International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

Luca Mazzinghi

WISDOM

Kohlhammer

Kohlhammer

International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT)

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Cover:
Top: Panel from a four-part relief on the "Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III" (859–824 BCE) depicting the Israelite king Jehu (845–817 BCE; 2 Kings 9f) paying obeisance to the Assyrian "King of Kings." The vassal has thrown himself to the ground in front of his overlord. Royal servants are standing behind the Assyrian king whereas Assyrian officers are standing behind Jehu. The remaining picture panels portray thirteen Israelite tribute bearers carrying heavy and precious gifts.
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Bottom left: One of ten reliefs on the bronze doors that constitute the eastern portal (the so-called "Gates of Paradise") of the Baptistery of St. John of Florence, created 1424–1452 by Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1378–1455). Detail from the picture "Adam and Eve"; in the center is the creation of Eve: "And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." (Gen 2:22)
Photograph by George Reader

Bottom right: Detail of the Menorah in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem, created by Benno Elkan (1877–1960): Ezra reads the Law of Moses to the assembled nation (Neh 8). The bronze Menorah was created in London in 1956 and in the same year was given by the British as a gift to the State of Israel. A total of 29 reliefs portray scenes from the Hebrew bible and the history of the Jewish people.

Luca Mazzinghi

Wisdom

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Editors' Foreword

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was "international, ecumenical and contemporary." The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the Deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to "contemporary," one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as "synchronic" and "diachronic" and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand "synchronic" to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. "Synchronic" studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand "diachronic" to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time.*

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a "depth dimension" of a given text – how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives – e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical – appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

Fall 2012 The Editors

Preface

The book of Wisdom is the object of renewed interest. Although deeply rooted in the Scriptures of Israel, it forms an interesting bridge between the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds.

This commentary presupposes two previous works which both constitute solid points of reference for the exegesis of Wisdom: the three volumes of C. Larcher (*La Sagesse de Salomon ou le livre de la* Sagesse, 1983-1985) and the three of G. Scarpat (*Libro della Sapienza,* 1989-1999). Begun in 1969 with his pioneering *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse*, Larcher's work constitutes the best existing work on Wisdom carried out in light of the criteria of traditional historical-critical exegesis. For its part, Scarpat's work offers a monumental philological analysis of our book which it would be hard to surpass. However, the studies of the last twenty years have contributed to the highlighting of some fundamental aspects which complete and develop these works. First of all, there has been a discovery of a careful literary structure through which the author of the book intends to communicate a precise theological message (M. Gilbert, P. Bizzeti). Then, a broader and more complete view of the style and literary genre of the book has developed. These too are seen to serve the message which the author is intending to offer to his readership. Secondly, there has been a broader and deeper assessment of the relationship which the book displays with the biblical and Jewish world, on the one hand, and with the Hellenistic world, on the other. There has also been a more accurate view of the historical context in Alexandria towards the end of the first century BCE. Finally, there has been closer attention to the particular theological standpoint of our sage. Although taken into consideration in the studies of Larcher, this has not been highlighted sufficiently by the other commentators, however illustrious (Scarpat, but also D. Winston). That is especially the case of the third part (Wis 10-19) which has been rediscovered only since the 1990s. All of this leaves room for a new commentary on Wisdom, certainly one that is more concise than the majority of its predecessors, but also one that seeks to unite exegetical analysis properly so called with the three factors indicated above: structure and literary genre; relationship with the biblical (and Jewish) world and with Hellenism; and the theological perspective of the author.

General Introduction[1]

A Unique Book

Written directly in Greek, the book of Wisdom displays novel characteristics which render it a unique book in comparison with other texts of its time. Composed towards the end of the first cent. BCE by an Alexandrian Jew well-versed in the Bible and faithful to the tradition of Israel, the book of Wisdom forms an important point of contact between the biblical world and the vast world of Hellenism.

The book also shows itself to be rich in novelties with regard to its content. The strong eschatological perspective, opened up by the announcement of the future fate of the just and the ungodly (Wis 1-6), is bound together with a vision of the past of Israel to which the final part of the book refers (Wis 10-19). There, eschatology is linked to history by means of the role of the cosmos. At the heart of the book stands the praise of wisdom (Wis 7-9), mediator between God and humanity.

The Book's Title

The book is known in the Greek manuscripts as ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΑΛΟΜΩΝΟΣ (S*), or else ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΑΛΟΜΩΝ (B^{c}), or even ΣΑΛΟΜΩΝΤΟΣ (A).[2] In the codices of the *Vetus Latina*, the inscription *Liber Sapientiae Salomonis* appears or sometimes *Sapientia Salomonis*, or, more simply, *Liber Sapientiae.* The book is entered in the Latin Vulgate and, thereafter, in the modern translations more simply as "book of Wisdom". On account of the fact that in the central part of the book (Wis 7-9) the author seems to identify himself with King Solomon – although this identification is never explicit – it is not improbable that it was he himself who called his own text "Wisdom of Solomon". This would accord with a practice that was not rare in antiquity and frequent in the Jewish tradition which tended to place under the aegis of Solomon a good part of the sapiential *corpus*: Proverbs, Qoheleth and the Song of Songs. However, already from the patristic period, it was clear that the attribution to Solomon was only pseudepigraphic. That is recognised by Origen, Augustine, and Jerome among others.[3]

Text and Versions[4]

Greek Text

The Greek text of the book of Wisdom has been transmitted to us in a good state in the three most important uncial codices which, according to Ziegler, represent the best text possible: Vaticanus (B), Sinaiticus (S) and Alexandrinus (A). The other

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1 For a complete introduction to the book of Wisdom, the point of departure is still represented by Larcher, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse* (1969). More summary, but complete, is the introduction of Gilbert ("Sagesse de Salomon") which dates from 1986.

2 Cf. the critical apparatus in Ziegler, *Sapientia*, 95.

3 Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 20.4 (PG XIV, 581); Jerome, *Praef. in libros Salomonis* (PL XVIII, 1307); Augustine, *Civ.* 18.20 (PL XLI, 554).

4 Cf. Larcher, *Sagesse,* I:53-74; Ziegler, *Sapientia*, 7-64; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 58-65. A pioneering work is that of Feldman, *Textkritische Materialien zum Buch der Weisheit* (Freiburg i.B. 1902).

uncials (V and C in particular) and the various minuscules are of less importance. Some fragments of the book of Wisdom also exist in papyrus. The patristic quotations and the *florilegia* take on a certain interest for textual criticism.[5] The edition of J. Ziegler has ironed out most of the problems of the text which is thus one of the most accessible books of the Old Testament.[6]

Vetus Latina and Vulgate

The most important of the ancient versions is the *Vetus Latina* which originated in North Africa, probably towards the end of the second century CE, and was inserted into the *Vulgate* towards the fifth century.[7] Jerome did not translate the book of Wisdom himself because he did not recognise it as canonical.[8] The Latin translation is earlier than the oldest Greek manuscript available to us (B) by at least two centuries and turns out to be very useful for the reconstruction of passages that are particularly difficult. It seems probable that the *Vetus Latina* was translated from a Greek text different from that of the great uncials, more similar to that of S* (cf., for example, the reading preserved in 2:9a: *nullum pratum* which is probably the original reading).[9] The other ancient versions – the *Peshitta*, the various Coptic versions, the Armenian, Arabic and Ethiopian versions – are all later than the great uncials and offer little interest for textual criticism.

Original Language

We must regard as completely eclipsed the opinion of those who speculated that the book of Wisdom was originally written in Hebrew (or Aramaic) and subsequently translated into Greek.[10] The book does not lack Hebraisms, such as the constant use of *parallelismus membrorum*,[11] but such an argument does not appear sufficient for considering the Greek of Wisdom as the translation of a Semitic original. In this connection, J. Reider writes that "[the book of Wisdom] is written in the purest form of Alexandrinian Greek, free from the Hebraisms and anomalies of the Septuagint and full of passages which combine the richest vocabulary with

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5 Cf. Ziegler, *Sapientia*, 10-11; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 58-59. For the Cologne papyrus containing the text of Wis 17:5-20b, cf. Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 310.

6 For some small problems raised by Ziegler's text, see Gilbert, "Sagesse", 59. Cf. also the whole study of Engel, "Sophia Salomonos".

7 Gribomont, Jean, "L'édition Vaticane de la Vulgate et la Sagesse de Salomon dans sa recension italienne", *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 4 (1968) 472-496.

8 Cf. *Praefatio Hieronymi de translatione graeca: Biblia Sacra*, XI (Roma: PIB 1957), 6 (PL XXIX,427-428).

9 In an appendix to each of the three volumes, Scarpat's commentary records the entire Latin text of Wisdom with an appropriate philological commentary and constitutes the best point of reference in this connection. Cf. De Bruyne, Donatien D., "Etude sur le texte latin de Sagesse"; *RBén* 41 (1929) 100-133. According to the opinion of De Bruyne, the Latin translator was not at the peak of his profession (cf. p. 130). Cf. also Skehan, Patrick W., "Note on the Latin text of the Book of Wisdom"; *CBQ* 4 (1942) 230-243. The text of the *Vetus Latina* of Wisdom can be found in Thiele, Walter, *Vetus Latina* XI,1, (Freiburg i.B.: Herder 1977-1985).

10 Larcher, *Sagesse*, I:91-95; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 61-65. Outstanding pioneers of this study are Gärtner, *Komposition und Wortwahl des Buches der Weisheit* (1912), and Focke, *Die Enstehung der Weisheit Salomos* (1913). However, the latter held that Wis 1-5 was originally composed in Hebrew (cf. pp. 65-66).

11 Cf. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 15.

genuine rhetorical eloquence. Compared with the Septuaginta, Wisdom appears to be an original and independent work"[12].

The Unity of the Book[13]

Already towards the middle of the nineteenth cent., C.L.W. Grimm held that the question of the literary unity of the book had been definitively resolved. For the great German commentator, the book of Wisdom was undoubtedly the work of a single author, even if there were some opposing voices which made themselves heard as late as the beginning of the twentieth century.[14] Some contemporary authors do indeed presuppose the unity of the work but think of a composition of the book in successive stages. In particular, Wis 11-19 would have been composed later, even if by the same author as the rest of the book.[15] The stylistic unity of the book, as well as the use of the same literary genre (see below), are excellent arguments for postulating not only unity of authorship but also of composition. In the light of the studies of Wright, Bizzeti and Gilbert, however, the main argument in favour of the unity of the book of Wisdom is the discovery of a careful literary structure (see below) which renders it very difficult to think of a composition which is not unitary. In addition, some authors have wanted to find precise numerical correspondences within the book itself, even if, in the case of Wright, the calculations do not seem entirely convincing.[16]

Two further reasons in favour of the unity of author and composition are the discovery of the so-called *flashbacks* and the presence of themes and *motifs* common to the book as a whole. Within the third part of the book (Wis 11-19), J.M. Reese points out the presence of verbal references and themes typical of the first

Flashbacks

12 Reider, *The Book of Wisdom*, 25-26. On the other hand, it is this Reider who claims that Wisdom is characterised by "some ignorance and poverty of diction" (27). Cf. a similar judgement by Larcher, *Sagesse,* I, 102. For the problems of the original language of the book, cf. Larcher, *Sagesse*, I, 95, but, above all, Gilbert, "Sagesse", 62-63. However, the latter notes that it is difficult to prove that the Greek is not in fact a brilliant translation from an author who knew the language perfectly. The work of Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences* (1973) seems, however, to leave few doubts about a text composed directly in Greek. Another problem, almost impossible to solve, is that of proving the existence of possible Hebrew or Aramaic sources employed by our author.

13 Vílchez Líndez, *Sapienza,* 22-29; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 87-91. H. Engel emphasises the current consensus relating to the unity of the book of Wisdom, cf. *Die Sapientia Salomonis als Buch,* 135-137.

14 Grimm, *Weisheit*, 9-15 For the history of the problem in the eighteenth and nineteenth cents., cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sapienza*, 21-24.

15 Cf. Skehan, "Text and Structure", 5; Larcher, *Sagesse*, 1:95-119.

16 Cf. Skehan, "Text and Structure", *passim*. In Wis 1-9, he counts a total of 500 stichs; Wis 10:1-11:1 a total of 60 stichs; and Wis 11:2-19:22 a further 561 stichs. Cf. Gilbert, "Sagesse", 89-90 who confirms Skehan's calculations. Wright, Addison G. ("Numerical Patterns in the Book of Wisdom", *CBQ* 29 [1967]: 524-538) claims that the book of Wisdom is constructed according to the principle of the so-called "golden number", represented by the ratio x/y = y/x+y; cf. a critical discussion in Gilbert, "Sagesse", 89.

two sections of Wisdom. Reese describes these texts as *flashbacks*, that is, as "a short repetition of a significant words or groups of words or distinctive ideas in two different parts of Wis".[17] Reese notes the presence of a good 45 *flashbacks*, a list which could, however, be extended.[18] We observe that it is not just a question of simple literary references. Very often, in the third part of the book, our sage takes up again a thematic element of the first or second part, broadening its significance (cf., e.g., Wis 17:20-21 as a *flashback* to Wis 7:29-30; see the comment on 17:20-21).[19] All this confirms a profound compositional unity which characterises the whole of the book of Wisdom.

Themes Common to the Whole of the Book

Finally, a careful analysis of the book of Wisdom reveals the presence of common themes which are repeated in a coherent way throughout the book. This supports the idea of a strong internal unity.[20]

One of these themes is undoubtedly that of justice which, for some authors, constitutes the real pillar of the whole work. In this key, the book of Wisdom actually could be read as a treatise of political theology.[21] The wisdom that is praised in the central part of the text (7-9) becomes the means made available to rulers for learning about justice (Wis 1 and 6). The judgement of God is ready to strike the unjust, particularly idolaters (Wis 13-15) but offers salvation to the just. The compass of the theme of justice within the book of Wisdom is not to be undervalued, although the addressees of the book are not actually pagan rulers (cf. below) and although it is wisdom that emerges instead at the centre of the book.

A second theme which runs throughout the book is that of the cosmos. This plays a fundamental role throughout the book. God created everything for life (1:13-14). Wisdom, craftsman of the world, is the point of contact between God and people, precisely because of its presence in the cosmos (cf. 7:1, 6, 21, 24, 27). The cosmos itself will intervene as an instrument at God's side to reward the just and punish the ungodly (5:17-20), as has already happened in the past (16:17, 24). Finally, the book of Wisdom closes with the view of a renewed creation (19:18-21).

Literary Structure[22]

The book of Wisdom displays a very careful literary structure. Through the use of hook-words, inclusions, concentric constructions that are often polished, and other stylistic devices, our sage offers his public a pleasing work in which the literary structure is at the service of a precise theological design. Here, for the

17 Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 124; cf. pp. 122-145 for a complete list of *flashbacks*.

18 Gilbert, "Sagesse", 89-90.

19 "The flashbacks reminded his readers that the past wonders of God's providence are an assurance that future rewards are awaiting the just"; Reese, *Hellenistic influence*, 124.

20 Gilbert, "Sagesse", 90-91.

21 Along these lines are the commentaries of Alonso Schökel, *Sabiduría* and Vílchez Líndez, *Sapienza*, 114-119. Cf. Bretón, Santiago, "¿Libro de la Sabiduría o libro de la justicia? El tema de la justicia en la interpretación del libro de la Sabiduría", *Cuadernos Biblicos* 1 (1978): 77-104.

22 Cf. a *status quaestionis* of the whole problem in Gilbert, "The literary structure".

most part, we are following the proposals of P. Bizzeti and M. Gilbert.[23] We shall offer, first of all, a general outline of the book. A detailed treatment of the literary structure will be given in the commentary to the individual sections of the text.

The book of Wisdom can be subdivided into three large sections. First, up to chapter 6 (see the introduction to Wis 6 for the problem represented by 6:22-25), we have what we could describe as the "book of eschatology".

The second part of the book, Wis 7-9, we can consider as the "book of wisdom" properly so called. After the praise of wisdom (7-8), the heart of the whole book is the prayer of "Solomon" to obtain the gift of wisdom (ch. 9).[24]

The third part, Wis 10-19, we could call the "book of history". Here, our sage reflects on the presence of wisdom in the history of his people (Wis 10) and, in particular, on the events of the Exodus in seven antithetical sketches in which the Israelites are contrasted with the Egyptians. What emerges is the action of God who makes use of his creation to punish the latter and save the former. Two extended digressions appear in this part: Wis 11:15-12:27, on divine philanthropy, and Wis 13-15, on idolatry.

A Theological Project

The general subdivision of the book follows an order that is neither logical nor chronological but rather *theological*. In fact, the book is introduced by the triumphal proclamation of the salvation which awaits the just (Wis 3-4; but also 1:13-15; 2:21-24). Right from the beginning, the reader is invited to be open to a future full of hope. This future is bound up with the reception of the gift of wisdom (Wis 7-9). This, in turn, is guaranteed by the certainty of the divine interventions in Israel's history (Wis 10-19). Past, present, and future come together in a brilliant synthesis. Hope in the future provides the motor for the life of the just, but, at the same time, it is history which is the basis of this hope. The link between past and future is wisdom, given by God and present in the cosmos. In fact, salvation moves out from creation.

Language and Style

Language

The vocabulary of Wisdom is indicative of the special nature of the Greek employed by our author. In all, 1734 words appear in the book. Of these, a good 1303 appear once only. Of these, 335 words, approximately 20%, are *hapax legomena* of the LXX (315, according to Larcher).[25] However, we must add a further 126 which appear in the LXX only in late texts such as Sir and 3-4 Macc. There also exist some twenty *hapax totius graecitatis* which lead us to consider our author as a real creator of language.[26]

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23 Bizzeti, *Il libro della Sapienza*; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 65-77.

24 Cf. the introduction to Wis 10-19 for ch. 10 as belonging to the third part of the book.

25 All the Greek terms in the book of Wisdom that are ἅπαξ λεγόμενα of the LXX will be marked in the commentary with a preceding asterisk (*).

26 Cf. Scarpat, "Ancora sull'autore"; Gilbert, "Sagesse", 63; Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 274 (δυσδιήγετος, 17:1; περικομπέω, 17:4; ἐφύβριστος, 17:7; φυλακίζω, 18:4).

Many of the terms employed by Wisdom hail from a vocabulary of a learned character: philosophical, poetic, sometimes even medical and scientific. Our author is a lover of compound words which are very numerous in the book.[27] There are a good 59 adjectives which are rare, poetic or composed with an α–privative.[28]

If some stylistic aspects could make us think of a Hebrew original (cf. the use of the causal ὅτι, especially in Wis 1:1-2:5[29]), others instead, such as the use of the infinitive[30] or of personal pronouns,[31] differ notably from the style of the LXX and show themselves to be genuinely Greek.

Style

History of Research

As far back as antiquity, commentators were aware of the special nature of the style on this book, so different from the majority of the other books of the LXX, and so profoundly Greek. Jerome wrote: "ipse stylus graecam eloquentiam redolet [the style itself is redolent of Greek eloquence]".[32] His judgement has been taken up again by the moderns: Brook Foss Westcott claimed that Wisdom is typical "of the style of composition which would be produced by the sophistic schools of rhetoric".[33] Henry Barclay Swete states that "no other book in the Greek Bible is so manifestly Alexandrian in tone and style".[34] Already, Carl L.W. Grimm provided a first list of typically Greek stylistic usages in Wisdom.[35]

Until now, James M. Reese has been the one who has devoted particular attention to the question of style.[36] His conclusion in this respect is clear: "this survey of the vocabulary and style of Wis shows that the sacred writer was trained in Greek rhetoric and was subject to a wide variety of Hellenistic influences".[37] The commentaries of Larcher and Scarpat confirm Reese's conclusions; but research on the style of the book of Wisdom remains a field that is still open. Only recently (2011) was the first study entirely devoted to Wisdom's style published, that of

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27 Focke, *Enstehung*, 61; Winston, *Wisdom*, 14-15, with many examples.

28 Focke, *Entstehung*, 60-61.

29 Sollamo, Raija, *Renderings of Hebrew Semipropositions in the Septuagint*, AASF B Diss 19 (Helsinki: Helsinki Academia Scientiarum Fennica / Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia 1979), 296. Ruppert still upholds the existence of a Semitic original for Wis 2:12-20; 5:1-7: cf. "Gerechte und Frevler (Gottlose) im Weish 1,1-6,21".

30 Soisalon-Soininen, Ilmari, *Die Infinitive in der Septuaginta*, AASF B 132,1 (Helsinki: Helsinki Academia Scientiarum Fennica / Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia 1965), 193.

31 Wifstrand, Albert, *Die Stellung der enklitischen Personalpronomina bei der Septuaginta*, Lund University Press: Lund 1950, 63.

32 *Praef. in libros Salomonis* (PL XXVIII, 1242).

33 Westcott, Brooke Foss, "Wisdom of Solomon", in *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1872), 3547.

34 Swete, Henry Barclay, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1914[2] (repr. New York: KTAV 1968, 268). Swete adds that "in the *style* of the originally Greek books [of the LXX] there is little to remind us of the Semitic origin of the writers" (313).

35 Grimm, *Weisheit*, 6-9.

36 Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 25-31.

37 Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 30.

Alexis Léonas, who discovers a conscious attempt to imitate the style and idiom of the Septuagint, rejecting it when it does not conform to Greek literary use.[38]

The style of the book is clearly affected by the typical devices of classical rhetoric. Word order is one of the basic characteristics of Greek style. Without doubt, the most significant element in this connection is the use of well-crafted periodic sentences, such as, for example, in 12:3-7:27; 13:11-5; 15:7; and 17:16-19. Prominent in this area is the repeated stylistic use of *hyperbaton*, which is rather rare in the LXX but present a good 240 times in Wisdom, especially in Wis 10-19. At times, as in Wis 14:18, this is in the form of a double *hyperbaton*.[39] The use of *hyperbaton* is not dictated by stylistic reasons alone but also by those of content, for example, when it is a question of highlighting a specific term: cf. 17:2a (νύκτα); 17:21b (σκότους).

Our author intends to address his audience by the additional means of the beauty of literary form which he employs. The careful style and the closeness to Greek rhetoric and poetry render the book of Wisdom attractive precisely to those Jews of Alexandria who feel themselves drawn to the Greek world. In this way, the tradition of Israel is re-presented to such readers in more congenial language.

Rhetorical Figures

The author of the book demonstrates a good knowledge of the classical figures of ancient rhetoric. The frequency of such devices is considerably greater compared with the books of the LXX translated from the Hebrew.[40]

- Metaphor: let us take note of a single example, the metaphor of darkness employed throughout the fifth diptych (17:1-18:4) which takes on simultaneously a cosmological, psychological, moral and eschatological value.
- Litotes (the replacement of a term with the negation of its antonym in order to strengthen what is meant: Wis 1:2a (τοῖς μή πειράζουσιν); 1:11b; 3:11bc; 11:7b; 12:9a, 10, 13b; 17:4a; 18:2a.; 19:22b (οὐχ ὑπερεῖδες).
- Anaphora (the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of multiple successive sentences or clauses): Wis 10 (repetition of αὕτη); 11:18a-d; 17:18c-19d.
- Paronomasia (the repetition of the same lexical root in different syntactical functions): Wis 5:3b, 10c; 6:10a; 12:25-26; 13:19b; 14:5a.
- There are also many cases of plays on words: 11:14-15; 17:12-13a, 21; 18:4).
- Isocolia (ἰσοκωλία identical clauses or similar sounding clauses): Wis 18:1b.
- Antithesis (juxtaposition of contrary elements): Wis 3:5a; 4:16; 7:6; 9:16; 18:7b.
- *Accumulatio* (the accumulation of multiple terms of the same category): cf. the compilation of the 22 attributes of wisdom listed in Wis 7:22-23.
- Asyndeton (words or phrases in successive order without the use of conjunctions that are regarded as equal and not comparative grammatically and in terms of content): asyndetic construction is used frequently to indicate a new point of view: cf. 4:10, 20; 10:12.

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38 Léonas, "The Poetics of Wisdom. Language and Style in the Book of Wisdom", 124.

39 Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 26-27; Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 278.

40 Rowe, Gregory O., "Style", in Porter, Stanley E., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period. 330 B.C. – A.D. 400* (Leiden – New York – Cologne: Brill 1997), 121-157; cf. also Denniston John Dewar, *Greek Prose Style*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

- *Homoioteleuton* (the repetition of the same or similar final syllables of words in uninterrupted succession, here in successive stichs): Wis 1:1, 4; 2:3-4; 4:10.
- Wisdom uses the figure of *sorites* (σωρείτης: chain syllogism) in 6:17-20.[41]

A final aspect of the style typical of the book of Wisdom is the use of clauses which recall classical metre. Examples of iambics or hexameters had already been discovered by Gregg (1906) and, with more care, by Thackeray (1909), the only one till now who has studied the poetic aspect of Wisdom, albeit in outline. A good example is Wis 17:1-18:4, where, in addition to a literary style that is typically Asianic, it is possible to recognise, on occasions, the use of the classical metre even if this is not systematic.[42]

The Literary Genre: Between the Epideictic Genre and Midrashic Style[43]

Wisdom: A Protreptic

Among the arguments in favour of the unity of the book of Wisdom, discussion of the literary genre has gained important weight. This debate is not without importance when it comes to the interpretation of the text. To identify the literary genre of a book means to see things from the point of view of the author and to have a better understanding of the purpose behind his work.

Taking up a proposal of Friedrich Focke,[44] James M. Reese has suggested associating the book of Wisdom with the literary genre of the *logos protreptikos*, well known to Aristotle, and, subsequently, to the Fathers. The *logos protreptikos* combines the deliberative and epideictic genres. It appears as an exhortation to follow a particular line of conduct by proving the validity and the advantage of following the orator's suggestion.[45] However, Reese hypothesises the existence of lesser literary genres within the various parts of Wisdom.[46]

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41 Further examples in Winston, *Wisdom*, 15-17; Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 27-28; Larcher, *Sagesse*, 1:107-108.

42 Cf. Gregg, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, xv; Thackeray, "Rhythm in the Book of Wisdom". For Wis 17:1-18:4, see Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce,* 277-280 and *ibid.* 163-165 for an analysis of the poetic dimension of Wis 17:16-21.

43 The debate on the literary genre of Wisdom culminated in the work of Bizzeti, *Il libro della Sapienza*, 113-180 who takes up and refines the insights of Gilbert, "Sagesse", 77-87. Cf. Larcher, *Le livre de la Sagesse*, 109-114, who suggests that, actually, there are different literary genres for the different parts of Wisdom.

44 Cf. Focke, *Entstehung*, 86.

45 Cf. van der Meeren, Sophie, "Le protreptique en philosophie: essai de définition d'un genre", *REG* 115 (2002) 595.

46 Cf. *Hellenistic Influence,* 90-121. Winston (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 18-20) accepts Reese's idea, albeit with some reservations; cf. Winston's observations on the book of Bizzeti in his review in *CBQ* 48 (1986) 525-527. Cf. also Engel, *Die Sapientia Salomonis als Buch*, 138-142 who does not exclude the idea of Wisdom as a protreptic and so as a text devoted to the education of the young Jews of Alexandria.

The greatest problem is the fact that we do not have complete examples of a *logos protreptikos* for this period nor do we have a complete treatise about it. Winston concludes, therefore, in a more nuanced way that "it is thus extremely difficult to determine whether Wis is an epideictic composition with an admixture of protreptic, or essentially a protreptic with a considerable element of epideictic".[47]

Wisdom: An *Encomium*

Starting with the studies of Paul Beauchamp (1963) and, above all, thanks to the work of Paolo Bizzeti and Maurice Gilbert, research has turned in the direction of the epideictic genre in an increasingly convincing way.[48]

According to the canons of classical rhetoric, it possible to distinguish the "forensic" (*genus dikanikon*), "deliberative" (*genus symbouleutikon*, lat: *genus deliberativum*) and "demonstrative" (*genus epideicticum*; lat: *genus demonstrativum*, or *laudativum*) genres (cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1358b). The forensic genre deals with the past and is used in law courts to establish the innocence or guilt of the accused. The deliberative genre, on the other hand, targets the future, what we ought or ought not do. From Aristotle's *Rhetoric* up to the treatises on rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian, the "epideictic" or "demonstrative" genre is described, as a discourse which is situated instead in the present and has the aim of praising a specific virtue or criticising some vice; cf. the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* of Cicero, the *Quod omnis probus liber est* and *De nobilitate* of Philo, and the *De clementia* of Seneca. The epideictic genre has a pedagogic and scholastic character, and so is addressed to the young. It seeks to persuade them by the force of demonstration and, above all, by the *encomium* of the virtue which it is intended to celebrate. The fictitious "Solomon" who speaks in Wis 7-8 insists heavily on his youth as we see, for example, in 8:10, but also in the reference to the dream of Gibeon (1 Kgs 3) implicit in Wis 9. The emphasis on the metaphor of royalty, which points to a clear Stoic background, presupposes a youthful audience (cf. below).

A comparison between the classical *encomium* and the book of Wisdom tells us still more about the author's project. The *encomium* generally opens with an *exordium* in which the listeners are exhorted to follow a specific virtue, and – at the same time – the opponents are refuted. Pitted against them are examples of those who have lived out the same virtue. This is the procedure in the first part of Wisdom (Wis 1-6) which opens with an appeal addressed to the listeners that they embrace justice and wisdom (Wis 1 and 6). It follows with a refutation of the points made by the opponents (Wis 2 and 5), and with a series of antithetical examples which serve to illustrate the main thesis, that is, the fate of the just and of the ungodly in Wis 3-4, a text which confirms the soundness of following wisdom and justice.

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47 "A Century of Research on the Book of Wisdom", 5.

48 Cf. n. 43. For Beauchamp, cf. *De libro Sapientiae Salomonis*, 1-40, a theory taken up again in: Id., "Epouser la Sagesse", 358-360. Cf. Reese's criticism of Bizzeti, "A Semiotic Critique". Reese mentions the difficulty of confining the book of Wisdom within a single literary genre.

The classical *encomium* then continues with the *elogium* proper in which the virtue which is the subject of the treatise is celebrated. There has to be a highlighting of the origin (τὸ γένος), nature (ἡ φύσις), and actions (ἡ πράξις) of the virtue, in our case, wisdom. This is what happens in the central part of the book of Wisdom: from 6:22-25 our author will deal with the origin and nature of Wisdom (Wis 7-8); its actions will be portrayed in Wis 10. With regard to the text of Wis 7-8, Alexis Leproux has proposed that these two chapters should be read in the light of the rhetorical *elogium* dedicated to a particular person, something that was widespread at the start of the imperial period, especially for works of the Second Sophistic.[49]

The final part of the classical *encomium* comprises the σύγκρισις (*comparatio*). Through a series of examples drawn from the past, the orator wishes to convince his public of the advantage of his thesis. Not infrequently, there is recourse to digressions on themes related to the main one. This is the case with the third part of Wisdom (Wis 10-19) which deals with the just/ungodly contrast (Israel and Egypt). This is read against the background of the events of the Exodus and animated by two large digressions, on the philanthropy of God (11:15-12:27) and, above all, on idolatry (13-15). Finally, the *encomium* closes with an *epilogue* in which the author recapitulates his arguments and draws his conclusions from them. This is what happens at the end of the book, in Wis 19:10-22.

The *Midrashic* Style

The subject of the *encomium* within Wisdom is not so much a moral quality or a human virtue, as in the classical *encomium*, but is rather the wisdom that comes from God. Moreover, at the centre of the book, there appears a text which does not find any echoes in the classical *encomia*: the prayer to obtain Wisdom (Wis 9) in which Solomon addresses the Lord directly. Furthermore, within the comparison of chapters 11-19, beside the two antagonists, Israel and Egypt, there intervenes a third element of comparison, the cosmos. It too is absent from the classical *encomium*. In Wis 9, the subject addressed by the author is no longer his audience but God directly, who is also addressed several times in the second person in the course of chapters 11-19. Joseph Heinemann has already indicated the differences between Wis 11-19 and the classical Greek σύγκρισις in which the analogy is internal to the comparison and not external as happens instead in Wis 11-19. This is achieved precisely by means of the *tertium quid* of the cosmos.[50]

Let us observe again that the constant background of the book of Wisdom is Scripture (see below), which our author continually rereads and re-presents for his audience even if through the lens of the Hellenistic culture of his time. In this way, the typically Greek literary genre of the *encomium* is embellished with a process which is more characteristic of Jewish literature: what we know by the name of *midrash.*

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49 Cf. Leproux, *Un discours de Sagesse*, 73-116. In Leproux's proposal, a little difficulty is created by the fact that the examples he adduces are mostly of the first cent. CE (cf. his thoughts on the dating of the book of Wisdom, pp. 81-82).

50 Cf. Heinemann, "*Synkrisis* oder äußere Analogie". Heinemann points out that, in Wis 11-19, the Jewish influence is undoubtedly more evident and ought not to be diminished for the benefit of the Greek influence.

It is impossible to give an exact definition for *midrash*. We could describe it as an attitude, a way of thinking, which betrays itself in a way of writing in a style proper to Judaism, one which characterises the approach it has to Scripture.[51] *Midrash* is the "search" for the meaning of Scripture which starts out from the conviction that it is contemporary with its readers and that it retains a perennial relevance. It is this relevance that the authors of *midrash* are striving to search for, bringing the biblical text into the situation in which they and their listeners are living. The perception of the unity of Scripture and its perennial relevance for whomever is listening to it constitute, therefore, the peculiar features of every *midrashic* commentary which thus has a character at once popular and homiletic.

In these circumstances, it is possible to speak of the *midrashic* character of the book of Wisdom, particularly in the book's third part (Wis 10-19), which takes up again the events of the Exodus. However, already in the first part (Wis 1-6), there is some attestation of the presence of this midrashic style.[52] In fact, the aim of our author is to demonstrate the unity of Scripture together with its relevance for the readers of his time, thus creating what Roger Le Déaut has felicitously described as a "sonorisation of history".[53] What makes the book of Wisdom a work that is absolutely original is precisely this close connection between the *midrashic* style and the use of a Greek literary genre, that is, the *encomium*. The brilliance of the Alexandrian sage consists in having known how to express in a Hellenistic literary form a content that is profoundly Jewish. The author of the book thus succeeded in setting before his listeners a text which, though remaining faithful to the biblical tradition, succeeded in expressing it in a language that was much more accessible to them.[54] We can, therefore, conclude that in the book of Wisdom we find a kind of Greek *midrash* on Israel's Scriptures.[55]

Author, Date, and Place of Composition

Author

The author of the book conceals himself under the Solomonic mask. That transpires from chapters 7-8 and, in particular, from the prayer of Wis 9, even if Solomon is never explicitly mentioned. Some Fathers of the Church still thought

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51 Cf. Le Déaut, Roger, "A propos d'une définition du Midrash", *Bib* 50 (1969) : 395-413.

52 Cf. Schaberg, "Major Midrashic Traditions in Wisdom 1,1-6,25".

53 "A propos d'une définition", 406 (cf. n. 50).

54 "He (the Sage) employs what Ricoeur calls distanciation because he was able to 'de-contextualize' the biblical text and to 're-contextualize' it in a way that would appeal to readers in a different culture. In a sense he did for a group of Jews what early Christian preachers did for their fellow believers by reinterpreting figures received from the written Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures in regard to Jesus"; Reese, "Can Paul Ricoeur's Method Contribute to Interpreting the Book of Wisdom?", 390.

55 Already, Jacob Freudenthal (*Hellenistische Studien: Alexander Polyhistor* [Breslau: Barth und Comp. 1875], 65-68) spoke of a Hellenistic *midrash*; cf. Jacob Weingreen, *From Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1976.

of the historical figure of Solomon. The Muratorian fragment (lines 69-71) thinks rather of the friends of Solomon: *ab amicis Salomonis in honorem eius scripta* [written by the friends of Solomon in his honour].[56] Although not seeming to accept it, Jerome records the opinion that Philo was the author of Wisdom. This is the origin of a legend about a hypothetical Christian Philo.[57] The position of Wisdom in the canon makes one think also, and perhaps more naturally, of Ben Sira, or his grandson who translated his book, a theory already advanced by Augustine in *Doctr. chr.* 2.8.13 though subsequently retracted (*Retract.* 2.30[4].2).[58] Later thoughts turned also to the priest Onias, the philosopher Aristobulus, and to Apollos, the Alexandrian mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 18). All of these are purely hypothetical attempts at identification.[59]

In reality, a precise identification of the author is impossible. We must content ourselves with thinking of an anonymous Greek-speaking Jew from Alexandria with a deep knowledge of Scripture, well anchored in the tradition of his ancestors but, at the same time, linked to the Hellenistic cultural environment which characterised the city of Alexandria.

Date

Time of Caligula?

For a long time, the period of the composition of the book of Wisdom has remained a further enigma for scholars.[60] In the past, the date proposed has oscillated from the beginning of the second cent. BCE to the time of Caligula (37-41 CE).[61] The linguistic arguments do not appear conclusive for dating Wisdom to the time of Caligula.[62] The possible connections with Philo play a role in this late dating of Wisdom. If it is admitted that the author of Wisdom knew Philo, the book obviously must be situated in a

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56 For a list of patristic texts which identified Solomon as the author of Wisdom, cf. Vílchez Líndez, *Sapienza*, 53 n. 8; Horbury, "Christian Use", 189.

57 Cf. Jerome, *Praef. in libros Salomonis* (PL XXVIII, 1308). Cf. Bruns, Peter E., "Philo Christianus: The Debris of a Legend", *HTR* 66 (1973): 141-145. For the Muratorian fragment, cf. Horbury, "The Wisdom of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment", *JTS* 45 (1994): 149-159.

58 Cf. La Bonnardière, *Biblia Augustiniana*, 46-57; 144-145.

59 Cf. Larcher, *Sagesse*, 1:125-139; Winston, *Wisdom*, 12-14.

60 Cf. Larcher, *Sagesse,* 1:141-161. He thinks of different dates of composition for the different parts of Wisdom. These go from 31/30 BCE as far as 15-10 BCE for the third part of the book. A more up to date view can be found in Gilbert, "Sagesse", 91-93 and Vílchez Líndez, *Sapienza,* 59-70. Vílchez Líndez provides three appendices which help to place Wisdom against the background of the situation in Alexandria at the end of the first cent. BCE (*Sapienza*, 544-607).

61 Cf. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 20-25; Scarpat has strongly defended a dating of Wisdom to the time of Caligula: cf. "Ancora sull'autore", especially pp. 180-184. Scarpat returned to the subject later in: "Ancora sulla data di composizione della Sapientia Salomonis. Il termine *diágnôsis* (Sap 3,18; At 25,21)".

62 Cf. Scarpat, "Ancora sull'autore", *passim*; Scarpat notes that these arguments prove only that Wisdom should be placed *no earlier* than the principate of Octavian; cf. similar observations in Winston, *Wisdom,* 22-23, who lists a good 35 words in Wisdom (cf. note 33 p. 22) which do not appear in Greek usage before the first cent. BCE.

time close to him. The period of Caligula's rule constitutes a plausible background on account of the anti-Jewish persecutions to which the text of Wis 2 seems to intend to allude. Wis 14:15-17, a text relating to the divinisation of the sovereign, could also be a precise allusion to Caligula.[63] Passages such as Wis 5:16-23 would presuppose a really desperate historical situation which could have occurred only in the time of Caligula.[64] However, we observe that the contacts between Wisdom and Philo could be explained by recourse to the hypothesis of a common cultural environment. In fact, the book of Wisdom does not seem to have been familiar with the works of Philo. As for the allusions to possible anti-Jewish persecutions, we should observe that Wis 2 seems to presuppose a *typical* situation relating to the just man persecuted by the ungodly rather than a real persecution in progress. Alternatively, perhaps our sage intends to refer to previous anti-Jewish persecutions, either in Egypt itself or in Judaea (cf. below).

Augustan age

Within the book we can find clues which lead us to confirm a date during the time of Octavian Augustus, that is, between 30 BCE and 14 CE, probably towards the last phase of his principate. Until now, study of the vocabulary has prevented us from placing the composition of the book before the Augustan period. The classic argument is the presence, in Wis 6:3, of the term κράτησις, "dominion", a technical term to indicate the taking possession of Egypt by the Romans in 30 BCE after the battle of Actium. However, as Maurice Gilbert has shown, the expression τῆς καίσαρος κρατήσεως, used with reference to the conquest of Egypt by Octavian, appears to have been completely abandoned after the death of the emperor, which happened in 14 CE. The use of κράτησις, therefore, not only constitutes a *terminus a quo,* but should also be considered as a *terminus ad quem* for the dating of the book.[65]

Further clues which bring the book close to the Augustan period are the text of Wis 14:22, which could be an ironic allusion to the *pax romana* proclaimed by Octavian Augustus in 9 CE, while the entire section of 14:16-22 could refer to the nascent cult of the emperor which was already current in the time of Augustus, not only in that of Caligula. The hostility displayed by the book in its dealings with the Egyptians could be read as a sign of the changed social situation created in Alexandria after the arrival of the Romans, but, above all, of the discontent widespread among the Alexandrian Jews following the institution of the so-called *laographía*. This was the poll tax already instituted by Rome in the first years of the rule of Augustus for all those who, like the Jews, did not enjoy the totality of Alexandrian citizenship.

Wis 19:13-17 and the question of civil rights

Here we have a polemic which is well reflected in Wis 19:13-17, a text which presupposes that Alexandrian Jews did not enjoy full civil rights. The problem of the struggle for civil rights causes the emergence of a deeper question: the Jews of Alexandria are striving simultaneously both for integration and for the recognition of their own particular identity. If the rich and prosperous Philo feels himself very close to the Greeks and seeks forcefully for equality between the Jews of Alexandria and the Greek element of the population, the author of the Third Book of the Maccabees regards the seeking of Alexandrian citizenship or even the

63 Cf. the historical picture sketched by Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 292-309.

64 "A desperate historical situation"; so Winston, *Wisdom*, 23.

65 Gilbert, "Your sovereignty comes from the Lord. Wis 6,4"; in: Id., *La Sagesse de Salomon*, 121-140 [especially 127-129].