**The Semantic Shift of נשא פנים and בשת in Ben Sira in the Hellenistic Context**

In two passages, Ben Sira examines the ambivalent nature of shame: 4:21–24 and 41:3–14. There are instances in which shame is good and desirable, and there are instances in which shame is negative and is deleterious to the one who experiences it. In Chapter 4 we read יש בשת משאת עון ויש בשת חן וכבוד (“For there is a shame [בשת] that leads to sin, and there is a shame [בשת] that is favor and glory”. 4:21 [C]).[[1]](#footnote-2) In 41:14–42:8, Ben Sira devotes a long pericope to a discussion of the negative and positive features of shame, under the title מוסר בשת (“Instruction on Shame”, 41:14 [B]). At the opening of the list, Ben Sira claims: לא כל בשת נאה לשמר ולא כל הכלם נבחר (“For it is not good to feel shame in every circumstance, nor is every kind of abashment to be approved”. 41:16 [B, C, M])—a statement that also adopts an ambivalent conception of shame. This unit offers a detailed list of instances in which one should be ashamed and refrain from a given action (41:14–22), followed by a string of actions that should be done forthrightly, without embarrassment for doing so (42:1–8).

In these two places, the expression נשא פנים appears, matched in parallel to a verb from the root בוש (Ben Sira 4:22, 42:1). After the statement in Chapter 4 about the dual nature of shame—on one hand it “leads to sin” while on the other it brings “favor and glory”—Ben Sira adds, אל תשא פנים לנפשך ואל תבוש למכשול לך (“Do not תשא פנים, to your own harm, or be ashamed, to your downfall”, 4:22 [C]).[[2]](#footnote-3) In Chapter 42, in the passage listing the things about which one should not be ashamed but rather one should in fact do, Ben Sira opens with the words אך על אלה אל תבוש ואל תשא פנים וחטא (“Of the following things do not be ashamed, and do not תשא פנים and sin”. 42:1 [B, M]).[[3]](#footnote-4) In these two verses, it appears that the meaning of the phrase נשא פנים is different from its meaning when it appears in Biblical Hebrew, but its precise meaning is the subject of a debate. The present article offers a solution to this debate by tracing the translation history of the expression נשא פנים and a synonymous expression, הכר פנים, in the Septuagint. With such usages, which have not previously been taken into consideration in the scholarship examining this question, the Septuagint serves as a sort of lexicon of Hebrew of the Hellenistic period.[[4]](#footnote-5) To understand the semantic process that has taken place with this expression, and more generally regarding verbs from the root בוש and the noun בשת in Ben Sira, I propose, in the second section of the article, to direct attention to the ambivalent conception of shame in Greek literature. It appears that these data can shed light on the reason the semantic shift in these terms took place in Ben Sira’s time. This may also yield a contribution to the growing discussion in recent decades about Jewish wisdom literature in the context of its time and place, in comparison with Greek literature.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**A. נשא פנים in Parallel with בשת (Ben Sira 4:22, 42:1)**

The literal meaning of the expression נשא פנים in the Hebrew Bible is “to lift up one’s/another’s face, to respect someone” (e.g., Gen 19:21, 32:21, 1Sam 25:35), and from that emerges the sense of the expression in a legal context, “to show (unfair) partiality toward”, as in the admonition לא תעשו עול במשפט לא תשא פני דל ולא תהדר פני גדול (Lev. 19:15) or אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שוחד (Deut 10:17; see also Deut 28:50, Ps 82:2, Prov 6:35, 18:5).**[[6]](#footnote-7)** Most commentators also interpret the expression in Ben Sira 4:22 and 42:1 in a legal context, meaning “to show partiality”. Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella translate 4:22 as “show no favoritism or partiality”, comparing it to the legal context of Lev 19:15 and Deut 10:17.**[[7]](#footnote-8)** At Ben Sira 42:1, G.H. Box and W.O.E. Oesterley state that some of the requests that Ben Sira is about to list require judicial fairness and therefore the sage prefaces the passage with a warning against favoritism in order to refrain from sin.[[8]](#footnote-9) This meaning, however, in judicial usage, in the sense of favoring one person over another, is inappropriate for the context in those two passages, and it is not helpful in clarifying the meaning of the verses.

In light of the parallelism in the verses that have been cited above, matching a call not to be ashamed with an admonition not to לשאת פנים, as in the parallel between the clause אל תשא פנים לנפשך (4:22 [C]) and the clause אל נפשך אל תבוש (4:20 [C]) within the same chapter, Menahem Kister has suggested that נשא פנים must be understood as “to be ashamed [of someone]”.[[9]](#footnote-10) It may be that this meaning of נשא פנים has been preserved also in another place in Ben Sira, 20:22; according to MS C, the Hebrew text reads יש מאבד נפשו מבושת ובאולת פנים יורישנה, and some of the central Greek manuscripts translate the expression ובאולת פנים, as one would expect, as ἀπὸ ἄφρονος προσώπου. Greek MS 248, though, which reads καὶ ἀπὸ λήψεως προσώπου ἀπολεῖ αὐτήν, and the Latin translation, “ab...persona...acceptione”, are apparently dependent on a different Hebrew *Vorlage*, along the lines of יש מאבד נפשו מבשת ובנְּשׂא פנים יורישנה.[[10]](#footnote-11) Additional evidence of the parallel between these terms emerges from the interesting textual variation, mentioned by Kister, in the minor Talmudic tractate Derekh Eretz betweenאל תשא פנים לעצמך לומר לא שמעתי and אל תבוש לומר לא שמעתי (Tractate Derekh Eretz 1:22 [ed. Higger, 74]).[[11]](#footnote-12) In light of all these examples, Kister has suggested that in the Hellenistic period, the meaning of the phrase shifted and it took on the meaning, “to be ashamed of”, as it is used in those verses from Ben Sira. However, Kister has admitted that “[t]he semantic development of the idiom […] in the sense of being ashamed is not quite clear”, because this meaning “is scarcely documented elsewhere”.

This lack of additional data led Eric D. Reymond to reject that suggestion and argue instead that Ben Sira used the expression נשא פנים only in accord with its sense in Biblical Hebrew.[[12]](#footnote-13) He rejected the textual variants in Tractate Derekh Eretz, since that is a relatively late source.[[13]](#footnote-14) The expression נשא פנים in 42:1 is translated by Reymond as “do not show partiality in any of these matters” and taken to refer to all the items that follow.[[14]](#footnote-15) That meaning, however, is inappropriate for the list of actions that comes after that verse, for in fact Ben Sira includes in the same list the things regarding which one should experience בשת and the things regarding which one should not experience בשת, and the idea of showing partiality is of no relevance in those matters. This suggestion also blurs the idea of shame, which is central in this pericope. Reymond interprets 4:22 not as synonymous parallelism but as antonymous parallelism. He translates the אל תשא פניך לנפשך / ואל תבוש למכשול לך as “Do not carry your head high for your own benefit, nor (by contrast), be ashamed to (the extent of being) ruined”. Once again, though, the explanation given for the expression נשא פנים is not appropriate in context. First, if one adopts the biblical sense of נשא פנים, it should be kept in mind that in the Bible a person always “lifts the face” of another, not one’s own. What is needed here, then, is a new meaning, different from what one would expect based on Biblical Hebrew. Second, vv. 20b–24 deal with the concept of shame and with exaggerated modesty that should be avoided. In what follows those words, Ben Sira warns in v. 23 against deliberately not revealing one’s wisdom, saying “Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment, and do not hide your wisdom”. The term נשא פנים in the opposing sense, “to exalt oneself”, does not get worked into that passage and does not get developed at all in the text. Reymond's suggestion is also at odds with the parallel between v. 20 of that chapter ואל נפשך אל תבוש (v. 20 [A]) and the beginning of v. 22, אל תשא פניך על נפשך (v. 22 [A]).

Reymond follows in the path of most earlier scholars, apparently due to the shortage of data noted by Kister, but in fact there is additional evidence that has not been presented until now supporting Kister’s suggestion that the expression נשא פנים underwent a semantic shift close to Ben Sira’s time. All that evidence is to be found in an important source reflecting the Hebrew of the Hellenistic period—the Septuagint. And as Jan Joosten noted, “although we are dealing with a Greek text, it nevertheless conceals within it abundant information about the Hebrew language as known and spoken by Jews of the Hellenistic period; for the writers of the Septuagint did not translate the biblical text according to its original meaning, but rather according to the meaning ascribed to it in their time”.[[15]](#footnote-16)

In a few instances, the Septuagint translates the expression נשא פנים— and the parallel phrase used to express the same meaning in a judicial context, הכיר פנים — by means of the Greek verb αἰσχύνομαι or ἐπαισχύνομαι, whose meaning is “to be ashamed, feel shame”.[[16]](#footnote-17) Thus, אל נא אשא פני איש in Job 32:21 is translated ἄνθρωπον γὰρ οὐ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶ (“for truly I will not be ashamed of anyone”), and אשר לא נשא פני שרים in Job 34:19 is translated as ὃς οὐκ ἐπῃσχύνθη πρόσωπον ἐντίμου (“he who does not feel shame before the face of an honorable man”). Proverbs 22:26, אַל-תְּהִי בְתֹקְעֵי-כָף בַּעֹרְבִים מַשָּׁאוֹת, is translated by the LXX as μὴ δίδου σεαυτὸν εἰς ἐγγύην αἰσχυνόμενος πρόσωπον (“Do not give yourself as surety because you feel shame before a person”), and it appears that the Hebrew text the translator used had something like מִשֵּׂאת פנים where the MT reads מַשָּׁאוֹת.[[17]](#footnote-18) If so, then here too the verb נשא with פנים as its object is translated by ἐπαισχύνομαι, which means “to be ashamed”.

The parallel expression, הכיר פנים, which is used in a judicial context in a fashion similar to נשא פנים (e.g., Deut 1:17, 16:19) is sometimes rendered in the Septuagint in a similar fashion, with the sense of “shame”. Thus, in Prov 28:21, הכר פנים לא טוב is translated as ὃς οὐκ αἰσχύνεται πρόσωπα δικαίων, οὐκ ἀγαθός· (“He who does not feel shame toward the faces of the righteous is not good”).[[18]](#footnote-19) Proverbs 24:23, גם אלה לחכמים הכר פנים במשפט בל טוב, is rendered by translational doublet in the LXX, employing both the verb ἐπιγιγνώσκω in the sense of “knowing”, to represent הכר, and the verb αἰδέομαι, meaning “to be ashamed”, to represent the expression הכיר/נשא פנים in the Hellenstic period: Ταῦτα δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν τοῖς σοφοῖς ἐπιγινώσκειν· αἰδεῖσθαι πρόσωπον ἐν κρίσει οὐ καλόν· (“Now these things I also say to you who are wise to know, to be ashamed before a person in judgment–is not good”).[[19]](#footnote-20) Even when this expression occurs in a non-judicial context, the Greek translator employs terms about shame. So it is with Isaiah 3:9, where this interpretation is more in line with the context, even though it does not necessarily fit the simple meaning of the expression: הַכָּרַת פְּנֵיהֶם עָנְתָה בָּם וְחַטָּאתָם כִּסְדֹם הִגִּידוּ לֹא כִחֵדוּ is translated as καὶ ἡ αἰσχύνη τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῶν ἀντέστη αὐτοῖς· τὴν δὲ ἁμαρτίαν αὐτῶν ὡς Σοδομων ἀνήγγειλαν καὶ ἐνεφάνισαν (“And the shame of their face has risen up against them; they have proclaimed their sin like that of Sodom, and they have made it plain”).[[20]](#footnote-21) From all those verses, decisive evidence emerges for the use in Hellenistic times of the expressions נשא פנים and הכיר פנים to mean “be ashamed of”. That meaning is a good fit for the simple contextual meaning of the phrases in the two verses in Ben Sira discussed above (4:22, 42:1).

The examples from the Septuagint cited here are also instructive regarding the conditions under which the semantic shift in the expression נשא פנים (and הכר פנים as well) took place in the Hellenistic era.[[21]](#footnote-22) Apparently, the dual meanings of the action נשיאת פנים, honoring and exalting a person along with self-lowering and shame, are perceived as two sides of the same coin, and thus one meaning can replace the other. Because of the respect and honor shown to another person perceived as being of exalted status, one abases oneself, becoming fearful and ashamed before the exalted other. These two sides can be noted, for example, in the Greek verb αἰδέομαι found in the LXX to Prov 24:23 as the rendition of הכר פנים (see above). Its common interpretation is “to be ashamed”, and this is its most common meaning in Greek texts. That Greek verb also expresses the sense of “fear”, “stand in awe of”, and even “feel respect for” (such as *Il*.22.124, S.*Aj*.1356). The noun αἰδώς also comprises those two opposite meanings, honor and reverence on the positive side, and on the negative, as the entry in LSJ notes, “as a moral feeling, reverence, awe, respect for the feeling or opinion of others or for one's own conscience, and so shame”.[[22]](#footnote-23) The act of נשיאת פנים, then, is a feeling of awe toward other people, leading to the donning of בושת פנים, shamefacedness, similar to the meaning encapsulated in the Greek word αἰδώς and other words derived from it. The extent of the connection between that Greek concept and the idea of shame in the Hellenistic period is worthy of broader examination in light of the data discussed in the following section. From the data already presented, though, it clearly appears that in the Hellenistic period the Hebrew termנשא פנים was used with the sense of “be ashamed” as well. In verses in Ben Sira in which the admonition אל תשא פנים appears next to אל תבוש, the two verb phrases should be understood as synonymous with each other:

4:21–22 [C]: אל תשא פנים לנפשך // ואל תבוש למכשול לך

Do not feel shame (literally: *lift up one’s face*) to your own harm,

or be ashamed, to your downfall.

42:1 [B, M]: אך על אלה אל תבוש ואל תשא פנים [[23]](#footnote-24)

But of the following things do not be ashamed,

and do not feel shame (literally: *lift up one’s face*) and (bear) sin.

It may be that the use of the term with that meaning dwindled after the Hellenistic period, but thanks to Ben Sira and the Septuagint, we can establish with some confidence that it existed at the time that those works were being composed.

**B. Shame in Ben Sira and in the Hellenistic World**

While the phrase נשא פנים in the Hellenistic period took on the meaning of diminishing one’s self-worth or “being ashamed of”, a reverse semantic shift occurred in the use of the term בשת and the root בוש in general. In the Hebrew Bible, all the occurrences of the term בשת and the root בוש are in a negative context. Shame, בשת, is the lot of evildoers or those to whom harm has been done.[[24]](#footnote-25) In Ben Sira and from Mishnaic Hebrew onwards, words from the root בוש take also on a positive meaning and context.[[25]](#footnote-26) Shame leads to caution or humility (Ben Sira 42:8), and in this way may prevent the commission of sin, as is described in Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael on Exodus 20:20 [MT: 20:16] (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, 237):

“[…] and to put the fear of Him upon you” [Exod 20:20]– “fear of Him” is בשת פנים. It is a good sign in a person that he is a ביישן. “...so that you do not sin” [*ibid.*]– this says that הבושת leads to fear of sin.

In classical rabbinic thought, one can find בושה referred to as a positive and desirable characteristic. As the Mishnah says, עז פנים לגיהינם, ובושת פנים לגן עדן (“Arrogance [leads a person] to hell, while בושת פנים [leads a person] to paradise”, Avot 5:20 [or 5:24]). Conversely, the absence of בושה leads to disaster: לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא היה להם בשת פנים זה מזה (“Jerusalem was destroyed only because they [i.e., its inhabitants] had no בשת פנים before one another”, BT Shabbat 119b).

Not only did Ben Sira make use of the new idea of shame as a positive thing as in the passages cited above, but he emphasizes, as we have noted, the ambivalence of shame. There is shame that is positive, but shame can also harm, in which case it is considered negative, as in this statement of Ben Sira: יש בש(א)ת משאת עון ויש בשת כבוד וחן (“For there is a shame that leads to sin, and there is a shame that is favor and glory”, 4:21 [A, C]). In chapters 41–42, as we have seen, he devotes a long pericope to a survey of positive and negative shame, outlining in which instances one should be ashamed and in which instances one should not, but instead do something forthrightly (41:14–42:8).

The ambivalent nature of shame, which appears to be a complete innovation in Ben Sira (4:21, 41:16), can often be found in ancient Greek literature. A Greek aphorism appearing in many places says that shame can sometimes be of assistance and sometimes be harmful.[[26]](#footnote-27) That proverb appears in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* in a similar context and in a wisdom composition of similar character to Ben Sira (*Op.* 318):

αἰδώς, ἥ τ’ ἄνδρας μέγα σίνεται ἠδ’ ὀνίνησιν·

shame (αἰδώς) which greatly harms men and also benefits them.[[27]](#footnote-28)

Identical terms are used to describe shame, which can cause harm or benefit, in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 24.44–45):[[28]](#footnote-29)

ὣς Ἀχιλεὺς ἔλεον μὲν ἀπώλεσεν, οὐδέ οἱ αἰδὼς

γίγνεται, ἥ τ’ ἄνδρας μέγα σίνεται ἠδ’ ὀνίνησι.

so has Achilles lost all pity, nor has he shame (αἰδώς),

which harms men greatly and profits them.[[29]](#footnote-30)

This idea reappears in a fragment from a work of Euripides that has not been preserved in full (F 365 = Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 6.2.9.5):

αἰδοῦς δὲ καὐτὸς δυσκρίτως ἔχω πέρι·

καὶ δεῖ γὰρ αὐτῆς κἄστιν αὖ κακὸν μέγα.

I also am of two minds about self-restraint (αἰδώς).

It is needed, but it is also a great evil.[[30]](#footnote-31)

In Euripides’ play *Hippolytus* one can find the ambivalent perception of shame throughout the whole work. “Shame” is the motor driving the action in that play, for it can prevent licentiousness but it can also stave off the saving of human life, just as in Ben Sira shame is appropriate when it prevents licentiousness (41:17, 20–21), but inappropriate when it comes to matters of Torah and the commandments (42:2).[[31]](#footnote-32) The idea is presented succinctly in Phaedra’s famous speech at the beginning of the play (383–387):[[32]](#footnote-33)

[…] εἰσὶ δ’ ἡδοναὶ πολλαὶ βίου,  
μακραί τε λέσχαι καὶ σχολή, τερπνὸν κακόν,  
αἰδώς τε· δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσίν, ἡ μὲν οὐ κακή,    
ἡ δ’ ἄχθος οἴκων· εἰ δ’ ὁ καιρὸς ἦν σαφής,  
οὐκ ἂν δύ’ ἤστην ταὔτ’ ἔχοντε γράμματα.

[…] there are many pleasures in life,

long conversations and leisure—a pleasant evil—

and the sense of shame (αἰδώς). Yet there are two (kinds),[[33]](#footnote-34) the one not bad,

and the other a burden on a house. If what is appropriate were clear,

there would not be two things (kinds of αἰδώς) designated by the same letters.

By way of comparison to the Greek aphorisms, it should be noted that Ben Sira’s grandson translated the term בשת with the word αἰσχύνη, since it was the commonly used equivalent to בשת and בושה in the Septuagint, and not αἰδώς, which is the word employed in all the Greek sources cited above that mention the ambivalence of shame. From the perspective of meaning, however, the Greek concept of αἰδώς is a better match for the word בשת in Ben Sira than his grandson’s translation, since αἰσχύνη most often refers to the negative shame appropriate for Biblical Hebrew, while the Greek word αἰδώς is used for the positive sense as well, as was mentioned above.[[34]](#footnote-35) It appears that the Greek translation of Ben Sira preferred to adhere to the common translation in the other books of the Septuagint and did not take meaning into consideration.

Plato addressed the difference between the concepts of αἰσχύνη and αἰδώς in his *Laws* (647a), thus concretizing the closeness between the concept of αἰδώς and the ambivalent concept of shame in Ben Sira:

Φοβούμεθα δέ γε πολλάκις δόξαν, ἡγούμενοι δοξάζεσθαι κακοί, πράττοντες ἢ λέγοντές τι τῶν μὴ καλῶν· ὃν δὴ καὶ καλοῦμεν τὸν φόβον ἡμεῖς γε, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ πάντες, **αἰσχύνην**. [… ] Ἆρ’ οὖν οὐ καὶ νομοθέτης, καὶ πᾶς οὗ καὶ σμικρὸν ὄφελος, τοῦτον τὸν φόβον ἐν τιμῇ μεγίστῃ σέβει, καὶ καλῶν **αἰδῶ**, τὸ τούτῳ θάρρος ἐναντίον ἀναίδειάν τε προσαγορεύει καὶ μέγιστον κακὸν ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ πᾶσι νενόμικεν;

And we often fear for our reputation, when we imagine we are going to get a bad name for doing or saying something disgraceful. This is the fear which we, and I fancy everyone else, call ‘shame’ (αἰσχύνη) […] The legislator, then, and anybody of the slightest merit, values this fear very highly, and gives it the name ‘modesty’ (αἰδώς). The feeling of confidence that it is the opposite he calls ‘shamelessness’ (ἀναίδεια) and reckons it to be the biggest curse anyone could suffer, whether in his private or his public life.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Plato uses the term αἰσχύνη when he refers to negative shame, but when he refers to the positive aspect of shame, the one that keeps people from violating the law, Plato uses the term αἰδώς, and afterward he employs this term consistently when he mentions the subject of shame.[[36]](#footnote-37)

From the perspective of Hebrew, then, we may claim that the terms בשת and בושה in Biblical Hebrew parallel the Greek word αἰσχύνη, while in Ben Sira and Rabbinic Hebrew, those concepts are closer to the Greek αἰδώς. While we need not argue that during the Hellenistic period, the term בשת took on the meaning of αἰδώς because of the influence of the Greek language, since it may be that the change occurred as a result of an internal development within the Hebrew language, nonetheless contact between languages and cultures can sometimes bring similar concepts and meanings close to each other. In any case, we have reason to propose that perhaps the statement about the ambivalence of shame that appears twice in Ben Sira is influenced by Greek thought. We cannot ignore the fact that the first appearance of this *topos* in Hebrew literature occurs in Ben Sira, while in Greek literature it is repeated in many writings, dating back to the earliest works in Greek. Greek literature even offers extensive theoretical inquiry into the topic of shame (αἰδώς), which cannot be found in the biblical wisdom literature that preceded Ben Sira.[[37]](#footnote-38) Not only shame but other concepts as well receive an ambivalent analysis in Greek literature.[[38]](#footnote-39) It is not inconceivable, then, that Ben Sira adopted a Greek pattern, infusing it with his own unique ideas.

Several scholars, such as Rudolf Smend and Alexander A. Di Lella, have suggested that what Ben Sira writes in the section dealing with shame, and especially his observation that one should not be ashamed על תורת עליון וחק (“of the law of the Most High and His covenant”, 42:2 [M]) is directed at the elite of his time, who were distancing themselves from their ancestral practices, perhaps out of embarrassment and lack of respect, attracted instead to new Greek customs.[[39]](#footnote-40) These suggestions are based mainly on passages in the books of Maccabees, which describe a time a few years later than Ben Sira (see 1Macc 1:11–15, 2Macc 4:9–17). If that atmosphere is indeed in the background of Ben Sira’s words, it is interesting that Ben Sira’s appeal to his listeners among the elite of his time would be based, as we have shown above, on a well-known pattern in Greek literature, the ambivalent nature of shame. Precisely by means of a paraphrase of a well-known Greek aphorism, Ben Sira seeks to emphasize that there are things about which it is good to be ashamed, but one should not be ashamed in many other instances, first and foremost among them “the law of the Most High and His covenant” (42:2).

**III. Summary and Conclusions**

In the first section of this article, I have offered new evidence for understanding the meaning of the expression נשא פנים when it is paired with the term תבוש in Ben Sira. This evidence comes from the Septuagint, which was created over the course of the third to first centuries BCE, the period during which Ben Sira wrote. This example joins many others that demonstrate that the Septuagint is a very important source for understanding the Hebrew of the Hellenistic period, one that has not yet yielded its full potential. The data I have presented show that in the Hellenistic period, the expression נשא פנים (and הכיר פנים as well) took on the meaning of the root בוש (“shame”, “be ashamed”). At the same time, the biblical verb בושmoved closer during the Hellenstic period, according to the evidence of Ben Sira and Rabbinic Hebrew, to the Greek concept of αἰδώς, in that it indicates not only the negative sort of shame felt by someone who did a negative thing, as in Biblical Hebrew, but also a positive sort of shame, i.e., humility, modesty, and caution. In practice, the two terms under discussion here, נשא פנים and בוש, encompass meanings similar to αἰδώς and the verb αἰδέομαι in Greek. It is not inconceivable, then, that the semantic development of concepts in the semantic field of shame in the Hellenistic period is connected to the fact that the Hebrew conceptual terms came closer to the Greek concept of αἰδώς, a concept for which it is difficult to find a parallel term in Biblical Hebrew.[[40]](#footnote-41) Even if we argue that the semantic development of these concepts is independent of any awareness of the Greek world, but is instead an independent development within Hebrew, it can be agreed that the wisdom verses on the ambivalence of shame that appear in two places in Ben Sira, which constitute a complete innovation in Hebrew literature, have many parallels in early Greek literature. It may well be, then, that a Greek model served as inspiration for Ben Sira in composing wisdom statements in the same dual structure that is characteristic of the Greek approach. The intersection of data presented here, a sensitivity to changes in Hebrew of the Hellenistic period alongside a comparison with the world of Greek thought that was likely to have been known to Ben Sira and his generation to one extent or another, can assist us in many other instances as well in understanding Ben Sira’s work.

1. \* The Hebrew texts are cited according to the edition of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language: *The Book of Ben Sira.* Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary (ed. Z. Ben-Ḥayyim; Jerusalem 1973). Cf. *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew* (ed. P.C. Beentjes; VTSupp 68; Leiden 1997). I have also consulted the photos of the Hebrew manuscripts (abbreviated in this paper in brackets as A, B, C, and M) in https://www.bensira.org. The Greek text and the numbering of the verses follows J. Ziegler (ed.), *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Septuaginta, Academiae Scientarium Gottingensis XII,2; Göttingen 1980). The English translation follows NRSV with deviations. I am grateful to Menachem Kister who discussed with me this material during one of the initial incarnations of this paper. My thanks go also to my research assistant,… , for her invaluable help.

   . The Greek text and Ms. A change the order of the words: ויש בשת חן וכבוד [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. . A reads אל תשא פניך על נפשך [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. . The reading אך at the beginning of the sentence is according to B. Manuscript M and is damaged at this point. For the Greek text at the end of the verse, τοῦ ἁμαρτάνειν, see n. 23 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. . For the methodology see J. Joosten, “Linguistic Innovations in the Hebrew of the Hellenistic Period: Qumran and the Septuagint”, *Meghillot* 2 (2004) 151-155 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. . See for example J.J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville, KY 1997); B.G. Wright III, “Ben Sira and Hellenistic Literature in Greek”, in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism* (ed. H. Najman, J.-S. Rey–E.J.C. Tigchelaar; JSJSupp 174; Leiden 2016) 71-88; H. Najman, “Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the Study of a Semantic Constellation”, in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke* (ed. A. Feldman, M. Cioată and C. Hempel; Leiden 2017) 459-472. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. . See for example HALOT, 724-728, s.v. נשא 6c; M.I. Gruber, “The Many Faces of Hebrew נשא פנים ‘lift up the face’”, *ZAW* 85 (1983) 252-260. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. . P.W. Skehan–A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB, New York 1987) 174, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. . G.H. Box–W.O.E. Oesterley, “Sirach”, in: R.H. Charles (ed.), *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, I (Oxford 1913) 268-517, here 468: “[...]while some of the things enumerated also involve the application of a judicial and impartial mind”. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. . M. Kister, “Some Notes on Biblical Expressions and Allusions and the Lexicography of Ben Sira”, in: *Sirach, Scrolls and Sages* (ed. T. Muraoka and J.E. Elwolde; Leiden 1999) 160-187, here 168-172. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. . For the text see Ziegler, *Sapientia*, 218. The Latin text reflects translational doublet: “et ab inprudenti persona perdet eam personae autem acceptione perdet se” (“and by occasion of an unwise person he will destroy it: and by respect of person he will destroy himself”). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. . Kister, “Some Notes”, 171; Cf. I. Lévi, *L’Ecclésiastique*, 2 (Paris 1901) 20; *The Treatise Derek Erez* (ed. M. Higger; New York 1935) 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. . E.D. Reymond, “Remarks on Ben Sira's ‘Instruction on Shame’, Sirach 41,14–42,8”, *ZAW* 115 (2003) 388-400, here p. 395: “So long as an attested meaning makes sense, one should not rely on a meaning ‘scarcely documented elsewhere’”. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. . Reymond, “Instruction on Shame”, 394, n. 22: “His appeal to a variant reading in the Talmudic treatise Derekh Eretz is interesting, but, this treatise is rather late and its relevance to Ben Sira, therefore, may be questioned, especially given the applicability of the biblical idioms”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. . Reymond, “Instruction on Shame”, 398. Cf. also E.D. Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach* (SBL Studies in Biblical Literature 9; Leiden 2004) 52 n. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. . Joosten, “Linguistic Innovations”, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. . LSJ, 43-44, s.v. αἰσχύνω; LSJ, 604 s.v. ἐπαισχ and Related Eύνομαι. Other equivalents of this idiom are the Hebraistic phrase πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν, and πρόσωπον θαυμάζειν. See L. Van Rompay, “The Rendering of ΠΡΟΣΩΠΟΝ ΛΑΜΒΑΝΕΙΝ and Related Expressions in the Early Oriental Versions of the New Testament”, *Oriental Lovaniensia Periodica* 6/7 (1975/1976) 569-575. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. . See M.V. Fox, *Proverbs: An Eclectic Edition with Introduction and Textual Commentary* (The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition; Atlanta 2015) 307-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. . The English translation here follows Fox, *Proverbs*, 368 with deviations. Cf. NETS ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. . L.C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha Greek and English* (London 1851) 812 tries to harmonize the doublet translating “And this thing I say to you that are wise *for you* to learn: It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment”. See also NETS: “Now these things I also say to you who are wise, that you know them ‘It is not good to be in awe of a person in judgment’”. For the meaning of αἰδέομαι see LSJ, 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. . The English translation follows NETS. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. . Kister, “Some Notes”, 171-172 admits that “the semantic development of the idiom … in the sense of being ashamed is not quite clear to me”. He guesses that נשא פנים received the meaning of an idiom such as אין לו פנים, that is “take away” his own face/honor, referring to Genesis Rabbah 91.5 (ed. J. Theodor–C. Albeck, Berlin 1929, 1121): בזמן שאדם עני אין לו פנים לראות מפני שהוא מתבייש מחבֵרו (“when one is poor, he has not the face to see him [i.e. a friend], being ashamed before him” [Eng.: H. Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis II (London 1939) 839]). However, in this case it is not possible to explain the Septuagint translation of הכר פנים in the same way [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. . LSJ, 36, s.v. αἰδώς. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. . The verb תשא may serve for both objects, פנים and חטא. The idiom תשא חטא here can be interpreted in a similar way to the biblical meaning, that is “bear sin” (cf. Lev. 20:20; 24:15; Num. 9:13; 18:22). For the idiom see B.J. Schwartz, “'Term' or Metaphor - נשא עון/פשע/חטא”, *Tarbiz* 63 (1994) 149-171. The Greek text may reflect a similar Hebrew reading as in the Hebrew manuscripts, rather than a different version such as לחטוא. For another opinion see for example Box–Oesterley, *Sirach*, 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. . The topic of shame (and honor) in the biblical literature has receive some scholarly attention in recent decades, especially from sociological and anthropological perspectives, alongside increasing interest in the field of sensory perceptions. See for example V.H. Matthews et al. (eds.), *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible* (=*Semeia* 68; Atlanta 1996); M.J.J. Lynch, “Neglected Physical Dimensions of ‘Shame’ Terminology in the Hebrew Bible”, *Biblica* 91 (2010) 499–517; Y. Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture.* Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies; New York 2012), 215-218. For the topic of shame in Ben Sira see also J.T. Sanders, “Ben Sira’s Ethics of Caution”, *HUCA* 50 (1979) 73-106; P.J. Botha, “The Ideology of Shame in the Wisdom of Ben Sira: Ecclesiasticus 41:14–42:8”, *Old Testament Essays* 9 (1996), 353-371; C.V. Camp, “Honor, Shame and the Hermeneutics of Ben Sira’s MS C” in: M.L. Barré (ed.), *Wisdom, You Are My Sister* (Washington, DC 1997); C.V. Camp, “Honor and Shame in Ben Sira: Anthropological and Theological Reflections”, in: P.C. Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (Berlin 1997); D. DeSilva, “The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Honor, Shame, and the Maintenance of the Values of a Minority Culture”, *CBQ* 58 (1996) 433-455. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. . See esp. Kister, “Some Notes”, 167-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. . The scholars who discuss Greek parallels to Ben Sira fail to notice the significance of the texts mentioned above. See T. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus*, Leiden 1973, 10, followed by Sanders, “Ben Sira’s Ethics”, 95. Sanders, who negates any connection between this idea about shame in Ben Sira and Greek literature, prefers to emphasize the importance of the Demotic wisdom text Papyrus Insinger for a comparative study, albeit with no significant evidence. For a better view concerning the relationship between Ben Sira and Papyrus Insinger, see M. Goff, “Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine and Egypt: Ben Sira and Papyrus Insinger”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36 (2005) 147-172. In regard to the topic of shame in Ben Sira he says (p. 155): “the idea of shame in Papyrus Insinger may also may also be a consequence of Hellenistic influence, although this cannot be claimed with certainty”. On Ben Sira and Hellenistic culture, see in general the following study which does not discuss the topic of shame: Wright, “Ben Sira and Hellenistic Literature”, 71–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. . Greek text and English translation follow *Hesiod*: *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, tr. G.W. Most (LCL 57; Cambridge MA 2018) 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. . For the relationship between these two texts (*Il*. 24.44-45; *Op*. 318) see M.L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days*, Oxford 1978, 236. See also T.A. Sinclair, “On ΑΙΔΩΣ in Hesiod”, *CR* 39 (1925) 147–8; D.L. Cairns, *Αἰδώς: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford 1993)149, n. 7, who suggest that both texts share a common proverb. For another perspective of shame in ancient Greek society see B. Williams*, Shame and Necessity* (Sather Classical Lectures 57; Berkeley 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. .  Greek text and English translation follow *Homer: Iliad, Books 13–24*, Eng. tr. A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt (LCL 171; Cambridge MA 1999) 565-567. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. . The Greek and English text follow Euripides, *Fragments: Aegeus-Meleager.* Ed. and transl. C. Collard–M. Cropp (LCL 504. Cambridge, MA 2008) 384-385. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. . For the subject of αἰδώς in this play see especially E.R. Dodds, “The αἰδώς of Phaedra”, *CR* 39 (1925) 102-104; Cairns, *Αἰδώς*, 323-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. . The English translation follows Cairns, *Αἰδώς*, 323–324 with minor deviations. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. .  Most scholars agree that the words δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσίν (“and there are two [kinds]”) refer to the αἰδώς. See for instance W.S. Barrett, *Euripides Hipplolytos* (Oxford 1964) 230; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 227-229. Most of them have argued that this line is based on the ambivalence of the concept of αἰδώς in Hesiod (*Op.* 314) mentioned above. See, for example, C. Segal, “Shame and Purity in Euripides’ Hippolytus”, *Hermes* 98 (1970) 288-299. Others, however, contended that the words δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσίν refer to the ἡδοναὶ (“pleasures”) mentioned at line 383. For a full survey see Cairns, *Αἰδώς*, 323–327. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. . For a different view see Sanders, “Ethics of Caution”, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. .  The English translation follows T.J. Saunders, “Laws” in J.M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis 1997) 1340-1341, with minor deviations. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. . Cf. Cairns, *Αἰδώς*, 646-647 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. . For the description of the ancient Greek world as “shame-culture” see especially E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 28-63; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 77-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. . Hesiod, for example, in *Works and Days* dedicates a detailed passage to the ambivalent nature of the concept of ἔρις (strife, quarrel, contention), a few lines before his proverb on “shame” mentioned above: “So there was not just one birth of Strifes after all, but upon the earth there are two Strifes (ἐπὶ γαῖαν εἰσὶ δύω). One of these a man would praise once he got to know it, but the other is blameworthy; and they have thoroughly opposed spirits. For the one fosters evil war and conflict [….] But the other one […] is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. […] and this Strife is good for mortals (ἀγαθὴ δ᾿ Ἔρις ἥδε βροτοῖσιν)”. (*Op*. 11-26, Most [LCL 57], 86-89). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. . See for example R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*, I–III (Berlin 1906) 389; Box–Oesterley, “Sirach”, 468; Skehan–Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. . Note that the words αἰδώς and αἰδέομαι are absent from LXX in books that have a Hebrew *Vorlage* except once. This case, in LXX Prov 24:23, has been discussed above. See n. 19 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)