

The Figure of Moses in the Book of Wisdom

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1. Introduction

There is little doubt that the book of Wisdom constitutes one of the most interesting of the texts produced by Alexandrine Judaism. On this occasion, we shall not be entering into the question as to whether or not the book belongs to the canon of biblical writings.¹ What interests us here is to explore, once again, the relationship which the author of Wisdom shows himself to have with the biblical tradition and, at the same time, the profound capacity he reveals of knowing how to re-read it in the light of the cultural context of Alexandria towards the end of the first century BC.²

We shall take the figure of Moses as an example, comparing it with the presentation made by another wise man of Israel, Ben Sira, especially in the praise of Moses contained in Sir 45:1-5; we shall also seek to situate the picture of Moses provided by Wisdom within the framework of Greek-speaking Judaism, in particular Alexandrian Judaism, up to the time of Philo.

I have chosen the figure of Moses for various reasons: in the first place, because he is (obviously!) an absolutely central figure in the whole of the biblical and Jewish tradition; in fact, to speak of Moses means speaking above all of the *Torah* and of the very identity of Israel.³ A second reason is bound up with the fact that, in the book of Wisdom, Moses actually loses this centrality and is recalled clearly only on four brief occasions, namely in Wisd 10:16; 11:1.14; 18:5 (to which it is probably necessary to add Wisd 16:6). These passages thus offer us

¹ Cp. HORBURY, *The Christian Use*, 182-196.

² On the end of the reign of Octavian Augustus as the probable date of composition of the book, cp. now the confirmation provided by GILBERT, *Your Sovereignty*, 124-129.

³ Cp. a collection of studies in GRAUPNER/WOLTER, *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions*.

the possibility of a study, which is deeper but also undoubtedly briefer and more focused, and one which is still lacking in this area.

2. Moses in the Texts of Wisdom

2.1. The first reference to Moses in the book of Wisdom is found in Wisd 10:16; chapter 10 opens the third part of the book (Wisd 10-19) which is devoted overall to a sapiential reflection on the events of the Exodus.⁴

In Wisd 10, our sage describes the activity of wisdom in history, following the thread of the biblical account (Genesis and Exodus) from the creation of the first man up to the crossing of the Red Sea. Our author chooses a series of eight biblical examples, both positive and negative: the first four are set out rapidly in a few stichs; the remaining four are presented more fully. Thus we have Adam (1-2); Cain and Abel (3); Noah (4); the tower of Babel and Abraham (5); Lot (6-9); Jacob (10-12); Joseph (13-14); Moses and the people of Israel (15-20). An unusual feature of this chapter—indeed of the rest of the entire book of Wisdom—is that the names of the people to whom the author alludes are never mentioned, probably to universalise the figures provided by the Scriptures of Israel in a Greek context.

On the one hand, the text of Wisd 10 thus generalises eight individual cases, presenting them as examples that are universal and still valid in the time of whoever listens to them, according to a style that was not unknown to the Greek world (cp. *The Characters* of Theophrastus); on the other hand, our author presupposes an audience that is very familiar with the biblical texts, one that is able to understand the allusions contained in the text without any difficulty: like the rest of the book, in fact, the chapter is addressed to an exclusively Jewish audience; a Greek reader would actually have understood very little of it. A particular characteristic of this gallery of figures is, then, the ability of our sage to re-read the biblical texts in order to actualise them for an audience immersed in the cultural world of Hellenism.

Wisd 10 is a text which has aroused a certain amount of interest in recent years: after the work of P. Enns on the last part of the chapter (10:15-21), A.T. Glicksman has studied it more recently with greater care, offering us the first work specifically on this text. Glicksman also deals with the question of the literary genre, comparing it with the

⁴ On this subdivision of the book and on the problems connected with it, cp. GILBERT, *The Literary Structure*, esp. 20-25.

genre of the aretology (particularly the Isis' aretologies) and at the same time with the *Beispielreihen* typical of apologetic historiography.⁵ Glicksman holds that Wisd 10 takes something from both these literary forms without, however identifying itself with either of them.⁶

The last section of Wisd 10 (vv. 15-21) is devoted to the role of wisdom at the time of the Exodus. However, Moses is recalled only in v. 16; in the verses, which follow (10:17-21), Moses disappears completely to make way for the people of Israel. But, as in the whole of the chapter, the true protagonist is, rather, wisdom, something which makes this presentation truly unique within the panorama of the biblical writings.⁷ Verse 16 says:

She [wisdom] entered into the soul of a servant of the Lord
and [he] resisted fearful kings with wonders and signs.

This text begins to describe the way in which wisdom has liberated the people of Israel (cp. v. 15). By alluding to Moses, Wisdom enters immediately *in medias res*. Verse 16 alludes to the spirit of God which fills Moses according to the account of Num 11:17.25 which our author is probably calling to mind. Perhaps he is also recalling the text of Is 63:11-14Lxx, which refers the action of the spirit in Moses to the time of the Exodus;⁸ the Isaianic text (especially v. 14) offers notable points of contact with our pericope (cp. the use of ὀδηγέω, the reference to the "name" and to the "hand" of God, to the "deep"...) to the extent that one can conclude that, in Wisd 10:15-21, our sage is attributing to wisdom what in the text of Isaiah is described rather as the work of the spirit of God.⁹

In taking up again the juxtaposition between wisdom and spirit set out already in Wisd 1:6 and 7:22, our author describes wisdom precisely as a "spiritual" reality which penetrates the soul of the elect (here: εἰσῆλθεν εἰς ψυχὴν), thus creating «friends of God and prophets» (cp. 7:27cd-28; but, already, Wisd 1:4). On its entering into the soul of Moses, wisdom appears as an interior principle of strength, of mission, of special divine assistance just as it is described exactly in Wisd 7-9.

⁵ Cp. ENNS, Exodus Retold; GLICKSMAN, Wisdom of Solomon 10.

⁶ However, we do not follow Glicksman when, with regard to the literary genre of the entire book, he accepts the idea of J. Reese, considering it to be a protreptic rather than an encomium, as it ought to be described in my opinion; cp. GLICKSMAN, Wisdom of Solomon 10, 64-101 (see the review of M. GILBERT in Bib 94 [2013] 304-308).

⁷ Cp. GLICKSMAN, Wisdom of Solomon 10, 136-138.

⁸ Ch. LARCHER, Livre de la Sagesse, 2: 641; WINSTON, Wisdom of Solomon, 219.

⁹ Cp. VAN IMSCHOOT, Sagesse et Esprit, 42.

Moses, therefore, is not presented here as a special case, someone unique, but only as an ideal example of the action of wisdom in man, in her (wisdom's) knowing how to create "prophets" (as Moses is called explicitly in 11:1; cp. *infra*). In a single stich, our author thus re-reads, in an explicitly sapiential key, the vocation of Moses, a theme that is actually rarely employed in ancient Jewish literature (cp. e.g. *Jubilees* 48:1); the action of wisdom in Moses makes an example of him and a model for every wise man. Moses is described then as «servant of the Lord», according to a use that is typical of the Lxx which readily applies the term *θεράπων* to Moses (cp. Ex 4:10; 14:31; Num 12:7 [cp. Heb 3:5]; Josh 1:2; 9:2Lxx; 1 Chr 16:40).

The text of v. 16b summarises in a further, brief stich Moses' mission to Pharaoh (cp. Ex 5:1-6:1): the verb *ἀντίστημι* refers very probably to Moses himself, and not to wisdom, the subject of the preceding verb, as would be grammatically possible; we must, therefore, assume an implicit change of subject: "he (Moses) resisted fearful kings." The plural *βασιλείς* is certainly strange, seeing that in the biblical account the Pharaoh is undoubtedly the sole ruler (but cp. Ps 104:30 and Sir 45:3G, where the use of the plural returns, while Sir 45:3H has the singular instead; cp. *infra*); the plural can, of course, be understood as a rhetorical amplification (cp., previously, with regard to 10:11a) or, better still, as a plural which encompasses Pharaoh and all his court.¹⁰ Moses, then, resists Pharaoh and his court "with wonders and signs." Employed in the reverse, the expression is frequent in the texts of the Pentateuch in connection with the plagues of Egypt (cp. Ex 7:3.9; 11:9.10; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19 etc.) and it is to these episodes that our sage is making reference. From chapter 11 up to chapter 19, the book of Wisdom will reflect on the plagues of Egypt extensively; but Moses will no longer appear there as protagonist, and, beginning with 11:1, wisdom will appear no more, giving place to the sole protagonist of Israel's history: God.

2.2. A new allusion to Moses features at the beginning of the *synkrisis* in 11:1, immediately after the mention of the crossing of the sea in 10:20-21.¹¹ Wisdom "made their [Israel's] works successful by the hand of a holy prophet." The reference is clearly to Moses, who is called "prophet," as in Deut 34:10 (cp. also Num 12:6-8; Deut 18:15.18; Hos 12:14). The mention of Moses as "prophet" refers once more to 7:27cd (cp. *supra*); wisdom forms precisely "friends of God and prophets;" and

¹⁰ On the whole question, cp. the extensive treatment in ENNS, *Exodus Retold*, 45-52.

¹¹ We shall not enter here into the problem of the literary structure; in our opinion—and *contra* Glicksman and others—11,1 belongs to the section that follows and not to chapter 10, and constitutes, with 11,1-5, the introduction to the first antithesis (11,6-14).

it is precisely Moses who is called "friend" (φίλος) in relation to God in the Greek text of Ex 33:11; for Wisdom, therefore, being a prophet goes along with that intimacy which the prophet himself has with God, as happened exactly with Moses. It does not seem that Wisdom follows the Philonic idea of the prophet understood as a person able to have a knowledge of truths that elude man (cp., for example, *Mos.* II,6; *Spec. Leg.* IV,192), "interpreter" of the holy laws of God (cp. *Mutat.* 126).¹² In any case, the further relationship which *Wisd* 11:1, as already 10:16, reveals itself to have with *Wisd* 7:27cd-28 confirms the idea that Moses is not a figure unique of his kind, but is offered to us as model for every wise man who, thanks to the gift of wisdom, can be precisely "friend of God and prophet."

Moses is, then, described as "holy prophet" (ἅγιος), a term which, in the light of the use of this word in the book of Wisdom, indicates, not so much a moral quality belonging to Moses, rather his special belonging to the Lord.¹³ The book of Wisdom does not insist on the extraordinary virtues of Moses, as happens systematically in Philo (cp. *infra*). It is difficult to say whether, in referring to the "holiness" of Moses, our sage had in mind the Sinai event, or the episode of the call of Moses in Ex 3:1-4:17. It is a fact that Wisdom never seems to wish to recall or allude to the exceptional role which Moses had at Sinai or to mention his close connection with the covenant and, above all, with the gift of the Law received from God (cp., on the other hand, Sir 45:1-5; we found a similar attitude in Philo and in *Jubilees*, where Exodus 24 receives little attention); but it is the entire subject of the Law which never appears particularly significant for the book of Wisdom.¹⁴

2.3. Actually, there is mention of the Law in the fourth diptych, *Wisd* 16:5-14, in which to the plague of insects which bite the Egyptians is counterposed the episode recorded in Num 21 concerning the bronze serpent with which the Israelites are saved from the bites of the poisonous serpents. In *Wisdom* 16:6, there is reference to "a sign of salvation, so that they [the Israelites] might remember the commandment of your law."

With regard to this verse, A. Leproux has examined the possibility of accepting the reading suggested by *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Alexandrinus* which, instead of σύμβολον, read rather the term σύμβουλον, that is, "counsellor."¹⁵ Leproux's proposal seems convincing for various

¹² For Philo's conception of Moses, cp. *infra*.

¹³ Cp. MAZZINGHI, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 8.

¹⁴ Cp. MAZZINGHI, *La memoria della legge*, 153-176. IDEM, *Law of Nature and Light of the Law*, 37-60.

¹⁵ Cp. LEPROUX, *Moïse, "conseiller de salut."*

reasons. First of all, the term σύμβουλος appears already in Wisd 8:9 with reference to wisdom who is taken by “Solomon” as bride, friend and, above all, as counsellor. The term σύμβουλος appears 24 times in the LXX (cp., in particular, 2 Mac 7:25: σύμβουλον ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ and 4 Mac 9:2, συμβούλῳ Μουσαί; here it is Moses who is explicitly recognised as a counsellor);¹⁶ σύμβουλος corresponds to the Hebrew רַבִּי which, for the most part, designates the royal “counsellor.” The correction of σύμβουλον to σύμβουλον could have taken place at the time when the text of Wisdom was reinterpreted along the lines of the Philonic allegory (perhaps under the influence of Christian tendencies?); in fact, in re-reading the episode of the bronze serpent, our sage interprets it rather in a midrashic than in a symbolical-allegorical sense. The term σύμβουλος certainly seems more consistent with the thought of the author and with his allusive style.

If we accept the reading σύμβουλον, what the Israelites possess (ἔχοντες) is not so much a visible sign (τὸ θεωρούμενον, namely, the bronze serpent of the book of Numbers), so much as a “voice,” specifically that of Moses, “counsellor of salvation,” who recalls the people to listening to the word of the Law (cp. v. 11 which is closely connected to v. 6). In this way, the participle τὸ θεωρούμενον can be neatly referred to as the object that was seen,¹⁷ namely, the bronze serpent; it is not the latter that saves the people, but the Lord himself (16:7b) and his word (12b), a word which precisely Moses, as “counsellor of salvation,” has brought to the people. In this sense, Moses incarnates for the people the same role which wisdom played in her dealings with “Solomon”; she too, in fact, is a σύμβουλος, a “counsellor” for the one who welcomes her (cp. Wisd 8:9).

In accepting this reading, even though within a typically sapiential *relecture*, we have to admit that the theme of the Law delivered by God to Moses, and so also Moses’ work in relation to it, is not wholly forgotten by the book of Wisdom.

2.4. Next, there is an allusion to Moses, though a passing one, in the text of Wisd 11:14, within the context of the first diptych (Wisd 11:6-14), a text which, by means of this mention of Moses, recalls specifically 11:1, thus creating within Wisd 11:1-14 a kind of thematic inclusion. Speaking of the Egyptians, our author writes:

¹⁶ By contrast, codices S and A seem to attribute the role of “counsellor” rather to the Law itself; cp. SCARPAT, *Quarto libro dei Maccabei*, 274-275; cp., also, LEPROUX, *Moïse, “conseiller de salut”*, 174-175; perhaps the *Fourth Book of Maccabees* is adopting this expression precisely from the text of Wisdom.

¹⁷ Cp. SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, 3: 195.

¹⁴the man¹⁸— who, at one time, exposed and thrown into the river, they rejected and spurned
 at the end of events they had to respect,
 having had a thirst very different from that of the righteous.

Verse 14 refers, retrospectively, to the events relating to the birth of Moses: Ex 2:1-10; cp. the use of ῥίπτω in Ex 1:22Lxx; cp., also, Acts 7:21. The use of ἐκτίθεις is singular, but cp. Wisd 18:5 and again Acts 7:21; in Philo, ἐκτίθημι is employed three times in the context of the life of Moses (*Mos.* I:10-12). It appears strange presenting Moses as “exposed and thrown into the river,” as if his own parents had rejected him; perhaps our sage is here re-reading the story of Moses in midrashic mode, in the light of the story of Joseph rejected by his brothers. In Philo too, the exposure of Moses is presented as an act carried out by his parents and not with the direct intention of saving the child; if that happens, it is rather on account of the will of God (*Mos.* I: 12).¹⁹

The mention of being spurned, which is based on texts such as Ex 11:1.11.28, where Moses is described as a person driven out from the presence of Pharaoh and from the land of Egypt, is certainly a not too veiled allusion to the scorn of which, at the time in which our author writes, the Jews of Alexandria felt themselves to be the object in what they considered their own city. In this way, our sage actualises the account of the Exodus; cp., also, 4 Mac 5:22 with the same verb, χλευάζω, and, above all, Philo, who uses this verb on a score of occasions; cp., for example, *Legat.* 211, in this type of context relating to anti-Jewish polemics.²⁰ As already in the case of the glorified just whom the wicked see *post mortem* in Wisd 5:4, the same wicked ones are now forced to respect (cp. 11:14b) precisely that Moses whom they had previously rejected; in fact, the thirst experienced by the Egyptians (14c) in the course of the first plague (the water changed into blood) was quite different (οὐχ ὅμοια: a litotes) from that experienced by the just, namely by the Israelites in the desert (cp. the whole of the antithesis 11:6-14, of which this stich forms the conclusion). The respect on the part of the Egyptians, after their prior scorn, is recalled in Wisd 11:14 with a tone that is clearly polemical and reveals all the pride of the author who

¹⁸ We read the relative ὅν (with A, Lat and Rahlfs) instead of τόν (B and S and the majority of the witnesses; Ziegler's preferred reading), which, referring to ῥιψέντα, would presuppose an anacoluthon very difficult to accept grammatically; the relative pronoun ὅν refers, *ad sensum*, to Moses.

¹⁹ It may be added that the act of exposing the newly born was common at the time of our sage (cp. LARCHER, *Livre de la Sagesse*, 3: 669-670 and 995-996) who, indirectly, could wish to criticise such a practice which is also evoked in Wisd 18,5.

²⁰ Cp. SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, 2: 407-408.

feels himself part of a people who are scorned but who are actually on a journey along extraordinary paths (cp., also, Wisd 18:3).

2.5. The figure of Moses returns finally in Wisd 18:5; opening the sixth diptych (Wisd 18:5-25), in which the celebration of the Passover is counterposed to the death of the firstborn, the book of Wisdom recalls anew the beginning of the story of Moses in terms analogous to those of 11:14: “only one child who was exposed was saved.”

Verse 5 links in a single text Pharaoh’s decree of infanticide (5a), the salvation of the tiny Moses (5b), the death of the firstborn (5c), and the destruction of the Egyptians in the sea (5d). As M. Priotto has well demonstrated,²¹ this linkage is unique in its genre within the Jewish tradition and attests a further reflection that is particularly lively and creative in midrashic style.

However, what is truly striking in the sixth diptych is the attention which Wisdom gives to the figure of Aaron (Wisd 18:20-25), who, in 18:21e, is called, just like Moses in 10:16, “servant” (θεράπων) of God and to whom is applied the same verb ἀντίστημι which is used for Moses in Wisd 10:16, so creating a close link between the two figures.²² As happens in Ben Sira (cp. *infra*), the figure of Aaron in the book of Wisdom receives a wholly positive connotation, in partial contrast with the biblical sources and very probably in polemic with the Jewish priesthood of the time.²³ In any case, the attention given to Aaron in Wisdom seems almost equal, if not in certain aspects superior, to that given to Moses, who does not appear to be linked with Aaron by a direct relationship of authority, as happens instead in Sir 45:15 (cp. *infra*).

2.6. From this presentation of the texts of Wisdom relating to Moses, though summary, we can already draw some preliminary conclusions. Except in passing, the book of Wisdom is not concerned with specifically biographical features of Moses; his battle with Pharaoh is summarised in a single stich (10:16b); the events of his birth are evoked twice in passing (11:14; 18:5). Moses is presented as a “prophet” (11:1) and also as a “servant” of God, equal, however, to Aaron; he is a person animated by the spirit of wisdom (10:16a), but that does not render him entirely unique, rather the model of every sage; whoever is wise, therefore, can be as Moses. His role as legislator and mediator of the Law is alluded to discreetly only by the text of 16:6, if we accept the reading proposed above, but the events of Sinai seem absent in their entirety

²¹ Cp. PRIOTTO, *Prima Pasqua*, 41-43.

²² Cp. PRIOTTO, *Prima Pasqua*, 186-187.

²³ PRIOTTO, *Prima Pasqua*, 184-224 for an in-depth study of the figure of Aaron; Cp. LEPROUX, *Moïse, “conseiller de salut”*, 182-184 with even greater attention to the literary structure and to the connection between Wisd 16:5-14 and 18:20-25.

from the horizon of Wisdom. As has been emphasised several times, traces of actualisation are not lacking; these certainly render the figure of Moses more significant in the context of Alexandrine Judaism in which our sage lives.

3. Moses in the Book of Ben Sira

The author of Wisdom was not the first to present the figure of Moses through a sapiential lens, inserting it, at the same time, in the context of the Hellenistic culture; a comparison with Ben Sira in this regard becomes important, if not indispensable. We must concern ourselves, therefore, although rather briefly, with the passage relating to Moses in Sir 45:1-5, situated within the Praise of the Fathers, a passage that has received a certain amount of attention on the part of commentators on Ben Sira.²⁴ We shall present, first of all, the translation of the text of Ben Sira, setting in comparison the Hebrew with the Greek version (in bold in the text).²⁵

¹[And he made to go forth] from him a man,
And he made to arise from him a man of mercy
 who found favour before every one living.
who found favour in the eyes of all flesh.

[Friend]²⁶ of God and of men:
Beloved by God and by men²⁷

Moses, whose memory is a boon
Moses, whose memory is blessed.

²[and he gave him the name of man of] God²⁸

²⁴ Cp. MACK, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 30-33; RAURELL, *Eccli 45,1-5:la "doxa" dei Moises*; WITTE, *Mose, sein Andenken*; WRIGHT, *Use and Interpretation*, 191-194.

²⁵ For the Hebrew text, cp. BEENTJES, *Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*; for the Greek, cp. ZIEGLER, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*.

²⁶ The Hebrew text has a lacuna; on the possible reading of אהוב, rather than אהוב, "beloved," cp. WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 164n16.

²⁷ The Greek ἡγαπημένον shows traces of the royal terminology of the Hellenistic period; WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 171n49.

²⁸ Ms B has a lacuna; some scholars read [ויבשרו כן] ליהים, "and he gave him a glory like that of the angels," or else "of God;" others propose instead to read [ויבשרו איש א] ליהים, "and he gave him the name of man of God;" cp. WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 165n17; WRIGHT, *Use and Interpretation*, 192. In any case, the Greek interpreter, in translating אלהים with "holy ones" (ἁγίων), thinks almost certainly of the "angels" and not of God. The idea expressed here is probably based on Ex 7:1, where God says to Moses: "I will make you as God to Pharaoh."

He gave him a glory equal to that of the holy ones
and made him great with fearful deeds.²⁹

and made him great in confounding his enemies

³Through his wo[r]d he made rapid [signs]

Through his word he made swift wonders

and he made him strong before the king.

he glorified him before the king.³⁰

And he gave him orders concerning [his people]

He gave him orders for his people

and [made him see his glory].

and showed him his glory.

⁴For his faithfulness and his humility

For his faith and his humility he sanctified him³¹

he chose him above all [flesh].

he chose him among all flesh

⁵And he made him hear his voice

he made him hear his voice

and he made him approach the pillar of clouds.

and he made him enter the dark cloud

And he placed in his hand a commandment:

He gave him commandments in (his) presence

a law of life and knowledge,

a law of life and knowledge

to teach Jacob his decrees,

to teach a covenant³² **to Jacob**

his testimonies and his judgements to Israel.

and his judgements to Israel.

From a reading of this passage, one understands, first of all, that Ben Sira too is not very interested in the narrative elements of the story of Moses even though these are abundant, especially in Exodus and Numbers. For Ben Sira, Moses becomes a figure who is exemplary and

²⁹ Reading בְּמִרְיָאִים with ms B in the margin (following the Greek and the Latin); the text of Ms B has בְּמִרְיָמִים, "in the heights" instead. However, "in the heights" could refer to Sinai, or to the "king" mentioned shortly afterwards.

³⁰ Cp. note 10. By employing the plural, perhaps the versions are thinking also of the wars of Moses with the kings Sihon and Og; cp. Num 21:21-35.

³¹ "He sanctified him" seems to be an addition belonging to the Greek translator who brings Moses close to Jeremiah, thus underlining also the prophetic aspect of Moses; cp. Sir 49:7gr.

³² In Ben Sira, the term δαθήκη tends to translate the Hebrew חֵק rather than בְּרִית; cp. WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 174-175, n. 75.

paradigmatic for the whole of Israel; in so far as he is “friend (or “beloved”) of God and men,” Moses becomes the first observer of his own Law. Ben Sira emphasises, above all, his ethical stature (cp. v. 4) and, also, underlines his close link with God (v. 3d), and so precisely with the *Torah*, explicitly mentioned (cp. the whole of v. 5).

Ben Sira creates this presentation of the figure of Moses on the basis of a careful reconsideration of various biblical texts drawn from the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (such as, especially, Ex 33:12-17, Num 12:3.7 and Deut 4:1-5.44-45), texts which he shows how to re-read and combine with one another with great care and ability, presupposing an audience which knows them well and understands the continuous stream of allusions to them. Ben Sira’s intention is primarily pedagogic, but it also has a paraenetic and apologetic character.³³ The message which Ben Sira aims at his hearers is clear: the Law given by God through Moses is “a law of life and knowledge” (v. 5d; cp. Deut 4:1-6; 30:15-16), something which originates from God himself, from his own “glory” (cp. 45:3d gr.); therefore, the Hellenistic culture is unable to offer to Israel a model as great as that of Moses.

In passing, we note that from this presentation of Moses is absent any feature of an eschatological character; reading v. 5, then, in the light of Sir 17:11-12, the link placed by Ben Sira between Law and creation appears significant.³⁴

The strong link established between Moses and the Law has already been prepared in Sir 24:23b gr., in the centre of the whole book, precisely by means of the recalling of the “Law which Moses has commanded us” (a literal quotation of Deut 33:4LXX). In the praise of wisdom contained in Sir 24, contrary to what is often thought, the Mosaic Law is not identified with wisdom, but is rather presented in a broader sense as a story rather than a code of law, as the best expression, almost the objectification, of wisdom herself.³⁵ In this way, in Sir 24:23b, Moses is placed in relationship also with wisdom, precisely by means of the Law of which he is mediator.

Ben Sira concerns himself with Moses also in two other passages of his book; in Sir 45:15, Moses is presented as the one thanks to whom Aaron is constituted priest. It is debated whether Ben Sira really wishes to subordinate Moses to Aaron, despite the greater space devoted to the latter.³⁶ However, in Sir 45:17, it is clear that the duty of teaching actu-

³³ Cp. DI LELLA, *Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors*, 161.

³⁴ Cp. WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 183-184.

³⁵ Cp. GILBERT, *Où en sont les études sur le Siracide?*, 177.

³⁶ Cp. WITTE, *Mose, sei Andenken*, 176-177.

ally passes from Moses to Aaron, and so to the priests. For this reason, Aaron is closely bound to Moses, as his legitimate spokesman (a theme, moreover, not absent from the biblical texts, from Ex 4:16).

Moses occurs still later in Sir 46:1.7, in connection with Joshua, who is called “servant of Moses in the prophetic office;” thus, through the link established with Joshua, Moses is associated with the figure of the prophets.

In conclusion, Moses receives a unique status in Ben Sira, first of all as a master for the whole of Israel (45:3d.5e), but still more as a man extraordinarily close to God (cp. 45:2a gr., and, again, 45:3d.5ab), the one to whom God has communicated his Law (24:23; 45:5).

Nevertheless, Ben Sira avoids making Moses explicitly a figure of “international” stature, a *Kulturbringer* such as happens instead in the Jewish environment in Artapanus or in Eupolemus (cp. *infra*); in reality, Ben Sira offers a very traditional and profoundly Jewish reading of Moses, firmly anchored, as has been said, in the biblical texts; only in the Greek tradition does one notice the presence of some typically Hellenistic aspects (cp. note 27). On the other hand, Ben Sira avoids dwelling too much on extraordinary episodes in the life of Moses such as, in particular, the account of the plagues or even the crossing of the sea, preferring thus to avoid glorifying him excessively or attributing to him regal traits (cp. instead what Philo does). Ben Sira intends rather to make of Moses a model for all (45:1bc), of humanity (of “humility”) and, also, of faithfulness to God (cp. 45:4ab, placed at the literary centre of the pericope); it is precisely for this reason that God chose him (45:4b).³⁷ In this connection, it should be observed that the mention of the πίστις καὶ πραύτης of Moses in Sir 45:4 gr. recalls the identical virtues which accompany wisdom in Sir 1:27b; Moses, already associated with wisdom through his link with the Law (cp. Sir 24:23b), is presented by Ben Sira, therefore, as model of the ideal sage. It is in this perspective, which is typically sapiential, that the figure of Moses, for Ben Sira, crosses over the boundaries of Judaism and is proposed, together with the Law “of life and knowledge” which God has delivered to him, as a character ideally relevant for humanity as a whole, someone who “found favour before everyone living” (45:1b).³⁸

³⁷ Ben Sira applies to Moses the verb בחר which in Deut 4:37; 7:6-8; 14:2 refers instead to Israel; but, while in Deuteronomy the divine “choice” appears gratuitous, here the choice of Moses is motivated by his humility and faithfulness; in this too, Moses is revealed as an exemplary figure.

³⁸ “The law of Moses is at the antipodes of sectarianism, of a particularism claimed to the extreme. It is not a product that is typically and exclusively Jewish. Certainly, it

4. Moses in the “Apologetic” Jewish Literature and in *Aristeas*

4.1. As Thiede writes:

The figure of Moses was one of the most important propaganda instruments that Jews of the Hellenistic Period appropriated for their competition with non-Jewish schools and cults, as well as inter-Jewish sectarian disputes.³⁹

To broaden our research to include the way in which the figure of Moses is presented within the compass of the whole of the Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period becomes a task that it is impracticable even if we confine ourselves only to Jewish literature in Greek or only to that of a certainly Alexandrine origin. Moses represents a central figure on account of his role as mediator of the divine Law, as prophetic figure, as intercessor.⁴⁰

We shall limit ourselves here to some very summary notes relating to the presentation of Moses in Jewish texts of an apologetic nature written in Greek, in the *Letter of Aristeas* and in Philo, in order to understand better the background against which to observe Ben Sira, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in particular, the author of Wisdom, and thus to understand better their originality.

4.2. It is well known that in Egypt Artapanus presents the figure of Moses as founder of the Egyptian civilisation; reinterpreted by Artapanus as Μουσαῖος, Moses even becomes the teacher of Orpheus (frg. 3a:3-4 = Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*, 9:27,1-39; FGH III.C.2 [p. 682]) and so a *Kulturbringer*⁴¹ proper who attests the superiority of Judaism over the entire Greek world. Artapanus imagines a fictitious audience of Greeks, but his audience is really totally Jewish: “the oeuvre served to give the Jews a sense of their own identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” a sort of “na-

comes from the God of Israel, the highest God of all, but it is a law of life and rationality. It is a law which arises from life and from rationality, from man’s intelligence as such, independently of its cultural, religious, ethical and racial qualities;” PETRAGLIO, *Libro che contamina le mani*, 112.

³⁹ TIEDE, *The Charismatic Figure*, 101. It is worthy to note—by contrast—the absence of Moses (and of the Mosaic Torah) in the Enochic literature; see NICKELSBURG, *Enochic Wisdom*; ADLER, *Enoch, Moses and the Essenes*.

⁴⁰ Cp. a general survey offered by HAFEMANN, *Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*.

⁴¹ On this *topos* cp. HOLLADAY, *Theios aner*, 220-227.

tional romantic history."⁴² Israel finds in Moses—not so much in the cult and not even directly in the Mosaic Law—a figure in which to express its own identity and the sense of superiority, which accompanies it. Artapanus is interested not so much in presenting Moses as legislator, but as great national hero, even as military chief, in probable response to the accusations hailing from anti-Jewish accounts such as those of Manetho which seems to re-read in a negative manner the entire story of the Exodus and, indirectly, the figure of Moses (see *infra*, n. 46). "In the literature of the Alexandrian Jews (...) Moses occupies a much more exalted position than he does in Palestinian literature, and Artapanus' account of him is in effect an aretology,"⁴³ not too far from Epicurean or Isiac aretologies.

It should be noticed, however, that by raising Moses to a level that is almost divine and associating him with Hermes, the divine scribe (frg. 3a:6), Artapanus actually makes him the inventor of hieroglyphics. Despite his apologetic and often polemic tone, Artapanus' attitude towards Egypt is revealed as entirely positive, so much so that Moses is actually seen as a figure who stands at the origin of the Egyptian cult: "he [Artapanus] indicates the possibility of being both a proud Egyptian and a self-conscious Jew."⁴⁴ For him, Moses is a person who, in an excellent way, shows this possibility to the Israel of his time.

4.3. In the fragments of Eupolemus, a Jewish author of the Maccabean period, Moses is presented once more as a *Kulturbringer*, the first wise man of the world (ὁ πρῶτος ὁ σοφός), the first lawgiver of the Jews, and the inventor of the alphabet (cp. frg. 1a = Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9:25,4; frag. 1b = Clement Alex., *Strom.* 1:153,4; FGH III.C.2 [p. 672]). Also for Eupolemus, therefore, the Jews are to be seen at the beginning of civilisation.⁴⁵ Both for Artapanus and for Eupolemus, the biblical story is thus re-read through the filter of Greek categories precisely in order to highlight the identity of Israel and its greatness within a world experienced as foreign.

⁴² STERLING, *Historiography and Self-definition*, 184, 186. It is difficult to date the work of Artapanus; one can think of some kind of period extending between the middle of the third and the middle of the first century BC. Cp., also, COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 36-46.

⁴³ HADAS, *Hellenistic Culture*, 171.

⁴⁴ BARCLAY, *Jews in Mediterranean Diaspora*, 132. See, on the contrary, what M. Hadas says: "In Artapanus claims for Jewish priority in cultural advances are exaggerated to the point of absurdity...;" HADAS, *Hellenistic Culture*, 96.

⁴⁵ STERLING, *Historiography*, 207-222; cP., also, WACHOLDER, *Eupolemus*, 71-96; DORAN, *Jewish Hellenistic Historian*.

Authors such as Artapanus and Eupolemus clearly have an aim which is primarily apologetic: “the works served to give the Jewish people a new identity in a new world. The crucial issue was how could they remain Jewish and at the same time accept Hellenism.”⁴⁶ Moses had certainly become a figure who was much discussed in the Alexandrine world, additionally because of the above-mentioned anti-Jewish presentations of the Exodus like that of Manetho.⁴⁷ For these authors, the key of their response passes through the revaluation of their own past, considered, however, as superior to that of the rest of the world; by utilising the Hellenistic culture to a considerable degree, and re-reading the scriptures of Israel in the light of that same culture, these authors nevertheless wish to show that Judaism is infinitely superior to it.

4.4. A presentation of Moses not dissimilar to that of Artapanus and Eupolemus is found in the fragments of the Jewish philosopher Aristobulus who was probably at work in the first part of the II century BC. In the first fragment, Aristobulus speaks of Moses, “our lawgiver,” and of his “wisdom and divine inspiration by reason of which, in fact, he is acclaimed as a prophet.” The connection established between wisdom and Law make of Moses the true founder of philosophy; from him, in fact, the Greek philosophers borrowed. Thus we read in the second fragment: “it is clear that Plato followed our legislation step by step...;” here, starting out from the Bible and also in this case from within Greek categories, Aristobulus offers us a further attempt to demonstrate the cultural superiority of Judaism.⁴⁸ In the very moment in which Aristobulus acknowledges what the Greek culture seeks from young men in view of a proper education, he also affirms that precisely these demands originate in reality from the genius of Moses: “in other words, he claims to own what he has in fact been mastered by.”⁴⁹

4.5. Finally, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the apologetic edge in relation to the figure of Moses is equally evident, as also a clear attempt to make a major opening to Greek culture. Moses is recalled by Aristeas on only a few occasions; he is presented as a lawgiver (νομοθέτης), but he is such

⁴⁶ STERLING, *Historiography*, 234-235.

⁴⁷ For a general presentation of this question, cp. GAGER, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism*. On Manetho, and on the problem of his debated anti-judaic position, cp. STERLING, *Historiography*, 117-135; see also TROIANI, *Sui frammenti di Manetone*; AZIZA, *Utilisation polémique*.

⁴⁸ For the fragments of Aristobulus, cp. Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* VIII:10, 1-17; XIII:12, 1-6 (cp. DENIS, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum*, 217-228). Cp. also PAUL, *Torah sapienziale*, 50-55.

⁴⁹ BARCLAY, *Jews in Mediterranean Diaspora*, 156.

precisely in his capacity as a wise man to whom God has given the knowledge of everything: σοφὸς ὧν ὁ νομοθέτης ὑπὸ Θεοῦ κατεσκευασμένος εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τῶν ἀπάντων (*Arist.* 139; cp., also, *Arist.* 131. 148). In the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is Moses himself who gives the Law: *Arist.* 144; the only passage in *Aristeas* where Moses is remembered by name (cp., also, *Arist.* 128. 129. 139. 147), and he discharges his task of legislator with an authority which, in *Aristeas*, recalls that of the great Greek legislators such as Solon and Lycurgus.⁵⁰ For *Aristeas*, it is true then that it is “God himself who has given to the lawgivers their ideas in order preserve the life of men” (*Arist.* 240). In this way, the wisdom of Moses is bound up closely with the Law of which he—and not God directly as is the case in the texts of the Pentateuch!—is considered the author, and not just the transmitter, although, on different occasions, *Aristeas* speaks explicitly of the divine quality of the Law itself: cp. *Arist.* 3. 31. 313: “the Law is sacred and has come to be through the work of God.”

By means of this singular presentation of Moses, *Aristeas* aims at attaining a dual objective: “though he accommodates his Judaism to many aspects of the Hellenistic tradition, he never abandons the Jewish sense of difference, indeed he uses Hellenistic categories to define the terms of Jewish superiority.”⁵¹

5. Moses in Philo of Alexandria

Philo’s presentation of Moses leads us into wholly new territory; Philo gathers together everything which the Judaism of his time thought and believed of Moses and develops it by means of a careful re-reading of the biblical texts in the light of Greek philosophy, especially the Platonic and Stoic varieties. In his *De vita Mosis*, he presents the figure of Moses at one and the same time as king, lawgiver, prophet and priest (*Mos.* II:1-7. 292; cp., also, *Congr.* 132, concerning the holiness of Moses and his prophetic role).⁵²

The royalty of Moses is described chiefly in the text of *Mos.* I:148-162; Moses is considered as a king especially in relation to the virtues which he possesses; for example, his desire to benefit his subjects (I:151)

⁵⁰ Cp. HADAS, *Aristeas to Philocrates*, 63.

⁵¹ BARCLAY, *Jews in Mediterranean Diaspora*, 147.

⁵² We are restricting ourselves here to a very summary presentation; for more depth, cp. CLIFFORD, *Moses as Philosopher-Sage*, and MORE, *On Kingship in Philo and in the Wisdom of Solomon*. Cp., also, NIKIPROWETZKY, *Commentaire de l’Ecriture*, 168, 196. PEARCE, *Notes on Philo’s Portrait of Moses*.

and his total indifference to wealth (I:152-153. 155). In presenting Moses as king, Philo thus follows closely the model of the Pythagorean treatises on kingship which were very widespread in the Hellenistic period, and, at the same time, he has clearly present the Platonic ideal of the king-philosopher; Moses incarnates in his life the perfect monarch such as it was imagined in the Hellenistic period.

Moses is again, for Philo, a king φιλόσοφος καὶ σοφός (II:2-3); as philosopher, Moses is *the* true philosopher. As Abraham had done already, Moses incarnates the νόμος ἔμφυχος καὶ λογικὸς, the law of nature, a theme of Stoic derivation very dear to Philo (*Mos.* I:162; cp. also II:4).⁵³ This is that law of nature which the earthly king incarnates according to a concept that is typical of the treatises on kingship (cp. Diotogenes, 71:21-22).⁵⁴ If we read his character in this perspective, Moses becomes for Philo too the greatest and the most excellent lawgiver, precisely insofar as his very life corresponds exactly to the law of nature which is the very law of God. In this way, by exalting Moses as king, philosopher and lawgiver all together, Philo, in reality, exalts the Law of which Moses is the bearer—the Law which then becomes the most important characteristic of Israel—and proclaims its excellence and superiority.

On many occasions, then, Philo recalls Moses as a “wise man:” cp. *Leg.* II:87.89; III:140-141; *Gig.* 48; *Ebr.* 100; *Cher.* 15; *Sacr.* 8; *Agr.* 99; *Migr.* 168. Insofar as he is such, Moses is, in this case too, an example of every possible virtue (*Mos.* II:7; *Abr.* 54; *Praem.* 53.56; cp., also, *Mos.* I:148-159). In describing the figure of Moses, Philo has in mind the presentation of the typical sage of Stoic philosophy; cp. *Mos.* I:28: Moses shows to have τὸν ὀρθὸν τῆς φύσεως λόγον ὅς μόνος ἐστὶν ἀρετῶν ἀρχὴ τε καὶ πηγὴ; which is exactly a Stoic principle. We note that a tendency of this kind is present also in 4 *Mac* 2:17: Moses was able to govern his anger by means of his λογισμὸς. By contrast with the Stoic sages, however, Moses’ wisdom appears in Philo as a divine gift and not as a purely human acquisition.⁵⁵

Such an elevated role Moses owes to his truly unique relationship with God; Philo awards great importance to the event of Ex 3:1-6 (the burning bush) and to the meeting of Moses with God on Sinai (Ex 19).

⁵³ HORSLEY, *Law of Nature*; NAJMAN, *Law of Nature*; MARTENS, *One God, one Law*; TERMINI, *Dal Sinai alla creazione*.

⁵⁴ Cp. the edition of THESLEFF, *Pythagorean Texts*. Cp., also, DELATTE, *Traité de la Royauté*, 245-249 for the place of the formula within the framework of the culture of the period as far as Philo (*Traité de la Royauté*, 263; cp. 1.15 in the edition of O. Hense, *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, Vol. II, Berolini 1909).

⁵⁵ On the characteristics of the wise man in Philo (read especially in relation to the book of Wisdom), cp. WINSTON, *Sage as a Mystic*.

For Philo, Moses is the only human being to have had such a vision of God (*Leg. All.* III: 97-101) In *Mos.* I:158, Moses is presented as being like God, the only one who has seen «the archetypal essence of existing things», those things which remain unknown to every other mortal. Moses is certainly not considered as “God” by Philo in the strict sense, but, in any case, on the basis of Ex 7:1 the title of “king and God” given to Moses by the biblical text makes him the most excellent man of all, made like God.⁵⁶

Philo takes the idea of Moses as sage and philosopher from the many authors who preceded him (cp. Aristobulus, Artapanus...); the royalty of Moses is, then, an apologetic feature, which serves to make of Moses himself an example and a unique model for the Hellenistic world, even at the political level. Yet Philo avoids insisting too much on a perspective that is exclusively apologetic, that is, of making Moses, like the Jewish apologists who had preceded him, the inventor of even the Greek philosophy (but cp. *Spec.* IV:61; *Leg.* I:108; on the contrary, in *Mos.* I:21 where Moses is presented as disciple of the Greek philosophers), although Philo himself proclaims that he considers himself to be among the philosophers of the school of Moses (οἱ κατὰ Μωσῆν φιλοσοφούντες; *Mut.* 223). Insisting rather on the virtue of Moses and on his special relationship with God, on Moses as the one who realises the Hellenistic ideal of the sage and philosopher-king, Philo intends, by means of the presentation of this figure, to plot a course that is ideally common to the Greek and Jewish worlds, as he does, moreover, in all his work, addressing himself to both Jews and Greeks: “after all, according to Philo, their original human source was but one and the same person: Moses.”⁵⁷

6. Moses in the Book of Wisdom: A Singular Presentation

In the light of this summary survey relating to the figure of Moses, we can conclude that, in the book of Wisdom, Moses does not have the importance, which he is shown to have in Ben Sira and in the literature of Alexandrine Judaism up to Philo. In *Wisd* 10:16 and 11:1, in fact, the true protagonist is not Moses but wisdom and, beginning precisely from 11:1, God himself, who governs the cosmos and also guides the history of his people. If, in *Sir* 45:1-5, Ben Sira emphasises the primary

⁵⁶ Cp. SCOTT, *Is Philo’s Moses a Divine Man?*

⁵⁷ CLIFFORD, *Moses as Philosopher-Sage*, 167. “Moses was the one to whom Philo most usually looked for the pattern of the ideal man and saviour;” GOODENOUGH, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 145.

role of God in the life of Moses, not even he, however, ends up by speaking of wisdom as present in Moses and as the one who truly acts in him. If the presentation of Moses as wise man is frequent in Hellenistic Judaism as far as Philo, we do not find elsewhere the idea expressed in the text of Wisdom concerning the personified wisdom, which acts in Moses, as in every other wise man.

We observe, then, that both Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom carefully avoid making Moses into a *Kulturbringer*, that is, a figure that can be used to exalt the superiority of Jewish culture, although expressed, paradoxically, in Greek categories, as happens in Artapanus, Eupolemus, Aristobulus and, in a different way, in Aristeas. Both texts, Ben Sira and Wisdom, linked by an analogous sapiential matrix, are much more attentive to the perspective offered by the scriptures of Israel, which constitute their first point of reference. Both the sages intend to demonstrate the relevance of these scriptures for their addressees; the book of Wisdom, in its particular way, does it by means of the conscious assumption of Greek categories, with aims which are only partly apologetic (cp. 11:14), but which, taken as a whole, reveal, rather, the will for a real dialogue with the Hellenistic world.⁵⁸ Compared with the presentation of Moses made by Ben Sira, this results in the scant importance which the book of Wisdom gives to the connection of Moses with the Law, a connection probably not entirely missing (cp. 16:6), but one which, in any case, is not regarded by Wisdom as having priority.

Both Ben Sira, and in some measure Wisdom also, then, highlight the humanity of Moses by holding back from dwelling too much on his, possibly too rich, biography and on the extraordinary deeds which accompany it. Compared with Ben Sira, the book of Wisdom also avoids emphasising the extraordinary nature of the relationship of Moses with God, thus making him one man among others, even if animated by wisdom; a model for each man who wishes to become a sage.

It is the comparison with Philo, however which best helps us to understand the perspective peculiar to the book of Wisdom: for Wisdom, Moses is no longer either a king, or a philosopher, or a lawgiver; he remains solely a prophet (Wisd 11:1), and, as has just been said, he remains a sage, but certainly not the first one or even the most extraordinary. It is interesting to note that, in the book of Wisdom, the idea of a wise king (not of a philosopher-king, as in Philo) passes from Moses to Solomon, the implicit protagonist of Wisdom 7-9. However, while, for Philo, Moses represents a unique and extraordinary case, also and es-

⁵⁸ GILBERT, *Livre de la Sagesse et l'inculturation*; MAZZINGHI, *Libro della Sapienza: elementi culturali*.

pecially in his exceptional relationship with God, Solomon is presented instead in *Wisdom* as a “democratic” king, a man like all (cp. *Wisd* 7:1-6).⁵⁹ This, because, in the book of *Wisdom*, what God offers to every man is wisdom herself, who is available to all in the same measure (*Wisd* 6:12-16), and is communicated by the same Solomon to whoever seeks her (without envy, without deceit: cp. *Wisd* 7:14); Solomon is a model to which all can attain, and his prayer to obtain wisdom (cp. *Wisd* 9) can be addressed to God by every human being.

In the book of *Wisdom*, Moses is no longer an extraordinary case, the living proof of the superiority and excellence of Israel and of its divine Law. Rather, he is an example, even if certainly not a minor one, of how divine wisdom can act in whoever is disposed to receive her. And such divine wisdom is, at least in principle, available to all men, as has just been said. If our Alexandrine sage certainly does not renounce his pride in being a faithful Israelite, nonetheless he does not put up barriers in his dealings with the culture in which he is living. Unlike the Jewish apologists, he does not even make use of that culture to demonstrate by means of Greek categories his own superiority. However, he does not go so far, as happens in Philo, to think that he is able to plot a common course between the two worlds: the Jewish and the Greek. By contrast, our sage seeks to set out again the biblical faith— which constitutes his true point of departure—by means of the intelligent use of Greek categories, addressing himself to a Jewish public which was oscillating between the desire to be integrated and that of shutting itself off in the face of such a world. The re-reading of the figure of Moses also thus contributes to making clearer the theological and cultural perspective peculiar to the book of *Wisdom*, so confirming the existence of a variety of positions and of a profound internal debate within the complex phenomenon of Alexandrine Judaism.

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⁵⁹ Cp. NEWMAN, *Democratization of Kingship*; VIGNOLO, *Wisdom, Prayer and Kingly pattern*; MORE, *On Kingship in Philo*.

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