25.1 The Style of the Book of Wisdom

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The Book of Wisdom originated in Alexandria, Egypt, almost certainly in the last years of the reign of Emperor Augustus (30[27] BCE – 14 CE).[1] Within Jewish literature written in Greek, this book represents perhaps the best example of a well-balanced dialogue between Judaism and Hellenism. After a history of the study of the Book of Wisdom (§ 1), we present the vocabulary (§ 2.1) and literary genre (§ 2.2), followed by a presentation of rhetorical and stylistic usage: word order (§ 3.1), rhetorical figures (§ 3.2), and the problem of prose or poetry (§ 3.3).

1. History of Study

Ancient commentators were already aware of the book's particular style, so different from that of the majority of the other books of the Septuagint and so very Greek. In this connection, it was Jerome who wrote: "ipse stylus [of the Book of Wisdom] graecam eloquentiam redolet."[2]

Jerome's judgement has been echoed by modern commentators on Wisdom. Brooke Foss Westcott held that the book is typical "of the style of composition which would be produced by the sophistic schools of rhetoric."[3] Henry Swete stated that "no other book in the Greek Bible is so manifestly Alexandrian in tone and style."[4] As early as 1860, Carl L. W. Grimm, perhaps the first great modern commentator on Wisdom,

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1. However, some authors favor a date during the reign of Caligula (37-41 CE). Cf. D. WINSTON, *Wisdom of Solomon* (Anchor Bible 43), New York, NY 1979, 20-25; G. SCARPAT, "Ancora sull'autore del libro della Sapienza" *RivBiblt* 15 (1967), 171-189, in particular 180-184; G. SCARPAT, "Ancora sulla data di composizione della *Sapientia Salomonis*. Il termine *diágnôsis* (Sap 3,18; At 25,21)" *RivBiblt* 36 (1988), 363-375. But see M. GILBERT, "Sagesse de Salomon (ou Livre de la Sagesse)" *DBS* XI, Paris 1988, 91-93. Recent confirmation of this dating can be found in M. GILBERT, "'La vostra sovranità viene dal Signore (Sap 6,3)': ambivalenza del potere politico nella tradizione sapienziale" *RicStoBib* 18 (2006), special issue "Il potere politico: bisogno e rifiuto dell'autorità (Atti della XXXVIII Settimana Biblica Nazionale—Roma, 6-10 settembre 2004)" edited by E. Manicardi and L. Mazzinghi, 117-132 (reedited as "Your sovereignty comes from the Lord (Wis 6:4)" in: M. GILBERT, *La Sagesse de Salomon. The Wisdom of Solomon. Recueil d'études. Collected Essays* (AnBib 190) Rome 2011, 121-140.
2. *Praefat. in Sal. libros*, PL XXVIII, 1242.
3. B. F. WESTCOTT, "Wisdom of Solomon" in: W. SMITH (ed.), *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, Cambridge 1872, 3547.
4. B. SWETE, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (second edition), Cambridge 1914 (reprint New York, NY 1968), 268. Swete adds that "in the *style* of the originally Greek books [of the Septuagint] there is little to remind us of the Semitic origin of the writers" (313).

offered for the first time a list of typically Greek stylistic usages to be found in the book.[5]

In fact, commentators' attention to the style of Wisdom arose for the most part as a result of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century debate as to the original language of the book: Aramaic/Hebrew or Greek? There had never before been a systematic examination of the style of the book; in any case, it led scholars to conclude that the book could not be considered a translation of a Semitic original, but had been composed directly in Greek.[6] The book is not lacking in Hebraisms, such as the constant use of the *parallelismus membrorum*,[7] but this is not a sufficient argument to support the hypothesis of a Semitic original. Along these lines, Joseph 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 genuine rhetorical eloquence. Compared with the Septuaginta, Wisdom appears to be an original and independent work."[8]

In his work on the influence of Hellenistic culture on the Book of Wisdom, James M. Reese, the author who, until now, has devoted the most attention to style, is unambiguous in his conclusion: "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."[9] The works of Crysostome Larcher and Giuseppe Scarpat, unquestionably the two most important academic commentaries on Wisdom, substantially confirm Reese's conclusions.[10] Nevertheless, the study of the style of the Book of Wisdom remains an open field. Only very recently has the first article entirely devoted to the subject, that of Alexis Léonas, been published.[11] This author sees in the book a

5. C. L. W. GRIMM, *Das Buch der Weisheit*, Leipzig 1860, 6-9, in particular the list on page 7, which can be found simply replicated in successive commentaries.
6. A good summary of this debate and of the history of the study of the style of Wisdom can be found in C. LARCHER, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon*, vol. I, Paris 1983, 91-95, and, more briefly, in GILBERT, "Sagesse de Salomon," 61-65. The most significant studies include E. GÄRTNER, *Komposition und Wortwahl des Buches der Weisheit*, Berlin 1912, a pioneering work on the vocabulary of Wisdom, and, on the grammar and style of the book in relation to its content, F. FOCKE, *Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomos*, Göttingen 1913, who claims, contrary to generally accepted opinion, that chapters 1-5 were originally composed in Hebrew (65-66).
7. Cf. WINSTON, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 15. E. g. WisSol 1:1-15, where the text appears as an attempt to imitate biblical *parallelismus membrorum*; cf. E. D. Reymond, "The Poetry of Wisdom of Solomon Reconsidered" *VT* 52 (2002), 385-389. The *parallelismus membrorum* is very rare in the last section of the book: WisSol 12:18-19:22; cf. Focke, *Die Entstehung*, 53.
8. J. REIDER, *The Book of Wisdom*, New York, NY 1957, 25-26. On the other hand, the same Reider holds that the Book of Wisdom is characterised by "some ignorance and poverty of diction" (27). See also a similar judgement by LARCHER, *Sagesse*, vol. I, 102. But cf. WINSTON, *Wisdom*, 17-18, in particular 17: "the hypothesis that Wisdom is a translation of a Hebrew original [is] virtually untenable."
9. J. M. REESE, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences* (AnBib 41), Rome 1970, 30.
10. Cf. C. LARCHER, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon*, vols. I-III, Paris 1983-1987; G. SCARPAT, *Il libro della Sapienza*, vols. I-III, Brescia 1989-1999.
11. A. LÉONAS, "The Poetics of Wisdom. Language and Style in the Book of Wisdom" in: E. BONS /

conscious attempt to imitate Septuagint style and idiom, "as it could have been seen from within the Greek linguistic and literary system," picking from the Septuagint "only those features of style that matched his aesthetic norm."[12]

2. Vocabulary and Literary Genre

2.1 Vocabulary

The vocabulary used in the Book of Wisdom provides a first indication of the exceptional nature of our author's Greek. In all, there are 1,734 words in the book. Of these, 1,303 appear only once. Moreover, of these, 335 words, approximately 20 % of the book, are *hapax legomena* in the Septuagint.[13] To this count should be added 126 others that appear only in the later books of the Septuagint such as the Book of Sira and 3 and 4Maccabees. Not only this, but our book contains a good number of *hapax totius graecitatis*: see, e. g., νηπιοκτόνος (11:7), δυσδιήγητος (17:1), περικομπέω (17:4), ἐφύβριστος (17:7), φυλακίζω (18:4), ἀχανής (19:17).[14] All this bring us to the conclusion that our author is an authentic creator of language.

Many of the terms used in Wisdom hail from a vocabulary that is erudite, philosophical, not infrequently poetic, sometimes also of a medical and scientific nature. Moreover, our author is a lover of compound words, which are extremely numerous in the book.[15] Finally, in keeping with Hellenistic taste, we encounter in Wisdom fifty-nine occurrences of rare or poetic words with α-privative and compound words with κατα-, περι-, and ευ-.[16]

If some stylistic features, such as, for instance, the causal use of ὅτι, especially in chapters 1, 2, and 5,[17] could suggest a Hebrew original, others, such as, for example, the

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T. J. Kraus (eds.), *Et sapienter et eloquenter. Studies on Rhetorical and Stylistic Features of the Septuagint* (FRLANT 241), Göttingen 2011, 99-126.

12. Léonas, "Poetics," 124, 122.

13. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 3. Larcher (*Études sur le Livre de la Sagesse*, Paris 1969, 182) identifies 315.

14. Cf. a list of these *hapax* in G. Scarpat, "Ancora sull'autore" 172-180. See also Gilbert, "Sagesse," 64 and L. Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce. Esegesi di Sap 17,1-18,4* (AnBib 134), Rome 1995, 274, see also 186 for δυσάλυκτος (listed by Scarpat but present in PGM IV:2858) —a good example of a magic vocabulary used by Wisdom. For her part, Martina Kepper identifies nineteen *hapax totius graecitatis*. See M. Kepper, *Hellenistische Bildung im Buch der Weisheit: Studien zur Sprachgestalt und Theologie der Sapientia Salomonis* (BZAW 280) Berlin/New York, NY 1999, 71-72.

15. Cf. lists in Focke, *Enstehung*, 61; Winston, *Wisdom*, 14-15, Kepper, *Hellenistische Bildung*, 51-52.

16. Cf. a list in Focke, *Entstehung*, 60-61.

17. See R. Sollamo, *Renderings of Hebrew Semipropositions in the Septuagint* (AASF B Diss 19), Helsinki 1979, 296. Cf. L. Ruppert, "Gerechte und Frevler (Gottlose) in Sap 1,1-6,21" in: H. Hübner (ed.), *Die Weisheit Salomos im Horizont Biblischer Theologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1993, 1-54, who still maintains the existence of a Semitic original for WisSal 2:12-20; 5:1-7.

use of the infinitive[18] or of personal pronouns[19], differ notably from the style of the Septuagint and show themselves to be genuinely Greek.

2.2 Literary Genre

The choice of the encomium was dictated by the book's main aim: to exhort the Jews of Alexandria, particularly the youth, to remain faithful to their tradition, while not shutting themselves off under the cover of their Jewish identity from any contact with the Hellenistic world.[20]

Although some authors have suggested that Wisdom represents a *logos protrepti-kos*,[21] the literary structure of the book corresponds to the articulation of the enco-mium, according to the rules of classical rhetoric: exordium, appeal to those ad-dressed, and refutation of opponents (1:1–6:21); announcement of the theme of the elogium (6:22-25); the elogium proper (7–9); *synkrisis* or *comparatio*, with *exempla* drawn from the past (10–19:9);[22] epilogue and recapitulation (19:10-22).

The Book of Wisdom also employs other elements typical of the epideictic genre such as the *prosôpopoiia*. Such is the case of the discourse of the Wicked (WisSal 2:1-20), which culminates in an accusation (*kathegoria*—WisSal 2:21-24). Another example can be seen in the speech of the Impious (WisSal 5:3-13). Another case of classical *prosopoiia* is the personification of Justice and Wisdom (and perhaps Death).[23] Else-where (3:1-9), our sage utilizes the genre of the funerary epitaph *(epitaphios logos)*.

Another significant Hellenistic feature of the Book of Wisdom's style is its care-fully crafted concentric structure, which is particularly evident in the organization of chapters 1–6, 7–8, 9, 16–19, but can also be seen in shorter pericopes such as 18:20-24.[24]

However, the Book of Wisdom differs from the epideictic genre in several ways. Particularly prominent among these is the midrashic style that characterizes the entire work. The author continually refers to the scriptures of Israel, which he aims to reread and actualize in a cultural context that is typically Hellenistic.

18. Cf. I. Soisalon-Soininen, *Die Infinitive in der Septuaginta* (AASF B 132,1), Helsinki 1965, 193.
19. Cf. A. Wifstrand, *Die Stellung der enklitischen Personalpronomina bei den Septuaginta*, Lund 1950, 63.
20. Cf. J. G. Gammie, "Paraenetic Literature: Toward the Morphology of a Secondary Genre" *Se-meia* 50 (1992), special issue "Paraenesis: Act and Form" edited by J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue, 52.
21. Cf. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 90-121; cf. also, D. Winston, "A Century of Research on the Book of Wisdom" in: G. Bellia / A. Passaro (eds.), *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research*, Berlin/New York, NY 2005, 2-5.
22. See I. Heinemann, "*Synkrisis* oder äussere Analogie in der Weisheit Salomos" *TZ* 4 (1948), 241-251.
23. Cf. J. R. Dodson, *The "Powers" of Personification. Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and in the Letter to the Romans* (BZNW 161), Berlin/New York, NY 2008.
24. Cf. J. M. Reese, "Plan and Structure in the Book of Wisdom" *CBQ* 27 (1965), 391-399; A. G. Wright, "The Structure of the Book of Wisdom" *Bib* 48 (1967), 165-184; Gilbert, "Sagesse de Salomon", 65-77; and, especially, P. Bizzeti, *Il libro della Sapienza. Struttura e genere lettera-rio*, Bologna 1984.

3. Rhetorical and Stylistic Usage

3.1 Word Order

The style of the book is clearly dependent on the most characteristic features of Greek rhetoric. Undoubtedly the most significant, in relation to word-order—one of the basic features of Greek style—is the use of highly polished periodic sentences. The structure of the phrase is always carefully measured (often two substantives and two verbs; cf. also the frequent use of chiasm: 1:4-8, with different cases; 3:15, etc.). While the simple coordination with καί predominates in the first ten chapters, the use of μέν ... δέ becomes more frequent in chapters 11–19, with an accompanying increase in the periodic style (cf. 12:3-7,27; 13:11-15; 15:7; 17:16-19).

Generally rather rare in the Septuagint, the repeated use of *hyperbaton*, a good 240 times in Wisdom, especially in chapters 10–19, should be noted; at times, as happens in WisSal 14:18, it is in the form of a double *hyperbaton*.[25] The use of *hyperbaton* is not dictated solely by stylistic factors but also by content, as, for example, when it is used to highlight a specific term, e. g. σοφίαν (9:4a); νύκτα (17:2a); σκότους (17:20b); ἀνάγκη (19:4a).

3.2 Rhetorical Figures

The author shows a keen awareness of the more classical figures of Greek rhetoric, tropes and figures, the frequency of which is noticeably higher when compared with the books of the Septuagint that were translated from Hebrew.[26] The following is a list of the most important ones:

Metaphor. The metaphor of death is used in chapters 1-6.[27] The metaphor of light and darkness, employed throughout the fifth diptych (17:1-18:4), takes on a value that is simultaneously cosmological, psychological, moral, and eschatological.

Litotes is quite frequent, seventeen times according to Reese[28]: it occurs at the beginning of the book (τοῖς μή πειράζουσιν—1:2a), at the end (οὐχ ὑπερεῖδες—19:22b), and many times in between (1:11b; 11:7b; 12:9a,10b,13b; 17:4a,12a, etc.).

Anaphora. The repetition of αὐτός [αὐτή] in chapter 10 offers a good example. Other instances include 17:13-15 and 18b-19d.

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25. For the various kinds of *hyperbaton* in Wisdom with some examples, cf. REESE, *Hellenistic Influence*, 26-27; cf. also MAZZINGHI, *Notte*, 278.
26. We are following here the scheme outlined by G. O. ROWE, "Style" in: S. E. PORTER (ED.), *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period. 330 B.C. – A.D. 400*, Leiden/New York, NY/Köln 1997, 121-157; cf. also J. D. DENNISTON, *Greek Prose Style*, Oxford 1952. Further examples of these stylistic usages of the Book of Wisdom are to be found in WINSTON, *Wisdom*, 15-17; REESE, *Hellenistic Influence*, 27-28; cf. also LARCHER, *Sagesse*, vol. I, 102-103.
27. Cf. M. KOLARCIK, *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom 1-6. A study of literary structure and interpretation* (AnBib 127), Rome 1991.
28. REESE, *Hellenistic Influence*, 30.

Paranomasia. Examples can be found in 4:2; 5:3b,10c,14,22a; 6:10a,22-23; 8:4; 11:9; 13:19b; 14:5a; 17:12-13; 18:15. In addition, there are a huge number of examples of assonance and alliteration. The book also contains many examples of word play, especially on words of the same root; e. g. 2:23 (ἰδίας ἀϊδιότητος); 5:17 (πανοπλίαν – ὁπλοποιήσει); 11:14-15; 17:19,20,21; 18:4.

Accumulatio. A parade example can be found in the twenty-two epithets of wisdom (7:22-23).

Double-duty words (apó koinoû). Examples are ἐν ἀγάπῃ (3:9), which can refer either to the faithful or to God, and συμπαροῦσά μοι κοπιάσῃ (9:10), where μοι can refer to both verbs.

Asyndeton. Asyndetical constructions are frequently used to indicate a new point of view (4:10,20; 10:12).

Isocolon. As in 1:1 and 18:1b.

Homoioteleuton. See 1:1,5; 2:3-4; 4:10. A variation of homoioteleuton is used in 3:11-12; 7:17-21; 8:19-20; 10:13-15; 14:11-12.

Antithesis: See 3:5a; 4:16; 7:6; 9:16; 18:7b.

The Book of Wisdom also employs the classical *tropos* of *sorites* in 6:17-20 while the debated text of 7:19-20 may constitute the rhetorical figure of *epiphonema*.[29]

3.3 Prose or Poetry?

A final aspect of the particular style of the Book of Wisdom is the use of clauses which resemble classical metre. J. A. F. Gregg discovered examples of iambic or dactylic metre. His work was closely followed by that of Henry St. John Thackeray, who remains the only scholar to have thoroughly studied the poetic aspect of the Book of Wisdom, although his pioneering study requires further research. An exemplary text in this respect is WisSal 17:1–18:4, in which, in addition to the discovery of a typically Asianic style (for example, the *prosa fracta*), it is possible to recognize to some extent, if not systematically, the use of classical metre, as the hexametric final clause (cf. particularly the passage 17:16-21).[30]

4. Conclusion

The style of the Book of Wisdom is truly distinctive. It stands out as a highly "Greek" style, especially in comparison with the other books of the Septuagint, even those books that are not translations. We can justly define it as an authentic attempt at in-

29. Cf. J. R. Dodson, *The "Powers" of Personification.*
30. Cf. J. A. F. Gregg, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, Cambridge 1909, xv; H. St. J. Thackeray, "Rythm in the Book of Wisdom" *JTS* 6 (1905), 232-237. For the style of WisSal 17:1–18:4, see Mazzinghi, *Notte*, 277-280; see also 163-165, for an analysis of the poetic dimension of WisSal 17:16-21.

culturation.[31] To be sure, our sage remains a Jew who intends to offer in his work a profoundly biblical message about God and man, but he does so by making use of a style that is typical of the Greek rhetoric of his age.

31. Cf. M. GILBERT, "Le livre de la Sagesse et l'inculturation" in: M. GILBERT / P. IN SYEK SYE / T. NKÉRAMIHIGO (eds.), *L'inculturation et la sagesse des nations*, Rome 1984, 1-11; M. GILBERT, "La Sagesse de Salomon et l'hellénisme" *Hieros* 4 (1999), 11-22; L. MAZZINGHI, "Il libro della Sapienza: elementi culturali" *RicStoBib* 1-2 (1998), special issue "Il confronto tra le diverse culture nella Bibbia da Esdra a Paolo (XXXIV Settimana Biblica Nazionale)" edited by R. Fabris, 179-197.

4. Conclusion