“THE TASTE OF PARADISE”
INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS AND MANNA
IN THE BOOK OF WISDOM

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main literary methods of early Jewish literature is the rewriting of previous material.1 Like in the other main wisdom book of our deuterocanonical corpus, in Ben Sira, where a separate section, the so called Praise of the Fathers deals with biblical persons or stories, in the Book of Wisdom a separate section discusses the role of Wisdom from the patriarchs to the story of Exodus. But unlike the other texts in this early Jewish literature, the Book of Wisdom does not really rewrites the previous narratives, neither interprets them but uses them as a source of reference. In the first part of the book this type of connections can be displayed with passages of Isaiah, Proverbs, Qohelet.2 The last part of the book is connected mainly to the story of Exodus. The theme of Exodus has already a prominent role in the canonical books, mostly in those which deal with the problem of the Exile and Restoration3 and this

1 See the debate on the term rewritten Bible e.g. in A. Klostergaard Petersen, “Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon—Genre, Textual Strategy, or Canonical Anachronism?,” in Flores Florentino. Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez (eds. A. Hilhorst et al., JSJSup 122, Leiden: Brill 2007) 285-306.  


problem is further discussed in the early Jewish literature. The Book of Wisdom uses the Exodus motive as a point of thematic comparison. Consequently the last part of the whole composition, chapters 11-19, became a theological elaboration of the Exodus story.

These are the literary motives, but what is the reason to use Exodus? Samuel Cheon studied this part of the Book of Wisdom and from his analysis he gained the conclusion that the whole book was written as a type of consolation and reinforcement for the Jews of Egypt in the time of oppression during the revolt in Alexandria in 38 CE.4 If we accept his supposition, Exodus as the main story of Israel’s historiography concerning Egypt forms not by chance almost the half of the themes of the Book of Wisdom, but it should be the most accented part of the whole book. Nevertheless, this is not a unique thematic without precedents. There is a special Egyptian group of Jewish authors who rewrote the Exodus story in a historical perspective before the Book of Wisdom was written. Two historians, Artapanos, Eupolemos, and Ezekiel the tragedian worked in the 2nd or 1st century BCE, most probably in Alexandria used the story of Exodus in their books.5 The question is, whether the special historical circumstances proposed by Cheon was the only or real reason of the author to use the Exodus story. In this paper I reconsider the special role of Exodus and the interpretation of Manna in the Book of Wisdom.

EXODUS IN THE BOOK OF WISDOM

Presentation of Exodus creates a problematic task for the interpreter of the Book of Wisdom. The text mentioning the stories of Exodus has two sections grown very close together: 10:1-21 and 11:1-19:17. Our


5 The analysis of the anti-Egyptian tone of their works and its connection to the Book of Wisdom is presented most recently by G. Schimanowski, Juden und Nichtjuden in Alexandrien. Koeexistence und Konflikte bis zum Pogrom unter Trajan (117 n. Chr.) (Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 18, Berlin: LIT 2006) 69-82