Sophia in Non-Canonical Christian Literature: A Unique Characterisation of Lady Wisdom

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Introduction

The personification of Wisdom is a recurring phenomenon across a plethora of religious traditions, ranging from Zoroastrianism to Manichaeism, from the Judeo-Christian to the Graeco-Roman tradition. Sophia is also a very prominent figure in many non-canonical early Christian texts. Here she is often described as a divine being, who made a grave mistake by creating the demiurge, and thus our imperfect material universe. It is precisely this aspect of Wisdom, the ability to make mistakes, that is so uniquely fascinating, since this, in fact, amounts to a lapse in wisdom. Moreover, Sophia was a perfect divine being, and perfection and failure should in theory not be compatible. It is this contradictory character that makes Sophia such a complex and captivating figure.

As said before, we can find Wisdom in many different religious traditions. Still, the non-canonical Sophia is not merely a copy of this Wisdom. While her depiction in non-canonical Christian texts is, of course, dependent upon the tradition of Wisdom within other sources, she is also unique.

In this thesis, we will look at the way in which Sophia in non-canonical Christian literature relates to personified Wisdom as encountered in other religious traditions. First, we will examine Wisdom in Zoroastrianism. After this, we will move on to a discussion of various Jewish texts, both from the Hebrew Bible as well as from deuterocanonical works and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Then, we will look at the way in which personified Wisdom is portrayed in a variety of Greek and Roman sources. After this, we will discuss the works of Philo, the New Testament, and the works of various Church Fathers. Then, we will move on to a discussion of Wisdom within the Manichaean tradition, after which we will examine the figure of Sophia in a variety of non-canonical early Christian texts. This thesis will conclude with an analysis of the gender of Wisdom.

This thesis will be primarily rooted in the various primary texts that are under consideration here, and the analysis will be based on the original languages in which these texts have been transmitted (Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Coptic). The various representations of Wisdom from different religious traditions will also be compared to one another, for it is this comparative work that will give us more insight into the way in which the figure of Sophia in non-canonical early Christian sources differs from, or corresponds to, the other representations of personified Wisdom that will be discussed in this research. This, in turn, will help us to understand how the literature of different religious contexts relate to one another in a complex textual landscape, in which sources from various traditions continually prove to influence one another, and are indeed connected very closely.

State of the field

1.0 Introduction

Since the personification of Wisdom is not unique to non-canonical early Christian texts, but is to be found within various other dominant religious traditions as well, it is not surprising that research on the personification of Wisdom has been ongoing for many centuries now. Nevertheless, the figure of Sophia is often overlooked in these studies. In studying personified Wisdom, scholars have gone in three main directions. Some of them have focused on the recurring phenomenon that is the personification of Wisdom. Others have connected the non-canonical early Christian character of Sophia with the personified Wisdom found in the Jewish tradition. A few also linked Sophia with Jesus. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the works of various authors, and will also explicate my own approach to the subject, and the way in which this thesis wishes to contribute to the gaps in the field.

1.1 Personified wisdom as a recurring religious phenomenon

Trevor Curnow observes that the association between wisdom and the divine was a widespread phenomenon in the ancient world.[1] While the specifics of this association were expressed in different ways, viewing wisdom as an aspect of the divine often resulted in the personification of Wisdom. We thus see, across a plethora of different ancient religious traditions, that there are certain deities who are explicitly associated with wisdom. But this phenomenon of associating wisdom with the divine is certainly not restricted to polytheistic religions, for also within monotheistic religions can we encounter a personified Wisdom. Curnow even argues that personified Wisdom in the Jewish tradition came very close to being regarded as an independent goddess in her own right.[2]

James Kellenberger points out that, even though wisdom exists independently of it, it often is associated with religious traditions.[3] He draws attention to the fact that the personification of Wisdom is a recurring practice, not only in the Graeco-Roman traditions, but also in the Judeo-Christian ones.[4] Kellenberger argues that gender assignment is not essential when it comes to the personification of Wisdom.[5] While I do not completely agree with him on this point, it goes beyond the scope of the current chapter to explore this issue in more detail. The gender of personified Wisdom is a topic to which we will return later on in this thesis.

[1] Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom in the Ancient World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 12.
[2] Ibidem, 35.
[3] James Kellenberger, *Wisdom: Folk, Arcane, Practical, Religious, Philosophical, Mystical* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1.
[4] Ibidem, 177.
[5] Ibidem, 185.

Describing wisdom as a global player, to be found throughout the entire ancient world, Jan Dietrich aims to compare various wisdom traditions with one another.[6] He argues that the wisdom tradition, as well as the image of the wise, was connected in particular with scribal schooling and the royal court. Although Dietrich admits that it is impossible to provide an all-encompassing definition of what wisdom is, he is able to point out certain recurring characteristics across various traditions in antiquity. That wisdom goes beyond mere knowledge can be seen in the recurring link between personified Wisdom and creation, both in the Hebrew Bible and the Egyptian tradition. It is in this connection with creation that Wisdom becomes a guiding principle even for God Himself.[7]

1.2 Jewish personified Wisdom

Judaism has a very complex and rich wisdom tradition, and it has become common practice among scholars to talk about a corpus of 'wisdom texts'. Recently, however, this construct of a Jewish wisdom corpus has attracted criticism. This is what has prompted Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey and Eibert Tigchelaar to dedicate a volume to this legacy of wisdom literature, aiming to "problematize and challenge current conceptions of the category of wisdom and to reconsider the scope and breadth of ancient Jewish wisdom".[8] Matthew Goff, one of the authors contributing to this volume, states that the personification of Wisdom as a woman had become one of the defining characteristics of Jewish wisdom literature.[9] While there is a general consensus among the contributors to this volume that we should be careful with pinpointing a specific wisdom corpus, most of the scholars do admit that it is still possible, and even fruitful, to keep researching sapiential literature in all its variety and complexity.

Another fascinating volume on the role of wisdom in ancient Judaism, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson, does not only discuss Jewish literature on this subject, but also makes connections to Egyptian, Babylonian and Aramaic wisdom traditions. In thus sketching the general Near Eastern setting in which the Jewish wisdom tradition took shape, this volume provides crucial insight into the ways in which the idea of wisdom was taken over and developed in new ways by Jewish authors. John Day, for example, convincingly argues that the book of Proverbs shows an indebtedness not only to Egyptian, but also to Semitic wisdom.[10] Roland E. Murphy, in another contribution to this volume, states that there is no personification comparable to that of Wisdom, who is given a voice resembling that of God.[11] When it comes to Wisdom, we see an unequalled combination of transcendence and immanence.[12] He comes to the conclusion that "there is hardly a

[6] Jan Dietrich, "Wisdom in the Cultures of the Ancient World: A General Introduction and Comparison," in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity: Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images,* ed. I.T.M. Oshima (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 3.
[7] Ibidem, 11.
[8] Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey and Eibert Tigchelaar, "Introduction," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism,* ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1.
[9] Matthew Goff, "Searching for Wisdom in and beyond *4QInstruction*," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism,* ed. Hindy Najman, Sean-Sébastien Rey and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 134.
[10] John Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel and Its Appropriation in the Book of Proverbs," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton,* ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55.
[11] Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton,* ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 222.
[12] Ibidem, 232.

more powerful symbol for the human (as well as the divine) achievement among theologians of both East and West than that of *Sophia*".[13] Judith M. Hadley argues that we should see the divine status of personified Wisdom in the Jewish tradition as a compensation for the eradication of worship of ancient Semitic goddesses such as Asherah.[14] In a situation where goddesses were gradually eliminated or assimilated into the one true God, the personification and deification of Wisdom can be seen as a way to still be able to express the feminine.[15]

Joseph R. Dodson delves into the linguistic tool of personification, and the functions that this tool has. He distinguishes six different purposes for the trope of personification, and asserts that, since personifications are a part of rhetoric, they are often used as tools for persuasion.[16] In his analysis of the personifications in the *Book of Wisdom*, he points out that Sophia is the main personification found in this work, and that all the other personifications either have a close connection to her or are opposed to her.[17] Sophia, presented as the way to immortality, is even regarded as the co-creator of our world, as privy to the divine mysteries and as protector of God's people.[18]

Based on the Jewish components that can be discerned in Gnosticism, as well as on certain rabbinic texts, Nils A. Dahl argues that Gnosticism had its origin in the Jewish tradition.[19] He regards Sophia as "a gnosticized variant of the hypostasized Ḥokmah of Jewish Wisdom literature", albeit with clearer features of a female deity than her Jewish counterpart.[20] Sophia is a mother figure, identified with the heavenly Eve and the Spirit of God. Interestingly, Sophia is sometimes referred to as ΠΡΟΝΙΚΟC ('lewd one'), which, according to Dahl, can also be traced back to the way in which several Jewish texts describe love for wisdom by using sexual imagery.[21]

Like Dahl, George W. MacRae argues for viewing the Gnostic Sophia as a direct adaptation of the personified Wisdom of the Jewish tradition. He builds this argument on the basis of a list consisting of fifteen specific parallels between Sophia and the Jewish personified Wisdom.[22] Despite these similarities, MacRae points out that the crucial difference between the Gnostic and Jewish perception of Wisdom is that the Gnostic texts betray an ambivalence, or even hostility, towards personified Wisdom, which stands in sharp contrast to the Jewish steadfast confidence in Wisdom.[23] According to him, this crucial difference can be explained by viewing Gnosticism as a revolt against Judaism, a revolt that, at the same time, originates from within Judaism.

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[13] Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," 233. Original emphasis.
[14] Judith M. Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton,* ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.
[15] Ibidem, 243.
[16] Joseph R. Dodson, *The "Powers" of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 41.
[17] Ibidem, 54.
[18] Ibidem, 106.
[19] Nils A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Volume 2,* ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 690.
[20] Ibidem, 706.
[21] Ibidem, 708.
[22] George W. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12, no. 2 (1970): 88-94.
[23] Ibidem, 97-98.

In his discussion of the *Pistis Sophia*, Wilhelm Bousset suggests that we cannot explain the myth surrounding the figure of Sophia from a Christian point of view.[24] It is clear, however, that he does see this figure as being grounded in the Jewish tradition, as she is identified with God's Holy Spirit, and embedded in a mythology explicitly resembling that found in the beginning of the book of Genesis.[25]

1.3 Christian personified wisdom

In an intriguing monograph, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott analyses the various ways in which God is portrayed as feminine. One of the ways in which God is portrayed as female, is the identification between Him and Lady Wisdom. She states that "Dame Wisdom is the image of God as female used most often by biblical authors".[26] Wisdom is not only presented as synonymous with God, but also as corresponding to the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.[27] Mollenkott provides numerous textual examples of the link between Jesus and personified Wisdom, but emphasises the retaining of the feminine gender of Wisdom, even when she is clearly synonymous with Jesus. As such, she argues that Wisdom can be an important source of inspiration for modern-day female believers, as they now have a role model who teaches them that they do not derive their worth from someone else, but that they are intrinsically valued and have agency.[28] It is this notion of agency to which we shall return later on in this thesis as well.

Susan Cole, Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig have written another fascinating study on the lasting legacy of personified Wisdom. The authors of this volume start by pointing out that we find more information about personified Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible than about almost any other figure: only God, Job, Moses and David are discussed in more depth than her.[29] Despite her prominence, Western society, including scholarship, has largely ignored or even suppressed this figure. Whereas one might think the feminine gender of personified Wisdom can be a means of empowerment for women, the authors argue that the way in which Sophia has been treated has led to a reinforcement of patriarchal values instead.[30] The aim of this volume, then, is to transform Sophia into a powerful figure for feminist spirituality, and to free her from the mediating and subservient role she has generally been assigned. The authors suggest that the realisation of the synonymity of Jesus with Sophia as a helpful way to reconnect women with the Christian tradition.[31]

Bart D. Ehrman points out that Wisdom has often been interpreted as a divine hypostasis, which he defines as "a distinct being from God that nonetheless is itself God".[32] In later literature, such as that of Philo, Wisdom becomes synonymous with the Logos, since both have a crucial role in creation,

[24] Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme Der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1973), 263.
[25] Ibidem, 38.
[26] Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 1983), 97.
[27] Ibidem, 99-100.
[28] Ibidem, 102.
[29] Susan Cole, Marian Ronan, and Hal Taussig, *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 15.
[30] Ibidem, 13.
[31] Ibidem, 146.
[32] Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 70.

and both are ordering principles in some way.[33] However, although both concepts are seen as similar to one another, Ehrman points out that Wisdom precedes Logos, and that Logos is born out of Wisdom. Especially in the prologue to the Gospel of John, we find many striking similarities between the description of Wisdom and the Word of God, which is often interpreted as denoting Jesus Christ.[34] We will return to a discussion of this prologue later on in this thesis.

It is precisely to this connection between personified Wisdom and Jesus as portrayed by the Gospel of John that Martin Scott dedicated his doctoral thesis. He states that the Jewish figure of Wisdom was the earliest image used by the Church to explicate the relationship between Jesus and God.[35] He argues that by means of this comparison, the pre-existence of Christ could appropriately be expressed by various New Testament writers. Interestingly, the fact that Wisdom was a feminine figure proved no real problem in this context. Scott points out that the role of Wisdom is not merely influential, but rather fundamental to the Christology of the Gospel of John.[36] Moreover, it is again this personified Wisdom that acts as the thematic and fundamental link between the prologue and the main body of this gospel.[37]

1.4 The contribution of this thesis

As we have seen, quite a lot has been written about the importance and prominence of personified Wisdom in various religious traditions, most notably within Judaism and Christianity. One might wonder what else can be said about Wisdom that has not already been said before. This is why I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the contribution that this thesis wishes to make to the existing scholarly landscape.

The idea from this thesis arose from my interest in the portrayal of Sophia in various non-canonical early Christian texts. In these texts, to which we will naturally turn in more detail later on in this thesis, Sophia is, on the one hand, portrayed as being of divine nature, as being perfect and wise. On the other hand, many texts ascribe to her a grave sin, in that she, though unwillingly, brings into being the imperfect demiurge, and is thus indirectly responsible for our sinful, flawed world. She sees the error of her ways, repents, and is reinstated to her former position of glory, but the demiurge is not erased from existence, and her sin is, in that respect, not deleted. It is precisely this combination of a personified Wisdom, who is supposed to be the paragon of insight, and her momentary lapse in wisdom, which started off my research into this figure.

It is safe to say, then, that Sophia, in non-canonical Christian literature, is a complex and even paradoxical figure. But since, as has been shown in the overview of scholarship above, personified Wisdom is a recurring religious phenomenon, non-canonical Sophia did not emerge in isolation. This is why I will analyse personified Wisdom in other religious traditions as well. However, I will not limit my research to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, but will also take into account Zoroastrianism, deuterocanonical Jewish literature, material from the Graeco-Roman tradition, and Patristic and Manichaean sources. In doing so, I wish to situate non-canonical Sophia more clearly in the fascinatingly complex literary landscape of the time, so that the similarities and differences

[33] Ibidem, 74-75.
[34] Ibidem, 273.
[35] Martin Scott, "Sophia and the Johannine Jesus," PhD diss., (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 83.
[36] Ibidem, 29, 242.
[37] Ibidem, 171-172.

between her and other instances of personified Wisdom can be more accurately understood. Especially the potential connections between the non-canonical representation of Sophia and personified Wisdom in the Graeco-Roman world has, in my opinion, not received sufficient scholarly attention.

In my discussion of the various primary texts, I will base my research on the original language of these texts, whenever the texts under consideration are written in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or Coptic. In the case of Zoroastrianism I must rely on translations and discussions of other scholars. Apart from these sources, whenever I provide a translation of a given text, this translation will be my own.

Personified Wisdom in Zoroastrianism

2.0 Introduction

In this section, we will look at the role of personified Wisdom in the Zoroastrian tradition. In many discussions of personified Wisdom, Zoroastrianism is either overlooked or ignored. I must confess that I myself only recently discovered the rich materials concerning Wisdom that this tradition has to offer. Since Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest world religions, and is thought to have had a profound influence on later monotheistic religions, we start our examination of personified Wisdom here.

2.1 Personified Wisdom in Zoroastrianism

While the Iranian religion under consideration here is nowadays commonly referred to as 'Zoroastrianism', adherents to this religion generally refer to themselves as Mazda-worshippers instead.[38] 'Mazda' refers to the supreme deity, Ahura Mazda, which has consistently been translated as 'the wise Lord' or 'Lord Wisdom'. Right from the start then, it is clear that wisdom occupies a central place within the belief system of Zoroastrianism. I think we may not be remiss in going a step further, and stating that Ahura Mazda can be viewed as a personification of Wisdom. And since Zoroastrians worship Ahura Mazda first and foremost, they are worshipers of a personified Wisdom. Ahura Mazda is credited with the ordering of the universe out of its original state of darkness and chaos.[39] He is not only associated with order, light, and good, but also with creation. Fire, which occupies a central place in the ritual practices of Zoroastrianism, is believed to be the son of Ahura Mazda, and, according to Pahlavi texts, Ahura Mazda is the one responsible for the creation of the human soul.[40] But Ahura Mazda did not just produce the human soul, but also created the entire world and its inhabitants through his innate wisdom, a recurring theme to which we shall return in the next chapter as well.[41]

The theological centrality of Ahura Mazda can be seen to point to a specific focus on intellect, a focus that is also reflected in the intricate poetic style of the *Gathas*, the oldest surviving Avestan texts.[42] Moreover, Zoroastrianism, much like other religions, knows a genre of wisdom literature. The main theme of this literature consisted of a resolute moral commitment to do the right thing.[43] Wisdom thus consists of being able to distinguish between right and wrong.[44] Nevertheless, in

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[38] Michael Stausberg, *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism* (London: Equinox Pub., 2008), 2.
[39] Prods O. Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 11.
[40] Ibidem, 19.
[41] Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, "Theologies and Hermeneutics," *,"* in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism,* ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015),217.
[42] Martin Schwartz, "Dimensions of the *Gāthās as Poetry,"* in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism,* ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 57.
[43] Alberto Cantera, "Ethics," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism,* ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 324.
[44] Ibidem, 326-327.

Zoroastrianism, wisdom was not primarily found in books, but was seen as being embodied by the priests who transmitted and regulated the, largely oral, priestly tradition.[45]

According to some Zoroastrian theologians, true wisdom lies in acknowledging our lack of knowledge.[46] This admittance of not having sufficient knowledge reminds us of the teachings of Socrates, and may also have some interesting connotations for the actions of Sophia in non-canonical early Christian texts, to which we will return later on.

2.2 Zoroastrian influences on other prominent religions

One might wonder what place there is for a discussion of Zoroastrian theology in a study centred on the Judeo-Christian heritage. Many scholars have pointed out, however, that the influence of Zoroastrianism on what would later on become other world religions was profound. While this is not the place to exhaustively cover all the similarities and differences, in what follows I will touch upon some of the ways in which we see the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism, Christianity and the Classical world.

Since Judaism has been in close contact with Zoroastrianism from the Achaemenid conquest of the Near East up until (and beyond) the Second Temple period, it is not surprising that we find several aspects of Zoroastrianism that have been taken over and embedded into the Jewish tradition. Of course, Zoroastrianism itself was also transformed by its encounters with other religions and cultures, but for our purposes, we are mainly interested in the Zoroastrian influence. Scholars like Anders Hultgård have argued that the universal and individual eschatology, as well as a dualistic worldview and the belief in the resurrection of the dead are clear signs of Iranian influence on Judaism.[47] Even though Judaism and Zoroastrianism encountered each other quite early on, the influences only manifested themselves from the Hellenistic period onward, possibly because of the Greek interest in the Persian culture and their respect for the Magi.[48]

2.3 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, Wisdom plays an integral and important role within the Zoroastrian tradition. The chief deity himself, Ahura Mazda, is primarily connected to wisdom, and might even be regarded as a personification thereof. Whereas the main interest of this thesis is the non-canonical early Christian tradition, we would be remiss to ignore the Zoroastrian texts and beliefs in our discussion. For, as we shall see in the next chapter as well, there are several interesting connections between Zoroastrian Wisdom and the Jewish one, one such connection being the recurring and explicit connections between personified Wisdom and the process of creation. In the next chapter, we will examine the Jewish tradition surrounding the personification of Wisdom in more detail.

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[45] Vevaina, "Theologies and Hermeneutics," 230.
[46] Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, "Theologies and Hermeneutics," 222-223.
[47] Anders Hultgård, postscript to *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism,* by Michael Stausberg (London: Equinox Pub., 2008), 107.
[48] Yaakov Elman and Shai Secunda, "Judaism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism,* ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 425.

Personified Wisdom in Jewish Literature

3.0 Introduction

The origin of many subsequent personifications of Wisdom, including the non-canonical early Christian ones, is to be found in various parts of Jewish literature. As Roland Murphy points out, the way in Wisdom is structurally presented as a woman is "the most extensive personification in the entire Bible".[49] In this chapter, we will discuss various different sources that present Wisdom as a personified being. We start with passages from the Hebrew Bible, but will also consider deuterocanonical works, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

3.1 Personified Wisdom in the book of Proverbs

The most well-known instance of personified Wisdom is to be found in the book of Proverbs. We see this figure recurring multiple times, in Proverbs 1, 3, 8, and 9. We shall look at each of these passages in turn.

The second half of the first chapter of the book of Proverbs is dedicated to the rebuke spoken by a personified Wisdom.[50] Here we read how she raises her voice from various public places throughout the city, addressing the simple ones (פְּתָיִם), and rebuking them. She berates them for not having listened to her words, and assures them that she, in turn, will rejoice in their well-deserved disaster. Were they to listen to Wisdom's advice, they would have lived in safety, out of harm's way. But since they refused to acknowledge the truth of her words, they have chosen the path that leads to death. This connection between Wisdom and life is one that we will encounter in Proverbs 8 and 9 as well (see below). Interesting here is the way in which knowledge (דָּעַת) is equated with fear of the LORD (יִרְאַת יְהוָה).[51] Larry Hurtado points out that by connecting Wisdom to fearing God, this verse identifies Wisdom with the Law of Moses, an identification that we encounter in other passages as well, for example in Baruch, which we will discuss below.[52]

We encounter a personified Wisdom again in Proverbs 3, in this case embedded in a teaching from a father to his son. While the personification is perhaps less pronounced than in Proverbs 1, 8, and 9, I still choose to incorporate this chapter in our discussion, since we find many similar recurring themes connected with Wisdom in this passage as well. The passage starts by stating that "blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding".[53] Wisdom is presented as that which is beyond compare, and once you have gained wisdom, you would want for nothing else. Explicitly connected with Wisdom is, once again, life, and Wisdom is even referred to as עֵץ־חַיִּים (a tree of life).[54] In the next verse, we also read how God established the earth through Wisdom. It is

[49] Roland E. Murphy, "Can the Book of Proverbs Be a Player in "Biblical Theology"?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (2001): 5.
[50] Prov. 1:20-33.
[51] Prov. 1:29.
[52] Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*. Third edition (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 42.
[53] Prov. 3:13. My own translation, , based on the Hebrew text as it appears in: Schenker, Adrian, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Bardtke. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
[54] Prov. 3:18.

this connection between Wisdom and the act of creation that we will encounter in many other passages as well, among them Proverbs 8, to which we will now turn.

In Proverbs 8, we read how Wisdom is presented as a woman, calling out to everyone entering the city. In her speech, she sets out what wisdom stands for and what it opposes, and argues that wisdom is the greatest good of all, and is, as we have seen in Proverbs 3 as well, to be cherished above gold and rubies.[55] After this, Wisdom moves on to a description of her origin, which predates all other creation: "The LORD created me in the beginning of His way, before His works, since then. From eternity I was established, from the beginning, before the earth".[56] So Wisdom predates everything else, she is God's first creation. But that is not all, for in verse 30, we read that Wisdom is an אָמוֹן ('master workman', 'craftsman') in her own right. While Wisdom has been created by God, and thus is seen as inferior, in this verse it is suggested that her role in subsequent creation is a crucial one. In this way, in her function of assisting God, and even being a creator in her own right, she gets an almost divine status. In his commentary on Proverbs, Charles Bridges also points out that there is a "mutual intimate satisfaction and delight" between Wisdom and God.[57] But Wisdom does not only delight in God, but also in mankind.[58] This is why she exhorts the people to listen to her and to seek her. For finding Wisdom is equated with finding life itself, and hating Wisdom is likened to loving death.[59]

Proverbs 9 is a logical continuation of this exposition on Wisdom. In this famous chapter, however, another figure is introduced and juxtaposed to Wisdom, namely the personification of Folly. What immediately draws our attention is the way in which both women are described in a very similar way. Both are described as being located at the highest places of the city (מְרֹמֵי קָרֶת).[60] Both of them call out to the people who pass them by.[61] Verses 4 and 16 are, apart from the two added conjunctives (ו) in the case of the foolish woman, even exactly the same. This means that the audience of Wisdom and Folly are identical: both women address those who are simple (פֶּתִי), and who lack in understanding (וְחֶסַר־לֵב).Of course, the contents of what the wise and the foolish women actually say to the passersby differ markedly. But still, it is fascinating to see the similarities in the way in which both of these women are portrayed here. Perhaps the differences between Wisdom and Folly are not all that pronounced after all. Perhaps the line between wisdom and a lapse in or lack of wisdom is not as clearly defined as we thought. It is this ambiguity and parallelism between wisdom and foolishness that we will return to later on in the context of an examination of the non-canonical representation of Sophia.

Moving on to the contents of the speeches of Wisdom and Folly, it is clear that much more attention is given to the words of Wisdom, who speaks whole paragraphs, whereas just two sentences are ascribed to Folly. We also, once again, see that Wisdom is explicitly equated with life, and Folly with death.[62] This need not surprise us, since, as we have seen in our discussion of

[55] Prov. 8:6-11.
[56] Prov. 8:22-23. My own translation, based on the Hebrew text as it appears in: Schenker, Adrian, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Bardtke. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
[57] Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 81.
[58] Prov. 8:31.
[59] Prov. 8:35-36.
[60] Prov. 9:3, 14.
[61] Prov. 9:3, 15.
[62] Prov. 9:11, 18.

Proverbs 3 and 8 above, Wisdom played an active role in the creation of the universe, and from this connection to creation logically follows her association with life.

3.2 The role of wisdom in the book of Job and Qoheleth

While the personified Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is by far the most well-known and the most clear example of personification, we find other instances in other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well. We find one such example in Job 28:12-28, where a quest for Wisdom is described. We read how no one knows the way to her, and, reminiscent of the way she is described in Proverbs, how she is more precious than gold or various gemstones: nothing compares to her. Even though Wisdom is hidden from every living being, God knows her dwelling place. He has known her since the very beginning, since the creation of the earth, during which Wisdom, once again, seems to have played an important role.[63] In the final verse we read how Wisdom is equated with fear of the Lord (יִרְאַ֣ת אֲדֹנָ֑י). This is the very same identification that we have encountered in Proverbs 1 as well. Moreover, she is in no way associated with or known by Destruction (אֲבַדּ֣וֹן) and Death (מָ֭וֶת).[64]

Once again, one might argue, just as in Proverbs 3, that we are not dealing with a personification here. Whether or not this is an actual personification of Wisdom is not our main concern here, however. This passage in Job 28 shares strikingly similar themes with the way in which Wisdom is characterised in Proverbs, which is why this passage should not be excluded from our discussion. Still, I would argue that we are dealing with a personification here, not least because there are two other personifications in this very same passage, namely אֲבַדּ֣וֹן and מָ֭וֶת, mentioned above as well, who talk about her as if she is personified in a similar way to themselves.

It should be mentioned here that Baruch 3 and 4 show some striking similarities to the passage in Job we just discussed. Just as in Job, in Baruch we read how no one is able to know Wisdom or where she dwells.[65] The only one who truly knows her is God Himself. In Baruch, Wisdom is also identified as the book of God's commandments, and as the law itself.[66] Wisdom will grant life to everyone who keeps her close, but those who leave her will die, a theme we have also frequently encountered in the book of Proverbs, as discussed above.

Wisdom is also a recurring theme throughout Qoheleth. While wisdom is not often personified in this book, there might be one exception, namely in chapter 7. Here we read how Wisdom is a shelter in much the same way as money is, but with the advantage that Wisdom can actually preserve those who turn to her.[67] Moreover, Wisdom can give one wise person as much power as ten rulers.[68] However, this passage also warns against being too wise (אַל־תִּתְחַכַּ֖ם יוֹתֵ֑ר), as that may lead to destruction.[69] While we have seen the connection between Wisdom and safety and wealth before, this is the first time that we see a warning against being overly wise. Apparently, too much wisdom can be one's undoing. I will briefly return to this notion later on in this chapter. But first, we will discuss two other works in which a personified Wisdom figures prominently, namely the Wisdom of Solomon and the work of Ben Sira.

[63] Job 28:25-27.
[64] Job 28:22.
[65] Bar. 3:31.
[66] Bar. 4:1.
[67] Eccles. 7:12.
[68] Eccles. 7:19.
[69] Eccles. 7:16.

3.3 Personified Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Book of Sirach

While a full examination of every instance in which a personified Wisdom is mentioned in either the Wisdom of Solomon or the work of Ben Sira lies beyond the scope of this thesis, we will focus here on a few selected passages.

In Wisdom of Solomon 6, we have an extensive exposition on the positive aspects of Wisdom. We are clearly dealing with a personification here, for we read how"she herself goes about, seeking those who are worthy of her".[70] This is why she is easily encountered by those who genuinely want to find her.[71] Those who do find her, are promised ἀφθαρσία ('incorruptibility', 'immortality'), which in turn brings them close to God.[72]

In the subsequent chapter, we read how the writer of this poem calls out to God, and encounters the spirit of Wisdom (πνεῦμα σοφίας).[73] Then, in a passage reminiscent of the way in which Wisdom is presented in Proverbs, we read how Wisdom is to be treasured above gold or any sort of riches and wealth.[74] But for our purposes, it is especially the second half of this chapter that is really fascinating. Here, Wisdom is called the artificer of all things (ἡ πάντων τεχνῖτις), and a list consisting of no less than twenty-one values is attributed to her.[75] But this is not the end of the writer's glorification of Wisdom:

"For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; because of this, nothing defiled falls into her. For she is the radiance of everlasting light, and the spotless mirror of the activity of God, and the image of His goodness."[76]

The way in which Wisdom has been described as aiding God in the process of creation has led to an identification of Wisdom with God's spirit, mentioned in Genesis 1.[77] Interestingly, in the passage above, Wisdom is likewise identified with a mist, vapour or breath (ἀτμίς) of God's power. Moreover, the way in which she is called an emanation (ἀπόρροια) of God's glory shows some striking similarities to the portrayal of Sophia in many non-canonical early Christian texts, as we will discuss in more detail later on. The way in which she is described in the passage translated above shows that she is worshipped on an almost godlike level, while at the same time always explicitly put in the context of the power and goodness of God Himself. It seems as if God can only be known through the perfect mirror of Wisdom, and the only way to become a friend of God, is by letting Wisdom into oneself.[78]

The close connection between God and Wisdom is also expressed in Wisdom of Solomon 9, where Wisdom is described as sitting by God's throne.[79] Here we also find an elaboration on Wisdom's presence during the process of creation: "And Wisdom was with You, (Wisdom) who

[70] Wisd. of Sol. 6:16. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Deane, William John. *ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΑΛΩΜΩΜ: The Book of Wisdom.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881.
[71] Wisd. of Sol. 6:12-14.
[72] Wisd. of Sol. 6:18-19.
[73] Wisd. of Sol. 7:7.
[74] Wisd. of Sol. 7:8-14.
[75] Wisd. of Sol. 7:22-23.
[76] Wisd. of Sol. 7:25-26. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Deane, William John. *ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΑΛΩΜΩΜ: The Book of Wisdom.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881.
[77] Gen. 1:2.
[78] Wisd. of Sol. 7:27.
[79] Wisd. of Sol. 9:4, 10.

knows Your works and who was present when You made the world".[80] The writer asks God to send down Wisdom so that she can teach him what is good and pleasing in God's eyes.[81] Once again, it becomes clear that no one knows God as well and as intimately as Wisdom does, and that it is only through Wisdom that one can get closer to God, and get to know how to behave according to His will.

Having discussed various passages concerning Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon, we will now move on to the Book of Sirach. In this book, there are six poems dedicated to the search for wisdom, and these poems divide the whole of the book into what may be considered chapters.[82] So, we might say that these wisdom-oriented poems are what divide, but also bind the whole. In what follows, I would like to focus on one such poem, found in chapter 24.

In this poem, a personified Wisdom speaks about herself, her origin and her values in the first person. She is portrayed as being in the presence of God, and as having a throne in the heavens.[83] She has originated from the mouth of God Himself, and has covered the earth like a mist.[84] This shows some striking similarities to the way in which she is described as the breath of God in the Wisdom of Solomon, which we discussed above. Moreover, this passage once again explicitly connects Wisdom to the creation. In verse 6, Wisdom relates how "I acquired the waves of the sea and the entire earth and every nation and people".[85] The verb κτάομαι used here clearly points to Wisdom being in possession of the entire earth. After gaining this possession, and wondering where she should settle, God commands her to put down her tent in Israel.[86] Interestingly, in the section that follows, Wisdom is likened to many different kinds of trees, which reminds us of the way in which she is compared to the tree of life in Proverbs 3. Whereas the Wisdom of Solomon claims that Wisdom is readily available and can easily be accessed and understood by those who want to, Ben Sira's Wisdom proclaims that no one will fully be able to know her, since her insight is too profound to understand.[87] Ben Sira seems to connect Wisdom with the Torah, a connection we have also seen in the book of Proverbs and in Baruch. According to Daniel Harrington, this identification of a personified Wisdom with the covenant and Torah "is the key to his integration of secular wisdom and biblical revelation".[88]

[80] Wisd. of Sol. 9:9. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Deane, William John. *ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΑΛΩΜΩΝ: The Book of Wisdom.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881.
[81] Wisd. of Sol. 9:10-11.
[82] Daniel J. Harrington, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach," in *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version,* ed. Michael David Coogan, Marc Zvi Brettler and Carol A. Newsom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1458.
[83] Sir. 24:2, 4.
[84] Sir. 24:3.
[85] Sir. 24:6. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Rahlfs, Alfred. *Septuaginta*. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971.
[86] Sir. 24:8.
[87] Sir. 24:28-29.
[88] Ibidem, 1459.

3.4 Personified Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls

As A.S. van der Woude rightly observes, the role of wisdom at Qumran has not been given enough attention in modern scholarship.[89] In this section, we will briefly take a look at some passages from various texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls in which we see a personification of Wisdom.

One very interesting text among these scrolls is the one called the Wiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184), which shows some striking similarities to, and according to Jacobus Naudé, even explicitly relies on certain passages from the book of Proverbs, including the ones discussed above.[90] However, rather than focusing on Wisdom, or the female personification of goodness, this text focuses on the female personification of Evil instead. We read how the entrance of her house leads directly to hell, and how her ways are the ways of death itself. The way in which this personification of Evil, or the Seductress, as some scholars have called her, is shown to be leading people astray from the city squares and the gates of the town strongly reminds us of the imagery of Proverbs 9 as well.

The reader of this text is thus warned against falling prey to evil, evil that will ultimately be one's undoing. As Harrington argues: "The intellectual presupposition of the text is the dualism of the 'two ways' found in Proverbs and in the Qumran sectarian writings".[91] Likewise, Benjamin Wright points out that "the woman figure personified in 4Q184 represents the anti-type of Woman Wisdom".[92] Naturally, one is encouraged to follow the path of Wisdom even more fervently than before, having read the atrocities awaiting those who choose the path of Folly.

An additional instance of personified Wisdom can be found in 4Q185, which is another wisdom instruction. This fragmentary text also clearly betrays influence by Proverbs' personified Wisdom. In this text, it is once again Wisdom who calls out to the people to give heed to her words, for her way is the way of life.[93] Interestingly, Wisdom, in this text, seems again to be equated to the law, since she claims that they who listen to her will know God's commandments. This text, however, does not only rely on the Biblical wisdom tradition, but, as Isabell Hoppe has argued, also incorporates the tradition of eschatological judgement we find elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as well.[94]

3.5 The value of wisdom reconsidered

As we have seen in Proverbs 7, too much wisdom can lead to destruction. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this is not the only passage in Qoheleth that seems to be rather ambiguous or even negative towards Wisdom. Completely in the overall style of this book, in the very first chapter we read that the quest for wisdom or folly is nothing more than רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ ('striving after wind').[95] So both wisdom and folly are seen as just more things that are in fact meaningless. But the writer of this passage even goes a step further and states that wisdom is something negative rather than positive: "for in much wisdom

[89] A.S. van der Woude, "Wisdom at Qumran," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton,* ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244.
[90] Jacobus A. Naudé, "The Wiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184), the Netherworld and the Body," *Journal for Semitics* 15, no. 2 (2006): 373.
[91] Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London: Routledge, 1996), 35.
[92] Benjamin G. Wright, "Wisdom and Women at Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no. 2 (2004): 243.
[93] 4Q185, column ii, 11-14.
[94] Isabell Christine Hoppe, *Transforming Proverbs: Intertextuality in 4Q185* (Leiden: Brill, 2025), 196.
[95] Eccles. 1:17.

is much grief".[96] What are we to make of this indifference, or even negativity towards Wisdom, which is otherwise always portrayed as something positive and valuable? Should we disregard this as merely an expression of Qoheleth's overall pessimism? Perhaps, but I would suggest we must not so easily dismiss this notion of ambivalence towards Wisdom. For, as we shall see in the following chapters, Wisdom can certainly have an ambiguity to her that we might not expect. Dismissing or ignoring statements such as this one from Qoheleth might mean that we miss an additional layer of meaning attributed to Wisdom, which is indeed a rather complex and paradoxical figure.

3.6 The origin of the Jewish personified Wisdom

Even though a personified Wisdom is to be found surprisingly frequently throughout various different parts of Jewish literature, as we have touched upon in our discussion above, this personification did not necessarily originate within Judaism itself.

Wilfred L. Knox argues for an Egyptian or Syrian origin for the personified wisdom in Proverbs, Job and other Jewish wisdom literature. Maintaining that "the personal Wisdom appears quite suddenly in Judaism and is obviously interpolated", he suggests that this interpolation occurred at the final stages of compilation.[97] There is a striking resemblance between the Egyptian goddess Isis, the Syrian goddess Astarte, and the personified wisdom of Proverbs. Knox sees the personification of Wisdom as the answer of orthodox Judaism to the importance of the Isis cult under the Ptolemaic dynasty.[98] Isis is here replaced by the Wisdom of God and becomes the source of order and creation. Knox argues that Philo, by referring to Wisdom as having many names, confirms the shared identity of Wisdom, Isis, Astarte, and other similar deities.[99] Moreover, Harrington points out that the way in which Wisdom is often seen as praising herself, for example in the book of Proverbs and the Book of Sirach, "is characteristic of ancient texts associated with the Egyptian goddess Isis".[100]

Like Knox, John Day also argues for an Egyptian origin for the personification of wisdom in Proverbs, but he insists we must look further than that, and also take into account the dependence on Semitic wisdom.[101] According to him, this influence is easily recognised in the figures of Job and Daniel. Moreover, he convincingly argues that there are undeniable parallels between passages from Qoheleth and Gilgamesh.[102] He also suggests that the contrast between the wicked and the righteous, and between Wisdom and Folly, is another instance of the Jewish appropriation of the Semitic wisdom tradition.[103]

However, it is important to keep in mind that Jewish authors did not merely take over the personified Wisdom they encountered in neighbouring cultures. In many Jewish texts, Wisdom is to be pursued as if she were a love partner, but, at the same time, she is also a gift. It is this paradoxical nature that, as Roland Murphy points out, is genuinely Israelite; we find it nowhere else.[104]

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[96] Eccles. 1:18. My own translation, based on the Hebrew text as it appears in: Schenker, Adrian, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Bardtke. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
[97] Wilfred L. Knox, "The Divine Wisdom," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 38, no. 151 (1937): 232.
[98] Ibidem, 236.
[99] Ibidem, 237.
[100] Harrington, "Ecclesiasticus," 1489.
[101] Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel," 55.
[102] Ibidem, 60.
[103] Ibidem, 63.
[104] Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," 232.

3.7 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the Jewish tradition on personified Wisdom is very rich indeed. We find her not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in other Jewish texts, both those considered deuterocanonical, as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls. While all the passages we have discussed above are unique and interesting in their own right, it is still possible to discern certain general similarities, certain aspects that we encounter in various different passages in a similar way. One such commonality is the way in which she is frequently contrasted to her adversary, the personification of Folly or even Evil. Another one is the way in which Wisdom is often connected to riches, wealth, and life, and how she is also connected to fear of God and God's commandments and law. And, finally, there is a recurring explicit connection between Wisdom and creation, in which she either actively participated, or, at the very least, aided God in this process. This further illustrates the intimate bond between God and Wisdom, a bond we have seen expressed time and again throughout the different texts we have studied in this chapter.

Unsurprisingly, the writers of the non-canonical early Christian texts we will discuss later on in this thesis relied heavily on the themes and imagery from this rich Jewish tradition. However, we must be careful not to limit this influence to just the Jewish tradition. For, just as the Jewish tradition was, as we have seen, in all likelihood influenced by other neighbouring wisdom traditions, the non-canonical early Christian accounts on Sophia rely not only on the Jewish tradition, but also on, among others, the Graeco-Roman one. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the way in which we find personified Wisdom in these traditions.

Personified Wisdom in Graeco-Roman Literature

4.0 Introduction

Even though it is often overlooked in discussions of the Jewish and Christian personified Wisdom, the Greek and Roman traditions were no stranger to such personifications either. I believe we would miss an important dimension of Wisdom if we were to ignore this rich heritage.

In this chapter, we will first briefly discuss some of the deities who are specifically connected to Wisdom. In this discussion we will, of course, also analyse some textual evidence pertaining to this. After this, we will look at the way in which we encounter personified Wisdom in the Greek philosophical tradition. Then, we will continue with a discussion of the rivalry and conflict between different deities associated with wisdom, and what this rivalry can tell us. Finally, we will move on to look at the way in which a lapse in wisdom is sometimes presented as part of a divine plan. This final point is something that will be of interest in our analysis of Sophia in non-canonical early Christian texts, to which we will return in more detail later on in this thesis.

4.1 Deities associated with wisdom

In Greek mythology, there are several deities who are primarily associated with wisdom. The most obvious example is the Olympian goddess Pallas Athena, whose Roman counterpart is Minerva. In this context, it will be interesting to discuss the various functions of this goddess in some more detail, so that we will gain a better understanding of how Wisdom was understood and interpreted. The most comprehensive overview of all of Athena's characteristics can be found in Hesiod's *Theogony.* Here, she is described as "Athena with gleaming eyes, terrible, strife-stirring, host-leading, unwearied, queenly, whom clamour, wars and battles delight".[105] Interestingly, the majority of these attributes are connected with warfare. Therefore, it is not surprising that Athena plays an active role in the Trojan War, and that throughout the Iliad and the Odyssey, she is presented as the primary guardian of Odysseus. Odysseus, in turn, is clearly connected to Athena, for some of the most prominent epithets of Odysseus include πολύμητις ('of many counsels', 'wily'), πολύτροπος ('of many turns', 'resourceful'), which point to his own connection to wit and wisdom.[106] But he is connected with Athena on more levels than just the intellectual, for he is consistently portrayed as a skilled warrior and he is the one who, with the invention of the famous wooden horse, ultimately brought victory to the Greeks, thus also solidifying him as a mastermind of warfare, which, as we have seen above, is also one of the main spheres of influence of Athena. Because of Athena's influence in affairs of war, having her at your side was of the utmost importance if you wanted to win. For example, we read in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* how it would be impossible for Troy to fall if the statue of Minerva would remain in the sanctuary there.[107] Apparently, merely this statue alone could ensure that Troy would be undefeatable. Unsurprisingly, it is up to Odysseus to make sure that the

[105] Hes. *Th*. 924-926. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia.* Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Loeb Classical Library 57. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.
[106] See, for example, Hom. Il. 3,200, Hom. Od. 1,1.
[107] Ov. *Met*. 13,333-349.

statue is safely brought to the side of the Greeks, once again pointing to his close connection to this goddess.

But Athena is not the only deity connected to wisdom, for, even though they are not as prominently presented as such, both of Athena's parents can also be seen as personifications of Wisdom. Metis, an Oceanic nymph, and mother of Athena, whose name itself means 'thought', is described by Hesiod as "she who knows the most of the gods and mortal men".[108]

Zeus is also often presented as the epitome of reason. Since Athena is believed to have been born out of the head of Zeus, this might very well have had some impact upon her role as the goddess of wisdom as well.

As Curnow has rightly pointed out, Athena has also been primarily connected with crafts and inventions of various kinds, thus pointing to a more practical aspect of wisdom.[109] We might connect this sphere of influence to the recurring association with Wisdom and creation, which we have discussed in some detail in the previous chapter as well. Moreover, Athena was also more explicitly related to "maintaining the order of the cosmos".[110] Besides the obvious connections to the Jewish depiction of Wisdom, we can also see connections to the Zoroastrian personified Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, who was likewise linked to creation and maintaining order (see chapter 2).

4.2 Personified Wisdom in Greek philosophy

Since philosophy is generally understood as a quest for wisdom, it is not surprising that all of the famous ancient Greek and Roman philosophers talk about wisdom in quite some detail. For our purposes, however, we will only look at those instances in which we are likely dealing with a personification of Wisdom. Interestingly, there are but a very few references that can be interpreted as referring to Wisdom as something personified. The only references I was able to discern, came from fragments of the work of Heraclitus.

In several of the fragments that have been transmitted to us, Heraclitus speaks of wisdom as if it is personified. Because we are dealing with fragments here, it is difficult to contextualise the sayings we find. Still, it is clear that Wisdom is seen as something substantial, as something concrete, rather than an abstract notion. In fragment 108, for example, Heraclitus speaks of "that which is wise, separated from all things".[111] Similarly, in fragment 41 he talks about "the wise thing, which is one", thus once again pointing to the concreteness of what we call wisdom.[112] Finally, in fragment 32, which is rather cryptic, he claims that "one thing, the only wise thing, is to be willing and unwilling to

[108] Hes. *Th*. 887. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia.* Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Loeb Classical Library 57. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.
[109] Curnow, *Wisdom in the Ancient World*, 52.
[110] Ibidem, 53.
[111] My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Heraclitus. *Fragments.* A text and translation with a commentary by T.M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
[112] My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Heraclitus. *Fragments.* A text and translation with a commentary by T.M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

be called by the name of Zeus".[113] This final fragment, in my own interpretation at least, seems to point to the identification of Zeus as a personification of Wisdom, and seems to indicate that he who claims to be wise is in fact claiming to be the king of the gods himself. However, a truly wise person would not dare to claim such a thing. This reminds us of the way in which Socrates talks about what he sees as true wisdom:

> "For it may be that neither one of us knows something fair and good, but this one believes that he knows something while he does not know, but I, just as I do not know, I do not believe I do. At least it seems as if I am wiser than this one in just this one small thing: that I do not believe to know what I do not know."[114]

Interestingly, we have encountered a similar attitude to true wisdom in our discussion of Zoroastrianism. We will return to this notion once again when we will discuss Sophia in non-canonical early Christian text later on in this thesis.

4.3 Rivalry and conflict between wisdom deities

Whereas Wisdom is often presented as infallible, in Greek mythology we see that there is a certain rivalry between deities, and that even deities associated explicitly with Wisdom can be tricked.

One such example is the way in which Metis is tricked by Zeus, a story we find in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Here we read how it was foretold that Metis's son would overthrow his father and become king of the gods himself. Zeus, fearing that the prophesy would come true, "cunningly deceived her with wily words", and swallowed her, in this way preventing the birth of the son who would usurp his power.[115] So Metis, who, a few sentences earlier, is described as the wisest among the gods, is now tricked by a god inferior in wisdom. Apparently, Wisdom is not always infallible and perfect.

Another example of Wisdom temporarily becoming foolish can be found in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite.[116] In this text, we read how Aphrodite is able to deceive even the mind of Zeus, thus coupling him with mortal women. In this very same passage, ironically, it is once again emphasised that it is Zeus that knows ἄφθιτα μήδεα ('imperishable prudence').[117] However, even his seemingly steadfast wisdom can be deceived by the goddess of love.

Sometimes, we even see conflict between a wisdom deity and a mere mortal. The most famous example of this is the story of Pallas Minerva's contest with Arachne, told by Ovid in the sixth book of his *Metamorphoses.*[118] Here, we read how Arachne, a relatively insignificant girl, who had a great talent for weaving, challenged Minerva to a weaving contest, denying that is was Minerva who had

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[113] My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Heraclitus. *Fragments.* A text and translation with a commentary by T.M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
[114] Plat. *Apol*. 21d. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Plato. *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo.* Edited and translated by Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy. Loeb Classical Library 36. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.
[115] Hes. *Th*. 889-890. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia.* Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Loeb Classical Library 57. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.
[116] *HH* 5,36-44.
[117] *HH* 5,43.
[118] Ov. *Met*. 6.1-145.

instructed her in her craft. Minerva proceeds to depict the glory of the gods in her tapestry, while Arachne focuses on their deception and cruelty:

> "Nor Pallas, nor Envy could criticise this work. The golden-haired heroine was pained by the outcome, and tore apart the embroidered cloths, the divine crimes. And as she held the shuttle from the Cytorian mountain, she struck the forehead of Idmonian Arachne twelve times."[119]

Following Minerva's assault, Arachne commits suicide. Minerva, however, takes pity on her, and allows her to live, albeit in the form of a spider. Throughout the story, it is quite clear that Arachne is too arrogant for her own good, and that it is right to respect the gods. However, it is equally clear that Arachne was indeed extremely skilled, and may even have won the competition. Minerva cannot contain her jealousy and rage, and attacks the girl. This is not exactly the reaction we would expect from a personification of Wisdom. Even though Minerva seems to regret her actions, we might wonder how much better life as a spider would be for Arachne. All in all, this story once again shows that Wisdom can indeed make mistakes and is not necessarily always the image of perfection.

Taking a step back from personified Wisdom, there are other instances as well where we discern a temporary lapse in wisdom, a lapse which is not necessarily viewed as something bad. A very interesting example of this is the way in which Agamemnon admits to Achilles that he did indeed act wrongly by demanding Briseis, Achilles' gift of honour, for himself. Interestingly, while admitting that he was wrong, Agamemnon claims that he is not responsible for this error, but argues that it was in fact Zeus who orchestrated this whole affair.[120] While this may seem a sorry excuse for an apology, within the broader framework of the Iliad, Agamemnon's speech here is not entirely unreasonable. For in the very opening lines of the Iliad we read how the wrath of Achilles, which was the direct result of Agamemnon's dishonourable deed, was in fact Διὸς βουλή ('the will of Zeus').[121] In this case, the temporary state of folly on the part of Agamemnon was in accordance with the will of the king of the gods himself.

We see similar cases throughout the vast corpus of ancient Greek literature. In the Bacchae, an ingenious tragedy by Euripides, we read how the god Dionysus takes revenge on the house of Cadmus by depriving all the women and the king of their wits, ensuring the eventual death of the king of Thebes as he is torn apart by his own mother and aunts. In such cases, a temporary state of a lack of wisdom, and even insanity, is part of a divine plan.

One might wonder why we should mention this fallibility of Wisdom in this context. As we shall see in our discussion of the non-canonical early Christian texts, Sophia is often presented as committing a sin, as making a grave error. Whereas the Jewish depiction of Wisdom is largely an image of divine perfection and infallibility, our discussion in this section has shown that even Wisdom can make mistakes and can be corrupted to some extent. We will discuss this theme of fallibility and lapse in wisdom in more detail in chapter 8.

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[119] Ov. *Met*. 6,129-133. My own translation, based on the Latin text as it appears in: Ovid. *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1-8.* Translated by Frank Justus Miller. Revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 42. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916.

[120] Hom. *Il*. 19,85-96.

[121] Hom. *Il*. 1,1-5.

4.5 Ambiguity towards Wisdom

As we have seen in our discussion of Qoheleth in the previous chapter, we can sometimes discern a certain indifference toward, or even a negative valuation of, wisdom. Another instance of this indifference can be found in the work of Seneca. In one of his letters, he writes the following: "Behold, Wisdom and Folly depart in opposite directions; which do I join? To which side do you bid me to go?"[122] Whereas one might view this passage as merely ironic, the context of the letter does not point to an easy choice, but seems to reflect an actual struggle for answers, for even Folly seems to prove the truth in logical ways. After having read the entire letter, one is left to wonder what exactly the difference was between Wisdom and Folly, between friend and man. Apparently, the choice is not always as easy as we are often led to believe.

4.6 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, Wisdom in the Graeco-Roman world was often connected to crafts, inventions and warfare. Whereas we have seen the connection between Wisdom and the process of creation within the Zoroastrian and Jewish tradition as well, the addition of the sphere of warfare is one we have not yet encountered as prominently elsewhere.

Interestingly, as we have discussed in this chapter as well, we can see a pattern of wisdom deities being deceived and challenged by both other deities, as well as by mere humans. This provides us with a more complex image of what Wisdom is than we have seen in the previous chapters. Whereas in the Jewish tradition Wisdom is principally portrayed as perfectly infallible, the Greek and Roman myths we have examined above have shown us that Wisdom is not necessarily beyond making mistakes. What is more, sometimes a temporary lapse in wisdom is even part of a divine plan. We will see a similar complexity in the various non-canonical early Christian texts we will discuss later on in this thesis. First, however, let us turn to a consideration of Wisdom in the New Testament and Patristic literature.

[122] Sen. *Ep*. 48.4. My own translation, based on the Latin text as it appears in: Seneca. *Epistles, Volume I: Epistles 1-65.* Translated by Richard M. Gummere. Loeb Classical Library 75. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917.

Personified Wisdom in Philo, the New Testament and Patristic Literature

5.0 Introduction

In this section we will take a look at the way in which personified Wisdom is depicted in the works of Philo, in the New Testament and in Patristic literature. One might wonder why Philo is discussed in this chapter, rather than in the chapter concerning the Jewish interpretation of Wisdom. The reason for the discussion of his works in this chapter, is that the way in which he connects Wisdom and Logos shows some striking similarities to the way in which Jesus is later often interpreted as both Logos and Wisdom. By discussing him here, we will be able to examine these connections more clearly than if we had several chapters in between them. Moreover, his indebtedness to Hellenistic thought makes it more logical to discuss his work after having discussed Graeco-Roman literature in the previous chapter.

5.1 Philo on the connection between Wisdom and the Logos

In Philo's works, we see that he frequently connects the personification of Wisdom to the Logos, or the Word of God. In this section, we will discuss various passages in which this connection is evident, and we will also consider the implications that this connection has for the interpretation of what Wisdom is.

In his *The Worse Attack the Better,* Philo touches upon the connection between Wisdom and creation, a connection we have seen throughout the previous chapters as well. Speaking of Wisdom as a mother (μητέρ), he describes her as the one "through whom the all was brought to completion".[123] This seems to imply that Wisdom fulfilled an active role in this process of creation, a role almost equal to that of the Creator Himself. Later on in this treatise, he once again refers to Wisdom as "the mother of all those who are in the world".[124] Philo further explicates the connection between Wisdom and creation in a passage from his *On Flight and Finding*, where he describes her as the one "through whom everything came into existence".[125]

Interestingly, Philo accords a very similar position to the Logos, whom he describes as being older than anything, and as the ὄργανον ('instrument') with which God ensured the perfection of His

[123] Phil. *Det*. 54. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Philo. *On the Cherubim. The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain. The Worse Attacks the Better. On the Posterity and Exile of Cain. On the Giants.* Translated by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 227. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.
[124] Phil. *Det*. 116. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Philo. *On the Cherubim. The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain. The Worse Attacks the Better. On the Posterity and Exile of Cain. On the Giants.* Translated by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 227. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.
[125] Phil. *Fug*. 110. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Philo. *On Flight and Finding. On the Change of Names. On Dreams.* Translated by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 275. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934.

creation.[126] As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, especially in chapter 3, Wisdom is frequently portrayed as having played an active role in the process of creation. Even Philo himself acknowledged Wisdom as having agency in this process.[127] Moreover, he also refers to the Logos as being identical to the law, an identification we have seen frequently in connection to Wisdom as well (see chapter 3).[128] In his *Allegorical Interpretation*, Philo states that the Logos is second to God alone.[129] Once again, this reminds us of the way in which Wisdom often seems to have a very high, divine-like status, both in Jewish as well as in Greek and Roman literature.

As Marija Todorovska has summarised it, in Philo's works, Wisdom "is only another word for Logos, used in all the senses of the word *Logos*".[130] However, we must keep in mind that, even though this identification of Wisdom and Logos seems to be a very strong one, there are also passages that point to the separation of these two personifications. One such example is the way in which Philo describes the Logos as being the son of God and Wisdom.[131] What are we to make of this? We might try to work it out in such a way that there is no inconsistency, but Philo's work is far too complex for such an easy way out. The fact that he here portrays Logos as the son of God and Wisdom does not mean that the identification between Wisdom and Logos elsewhere in his works is void. I believe we can still very clearly see the similarities between both personifications throughout his works, even though the complexity of his arguments sometimes point in a different direction. This passage, moreover, also once again points to the extreme intimacy between Wisdom and God, and also seems to imply that Wisdom occupies a level of importance similar to that of the Almighty Himself.

5.2 Jesus as God's Wisdom in the New Testament

As we have seen in our discussion above, Philo repeatedly connects Wisdom to Logos. Since in the Christian tradition, Jesus is often referred to as the Word of God as well, the next logical step is to examine the way in which Jesus is connected to Wisdom.

In the famous prologue to the Gospel of John, Jesus is identified with the Logos. The prologue is packed with references to the way in which Wisdom is portrayed in especially Jewish sources. It will be helpful to cite the prologue in full here first, before going deeper into the meaning of this.

> "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and God was the Logos. He was in the beginning with God. Everything came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing that has come into being, came into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."[132]

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[126] Phil. *Cher.* 127, *Migr.* 6.
[127] Phil. *Det*. 54.
[128] Phil. *Migr*. 130.
[129] Phil. *Leg*. II.86.
[130] Marija Todorovska, "The Concepts of the Logos in Philo of Alexandria," *Živa Antika* 65 (2015): 52-53. Original emphasis.
[131] Phil. *Fug*. 109-110.
[132] John 1:1-5. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Iōan D. Karavidopoulos, Carlo Maria Martini, and Holger Strutwolf. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

So, first of all, the Logos was there in the beginning with God. This corresponds to the frequently recurring connection between Wisdom and creation, where she exists before everything else in the universe. Interestingly, the author of this prologue goes a step further and explicitly identifies the Logos with God: they are one and the same. Whereas we have often encountered the intimate bond between Wisdom and God, and they are sometimes even treated as having a similar status, they are not necessarily treated as being the exact same being. However, when we continue reading the prologue, we see other clear similarities to the traditional portrayal of Wisdom. For we read that everything that is, came into being through the Logos. This corresponds to the active and fundamental role Wisdom often plays in the process of creation. Moreover, we read how life is in the Logos, and also light. We have seen these very same concepts linked to the personification of Wisdom, especially in the book of Proverbs. Moreover, the darkness could not overpower the Logos, pointing to his incorruptibility, an aspect also regularly applied to Wisdom.

Interestingly, the New Testament does not feature a personified Wisdom as often as one would expect. The only time we are clearly dealing with Wisdom being personified, is in 1 Corinthians, where Paul explicitly identifies Wisdom with Jesus. Interestingly, the passage in 1 Corinthians 1 starts with the acknowledgement that the message of the crucified Christ is foolish in the eyes of the world.[133] This is an interesting paradox, that true Wisdom can be viewed as foolishness by those who, in turn, consider themselves to be wise in their own right. However, this is exactly the way God seems to want it, for we read how this incongruence pleases Him.[134] This paradox is followed by the statement that those who have been called rightly view Christ as both God's Power (δύναμις) and Wisdom (σοφία).[135] After this exposition on Christ's true identity, Paul returns to the paradox he began this passage with, and states that God explicitly chose the foolish things (τὰ μωρὰ) of the world in order to shame those who consider themselves wise (τοὺς σοφούς).[136] This apparent contradiction is very interesting indeed, for it implies that Christ, the personification of God's Wisdom, can be and has been interpreted as something foolish. Once again, we are reminded that wisdom and folly are not that clearly delineated from one another, and that there are certain similarities between them, so much so that one might be interpreted in terms of the other. In verse 30, Christ is once again equated with God's Wisdom, which is further characterised as righteousness, sanctification and redemption. This reminds us of the way in which Wisdom is portrayed in the book of Proverbs as walking in the way of righteousness.[137] Moreover, throughout the book of Proverbs, and also in the Wisdom of Solomon, it is continually emphasised that through Wisdom one is able to redeem oneself, and that to follow her is to choose the path that leads to life, which is similar to the connotations of sanctification and redemption connected to Wisdom in 1 Corinthians.

When we turn to the second chapter of this letter of Paul, Wisdom is described as being hidden (ἀποκεκρυμμένην), and is characterised as "that which God predetermined before the ages for our glory".[138] This statement tells us three things. Firstly, Wisdom has been with God from the beginning, before anything else, just as we have seen in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon in chapter 3.

[133] 1 Cor. 1:18-23.
[134] 1 Cor. 1:21.
[135] 1 Cor. 1:24.
[136] 1 Cor. 1:27.
[137] Prov. 8:20.
[138] 1 Cor. 2:7. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Iōan D. Karavidopoulos, Carlo Maria Martini, and Holger Strutwolf. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

Secondly, Wisdom's purpose seems to be to interact with people, and to convince them to follow her instruction, for she is predestined for the glory (δόξα) of those who believe in Christ. This, again, reminds us of the way in which Wisdom in Proverbs speaks to the people, and tries to convince them to listen to her, so that they may be well rewarded. Similarly, as we have seen in the Book of Sirach, Wisdom is said to have possession of the entire earth, including its inhabitants.[139] Finally, the way in which Wisdom is described here as being hidden reminds us of her characterisation in the book of Job, as well as in the Book of Sirach, where it is said that no one will be able to find her, or, even if they do, to fully comprehend the profound insight she offers.[140]

Paul returns to the paradox of wisdom and folly once again in the third chapter, where he advises his readers to become foolish in order to become wise.[141] This passage clearly picks up the theme of the first chapter, where the concept of worldly wisdom as folly is introduced, as we have seen above. However, we might also connect this to the ambiguity towards wisdom that we have seen in Qoheleth, and also in the letter of Seneca that we discussed in the previous chapter. Apparently, it is quite difficult to discern real Wisdom, since she is, in fact, hidden from us. The only way to reach her is to become foolish in the eyes of the world. In this context, the question of Seneca, whether to choose Wisdom or Folly, seems not to far-fetched at all. For indeed, which way should we choose? Paul's answer to this question seems to be that we should first become fools, so that we might then encounter God's Wisdom. This sentiment is expressed even more clearly in the next chapter, where Paul states that "we are fools because of Christ, but you are wise in Christ".[142] Once again, this seems to be a very contradictory statement, for how can one be foolish and wise at the same time in the same Christ? However, most commentators agree that we are dealing with an ironical statement here. While Paul calls himself and the other apostles fools, he states that the Corinthians, his readers, are wise. However, when we read this statement in the context of what he said in the first part of his letter, namely that worldly wisdom is nothing but folly, then it becomes clear that this is by no means a compliment to his readers: they are wise in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of their own contemporaries, who, as Paul has pointed out, are the true fools in the eyes of God.[143] Joseph Fitzmyer agrees that we must read this comment as an ironic one, and that to be fools because of Christ is indeed far more preferable than being considered wise by one's contemporaries.[144] Moreover, he argues that the Corinthians tried to harmonise the wisdom of the world with the true Wisdom they received through the preachings of apostles like Paul. Paul, however, insists that this cannot be done, and that worldly wisdom cannot in any way be compared or connected to God's Wisdom, namely Christ. In other words, we are dealing here with a contrast between the self-understanding of Paul and that of the Corinthians.[145]

What is clear, then, is that Wisdom as understood in the context of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, is to be identified with Christ, whose message, in turn, is considered to be foolish in the eyes of the world. Moreover, Wisdom is described as being hidden, as being intended for those few

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[139] Sir. 24:6.
[140] Job 28:21, Sir. 24:28-29.
[141] 1 Cor. 3:18.
[142] 1 Cor. 4:10. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Iōan D. Karavidopoulos, Carlo Maria Martini, and Holger Strutwolf. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
[143] 1 Cor. 1:18-23
[144] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 219.
[145] Carl R. Holladay*, The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* (Austin: Sweet Pub. Co., 1979), 64.

who truly understand her worth, and as having been with God from the very beginning. While we might view it strange to speak of Jesus in terms of a feminine personification of Wisdom, this is an ambiguity we have encountered more often, and will encounter again in the next chapters. We will discuss the issue of Wisdom's gender in more detail in chapter 8.

Another implicit way in which Jesus is connected to Wisdom can be found in the letter to the Colossians, where we read the following:

> "He (=Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, because in Him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."[146]

Here, we read how Jesus is presented as existing before everything else, and as being a crucial agent during the process of creation. Moreover, it is Jesus who holds all things together, which reminds us of the way in which both Ahura Mazda and Athena as personifications of Wisdom are explicitly connected to maintaining the order of the cosmos (see chapter 2 and 4). So, even though Wisdom is not mentioned in the passage from Colossians quoted above, there are so many similarities to personified Wisdom, that the connection between Wisdom and Jesus here becomes a probable one.

Building on the identification of Wisdom and the Logos, as we have seen in the works of Philo and the prologue to the Gospel of John, as discussed above, it will be interesting to look at what the New Testament says about the Logos.

In Hebrews 4, we read how the Logos of God is described as ζῶν and ἐνεργὴς ('living' and 'active'), which points to the personification of this abstract concept, and to the enduring influence that this personification has.[147] In this same verse we also read how the Logos is able to judge the thoughts of one's heart, which may remind us of the way in which Wisdom is presented in the Wisdom of Solomon as being the only way to know how to behave in accordance with God's will.[148]

In the first letter of John, we read how the Logos is explicitly connected to life, which is an attribute which is, as we have seen, also frequently linked to Wisdom.[149] Once again, this verse refers to the Logos as being there from the beginning, thus solidifying this connection between Logos and Wisdom.

Finally, in the book of Revelations, we have a very unique passage on the Logos, who is described here as a terrible, warrior-like figure, with flaming eyes and bloody garments.[150] While this warrior figure does not seem to resemble the Jewish personification of Wisdom, it does show some striking similarities to the way in which Athena has been characterised in Greek literature. For, as we have seen, her expertise in warfare is one of her main attributes, and one that forms an integral part of her identity. So, even though the image presented in Revelations seems far removed from the wise, god-like personification we have come to expect, we would do well not to forget the dimension of

[146] Col. 1:15-17. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Iōan D. Karavidopoulos, Carlo Maria Martini, and Holger Strutwolf. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
[147] Heb. 4:12.
[148] Wisd. of Sol. 9:10-11.
[149] 1 John 1:1.
[150] Rev. 19:12-14.

warfare, which Greek culture regarded as an indispensable sphere of influence of personified Wisdom.

5.3 Personified Wisdom in Patristic literature

Taking into account the prominence of personified Wisdom in the Biblical tradition, it is not surprising that many Church Fathers have written on this subject as well. When reading their accounts, we can discern two main positions: some identify Wisdom with Jesus, others identify her with God's Spirit.

Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of Jesus both in terms of the Word, as well as referring to Him as 'the true Wisdom'.[151] Later on in this treatise, he speaks of Wisdom as "the maker of the ages, the completer and remodeler, the limit of all things that have come into being, who knows the things of God in the same way as the spirit of the man knows the things that are in him".[152] While we have seen many times before how Wisdom is presented as an active agent during the process of creation, Gregory seems to take this a step further, and seems to impart to Wisdom the role of God Himself, describing Wisdom as the maker, completer and remodeler of the αἰῶνες, a word that might either denote the world, or even life itself. This intimate relationship between God and Wisdom is further emphasised by the comparison to the relationship of someone to his own spirit.

Likewise, in his *Dialogue with Trypho,* Justin Martyr repeatedly mentions Wisdom as one of the alternative names attributed to Christ.[153] Here he also mentions the other characteristics often ascribed to Wisdom by Jewish texts, especially focusing on the intimate relationship between Wisdom and God, and on the fact that Wisdom existed prior to everything else: "But this offspring, indeed brought forth from the Father, before all the things that were made, was with the Father, and the Father conversed with it".[154]

Finally, Origen also explicitly connects Wisdom to Jesus, stating that they are one and the same being, based on both the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs, as well as on the writings of Paul.[155] Interestingly, rather than reiterating that Wisdom existed in the beginning, Origen claims that Wisdom, and thus Jesus, was there before any comprehensible beginning, and that Wisdom contained all the creative power of God.[156] Moreover, he also states that Wisdom alone is able to truly know God, and that she is able to share her knowledge with whom she chooses.[157] This strongly reminds us of the way in which Wisdom is described in the Wisdom of Solomon as the only way to truly know the will of God. Moreover, this statement also shows resemblances to the way in which Wisdom is sometimes characterised as God's law.[158]

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[151] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes Theologicae,* IV.2.
[152] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes Theologicae,* IV.15. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Gregory of Nazianzus and Arthur James Mason. *The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899.
[153] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* XXXVII, LXI-LXII.
[154] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* LXII.26-28. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Trollope, William. *S. Justini Philosophi et Martyris: Cum Tryphone Judaeo Dialogus.* Cambridge: printed by and for J. Hall, 1849.
[155] Origen, *De Principiis,* I.2.1.
[156] Ibidem*,* I.2.2.
[157] Ibidem, I.2.8.
[158] Bar. 4:1; 4Q185, column ii, 11-14.

The connection between Jesus and Wisdom was so strong, that we can discern a pattern developing in Eastern Christianity, initiated by Constantine, where many Byzantine churches are dedicated to Jesus in His capacity as 'Holy Wisdom'.[159]

As mentioned above, there was another interpretation of Wisdom's identity among Church Fathers, namely the identification of Wisdom and God's Spirit. The most prominent example of this can be found in the writings of Irenaeus, who makes a clear distinction between the Logos and Wisdom. The Logos he identifies with Jesus, while Wisdom is equated to God's Spirit.[160] Both the Logos and Wisdom were with God before anything else, and they were both instrumental in the process of creation.[161] Interestingly, then, Irenaeus seems to add the Logos into the role normally preserved solely for Wisdom, or for Wisdom as equated to Jesus. This means that there are now two separate entities who exist prior to everything else, and who aid God during the creation of the world. Nevertheless, both seem to fulfil a similar role, which begs the question why Irenaeus did not just identify Wisdom with Jesus. The answer to this question might very well lie in the prominence of Sophia in many of the non-canonical early Christian texts Irenaeus seeks to discredit. Several times he points out the inconsistencies and illogical character of this figure, which, despite her link to wisdom, contrarily is also involved in ignorance.[162] Perhaps the centrality and divine-like status of Sophia in these texts made him reconsider equating Wisdom with Jesus, so as to prevent ascribing a similar status of divinity to this personification, so as to not show any similarities at all to those groups of people he deemed heretics. Of course, this is just speculation, but it is one possibility for the recurring existence of Logos and Wisdom next to one another in his works, two personifications fulfilling similar roles, but also strictly separated from one another.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how Philo equates Wisdom with Logos, and this identification has been perpetuated in various parts of the New Testament, as well as in the works of Church Fathers. While Wisdom is most often equated with Jesus, we have also seen an identification between Wisdom and God's Spirit.

As we will see, the portrayal of Wisdom in the New Testament and Patristic literature has influenced the non-canonical early Christian figure of Sophia as well. And, as we have seen in the work of Irenaeus, this portrayal of Sophia has also influenced Patristic literature. But before we will go deeper into these texts, let us first consider another important and influential, though often overlooked, tradition, namely Manichaeism.

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[159] Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.
[160] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses,* IV.20.1, 3.
[161] Ibidem, IV.20.4.
[162] Ibidem, II.17.8, 18.1.

Personified Wisdom in Manichaeism

6.0 Introduction

In discussions on personified Wisdom, a religious dimension that is structurally overlooked is that of Manichaeism. However, since this religion explicitly strived for a hitherto unknown universalism, and because it aimed to unite, combine and exceed the religious teachings from, among others, Zoroastrianism, ancient Greek religion, Judaism and Christianity, a discussion of Manichaeism should not be missing here.

6.1 Personified Wisdom in Manichaeism

Part of the impressive success that the prophet Mani achieved with his new religion can be attributed to his conscious effort to translate his universal teachings into as many languages and cultures as possible.[163] This also means that we have a uniquely diverse corpus of texts at our disposal, written in languages ranging from Aramaic to Arabic to Chinese. Because a discussion of all of these works unfortunately lies beyond the scope of the present thesis, as well as outside of my linguistic expertise, I have decided to restrict the discussion of a personified Wisdom to the Manichaean Psalm Book.

The Manichaean Psalm Book, a text written in Coptic, is part of the Medinet Madi library, which was discovered in Egypt in 1929. According to Guy Stroumsa, this Psalm Book "preserves some of the earliest strata of Manichaean literature".[164] Though not of Mani's own hand, these psalms testify to the rich liturgical tradition of the early Manichaean churches.[165]

In Psalm 222, we read how the Bema of Wisdom (ⲡⲃⲏⲙⲁ ⲣⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ) invites the believers to confess their sins and to prepare themselves for the end of their lives.[166] The Bema, as Iain Gardner has pointed out, is a seat of judgement, which occupies a central place in the eponymous Bema ceremony, which formed the annual culmination of the Manichaean liturgical year.[167] So since this chair is ascribed to Wisdom, we can therefore assume that we are dealing with a personification here. Moreover, as the Bema is usually reserved for the prophet Mani alone, who occupied the position as judge until Jesus would return, the fact that this psalm attributes this seat to Wisdom points to her prominence. We might even go so far as to suggest that this psalm connects Wisdom and Jesus in a similar way as we have seen in some of the early Christian texts we discussed in the previous chapter. This link is even more explicit when we take into account the next two verses of

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[163] Nicholas Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 8.
[164] Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92.
[165] Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism,* 94.
[166] *Man. Ps. II* 7, 18-21. The manuscript pages and lines referenced in this chapter are based on those of the following volume: Allberry, Charles Robert Cecil, and Hugo Ibscher. *A Manichaen Psalm-Book: Part II.* Manichäische Handschriften Der Sammlung A. Chester Beatty. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938.
[167] Iain Gardner and Jason BeDuhn, *The Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani: The Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, 30 May - 2 June, 2016* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xvi.

this psalm, where the Bema of Christ is referenced.[168] Later on in this same psalm, the writer prays for the forgives of the sins of those who know the mystery of God. This mystery has been revealed to them "through the holy wisdom, in which there is no error".[169] The adjective ⲟⲩⲁⲃⲉ ('holy') once again highlight Wisdom's significance, as well as her infallible nature.[170] Moreover, the fact that the mystery of God can only be revealed through her points to the intimate relationship between Wisdom and God, which we have seen, for example, in the book of Proverbs as well (see chapter 3).

In Psalm 241, Christ's Wisdom is praised as being the one responsible for defeating the error of rivalling religious sects or religious doctrines.[171] Once again, Wisdom is closely connected to Jesus, but at the same time, it seems to be a separate entity, belonging to Christ, but not identical to Him. It is Wisdom who is responsible for the refutation of the false doctrines, or for the error of the sects.[172] This corresponds to the way in which the 'Holy Wisdom' is elsewhere likewise described as being located in the Manichaean church.[173] This may remind us of the way in which Wisdom has often been described as being God's gift to Israel in particular.[174]

Interestingly, in Psalm 251, Wisdom seems to be equated with the Holy Spirit.[175] Despite the lacunae that make it hard to learn anything more about Wisdom here with any certainty, the identification between the Holy Spirit and Wisdom reminds us of the creation account in Genesis 1, as well as of the way in which Irenaeus identified Wisdom with God's Spirit (see chapters 3 and 5).

Psalm 283 presents Wisdom as among those who illuminate one's soul.[176] This connection with light is one that we have seen in, for example, the Wisdom of Solomon as well.[177] However, Wisdom does not merely illuminate the soul, but also actively fights on behalf of it. Once again, we encounter here the warlike aspect that characterises the Greek personification of Wisdom in the goddess Athena, as well as Revelation's portrayal of the Logos.

Interestingly, another psalm connects Wisdom with the apostle James, who is identified as the spring (ⲡⲏⲅⲏ) of the new wisdom.[178] A couple of verses later, Mary is called 'the spirit of wisdom'.[179] Apparently, Wisdom is not restricted to the higher realms, but can be connected to human beings as well, both men and women.

6.2 Conclusion

As we have seen in our discussion above, the role of personified Wisdom throughout the Coptic Manichaean Psalm Book is, once again, a complex one, though also closely resembling the way in which she has been characterised in the Judeo-Christian, as well as Graeco-Roman traditions.

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[168] *Man. Ps. II* 7, 22-23.

[169] *Man. Ps. II* 8, 24. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Allberry, Charles Robert Cecil, and Hugo Ibscher. *A Manichaen Psalm-Book: Part II.* Manichälsche Handschriften Der Sammlung A. Chester Beatty. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938.

[170] We also encounter 'Holy Wisdom' in *Man. Ps. II* 86, 23; 111, 15-16; 134, 9; 167, 7.

[171] *Man. Ps. II* 42, 24-25.

[172] The Coptic ⲇⲟⲅⲙⲁ can mean either 'teaching' or '(religious) sect'. The context of the psalm does not preclude either of these meanings: both are possible here.

[173] *Man. Ps. II* 134, 9.

[174] See, for example, Sir. 24:6. *Man. Ps. II* 93, 12 also presents wisdom as a gift from God.

[175] *Man. Ps. II* 61, 5-6.

[176] *Man. Ps. II* 105, 27-29.

[177] Wisd. of Sol. 7:25-26.

[178] *Man. Ps. II* 194, 10.

[179] *Man. Ps. II* 194, 19.

Wisdom is closely connected to God, and can be identified with Christ, as well as with the Holy Spirit. She is presented as a light, but also in a warrior-like capacity. As a gift from God, she can also be connected to human beings, despite the fact that she is also frequently qualified as being holy.

Now that we have discussed personified Wisdom in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, the Graeco-Roman tradition, and canonical Christian, Patristic and Manichaean literature, it is now finally time to move on to an examination of Sophia in various non-canonical early Christian texts.

Sophia in non-canonical Christian literature

7.0 Introduction

Personified Wisdom, known also by her Greek name Sophia, is a very prominent figure in the cosmology of many different non-canonical early Christian texts, perhaps even more so than in the hitherto discussed religious traditions. Though it is impossible to examine every text in which Sophia is mentioned, in this chapter we will take a look at a broad selection of these sources. We will first analyse these texts individually, after which we will compare them to each other, as well as to personified Wisdom in other religious traditions, as discussed in the previous chapters.

7.1 Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John*

The *Apocryphon of John* survives in four copies, which do not differ much from each other apart from the length of these treatises.[180] For our discussion here, we will focus mainly on one of the longer versions, found in the second Nag Hammadi codex.[181] In this text, Sophia plays a crucial role in the creation of our world, though not in the way which we have come to expect based on our discussion of the Jewish tradition in chapter 3. In the main passage in which we encounter her, we read how she desires to create something of her own, something in her own likeness (ⲉⲓⲛⲉ). However, her companion, the Spirit, which is qualified as ⲡⲡⲣⲟⲥⲱⲡⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲥⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧ ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ ('the person of her maleness'), does not approve of her wish. But despite her partner's refusal to cooperate, because of her invincible power (ⲧⲃⲟⲙ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲁⲣⲟ) Sophia is still able to create life all on her own. The being she creates, however, is imperfect and does not resemble his mother at all, being instead described as a lion-faced serpent with fiery eyes. Faced with this abomination, Sophia tries to hide her creation, so that none of the other immortal beings would see the mistake she made in her ignorance (ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ).

What we have here, then, is a rather complex characterisation of Sophia. On the one hand, her divinity is emphasised in the way in which she is able to create life on her own, without the help of her companion, the Spirit. This creation of life is a quality that is normally reserved for the highest God. However, even this aspect of creation contains an ambiguity to which we will turn shortly. On the other hand, it is clear that her creation of the demiurge Ialdabaoth is to be viewed as a grave mistake, a mistake made in ignorance. It is precisely this quality of Sophia, her ignorance, her ability to make mistakes, to err, that is so uniquely interesting here. For ignorance is not a logical aspect of a personification of Wisdom, since Wisdom and a lapse in wisdom do not seem to be compatible to one another. Yet, this is precisely what we see happening here. Sophia herself is also shocked at her mistake, and tries to hide it from her fellow aeons.

As said before, many non-canonical early Christian texts have a differing view on the process of creation and our material universe than the Jewish tradition and what later became orthodox

[180] Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse (ed.), "The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2," in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 2*, ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1.
[181] NHC II,1 9,25-10,22.

Christianity. While the Jewish tradition maintained that the God who created the world was inherently good, perfect and benevolent, as well as the supreme and only deity, many non-canonical early Christian texts attribute the creation of our world to a lesser, imperfect being, the demiurge, who in the *Apocryphon of John* is called Ialdabaoth and described as being a monstrous, misshapen figure. This demiurge pretends to be the highest god, and tries to delude everyone into worshipping him. The imperfect character of this demiurge is what leads to the evil in the world. While thus solving the problem of theodicy with this explanation, these non-canonical early Christian texts purposefully transform the almighty God of Judaism into an arrogant, deceiving and delusional being, who, because of his own imperfection, creates an imperfect world full of suffering. Wisdom has, as we have seen, often been described as being a crucial agent in this process of creation, and this is viewed as something praiseworthy, as something positive. However, in the *Apocryphon of John,* as well as in other texts that we will discuss later on in this chapter, Sophia, while being likewise intimately connected to the process of creation, is making a grave mistake precisely because her desire to create something all on her own backfires and ultimately leads to even more imperfect creations by the hand of the demiurge.

While the passage detailing the fall of Sophia seems to end with nothing but failure, Sophia's story is not over yet. For later on in this treatise we read how she repents and ultimately regains her former position of glory.[182] She no longer tries to hide her mistake, but cries out to the other aeons, so that they might help her rectify her error. Her companion, the Spirit, grants her request, and she is gradually reinstated to the powerful and glorious position she once held. However, it is not the Spirit who repairs Sophia's mistake, for she herself is actively involved in the process to set things right. For we read how she deludes the demiurge into transferring her own power, which until then resided in Ialdabaoth himself, into the people he created.[183] It is this act that seems to complete Sophia's penance, and it is then that she is called life (ⲍⲱⲏ) and the mother of those who are alive, and through her, perfect knowledge (ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ) is attainable.

Whereas her creation has led to the creation of the material, imperfect world, in the end Sophia seems to be identified with life in a less negative way. For through her involvement in the creation of the human beings, and because she bestowed upon them an aspect of her divinity, the created universe has become less flawed, and people have been given an opportunity to see past the lies that Ialdabaoth placed before them. So while Sophia is in some way responsible for our suffering, she is also the one who offers us a way out of it, who shared her spark of divinity with us, so that all hope is not lost after all.

7.2 Sophia in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*

The *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* is another very interesting text, part of the seventh codex found at Nag Hammadi. Even though Sophia does not figure as prominently here as in the *Apocryphon of John*, the way in which she is described here still merits a discussion.

At the beginning of the work, Sophia is characterised as 'our sister, she who is a whore' (ⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲧⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲡⲣⲟⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ ⲧⲉ).[184] Right from the start, then, Sophia's character is a complex one. On the

[182] NHC II,1 13,36-14,13; 23,18-26.
[183] NHC II,1 19,23-32.
[184] NHC VII,2 50,27-28.

one hand she is described as the sister of Jesus, who is the speaker of this text. On the other hand, this positive characterisation is immediately followed by a description of her as a whore, which, we might safely assume, is not to be seen as a positive trait. While it is not explicated what she has done to deserve these harsh words, it is probable that the writers and readers of this text were so familiar with accounts such as that found in the *Apocryphon of John* that they did not see the need of once again detailing Sophia's fall here. Still, it is interesting that she is described as a whore here whereas in fact she created life all on her own, as we have seen in the previous section as well. Perhaps the characterisation of her as a whore refers to another scene, very briefly mentioned in the *Apocryphon of John,* where we read how each of the authorities (ⲉⲝⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ) of the chief archon commit adultery with Sophia, so as to create fate.[185] If this scene is indeed the one that is implicitly referenced here, that would provide an explanation for Sophia's characterisation as being a ⲡⲣⲟⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ.

At the very end of the treatise, when Jesus expands on His own identity, He states: "But I alone am the friend of Sophia".[186] The fact that Jesus alone is the friend of Sophia seems to reflect positively on her. Moreover, since this is the concluding passage of the treatise, we are left with this positive valuation of Sophia. Still, we cannot simply overlook the characterisation of her as a ⲡⲣⲟⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ in the beginning of the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth.* Both aspects are part of Sophia's character; to ignore one is to paint an incomplete picture of her complexity. This complexity only increases in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *Eugnostos the Blessed.*

7.3 Sophia in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *Eugnostos the Blessed*

The *Sophia of Jesus Christ* was first discovered in the Berlin Codex, but is also found among the Nag Hammadi codices. *Eugnostos the Blessed* is a text that is closely connected to the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. In fact, most of the contents of the former are found in the latter.[187] Moreover, both texts appear next to each other in the third Nag Hammadi codex. *Eugnostos the* Blessed is also found in the fifth Nag Hammadi Codex. There is some discussion among scholars which of these works came first, and how the process of reception and rewriting took place.[188] However, this question of precedence is not of crucial importance to our discussion of Sophia. While there are multiple versions of both these texts, they do not differ significantly enough to warrant a discussion of all the variations of these texts. Our discussion in this section will therefore be limited to the versions found next to one another in the third codex.

The *Sophia of Jesus Christ* has been structured as a dialogue, wherein Jesus answers the questions of various of the disciples. In this text, there seem to be two separate figures who bear the name Sophia. The first one, who is called the 'Great Sophia' (ⲧⲛⲟⲃ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ), is the companion of the Son of Man.[189] The second Sophia seems to delineate directly from the Great Sophia and the Son of Man. Interestingly, this being is an androgynous one, whose female name is Sophia, or Pistis, and whose

[185] NHC II,1 28,11-14.
[186] NHC VII,2 70,4. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Riley, Gregory. "Second Treatise of the Great Seth." In: *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 4*, edited by James M. Robinson. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
[187] Douglas M. Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 3-4 and V, 1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081: Eugnostos and the Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 3.
[188] Ibidem, 3-5.
[189] NHC III,4 106,15-17.

male name is Saviour (ⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ), Son of God (ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ), or Christ (ⲡⲉⲭ︦ⲣ︦ⲥ︦).[190] This is very interesting indeed, since this seems to indicate that Christ and Sophia are one and the same, an idea we have also seen expressed in the New Testament, as well as in the works of various Church Fathers. Another interesting aspect is the androgynous nature of this figure, which we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Moreover, the fact that the Great Sophia and the Son of Man are companions shows a certain parallelism to the way in which (Pistis) Sophia is the same as Christ. One further observation worth mentioning here, is that we read that Pistis Sophia is called the mother of the world or of the creation (ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ̄).[191] This might betray some influences from the Jewish tradition that we have encountered in the book of Proverbs, for example. Another name for this Sophia is Love.

In the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* we also have some allusions to her fall, albeit in far less detail than in the *Apocryphon of John*. As an answer to Mary's question of the origin and destination of the disciples, Jesus refers to Sophia's wish to create life without her male consort.[192] The context of Mary's question to Jesus, as well as the repetition of Sophia's function as the mother of the world and the fact that in this same section Ialdabaoth is mentioned, indicate that we are dealing with a very similar version of Sophia's fall as we have encountered in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Since *Eugnostos the Blessed* is a text that is very similar to *The Sophia of Jesus Christ,* we will only discuss those passages that offer new information about Sophia. In the context of the androgynous being whose female name is Sophia, we read how this Sophia is uncontested truth.[193] Interestingly, in this text the androgynous Sophia is succeeded by no less than six other androgynous beings, whose female names are all Sophia as well, albeit with different specific qualities or capacities, such as love or wisdom.[194] In this text, no mention is made of the fall of Sophia that ultimately results in the creation of our material universe. The reason for this is not entirely clear. The origin of the world is attributed to the thoughts of the six androgynous beings, all called Sophia, but there seems to be no negative connotation to this. In other words, the creation of the material world does not seem to constitute a sin or error in the same way as we have seen in the *Apocryphon of John.*

7.5 Sophia in *On the Origin of the World* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*

The untitled work named *On the Origin of the World* by scholars due to its opening sentence and general contents, appears in two of the Nag Hammadi codices and is closely connected with the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, which immediately precedes it in the second codex.[195] Both these texts focus specifically on how the world came into existence, and provide alternative readings of the creation account of the book of Genesis. Since these texts correspond very closely, it will suffice to focus on the depiction of Sophia in *On the Origin of the World*, since this is by far the longer and more detailed treatise of the two. Our discussion here will focus on the text as found in the second Nag Hammadi codex.

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190 NHC III,4 104,10-16; 106,17-24.
191 NHC III,4 104,16-22.
192 NHC III,4 114,8-18.
193 NHC III,3 77,7.
194 NHC III,3 82,12-83,2.
195 Hans-Gerhard Betghe, "Treatise Without Title: On the Origin of the World," in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 2*, ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 12.

In *On the Origin of the World,* Sophia is mentioned quite often. At the beginning of the tractate, we read how Sophia, in this text often called Pistis Sophia, or Pistis, using her willpower, came to resemble the primeval light and that her will resembled heaven.[196] The text goes on to describe her as the veil (ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲡⲉⲧⲁⲥⲙⲁ) that separates mankind from the immortal beings. The connection between Wisdom and light is one we have encountered multiple times before as well.[197] However, here she is not merely a light, but she resembles the primeval light, thus emphasising the fact that she existed before anything else, which we have seen expressed in many of the sources discussed in chapter 3 as well. The way in which Sophia functions as a veil here may remind us of the way in which the Wisdom of Solomon presented her as the only way to God, the only way to become His friend and to know His will.[198]

On the Origin of the World also mentions Sophia's mistake in creating Ialdabaoth, although this text does not immediately explicate the conscious intention of Sophia to bring about this creation. Rather, the text seems to indicate that the shadow that will eventually become the demiurge has come into existence unintentionally.[199] At the same time, however, Sophia is blamed for this creation, for the text calls it her defect (ⲱⲧⲁ).[200] Interestingly, only once the shadow already exists does Sophia wish to give it more substance, and to create a ruler, which she subsequently does. Ialdabaoth is here described as having the shape of a lion, and as having great authority, but all the power he has, he unknowingly derived from the force of Sophia.[201]

Just as in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ,* this text also mentions another figure named Sophia, namely one of the seven androgynous beings that Ialdabaoth created.[202] However, it seems as if this Sophia is seen as the most inferior of these beings, since she is described as ⲧⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ('she who is below them all').[203] This seemingly negative valuation of this Sophia might be due to the fact that she is mentioned as being the last of the seven androgynous children.

When Ialdabaoth becomes too arrogant, and starts to claim that he is the only god, and that there is no other deity besides him, Pistis Sophia, the one who brought about his creation, becomes angry and rebukes him.[204] One of the children of Ialdabaoth, Sabaoth, recognises Sophia's divinity and worships her, upon which Sophia shares some of her light with him, so as to enable him to stand against his father and the forces of chaos.[205]

A bit further into this text, we read how Israel, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are seated in a cloud, accompanied by Sophia, who instructs them in the mysteries of the higher realms. But things become even more complicated when a third Sophia seems to enter the stage: Sophia Zoe, who is described as being with Sabaoth, who, as we have seen above, was transformed through his belief in Pistis Sophia.[206] By means of a drop of her light, Sophia creates the first human being, once again androgynous, who is to serve as an instructor. Sophia Zoe is also the one who breathes into Adam so

[196] NHC II,5 98:12-23.
[197] E.g. Wisd. of Sol. 7:25-26, *Man. Ps. II* 105, 27-29.
[198] Wisd. of Sol. 7:27, 9:10-11.
[199] NHC II,5 99,1-2.
[200] NHC II,5 99,30.
[201] NHC II,5 100,1-29.
[202] NHC II,5 101,24-102,2.
[203] NHC II,5 103,2.
[204] NHC II,5 103,5-103,32.
[205] NHC II,5 103,33-104,11.
[206] NHC II,5 113,10-17.

as to make him alive, a task in which Ialdabaoth himself failed to succeed.[207] When Ialdabaoth's offspring, the rulers, become jealous of Adam and Eve, and try to shorten their lifespan, Sophia Zoe once again actively interferes. She is presented here as a warrior-like figure, who appears with full power, chases (ⲁⲥⲣ̄ⲇⲓⲱⲕⲉ) the rulers, and casts them down (ⲁⲥⲛⲟϫⲟⲩ ⲉⲡⲓⲧⲛ̄) into the sinful world.[208]

What we see in this text, then, is a very complex image of Sophia. While there seem to be three different figures who are named Sophia, we might very well be dealing with the same figure, albeit in different capacities, namely that of faith (Pistis) or life (Zoe). While she does make a mistake in bringing about the creation of the demiurge, she does everything in her power to set things right, and to make sure that Ialdabaoth does not win in the end. As Hans-Gerhard Betghe has rightly pointed out, Sophia is the true saviour in this text, and her role is such a crucial one that Jesus Christ basically becomes obsolete.[209] The redemption arc in this text is the clearest one yet, and one in which Sophia herself actively endeavours to try and rectify her mistake.

7.6 Sophia in the *Pistis Sophia*

The *Pistis Sophia* is the first text we will discuss that was not found at Nag Hammadi. This long and fairly complicated text, part of the Askew Codex, was written by and for Christians who are often referred to as 'Jeuians', since the *Books of Jeu,* books that were written and read in the same circles, focus on the central figure of Jeu, the cosmic demiurge.[210] The *Pistis Sophia* is usually divided into four books, and Sophia's fall and redemption are discussed in the first and second of these. While we clearly see the influence of other non-canonical texts, there are also striking differences, which, as Erin Evans has pointed out, show that these myths were reinterpreted and adapted for a specific Jeuian belief system.[211] Because of the scope and complexity of this text, we will summarise the broad outline of the Sophia myth as presented in the *Pistis Sophia,* focusing on the way in which this text rewrites the function and character of Sophia.

In the *Pistis Sophia*, Sophia's mistake or sin is not the creation of the demiurge, as is the case in the texts discussed earlier in this chapter. While her mistake does find its origin in the fact that she wishes to go beyond the position ordained for her, she does not wish to create life by herself, but aims to reach the great light of the veil of the Treasury of Light, high above her own realm.[212] Unable to reach this light, she worships it instead, neglecting to perform her normal duties, which in turn makes the archons and aeons hate her. Authades in particular, who is described as a disobedient 'great triple-powered one' (ⲡⲛⲟⲃ ⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲓⲁⲅⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ), wishes to take revenge on Sophia's insolence, doing so by creating a lion-faced light of his own and luring her towards this light instead.[213] Once she sees this light, she wishes to go to it and use it to reach the light she saw in the Treasury: "And she thought to herself: I will go to that place without my companion, and I will take the light and

[207] NHC II,5 115,12-14.
[208] NHC II,5 121,27-35.
[209] Betghe, "Treatise Without Title," 15.
[210] Erin Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia As Handbooks to Eternity: Exploring the Gnostic Mysteries of the Ineffable.* Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, Volume 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2-5.
[211] Ibidem, 233-234.
[212] *1PS* 30,7-23.
[213] *1PS* 30, 33-39.

make it for myself into aeons of light, so that I shall be able to go to the light of lights, that which is in the height of the heights".[214] However, instead of using the light for her own purposes, Sophia is tricked and her light is taken from her and turned into Ialdabaoth, while she herself is left alone in the lowest places of the Chaos.[215] Recognising her mistake, Sophia has to go through a lengthy repentance process before she is able to be reinstated to her former position. However, she is not able to save herself, but rather has to be saved by Jesus. The only thing she can do is cry out for help and sing songs of praise for the true light of the Treasury. This text, then, presents Sophia as a victim, who was unwittingly tricked to descend to the Chaos, blinded by her desire to ascend to the light, to become more than she ever was. In this respect, she is a far more passive character than in any of the other texts we have discussed in this chapter. Moreover, she is easily fooled, which we would not necessarily expect from a figure who is supposed to be Wisdom personified.

Evans convincingly argues that the myth detailing Sophia's fall and redemption is a conscious subversion of the account presented in the *Apocryphon of John.* However, the reason behind this is unclear, for the subverted Sophia myth seems to serve no purpose at all in the broader cosmology of the *Pistis Sophia*. Moreover, the insertion of this myth often feels artificial, leaving one to wonder why this narrative has been included at all. Perhaps this rewriting is merely the result of explicit polemics between different groups of Christians.[216] By making the figure of Sophia into a foolish and passive character, in stark contrast to the figure as presented in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Jeuians declare their own ideas as vastly superior, and as transcending the entire belief system of their misguided competitors.

7.7 Sophia in the *Gospel of Philip*

The *Gospel of Philip*, part of the second Nag Hammadi codex, is a text that is, once again, primarily interested in the origin of the world and of mankind, but it also deals extensively with various sacraments, in particular marriage. While Sophia does not play a major role in this text, the ways in which she is mentioned do call for a closer examination of these contexts.

The first time Sophia is mentioned is in the context of an offering: "The apostles said to the disciples: 'Let our whole sacrifice possess salt.' They called [Sophia] salt. Without it, no sacrifice is accepted".[217] Even though in this line there is a lacuna, we know from the context that we need a feminine noun here. Moreover, in the next couple of lines we see Sophia linked with salt once again, which makes it highly probable that this is the noun we need to insert here as well. This connection between Sophia and salt is one we have not encountered anywhere before. Interestingly, in his commentary on the Bible, Arthur Peake mentions salt in connection with Wisdom in the context of the book of Proverbs, where he describes Folly as lacking the "wholesome salt of reason and understanding".[218] As Uri Mayer-Chissick and Efraim Lev have pointed out, salt played a very

[214] *1PS* 31,7-11. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Schmidt, Carl, and Violet MacDermot. *Pistis Sophia*. Leiden: Brill, 1978.
[215] *1PS* 31,11-31.
[216] Evans, *The Books of Jeu,* 245.
[217] NHC II,3 59,28-31. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Isenberg, Wesley W., and Bentley Layton. "The Gospel According to Philip." In: *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 2*, edited by James M. Robinson. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
[218] Arthur S. Peake, *A Commentary on the Bible* (London: T.C.&E.C. Jack, 1920), 344.

important role in ancient Jewish religion and society.[219] Moreover, God's covenant with David and his sons is explicitly referred to as a covenant of salt.[220] In the *Gospel of Philip*, the reference to salt in the context of an offering is thus not surprising, given the religious importance of this substance. The passage translated above goes on to state that Sophia is barren. This, in all likelihood, is once again a connection to salt, for salt has often been a symbol of barrenness and desolation.[221]

A little further in this treatise, we read of two different kinds of wisdom, Echamoth and Echmoth. Whereas Echamoth is simply Wisdom (ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲉⲁⲡⲗⲱⲥ), Echmoth is the Wisdom of death (ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲟⲩ).[222] For this reason, Echmoth is also called the little Wisdom (ⲧⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ). As R. Wilson has convincingly argued, this connection between Sophia and death might be due to the fact that in many of the cosmologies we have discussed in this chapter, Sophia is the one responsible for the creation of the world, and thus for the introduction of suffering and death.[223] Moreover, this distinction between two different kinds of Wisdom reminds us of the way in which, among others, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *On the Origin of the World* present two different figures named Sophia, with also a clear distinction in hierarchy between the two.

The final mention of Sophia in this gospel once again connects her to barrenness, but, paradoxically, this very same sentence also identifies her as 'the mother of the angels'.[224] It is this contradictory nature that we will also encounter in the *Thunder: Perfect Mind.*

7.8 Sophia in the *Thunder: Perfect Mind*

A uniquely fascinating text among the Nag Hammadi codices is the one called the *Thunder: Perfect Mind*. This treatise is written from a first person point of view, and portrays the speaker as a strikingly complex figure.[225] Though Sophia is never explicitly identified as the one who proclaims this text, there are certain notable similarities between the female speaker of this text and the way in which Wisdom has been portrayed in various of the sources we have discussed throughout this thesis.

At the very beginning of this treatise, the speaker states: "I was found among those who seek me".[226] This may remind us of the way in which Wisdom has often been presented in various of the Jewish sources we examined in chapter 3. The speaker of this text also identifies herself paradoxically as both a whore (ⲧⲡⲟⲣⲛⲏ) and a holy woman (ⲧⲥⲉⲙⲛⲏ).[227] The first part of this statement corresponds to the way in which the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* characterises

[219] Uri Mayer-Chissick and Efraim Lev, "'A Covenant of Salt': Salt as a Major Food Preservative in the Historical Land of Israel," *Food and History* 5, no. 2 (2007): 9.
[220] 2 Chr. 13:5.
[221] James Hastings, John A. Selbie, John C. Lambert, and Shailer Mathews (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Scribner's, 1914), 820.
[222] NHC II,3 60,10-15.
[223] R. McL. Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 102-103.
[224] NHC II,3 63,31-34.
[225] This first person point of view is one we have also encountered in our discussion of Wisdom in the book of Proverbs and the Book of Sirach (see chapter 3).
[226] NHC VI,2 13.4. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Taussig, Hal, Jared Calaway, Maia Kotrosits, Celene Lillie, and Justin Lasser. *The Thunder: Perfect Mind. A New Translation and Introduction.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
[227] NHC VI,2 13.19.

Sophia, as we have seen above. However, this verse also illustrates the complexity that often surrounds the figure of Sophia in many non-canonical early Christian texts. On the one hand, she is criticised, sometimes severely, because of the mistake she made, but on the other hand, she is still an immortal divine-like figure. A similar complexity is expressed a little further on in this treatise, where the speaker claims that she is both knowledge and ignorance.[228] While this seems paradoxical, it is, as we have learned from the texts discussed previously in this chapter, a rather apt characterisation of Sophia. We see a similar statement later on in this treatise, where the speaker is portrayed as both wise (ⲥⲁⲃⲏ) and foolish (ⲁⲑⲏⲧ).[229] A few verses later, the speaker explicitly identifies herself as Wisdom, stating: "For I am the Wisdom of the Greeks and the Knowledge of the barbarians".[230] She is also connected to life and the law, though at the same time she is also connected with their opposites.[231] The fact that this text speaks in cryptic contradictions makes it hard to state with certainty that we are dealing with Sophia here, and this is also not a claim I wish to make. I merely want to point out that there are certain statements in this text that show striking resemblances to the way in which Sophia has been portrayed in various of the other texts we have examined throughout this thesis.

7.9 Conclusion

Now that we have discussed so many different portrayals of Sophia, it would be useful to try and make some general observations, and to connect Sophia to the other versions of personified Wisdom from other religious traditions that we have previously discussed.

As we have seen, the figure of Sophia in non-canonical early Christian texts is a uniquely complex and ambiguous one, full of contradictions. On the one hand, she is supposed to be the personification of Wisdom, and thus infallible and perfect in knowledge. However, in many of the accounts we have discussed above, she is portrayed as having committed a grave error, an error originating from her ignorance. Moreover, sometimes she is described as a divinity and as a friend to Jesus and His followers, while at other times she is harshly rejected as being a whore. She is described as barren, and also as a mother. As we have seen in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth,* the *Gospel of Philip,* and the *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, these vastly different valuations can co-exist within the same text, and even within the very same sentence. While Sophia is frequently connected with the process of creation, just as we have seen in the Jewish tradition concerning personified Wisdom (see chapter 3), in the texts discussed above her role in the creation process is generally viewed as a negative quality, since her creation turns out to be imperfect, and ultimately leads to our imperfect material world. Nevertheless, her role as the mother of life is not always a negative one, for, according texts like *On the Origin of the World*, she is also the one responsible for bringing to life the first human beings, and for teaching them the truth of the universe. However, the *Gospel of Philip* also connects Sophia to death, thus solidifying her truly complex and paradoxical nature.

A similarity between Sophia and other instances of personified Wisdom, is that she is often connected with light. By means of this light, which contains her power, Sophia is able to create life. As we have seen in the *Pistis Sophia*, it is this light that is taken away from her by Authades, once again pointing to its value.

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[228] NHC VI,2 14.27.
[229] NHC VI,2 15.28.
[230] NHC VI,2 16.3-4.
[231] NHC VI,2 16.12-15.

The fact that Sophia recognises her mistake, and admits to her error, may remind us of the way in which Socrates, as seen in chapter 4, has stated that true wisdom consists of being humble enough to admit that one does not know anything. Perhaps, then, even though Wisdom personified is not all-knowing and perfect, the fact that she is still able to discern right from wrong is indeed enough to redeem her.

Another interesting aspect of some of the texts discussed in this chapter, is that Sophia is often connected to both the Spirit and Jesus Christ. In the *Apocryphon of John*, the way in which the Spirit is described as the 'person of her maleness' points to the identification of Sophia and the Spirit: they are one and the same. Similarly, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* presents Sophia and Christ as two different names for the same androgynous being. It is to this complex aspect of the gender of Wisdom that we will turn in the next chapter.

The gender of Wisdom

8.0 Introduction

As we have seen in our discussion of the personification of Wisdom, she is predominantly portrayed as a woman, the notable exception being the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the significance of Wisdom's femininity, which, unsurprisingly, is once again more complex than we might suspect at first glance.

8.1 The feminine aspect of Wisdom

Some scholars, like Ehrman, assume that the feminine gender of personified Wisdom is the sole result of the fact that the Greek and Hebrew words for 'wisdom' happen to be feminine.[232] However, there are also some who maintain that the feminine gender of personified Wisdom is a conscious and explicit choice. Scott, for example, states: "Only occasionally do we find any kind of feminine dimension of the divine in Jewish thought, the most prominent such being the representation of God's wisdom in the female figure, Sophia".[233] He argues that in the ancient Near Eastern world, goddesses played an essential role in fertility cults and processes of creation, to which Sophia is, as we have seen throughout this thesis, also frequently connected.[234] However, we must be careful not to overstate the femininity of Wisdom. As Judith McKinley points out, there has been a long process of masculanisation of Wisdom, a process that finds its culmination in the interchangeability between Wisdom and Logos, which we have encountered, for example, in the prologue to the Gospel of John.[235] This 'repersonalisation', as she terms it, has considerable consequences, for Wisdom is in this way superseded by the male Logos, and thus loses the supremacy she once enjoyed.[236] By repressing the feminine Wisdom, masculine authority once again triumphs.

While I agree with Scott in his assertion that the feminine character of Wisdom is something more than a mere linguistic restriction, and I indeed believe there has been an ongoing process to make this figure conform to patriarchal values, I would argue that Wisdom has, from the very start, been something more than female in the traditional sense, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

8.2 Wisdom as androgynous

In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as being seated in a public space and as calling out to all those who pass her by. This assertive attitude is not behaviour that would normally have been seen as appropriate for women, who could only assume positions of authority within the confines of their own homes, and were largely excluded from the public life.[237] Likewise, the fact that one of Athena's main spheres of influence is warfare, normally reserved for men, points to Wisdom's transcension of the boundaries of what were seen as appropriate roles for women. Moreover, as we

[232] Ehrman, *When Jesus Became God,* 70.
[233] Scott, "Sophia and the Johannine Jesus", 36.
[234] Ibidem, 46-47.
[235] Judith E. McKinley, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 239-240.
[236] Ibidem, 240-42.
[237] Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986), 26.

have seen in chapter 5, Wisdom is often presented as synonymous with the male principle of the Logos.

In various of the non-canonical early Christian texts we discussed in the previous chapter, Sophia is explicitly presented as being androgynous. In some cases, this androgyny can be seen as reflecting Sophia's divinity. In *On the Origin of the World*, we read the following statement: "And they came into existence androgynous, according to the immortal pattern that existed before them, in accordance with the wish of Pistis, so that the likeness of that which existed since the beginning will reign until the end."[238] This passage makes it clear that all the higher immortal beings were androgynous in nature, and the demiurge subsequently wishes to create androgynous beings to resemble the perfection of the inhabitants of the immortal realms.

In a very interesting passage from the *Tripartite Tractate,* it is the Logos who created the demiurge. After his intended perfect creation goes horribly wrong, we read that "he became weak, in the likeness of a female nature, who has deserted her masculinity".[239] The Logos here is clearly meant as a substitute for Sophia, and after his mistake, he loses his masculinity and becomes feminine, which may suggest that before this mistake, the Logos was androgynous, possessing both male and female characteristics.

Even though not all of the texts we discussed in the previous chapter present Sophia as androgynous, the fact remains that in many of these texts she is said to have created life on her own, without the help of her male companion. This suggests that even in these texts, Sophia is something more than 'merely' feminine, that she in fact seems to contain the male aspect necessary to create life on her own. Even the way in which she asserts her power and is not afraid to show her strength does not conform to the traditional roles ascribed to women.

It is this power that seems to be a concern for Philo as well. Even though, as we have seen in chapter 5, he speaks of Wisdom as a mother, we see that there is some confusion concerning the feminine character of Wisdom.[240] In a passage from his *On Flight and Finding,* he suggests that the name of Wisdom is feminine, while the sex is masculine: "For in fact all the moral virtues have names of women, but powers and actions of accomplished men".[241] According to Philo, then, Wisdom is simply feminine in name, but really is male, as can clearly be seen by her powers (δυνάμεις) and actions (πράξεις), since the feminine is, in his eyes as well as in those of his contemporaries, always vastly inferior.[242]

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[238] NHC II,5 102,3-7. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Betghe, Hans-Gerhard. "Treatise Without Title: On the Origin of the World." In *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Vol. 2*, edited by James M. Robinson. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

[239] NHC I,5 78,10-13. My own translation, based on the Coptic text as it appears in: Attridge, Harold, and Elaine H. Pagels. "The Tripartite Tractate." In: *Nag Hammadi Codex I (the Jung Codex). Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices,* edited by Harold Attridge. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

[240] Phil. *Det*. 54, 116.

[241] Phil. *Fug.* 51. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Philo. *On Flight and Finding. On the Change of Names. On Dreams.* Translated by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 275. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934.

[242] Phil. *Fug.* 51-52: ἐνδεῖ καὶ ὑστερίζει τὸ θῆλυ.

8.3 Value judgements connected to androgyny in the ancient world

Whereas we might assume that androgynous beings, as we could argue that Wisdom is, are generally looked down upon, a closer examination of sources in Antiquity show that this is not necessarily the case.

Let us start with the well-known creation account of the book of Genesis. Here we read: "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them".[243] This passage, then, asserts that human beings were created in the image of God, and that they were created both male and female. This would suggest that God contains both these sexes, for otherwise He could not have created men and women in His image. Moreover, in the second creation account in Genesis 2 we read how Eve is created from a rib from Adam's body, suggesting that Adam already contained this femininity.[244] Leah DeVun, examining late antique and medieval commentaries on Genesis, points out that this primal state of androgyny was often thought to be the ideal state.[245] This reminds us of the way in which *On the Origin of the World* presents all the immortal higher beings as androgynous, once again reflecting the divinity of the combination of male and female.

Moving on to the Graeco-Roman world, we have multiple accounts of androgynous beings, the most famous one being that of Plato. In his *Symposium*, he states that there originally were three separate sexes, namely male, female, and androgynous. The androgynous people "were terrible with respect to their strength and vigour, and they had mighty minds, and they made an attempt to the gods".[246] Zeus, feeling threatened by these human beings, then decides to cut them in half. Plato's account thus presents androgyny as both natural as well as the most powerful, proving to be a threat to the gods themselves.

In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, who become one and the same being. In a passage which reminds us of the one concerning the Logos in the *Tripartite Tractate*, we read how Hermaphroditus prays to his parents, Hermes and Aphrodite, to grant him his wish to make every man who comes to the water, in which he himself was transformed, effeminate.[247] Important for our discussion here, too, is the fact that Hermaphroditus is a deity, both before and after his transformation and unity with Salmacis.

However, not all the accounts present androgyny as a powerful and divine-like state. Lucretius, for example, counts the hermaphrodite as being among a long list of monstrosities, created by the earth itself.[248] Likewise, Diodorus Siculus states that some regard androgynous beings as unnatural, and even as monsters.[249]

Despite the fact that some authors viewed androgyny as a monstrous state, there is both

[243] Gen. 1:27. My own translation, based on the Hebrew text as it appears in: Schenker, Adrian, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Bardtke. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
[244] Gen. 2:21-23.
[245] Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 16-17.
[246] Plat. *Sym*. 190b. My own translation, based on the Greek text as it appears in: Plato. *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*. Edited and translated by Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy. Loeb Classical Library 166. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022.
[247] Ov. *Met.* 4,385-286.
[248] Lucr. 5,537-539.
[249] Diod. 4,6.

archaeological and literary evidence for the veneration of androgynous deities. In his description of the superstitious man, Theophrastus refers to the crowning of the Hermaphrodites.[250] Moreover, a large mould of an androgynous figure was found in Athens, which points to an early religious importance of these figures, as well as to their popularity, since a mould such as this one could be used for mass production.[251]

This short overview, then, has shown us that androgynous beings were often presented as extremely powerful, as gods, or as divine-like. Sometimes, however, they were regarded as monsters. Wisdom, especially within the context of non-canonical early Christian texts, can be viewed as a complex combination of these two extremes. On the one hand, Sophia is presented as a perfect immortal being, on the other, her wish to create life on her own leads to the creation of a monster, a monster originating directly from this perfect divine being.

8.4 Conclusion

As we have discussed in this chapter, personified Wisdom has predominantly been presented as a woman. However, the way in which she is described structurally seems to transcend the boundaries normally set for women: she appears actively in the public sphere, demonstrates her power and authority, and is even able to create life on her own, without the help of her male companion. This has led us to an examination of this figure as being an androgynous one, especially in the context of non-canonical early Christian texts. As we have seen from the discussion of various Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources, androgynous beings were often venerated as deities, while also sometimes being rejected as monstrosities. The non-canonical figure of Sophia can be regarded as, once again, a complex combination of these contradictory valuations, in that she is a perfect deity who produces an imperfect, monstrous being.

[250] Thphr. *Char.* 16.

[251] Homer A. Thompson and Dorothy Burr Thompson, *Hellenistic Pottery and Terracottas* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1987), 145.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the personification of Wisdom in the Zoroastrian, Jewish, Graeco-Roman, Manichaean, and canonical and non-canonical early Christian tradition. We have seen that there are several recurring characteristics connected to her, and have observed that she really is a multidimensional figure. Even though the non-canonical figure of Sophia seems to be rather unique in the negative connotations connected to her due to the mistake she made by creating the demiurge, she nevertheless also resembles her counterparts from other religious traditions in various respects. She is frequently portrayed as a light, as having creative power, and as being connected with life. Even though her fall is something we might not expect, in chapter 4 we have seen similar scenes of a lapse in wisdom from various sources in the Graeco-Roman world. We have also discussed the matter of Wisdom's gender, and the way in which this too proves to be a rather complex issue, since Wisdom, though predominantly portrayed as a woman, frequently crosses and transcends the boundaries of the traditional roles ascribed to women.

In this thesis, I hope to have illustrated the complex textual landscape in which the figure of Sophia arose, a textual landscape that is crucial for understanding the paradoxicality surrounding Sophia. By means of this contextualisation, the complexities and contradictions of the non-canonical early Christian versions of personified Wisdom can certainly be explained to some degree. However, we must of course also keep in mind that these early Christian sources did not merely copy the versions of Wisdom that were available to them from other religious traditions, but that they carefully selected certain aspects of these personifications so as to suit their own unique purposes, resulting in a highly complex deity, who proved to be both our undoing and liberator.

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