

## SUMMARY

### Part I

The history of scholarship of the Jewish-Hellenistic book Wisdom of Solomon (WisSol) is a reflection of the book's complex nature, which has led to widely divergent views on its origin, structure and range of ideas. This diversity of opinion seems to make a scholarly consensus about the interpretation of much of its contents elusive. Recently, a new approach to biblical exegesis, the rhetorical criticism, has emerged, based on the widely used classical rhetoric of the ancient world. This comprehensive approach will enable us to shed light upon some dark corners of this complex nature. Rhetoric, as taught in the ancient schools, consisted of five parts which represent five stages in the act of composing a speech: the invention (*inventio*), the disposition (*dispositio*), the style (*elocutio*), the memory (*memoria*) and the delivery (*pronuntiatio*). The first three stages will function as the starting-point for our rhetorical analysis of WisSol, which aims at a coherent interpretation of the book, based on an analysis of the structure, the historical background, the audience, the author of WisSol, the subject and the argumentation.

The first stage is the invention, which deals with the planning of a discourse and the arguments to be used in it. This planning consists of the choice of the subject, the rhetorical form and the modes of persuasion. The subject of WisSol is the much-debated problem of retribution. According to the Old Testament notion of retribution, only a life in conformity with the Jewish religious laws will be blessed with worldly goods and a long and happy life. At the time of WisSol, it seemed as if this notion had lost its validity; the godless lived a happy life, in sharp contrast to the righteous who died early after a miserable life. In his book, the author of WisSol discusses this notion. In his view, the righteous will be blessed *after* their lives, whereas the godless cannot escape punishment. The dominant rhetorical form of WisSol is the deliberative, which aims at expedient action in the (near) future. This type of discourse is in WisSol directed towards exemplary behaviour, a life exclusively conducted according to the Jewish traditions. The modes of persuasion used are the authority of the speaker (*ethos*), the emotion of the audience (*pathos*) and the argument of the writing (*logos*).

The second stage consists of the disposition or arrangement, which involves the composition of the various elements into an effective whole. The arrangement of WisSol is as follows: proem (*exordium*), proposition (*propositio*), narration (*narratio*), argumentation (*argumentatio*) and conclusio (*peroratio*). In the proem (1,1-15) the writer of WisSol presents the quintessence of his discourse. For him, a person has to choose between a righteous or a sinful way of life. In the proposition (1,16), he states his view on the problem of retribution. In his opinion, it is impossible for the godless to escape death as their punishment. The narration (2,1-10,21) contains the necessary information about his view on this problem of retribution. In the first part of the narration (2,1-6,21), he explains why the way of life of the godless must lead to death and why the way of the righteous will lead to immortality and intimacy with God. At the same time, he shows that the way of wisdom is the only way to immortality as a reward for an upright way of life. The second part of the narration (6,22-10,21) is a digression on the origin, nature, qualities and importance of Lady Wisdom. The argumentation (11,1-19,9) is the most important part of the discourse; here, the writer of WisSol has to prove his proposition. The argumentation of WisSol is based on a series of examples referring to the plagues of Egypt, well-known from the book of Exodus. The conclusion of WisSol (19,9-22) summarizes the content of the discourse and ends with a brief prayer of thanksgiving, which acknowledges God's constant care over his chosen people.

After the careful planning of the discourse, the third stage follows, involving both the choice of vocabulary and the composition of words into sentences, including the use of figures. The language of WisSol can be described as rich, spontaneous, poetical and elegant. The writer of WisSol employs a wide-ranging vocabulary and an abundance of embellishment. The style which is mostly used by the author of WisSol is the so called 'middle style'. This third stage in our analysis is amplified by a study of the literary genres of WisSol. In connection with the deliberative form, the literary genre employed is the protreptic (*logos protreptikos*) or exhortatory stratagem. A protreptic is a highly charged appeal designed to stimulate an audience to take action. In WisSol, the writer tries to persuade his audience to lead an upright way of life. The protreptic readily lends itself to an incorporation of other literary forms or genres such as the *diatribe*, for example. WisSol contains a number of diatribal features in 1,1-6,21, 11,15-12,27 and 13,1-15,19. The second part of WisSol (6,22-10,21) is entirely devoted to the praise of Lady Wisdom in the form of an *encomium* or eulogy. The last part (11,1-

19,22) consists mostly of a *synkrisis* or simile.

The rhetorical analysis of WisSol is augmented with a study of the 'rhetorical situation', which refers to the context in which a speaker or writer creates a rhetorical discourse. The context in which the writer of WisSol lived was the Jewish community in Alexandria, probably in the last decades of the first century B.C. This community displayed profound socio-cultural differences. The upper class Jewish trend of self-integration into the surrounding Hellenistic cultural environment was counteracted by quite different tendencies among the more conservative Jews who wanted to live according to the old traditions. These differences were profound enough to constitute rifts within the community. This controversy is the most probable reason why WisSol came into existence. The writer sincerely wanted to persuade the Jews to make the choice for the traditional Jewish way of life, with particular regard to the youth who had not yet made this choice.

Rhetoric is an art aimed at persuading people. Language is not just a vehicle of information, it is also an instrument of influence upon others. Rhetorical criticism recognizes the argumentative situation; it studies style and composition as a means of creating an effect upon the audience. The writer of WisSol used this instrument in order to convince his audience that the God of Israel will never abandon his people. He will lead them to immortality just as He led them to the promised land. This God of Israel is also a merciful God; there is always a possibility for the godless to repent. The author of WisSol tries to prove to his audience that there is no reason to abandon the old beliefs. The just and merciful God will always reward the way of life of the righteous in spite of their poverty, their misfortunes and early death in *this* life. The intention of the writer of WisSol consists of an affirmation of the superiority of the Jewish faith, the faith in the one and only God, and in the persuasion to choose the right way of life: the way of wisdom.

## Part II

At the centre of Jewish wisdom literature, personified wisdom appears. This personage is increasingly related to divine creation, guidance and salvation in this world. Since she is found in works which span centuries and diverse geographical areas, it is impossible to harmonize all descriptions of her nature, role and theological meaning. This is why scholarly debate on the interpretation of personified wisdom has remained unsolved, not least because the differences apparent in the various books of wisdom make it impossible to apply any one interpretation to every text where personified wisdom appears. Thus, it is not surprising that, up to the present, no consensus has emerged concerning the exceptional description and theological significance of Lady Wisdom in WisSol. It is the aim of the second part of our dissertation to look for a way out of the labyrinth of the divergent views on personified wisdom in WisSol.

Lady Wisdom has characteristics in common with both Jewish wisdom tradition and Greek thought. The author of WisSol describes her in ways that are familiar from the books of wisdom, but has "updated" her by means of resources with which his audience was familiar from contemporary Hellenistic philosophy and religion. Thus, he created a new picture of Lady Wisdom by integrating features of style and vocabulary from the philosophy of the Stoa and from the cult of the mystery goddess Isis. The many aspects of the nature of personified wisdom in WisSol can be subdivided into didactic and cosmic aspects. Concerning the didactic dimension of Lady Wisdom, the word education (*paideia*) reflects a combination of Jewish discipline (*musar*) and Greek education (*paideia*). In spite of this combination, the writer of WisSol is nevertheless mainly interested in establishing a connection with the Jewish traditions of wisdom. Lady Wisdom teaches the righteous way of life: the way to immortality.

The attributes the author of WisSol has used to describe the origin, nature and powers of wisdom are, for the most part, adopted from the Stoa. Moreover, he uses a well-known Stoic concept to describe both the cosmic and didactic dimension of wisdom. He sees Lady Wisdom as a spirit (*pneuma*) which has many qualities and powers normally only regarded as being divine. In the light of this, reflection on her relation to God is crucial. Wisdom's relation to God is evoked in a five-fold metaphor which describes her origin as an emanation and reflection of God's power, glory, light, working and goodness. There is obviously distinction but no separation between Lady Wisdom and God. In spite of these similarities, the differences make it very clear that the writer only used the word *pneuma* to refer to a meaning more coherent with the Jewish background of personified wisdom. The best

explanation for the use of this Stoic concept is, at the same time, an explanation for the relation between Lady Wisdom and God. She is nothing less than the well-known Old Testament concept of the spirit of God, with the same effects and attributes. She is an expression of the most intense divine presence in the world. She functions in the same way that the Holy Spirit is described as functioning in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, in other words, as a personification guiding the prophets and leaders of Israel.

WisSol derives its title from the long autobiographical account by Solomon (6,22-10,21), the famous wise king of Israel. In this account, the writer presents his personal experiences with Lady Wisdom in the person of Solomon. He enumerates the rewards that she will bestow on the one who lives righteously. Besides the previously-mentioned immortality and intimacy with God, her gifts are gold and silver, virtues, comfort, honour and respect in the world and the comprehensive knowledge of the ancient world. However, what Lady Wisdom brings are not human accomplishments but gifts that come from the discipline of responding to the covenant by carrying out the law of Moses. In his account, Solomon recognizes that a human being can only respond to the covenant when he has received God's wisdom. Despite being a king, he too needs God's wisdom to fulfil his destiny. These references to the Old Testament stories of Solomon are presented in combination with terms derived from the Hellenistic kingship tracts, the Stoic ideal of the wise man and the mystery religions. In this way, the writer of WisSol wants to show that he does not want to sever his audience from Greek thought and religion. On the contrary, he encourages them to make use of all its advantages, on condition that they see all these advantages in terms of God's plan and that they learn that true wisdom is His gift alone. This long description of Solomon's quest for Lady Wisdom functions as a personal example; the writer of WisSol tries to persuade his audience to follow in Solomon's steps. The ethical powers that Wisdom communicated to Solomon made him fit to be a king. Wisdom can also make kings of the Jewish listeners. If they develop the advantages of their religious tradition in harmony with the Hellenistic culture, they will reign and enjoy greater happiness than they could ever discover in Hellenistic philosophy or religion alone.

A thesis attractive to many scholars is the one which maintains that personified wisdom has been greatly influenced by the Hellenised form of the Egyptian goddess Isis. Studies of her cult give evidence of the uniquely primary place she assumed in the pantheon of deities and in the hearts of human beings. The various texts referring to Isis, including the aretologies, give insight into the claim made for her universal sovereignty over the cosmos and the human world. Throughout the Hellenistic world, Isis was venerated by ruler and slave alike. The cult of Isis was experienced as a temptation to Jews to turn away from the traditional faith of their ancestors. According to many scholars, personified wisdom was orthodox Judaism's answer to this threat. There is little doubt that the writer of WisSol has transferred characteristics of the mighty Isis to personified wisdom in an effort to counteract the influence of this popular and attractive deity. The question remains, however, as to what extent these characteristics have transformed the Jewish-based origin, nature and powers of Lady Wisdom. In our dissertation, we have searched for configurations, patterns and functions in which the two can be seen to be correlated, instead of drawing isolated linguistic parallels between the description of Lady Wisdom and the various Isis texts. Our conclusion is that both Isis and Wisdom create, sustain and regulate the universe. The most important similarity is, however, their saving capacity. Chapter 10 of WisSol reinterprets, in the light of Wisdom's saving power, the story of Israel's history of salvation from the first human being to the Exodus, attributing to her the acts of salvation that are recounted of God in the Old Testament. In this way, the author of WisSol could counteract the most important influence of Isis. Not Isis, but God's wisdom is the giver of life and salvation. Personified wisdom possessed the merits for which Isis was praised and thus Jewish faith could be sustained.

The interpretation of the origin and meaning of personified wisdom in the various books of wisdom has given rise to diverse scholarly positions, not least because of her (semi-)independent personality. On the point of origin, most scholars assume the influence of an extra-biblical female deity figure, such as Astarte, Asherah, Ma'at and Isis, for instance. As demonstrated above, personified wisdom in WisSol is partly influenced by the Hellenistic form of the Egyptian goddess Isis. Scholarly debate on the interpretation or theological meaning of wisdom has also remained unresolved. Among the widely divergent opinions, three possible solutions have been plausibly argued. As a result of the mythological elements in the description of personified wisdom, some scholars have come to the conclusion that the various wisdom hymns can only be understood as part of a wisdom myth. Other scholars point at the figure of Wisdom as the most developed personification in the

Jewish tradition. She is, for instance, the personification of cosmic order, the meaning which God has implanted in creation. Another possibility is that Wisdom is the poetic personification of a divine attribute, originating from the belief that God is wise. According to the last position, wisdom is a hypostasis, not in the sense which that word acquired in the later Trinitarian debates, but with a meaning that grants Wisdom a certain independence from God, although it remains closely associated with the divine work.

The hypostatization theory seems to be losing favour in recent scholarship. Besides the insurmountable problems concerning a precise definition, the idea of a semi-independent hypostasis doing the work of the one God is foreign to Judaism. After a thorough discussion concerning these different opinions, we have come to the conclusion that the best possibility to explain Lady Wisdom in WisSol is to regard her as a personification. Wisdom is a personification of God's own self in creative and saving involvement in the world. One of the main reasons for this is the equivalence between the deeds of Wisdom and those of God. She fashions all that exists and pervades it with her pure, ubiquitous and charitable spirit. She is omniscient and omnipresent, renewing all things. She also works in history to save her chosen people. The description of Wisdom as a spirit (*pneuma*) in relation to God's Holy Spirit presents her as the revelation of God's spirit in the world. In WisSol, she functions as a medium of communication between God and his people; she communicates His will and commandments and helps the righteous on the road to their destination: immortality and intimacy with God. She is the perfect answer to the challenge from the Hellenistic culture. The writer of WisSol is primarily concerned with persuading his audience to take pride in their traditional faith. He seeks to convince them that their way of life is of an incomparably higher order than the Hellenistic one. In using this powerful figure from the wisdom tradition, the writer is able to prove the superiority of the Jewish faith.