



A Priestly Perspective on the Representation of History in the *Praise of the Ancestors* (Sir 44–49)

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Abstract: The article aims to synthetically present the idea of priesthood in the *Praise of the Ancestors* (Sir 44–49), a text that contains a theological reflection and description of selected characters in the biblical story from the point of view of a sage living at the turn of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. First, the successive stages of history depicted by Ben Sira and their possible connections to priesthood are outlined. Then, priesthood as viewed by Ben Sira was presented using specific examples of individuals known from the history of biblical Israel (Aaron, Phinehas, David, Samuel, Joshua son of Jehozadak). However, kings from the Davidic dynasty no longer reigned after the Babylonian exile, even though the sage compares the governor Zerubbabel, who came from the House of David, with the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak. The sign of the covenant, however, remained the high priest. Anonymous references to women in the *Praise of the Ancestors* also feature references to the reality of the cult. Closing the *Praise of the Ancestors*, Adam is a type of priest that foreshadows the story's culmination in the description of the high priest Simon II (Sir 50:1–21). The priesthood in Ben Sira's view is the keystone that connects the past to the present.

Keywords: Old Testament, Book of Sirach, *Praise of the Ancestors*, priesthood

The Book of Sirach is a collection of wisdom sentences and poems, diverse in theme and literary genre. The diversity is due to the fact that it is likely that the book was written entirely at the end of the sage's life, as the fruit of many years of thought and experience. The presentation of his vision of history was influenced not only by Ben Sira's personal experiences, but also by the situation in which he lived. Although he was a man open to the world and its novelties – for this reason he enjoyed traveling – he noted the potential dangers of losing the identity of his own nation. Israel's identity as a people of the covenant stemmed from faithfully responding to the gift of God, whose will was enshrined in the Torah. Therefore, the description of history, already known to the sage from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, is approached in a new way to become a response to the needs of his time. The *Praise of the Ancestors* begins with an introduction (44:1–15), and then Ben Sira presents each character (44:16–49:16). On the one hand, the sage is guided in part by historical chronology, while on the other hand he makes significant changes to his description.

Is it possible to find a key, a criterion for the selection and presentation of people and content that Ben Sira followed? The presentation of the individual passages of

the *Praise of the Ancestors* describing different characters made it possible to notice the special connections of many of them with the institution of priesthood. This article, therefore, will attempt a synthetic, holistic analysis of the text of the *Praise of the Ancestors* in its relation to priesthood and priests. Andrew Piwowar accurately noted that the subject of priesthood is not a point of interest for the authors of the Wisdom Books.¹ The exception here is the sage Ben Sira, who speaks of the priests with great respect (cf. 7:29–31), focuses on the priests in the *Praise of the Ancestors* (cf. Sir 44–49) referring to the figures of Aaron, Phinehas, Samuel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, and crowning the entire praise with the figure of the high priest Simon II (cf. Sir 50:1–21).

There have been individual publications discussing Ben Sira's relationship to the institution of priesthood,² suggestions recognizing the sage's belonging to the priestly lineage,³ referring to individual characters or groups of priestly characters,⁴ showing their relationship to the priesthood, such as Aaron and his offspring, David, Adam, references to women.⁵ There are also publications on the high priest Simon II.⁶ The presence of the idea of priesthood throughout the *Praise of the Ancestors* has not yet been the subject of a separate study. This article aims to synthetically discuss the priesthood motif in this section of the Book of Sirach, also taking into account possible references to priesthood. After a general outline of the subsequent stages of the story in the *Praise of the Ancestors*, the characters mentioned in it who held priestly positions or who had, according to Ben Sira, connections to the cult (Aaron, Phinehas, Samuel, David, Joshua son of Jehozadak) are introduced. Then there are less apparent references to the priesthood that are present in the anonymous references to women in the *Praise of the Ancestors*. The final link that connects the priests of biblical history to Ben Sira's contemporary, the high priest Simon II, is the last one mentioned in the text of praise, Adam, the first man and also the first „priest” of creation.

1 Cf. Piwowar, „Syrach,” 93–94.

2 See e.g. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*; Olyan, „Ben Sira's Relationship,” 261–286.

3 Cf. Stadelmann, *Ben Sira*, 41–42.

4 See e.g.: Piwowar („Syrach,” 93–117) presents the priests: Aaron, Phinehas and Simon.

5 See the author's articles discussing selected characters in the *Praise of the Fathers* through the lens of the priesthood theme: Pudełko, „Aaron jako nauczyciel świadectw,” 133–153; Pudełko, „The (Apparent) Absence of Women,” 107–126; Pudełko, „Dawid jako organizator kultu,” 263–283; Pudełko, „Dlaczego Adam zamyka *Pochwałę Ojców*,” 441–457; Pudełko „Periodyzacja dziejów Izraela,” 37–74; Pudełko, „Obecność anioła,” 269–284.

6 See e.g.: Mulder, „Two Approaches,” 221–234; Mulder, *Simon the High Priest*.

1. The *Praise of the Ancestors* – A Theological Record of the History of Biblical Israel

In Sir 44–49, the author selected the figures and introduced them. The first characters: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas (not counting Enoch⁷) are a cohesive whole, connected by the covenant theme, with which promises and blessings were linked (cf. 44:16–45:24). To emphasize this, the author departs from chronological order and mentions at this point additionally (cf. 45:25) the figure of David.⁸ Worth noting is the emphasis on the characters of Aaron and Phinehas (45:6–24), which draws attention to the role of the priests in the story. Then Joshua and Caleb (cf. 46:1–10) and the Judges (collectively, cf. 46:11–12) appear, presenting two concepts for conquering the promised land (the swift conquest of Joshua and the quiet infiltration of the period of Judges). The history of the monarchy introduced with the figure of Samuel (cf. 46:13–20) proceeds on two parallel paths, with prophets appearing alongside the kings. Saul appears unnamed (cf. 46:20), Solomon's evaluation is ambivalent (cf. 47:12–23), and Rehoboam and Jeroboam receive a negative assessment (cf. 47:23–25). David (cf. 47:2–11), Hezekiah (cf. 48:17–25) and Josiah (cf. 49:1–6) are declared worthy of honor; the other kings of Judah regarded as transgressors, appear nameless (cf. 49:4). Among the prophets mentioned there are Samuel (cf. 46:13–20), Nathan (cf. 47:1), Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve (cf. 48:1–49:10). The time of reconstruction after the exile is represented by the figures of Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah (cf. 49:11–13). Noting that the sage makes a change in the final chronology, placing the characters from the beginning of the story at the end of the description: Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth, Enosh and Adam (cf. 49:14–16), one can easily understand that this is not the purpose of his presentation. The purpose is the theological message, intended to strengthen and guide the identity of future generations. It is therefore worth looking closer at some elements of the theological perspective adopted here, which emphasizes the importance and role of priests the most. This perspective, and the reference to the beginning of history, leads to the conclusion and realization of the story, which occurs in the description of the high priest Simon II (50:1–21).

⁷ The absence of Sir 44:16 in the manuscript from Masada and the Syriac text undermines the authenticity of this text according to some scholars. Cf. Yadin, *The Ben Sira*, 224–225; Beentjes, “Praise of the Famous,” 380–382.

⁸ Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 39.

2. From Aaron to Joshua. Priests in the History of Israel

The presentation of the character of Aaron is much broader than that of Moses, discussed earlier, and does not emphasize the Mosaic Covenant, of which Moses was the mediator. Sir 45:6, on the other hand, begins with Aaron's praise, which takes up as many as 17 verses.⁹ On the one hand, the sage emphasizes Aaron's ancestry and his bond with Moses, and on the other hand, his special appointment by God. This point is further explored in the next verse, 45:7ab. There is reference to the everlasting covenant made with Aaron and the gift of the priesthood to him and his offspring.¹⁰ Here the author wants to emphasize the irrevocability of God's decision regarding Aaron and his descendants.¹¹ The honor and the gift of God bestowed upon Aaron become the cause of his glory and authority, as confirmed in 45:7bc by the H versions (glory/majesty: כבוד/הוד¹²). In the HB, glory and majesty (כבוד/הוד) belong to God (cf. Ps 8:2; 96:6). Given to Moses, they are transferred to Joshua (cf. Num 27:20–23), and are also shared by King Solomon (cf. 1 Chr 29:25) and even the future messiah (cf. Zech 6:13). However, it is not related to Aaron or his descendants. The G version of the Book of Sirach links the glory with the high priest's robe (περιστολή δόξης; 47:7d), as indicated in the next passage of the text: 45:7d–14.¹³ According to Exod 28:2, Moses prepares priestly garments for Aaron and his sons; in Ben Sira's text, God Himself does it.¹⁴ In the H version of Sir 45:7d, the phrase "horns of the buffalo" (תועפות ראם) appears, as one of the elements of the high priest's attire. This is a metaphor for power and strength, which in Num 23:22 and 24:8 belongs to God Himself, leading His people out of Egypt. The priest will thus be clothed in the power and beauty of God (cf. Sir 45:8a). The sage also mentions various elements of the high priest's attire: pants, tunic, ephod (cf. 45:8b), robe ornaments (pomegranate fruit and bells: 45:9a), purple robe (cf. 45:10a), bags of urim and thummim (cf. 45:10b), stones honoring the twelve tribes (cf. 45:11), decorated tiara (cf. 45:12).¹⁵ Although the elements of the attire come from Exod 28, one notices that the author's additions clearly go beyond the description of a high priest and are a sign of authority.¹⁶ In the H version of 45:8b, there appears the expression ויד ועווי ב... ויפארוהו ב ("he adorned him with

⁹ The description of Aaron relates directly to his person and to the office of high priest, as will be reflected in the portrayal of the high priest Simon (Sir 50). Cf. Wright, "The Use," 195; Rivkin, "Ben Sira," 97*; Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship," 267.

¹⁰ The prerogatives related to the covenant (irrevocable bond with God) are shifted here to the gift of the priesthood associated with the person of Aaron and his descendants, cf. Wright, "The Use," 195.

¹¹ Cf. Reiterer, "Aaron's Polyvalent Role," 33; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 511.

¹² According to Marginalia Ms B: בברכה (in blessing). Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 79; Friedrich V. Reiterer, "Aaron's Polyvalent Role," 34) believes that this is a more original lesson as it relates to the essence of the priestly ministry – the transmission of the blessing (life) of God.

¹³ Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 328; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 310; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 511.

¹⁴ Cf. Reiterer, "Aaron's Polyvalent Role," 35–36.

¹⁵ Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 511.

¹⁶ Cf. Piwower, "Syrach," 107.

glory¹⁷ and strength”) which finds no reference to the descriptions of the high priest in the Pentateuch. Strength (עֹז), on the other hand, refers to the person of David (cf. 2 Sam 6:14; 1 Chr 13:8).¹⁸ In describing the high priest’s headdress, the sage uses the expression עֹטֶרֶת פֶּזֶז (“crown of gold”; 45:12), which appears only once more in the HB in Ps 21:4 to denote the king’s crown. Thus, the attributes of a king were transferred in the mind of the son of Sirach to the person of the high priest.¹⁹ The attire inspired admiration because of its beauty and at the same time its uniqueness – only the high priest and his successors could wear it (cf. 45:13). It was an expression of God’s special appointment and the ministry to which the high priest was called. The description of the attire concludes with a reference to the offered sacrifices (cf. 45:14), and therefore – to the priestly ministry performed by God’s chosen ones.²⁰

After describing the high priest’s attire, the sage informs of Aaron’s introduction to priestly duties, which was performed through Moses (cf. 45:15). Ben Sira refers here to Exod 29 and Lev 8, which describe the consecration of priests (anointing with oil). However, there is more to this. The sage speaks of the everlasting covenant made with Aaron (ברית עולם/διαθήκη αἰώνος), which will last forever, “like the days of heaven” (Sir 45:15: כִּימֵי שָׁמַיִם/ἐν ἡμέραις οὐρανοῦ), as the one made with David [Ps 89(88):30: כִּימֵי שָׁמַיִם/ὡς τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ]. Blessing the people in the name of the Lord also evokes David’s actions (cf. 2 Sam 6:18; 1 Chr 16:2).²¹ Thus, the attributes of a king were again transferred in the mind of Ben Sira to the person of the high priest.

This is confirmed by a later description of the character of Phinehas (cf. Sir 45:23–24). He is a lesser-known figure, the grandson of Aaron, but his priestly identity and struggle for purity of faith have made him prominent in the eyes of posterity.²² He was referred to as the “third” after Moses and Aaron, and the line seems to go to the high priest Simon II (cf. Sir 50:1–21), since he in this narrative performs the rite of “cleansing” the people on the Day of Atonement, and Phinehas did it in a different way at Baal Peor (cf. Num 25:1–15).²³ By speaking out against idolatry, Phinehas received from God the promise of eternal priesthood for his descendants, the so-called “covenant of peace” (cf. Num 25:12; Sir 45:24).²⁴

¹⁷ Text damaged, possible reconstruction: בְּכֹד („glory”).

¹⁸ Cf. Reiterer, „Aaron’s Polyvalent Role,” 39.

¹⁹ Jesus Sirach wrote down his story for one specific purpose. It is to perpetuate the priestly succession of Simon and his successors. Their role was to guarantee God’s continued involvement in Israel’s history. Cf. Beentjes, „The Countries Marveled at You,” 12–13; Wright, „The Use,” 197.

²⁰ Cf. Olyan, „Ben Sira’s Relationship,” 269.

²¹ Cf. Reiterer, „Aaron’s Polyvalent Role,” 48.

²² Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 513. Piwowar, „Syrach,” 110–112.

²³ Cf. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 31–32; Olyan, „Ben Sira’s Relationship,” 270.

²⁴ According to Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, (*The Wisdom*, 513): “Ben Sira seems intent on proving that Phinehas was the legitimate successor to the high priesthood (45:24–25); according to 4 Macc 18:12, there had been disputes about the authentic succession of high priests. The crisis

The Sage, in describing Aaron and Phinehas, uses the characteristics of a high priest of the Second Temple period. He portrays them as having both religious and secular authority (legislative, executive and judicial – cf. Sir 45:17) by order of God Himself.²⁵ Sir 45:16, on the other hand, lists the typical priestly duties that Aaron and his successors were to perform: approaching the altar, presenting sacrifices, offering incense and making expiation for the people.²⁶ However, one cannot help but notice the emphasis on the priesthood throughout the first part of the story. The patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) were priests, as fathers and heads of families. Moses, Aaron and Phinehas descended from the tribe of Levi. Moses appointed Aaron and his descendants as priests (cf. Sir 45:15), and Ben Sira emphasizes the perpetuity of this priesthood (cf. Sir 45:7, 15, 24). The first period of the history of God's people is seen through the lens of both the covenant and the priesthood instituted in its service, the descendants of Aaron.²⁷

Surprisingly, in this group there is a reference to David (45:25), who will be described in more detail when his turn comes in Sir 47:2–11. There he appears in connection with the topic of the covenant, which is discussed throughout Sir 44:16–45:26. The covenant with David references various biblical texts.²⁸ However, it seems that here it has a lower position than the “priestly covenant,” which applies to all of Aaron's descendants, not just one heir to the Davidic dynasty.²⁹ The conclusion of this period of history refers to the priests contemporary to Ben Sira (cf. Sir 45:26). Perhaps the sage wanted to show that the promises given to David are fulfilled in the special ministry of priests.³⁰

of his people' that Phinehas met (45:23d) is described in Num 25:1–15. In his zeal for 'the God of all' (45:23c), Phinehas slew a certain Israelite man and a Midianite woman who had participated with other Israelites in the idolatrous worship of the god Baal of Peor, and who had tried to escape punishment for their sin (Num 25:6–8). It was by this act that Phinehas 'atoned for the people of Israel' (45:23f); cf. Num 25:10–13; Ps 106:28–31. The expression 'covenant of friendship', Heb *bērit šālôm*, lit., 'covenant of peace' (45:24b), is taken from Num 25:12. It was through this covenant that God promised that the priesthood would remain forever in the family of Phinehas (Num 25:12–13); cf. 1 Macc 2:54.”

²⁵ Cf. Piwowar, „Syrach,” 107.

²⁶ Cf. Reiterer, “Aaron's Polyvalent Role,” 48; Wright, “The Use,” 199.

²⁷ It is no coincidence that the term ברית appears six times in the passages Sir 44:17–45:26 in the H version (Sir 44:17, 20, 23; 45:15, 24, 25), and the word διαθήκη appears as many as nine times in the G version (Sir 44:18, 20, 23; 45:5, 7, 15, 17, 24, 25). Such a concentration of terms denoting covenant takes place only in this part of the *Praise of the Fathers*. Goshen-Gottstein (“Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers,” 245) believes that this indicates the sage's intention to relate this part of the *Praise of the Fathers* to the Torah, and that the entire record of Israel's history is meant to reflect the composition of the gradually forming canon of holy scriptures.

²⁸ “The 'covenant with David' (45:25a) is mentioned in 2 Sam 7:11–16; 23:5; Isa 55:3; Jer 33:21, 26; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7; Ps 89:3–5, 29–30.” Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 514. Cf. Wright, “The Use,” 202.

²⁹ Cf. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 39. John Priest (“Ben Sira 45:25,” 111–118) shows that Ben Sira in this description is close to the Qumran conception of two messiahs: royal and priestly.

³⁰ Cf. Beentjes, “Praise of the Famous,” 379–380; MacKenzie, “Ben Sira as Historian,” 320.

The figure of Samuel, a judge, prophet and nazirite, introduces the monarchy period (cf. Sir 46:13 H). According to Sir 46:13d H, Samuel also had a priestly function: שמואל שופט ומכהן (“Samuel the judge and priest”).³¹ In the further description of the figure of Samuel, the motif of offering sacrifice appears (cf. 46:16c). Here Ben Sira is talking about a sacrifice in general terms, about something that is brought (προσφορά). The term προσφορά is known to Ben Sira; he uses it, for instance, in a context related to worship at the Jerusalem Temple (cf. 50:13) and to the high priest Simon (cf. 50:14). In 46:16, the expression ἐν προσφορᾷ (“sacrifice”) indicates the manner of the prayer of supplication, the invocation of the Lord that Samuel performs. The reference to Samuel offering a sacrifice also makes it possible to apply to him the functions of a person “acting as a priest” (מכהן, Sir 46:13 H).³²

The figure of David was mentioned in the introduction of earlier characters of the Torah in connection with a reference to the covenant. However, David was also connected with the cult, which is clearly highlighted in Sir 47:8–10.³³ Based on the account of 1 Chr, Ben Sira presents King David as a ruler who praises God, and at the same time organizes the liturgy of Jerusalem. He composed psalms and songs of praise himself and appointed musicians in the temple liturgy.³⁴

David, in his concern for the house and the glory of the Lord, thus appears as a man of complete commitment and care. Ben Sira’s description shows that David as king is first and foremost a “man of worship.”³⁵ However, Ben Sira’s concept is not limited to copying the chronicler’s message. Through such a portrayal of David, Ben Sira seems to link the origins of the cult present in the depiction of the figure

31 “Samuel served in the tabernacle at Shiloh under the priest Eli (cf. 1 Sam 2:11), and wore the linen ephod appropriate for priests (cf. 1 Sam 2:18). This is how Samuel gradually takes over the priestly functions of the family of Eli, whose sons dishonored the ministry by appropriating the meat of the sacrifices before they were offered (cf. 1 Sam 2:12–17). This is not a simple change of the person responsible for the ministry, but it is the Lord himself who appoints the faithful Samuel as his priest, in place of the sons of Eli (cf. 2 Sam 2:35). There are other texts that indicate that Samuel’s works also involved the sphere of sacrificial worship (cf. 1 Sam 7:7–9; 9:13, 19; 10:8; 16:1–5). This raises the question of Samuel’s identity and his connection to the tribe of Levi and the lineage of Aaron. According to 1 Chr 6:12, 13, 18, Samuel belongs to the tribe of Levi. Ps 99:6 places Samuel on an equal footing with Moses and Aaron, which reflects the tradition that Samuel belongs to the priestly lineage: “Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel among those calling on His name.” Pudelko, *Profetyzm w Księdze Syracha*, 210–211; Cf. McKenzie, “The Four Samuel,” 3–18; Demitrow, *Quattro oranti*, 167.

32 The very sparse references to priesthood and sacrifices in the G version of the Book of Sirach can be explained by the resentment towards the Hasmonean high priests, ruling at the time of Ben Sira’s grandson, the translator of the Greek version. Cf. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 27–28. Antonino Minissale (*La versione greca del Siracide*, 222–224) notes the changes in the G version, which excludes the themes relating to the priesthood and priests.

33 More on the topic: Pudelko, „Dawid jako organizator kultu,” 263–283.

34 “It is not insignificant that the chronicler is compiling his work in the Persian era and wants to show that such an order of temple service is rooted in the Davidic monarchy established by God. What was God’s decision communicated through David, anointed by Him, is still relevant in the Second Temple era.” Pudelko, “Dawid jako organizator kultu,” 274.

35 Cf. Petraglio, *Il libro che contamina le mani*, 236.

of Aaron (cf. Sir 45:6–22) with the cult of his time, represented by the high priest Simon (cf. Sir 50:1–21). This is also confirmed by the use of parallel terminology in the description of David and Simon. By repeating as many as fifteen terms in the cultic description of David and Simon, the sage connects the two figures and shows the continuity of the established cult:³⁶

David (47:8–10)	Simon (50:1–21)
47:8: παντι ; πάση	50:9: παντι 50:13: πάντες; πάσης 50:17: πᾶς 50:20: πᾶσαν
47:8: ἅγιω 47:10: ἅγιον	50:11: ἅγιου
47:8: ὑψίστω	50:15, 17: ὑψίστω 50:7, 14, 19, 21: ὑψίστου
47:8: δόξης	50:7, 11: δόξης 50:13: δόξη
47:9: ἔστησεν	50:12: ἐστῶς
47:9: ψαλτωδους	50:18: ψαλτωδοὶ
47:9: κατέναντι	50:19: κατέναντι
47:9: θυσιαστηρίου	50:11, 15: θυσιαστηρίου
47:9: γλυκαίνειν μέλη	50:18: ἐγλυκάνθη μέλος
47:10: ἐκόσμησεν	50:9: κεκοσμημένον 50:14: κοσμήσαι
47:10: συντελείας	50:11, 14: συντέλειαν
47:10: αἰνεῖν	50:18: ἤνεσαν
47:10: ὄνομα αὐτοῦ	50:20: ὄνοματι αὐτοῦ
47:10: ἤχην	50:16: ἤχησαν
47:10: ἀγίασμα	50:11: ἀγιάσματος

Ben Sira's depiction of the time of reconstruction after the Babylonian exile is very laconic. According to Alon Goshen-Gottstein, the sparse mention of the characters after the exile indicates that the books related to them were not yet very well known, much less had the status of holy books in Ben Sira's time.³⁷ This period is represented by the figures of Zerubbabel, Josiah and Nehemiah (cf. Sir 49:11–13), who may relate to the three positively portrayed kings: David, Hezekiah and Josiah.³⁸ Zerubbabel and Joshua receive praise because they contributed to the rebuilding of the temple, and Nehemiah to rebuilding the city walls. Zerubbabel is depicted by Ben Sira using the imagery of Hag 2:23 as a signet ring, and Joshua, son of Jehozadak is celebrated

³⁶ Cf. Pudelko, „Dawid jako organizator kultu,” 279–280.

³⁷ Cf. Goshen-Gottstein, “Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers,” 194.

³⁸ Cf. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 41.

for his work of rebuilding the temple, as foreshadowed in Zech 6:11–13.³⁹ Jehozadak, according to 1 Chr 5:40–41, was the son of Seraiah, the high priest captured during the Babylonian invasion of Judah and murdered in Ribla (cf. 2 Kgs 25:18–21). Thus, Joshua serves as a kind of bridge between the First and Second Temples. Zerubbabel and Joshua, mentioned together (cf. Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Hag 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4) as the two “restorers” of life after the Babylonian exile, represent two dimensions of authority: secular and religious, relating to the “Davidic and Aaronic” covenant.⁴⁰ Ben Sira includes both of these dimensions in his description of the figure of the high priest Simon, who, in addition to leading the cult, also possessed political power, as demonstrated by the temple renovation work mentioned in his praise.⁴¹ The Davidic dynasty was not restored in the dimension of political power, hence the figure of Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, is no longer discernibly present in the description. That is why in Ben Sira’s time it was the high priest who was the visible sign of God’s promises and covenant.

3. The (Apparent) Absence of Women in the *Praise of the Ancestors* and the Priestly Perspective

Reading the *Praise of the Ancestors*, one gets the impression that there are no mentions of women. After a more careful reading, however, one notices anonymous references.⁴² The praise of David in the Hebrew and Syriac versions of Sir 47:6 features anonymous women who praise him after his victory over Goliath.⁴³ Praise of Solomon and his deeds (Sir 47:12–18) turns to harsh judgment in Sir 47:19. All the king’s previous achievements and contributions are nullified by his sin. The sage, following the description in 1 Kgs 11:1–3, points to his foreign wives as the cause of his downfall.⁴⁴ Further mentions of women relate to mothers, and even more to the beginnings of the characters’ lives, which is conveyed symbolically in the expression “mother’s womb.” The first reference is to the figure of Samuel, who, according to 1 Sam 1, is born of the initially barren Hannah (cf. Sir 46:13ab).⁴⁵ A similar reference to a “mother’s womb” is also present in the description of Jeremiah, who was already formed in

³⁹ Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 544.

⁴⁰ Cf. Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” 283.

⁴¹ Cf. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 372; Minssale, *Siracide*, 236–237; Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, 247.

⁴² For more on the subject see Pudelko, “The (Apparent) Absence of Women,” 107–126.

⁴³ Cf. Marko, “David in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 39; Box – Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 495; Hamp, *Sirach*, 129; Minissale, *Siracide*, 224; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 319–321; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 347.

⁴⁴ Cf. Box – Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 498; Hamp, *Sirach*, 130; Minissale, *Siracide*, 227; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 322–323; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 352.

⁴⁵ Cf. Demitrów, *Quattro oranti*, 149; Box – Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 492; Hamp, *Sirach*, 127; Minissale, *Siracide*, 222; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 317–318; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 341.

the womb consecrated as a prophet (cf. Sir 49:7).⁴⁶ Sir 48:19 references Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem and Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kgs 19; Isa 37). The Assyrian invasion caused great fear in the people of Jerusalem, and their suffering was compared by the Son of Sirach to the pain of those giving birth.⁴⁷

Addressing these mentions in the cultic key, one cannot help but notice certain relationships. In addition to the figurative use of the image of the pain of women giving birth (cf. Sir 48:19), other examples refer to specific living persons, historical figures, mentioned by other books of the Bible (see women praising David: 1 Sam 18:7; Solomon's foreign wives: 1 Kgs 11:1–3; Hannah, mother of Samuel: 1 Sam 1–2; Jeremiah's calling that began in his mother's womb: Jer 1:5). Including such examples, albeit anonymous, leads to interesting conclusions. Although the women praising David, or God in David's life (cf. Sir 47:6 H/S) are not official personnel of the cult, they perform religious functions in public, through which they glorify the God of Israel and proclaim His great works. The contrast to this attitude is Solomon's foreign wives (Sir 47:19). Although the text itself says nothing about the king's idolatry, after all, the tarnishing of the monarch's glory (Sir 47:20) and the division of the monarchy (Sir 47:21) were the result of his idolatry, which the Bible links to the presence of his foreign wives. These women are therefore a symbol of sinful worship, opposed to the worship of the God of Israel, which has always led to ruin, both in religious and political dimensions. The metaphorical image of a mother's womb used for Samuel (Sir 46:13 H/S) and for Jeremiah (Sir 49:7) shows, on the one hand, the power of God, who reveals Himself and calls His chosen ones from the very beginning of their lives, but on the other hand emphasizes the involvement of mothers in this divine work related to His prophets and priests. Thus, these women, in some way, "fit into" the sage's cultic conception of Israel's history, either in a positive or negative way.

The lack of name references to women, then, is not a manifestation of the author's misogyny, and is not merely due to the pedagogical nature of his instructions (since instructions in the wisdom tradition could also be given by a woman, a mother). Nor is the lack of name references to women due to the choice of the literary genre of *encomium* (praise), as we know of Greek praises of women. It seems, therefore, that it is the apologia for the priesthood present in the *Praise of the Ancestors* that determines both the selection of the persons depicted and the way in which they are portrayed. Women had no part in the official priesthood of Israel,⁴⁸ which was passed down

⁴⁶ Cf. Box – Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," 504; Hamp, *Sirach*, 135; Minissale, *Siracide*, 233; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 333–334; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 370.

⁴⁷ Cf. Box – Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," 503; Hamp, *Sirach*, 133; Minissale, *Siracide*, 231; Sauer, *Jesus Sirach*, 328–329; Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 364.

⁴⁸ In Exod 38:8, reference is made to the women who ministered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and gave their mirrors to cast the bronze pool. The motif of women also appears in 1 Sam 2:22, considered a gloss. Perhaps it is a text of later origin, which echoes Josiah's reform and the removal of the women weaving veils for Asherah from the temple (see 2 Kgs 23:7). The fact that women sang and danced at

from father to son, beginning with the high priest Aaron. The absence of the great heroines of biblical history may therefore be a conscious choice by the author, who focused his attention on the priestly dimension of Israel's history. The successor to the high priest Simon, praised by the Son of Sirach, Onias III, no longer had as strong a personality as his father. The portrayal of Israel's history with an emphasis on God's chosenness with respect to Aaron's descendants was thus meant to become an attempt to overcome the growing crisis surrounding the weak high priest Onias, who through his office was the only remaining keystone of the covenant between God and Israel.

4. Adam as a Herald of the High Priest Simon

The praise of Nehemiah (cf. Sir 49:13) is followed by a return to the beginning. Ben Sira mentions Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth and Enosh (H), and the last figure of the „fathers of old” is Adam. According to Sir 49:16b, he is a completely Godly man, and there is no mention of his sin in the description. This is probably the earliest text that highlights the glory and beauty of Adam, while completely omitting his fall.⁴⁹ The Greek version emphasizes Adam's superiority over all creation: καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ζῴων ἐν τῇ κτίσει Ἀδάμ (“and above every living being in creation – Adam” – Sir 49:16b), while his descendants Shem and Seth received only glory among men (49:16a: ἐν ἀνθρώποις). This reflects the truth that Adam was not born, but created directly by God, and shows his superiority to both humans and all works of creation.⁵⁰ Thus, Adam has a beauty and glory that no one else has received: the closeness to God, the original beauty that God intended for man. This makes him rise to the top in the ranks of the figures of history, being both the “father” of mankind and the “father” of Israel, since he is the “son of God.”⁵¹ Therefore, it can be suggested that

religious ceremonies (cf. Exod 15:20; Judg 21:21; Ps 68:26) does not mean that they were part of the official personnel of the cult. There is evidence of the presence of female priests in Assyrian and Phoenician cults, where the female equivalent of the term “priest” was created. However, the Hebrew language lacks the feminine forms of the nouns “kohen” and “levi.” Given the existence of pagan priestesses, the reference to women in a cult could have led to associations with idolatry. Cf. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 383; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 536–572.

⁴⁹ Cf. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Jesus*, 336; Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 545. John R. Levinson (*Portraits of Adam*, 34–43) notes Ben Sira's references to Adam in other parts of the Book. He is portrayed as created by God, endowed with free will (15:4), created from the earth and returning to it (17:1; 33:10), made in the image and likeness of God, endowed with senses, knowledge and reason (17:1–8), and being the father of all men (40:1).

⁵⁰ Cf. Box – Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 507; Levinson, *Portraits of Adam*, 45; Pudielko, “Dlaczego Adam zamyka *Pochwałę Ojców*,” 452.

⁵¹ Geirg Sauer, (*Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, 336), calls Adam “the radiant beginning of history.” Cf. Levinson, *Portraits of Adam*, 44; Pudielko, “Dlaczego Adam zamyka *Pochwałę Ojców*,” 452.

the figure of Adam, who crowns the *Praise of the Ancestors* and introduces the high priest Simon II in the description, is the prototype, or seed, of the messianic figure.⁵² As he stands at the beginning of the world and creation, he can be the hope of the “new beginning” that the high priest realizes.⁵³

Although the story of the “fathers of old” is over, the *Praise of the Ancestors* reaches its „culmination” in the description of the priestly ministry of the high priest Simon II. The transition from Adam (Sir 49:16b) to Simon II (50:1) is natural. In the H version of Sir 49:16b, the term תפארת, which means “beauty, glory,” appears in reference to Adam (“above every living being the beauty of Adam” – Sir 49:16b H) and in 50:1, 11 it describes the beauty of the high priest Simon II’s attire.⁵⁴ Burkard M. Zapff, appealing to the tradition in the Book of Jubilees 3:27,⁵⁵ sees Adam as a type of high priest.⁵⁶ There is also no shortage of papers that portray the Garden of Eden as a prototype of a temple in which Adam performs priestly functions.⁵⁷

Thus Adam, the first “priest” of creation, shows the way to the nearness of God. His glory and beauty, of which Ben Sira speaks (49:16b: תפארת אדם) finds its expression in the ministry of the high priest, both of Aaron (45:8: תפארת כליל, “And he clothed him in full glory”) and of the high priest Simon II (50:1: גדול עמו, “Great [among] his brethren and the glory of his people”; 50:11: אהיו ותפארת עמו, “And he dressed himself in the garments of glory”). Again, one can note that the praise of Simon II (50:1–21) represents a new stage that remains in close connection with the earlier text (44–49).

Thus, we can discern here Ben Sira’s bizarre idea. God fulfills His promises to Israel through the ministry of the high priest, who is not just another piece of earthly history (then he should appear after Nehemiah in Sir 49:13), but the fulfillment of God’s “mediator” role that Adam performed for all creation.⁵⁸ Not only Adam, but

⁵² Box – Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 507; James D. Martin (“Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Fathers,” 117–118) states that in Ben Sira’s time the political situation was still quite stable and probably messianic ideas were not very prominent.

⁵³ Cf. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 476. Alexander Toepel („Adamic Traditions,” 322) notes that Adam is depicted by Philo of Alexandria as exalted above the angels and described in an almost divine manner.

⁵⁴ Cf. Skehan – Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 545; Marböck, “Henoch,” 103–111.

⁵⁵ “And on that day on which Adam went forth from the Garden, he offered as a sweet savour an offering, frankincense, galbanum, and stacte, and spices.” Charles, *The Book of Jubilees*, 27. Cf. VanderKam, *Jubilees*, I, 207.

⁵⁶ „Nähe Adams zu Gott macht ihn damit zum Urbild des Hohenpriesters.“ Zapff, *Jesus Sirach*, 374; cf. Levinson, *Portraits of Adam*, 153.

⁵⁷ See for example Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” 275–298; Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism,” 399–404; Liou, *Axis of Glory*.

⁵⁸ The figure of Adam also appears in other, later Judaic writings (e.g. the *Book of Wisdom*, the writings of Philo of Alexandria, the *Book of Jubilees*, the writings of Flavius Josephus, the *4 Esdras*, the *2 Baruch*), where he appears as a unique man, created directly by God, acting as an intermediary between God and creation. More on the topic: Levison, “Adam as a Mediatorial Figure,” 247–272; Callender, *Adam in Myth and History*; cf. Pudełko, “Dlaczego Adam zamyka *Pochwałę Ojców*,” 453.

the aforementioned Shem, Seth (Enosh in H) performed priestly functions.⁵⁹ Taking a closer look at the composition of the *Praise of the Ancestors*, it seems that the role of the „new Adam” falls then to the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple. The entire *Praise of the Ancestors*, in fact, emphasizes the priestly dimension⁶⁰ in Israel’s history and regards it as the fulfillment of the covenant between God and His people.

Conclusions

Regarding the text of Sir 44–49, one can see the author’s strong interest in the role of priests in Israel’s history, which culminates in the figure of Simon II, described at the end. There has even been a proposal to view the *Praise of the Ancestors* as a genealogy of the high priest Simon II⁶¹ – this is a rather one-sided view (since the *Praise of the Ancestors* describes the entire history of salvation) but this suggestion allows one to view the entire praise through the motif of the priesthood. The figures mentioned demonstrate to a greater or lesser extent the importance of the cult and priestly service to the sage of Jerusalem. This presentation does not exhaust the questions concerning the figures mentioned and their connections to other movements of Judaism. It is only an attempt to highlight the elements that the sage of Jerusalem included in his description.

Ben Sira, in describing Aaron and Phinehas, uses the characteristics of a high priest of the Second Temple period. He portrays them as having both religious and secular authority (legislative, executive and judicial) by order of God Himself.⁶² In Ben Sira’s time, there was no monarchy anymore, and the Davidic dynasty was no longer a visible sign of the covenant between God and Israel. After the Babylonian exile, it was replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem and the high priest who headed it – the mediator between God and the people. The consistency of terminology and cult themes in the depiction of David and Simon, as mentioned earlier, is thus a conscious effort by the sage of Jerusalem. David is a king, but Ben Sira also emphasizes his connection to the cult and its organization. In doing so, he adapts the figure of David to his time and presents him as a model of liturgical zeal for both the Jews of his time and for posterity. Anointed as king by Samuel, who also served as a priest, David became a “link in the chain” that, through the figures of Zerubbabel and Joshua, bridges the gap between the past and the time of the sage of Jerusalem. This

⁵⁹ Shem was identified in Jewish tradition with the priest Melchizedek. In addition, since the time of Seth and Enos, people began to call upon the name of YHWH (see Gen 4:26). Cf. Petraglio, *Il libro che contamina le mani*, 383.

⁶⁰ More on the subject: Piwowar, “Syrach,” 93–117.

⁶¹ Cf. Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50*, 206.

⁶² Cf. Pudełko, “The (Apparent) Absence of Women,” 121–122.

adaptation comes to its fullness in the person of the high priest Simon II, who by his character and actions realizes who David was in the past.⁶³ Thus, the most exemplary figures of the history of biblical Israel and the world, as seen through the eyes of Ben Sira, foreshadow the realization of the ideal of the pious Israelite, faithful to the covenant, in the form of the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple, Simon II. According to Ben Sira, only the priests remained faithful to God's promises, so the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple, a descendant of God's chosen Aaron, became the rightful heir to all of Israel's history and tradition.

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⁶³ Cf. Pudelko, “The (Apparent) Absence of Women,” 281.

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