceeding the value of one's assets, and not to risk losing an amount that could pose some risk to the guarantor if the borrower is unable or unwilling to repay their debt to the creditor and the guarantor is forced to do it instead. Each guarantor should reasonably and prudently assess their ability to help their neighbour and offer support only if their assets allow them to do so and their possession will not be seriously threatened.[135] The same idea is presented in 8:13a – the prohibition of becoming surety beyond one's capability, i.e. material resources, property.[136]

These are two limitations that anyone asked to become a party in the act of suretyship should take into account and consider before becoming liable for someone else's debt. They are also the basis for refusing to vouch for someone, which Ben Sira implicitly (*implicite*) allows, despite the express (*explicite*) commandment to help. Thus, the Sage allows the refusal of becoming surety for someone else if the two above-mentioned restrictions are not observed. The reason for refusal should not be a reluctance to help a person in need, but

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134   Cf. Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico*, 149.
135   Cf. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 210–211; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.
136   Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 185; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158–159; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 372.

concern for one's life and one's family, which may be at risk in the event of becoming surety for a stranger, thus acting in an imprudent way, offering assistance beyond one's possibilities.

The second stich confirms the reasons for refusing the type of help under study, drawing attention to prudence towards oneself (πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ μὴ ἐμπέσης – "beware, lest you fall") as the main argument for not becoming liable for someone else's debt. Sir 29:20b consists of a main sentence expressing a command – an order (πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ) and an intentional subordinate clause (μὴ ἐμπέσης), in which the conjunction ἵνα, possibly ὅπως ("in order to", "so that"), introducing that type of subordinate sentence is omitted.

In v. 20bα, Ben Sira again directly addresses his disciple using the imperative form of the present tense, the active voice and the second person singular πρόσεχε ("beware"). This time, it is a command uttered using *imperativus praesentis*, which refers to repeating or continuing the action expressed by the verb. Thus, the Sage urges his disciple to be constantly on guard and careful, not to make some mistake involving a lack of prudence or reason. Apart from 29:20b, the verb προσέχω ("to pay attention to something", "to watch something closely", "to pay attention to someone") can be found sixteen more times in the Greek version of the work of the Sage of Jerusalem, of which as many as eight times in the identical form as in the stich under analysis (cf. 1:29a; 6:13b; 7:24a; 11:33a; 13:8a.13a; 16:24b and 28:26a). Πρόσεχε always means a warning, an admonishment to watch over some aspect of one's life (cf. 1:29b; 13:8a, 13a; 16:24b; 28:26a) or towards others (cf. 6:13b; 7:24a; 11:33a). Of all these texts, in the context of the analysis of 29:20b, attention should be drawn to 13:8a and 28:26a, since the former calls for vigilance so as not to be deceived (πρόσεχε μὴ ἀποπλανηθῇς) and the latter recommends staying aware so as not to slip, i.e. not to lose balance and fall (μήπως ὀλίσθῃς ἐν αὐτῇ μὴ πέσῃς) into someone else's trap. Also in 29:20b, Ben Sira encourages his disciple to be mindful of whom they want to help and stay prudent while acting. The above is emphasised by the use of the reflexive pronoun σεαυτῷ ("himself/herself") instead of the personal pronoun in the singular dative (σοι/σοί – "you").

The intentional subordinate clause states the danger against which Ben Sira warns his disciple. It is a fall (μὴ ἐμπέσης) or, more literally, falling into. In the Greek text, the same verb ἐμπίπτω – as in vv. 19a and 19b, is used.[137] Verse 20b, however, does not specify what the disciple of the Sage may fall into (there is no object expressed using the syntagma εἰς + *accusativus*), but one can guess from the context that it refers to falling into the trouble and danger associated with becoming someone else's surety.[138]

In the conclusion of his reflection on suretyship, Ben Sira goes back to the initial idea, according to which a person who needs support in the form of a guarantee should be helped.[139] However, this is not an absolute order, i.e. independent of the circumstances, applicable in every case and every request of that type. The Sage encourages caution and

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137   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.
138   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.
139   Cf. Vigini, *Siracide*, 174.

not to offer that form of support to unknown persons or strangers or in situations where it might pose a risk of getting into serious financial trouble.[140] An order for support by means of becoming surety for another person has two limitations: personal (it should be offered only to a neighbour) and economic (the amount should not exceed the financial possibilities of the guarantor). Taking these two factors into account before becoming a party in the act of suretyship is a manifestation of reason and prudence,[141] i.e. one of the main indications of wisdom.

Conclusions

Ben Sira, in his teaching on suretyship, encourages (cf. v. 14a and v. 20a) – despite the risks associated with that type of assistance, offering help to the person in need of financial and material support (cf. vv. 16–19) and becoming surety for such an individual. He is a realist who closely observes the events around him, therefore he notices the possible risks associated with such a form of assistance and thus does not want to stay silent (cf. vv. 16–18) and warns his disciple of the dangers. Despite the serious threats (the possibility of bankruptcy and the necessity to leave the home country), he supports the act of becoming surety for someone who asks for such help. However, being aware of the consequences of the improper conduct of the suretyship beneficiaries towards the creditors and guarantors, he advises to stay prudent and use common sense when it comes to such aid. As per the Sage, that form of help might be refused if one does not know the one asking for it, or if the amount of the loan threatens the position of the guarantor. The order to help is therefore not bounding but involves the above-mentioned limitations relating to the assistance in the form of becoming liable for someone else's debt. Taking them into account is an indication of reasonableness and prudence, i.e. one needs to take a wise and well-thought-out decision so as not to expose themselves or their family to financial problems.[142]

Ben Sira also reminds the person who was vouched for of the need to fulfil the obligation to repay the debt, so as not to expose the guarantor to the loss of part or even all of their property (cf. v. 15).[143] The one who is dishonest and unfair in this regard is called by the Sage of Jerusalem a sinner.[144]

Ben Sira's teaching on suretyship differs fundamentally from the message of the Book of Proverbs, which radically forbids that form of assistance.[145] B.C. Gregory describes

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140   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158.
141   Cf. Palmisano, *Siracide*, 274; Vigini, *Siracide*, 174; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, 182.
142   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 163.
143   Cf. Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 186; Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 211.
144   Cf. Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico*, 149.
145   "Ben Sira ne s'oppose donc pas au cautionnement. Il demande seulement que le débiteur soit loyal vis-à-vis de son garant et que celui-ci ne soit ni naïf ni malhonnêtement assoiffé de profit" (Gilbert, "Prêt, aumône et caution," 185). "De todos modos, esta unidad literaria es un buen botón de muestra del profundo sentido de la misericordia que tenía el autor del Eclesiástico" (Morla Asensio, *Eclesiastico*, 149). "[...] the generosity

the teaching of the Sage of Jerusalem as a true and real progress in the approach to the issue of suretyship compared to the message in the Book of Proverbs.[146] The Sage, being influenced by the commandment to help one's neighbour, significantly relaxes the prohibition in the Book of Proverbs (B.C. Gregory, in turn, claims that the change noticeable in the teaching of Ben Sira might be the outcome of the teaching in Gen 43:9 and Isa 38:14[147]). He does so guided primarily by religious motives, seeing the act of suretyship as a form of magnanimity and generosity towards those in need,[148] whereas the Book of Proverbs seems to have been influenced by rational thinking and purely human caution relating only or mainly to the financial dimension. Ben Sira recognises the risks, but despite them encourages becoming surety for others, which should be preceded by a rational assessment of the situation of those in need. The form of assistance in question does not release from the obligation to stay prudent and cautious. The above may be the only reason for refusing to become liable for someone else.

Perhaps another reason for the change in Ben Sira's approach to suretyship in relation to the Book of Proverbs was the economic and material situation of the people in the time of the Sage.[149] The spreading Hellenistic influence brought changes in economic and financial matters. Many Jews might have been in a difficult financial situation and needed support and someone becoming surety for them so that they could obtain a loan that would enable their survival and maintain their current standard of living. Suretyship was to support them and allow them to make ends meet without having to leave their country and emigrate to the neighbouring lands. Therefore, the motive for the change in Ben Sira's teaching on suretyship might have also been the will to strengthen the Jewish community in Palestine, keep it in their home country and preserve their identity and culture.

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recommended by Ben Sira despite the dismal social portrait of vv. 16–19 stands out as a unique development within Israelite and Jewish tradition" (Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 158). Cf. Alonso Schökel, *Proverbios y Eclesiastico*, 249; Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des Sages*, 211; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 160–162; Lipiński, "Gage et cautionnement," 222; Pérez Rodríguez, "Eclesiástico," 1208; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 211; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 145–146; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 173.

[146]   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 160.

[147]   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 162. See also Seeligmann, "Darlehen," 328.

[148]   Cf. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 162–163, 169–170. "Ben Sira riporta la cauzione a una forma di elemosina" (Duesberg – Fransen, *Ecclesiastico*, 223).

[149]   Cf. Alonso Schökel, *Proverbios y Eclesiastico*, 249; Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 160–161; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 210; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 146.

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