

**LAYOUT AND MEANING  
STICHOGRAPHY IN HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS:  
THE CASE OF PSALM 83 IN MAS 1E AND  
THE HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS OF BEN SIRA**

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The layout of a manuscript—such as the use of margins, columns, spacing, marginal notes, and decorative elements—actively shapes the reader's reading experience and interpretation of the content in front of them, for the act of understanding cannot be dissociated from the visual effect created by the manuscript's physical characteristics. From this perspective, manuscripts are not just conveyors of words but dynamic, multi-layered objects where form and meaning are deeply interwoven.

As we will show in this paper, using as case studies Ps. 83 in Mas 1e and the nine Ben Sira Hebrew manuscripts—from the first century BCE to the medieval period—part of the transmission of the text, and consequently its interpretation, heavily relies on the arrangement of the text itself, as much as its content. Because scribes can be considered as both readers and writers, they engage with the text on the basis of their own interpretation and choose in consequence the layout for the copied manuscript, which in turn impacts the reader of the manuscript.

Based on our two case studies, we aim to demonstrate that even if no Hebrew letter changes from one manuscript to another, the layout of the text on the page has a radical impact on its meaning and the way it is read. From this perspective, each particular arrangement of the text produces a new text, even if the letters have not changed at all. To illustrate our point, we will focus on the question of the stichographic or non-stichographic layout of manuscripts. We aim to show how this layout of the text on the page implies a process of interpretation and a specific poetic effect, both at the level of the composition of the text on the page by the scribes, and at the level of the readers who perceive the text through this layout.

The paper is organised as follows: (1) in the first part, an overview will be given of the state of research on stichography in Hebrew manuscripts; (2) the example of Ps. 83 in Mas 1e, our first case study, will be used to show how this arrangement has a fundamental impact on the poetic interpretation of the text; (3) our second case study, the Hebrew witnesses of Ben Sira, will present the implications of stichography organization of the textual material. Finally, (4) we will draw some conclusions from the observations we have been able to make.

### **1.0. Materiality, Text Perception and Textual Transmission: Stichographic Presentation and Understanding**

In terms of critical editions (or modern translation), the way the text is represented on the page is a fundamental choice on the part of the editor. In the case of poetry, for example, representing a text in verse can be strongly biased by our own conception of what poetry should be (Placial and Rey, forthcoming).

Neither a Lachmanian eclectic edition nor a Bédierist single-manuscript edition is adequate to account for the singularity and variance of page layouts in manuscript traditions. In this study, we would like to take a position that considers each manuscript in its individuality, but also as iterations of a work in constant flux." Variance can only be fully understood in terms of the relationship between manuscripts. In this respect, the *stemma codicum* of manuscripts, when it can be traced, is no longer intended as a means of reconstructing the archetype of the entire manuscript tradition, but as a way of understanding the successive transformations of texts in the course of their transmission, by studying their variance over time, whether textual or material (Rey et al. 2025).<sup>1</sup>

One of the traits manuscripts bear in this ever-evolving tradition is the layout of the text on the page, which reflects not only the scribe who composed it but also the way the text is or could have been read. In this respect, Ben Sira's manuscripts are exemplary. Each manuscript has specific characteristics. For example, while Manuscript C is presented as an anthology of Ben Sira's book, representing a specific selection and order of sentences, Manuscript B is characterized by its numerous marginal notes, which are the result of the collation of at least one other manuscript, as is clearly indicated by the last marginal note written in Persian. This presentation of the text testifies to the desire to preserve different textual traditions on the same manuscript without merging them. In fact, the presence of numerous doublets, the

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail on such a position in studies of medieval literature: Altschul 2006; Leonardi 2014; and Leonardi et al. 2022.

result either of the conflation of different textual traditions or of literary creativity, reflects the desire to accumulate variance in the text itself.

Out of all these different characteristics, we would like to focus our attention on the stichographic representation of texts.<sup>2</sup> The topic has been extensively studied by scholars in relation to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Different forms of text segmentation can be observed on the manuscripts, and Emanuel Tov is credited with the first attempt at a typology.<sup>3</sup> Tov's initial studies have been extended by a number of analyses focusing on more specific points. Kipp Davis addressed the question of 'Psalms scrolls' structured into a narrow columnar format (Davis 2017). Anna Krauß and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut are particularly interested in the layout of Psalms manuscripts. They conclude that the stichographic arrangement is chosen to emphasize the linguistic structure of a text (Krauß and Schücking-Jungblut 2020). The most extensive study on the subject is certainly the monograph by Shem Miller, who is particularly interested in the literary function of stichography and its close relationship with orality (Miller 2019; cf. Miller 2015 and 2017).

To these studies specifically dedicated to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we must add studies on Hebrew poetry, and in particular James Kugel's seminal work, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History*, which devotes several dense pages to the subject. For Kugel, the practice of stichography is closely linked to the representation of parallel

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<sup>2</sup> We borrow the term *stichography* from James L. Kugel, which distinguishes it from the more common *stichometry*. The former focuses on the material representation of the text, the latter on a notion of meter, which is poorly suited to Hebrew poetry (Kugel 1981, 119).

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Tov 2004, 156–67; 2008, 409–20

structures (*parallelismus membrorum*), but also to a desire to set certain texts apart for aesthetic reasons (Kugel 1981, 119–27; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp 2015).<sup>4</sup>

In the case of the nine manuscripts of Ben Sira, with the exception of the manuscript with the rhyming paraphrases,<sup>5</sup> only the typology of two stichs per line separated into two columns is attested.<sup>6</sup> We will therefore only focus on this model. By placing two stichs per line, the scribe imposes a way of reading the text as a combination of two pairs that make sense in a coordinated manner, at least visually.

## 2.0. Psalm 83 in Mas 1e

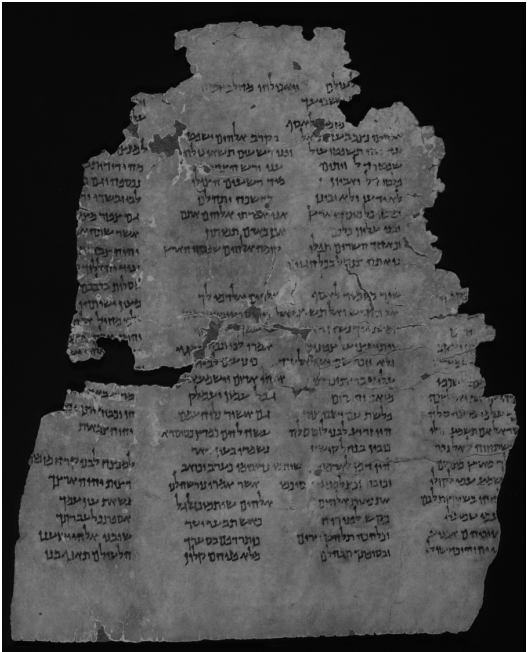
Our first case study consists of the discussion of a Masada manuscript of the Psalter. Mas 1e is presented in two columns, with one stich per column. In the case of Ps. 83, the scribe places the 'title' of the psalm, שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף, in the right-hand column and verse 1a in the left-hand column of the first line. In doing so, As a result, the combination of the psalm's sentences differs from that indicated by the Masoretic

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the complex relationship between stichography and the definition of Hebrew poetry see Placial and Rey, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> See Frédérique Michèle Rey and Eric Reymond, *A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Manuscripts of Ben Sira: With Translations and Philological Notes*, JSJSup 217 (Brill, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> In rabbinic literature, this model is designed as "small brick over small brick, large over large," see b. Meg. 16b and y. Meg. 3:7, and Kugel 1981, 121.



punctuation (see figure 2 for a translation of the text as it appears in Mas 1e compared to MT).

Figure 1: Mas 1e. Photo Shai Halevi. Courtesy to the Israel Antiquities Authority

Psa 83 (Mas 1e, transl. NRSV slightly modified)	Psa 83 (TM, transl. NRSV slightly modified)
1 A Song. A Psalm of Asaph.	1 A Song. A Psalm of Asaph.
2 O God, do not keep silence.	2 O God, do not keep silence, do not hold your peace or be still, O God.
Do not hold your peace or be still, O God, because now your enemies are in tumult.	3 Because now your enemies are in tumult, and those who hate you have raised their heads.
And those who hate you have raised their heads, against your people, they lay crafty plans.	4 Against your people, they lay crafty plans, and they consult together against those you protect.
And they consult together against those you protect, they say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation,	5 They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation, and Let the name of Israel be remembered no more."
And Let the name of Israel be remembered no more;" because they conspire with one accord;	6 Because they conspire with one accord, against you they make a covenant.
Against you they make a covenant, the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,	7 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites,
Moab and the Hagrites, Geba, Ammon and Amalek,	8 Geba, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre.
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre, also Assyria has joined them.	9 Also Assyria has joined them, they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. Selah
They are the strong arm of the children of Lot. Selah	10 Do to them as to Midia, as to Sisera, as Jabin at the Wadi Kishon.
As Jabin at the Wadi Kishon, who were destroyed at En-dor.	11 Who were destroyed at En-dor, They became dung for the ground.
They became dung for the ground, Make their nobles as Oreb and as Zeeb.	12 Make their nobles as Oreb and as Zeeb, and as Zebah and as Zalmunna, all their princes.
And as Zebah and as Zalmunna, all their princes who said, "Let us take for us	13 Who said, "Let us take for us the pastures of God.
the pastures of God. 14 God, make them like whirling,	14 God, make them like whirling like chaff before the wind.
Like chaff before the wind 15 Like fire consumes the forest.	15 Like fire consumes the forest, and as the flame sets the mountains ablaze.
And as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest.	16 So pursue them with your tempest, and with your hurricane terrify them.
And with your hurricane terrify them, 17 Fill their faces with shame.	17 Fill their faces with shame...

Figure 2: Comparison of Ps. 83 in Mas 1e and in MT

In other psalms, the scribe places the title in the middle of the column, independent of the rest of the psalms, as in Ps. 82 (מזמור לאסף), figure 1, line 3). This demonstrates that the position of the title of Ps.

83 in the first column is a deliberate choice by the scribe to organise this psalm in this very specific way. The same phenomenon of what we may call a 'cyclic permutation' appears when, according to the Masoretic punctuation tradition, the poem includes a tristich. Indeed, the two stichs per line layout does not allow the construction in tristich, unless leaving a *vacat* after the third stich. Otherwise, it will cause a shift in the overall composition, making the third stich the first of the next pair, and so on.

Talmon notes that "MasPs<sup>a</sup> preserves the two half-columns structure throughout, altogether disregarding the resulting loss of content parallelism of the stichs in a line" (Talmon 1996, 307). Similarly, Krauß and Schücking-Jungblut emphasise the aesthetic value of presentation at the expense of parallelistic structure. They remark:

Mas 1e is arranged (...) in columns with two separated stichs per line. Even when a tristichon occurs, the scribe does not deviate from this strategy. Thus, not every verse begins in a new line but rather shares a line with another verse after every second verse with three stichs. This strict arrangement of columns with two stichs per line does still structure the text in smaller sense units but the larger units – that is: verses – are not visualized through this kind of arrangement (Krauß and Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 19)

Krauß, Schücking-Jungblut, Talmon and Kugel suggest that Mas 1e does not respect in its layout the correct organization of the distichs imposed by *parallelism membrorum* or by verses. However, in agreement with Shem Miller (2019, 130–32), it is possible to regard the text thus arranged as imposing a legitimate semantic organization, albeit one different from that later preserved by the Masoretic punctuation tradition. Moreover, whether the initial intention was purely aesthetic or



not, the effect on the reader is similar: the units of meaning are guided by the layout of the text and not by an *a priori* idea of the correct order or of what ancient Hebrew poetry should be. Presented in this way, the text makes perfect sense and highlights poetic constructions different from those retained by the Masoretic tradition.

It is beyond the scope of this article to present the poetic structure of Mas 1e. A brief presentation of the first verses will suffice to capture the idea.

Table 1: Paralleling Ps. 83.1–4 between Mas 1e and MT

Mas 1e	MT
	1 שִׁיר מְזֻמֹּר לְאַסָּף:
שִׁיר מְזֻמֹּר לְאַסָּף	
אֱלֹהִים אֵל דָּמִי לֶךְ	2 אֱלֹהִים אֵל־דָּמִי לֶךְ
	אֵל־תַּחֲרֹשׁ וְאֵל־תִּשְׁקֹט
	אֵל:
אֵל תַּחֲרֹשׁ וְאֵל תִּשְׁקֹט	
כִּי־אֵל הָנָה אוֹיְבֶיךָ יִהְיֶינָה	3 כִּי־הָנָה אוֹיְבֶיךָ יִהְיֶינָה
	וְמִשְׁנֵאֵיךְ נִשְׁאוּ רָאשׁ:
וּמִשְׁנֵאֵיךְ נִשְׁאוּ רָאשׁ	
עַל עֵמֶךְ [יַעֲרִימוּ סָוֶד]	4 עַל־עֵמֶךְ יַעֲרִימוּ סָוֶד
	וְיִתְּעֻצּוּ עָלֶיךָ צְפוֹנִיךְ:

- In the verse 2 of MT, the text is constructed as a synonymous parallelism. Each stich has a double vetitive (אֵל) with God as subject and a verb evoking the silence.
- In the text of Mas 1e, stich 2b is associated with 3a building an antithesis between God's peace and silence *versus* the tumult of the enemies. The conjunction כי marks the

articulation of the two pairs as often in Hebrew poetry, v. 3a being indeed the causal proposition of 2b: why God must not be still? Because enemies are in tumult. This is perfectly coherent from a syntactic and stylistic point of view.

- In the verse 3 of MT, the two stichs are built in synonymous parallelism: 'your enemies' (אֹיְבֶיךָ) // 'those who hate you' (וְשֹׂנְאֶיךָ) and 'are in tumult' (יְהַמְיִזוּ) // 'raised their hands' (נִשְׁאוּ רָאשׁ).<sup>1</sup>
- In the Masada organisation, the second pair is also perfectly coherent: first, 'those who hate you' (וְשֹׂנְאֶיךָ) is the subject of the verbs of the two stichs in semantic parallelism: they 'raised their head' (נִשְׁאוּ רָאשׁ) and they 'lay crafty plans' (יַעַרְיָמוּסוּ); second, the first expression of each stich is antithetic: 'those who hate you' (וְשֹׂנְאֶיךָ) vs 'your people' (עַמְּךָ)

In the absence of Masoretic punctuation and an anachronistic notion of verse, it is the two-column layout of the text combined with the syntax that imposes its rhythm and meaning. This simple observation invites us to rethink the organisation of texts, beyond the verse and the Masoretic organisation. For example, every time we are confronted with a 'tristich' in a poem, we can imagine that it is actually a distich (2 tristichs are also 3 distichs). What we think of as the third distich would actually be the first of the next pair, implying a cyclic permutation of all the following pairs according to Masoretic punctuation.

It goes without saying that these questions only arise when the scribe arranges the text in two columns with one stich per column; the

question is totally different with a text written in continuous script, as in 11QPs<sup>a</sup>, for example.

### 3.0. Stichography in the Ben Sira Manuscripts

Going back to Ben Sira Hebrew manuscripts, five are arranged in stichography (2Q18, Masada, B, B margin, E and F), while the other four arrange the text in continuous lines (11QPs<sup>a</sup>, A, C, and D). These two forms of text presentation are attested in both medieval manuscripts and those from antiquity.<sup>7</sup> Since both layouts survive in different branches and at different stages of the stemma (Rey et al. forthcoming), we must assume that some scribes deliberately chose to change the presentation of the text in one direction or the other as they passed it down.

#### 3.1. Stichography in 2Q18 and Masada

The most ancient examples of stichographic presentations of the text of Ben Sira are found in 2Q18 and the Masada manuscript. Stichographic layout—in the absence of any sort of punctuation—shows that, in the first century BCE, the scribes of Masada and 2Q18 considered the text of Ben Sira as a succession of sentences constructed as pairs. It prohibits all forms of tristichs unless textually indicated by a free empty half line. In the whole of the Masada manuscript this layout is attested only once, in Sir. 42.24. This sole example of blank stich on the manuscript is a good indication that the scribe made conscious choices regarding the layout of the text. Apart from this particular case, the text shows no exceptions, with every line from Sir. 39.27 to 44.17 regularly

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<sup>7</sup> 2Q18 and Masada date from the 1st century BCE, while 11QPs<sup>a</sup> dates from the early 1st century CE.

organised as a pair of stichs. Whatever the definition of Hebrew poetry or *mashal*, the text of Ben Sira is graphically presented, here, through two elements, A and B, connected to one another, at least graphically (Kugel 1981, 69; Vayntrub 2019, 57–59).

As manuscript 2Q18 is very fragmentary, it is difficult to draw any conclusions apart from the fact that its layout corresponds to the punctuation of the text preserved in Manuscript A.

### 3.2. Stichographic Layout of Manuscript B

We now turn our attention to the stichographic presentation of Manuscript B (British Library Or. 5518.1). With the exception of a few titles centred between the two columns of text, the scribe never deviates from the rule of two stichs per line. How, then, does the scribe proceed in the case of tristichs? The situation is relatively frequent, but at no time is there an isolated stitch in the manuscript presentation. In numerous cases, the scribe tightens letters' size to fit the three stichs onto a single line. This reveals that the scribes are clearly aware of the incongruity of the situation and the importance of not inserting a shift in the organisation of the text. A good example of this phenomenon is Sir. 37.1–2.

#### 3.2.1. Sir. 37.1–2

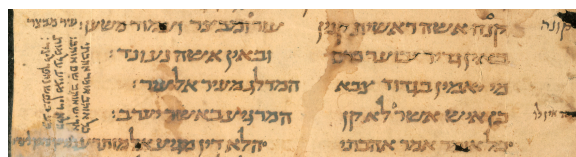


Figure 3: Sir. 37.1 (Or. 5518.1 recto l. 6–10, courtesy to the British Library)

In Sir. 37.1, the main text of Manuscript B preserves three stichs written on one line:<sup>8</sup>

כל אומר אומר אהבתי הלא דין מגיע אל מות רע כנפשך נהפך לצר:

- 1 Everyone who speaks says, “I love.”
- 2 Is it not a sadness approaching death—  
a companion like your very self who turns into an enemy?

However, the text is also preserved in the margin of Manuscript B in two distichs (as it is also the case for this verse in Manuscript C, the Greek and the Syriac):<sup>9</sup>

כל אוהב אומר אהבתי  
אך יש אוהב שם אוהב:  
הלא דין מגיע על מות  
רע כנפש נהפך לצר:

- 1 Every friend says, “I love”  
but there is the friend (who is only) a friend in name.
- 2 Is it not a sadness approaching death—  
a companion like your very self who turns into an enemy?

We can clearly see how the scribe of Manuscript B adapted their writing to keep the tristich on one line so as not to provoke a cyclic permutation of the next sentences. It also shows that the stichographic representation of Manuscript B was certainly reconstructed *a posteriori*,

<sup>8</sup> Supralinear dots indicate incomplete letters.

<sup>9</sup> For the marginal readings of Manuscript B, see among other: Rey and Dhont 2019, 97–124.

**Commented [MOU1]:** 1) What do the supralinear dots in your transcription indicate? The readings look fairly certain to me based on the image above.

2) The small circles preceding כל and הלא indicate a correction (the correct text is provided — in 2xdistichs! — at 90 degrees. I think you need to explain its significance (or not) for your argument for the benefit of someone who might not be familiar with this ms. For example, are the marginal corrections contemporary with the main text or even added by the same scribe? If so, this would undermine your argument that the layout here is deliberate.

**Commented [FR2R1]:** 1. It means that the letters are incomplete on the manuscript. But you can delete it without problem.

**Commented [FR3R1]:** 2. It is a very big debate. I added a reference in the note. To be honest, I don't know if it is the same scribe or not... I don't think... but even if it would have been the same I don't see in which way it would undermine the argument. In the margin we have four sticks, in the main text thee... three on one line, four on two lines...? Or I misunderstood?

**Commented [MOU4R1]:** 1. I've added a footnote. Hope it's okay.

2. Not quite sure now, what I had in mind, but if you're happy, I'm happy!

probably on the basis of a text that did not have a stichographic representation that allowed such freedom in textual organisation.

Numerous examples are found (Sir. 15.20; Sir. 31.16; Sir. 31.22; Sir. 31.31 [// MS F]; Sir. 32.1 [// MS F];<sup>10</sup> Sir. 32.4 [// MS F]; Sir. 37.2 [// MSS C and D]; Sir. 44.11–12; Sir. 45.26; Sir. 44.17). As is the case in the numerous tristichs in Manuscript A, they are always the place and result of complex textual transformations (see section 3.3).

These examples, directly perceptible in the materiality of the text, are visible traces of the text's development over time. In many cases, however, stich shifts and re-compositions of semantic pairs have been definitively incorporated into the body of the text, remain perceptible only by comparison with ancient Greek, Syriac and Latin versions, and explain the frequent discrepancies in verse numbering.

### 3.2.2. Sir. 42.23–43.1

Consider, for example, the case of Sir. 42.23ff. Compared with the Masada text, manuscript B does not include (at least not at this location) verse 24, which is exceptionally arranged in three stichs in the Masada manuscript, the last stich being followed by a blank space. Nor does Manuscript B preserve the second stich of verse 23 (attested only in the margin), which is replaced with the first stich of Masada's verse 25, creating an obvious shift at the beginning of chapter 43. Indeed, Sir 43:1a is now connected with 42:25b. Consequently, the following sentences are constructed in a totally different way from Masada's text.

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<sup>10</sup> Sir. 31.31 and 32.1 present the same tristich on a single line in Manuscript B and Manuscript F, although the two manuscripts do not belong to the same branch of the stemma. Nevertheless, the fragmentary state of Manuscript B for these verses does not allow us to draw any further conclusions.

**Masada (Sir. 42.23–43.1)**

23	הכל חי ועמ[ד] לעד	[ו]כל צרך והכל נשמר
24	כלם שנ[ים]	[זה]לעמות זה
	ולא עשה מהם [שוא]	<i>vacat</i>
25	זה על זה חלף טובם	[ו]מי ישבע להביט הודם
43:1	תאר מרום ורקיע לטהר	עצם שמים מ[ב]ע נהורו

23 All live and endure forever;

(their) every need—everything is provided for.

24 All of them, diff[erent]

opposite

he made none of them [in vain]

*vacat*

25 This one to the next, their beauty is surpassing

who could be sated at seeing their splendor?

1 The beauty of the height(s) and of the firmament (is) pristine indeed;

heaven itself em[it]s its shining.

**Manuscript B (Sir. 42.23–43.1)**

23a/25a	הוא ת[י] עמד לעד	זה על זה חלף טובו:	(23b) לכל צרך והכל נשמע:
25b/43:1a	וימי ישב[ע] ל[ה]ב[י]ט הדם	תואר[ר]	[ל]טוהר:

23a He is a[live and] remaining (margin: enduring) forever,

25a This one to the next, his beauty is surpassing.

(margin: 23b For every need, all is considered.)

25b And, who can get their fi[ll] at [se]eing their glory?

1a Beauty[ ] (are) pristine.

This example clearly shows how the addition or omission of a stich causes a complete re-composition, not only of the verse in question, but of all the stichs that follow. As a result of this phenomenon, the new pairs of meanings are created.

### 3.3. Non-Stichography in Manuscript A: Creation of Tristichs and Shift of the Following Stichs

In the case of manuscript not written in stichography, like Manuscript A, one of the difficulties is the precise definition of 'stich'.<sup>11</sup> A good example of this imprecision is the case of Mas Sir. 42:24, mentioned previously, where the scribe lays out the text **in three stichs, requiring the scribe to leave** a blank space in the second column, where the Greek tradition—which agrees completely with the Hebrew—makes it a distich.<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.3.1. Sir. 4:3–6

Among the many transformations witnessed in the Ben Sira manuscripts, one of the most obvious is the creation of doublets (Rey 2021). Let consider the case of Sir. 4.3-4, found only in Manuscript A which is written in non-stichography, but whose textual units are delimited by *sof passuq*. In comparison with the Greek and Syriac version,

<sup>11</sup> I use *stich* as a synonym of *colon* and in the case of stichographic layout as the first and second part of the line divided by a white space. For terminology, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2015, 20–29.

<sup>12</sup> It is clearly visible on Codex Vaticanus, for example, which layouts the text of Ben Sira in stichography (folio 882, ll. 20–22). For stichography in Greek Bible manuscripts, see Barclay Swete and Thackeray 1900, 348–50.



Manuscript A has a supplementary stich that seems to be the result of a collation of two textual traditions, one attested by the Greek, the other more or less by the Syriac. The insertion of this 'extra' stich by one scribe creates a shift in all the pairs of the following verses, creating a completely different poem with different poetical combination, exactly as in our example of Ps. 83 from Mas 1e. By contrast, the Greek has two additional stichs (4b and 5a) that are missing in the Hebrew and the Syriac. Consequently, the three versions present different combinations of pairs in **verses 3–5, finally realigning from verse 6** onwards (marked by a small *vacat* in the Hebrew manuscript).

**Hebrew Text** (Greek numeration of verses in parenthesis)

3 אֶל תַּחְמִיר קִמְי דָּךְ  
 וְקָרֵב עֲנִי אֶל תִּכְאִיב:  
 4 אֶל תִּמְנַע מִתֶּן מִמַּסְכִּינְךָ  
 וְלֹא תִבּוֹזֶה שְׁאוֹלוֹת דָּל  
 5 וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ מְקוֹם לִקְלָלֶךָ:  
 6 *vac.* צוּעֵק מֵרֹחַ בִּבְאָב נַפְשׁוֹ  
 וּבִקּוֹל צַעֲקָתוֹ יִשְׁמַע צוּרֹו:

3 Do not inflame the emotions of the oppressed,

(> G, S) and do not pain the bosom of the poor.

4 (3b) Do not refuse a gift to the destitute who is near you,

(4a) and you should not despise the requests of the impoverished.

5 (5b) so as not to give them occasion to curse you.

6 *vacat* (When) one of bitter spirit cries out in the pain of their soul,

their rock hears the sound of their cry.<sup>13</sup>

**Greek Text** (Hebrew numeration of verses in parenthesis)

**3** καρδιαν παρωργισμένην μὴ προσταράξης  
καὶ μὴ παρελκύσης δόσιν προσδεόμενου.  
**4** ἰκέτην θλιβόμενον μὴ ἀπαναίνου  
καὶ μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἀπὸ πτωχοῦ.  
**5** ἀπὸ δεομένου μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς ὀφθαλμὸν  
καὶ μὴ δῶς τόπον ἀνθρώπῳ καταράσασθαί σε·  
**6** καταρωμένου γάρ σε ἐν πικρίᾳ ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ  
τῆς δεήσεως αὐτοῦ ἐπακούσεται ὁ ποιήσας αὐτόν.

**3** An angry heart do not trouble,  
**(4a)** and do not delay giving to one in need.  
**4 (4b)** A suppliant in distress do not keep rejecting,  
(> H, S) and do not turn your face away from the poor.  
**5** (> H, S) From one who begs do not turn away an eye,  
**(5)** and do not give him occasion to curse you.  
**6** For if one curses you in bitterness of his soul,  
the one who made him will hear his petition.<sup>14</sup>

**Syriac Text**

<sup>13</sup> Translation Eric D. Reymond & Frédérique Michèle Rey.  
<sup>14</sup> Translation Benjamin G. Wright, NETS.

3 וְלֹא תַעֲזֹב אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי לְעַזְבוֹתָיו.  
 אֲלֵךְ אֲלֵךְ וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי.  
 4 אַל תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי.  
 5 אֲלֵךְ אֲלֵךְ וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי.  
 6 אֲלֵךְ אֲלֵךְ וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי.  
 אֲלֵךְ אֲלֵךְ וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַפְּוֹנִי.

3 Do not make the emotions of the poor man suffer

And do not withhold a gift from the needy

4 Do not ignore a request of the poor

5 and do not give him an occasion to curse you.

6 He curses because he is completely embittered

but his Creator hears the sound of his cry.<sup>15</sup>

If one of the two stichs of the verse 3 has been added secondarily—whatever the etiology—we have to conclude that the scribe has taken an active part into the poetic construction of the text by creating a beautiful chiasmic parallelism (verb – complement *versus* complement – verb) full of biblical echoes.<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew is clearly structured by ‘*vav*’ that articulate stich pairs and, later, by the addition of *sof passuq*. In the present context, the addition of one stich in verse 3 does not create

<sup>15</sup> Translation Nuria Calduch Benages, Joan Ferrer, Jan Liesen (modified).

<sup>16</sup> מעה and קרב are connected in Lam. 1.20 (which also use the association of מעה and חמר, see also Lam. 2.11), Isa. 16.11 and Job 20.14; and for the link between עני and דך echoes Ps. 74.21.

a tristich in this verse. Rather, the scribe carries the shift over to the next verse, generating a new synonymous parallelism in vv. 4a and 4b where the two complements echo each other ('the destitute **who is near you**' (שְׁאוֹלוֹת דָּל) // 'the requests of the impoverished' (מִמְסְכִינֶךָ) as well as the two verbs ('Do not refuse' (אַל תִּמְנַע) // 'you should not despise' (לֹא תִבְזֶה)). However, it seems clear that such a stich addition would only be possible in a non-stichographic layout.

3.3.2. Sir 14.11–14

A second example can be found in Sir. 14.11–14. The scribe’s punctuation and the insertion of a *vacat* in the middle of verse 13 (according to the Greek) suggest the following organization, which is somewhat counterintuitive to Hebrew syntax:

Hebrew Text

בני אדם יש לך שְׁרוֹת נפשך	11
וְאִם יֵשׁ לְךָ הִיטִיב לָךְ	
וְלֹא יִדְּךָ הַדֶּשֶׁן	
זְכוּר כִּי לֹא בִשְׂאוֹל תַּעֲנוּג	12ab
וְחֹק לִשְׂאוֹל לֹא הִגֵּד לָךְ	12c/13a
וְהַשִּׁיגַת יָדְךָ תֵּן לוֹ	13b/14a
וְבֵה לִקַּח אֶחָד אֶל תַּעֲבֵר	14bc
וְאִם יֵשׁ לְךָ הִיטִיב לָךְ	
וְלֹא מוֹת יִתְמַהֲמָה:	
בְּטֶרֶם תָּמוּת הִיטִיב לְאוֹהֶב:	<i>vacat</i>
אַל תִּמְנַע מִטוֹבַת יוֹם	
וְחִמּוּד רָע אֶל תַּחֲמוּד:	

11 My child, if you have the means, serve your soul  
if you have the means, do good to yourself  
and according to your abilities, satisfy yourself.  
12 Remember that there is no pleasure in Sheol  
and that death does not delay.

And as the decree of Sheol has not been disclosed to you,

**13** before dying, do good to (your) friend. *vacat*

And as much as you are able, give to them.

**14** do not refuse the happiness of a day

and do not neglect to bring a brother into it

and do not desire what your companion desires.<sup>17</sup>

The text is full of doublets that are missing in the Greek and Syriac texts:

#### Greek Text

**11** Τέκνον, καθὼς ἔαν ἔχῃς, εὖ ποιεῖ σεαυτὸν

καὶ προσφορὰς κυρίῳ ἀξίως πρόσσχε·

**12** μνήσθητι ὅτι θάνατος οὐ χρονεῖ

καὶ διαθήκη ἁδοῦ οὐχ ὑπεδείχθη σοι·

**13** πρὶν σε τελευτήσῃ εὖ ποιεῖ φίλῳ

καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἰσχύν σου ἔκτεινον καὶ δὸς αὐτῷ.

**14** μὴ ἀφυστερήσῃς ἀπὸ ἀγαθῆς ἡμέρας,

καὶ μερὶς ἐπιθυμίας ἀγαθῆς μὴ σε παρελθάτω.

**11** Child, even as you have, treat yourself well,

and bring offerings to the Lord worthily.

**12** Remember that death will not tarry,

and the covenant of Hades has not been shown to you.

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<sup>17</sup> Translation Eric D. Reymond and Frédérique Michèle Rey.

**13** Before you die, treat a friend well,  
and, according to your strength, reach out, and give to him.  
**14** Do not withdraw from a good day,  
and do not let a share of a good desire pass you by.<sup>18</sup>

Syriac Text

11 ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
12 ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ  
ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
13 ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
14 ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ  
ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ

**11** If you have (something), my son, attend to yourself  
and if you have (something), do well to yourself.  
**12** Remember that up till now you did not see death  
and the decree of Sheol was not visible for you.  
**13** Before you die, do good to your friend  
and what he asks of you, give (it) to him.  
**14** Do not refrain from the good which (you can do) today

<sup>18</sup> Translation Benjamin G. Wright, NETS.

and do not covet an odious desire.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, this passage underwent numerous transformations during its transmission. A scribe punctuates v. 11 as a tristich, which is unusual and not in concord with a stichographic layout. This verse is obviously the conflation of two textual traditions. Indeed, the stichs 11ab are reflected with a variation of the word order in the Syriac translation (11ab: *אֶל־הַגִּבּוֹרִים בְּנֵי אִם יֵשׁ לָךְ שְׂרוֹת נַפְשָׁךְ וְאִם יֵשׁ לָךְ הִיטִיב לָךְ* versus *אֶל־הַגִּבּוֹרִים בְּנֵי אִם יֵשׁ לָךְ שְׂרוֹת נַפְשָׁךְ וְאִם יֵשׁ לָךְ הִיטִיב לָךְ*), while the stichs 11bc are represented by the Greek version. The stich 11b *אֶל־הַגִּבּוֹרִים בְּנֵי אִם יֵשׁ לָךְ הִיטִיב לָךְ* corresponds to *Τέτατον, αὐτῶς ἐὰν ἔχῃς, εὖ ποιεῖ σεαυτὸν* also attested as such in b. 'Erub. 54a (בְּנֵי אִם יֵשׁ לָךְ הִיטִב), whereas in stich 11c *וְלֹא־יִדְּדֶנּוּ* is reflected in Greek through *καὶ ... οὐκ ἐπιθυμῶν*, while the *הִדְשֵׁן* is echoed in the term *προσφορὰς*.

The first two stichs (12a and 12b) of the tristich 12a–c are also clearly the result of a conflation of various textual traditions. Both Greek and Syriac have only the distich 12b and 12c. The stich 12a (*זִכּוֹר* (כִּי אֵין בִּשְׂאוֹל לְבַקֵּשׁ תַּעֲנוּג) is a doublet of Sir. 14.16a (כִּי אֵין בִּשְׂאוֹל לְבַקֵּשׁ תַּעֲנוּג), but its place before 12bc is also attested in the citation of b. 'Erub. 54a, which organises verse 12 as two **pairs of stichs**.

The Steinsaltz edition provide the following text:

שֶׂאִין בִּשְׂאוֹל תַּעֲנוּג  
וְאֵין לְמוֹת הַתְּמָהְמָה  
וְאִם תֹּאמַר אֵינִי לְבָנִי

<sup>19</sup> Translation Nuria Calduch Benages, Joan Ferrer, Jan Liesen.

<sup>20</sup> The syntax of *וְלֹא־יִדְּדֶנּוּ* is slightly different from the classical usage—supposedly *יִדְּדֶנּוּ לֹא־יִדְּדֶנּוּ*, see Sir. 5.1 and Gen 31.29—which may explain the Greek translator's confusion.

חוק בשאול מי יגיד לך

MS Vat. ebr. 109, fol. 28v, l. 4 offers a slightly different text, but preserves the same order of stich: **כי אין בשאול תענוג למות התמהמה ואם תאמר אניח לבני ולבנותי חוק בשאול מי יגיד לך**.

In Manuscript A, however, a scribe has placed a *sof passuq* at the end of stich 12b, punctuating the text in distich as required by a stichographic layout. As a result, 12a and 12b are joined, and the following stichs are offset from the Greek and Syriac versions. Stich 12c is then strangely joined to stich 13a. This organisation of the text is confirmed by the *vacat* that disconnects 13a from 13b. From verse 15 onwards, all the versions are realigned, since verse 14 also contains an additional stich. The latter, in the same way, is the result of the conflation of two textual traditions, one (v. 14b) more or less reflected by the Greek tradition<sup>21</sup> and the other (v. 14c) by the Syriac tradition ( **אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ** ). A beautiful example of the idea that two tristichs can also be two distichs.

Similar situations where Hebrew stich pairs are reorganized by the addition or omission of a clause that cannot be adapted to a stichographic presentation are not an isolated phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew does not correspond exactly to the Greek but both versions can be explained in relation to each other, see for example the solution proposed by Lévi 1901, 104.

<sup>22</sup> See also Sir. 3.28; 4.17; 11.25; 12.11; 12.14; 13.2; 13.17; 14.11; 14.14; 15.14; 16.15.



#### 4.0. Conclusion

This article was dedicated to the analysis of the implications of the text layout on the page in stichography or non-stichography and the consequences of switching from one model to the other.

As the stichographic layout requires more paper or leather than a full-line text it is more expensive to produce. As a result, it already conveys essential information to the reader about the importance of the copied text. The codicological quality of Manuscript B is close to that of the Masoretic biblical manuscripts, testifies to this in more ways than one. But beyond the obvious aesthetic function of presenting the text on the page, the stichographic layout closely associates two sentences, creating a specific syntactic, semantic and poetic link between them. This is not the case in a text written without stichography, especially in the absence of any punctuation, where each sentence can be understood through a variety of connections with the texts that precede or follow it, or through the constitution of larger units. The very definition of the theoretical notion of 'stich' for an unpunctuated text is in itself a complex, even problematic issue.

Moreover, on the basis of several examples, we were able to show that the layout of the text in two stichs per line creates a strong constraint for the poet: the impossibility of integrating a tristich without generating a cyclic permutation of all the following stichs. Of course, this constraint disappears as soon as the text is no longer presented in stichography. But although the stichographic model is attested in the oldest manuscripts, we have been able to show from both Manuscript B and Manuscript A that the scribes may have oscillated from one model to another during the transmission of the text. As a result, while difficult to introduce in a stichographic presentation,

tristichs have appeared in the textual tradition generally by conflation of different textual traditions. The scribe of Manuscript B tries to accommodate them as best they can without disrupting the sequence of subsequent stichs. Conversely, in Manuscript A, certain syntactically counterintuitive punctuation marks seem to reflect a time when the text was presented as in stichography. While the scribe of Manuscript B—or the earlier scribe in the branch of Manuscript A—tries to avoid cyclic permutations, these later ones are clearly attested. They lead to a completely new syntactic, semantic and poetic composition without changing any letter of the transmitted text. Finally, like the transformation and evolution of the consonantal text or of its vocalization traditions through its textual transmission, the layout of the text takes an entire part of its life, its meaning, and its poetical structure.

To conclude this section, the question of text layout also affects modern editions, which vary greatly in their representation of poetry (or what they consider as poetry) and the very Western idea that poetry should be presented in verse/stich. When Eric Reymond and Frédérique Michèle Rey designed the critical edition of the Hebrew Manuscripts of Ben Sira, they had a methodological dilemma that is indicative of this problem: should we present non-stichographic manuscript as they are preserved in the manuscript **or in** stichography like Masada and B? We opted for the second solution, precisely because of the effect it would have on the reader: enhancement of sentence pairs, ease of reading, ease of cross-referencing notes, ease of comparison with other manuscripts, and so on. But the other solution is still on our mind and we still have a touch of regret: how would a text of Ben Sira in continuous script affect the reader differently?

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