ABSTRACT

“NOW I WILL RECALL THE WORKS OF GOD”:
ALLUSION AND INTERTEXTUALITY
IN SIRACH 42:15–43:33

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Since the discovery of the Hebrew fragments of Sirach in the Cairo Geniza, the study of influence and intertextuality has been pervasive. However, previous scholars have generally overestimated the occurrence of literary allusion, partially due to the lack of a universally accepted method and nomenclature. This dissertation addresses that issue by investigating Ben Sira’s deployment of culturally constructed registers related to the storm-god theophany, the combat myth, divine speech, and the sapiential register in Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Creator. Using a reconstructed version of the Masada Manuscript, none of the discrete parallels proposed by various scholars held up as literary allusions or echoes to detailed investigation. This dissertation argues that Ben Sira employs the storm-god theophany motif to undergird his claim that God can be known through creation. He creates the expectation for the combat myth by deploying words and images associated with it and the divine warrior motif, then undermining its actualization by eliminating any hint of opposition. Instead, Ben Sira portrays God as the unopposed lord of the cosmos. Instead of battling opponents, Ben Sira’s God need only speak. Thus, Ben Sira employs the divine speech register to showcase the way God effortlessly creates and maintains cosmic order through the divine council. By activating the sapiential register and portraying God as a sage par excellence, Ben Sira posits that all of creation is wisely and justly ordered by its magnificent sage-sovereign. God’s omnipotence and administration raise questions about theodicy and retribution. As an answer, Ben Sira develops throughout his book a doctrine of balance, which culminates in Sir 42:15–43:33. According to this doctrine, humans are repaid according to their deeds, for which they are culpable, since God has ordered creation and revealed Godself through it. In this formulation, wisdom and piety are united. God and Wisdom dwell especially in Israel.