

Preface

It All Began at Soesterberg in 1996
In Appreciation of Núria Calduch-Benages

Looking at an old photograph of the famous Ben Sira scholars who were invited by Pancratius C. Beentjes to Soesterberg on 28–31 July 1996 to mark the hundredth anniversary of the rediscovery of the Hebrew manuscripts of Ben Sira, I see Núria standing there in the middle of the first row. I remember very well all the important specialists of this book of wisdom literature coming together: Pancratius Beentjes, Christopher Begg, Alexander A. Di Lella, Maurice Gilbert, Johannes Marböck, Antonino Minissale, Stefan C. Reif, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Benjamin Wright ... and we, the young generation.

Núria began her studies at Barcelona University (Bellaterra). Thanks to her parents' support and encouragement, she studied philosophy, German, and English philology, finishing her bachelor's degree in her hometown before she went to Rome to become a theologian. First came another bachelor's degree at the Pontifical Urban University. In 1991, after her license degree at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Núria was appointed assistant professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University. She completed her doctorate in 1995 with the thesis *En el crisol de la prueba. Estudio exegético de Sir 2,1–18*¹ at the same Institute under the supervision of Maurice Gilbert and was promptly appointed associate professor at the Gregorian University.

Núria was not entirely clear why she received an invitation to the Ben Sira conference in Soesterberg but one afternoon the telephone suddenly rang, and it was Pancratius Beentjes calling to invite her to that Ben Sira Conference in the Netherlands.

Of course, English had to be the language of that meeting but Núria's thesis had been written in Spanish. Núria has a great love and an enormous talent for languages and had, in addition to her mother tongues of Catalan, Spanish, and French, also studied German, Russian, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Swahili, and Vietnamese. However, she was not yet fluent enough in English to translate with ease an excerpt of her thesis. She therefore asked a fellow student, Jan Liesen, a later ISDCL member and now bishop of Breda, for his assistance. The snag was that he expected it to be a translation into English from Italian, not from Spanish. After an intensive collaboration, a rather nervous young Núria attended the conference and presented her paper brilliantly. This "golden opportunity," as Núria

¹ Núria Calduch-Benages, *En el crisol de la prueba. Estudio exegético de Sir 2,1–18*, ABE 32, Estella: Verbo Divino, 1997.

told me much later, had occurred because a professor had declined to participate, and she had been invited to fill in at the last minute.

That conference in Soesterberg was in many respects also the starting point of our plans at Salzburg University to promote a more intensive study of the deuterocanonical books. Friedrich Reiterer had already started with a Ben Sira research project. In 2002, he initiated a meeting in Salzburg, inviting Pancrati-us, Núria, and Jeremy Corley to plan further steps. So it was that Núria became one of the founding members of the International Society for the Study of Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature (ISDCL) and at the inaugural meeting in 2003 was also elected as a member of the advisory board. At this juncture, we also created two new series at the publishing house, Walter de Gruyter. Núria was invited to become co-editor of the series Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook (DCLY) to ensure, together with her colleagues, the high-quality publication of the papers read at our international conferences. In 2013, she was duly elected vice-president and holds this position to the present.

Meanwhile, Núria built her career in Rome; she became Book Review Editor of the journal *Biblica* and later also a member of the editorial boards of the journals *Estudios Bíblicos*, *Gregorianum*, *Storia delle donne*, *Vetus Testamentum*, and its Supplement series.

In 2003, she received an appointment as extraordinary professor at the Gregorian University and became full professor seven years later. In 2006, Núria also became an advisor of the *Cardinal Bea Centre* at the same institution. Since 2016, she serves as an Invited Professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. From 2014 to 2019, she was appointed a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, a position that was later renewed until 2025; she serves now as its secretary. In 2016, Núria joined the Papal Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women.

These many distinguished and important assignments did not prevent Núria from publishing regularly in the field of wisdom literature. Ben Sira is her favored book in which her scholarly expertise is internationally acknowledged and will hopefully be crowned with the conclusion of a commentary after her retirement. She is also interested in biblical anthropology and feminist hermeneutics.

Núria's colleagues hold her in high esteem and her students love her. The editors and contributors of this Festschrift wish Núria strength and health for many more years of productive scholarship and join with the sage in stating, "Praise will come forth from the mouth of the wise and by her will proverbs be studied" (Sir 15:10). We may appropriately conclude by repeating the praise offered by Núria's *Doktorvater*: "That lady is fascinating, joyful, dynamic, enterprising and a hard worker."

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President of the ISDCL

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