

Pancratius C. Beentjes. “Happy the One who Meditates on Wisdom” (Sir 14,20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira. CBET 43. Leuven: Peeters 2006. Pp. xvi + 386. ISBN: 90-429-1751-2. \$66.00 USD, paper.

1. Earlier in the current issue of *TC*, we had the privilege to review a collected volume of Johannes Marböck, a volume that contains primarily essays on the early Jewish wisdom book of Jesus Ben Sira. This magnificent book has experienced a sort of a renaissance in research in the last quarter of century. This is conveniently witnessed by the fact that in the same year that Marböck’s volume appeared (2006), another collection of articles has been published, too, focusing on diverse problems of Ben Sira.
2. Pancratius Beentjes is certainly one of the most engaged and pre-eminent students of Ben Sira. Since his dissertation on the relationship of this book to the rest of the Old Testament, and especially to the Pentateuch (*Jesus Sirach en Tenach*, 1981), he has published extensively on this important document of early 2nd century BCE Palestinian Judaism. This volume collects together these contributions, written during the last two decades.
3. The introductory essay, first published in 2005, treats “Some Major Topics in Ben Sira Research” (pp. 3-16): texts and versions, structure, attitude towards Hellenism, and use of Scripture, respectively. After this basic and informative introduction—which lacks perhaps only one aspect: the place of Ben Sira in contemporary society—the volume has three essential parts: “Studies of Literary Units” (pp. 19-165, containing 12 essays), “Essays on Thematic Topics” (pp. 169-279, containing 7 essays), and “The Hebrew Text(s) of Ben Sira” (pp. 283-374, containing 8 essays). The strongest merit of the contributions of the first part is that they cover not only “popular,” oft-discussed passages of Ben Sira, but the reader finds treatments of generally neglected pericopae as well. The second part has on the one hand a strong intertextual interest (see especially contributions 14 and 15: “In Search of Parallels: Ben Sira and the Book of Kings” [pp. 187-99] and “Relations between Ben Sira and the Book of Isaiah: Some Methodological Observations” [pp. 201-06]), and on the other hand, it treats topics that show the importance of Ben Sira within the broader field of research on early Judaism (see, e.g., contributions 13 and 19: “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira” [pp. 169-86] and “Theodicy in the Wisdom of Ben Sira” [pp. 265-79]).
4. The third part of the volume leads the reader into the field on which Beentjes has made the most important contribution for Ben Sira research, namely, the complicated area of the Hebrew text of Ben Sira. It is well known that the book is preserved in its entirety in Greek, but Hebrew fragments of different sizes were discovered in the Cairo Geniza, in Qumran and in Masada from 1896 until as late as 1982 (MS F). Despite the growing number of these discoveries, despite the fact that they testify to approximately two-third of the entire material of the book, and despite the fact that they shed a very important light on the textual history of Ben Sira, the scholarly public did not have a critical edition of these fragments until the work of Beentjes— published in 1997 as *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*. The third part of the present volume thus collects essays which can be considered as by-products of Beentjes’ editorial activity.
5. These previously published essays are nicely collected and edited here together, testifying to the activity of a first-rate scholar. It is a pity, that the book lacks consistent cross-references of the contributions, and the list of abbreviations is imperfect. Regarding the content, however, Beentjes’ volume is a pleasant addition to the Ben Sira research.

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