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Worship and Holy Places in the Wisdom of Solomon

Abstract: In contrast to the book of Ben Sira with its strong focus on Jerusalem and the temple, the Wisdom of Solomon, written between the first century BCE and the first century CE in Alexandria, mentions the holy city in only two verses, both in the relecture of the prayer of Solomon (1 Kgs 3) in Wis 9. The temple and the sacrifices play only a marginal role in the book of Wisdom. This article provides an overview of the use of terms for “holy” in the book of Wisdom. It also analyzes its handling of holy places and its high estimation of prayer and of the interpretation of scriptures—two location-independent forms of worship—as typical of early Jewish diaspora theology.*

Keywords: Aaron; Alexandria; cult; holiness; idols; Jerusalem; justice; Moses; Passover; piety; prayer; sacrifice; temple; Zion

ἀλλὰ τίς δὴ θεῶν θεραπεία εἶη ἂν ἡ ὀσιότης;
(Plato, *Euthyphr.* 13D)

1 “The City of Alexandria abounds with public and sacred buildings”¹

Temples and altars for the Olympian gods, sanctuaries of Isis and of Serapis, statues of gods and dedicatory inscriptions at every corner, cult-based associations and processions, public prayers and the staging of the ruler cult, pilgrimages to the tomb of Alexander the Great: such was Alexandria at the beginning of a new era. This is the city of the thousand gods, the metropolis of cultic ceremonies and holy places, of priests and prophets, of magicians and mystagogues, of philosophers and mythologists. The Wisdom of Solomon took shape in the midst of such a milieu, perhaps in a *bêt midrash* or in a synagogue on one of the numerous processional ways, with access to the holy scriptures of Judaism and to popular literature, surrounded by the sounds of the Sistrum of

* I warmly thank Tobias Tan (Oxford) for correcting the English version of this article.

¹ Strabo, *Geogr.* 17, 1, 10.

the Isis-servants and the holy branches of the Serapis-priests, yet also characterised by the reflections of Plato and the Stoics on the appropriate veneration of the Divine. In such a context, the unknown Jewish author, who wraps himself in the garb of the legendary king Solomon, writes his advertisement for divine wisdom. The one who searches for this divine wisdom wholeheartedly gains knowledge of God and thereby a life of continual communion with God.

The Wisdom of Solomon does not offer a theoretical treatise on cultic ceremonies and holy places. It does, however, employ a diverse vocabulary from the domain of cult and lived religion, and in the various parts of the book it directly or indirectly addresses all of the essential elements which, according to either antique or modern definitions, belong to the cult. Thus a characteristically Jewish understanding of worship in the diaspora during the first century before Christ arises from the semantic field of the sacred and from the passages in which the Book of Wisdom explicitly speaks about piety (εὐσέβεια; *pietas / religio*),² worship and cult (θεραπεία; θρησκεία; λειτουργία; *cultus deorum*).³

2 On the language of the Holy

A specific feature of the Wisdom of Solomon already appears with the use of ἅγιος, the most important word in the domain of cult and religion. It uses the word ἅγιος to identify that something—or more predominantly someone, a person or peoples—belongs to God. This is the case for the “Holy Spirit” (1:5; 7:22; 9:17), for “the holy ones”—be it the “just” (5:5) or the “Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt / the holy people” (17:2; 18:9) or the “angels” (10:10)—for the “name of God” (10:20, circumscribed in 18:24) and for Moses (11:1). The adjective is only applied to a location on three occasions: once for Jerusalem (9:8), once for the place of the heavenly throne of God (9:10) and once for the “holy land” (12:3).⁴ The economical usage of the word ἅγιος, together with a concentration of the term being applied to persons, shows that the book of Wisdom primarily conceives of “holiness” in personal terms and in a direct relation to

² Only in Wis 10:12; cf. σέβομαι in 15:6, 18 and σέβασμα in 14:20 and 15:17. The Wisdom of Solomon does not use the term θεοσέβεια, which is common in the Septuagint for “fear of God” and before the Septuagint appears only in Xenophon, *Anab.* 2, 26, 2.

³ Cf. 14:18, 27 resp. 18:21. Other terms for worship and cult used in pagan sources and in the Septuagint, such as *θεραπεία* and *λατρεία*, do not occur in the Wisdom of Solomon.

⁴ Cf. Zech 2:16; 2 Macc 1:7.

God. The usage of the term $\delta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ⁵ for particular “pious” ones (3:9; 4:15; 7:27) or for “the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt / the pious people” (10:15, 17; 18:1, 5, 9) is consistent with this. The multiple occurrences of the root $\delta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Wis 6:10 is a special instance:

οἱ γὰρ φυλάξαντες $\delta\sigma\iota\omega\varsigma$ τὰ $\delta\sigma\iota\alpha$ $\delta\sigma\iota\omega\theta\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\tau\alpha\iota$,
καὶ οἱ διδαχθέντες αὐτὰ εὐρήσουσιν ἀπολογίαν.

This verse is based on 2 Sam 22:26 (par. Ps 18[17]:26) and 1 Kgs 9:4. It promises that those who have proved as *hāsīd*, as faithful (cf. Wis 2:22), will be received by God and granted “eternal life.” The sacred becomes concrete in the divine νόμος and the divine βουλή (6:4)⁶ on the one hand, and the divine σοφία (6:9) on the other. Justice (δικαιοσύνη) and righteousness (εὐθύτης) (9:3) are synonymous with the holiness (ὁσιότης) understood as a descriptor of people. Thus in Wis 9:3 ὁσιότης describes the “perfect godly behaviour.”⁷ Holiness (ὁσιότης) is equally a characteristic of God (5:19) and of the righteous (2:22), that is, those who really know God (2:12-13; 14:22, 30). This strong personal orientation of the term $\delta\sigma\iota\omega\varsigma$ reveals itself in its interchangeability with the terms πιστός and ἐκλεκτός (cf. 3:9; 4:15).

3 Holy places

The Book of Wisdom speaks about the *one* central holy place of the ancient Judaism, Jerusalem, with its temple (ναός),⁸ in only one unique reference and within a single distich:

σύ με προείλω βασιλέα λαοῦ σου
καὶ δικαστὴν υἱῶν σου καὶ θυγατέρων·
εἶπας οἰκοδομησαὶ ναὸν ἐν ὄρει ἁγίῳ σου
καὶ ἐν πόλει κατασκηνώσεώς σου θυσιαστήριον,
μῆμημα σκηνῆς ἁγίας, ἣν προητοίμασας ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. (Wis 9:7-8)

⁵ $\delta\sigma\iota\omega\varsigma$ is the equivalent term for *hāsīd*, but never for *qādōš* in the Septuagint.

⁶ In Wis 6:4 this probably refers to the “natural law” within the sense used by the Stoics rather than the Mosaic law (cf. MAZZINGHI, Law, 39-40). In contrast, SCHAPER, Νόμος, 294-295, identifies the law in Wis 6:4 with the Torah according to Deut 17.

⁷ HAUCK, ὁσιότης, 492.

⁸ In 3:14 a postmortal inclusion in the heavenly sanctuary is promised to the pious eunuch, going beyond Isa 56:3-5 (so with ENGEL, Weisheit, 88; NOBILE, Hereafter, 256-257; CORNELIUS, Eunuchs, 330).

As is well known, the Book of Wisdom does not use any proper names. The intended persons and places nevertheless readily reveal themselves to the readers familiar with the scriptures of Israel, due to relevant terms and motifs taken from the Jewish tradition. Thus it is clear that Pseudo-Solomon's recollection of the construction of a temple (ναός) and of the altar (θυσιαστήριον) on the "holy mountain" relates to the building of the temple of Yahweh on Mount Zion and that the "city of the dwelling (of God)" (πόλις κατασκηνώσεώς σου) is Jerusalem. Behind this passage lies 2 Sam 7:12-13; 1 Kgs 5:19 (cf. 2 Chr 2:3-4); 1 Kgs 8:19 (par. 2 Chr 6:9) and 1 Chr 28:6(7). Regarding the image of Solomon at prayer, the reference emphasises the ideal ruler, one who recognises himself as chosen by God, a wise judge and as a pious builder of a sanctuary. The picture corresponds to the royal ideology of the Ancient Near East and of the Hellenistic world.

With respect to the conception of a holy place in Wis 9:7-8, it is significant that the temple built by Solomon is a "copy of the holy tent" (μίμημα σκηνῆς ἁγίας), which was prepared by God "from the very beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς). Hence Solomon's Temple bears an unmediated resemblance to the tent-sanctuary of Israel's time in the wilderness. It manifests itself as a direct representation of a prototypical heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb 8:2, 5).⁹ The way "from Sinai to Zion" runs in some sense directly "from heaven to earth." Traditional Israelite conceptions of sanctuary, particularly from the priestly Exodus-tradition,¹⁰ and Platonic archetype-image-representation characteristically combine here. A comparable combination, though with greater detail, can be found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.¹¹ Wis 9 envisages the actual temple in Jerusalem and not merely a metaphorical "house for wisdom."¹² This is evidenced in the contrast with Ben Sira 24, in which an indwelling of wisdom in the temple is explicitly mentioned (Sir 24:10-11).

Considering that Solomon's prayer for wisdom (8:21-9:18) is at the centre of the entire composition of the Book of Wisdom and that it contains essential elements of its anthropology, theology and ideas of wisdom, the recourse to Jerusalem and its temple in 9:7-8 reflects the great importance of the holy city and its sanctuary even for this wisdom text, written in the diaspora. That the Book of Wisdom uses the word πόλις only once, namely for Jerusalem, is an

⁹ Cf. Heb 9:11-12; Rev 11:19.

¹⁰ Exod 25,8-9, 40; cf. Acts 7:44.

¹¹ While in the Septuagint the Platonic term μίμημα only appears in Wis 9:8 (cf. Ezek 23:14 according to Aquila), Philo uses it 67 times. On the philosophical background of this term see Plato, *Pol.* 300E; *Tim.* 48E; 50C; *Leg.* 668B.

¹² So PRIOTTO, *Temple*, 266-268.

expression of its Jewish self-confidence and, in the context of its presumed Alexandrian origins, can also be understood as a contestation of Alexandria's preeminent rank as *the* cosmopolitan city.¹³

With regard to its own understanding of ceremonies, Wis 9:7-8 reveals that a temple and an altar are part of the true cult, even if pilgrimages are not mentioned and sacrifices are only mentioned in passing (see below). Finally, the motif of the "tent" occurs twice in the reference to the building of the temple. It does not date back to the Solomon-tradition, but to the Moses-tradition, especially to the Exodus- and wilderness-tradition. This relates to the Exodus theme of the whole Book of Wisdom and reflects the self-understanding of its supporters and addressees. Thus the book of Wisdom—and here the letters to the Hebrews offers a close comparison—imagines a "travelling people of God," whom God assists "at all times and in all places" (Wis 19:22). Insofar as God always and everywhere endows his people with *δόξα* in Wis 19:22, the glorified people occupies the place of the sacred site. This site possesses a historical right and remains an important point of reference for religious identity. The heart of this identity is, however, knowledge of and communion with God, which is not locally bound. Such a disentanglement of the idea of sacredness and holy places, a "de-spatialisation of the sacred," also appears in the way in which the book of Wisdom makes holy occasions a subject of discussion.

4 Holy occasions

The cultic encounter between God and man is most intensively experienced and articulated in the religious festival, an exceptional time distinguished from quotidian life, but also from regular ceremonies celebrated on a daily and weekly basis. It is significant that of the big festivals which are embedded in the Pentateuch-tradition (Passover-Mazzot, Shavuot, Sukkot), the Book of Wisdom only mentions Passover (Wis 18:9). Similarly to other early Jewish sapiential scriptures, even the Sabbath is not taken into consideration.¹⁴

The law of Passover in Exod 12:43-50 (according to the Septuagint) lies behind Wis 18:9:

κρυφῆ γὰρ ἔθυσίαζον ὄσιοι παῖδες ἀγαθῶν
καὶ τὸν τῆς θεϊότητος νόμον ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ διέθεντο

¹³ On Alexandria as the greatest trading centre "of the world" see Strabo, *Geogr.* 17, 1,13.

¹⁴ Cf. Job, Prov, Qoh, Sir; 4Q525; 4QInstruction.

τῶν αὐτῶν ὁμοίως καὶ ἀγαθῶν
καὶ κινδύνων μεταλήμψεσθαι τοὺς ἁγίους
πατέρων ἤδη προαναμέλλοντες αἰνούς.

Whereas the Passover ordinance is conveyed to Moses and Aaron by God in the Book of Exodus, by contrast it is drawn up by the congregation itself in the Book of Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom thus mentions the unanimity of the gathered congregation (10:20)¹⁵ and the hymn accompanying Passover.¹⁶ All three aspects—the emphasising of the holy community, its unity and its prayer—are characteristic of the understanding of ceremonies in the Book of Wisdom.

The exclusive thematisation of Passover within the interpretive framework of the Exodus- and wilderness-tradition (Wis 11:1-19:22) is explained by the fact that this festival can be celebrated solely within the context of the family, independent of a certain location and a particular sanctuary. Indeed the detail in 18:9 that the prototypical Passover of the Exodus-generation took place “in secret” (κρυφῆ) is probably neither a stylisation of the Jewish rite as a secretly performed ritual-meal such as those of the mystery-religions,¹⁷ nor is it the result of an exegetical conflation of varying details in the book of Exodus.¹⁸ Rather, κρυφῆ appears to advise the primary audience of the Book of Wisdom to celebrate this festival without relying on a public staging or a public space. The Jewish community thereby sets itself apart from the countless public cult celebrations in Alexandria.

Insofar as the νόμος τοῦ πάσχα (Exod^{LXX} 12:43) includes circumcision, the Book of Wisdom subtly brings into play the essential Jewish rite of initiation, without elaborating upon it further. Its Jewish readers are aware of this. The fictitious rulers of the world to whom the scripture is addressed in the prologue (1:1; cf. 6:1) and perhaps even the actual pagan readers would only shake their heads at an explicit mention of circumcision.¹⁹ The pagan imagination, however, corresponds to the general expression of a νόμος τῆς θεϊότητος (18:9),

¹⁵ On “unanimity” as an ideal of the cult, see also Ps^{LXX} 54:15; 132:1; Philo, *QE* 1, 10; Acts 1:14; 2:45-46; 4:24; 15:25; Rom 15:6.

¹⁶ Cf. 2 Chr 30:21; 35:13-15; Jub. 49:6; Philo, *Spec.* 2, 148; Mark 14:26; b. Pesah̄ 117a.

¹⁷ But see WINSTON, *Wisdom*, 316.

¹⁸ Cf. ENGEL, *Weisheit*, 278-279, who supposes an conflation between Exod 3:18; 5:1-3; 10:25-26 as well as Exod 8:21-25; 12:6-7, 21 and Exod 12:22.

¹⁹ Cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 16, 2,37; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5, 5,2; Martial, *Epigr.* 7,35; 7,82; Apon (by Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2,137).

even if the term *θειότης* rarely appears in pagan Greek²⁰ and the phrase *νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ / τῶν θεῶν* is more common.²¹ The self-understanding of the author's circle follows from the mention of the Passover in Wis 18:9, in which liturgy and solidarity are the basis for Jewish identity in the past, the present and the future.²²

5 Holy actions

The Passover reference in Wis 18:9 already mentions the two fundamental holy actions which shape the cult in the Ancient Near East and in classical antiquity, in particular in the Hellenistic-Roman world, namely *sacrifice and prayer*:

τί δὴ αὐτὸ λέγεις τὸ ὄσιον εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὀσιότητα; οὐχὶ ἐπιστήμην τινὰ τοῦ θύειν τε καὶ εὐχεσθαι; (Plato, *Euthyphr.* 14C)²³

Thus prayer is obviously the decisive form of communication between humans and God in the Book of Wisdom.²⁴

Hence the Book of Wisdom displays a multitude of terms for praying and prayer. Throughout the third part (Wis 11:2-19:22), it repeatedly offers a direct address to God in the second person and thereby switches into the mode of prayer. In particular, the Book of Wisdom contains 1) performed prayers, in which the praying "I" addresses God as "you", 2) reports of prayers offered by an individual or a group, 3) hymnic addresses to God and 4) doxological descriptions of God's actions.²⁵ Finally, according to the Wisdom of Solomon—and similarly for the stoic Posidonius (135-51 BCE)—praying fundamentally belongs to humans, who were created by a living God related to him.²⁶ The praying

²⁰ Cf. Let. Aris. 95; Philo, *Det.* 86,7; Rom 1:20. The textual evidence by Epicur (fr. 19, 2,18) and Chrysipp (SVF II, 1190, 2) is uncertain.

²¹ Cf. Aeschylus, *Eum.* 171; Euripides, *Ion* 230; Xenophon, *Mem.* 4, 4,21; SVF III, 523,2 (Chrysipp).

²² So with ENGEL, *Weisheit*, 278.

²³ Cf. Plato, *Leg.* 716B; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1, 14 (sacrifice); 2, 71 (adoration/veneration); Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, *Nat. d.* 35:15 (To true worship belongs piety, sacrifice, adoration and oath) or Diogenes Laertius' description of the magicians worship (*Vit.* 1, 6,8).

²⁴ Cf. extensively GILBERT, *La structure*, 301-331; ENGEL, *Gebet*, 293-312.

²⁵ Cf. WITTE, *Emotions*.

²⁶ According to Posidonius it is "ein Urtrieb der Menschheit, im Gebet die Hände zu Gott zu erheben, dem sie ihr Dasein dankt, und ihm in mannigfacher Weise [...] ihre Verehrung zu

Solomon, who considers the *conditio humana* and asks for wisdom (7:1-7) is the ideal of human, endowed with reason and commissioned to order the world (9:2-3). For the Book of Wisdom the prerequisite of prayer is knowledge of one's self and of God, the latter being manifested in the concrete, historically verifiable experience of God (cf. Wis 10:1-11:1). Prayer aims at the communion with God, in which the individual finds not only fulfilment in life, but also beyond the grave (7:14; 15:3). The image of God is the crucial basis for both the enabling of prayer and the overcoming of death, (cf. 1:13-15; 2:23).

As a human response to God's action, prayer—be it in the form of a request, gratitude, lament or praise—influences God himself. The Book of Wisdom unfolds prayers of praise in its recollection of the atonement (ἐξιλασμός), which Aaron once developed in the face of the murmuring community in the wilderness (18:20-25). Thus the Book of Wisdom focuses on Aaron's acts; it depicts Aaron's intercession without the mediation of Moses in contrast to its template in Num 17:6-15 (= Num^{LXX} 16:41-59). The προσευχή and the λόγος, which consist of a "remembrance" (ὑπομνήσκω) of the "covenants" (διαθήκαι), are the crucial means by which Aaron appeases the divine wrath. The smoke sacrifice (θυμίαμα, 18:21) and the high priestly robe which is intricately admired (18:24) accompany the prayer.

Like the Passover reference in 18:9, the description of Aaron's "service" (λειτουργία)²⁷ in 18:20-25 shows that sacrifice as a ritual action is self-evidently significant for the cult in the Book of Wisdom. Likewise, the Wisdom of Solomon equates the acceptance of the righteous with a whole burnt offering (λόκαρπωμα θυσίας, 3:6) in God's eyes using a metaphor and requires the recognition and the performance of such sacrifices:

ὡς χρυσὸν ἐν χωνευτηρίῳ ἐδοκίμασεν αὐτούς
καὶ ὡς λόκαρπωμα θυσίας προσεδέξατο αὐτούς.²⁸

The Book of Wisdom nevertheless prepares for a shift from the material to the verbal sacrifice. Comparable metaphorisations and spiritualisations of cultic terminology—especially of terms used for sacrifice—demonstrate such a shift in the early-Jewish literature.²⁹

bezelgen" (POHLENZ, *Stoa*, 1, 234, according to Dion of Prusa, *Olympicus* 61, in NICKEL, *Stoa*, 2, nr. 1319); similarly Seneca (cf. POHLENZ, *Stoa* 1, 323) and Epictet (cf. POHLENZ, *Stoa*, 1, 340).

²⁷ Cf. Sir 50:19; 1 Chr 23:28; 24:19.

²⁸ Cf. SCHENKER, *Le sacrifice*, 351-355.

²⁹ Cf. Rom 12:1; Phil 4:18; Heb 13:15-16.

The Book of Wisdom shares its special appreciation of prayer that is not tied to certain places and times with many early-Jewish texts and underlines its personal conception of holiness. Alongside the prayer of particular exceptional figures of its own distinctive mythical legendary history (Aaron, Solomon), the Book of Wisdom always emphasises the praise of the Israelites who fled Egypt.³⁰ This shows the great importance it grants to the congregation in the worship service. Here the book of Wisdom corresponds to the particular living conditions of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt, in a tradition increasingly evident in the Judaism since the Persian period.³¹ Finally, a reference in 16:28 demonstrates that the Book of Wisdom is already aware of the practice of the morning prayer of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία):

ὅπως γνωστόν ἦ ὅτι δεῖ φθάνειν τὸν ἥλιον ἐπ' εὐχαριστίαν σου
καὶ πρὸς ἀνατολὴν φωτὸς ἐντυγχάνειν σοι.

6 Holy people

The reminiscence on the intercession of Aaron is also the only passage in the Book of Wisdom in which a *priest* is mentioned. The attributes conferred upon Aaron are revealing: Aaron is ἀμειπτος "irreproachable," which in the Septuagint is only said of the exemplary intercessors Abraham,³² Job³³ and Esther;³⁴ and he is θεράπων "servant," a label only carried by Moses (10:16) in the Septuagint and which—in contrast to its application to Moses—is unprecedented in the older Aaron-tradition.³⁵ In the Book of Wisdom Moses is stylised as a wonder-worker endowed with σοφία and above all as a *prophet* (10:16; 11:1; cf. Deut 18:15; 34:10; Hos 12:14).

It is significant that title θεράπων is used exclusively for *these* two figures in the Book of Wisdom. They are classified as the true founders of the ceremonies in the Jewish tradition; as priest and prophet they represent the most important

³⁰ Cf. Wis 10:20; 11:4; 16:25; 18:9; 19:8-10(11-12).

³¹ Cf. ALBERTZ, Religionsgeschichte, 422-427; GERSTENBERGER, Israel, 372-386.

³² Gen^{LXX} 17:1; 18:23-32; 20:7, 17; cf. Wis 10:5.

³³ Job^{LXX} 1:1; 2:3; 42:8.

³⁴ Est^{LXX} E 13 (= 8:12n), cf. C 12-30 (= 4:17k-z).

³⁵ Cf. Exod 14:31; Num 11:11; 12:7-8; Jos 1:2; 8:33 resp. in early Jewish scriptures in 1 Chr^{LXX} 16:40; 4Q123 2 1; 4Q378 22 1 2; 4Q504 1-2 rv 14; 4Q504 6 12; 4Q505 122 1; LAE 1:0 and in early Christian writings in Heb 3:5 (the only designation of Moses as θεράπων in the NT); 1 Clem. 4:12; 43:1; 51:3, 5; 53:5; Barn. 14:4.

mediators in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern in particular and antique cult in general. The circumscription of the functions of priests and prophets to the two figures of the mythical founding period is a further indication of a special esteem in which the ceremonies are held. In the ceremonies it is not only individual holy persons who play a significant role, but the holiness of the whole congregation is also decisive. This picture of collective personal holiness corresponds to the conferral of the title “friend of God” and “prophets” to those in whose souls wisdom dwells (7:27):

μία δὲ οὐσα πάντα δύναται
καὶ μένουσα ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ πάντα καινίζει
καὶ κατὰ γενεάς εἰς ψυχὰς ὁσίας μεταβαίνουσα
φίλους θεοῦ καὶ προφήτας κατασκευάζει.

Thus wisdom “democratizes” the conception of individual holy persons. Everyone who does justice takes their place.³⁶ Their archetypes are those who were saved by the σοφία in prehistory and early-history (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph): for these figures no cultic function was decisive in preserving them from the evil (Wis 10:1-14).

7 Holy objects

The practice of the religion includes relevant equipment. In the Book of Wisdom such objects are mentioned in both positive assessments and strong denunciations.

Alongside the altar in Jerusalem built by Solomon (9:8), the high-priestly garment of Aaron is also considered (18:24). The comment that the whole cosmos is illustrated on this garment is consistent with the high estimations of the garment found in a multitude of early Jewish appraisals of it. These are all based on the prototypical description in Exod 28:1-42 and thus presuppose the reader’s knowledge of this text and the garment it mentions.³⁷ The garment’s complete colouration and material adornments allow it to become a representation of the world. The three *stichoi* in the Book of Wisdom which focus on descriptions of the garment are characteristic for its theology in three ways: 1) the

³⁶ Cf. Wis 2:10-3:1; 4:7, 16; 5:1, 15; 18:7, 20; 19:16-17.

³⁷ Cf. Sir 45:7-13; 50:5-11; Let. Aris. 96-99; T. Levi 8:2-10; Josephus, *A.J.* 2, 7,7; Philo, *Mos.* 2, 109-135; *Spec.* 1, 84-97; *QE* 2, 107-120.

garment symbolises the scale of the cosmos, the heavens and the heavenly bodies, the sea and the earth (18:24a); 2) it documents the history of Israel by engraving the names of the patriarchs in gemstone (18:24b); 3) it shows the exclusive focus of the cult on the one God of Israel by means of the tetragrammaton (18:24c, cf. Exod 28:36), mounted on the headband of the high priest. Universality, historical awareness and strict monotheism are the essential characteristics of the theology of the Book of Wisdom. Even though the brief description of Aaron's garment in Wis 18:24 can only be fully appreciated by a reader familiar with the Pentateuch, in keeping with the tenor of the Book of Wisdom the basic picture is also comprehensible to a pagan audience which would have been familiar with the holy garments of various cults and their corresponding symbolism.³⁸

In sharp contrast to such an inclusive and positive understanding of a cult object stands the Book of Wisdom's harsh criticism of idols. The Book of Wisdom offers the most extensive biblical criticism of idols (chs. 13-15). Thus it is rooted in the tradition of the prohibition of idols in line with a strict monotheism which is understood as fundamentally iconoclastic. This tradition derives from the Decalogue as well as the Deutero-Isaianic and sapiential polemics against idols (cf. also Jer 10) and is analogous to pagan philosophical criticism of anthropomorphic representations of God.³⁹ The argumentation of the Book of Wisdom proceeds in three steps: 1) The adoration of cosmic elements and meteorological phenomena as gods would be understandable in view of their beauty, but unreasonable since it confuses the creation with the creator (13:1-9). 2) Even more unreasonable would be the veneration of ancestors or rulers wherein humans are declared gods and thus ignores the difference between God and humans (14:15-16). 3) The pinnacle of foolishness was the veneration of God or gods in the form of a man-made idol, since this forgets that the mortal humans can only fashion lifeless objects thus cannot create a god (15:17). By enlarging and extending the justification of the prohibition of images in Deuteronomy 4:15-19, the Book of Wisdom grounds idol-free worship of God historically and anthropologically: images of deities did not always exist but they are rather a

³⁸ Cf. for example the description of the garments of Isis and Osiris by Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 76-77 (= *Mor.* 382B-D).

³⁹ Xenophanes of Colophon (ca. 570-470 BCE; DK 21 B 15; 16) and the Euhemerism (cf. in the early Jewish writings Jub. 11:4-7; Sib. Or. 3:547, 723) should be remembered here; see also Strabo's polemic against the statues of irrational beasts in Egyptian temples (*Geogr.*, 16, 1, 27 - par. Wis 11:15; 15:18) or Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.* 2, 2 (NILSSON, *Geschichte*, 2, 395; AMMANN, *Götter*, 192-253; 260-266).

human invention (14:12-14);⁴⁰ and they are enemies of life since they lead one away from the true God of life, whose vitality cannot be captured and certainly not in a graven image (14:27).⁴¹

Ἀρχὴ γὰρ πορνείας ἐπίνοια εἰδώλων,
εὐρεσις δὲ αὐτῶν φθορὰ ζωῆς.
οὔτε γὰρ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς οὔτε εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἔσται
κενοδοξία γὰρ ἀνθρώπων εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον,
καὶ διὰ τοῦτο σύντομον αὐτῶν τὸ τέλος ἐπενοήθη.

ἡ γὰρ τῶν ἀνωνύμων εἰδώλων θρησκεία
παντός ἀρχὴ κακοῦ καὶ αἰτία καὶ πέρας ἐστίν. (Wis 14:12-14, 27)

With its radical contestation of the legitimacy of images of deities within the cult, the Book of Wisdom emphasises the absence of images in ceremonies as an essential characteristic of Jewish religion per se on the one hand; and, on the other hand, it fundamentally criticises the religions of its surroundings (including the ruler cult), in which a cultic image belongs to the private and official practice of the cult.⁴² This criticism fits in seamlessly with the strongly personalised and location-independent understanding of worship of the Book of Wisdom. Even if a cult image is used within a procession, it remains tied to a special place of cult. This locatedness also applies to the countless available figurines and representations of gods and goddesses on coins, seals and amulets which refer to a certain place of origin and veneration of the represented deity in the Book of Wisdom's context.

In the Book of Wisdom, *the holy scripture* replaces the cultic graven images, as in other early Jewish writings. The Book of Wisdom, however, neither explicitly designates scripture as "holy" nor treats the Torah scroll like a cultic image in the religions of the environment (but cf. 1 Macc 3:48). Nevertheless, the Book of Wisdom's particularly special relationship to the holy scripture is demonstrated by allusions to the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms and particular sapi-

⁴⁰ On the one hand this is caused by the line of argumentation that Israel originally did not have any idols (cf. Hos 8:4; 13:2) and on the other hand touches on the idea of Poseidonius that worship originally was non-pictorial and that pure worship has not need images (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16, 2,35; POHLENZ, *Stoa*, 1, 234; NICKEL, *Stoa*, 2, nr. 1135).

⁴¹ Cf. Plutarch, *Superst.* 6b (= *Mor.* 167D); *Is. Os.* 76 (= *Mor.* 382B-C).

⁴² For example, the making of an cultic image of the daughter of Ptolemaeus III and Berenice II, who died as a young girl, and her inclusion in the Egyptian pantheon (cf. the Canopus decree, BCE [OGIS 56, translated in: BAGNALL and DEROW, *Documents*, nr. 136; cf. HÖLBL, *Geschichte*, 73; 103]).

ential scriptures, by the aretology on the acting of the σοφία from Adam up to Moses (10:1-11) and by the Midrash-like treatment on the Exodus in the third part of the book. The holy scripture is the real cult object in which the referential character of the scripture is crucial: the scripture is the subject of the service, insofar as it points to God. The place of the exceptional religious functionaries—the prophet and the priest—mentioned protologically only in 11:1 and 18:20-25, are now taken by the individual sage and the holy congregation, who know the scripture, who interpret the scripture and who live by the scripture.

8 Conclusion

The Book of Wisdom combines the location-specific conception of holiness, in which Jerusalem is the one holy place, with personal ideas of holiness in the encounter with God, which is possible at any time and place in the experience of God-given wisdom, justice and life. The one holy place, Jerusalem, with its temple and altar where the high priest enacts the cult, as well as further elements of the Jewish cult (circumcision and Passover) has a lasting significance for religious identity. At the centre of the Book of Wisdom's understanding of ceremonies and holy places are the personal and location-independent forms of communication with God: prayer and scripture, as well as the interpretation of scripture. Accordingly, a locally- and materially-bound worship, manifested in the veneration of idols, is a "false worship (θρησκεία)" and "the cause (ἀρχή) of all evil" (14:27 cf. 11:15). "True worship" flows from the true knowledge of God and manifests itself in the service (θεραπεύω) of the σοφία (10:9) and righteousness (8:7; 9:3). As such, it is the source of goodness.⁴³ Thus according to the Book of Wisdom Jewish worship has a strong rational character without any ecstatic elements which appear in mystery religions.⁴⁴ With the cult's strong emphasis on the personal and rational encounter between God and humans, and with its personal, rational and universal understanding of God based on this orientation, the Book of Wisdom represents a typical sapiential diaspora-theology. This is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition and equally an advertisement addressed to the pious and wise among the gentiles. A Cicero, a Seneca

⁴³ Cf. Plato, *Leg.* 716D-E: Sacrifices and the continuous intercourse with the gods by prayers, votive offerings and all forms of worship are the best means for a beatific live.

⁴⁴ Cf. Wis 12:3-11; 14:23 in which, on the basis of Deuteronomic stereotypes (Deut 12:31 18:9-14) with a possible awareness of a tragedy such as Euripides' *Bacchae*, non-Jewish worship is described as ecstasy and cannibalism (cf. Euripides, *Bacch.* 1120-1140).

or a Plutarch, with their remarks on the cult and on the relationship between knowledge of God and veneration of God, would certainly not have been the worst interlocutors for Pseudo-Solomon.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Cf. Cicero, *Nat. d.*, I,13-14; Seneca, *Lucil.* 95,45-51; Plutarch, *Superst.* 1; 6b (= *Mor.* 164E: 167D-E).

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