1. THE BOOK OF WISDOM AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY: WHAT KIND OF CONNECTION?

The presence of many close connections between the Book of Wisdom and the philosophy of its time, particularly Stoicism and Middle Platonism, is a phenomenon already well-established by scholars. A good point of departure for our study is undoubtedly the status quaestionis offered by C. Larcher in his well known Études sur le livre de la Sagesse. After a careful examination, Larcher remains convinced that our sage is basically an eclectic who has read a little of everything without, however, having given his allegiance to any specific contemporary current of philosophy.1 In this connection, we do well to recall the conclusion of the in-depth analysis of J. Reese for whom “the author of Wisdom’s use of Hellenism is primarily strategic, serving merely to effect a bridge between received biblical faith and the contemporary situation of the readers.”2

D. Winston has recently returned to this question in a study presented to the conference at Palermo in 2002 where he takes up again and summarises some of his previous work. According to Winston, “both Philo and the author of Wisdom have refracted their ‘ancestral

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1 Cf. C. Larcher, Études sur le livre de la Sagesse (Paris: Gabalda 1969) 201-236 and M. Gilbert, “Sagesse de Salomon (ou le livre de la Sagesse),” in DBS 9: 100. A similar position is to be found in F. Focke, Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomos. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdischen Hellenismus (FRLANT 22, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1913) 90-92. Cf. on the other hand, the opinion of J.J. Collins, Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age (Louisville: WJKPress 1997) 202: “The author ofWis. Sol. was not a philosopher (…). Nevertheless there is enough correspondence with Philo to debunk the idea that he was an idiosyncratic amateur making his own superficial use of philosophical terms.”

philosophy’ (Vit. Mos. 2:216) through the lens of Middle Platonism, though this fact is not meant to imply that they were Middle Platonist tout court.‘ However, starting from an analysis of Wis 7:22-26, H. Hübner has reached the conclusion that our sage offers his own personal combination of Stoic and Platonic ideas, neutralising, for example, the Stoic materialism with regard to the divine pneuma by means of the introduction of the Platonic idea of transcendence.⁴

Although Winston and Larcher take their stand on positions that are clearly different, both authors accept that our sage would have had a good knowledge of Stoic and Middle-Platonic philosophy such as would have been available to a Jew of Alexandria towards the end of the first century BC. Philo is an excellent example and, at the same time, the best proof of such knowledge within Alexandrian Judaism at a period only a little after ours.

The true problem, already evident from this short introduction, is the need to clarify just what type of relationship exists between our sage and the philosophy of his time. In sum, is it a question of an attempt, before anything else, to convince himself that the tradition of the fathers—that is, the Jewish faith—can still retain all its validity in the presence of the very different philosophical context in which our sage found himself living? Or, is the author of Wisdom, conscious of the total value and truth of his own tradition, trying to express it in categories which are accessible also to Alexandrian Jews who have been steeped in Hellenistic culture, creating thus what M. Gilbert has defined as a genuine work of “inculturation”?⁵ Or do we simply find ourselves faced with a no holds barred apology for Judaism, re-presented under the veneer of Greek categories to a cultural environment which accused it of being antisocial and xenophobic, a people ἀπάνθρωπος and μισοδέξιος as Hecataeus of Abdera wrote?⁶

In the present work we shall begin with the text of Wis 18:4 in which the Law of Moses is presented under the metaphor of light. We shall ask,

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⁶ Cf. Diodorus Siculus 40.3.4. In this regard, M. Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism (3 vols., Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 1974-1984) cf. 1: 26-35.