

Chapter Seven

Solomon's Wisdom—From Hermes to Aristotle

"Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn her seven pillars"
Proverbs 9:1

"Von Osten bis zum Westen,
wer ist so weise wie Salomo?
wer wie Israels König ist gesegnet'
wer so würdig eines Königs Thron?
[From the east unto the west,
Who so wise as Solomon?
Who like Israel's king is bless'd
Who so worthy of a throne?]"
Händel, "Solomon"

Various definitions of "wisdom" appear in the Bible, and the concept continued to accrue new meanings and understandings in post-biblical literature.⁷¹⁹ The idea of Solomonic wisdom and knowledge (*chokmah* and *madda*) thus also attracted new interpretations under the influence of Hellenistic culture. *The Wisdom of Solomon* (WS), a work apparently written in Palestine and Egypt in the second or first century B.C.E., holds that wisdom is "the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness".⁷²⁰

719 From the rich literature on various types of wisdom in the ancient Near East. See John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (1990); Noth and Thomas (1955); Crenshaw (1976); Hurowitz Yona (2011); Scott (1969); Kalugila (1980); Wälichli (1999). The terms *sophia* (Greek) and *sapientia* (Latin), or wisdom, intelligence and knowledge, are laden with many connotations in the Bible and in post-biblical Jewish literature. Wisdom is attributed to God ("The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens", *Proverbs* 3:19). It is personified ("Does not wisdom call, and does not her voice?", *Proverbs* 8:1); it is both the gift of God and an individual quality. Latin literature makes use of the terms *sapientia* and *prudentia*; the latter is a translation of the Greek *phronesis*, or "practical knowledge", in contrast to the former (*sophia*), a form of wisdom which is an end in itself (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Six). Clement of Alexandria writes that "Scripture calls every secular science or art the one name wisdom there are other arts and sciences invented over and above by human reason"); see Vol. 3 of Clement, *The Stromata*, in Roberts and Donaldson (1995, p. 304).

720 *The Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25–26.

Wisdom is also the wisdom of jurisprudence and just rule⁷²¹; the wisdom that Solomon demonstrates in solving the riddles posed by the Queen of Sheba⁷²² and Hiram king of Tyre⁷²³; and that contained in the three sapiential biblical books attributed to him, as well as the *Book of Solomon*.⁷²⁴ In the Septuagint's (henceforth *LXX*) translation of 2 Chronicles 1:11–12, the words *sunesis* and *sophia* are used as a pair to render the Hebrew *chokhmah* and *madda*; in its translation of 1 Kings 3:12, *LXX* speaks of “a heart of understanding and wisdom” (*kardian phronimên kai sophiên*).⁷²⁵ In apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical literature, wisdom (*sophia*) takes many forms: a divine summons to man; a means of revelation; world-reason (*logos*); an omnipresent cosmic element; a way of life; a body of knowledge; and more. According to *WS*, “wisdom” teaches Man to understand the secrets and traits of the world.⁷²⁶ Wisdom is “omnipotent, omniscient, and puts all the attributes into action”⁷²⁷; it is bestowed by God, or by the angels. As a body of knowledge handed down to an Elected One, wisdom appears, for example, in the *First Book of Enoch*: “After that he gave me instructions in all the secret things [found] in the book of my grandfather, Enoch, and in the parables which were given to him, and he put them together for

721 Thomas Aquinas informs Dante that Solomon was a king who sought wisdom the better to merit his position (*Paradiso*, XIII, 94–95: “[...] clearly he was king who asked for wisdom \ That he might be sufficient a king”, Dante Alighieri 1981, p. 46). Solomon's illustrious wisdom, in other words, was the wisdom of proper governance and jurisprudence.

722 *Midrash Proverbs 1*, which was apparently edited in Palestine between the seventh and eleventh centuries, contained more riddles. See Visotzky (1990, 1992); Lassner (2007); Stein (1993). According to al-Kisā'i's version: “God said to David, ‘wisdom is in ninety parts, seventy which are in Solomon and the other twenty in all the rest of the people’, al-Kisā'i, *Tales of the Prophets*. Another story has it that when Solomon turned seventeen, the angel Gabriel descended from Heaven and brought his father a golden page, saying: Oh, David, Allah sends you his greetings and commands you to collect all of your sons in order to read to them the questions written on the page. The one who can answer them will be your heir.” David fulfilled the instructions and read the seventeen questions to his sons. Only Solomon knew how to answer them, and David received the approval of the sages to pronounce him his heir. al-Kisā'i (1997, pp. 294–296).

723 *Antiquities* 8.5.4, Josephus (1963, pp. 143–149); *Against Apion* 1.1.17, pp. 111–115.

724 The Solomon of legends, folklore, and literature is generous with his wisdom and shares it with *hoi polloi* [the people]; in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, for example, he provides two young pilgrims to Jerusalem with advice on amorous matters “of great privacy and complexity”. *Decameron* IX:9, Boccaccio (1975, pp. 721–736).

725 The discussion in Torijano (2002, pp. 29–30), suggests the two words refer to both “practical wisdom” including political judgment and physical science, and “knowledge of divine things”, that is, of unchanging entities in philosophical terms. Torijano (2002, p. 29).

726 *The Wisdom of Solomon* 7:17–19.

727 Föhrer (1976); Charles (1913, Vol. 1, p. 527); Collins (1997 [1966]).

me in the words of the book which is with me".⁷²⁸ Aristobulus, a priest from Jerusalem from the second century B.C.E., who later settled in Egypt, wrote in his *Commentary on the Law of Moses* that "Solomon said clearly and better that wisdom existed before heaven and earth".⁷²⁹ Ben Sira, in contrast, depicts Solomon as a poet and wise man in the sense of a teacher and educator who formulates rules of behavior in all areas of faith, morals, and justice: "Thy soul covered the whole earth, and thou fillist it with dark parables. Thy name went far unto the islands; and for thy peace thou was beloved. The countries marveled at thee for thy songs, and proverbs, and parables, and interpretations".⁷³⁰

WS and Josephus' *Antiquities* expanded on the biblical references to Solomon's great wisdom, making use of the new understandings of wisdom itself. They attributed to Solomon supreme proficiency in the "wisdom of nature" (tôn ontôn / *rerum natura*) alongside with the command of magic (healing and exorcism). In WS the king himself—the reputed possessor of all wisdom—describes his extensive knowledge, imparted to him by God:

"For it is he (God) who gave me unerring knowledge (*gnôsis*) of what exists (*tôn ontôn*),
To know the structure of the world (*sustasis kosmou*) and the activity of the elements (*energeia stoicheiôn*),
The beginning and end and middle of times,
The alternations of the solstices (*tropôn allagai*) and the change of the seasons,
The cycles of the year and the constellation of the stars,
The nature of animals and the temper of wild animals (*pneumatôn bias*),
The powers of spirits (*pneumatôn*)⁷³¹ and the thoughts of human beings,
The varieties of plants and the virtues of roots delect
I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,
For wisdom the fashioner of all things taught me".⁷³²

In WS, Solomon's wisdom is said to encompass extensive knowledge of ontology, cosmology, physics, astronomy, biology, botany, zoology, and esoterica.⁷³³ The

728 1 Enoch 68:1.

729 Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 13.12.11, in Eusebius (1985, p. 841).

730 *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 47:14–17.

731 The reference here may not be to "evil spirits" but rather, according to some scholars, to the Egyptian *akhu*, or powers of the soul.

732 Trans. Grabbe (1997, p. 64). See also the translation by Winston (1979, p. 172), and Charles (1913, Vol. 1, p. 546). A description of "wisdom" also appears in 2 Enoch (the 'Slavonic Enoch'), which records the knowledge given to Solomon by God, as a result of which he is "all-knowing" (2 Enoch 13).

733 Pico della Mirandola, however, sensed an absence of detail regarding Solomon's occult knowledge and wrote that the version of *The Wisdom of Solomon* that had been preserved was different than the original, in which Solomon does explain "the nature of things".

philosophical vocabulary of *The Wisdom of Solomon* was influenced by Greco-Hellenistic-Roman “scientific” and philosophical language—an influence manifested, for example, in the use of the terms *dynamis*, *energeia*, and *stoicheia*⁷³⁴ (which also appear in Hermetic texts). The origins of *WS* itself are unknown, as is the nature of its intended audience. At any rate, although the book was widely disseminated in Greek, Latin, and other languages, it seems to have had scant influence in shaping the image of Solomon as a wise man—at least until the Renaissance.⁷³⁵

Antiquities of the Jews, written at the end of the first century C.E., also describes Solomon as well-versed in *rerum natura*:

Now so great was the prudence and wisdom which God granted Solomon that he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians, who are said to excel all men in understanding, were not only, when compared with him, a little inferior but fall far short of the king in sagacity [...] There was no form of nature with which he was not acquainted or which he passed over without examining, but he studied them all philosophically and revealed the most complete knowledge of their several properties.⁷³⁶

Josephus was apparently unacquainted with *WS*, and unlike it, does not describe in detail the nature of Solomon's research and discoveries. Despite that, and unlike *WS*, he explicitly compares Solomon's wisdom to that of the Egyptians and highlights Solomon's dominion over the supernal world.⁷³⁷

Josephus' purpose, it seems, was to depict Solomon as a royal sage. In the ancient Near East, quite a few kings were described as sages endowed with wisdom and knowledge, and the *topos* of Solomon as a “royal sage” could well have been inspired by traditions about who boasted of their profound wisdom (*hasisu palku*). Assurbanipal (668–631 B.C.E.), for example, bragged about his skills as a diviner and scholar various talents and declared himself a scholar learned in science and books and well-versed in both theoretical and practical wisdom.⁷³⁸ It is

734 Scholars found in *WS* the influence of Middle-Platonism, “in which many Stoic notions were incorporated”, Alexander (1986, pp. 579–586).

735 The book was translated into Hebrew by Naphtali Herz Wesel (Wessely) in 1780.

736 *Ant.* VIII.42–44, Josephus (1963, pp. 693–695). In *Targum Sheni*, Solomon “explained parables, resolved mysteries, and made known secrets of infinite nature”. Trans. Grossfeld (1994, p. 106).

737 Josephus attributes to Solomon not only the authorship of a thousand five hundred books of odes (*ōdai*) and songs (*melos*) and three thousand books of parables (*paroimiai*), but, as we saw in Chapter Five, also knowledge of the art used against demons (*Ant.* VIII.45–46). See Chapter Five.

738 “Marduk, the wisest (*apkalla*) of gods, gave me the wide understanding (*uznu*) and extensive intelligence (*hasisu*), and *Nabu*, the scribe [who knows] everything, granted me his wise

far more likely, however, that the *topos* as it appears in Josephus' *Antiquities* was influenced more directly by the image of several kings of Pharaonic Egypt. For instance, King Tuthmose III (1479–1425) was praised for his wisdom:

“Behold, His Majesty knew what has come into being. There was nothing at all which he did not know. *He was Thoth in everything*; there was not any subject of which he was not knowledgeable [...] after the manner of the Majesty Seshat. He could construe (or ‘divide’) a sign according to its value (or ‘use’) like the god who ordained it and created it”.⁷³⁹

The Egyptian king is compared to the god Thoth (*mr-rh*)—“he-who-loves-knowledge”, or “he-who-wishes to-learn”, later known as Hermes Trismegistus (“Thrice-great one”)—would be endowed, over the generations, with a panoply of qualities and functions. Egyptians and Egyptian-Hellenistic literature considered him, among other things, the author of numerous books on magic, theology, and philosophy (Manetho ascribed 525 books to Thoth, while according to Seleos the number was 20,000). He was regarded as the creator of cosmic order, the lord of knowledge, he who knew all that is hidden under the heavenly vault and beneath the earth,⁷⁴⁰ the first measurer of time, and the inventor of hieroglyphic script. Esoteric wisdom, however, was his particular preserve.⁷⁴¹ *The Book of Thoth* is a title applied to numerous distinct texts; these were probably created by scribes associated with the “House of Life” (*pr-nh*), the library of the temple. In various renditions of this ‘book’, Thoth emphasizes special branches of knowledge: “‘What is its nature?’ ‘What is the shape of the papyrus plant?’ [...]”⁷⁴² At the same time, *The Book of Thoth* revolved around the acquisition of knowledge, mainly the topography of heaven and the underworlds; it is prominent in underworld theology and “excellent in magic”.⁷⁴³

teaching (*ihzi nemeqi*) [...] I learned the art of the Sage Adapa [so that now] I am familiar with the secret storehouse of all scribal learning (including) celestial and terrestrial potent”. See Na’aman (2019, p. 79); Sweet (1990, p. 55).

739 In Jasnow and Zauzich (2005, p. 62), after Redford (1986, pp. 166–167). King Sesotris I (1917–1872 B.C.E.) is praised by Sinuhe as “the master of knowledge”, and King Ramses II (1279–1213) is said to be “wise in knowledge like Thoth, knowing how to instruct, skilled in craftsmanship”.

740 P. Graec. Mag. VIII.15–15, in Fowden (1993, p. 75).

741 Trans. Duling, in Charlesworth (1983, Vol. 1, 935–987); Fowden (1993, p. 23).

742 Jasnow and Zauzich (2005, p. 64).

743 It is important to note here that Thoth is not only omniscient but also an “inventor” (for example, of writing), an ability not attributed to Solomon. In *The Admonition of Ipuwer* (the Middle Kingdom c. 2040–1640 B.C.E.), the writer laments: “Lo, the private chambers, its book are stolen \ The secret in it are laid bare.... Lo, magic spells are divulged”. In Lichtheim (1975, p. 155). On Egyptian magic see Pinch (1994); Hornung (2001, pp. 55–66); Ritner (1995b, pp. 3333–3379).

Josephus was familiar with legends regarding the early origins of human wisdom. In *Antiquities* he wrote that the sons of Seth had “discovered the science of the heavenly bodies and the orderly array”,⁷⁴⁴ and that Abraham had “introduced [the Egyptians] to arithmetic and transmitted to them the laws of astronomy”.⁷⁴⁵ In other words, Abraham was the conduit of astronomical knowledge from Mesopotamia to Egypt.⁷⁴⁶ Yet, while Jewish-Hellenistic apologetic literature attributed various “inventions” (*de inventis*) dating to the dawn of history to the patriarchs of Israel, Josephus himself made no such attributions to Solomon. Instead, he credited to him encyclopedic wisdom, in which “he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians”.⁷⁴⁷ In other words, since Solomon's contribution to humankind could not be expressed in “inventions” from ancient times, Josephus attributed to him “wisdom” as it was understood in Hellenistic-Jewish literature and personified in the figures of the Egyptian god Thoth and Hermes Trismegistus.⁷⁴⁸ Thus, in asserting that “there was no form of nature with which he was not acquainted or which he passed over without examining, but he studied them all philosophically and revealed the most complete knowledge of their properties”,⁷⁴⁹ Josephus ascribed not only broad “scientific” knowledge and philosophical understanding to Solomon but also a command of occultic wisdom.⁷⁵⁰

744 *Ant.* I., Josephus (1963, pp. 69–70). Josephus, however, describes Solomon as a “Hellenistic king”.

745 *Ant.* I., Josephus (1963 pp. 167–168).

746 See Siker (1987, pp. 188–208). From the description ascribed to Eupolemus, probably from the first century B.C.E., of Abraham as the inventor of astrology who taught it to the Egyptians (in Charlesworth 1983, Vol. 2, pp. 861–879), and from several other mentions, some scholars have leapt to the exaggerated conclusion that “the Jews were known in the ancient world not only as miracle workers, magicians, fortunetellers and the like, but also as astronomers”. In any event, they both shared the view that the universe was a “defined structure of directly related bodies”. See Long (1982, pp. 165–192).

747 *Ant.* VIII.42–44. Josephus (1963, pp. 42–44).

748 The anonymous author of *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (which dates to the second half of the fourth century) wrote, as if in response to Josephus: “It is impossible, in whatever matter you may wish, to find such a wise man as the Egyptian; and so of all philosophers and men versed in the wisdom of letters, the best have been those who have always dwelt in this country”. On the literature about the “first discoverers” (*prōtoi heuretāi*), see Thräde (1962a); Sarton (1993, pp. 280–433).

749 *Contra Apionem* II.36, pp. 255–261. See Bar-Kochva (2010b).

750 He could have written about Solomon in the same vein that Philo described Moses in *De Vita Mosis* (I, 5–21); the claim was that the latter was tutored in Pharaoh's palace by Egyptian, Chaldean, and Greek scholars in subjects as diverse as arithmetic, geometry, the lore of meter,

Since Thoth-Hermes was among the most popular of the Egyptian gods⁷⁵¹ and was regarded in Greek magical papyri as a cosmic power, the creator of heaven and earth, and an almighty world-ruler,⁷⁵² it is entirely likely that Josephus was familiar with his mythological image. There is no evidence, however, to affirm whether he had access to any of the versions of *The Book of Thoth*, which was “restricted knowledge” in the possession of temple scribes (although excerpts were copied and circulated). Thus, Josephus portrayed Solomon in *Antiquities* as, in Torijano’s words, an esoteric king: “As seems clear from the above analysis, the lore that is described in the *Wisdom of Solomon* has little to do with biblical wisdom or purely scientific disciplines [...] as a matter of fact, each of the points listed is at the core of Hermetism, astrology, or magic in general”.⁷⁵³ Torijano also suggests that it is quite probable that Josephus knew of a tradition that connected Solomon with philosophical and Hermetic conceptions of four elements, and it was for that reason that he chose to present the king as a scientist or philosopher. Moreover, Torijano argues that Josephus’ depiction of Solomon is an echo of a popular tradition of Solomon as a Hermetic sage.⁷⁵⁴

Be that as it may, neither *WS* nor Josephus constitutes sufficient evidence that Solomon was recognized by Jews in Egypt as an occultist, and it is difficult to believe that Josephus would have chosen to compare Solomon to a mythological figure or god. If anything, it seems more likely that Josephus’ Solomon is akin to Egyptian kings, who in turn were compared to Thoth in order to glorify them. However, since Josephus and the author(s) of *WS* were, in all likelihood, unfamiliar with Egyptian, Hellenic, or Greek science, it would probably be correct to define the form of wisdom they attributed to him as occultism.

Further, in this chapter, we will see how, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Solomon would come to be seen as an ancient magus—a figure like Hermes Trismegistus, the Hellenist incarnation of the Egyptian god Thoth.

rhythm and harmony, music, philosophy conveyed by symbols, and astrology—comprising the so-called “encyclopedia subjects”. Philo, Vol. VI, trans by Colson (1994, Vol. 6, pp. 229–287).

⁷⁵¹ Fowden (1993, p. 22). Also see Bull (2018). In 2010, a colossal statue of Thoth, in the shape of a baboon, was discovered in Luxor, dating back to the 18th dynasty.

⁷⁵² Fowden (2003, p. 25).

⁷⁵³ Torijano (2002, p. 93).

⁷⁵⁴ Torijano (2002, pp. 99–100, 103–104). Indeed, Solomon’s name appears in four tractates of the corpus of Nag Hammadi. In one of these, *The Book of Solomon* is mentioned. See *The Origins of the World from Nag Hammadi*, in J. M. Robinson (1988, p. 117).

Solomon's Wisdom according to the Sages

The Sages posited various reflections regarding the scope of Solomon's wisdom and the manner in which it was expressed. At times their approach was skeptical, though they also showcased Solomon's wisdom in numerous legendary tales about his prowess as a judge and searcher of all hearts, even in controversies between animals.⁷⁵⁵ *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* says: "It is written, God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding in large measure [...] even as the sand that is on the seashore (1 Kings 5:9). R. Levi and the Rabbis say, "He gave him as much wisdom as all the rest of Israel had put together". Said R. Levi, "Just as the sand serves as the fence for the sea, so wisdom served as the fence for Solomon".⁷⁵⁶ The *Second Targum of Esther* has it that "Solomon was perfect and honest, shining evil; he perceived the mysteries of heaven and was knowledgeable [...] To him was given the great key whereby one can open all gates of wisdom and understanding of the heart"⁷⁵⁷ Other *midrashim* are seemingly less abstract. According to *Midrash Tanhuma Buber* (*Qodashim* 10), Solomon "was wise and knew the root of the foundation of the world. [...] Now Solomon knew which vein went to Cush and planted peppers on it".⁷⁵⁸ Solomon, in other words, had mastered not only matters of agriculture but also the structure of the world.

Some sages argue that Solomon could be credited with both a profound knowledge and understanding of the Torah and with guiding others towards such understanding: *Song of Songs Rabbah* likens the Torah to a deep well whose waters Solomon learned to draw to the surface: "So proceeding from one thing to another, from one parable to another, Solomon penetrated to the

⁷⁵⁵ Zer-Kavod (1977, pp. 203–207).

⁷⁵⁶ *Pes. deR. Kahana* 4.3, in Neusner (1997, p. 50). That source also describes Solomon's wisdom as the wisdom of foresight: "You find when Solomon planned to build the house of the sanctuary, he sent to Pharaoh Neccho saying to him, Send me craftsmen. for a salary. For I am planning to build the house of the sanctuary. What did he do? He gathered all the astrologers of his court, who looked into the matter and picked out those men who were going to die that year, and those he sent to him. And when they came to Solomon, he looked into the matter through the Holy Spirit, realizing that they were going to in that year, and he gave them shrouds and sent them back to him. He sent and wrote to him, "Did you not have enough shrouds in Egypt to bury your dead? Here are they, here are their shrouds". *PesK* 4.3; trans. Neusner (1997).

⁷⁵⁷ Trans. Grossfeld (1994).

⁷⁵⁸ Trans. J.T. Townsend. In *Tales of the Prophets* by al-Kisā'i, Solomon's wisdom is revealed in his youth as a reader of books. When he was twelve, David dressed him in the "garb of the prophets from white wool" and permitted him to mount the pulpit. And the boy Solomon "read to them from the books of Seth, Enoch, Abraham and Moses." al-Kisā'i (1997, p. 350).

innermost meaning of the Torah”.⁷⁵⁹ Solomon was a sage who instituted regulations: “When Solomon instituted ‘erubin⁷⁶⁰ and the washing of the hands, a Heavenly Echo came forth and declared, My son, if thine heart be wise; My heart shall be glad, even mine”.⁷⁶¹ The Solomon of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* (7.23,4) states: “Concerning all these [ordinances of the Torah] I have stood and investigated [their meaning], but the chapter of the Red Heifer I have been unable to fathom” while in *Sanhedrin 21b* we read: “R. Isaac also said: Why were the reasons of [some] Biblical laws not revealed?—Because in two verses reasons were revealed, and they caused the greatest in the world [Solomon] to stumble. Thus, it is written: He shall not multiply wives to himself, [‘That his heart turn not away’, Deut. XVII, 17.] whereon Solomon said, ‘I will multiply wives yet not let my heart be perverted.’ Yet we read, When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart. [I Kings XI, 4] Again it is written: He shall not multiply to himself horses; [Deut. XVII, 17] concerning which Solomon said, ‘I will multiply them, but will not cause [Israel] to return [to Egypt].’ Yet we read: And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six [hundred shekels of silver]” [I Kings X, 29] (Soncino transl.). According to *Exodus Rabbah*, he was responsible, together with seven other elders, for the addition of the thirteenth month to the Jewish calendar; the seven elders plus Solomon, the prophet Nathan, and the seer Gad were together ten persons, as was the norm for the intercalation of a month.⁷⁶² R. Simeon ben Yoḥai interpreted Ecclesiastes 2:12 (“And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness and folly”) as follows: “Solomon said: ‘Because I tried to be wiser than the Torah and persuaded myself that I knew the intention of the Torah, did this understanding and knowledge turn out to be madness and folly [...] Who is permitted to entertain doubts about the ways and decrees of the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, whose words issue from before Him like solid blocks. [...] because I questioned His actions, have I stumbled’”.⁷⁶³ In contrast, R. Samuel ben Naḥman read the words of Ecclesiastes-Solomon—“walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes” (Eccl. 11:9)—as “words that tend towards heresy”: “there is no judge, no laws!” Yet because Solomon continued the verse “know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment,” the Sages found that “Solomon spoke well”.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁹ *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1.1.8.

⁷⁶⁰ ‘Erubin for regulating Sabbath limits.

⁷⁶¹ *Shabbat* 14b.

⁷⁶² *Exodus Rabbah* 15.20.

⁷⁶³ *Midrash Rabbah Exodus (Va’Era)*, VI:1, trans. S. M. Leherman, London, 1961, pp. 104–105.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XI:9.

As a judge, Solomon is unlike the judges of the gentiles: “I am not like all the other judges. A mortal king sits on his tribune and issues judgments for execution by the sword, by strangulation, by burning, or by stoning, and it means nothing [to him]. I am not like this. If I (unjustly) find a person guilty in monetary matters, I am held to account for it as if it were a capital case”.⁷⁶⁵ Solomon, endowed with an understanding of the natural and the spiritual, was also blessed with the wisdom of sound government and the ability to discern good from evil, and so with an ability to “impose order and judgment on to the entire world”.

While the Sages had different views about “Greek wisdom” (*tes hellenikos Sophias*), namely logic and natural sciences, they did not depict Solomon’s wisdom as legitimization of “Greek wisdom”, and find no need to posit a resemblance or a distinction between the wisdom of Solomon and that of Greece.⁷⁶⁶

Solomon’s Wisdom in the Middle Ages

Celsus wrote that the Jews “never did anything of worthy its names” (IV:31) and the emperor Julian wrote: that the wisdom of Solomon cannot be comparable to the wisdom of Hellens”. In fact, God has not granted them to invent any science (*episteme*=knowledge) or any philosophical study (*mathema philosophon*). “Why is it? For the theory of the heavenly bodies was perfected among the Hellens, after the first observations had been made among the barbarians in Babylon, and the study of geometry arose in the measurement in the land of Egypt, and from this grew to its present importance. Arithmetic began with the Phoenician merchant, and among the Hellenes in the course of time acquired the aspect of regular science” (178 A-B). Indeed, we don’t know about any institutionalized “scientific” activity, or any individual “men of science in Jewish society until the Middle Ages. Only with the mediation of the Islamic world, the Middle Ages saw the rise of a two-way interchange between Jewish thought and the heritage of Greek-Hellenist philosophy and science. “Wisdom” came to be seen as a matter of natural philosophy, (i.e., “physics”) and Solomon was depicted as an occultist, philosopher, and man of “natural philosophy”.⁷⁶⁷ As this “wisdom” was divided into divine wisdom, natural wisdom (physics) and scholarly wisdom

⁷⁶⁵ Hammer (1986, § 10, 34).

⁷⁶⁶ See Shavit (1999, pp. 79–95).

⁷⁶⁷ In both Islam and Latin Christianity in the Middle Ages, the heritage of the ancient world was not only Aristotelian, but also included writings on various spheres including astronomy, medicine, physics, mathematics, and more. On this, see two popular works by John Freely (2010, 2015).

(mathematics, logic, etc.), it was Solomon who could become a king-philosopher engaging also in “science” and thus serve as personification of the ancient wisdom of the Jews and as legitimation to deal with philosophy and the sciences.

According to Judah Halevi's apology, Solomon's judicial fame was well-known throughout the world, but the wisdom he revealed to the Queen of Sheba and other rulers remained a closely kept secret and hence was lost with few exceptions. In other words, much of Solomon's wisdom was “concealed wisdom”—known only to select individuals, never recorded, and eventually lost. Its substance could be extrapolated from various books of wisdom by the gentiles, who translated Solomon's books and so preserved them for the coming generations.⁷⁶⁸

In Maimonides' view, Solomon was an esoteric philosopher, his words intended for an intellectual elite and not for the “common people”. Solomon was well-versed in the highest possible levels of natural and metaphysical knowledge, but he communicated his philosophical teachings and their metaphysical contents in an esoteric manner, by means of parables⁷⁶⁹—though he was nonetheless also a “practical wise man” who set forth concrete rules of moral and religious behavior. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) found in Solomon's books knowledge of the “laws of heaven” (i.e., astronomy): “I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it”.⁷⁷⁰ The statesman, philosopher, and biblical commentator Isaac Abrabanel (1437–1508) wrote, in his commentary on 1 Kings 3, that Solomon had excelled in several types of knowledge: “natural, scholarly, divine, and religious”,⁷⁷¹ and that he had acquired this knowledge not gradually by way of induction, but “wondrously,” which rendered him superior to Aristotle and all the sages who came before and after him.⁷⁷² Nahmanides (1194–1270) wrote that King Solomon had so mastered the entirety of natural wisdom, history, even the strength and qualities of herbs, that he wrote a book of medicine. The thirteenth-century physician and scholar Shem Tov ben Isaac of Tortosa was of the opinion that Solomon's wisdom encompassed all of the natural scien-

⁷⁶⁸ Kuzari 3:63. And see Chapter Eight.

⁷⁶⁹ I rely here on Klein-Braslavy (2007). And there are apologetics that explained that since *hoi polloi* were too ignorant to understand Solomon's wisdom, he conveyed it through parables.

⁷⁷⁰ Sela (1999, p. 45, note 38). See also Sela (2003)

⁷⁷¹ Melamed (2003, p. 159).

⁷⁷² Cohen Skalli (2017, pp. 178–189). In the author's opinion, Abravanel was influenced by Hermeticism and the notion of natural magic.

ces and that his medical knowledge derived from a divine power within him.⁷⁷³ R. David Messer Leon (c. 1470 – c. 1526), also a “Renaissance man”, held that Solomon was fluent in every sphere of wisdom and possessed knowledge of all matters included in the natural sciences, among which he numbered physics, astronomy, and astrology.⁷⁷⁴ The *Sefer haMesshiv* (*Book of the Responding Entity*), a late fourteenth-century collection of the visions of a group of Kabbalists from Spain, and which has been only partially preserved, relates its authors’ discovery of the lost books of Solomon. It notes the names of these books and declares that they contain the original, true theory of nature and science, whose origin lay in divine revelation rather than philosophy or science, which are the products of human reason.⁷⁷⁵ Spinoza, in contrast, interpreted Proverbs 16:22 (“Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it, but folly is the punishment of fools”) to mean that Solomon’s was a “natural wisdom”—an inner quality—and that Solomon’s idea of God was a product of his wisdom, which is praised in the Holy Scriptures. Yet, this wisdom led Solomon to consider himself above the law of the Torah and to disdain the laws of the king⁷⁷⁶ even to the point of violating them.⁷⁷⁷ In Rabbi Jacob Emden’s (Ya’avetz, 1687–1776) view, a scholar and *posek* (arbiter) from Altona, Solomon was the father of alchemy based on a passage in the *Gemara*: “When King Solomon built the Sanctuary, he planted therein all kinds of [trees of] golden delights, which were bringing forth their fruits in their season and as the winds blew at them, they would fall off [...] and when the foreigners entered the temple they withered”.⁷⁷⁸ Emden wrote that “now there are concealed secrets regarding the nature of plants and minerals that are known to a select few, like the praises of the alchemists regarding the power of all-purpose healing medicine [...] I believe they learned this from the Book of Healing of King Solomon [...] when the sages said that Solomon planted a forest of gold, I maintain they are hinting at the conversion of metal into gold, which increases by means of the seed it contains”.⁷⁷⁹ In *Sefer haBrit* (*Book of Con-
 vnanant*) by the Kabbalist Pinhas Eliyahu Hurwitz (1765–1821),⁷⁸⁰ Solomon was

773 Muntner (1958, p. 326). Shem Tov based his views on al-Zahrāwī, *Kitāb al-Taṣrīf* (*Sefer ha-Shimmush*), a thirty-volume encyclopedia of medical practice composed between 1261–1264, or earlier (around 1000).

774 *Sheva ha-Nashim*, in Tirosh-Rothschild (1991, pp. 71, 280).

775 Idel (1994).

776 Deuteronomy 17:16–17.

777 Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* (see Chapter Two). See also Israel (1995).

778 *Yoma* 21b.

779 See Kahana (2013a). Also see Kahana (2013b).

780 The book first appeared in 1797 in Brin, Moravia, and was translated into Yiddish and Ladino and printed in dozens of editions.

described as having anticipated the scientific thinking of the west, and his assertion that “the earth remains forever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4) served to refute Copernicus.⁷⁸¹

For the Haskalah movement in the nineteenth century, Solomon represented the ideal of a *maskil* and a symbol of the struggle against conservative trends in Jewish society. In his *Te'udah be'Yisrael (A Testimony in Israel)*⁷⁸² Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860), first and foremost among the *maskilim* of Czarist Russia, depicted Solomon as a link in a progression of figures in Jewish history who granted legitimacy to the acquisition and study of all forms of secular knowledge. Following in the footsteps of Abravanel, Levinsohn declared: “And we shall return to the wise king Solomon son of David who took pride in his wisdom, and more than he received from his father, he himself made an effort to acquire it and greatly excelled, until he became the father of all wisdoms and the head of all those seeking them among the scholars of his own time and thereafter: ‘he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall’”.⁷⁸³

The imaginary Solomon was brought into being to argue that Jews were the source of the ancient wisdoms (*prisca sapientia*), but Jewish apologists could not merely claim that Solomon was endowed with wisdom; they had to specify what that wisdom encompassed. At first, when the boundaries between occultism and science were not clear-cut,⁷⁸⁴ Solomon would have functioned as the author of books of magic and as a master of both the natural and the occult “sciences”, and eventually as a figure who inspired the “new science.”⁷⁸⁵ Because Aristotle, during that period, was regarded as the philosopher whose wisdom was “all-embracing”, the need arose to claim that Solomon’s wisdom was no less universal.

781 See I. Robinson (1989).

782 Written in 1823, printed in 1828.

783 At the same time, both Abravanel and Levinsohn noted that wisdom had not vanished after Solomon, and they did not mean to say that no men wiser than him would appear.

784 These boundaries were also glossed over by famous scientists such as Newton, Robert Boyle, and others. Newton is known to have been influenced by the book *The Compound of Alchemy or The Twelve Stones*, written by the alchemist George Ripley (c. 1415–1490). In other words, he regarded the ancient wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus and of Solomon as one and the same.

785 See Feiner (2002).

Solomon's Wisdom in Christian Literature

"If only I had great wisdom like that of Solomon"

Francis of Assisi, *Testament of the Holy Father St. Francis*

Emperor Julian, as mentioned, mocked the wisdom of Solomon: "Can Solomon be compared to Phocylides or Theognis or Isocrates? Certainly not".⁷⁸⁶ The target of his scorn was Christianity, which adopted the biblical description of Solomon's wisdom and its divine source.

The result of Christianity's ambivalent attitude toward Solomon's wisdom resulted in what Hattaway defines as the "Paradoxes of Solomon": on the one hand the king, in his wisdom and erudition, represented an advocate of sorts for the study of philosophy, while on the other hand the book of Ecclesiastes provided arguments against it. In the latter case, Solomon and Aristotle were seen as representing two diametrically opposed conceptions of wisdom and worthwhile study, which not only adopted the biblical portrayal of Solomon's wisdom but also embroidered upon it.

Bachiarus described Solomon as "that wondrous man who deserves to share in the wisdom that sits next to God",⁷⁸⁷—and in his treatise *On the Government of Rulers*, Thomas Aquinas extolled Solomon: "Not only did he [Solomon] receive from the Lord the wisdom that he requested, but also became praised for his wisdom more than all the kings",⁷⁸⁸ "How can he be ignorant of anything that is, when he is Wisdom, the maker of the world, who brings all things to fulfillment and recreates all things, who is all that has come into being?"⁷⁸⁹ Solomon, like Jesus, was said to know all.

According to Origen, "Solomon discovered and taught [...] by the wisdom that he received from God"; that is, his wisdom encompassed both moral philosophy and natural science,⁷⁹⁰ and in Eusebius view, Solomon was a "pupil of the heavens"; and he discerned a resemblance between Solomon's wisdom and the

786 *Against the Galileans*, 178b, p. 383.

787 "Solomon ille mirabilis, qui meruit assistrici, Deo sapientia", in Behrends (1976, pp. 166–167).

788 *De regimine principum*, Chapter 9.

789 Eusebius (2002, pp. 560–561). The *Epistle of James* distinguishes between the "wisdom that descends from above", which is pure, loves peace, tolerance, is full of mercy, etc., and earthly wisdom, which "stems from instinct and the demons" and gives rise to envy, falsehood, and every evil deed (Eusebius 2002).

790 *The Song of Songs*, Origen (1957, pp. 40–41); see Chapter Three.

philosophy of Plato, who divided it into three branches—Physics, Ethics, and Logic.⁷⁹¹ According to him, Solomon, like Plato, drew a distinction between the contemplation of things abstract and incorporeal on the one hand, and the study of things observable through the senses—the natural sciences—on the other. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon explained the “nature of the fleeting substance of bodies” and arrived at the conclusion, saying “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”. This was Solomon’s conclusion concerning corporeal substance. Clement of Alexandria quotes Proverbs 1,2, to reach the conclusion that wisdom is “a communicative and philanthropic thing”. Solomon teaches that “the word that is sown is hidden in the soul of the learner, as in the earth, and this is spiritual planting”. Gregory of Nazianzus prayed to possess Solomon’s state of mind—“not to think or say anything about God that is simply my own. For when [Solomon] says, ‘I am the most foolish of all people, and human prudence is not in me’ [Prov. 20:2] it is not, surely, in recognition of his own lack of understanding that he speaks this way. For how could one say this who asked from God before all else—and who received—wisdom and contemplative vision and wideness of heart [...] Solomon said these things because he has no natural wisdom of his own, but is enlivened by more perfect wisdom that comes from God”.⁷⁹² It was, therefore, possible to bring verses from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to argue that philosophy is nonsense and evil on the one hand and claim that it helped faith on the other hand.

We have already seen that St. Anthony won out over the philosophers to whom he demonstrated the power of faith in Jesus and the cross, overcoming all those who were “blinded by the fog of secular wisdom and [...] most learned in all branches of philosophy”—this was a testament to his faith in the divine scriptures and in Jesus, the true God. “We Christians”, he maintained, “keep the mystery of our life stored up, not in worldly wisdom, but in the power of faith which God has granted us through Christ”.⁷⁹³ Theologians and, later on, counter-Renaissance thinkers found that Ecclesiastes’ dictum that “all is vanity”, and the author’s resulting exhortation to “fear God and keep his commands”, supported their absolute preference for faith over wisdom and their conviction that the ability of wisdom and science to provide answers must be evaluated

791 *Preparation for the Gospel Part 1*, Eusebius (2002, Book II and XI:VII, pp. 521, 644–562). He writes that Solomon, above all others, excelled in knowledge of the natural science “of things sensible”.

792 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 20: On Theology, and the Appointment of Bishops 5*, in Daley (2006, pp. 755).

793 C. White (1991, pp. 54–59).

with humility and skepticism. However, “wisdom” is not only philosophy, but knowledge in many fields and, as we will see, it was difficult to reject.

Jesus' Wisdom

“Wisdom is therefore queen of philosophy,
as philosophy is of preparatory of culture”
Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book 1

Did Jesus learn from Solomon's wisdom and does his wisdom resemble Solomon's?

Jesus' wisdom is known only from the words and deeds attributed to him in the New Testament. In him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”⁷⁹⁴; he is “the power of God and the wisdom of God”,⁷⁹⁵ and the apostles reveal the concealed wisdom of God; they express it not in the words that human wisdom teaches, but in words that the Spirit teaches. It is God, not human wisdom, that truly understands a man's spirit: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified [...] Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”.⁷⁹⁶ In Colossians, Paul warns his listeners: “See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirit of the universe, and not according to Christ”,⁷⁹⁷ while 2 Timothy 2:7 promises that it is “the Lord [who] will give you understanding in all things.” The sentiment is reflected by Augustine: “Christ is the wisdom of God [...] the word, co-eternal with the Father”.⁷⁹⁸ Christians do not consult any wise man but Wisdom Herself: “Let us then both give ear to Jesus Christ”.⁷⁹⁹

Is “wisdom”, only philosophy seemingly separated by a wide abyss from the wisdom of the gospels, Tertullian posed a rhetorical question—“What then has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the academy and the church?” (*Quid ergo Athenis*

794 Colossians 2:3.

795 Paul adds: “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of reason, but with a demonstration of the Spirit of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not wisdom of this age or of the rulers of the age, who are doomed to perish, but we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decree before the ages for our glory”. 1 Cor 2:4–7.

796 1 Cor 1:22–24.

797 Colossians 2:8.

798 *City of God* XVII:20, Augustine (1984, p. 755).

799 Sermon X, in Schaff and Wace (1995, pp. 290–294).

et Hierosolymis?)⁸⁰⁰—and again: “What there in common between the philosopher and the Christian, the pupil of Hellas and the pupil of the heavens”.⁸⁰¹ Here Tertullian established a dichotomy between Aristotle and Solomon: “Unhappy Aristotle” (*miserum Aristotelen*) invented dialectics—“the art of building up and pulling down; an art so evasive in its propositions, so farfetched in its conjectures, so harsh in its arguments, so productive of contentions—embarrassing even to itself...”—while “our principles come from the Porch of Solomon, who himself taught that the Lord is to be sought in simplicity of heart”. However, useful knowledge is desirable, and Augustine tried to work out *ab initio* what kinds of knowledge and expertise it might be useful for Christian children to acquire”, and claimed that rhetoric, history, medicine, astronomy, and even philosophy are divinely instituted discipline.⁸⁰²

However, although in early Christianity there were those who believed that philosophy was the creation of Satan or of demons,⁸⁰³ more than a few Church Fathers nonetheless conceived of philosophy as a kind of “preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration [...]. Philosophy, therefore, was [for those with a ‘Hellenic mind’] a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ”.⁸⁰⁴ Pelikan cites Gregory of Nazianzus, who was well acquainted with Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy and argued that “Christians, many of them common people or even monks, were philosophically superior to Plato or Aristotle” since Christian philosophy “could be accommodated to the faith and understanding of simple believers. Such believers were now capable of becoming ‘wise’ in the fullest and truest sense of the word”.⁸⁰⁵ In the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, Gregory of Nyssa found a philosophy of apophatic restraint.⁸⁰⁶

800 Tertullian (1956, pp. 35–36). Away, he wrote, with the attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonists, and dialectical compositions. (See Roberts, (1924, pp. 63–78). Hieronymus wrote that he “made oath and called upon His name, saying, ‘Lord, if ever again I possess worldly book, or if ever I read again such, I have denied you’ (letter 22, 30; to Eustochium, 383 AD). One should not drink the cup of Christ, and at the same time, the cup of devils”.

801 *Apologeticus* 46, 18. See Cochrane (1957, pp. 213–260), especially pp. 222–223.

802 See R.P. H. Green introduction to Augustine (2008, xiv–xv).

803 Daniélou (1973, pp. 62–64). Cyril of Jerusalem in his Fourth Catechetical Lecture (*On the Ten Points of Doctrine*) stated that knowledge of Christian doctrine was important “since there are many that make spoil through philosophy and vain deceit”, in Schaff and Wace (1995, Vol. 7, pp. 19–28).

804 *Stromata*, v. In: Clement of Alexandria (1995, Vol. 2, p. 305).

805 Pelikan (1993, p. 180).

806 Pelikan (1993, p. 181).

In any event, what distinguished between pagan and Christian wisdom was that the former was “natural” wisdom and the latter was a product of supernatural (divine) revelation. Quite a few Church Fathers were familiar with Hellenist-Roman literature and, with some reservations, permitted it to become part of standard Christian education, directing its students to a moral life.⁸⁰⁷ And so both Solomon and Jesus were granted Divine wisdom, but Jesus was “wisdom itself”, whereas Solomon, despite his wisdom, erred and sinned. The sin that is perceived to cast doubt on the value of human wisdom is another matter in which Jesus is “greater than Solomon”. However, in another matter, Solomon is “greater than Jesus” in that Solomon’s wisdom included subjects considered to be “human wisdom”, thus making Solomon much closer to Aristotle than to Jesus.

From Thoth-Hermes to Aristotle

In the Middle Ages, Thoth reemerged in a new garb as Hermes Trismegistus. Hermetism⁸⁰⁸ existed in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy side by side with various other occult traditions and theological and philosophic schools⁸⁰⁹ including Neo-Platonism, Pythagoreanism, Stoicism, Aristotelianism, and Thomism.⁸¹⁰ Of all these, Hermetism is the most relevant to our subject.

In the 1460s, writings attributed to Hermes—namely the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a set of tracts said to have originated between 300–1000 C.E.—arrived in Florence. Hermetic or pseudo-Hermetic literature was widespread in Muslim culture;

807 “This addition to the standard curriculum” was suggested by, among others, Basil of Caesarea (c.330–379, 12:233–234) See Basil of Caesarea (1970). On Augustinus, Classical literature, and the influence of Platonist Philosophy see Fox (2016).

808 See Garin (1983). A sign of Hermes’ status may be found in the fifteenth-century floor mosaic in the Siena cathedral, where Hermes Mercurius Trismagistus is depicted as a contemporary of Moses (“*contemporaneous Moysi*”) and harbinger of Christ. On Hermetic books in the Middle Ages, see Thorndike (1964, Vol. 2, pp. 214–229). As far back as the tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia *Suda* (attributed to Sotas) it was written that “He was called Trismegistus on account of his praise of the trinity, denying there is one divine nature in the trinity” (Thorndike 1964, xli). It was, of course, the Protestant scholar Isaac Casaubon who proved that the tracts were not ancient. See Grafton (1991). However, there were those who disagree with Casaubon’s view and, as we have seen, they held that these philosophical and magic tracts have ancient Egyptian roots. In any case, the controversy is irrelevant to our discussion here.

809 Gibbons (2001).

810 Burke (1975); Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns*, Berkeley, (1972, pp. 201–248).

a ninth-century book by Abū Ma'shar, *Kitāb al-Ulūf* (The Book of Thousands), is one such text, summarizing the Hermetic occult science.⁸¹¹ The *Corpus Hermeticum*, translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino, and was printed in 1463⁸¹²; parts of the corpus had been known to some Church Fathers,⁸¹³ and were accepted as the authentic ancient work of an Egyptian scholar who wrote primordial words of wisdom,⁸¹⁴ and became an influential school of thought.⁸¹⁵ Thus, the mythical Thoth was resurrected in the shape of Hermes Trismegistus, the *Pater philosophorum*, a super-sage and ancient prophet who represented *prisca theologia* and of whom Ficino wrote: “they called him Trismegistus because he was the greatest philosopher and the greatest priest and the greatest king”.⁸¹⁶ Hermes' writings were regarded as presaging esoteric Christian wisdom; they both greatly preceded Jesus and foretold his coming. No less importantly, their existence was said to demonstrate that all “wisdoms” were born of a single ancient source and were, therefore, like Solomon's wisdom, universal.⁸¹⁷

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Jewish thinkers were also influenced by the Hermetic corpus,⁸¹⁸ and during the Renaissance, Solomon appeared in works by Jewish scholars as a parallel not only of Hermes Trismegistus but also of Apollonius of Tyana,⁸¹⁹ who was, we will recall, compared to Jesus (Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem*) and accorded a semi-divine status. These two figures were linked in the Arabic pseudo-Aristotelian literature, which made its way into the West and was translated into Latin. The connection between the two originated mainly in the popular treatise *Kitāb*

811 See Carboni (2013).

812 In his *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* (Book of the Categories of Nations, 1068), a Muslim scholar from Andalusia, Šā'id al-Andalusī, mentions several books written by Hermes of Babylon, “which proves his greatness as a scientist”. See al-Andalusī (1991, pp. 19–20). See also: Ebeling (2007, p. 48); Celenza (2001, pp. 115–133). 133–155.

813 Fowden (1993, pp. 198–202). Hermes is mentioned in *Cyranides*, a fourth-century compilation of magico-medical work, as a cosmologist and alchemist. Augustine, who was familiar with some part of the Hermetic literature, wrote that “Hermes says much of God according to the truth”. See *City of God* VIII:23–24, Augustine (1984, pp. 332–337).

814 Najman et al. (2016).

815 Clement of Alexandria (1995) calls him Hermes, the false prophet (*Stromata*, xvii).

816 Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (1992, xlvii; 2003). See also: Yates (1979); Merkel and Debus (1988).

817 Celsus had also written that “There is an ancient doctrine which has existed from the beginning, which has always been maintained by wisest nations and cities and wise men” (I:14). He did not count the Jews and Solomon among these. See Origen (1965, I:17).

818 On Hermetic literature in the Geniza, see Eliyahu (2005). Wasserstrom (2000).

819 See Ellen (2014).

Sirr al-Asrār, a pseudo-Aristotelian work translated into Latin c. 1120 by John of Seville, who titled it *Secreta Secretorum* (the Secret of Secrets).⁸²⁰ It appeared in several versions and was translated into many languages, including Hebrew⁸²¹ and English (by Roger Bacon).⁸²² The text purports to be a letter sent by Aristotle to his pupil Alexander the Great; in substance, it is an encyclopedia on a broad range of subjects including astrology, alchemy, and medicine, and it was received as a genuine Aristotelian work.

Mahmoud Manzalaoui claims that the book “is an echo of the traditional notion that Aristotle’s works were of two kinds, esoteric (acroamatic) and exoteric”.⁸²³ In the thirteenth century, the chapter that dealt with the occultic sciences began to be circulated separately as the book *Tabula Smaragdina* (The Emerald Tablet). It, too, was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, and was discovered by Apollonius of Tyana, who learned from it “the reasons for all things”. The *Tabula Smaragdina* was composed in Arabic between the sixth to eighth centuries and exists in several versions. Its author, or recorder, is supposedly Balinas/Balinus, the Arabic name of Apollonius of Tyana.⁸²⁴ According to the story, Apollonius discovered the book in a vault under a statue of Hermes Trismegistus, where he found an old man seated on a throne of gold holding an emerald tablet containing the secrets of transmutation and its primordial substance. The first version of this pseudo-Aristotelian work, a product of Arab-Hermeticism that attributed to Apollonius hermetic books on astrology, alchemy, and cosmography,⁸²⁵ was *Kitāb Sirr al-Khaliqa wa Ṣanʿat al-Ṭabīʿa* (Book of the Secret of Creation

820 A translation of its full name is *Book of the Science of Government, On the Good Ordering of Statecraft*. See Chapter Eight.

821 The translator from Arabic was Ibn Chasdai (1180–1240), a scholar, philosopher poet, and follower of Maimonides. The Hebrew translation (together with a translation into English and introduction by M. Gaster) of *Sod haSodot asher Katav oto Aristotolo el haMelekh haGadol Alexander* was printed in Venice in 1519 and published by Gaster (1907–1908), and reprinted in the third volume of Gaster (1925–1928, pp. 111–162). See also: Ryan and Schmitt (1982); S. J. Williams (1994b). The book deals with rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, and more. It was quoted in the fourteen-century Latin text *Secretum Philosophorum*, which originated in England c.1300–1359.

822 S. J. Williams (1994b). See Chapter Eight.

823 See his detailed monograph, Manzalaoui (1974). On the various versions of the book and its reception in the Christian West, see S. J. Williams (2003).

824 On the literature on this subject, see Ruska (1926); Steinschneider, (1891); Steele and Singer (1928).

825 Copenhaver (1992, xlvii, pp. 112–113).

and the Art of Nature).⁸²⁶ According to Jacob ben David Provençal, the content of this book was borrowed from *The Book of the Mystery of Nature*, which in turn was attributed to Solomon⁸²⁷; Hermetic books were also attributed to Aristotle.

Was Hermes, then, a rival for Solomon, someone “greater than Solomon”? This question leads again to Johanan Alemanno, a scholar, philosopher, Kabbalist, and biblical exegete known mainly for having tutored Pico della Mirandola in Hebrew and Kabbalah. Alemanno connected between several legendary traditions about the source of magic, including the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* and *Sefer Raziel*, whose date of composition is unknown. According to the latter, Noah received from his forefathers a book of secrets that the angel Raziel had given to Adam, from which Noah learned how to construct his ark. That book finally reached Solomon, “who was very accomplished in all the secrets, sagacity, and parable, including all the spirits and all the objects and the harmful things roaming throughout the world, and he prohibited them and permitted them and controlled them, and he built and did well, all from the wisdom in this book [...]”.⁸²⁸ According to Alemanno, each of the texts he addressed attributed the understanding of the secrets of creation to a heavenly source. He further mentioned unknown books of magic including “*Melekheth muskelet*” (English), attributed to Apollonius, whom Alemanno described as a “wise Christian”, and from the Arab astronomer and mathematician from Seville, Abū Muḥammad Jābir ibn Aflāḥ (1100–1150). Primarily, Alemanno learned from Apollonius of Tyana that Solomon had composed twenty-four books on the occult sciences, in which he became, as a result, more proficient than Plato and Aristotle.⁸²⁹ Alemanno claimed that he has in his possession a copy of the eleventh-century enigmatic mystical treatise *Sefer HaTamar* (The Book of the Palm) by a Muslim author from Syracuse, and he also quotes from it (see Chapter Eight). In that book, Suliman al-Yahud (Suliman the Jew), or the “ancient Suliman”, is described as having taken an interest in the wisdom of religion when still a boy and having later stud-

826 An excerpt was translated by Newton, who wrote a commentary on the subject. From line 15: “And because of this they have called me Hermes Trismegistus since I have the three parts of the wisdom and Philosophy of the whole universe”. See Weisser (1979).

827 The prolific translator from Greek to Arabic Yahya (Yuhanna) Ibn al-Bitriq (ca. 815) relates that while he was seeking philosophical texts, he arrived at the Temple of the Sun that the philosopher Asklepios had built and succeeded in convincing the priest to allow him to see the writings that were preserved there. These he then translated from Greek to Syriac and from Syriac to Arabic. See S. J. Williams (2003, pp. 8–9, and notes 5 and 6). Provençal was born in Mantua, engaged in maritime trade, and resided at the end of his life in Naples, where he served as a rabbi and wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs. See Carmoly (1844, p. 125).

828 Jellinek (1938, pp. 155–160).

829 Rosenthal (1977).

ied the “scholarly wisdoms”, becoming greater in wisdom than Plato and Aristotle and proposing five forms of study.⁸³⁰

It was Solomon, then, and not Hermes, who revealed the secrets of the occult (*secreta opera mundi*) to humanity.⁸³¹ Solomon “was wiser than any man and many perfect men who performed actions by intermingling various things and comparing qualities in order to create new forms in gold, silver, vegetable, mineral and animal [matter] which had never before existed and in order to create divine forms which tell the future and the laws and the *nomoi*, as well as to create the spirit of angels, stars and devils”.⁸³² The lengthy introduction to the commentary on Song of Songs (mentioned in Chapter Three) was, in fact, Solomon’s biography as a polymath and magus⁸³³ proficient in all spheres of knowledge, both the theoretical and the practical⁸³⁴; Alemanno did find it “incredible, however, that King Solomon could have been wiser in the Torah than Moses himself”.⁸³⁵ Solomon was born as a “perfect man” with the “power of imagination, of assumption, intelligence, integrity of thought, the wisdom of logic”; he was accomplished “in the six verbal arts—grammar, humor, poetry, logic, incantations and combinations” as well as in “astrology, music, politics and the natural sciences”. In a certain sense, he was wiser even than Moses, since Moses knew nothing of the wisdom of the nations, while Solomon did. From Plato, Alemanno learned that “desire” (1 Kings 9:1) was “the preparation of the soul and the way to ascend to human virtue”, and Solomon did indeed desire the words of God.⁸³⁶

Hermetism was highly influential in shaping the figure of the Renaissance magus as one who dealt in the occultic sciences, and, in so doing, it contributed to Solomon’s image as an occultist. Thus, an imaginary circle was closed: where Josephus had chosen the mythological god Thoth-Hermes as his model for Solomon, with the aim of glorifying the Jewish people (*ad maiorem gloriam Iudae-*

830 Gershom Scholem, who prepared the manuscript of *Sefer haTamar* for printing, wrote that Solomon is depicted in it as having opposed or even derided hermetic “even though he is very close to that literature”. The Hebrew translation was printed in Jerusalem in 1926. Scholem also brought out a translation into German titled *Sefer Ha-Tamar; Das Buch von der Palme*, Scholem (1926). See Chapter Eight.

831 See also: Idel (1988); Hermann (1999). A demotic papyrus tells of the prince Khmawas, son of Ramses II and the high priest of the Petah temple, who heard of a book written by Thoth which recorded all the magic (*hekau*) in the world, including incantations with the power to rule nature. The book was placed in a silver box in Thoth’s tomb.

832 Idel (1983b).

833 And as a Lorenzo de Medici-type figure.

834 See Lelli (2000, 2004); Idel (1988).

835 Quoted in Herrmann (1999, p. 73).

836 Alemanno (2019, p. 33).



Fig. 3 A wall painting from Pompeii depicting Aristotle and Socrates regarding Solomon, who sits in judgment. Roman art: Judgment of Solomon. Naples, National Archaeological Museum. © 2019. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo.

orum) above Egypt,⁸³⁷ the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw Solomon take the form of an ancient Jewish super-sage, greater in occultism than Hermes Trismegistus. Jewish culture could now boast not only an ancient magus of its own but one who could take his place among the other ancient magi in universal wisdom. Yet, Solomon, unlike Moses, was born too late to be regarded as the teacher of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, who was believed to be a contemporary of Moses. Aristotle, on the other hand, postdated Solomon by centuries, and this made possible the invention of a tradition in which the Greek super-sage became Solomon's pupil.

⁸³⁷ See Conzelmann (1992).



Solomon and Aristotle

The correspondence between Solomon and Hermes is marginal when compared to the correspondence drawn throughout the centuries between Solomon and Aristotle. It began, perhaps, in a fresco in the House of a Physician in Pompeii, in which Theodore Feder recognizes a depiction of the famous Judgment of Solomon and identifies the figures of two onlookers staring in astonishment at Solomon's wisdom as representing Socrates and Aristotle.⁸³⁸ As to whence the creator, or commissioner, of the fresco might have drawn this connection, Feder cites a meeting between a Jewish sage and Clearchus of Soli, a pupil of Aristotle's, in Asia Minor (a meeting that could have occurred between 347–345 B.C.E.; based on Josephus' *Against Apion*,⁸³⁹ an echo of the legendary tradition that Greek phi-

⁸³⁸ Feder (2008).

⁸³⁹ See Bar Kochva (2010a). And see Chapter Eight.

losophy originated in Jewish wisdom.⁸⁴⁰ However, Josephus and the Jewish-Hellenist writers appear to have been unfamiliar with Aristotle's writings, and in any event, did not rely on them.⁸⁴¹ Philo was the only Jewish Hellenistic writer who referred to Aristotle, whose cosmology he rejected. In the introduction to *De Opificio Mundi* (On the Creation), Philo wrote that "There are some people who, having the world in admiration rather than the Maker of the world, pronounce it to be without beginning and everlasting, while with impious falsehood they postulate in God vast inactivity".⁸⁴² There were probably Jewish sages who had heard of Aristotle, but in the tales that relate how Jewish sages (and even children) are wiser than the "sages of Athens",⁸⁴³ Aristotle's name remains unmentioned.

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One cannot truly speak of "Aristotelianism" in the singular since it constitutes a vast and enormously diverse corpus (*corpus Aristotelicum*); the plural "Aristotelianisms" would be more accurate.⁸⁴⁴ It would be no less incorrect to focus on scholastic Aristotelianism alone, as beginning in the thirteenth century, the Christian West experienced an infusion of scientific literature via translations of Greek and Arabic texts into Latin.⁸⁴⁵ In Chapter Four we saw that, in the fresco *Trionfo di san Tommaso d'Aquino*, Aquinas represented the importance of knowledge in the "various wisdoms" beyond merely the *trivium* and *quadrivium*; recall that the figures at the bottom of the fresco represent not only philosophy (Aristotle) but also astronomy, geometry (Euclid), arithmetic (Pythagoras), and so on. At Thomas Aquinas' request, a Dominican friar translated Ptolemy,⁸⁴⁶

840 On the antiquity of this tradition, see Bar Kochva (2008).

841 The *Greek Alexander Romance* tells about a letter he wrote to Aristotle on India, but Aristotle is not mentioned in the medieval Hebrew versions. See Gunderson (1980). Joseph Dan writes that the image of Alexander in the Hebrew versions as a philosopher king was influenced by his having been tutored by Aristotle; see Dan (1969, p. 17). But this is merely a hypothesis. See also: Yassif (2006).

842 1 *Philo*, Trans. Francis Henry Colson (1994, I., LCL, MXMXX, p. 9).

843 *Bekhorot* 8b; *Midrash Lamentations* 1, 4F; *Derekh erez rabba*, 5, 2.

844 See Schmitt (1983).

845 By translators such as William of Moerbeke (c. 1120–1286).

846 Around the year 1230, Johannes de Sacrobosco (c. 1175-c. 1256), a French friar, scholar, and astronomer, published his book *Tractatus de Sphaera* (On the Sphere of the World), based on Claudius Ptolemy's influential *Almagest* (second century C.E.), which had been translated into Latin in 1175 and studied for about four hundred years at European universities. That the combination of occultism and astronomy was not well received is demonstrated by the case of Cecco d'Ascoli (1257–1327), a physician and encyclopedist who wrote a commentary on the

Hero of Alexandria, Galen, and others. Influenced by these translations, Roger Bacon wrote on the benefit of mathematics to the study of physics (*Mathematicae in Physicus Utilitas*) and on the subject of experimental knowledge (*De Scientia Experimentalis*).⁸⁴⁷

Aristotle was revived in the Christian West hundreds of years after the Church excommunicated those who took an interest in the natural sciences.⁸⁴⁸ He was almost forgotten from the fourth century C.E.⁸⁴⁹ until his rediscovery in West via the translation of his works into Arabic and his appropriation by the Muslim world.⁸⁵⁰ After 1255, it was impossible to halt the spread of Aristotelian philosophy, though its reception by the Roman Catholic Church was attended by acute internal controversy and the Pope had forbidden the study of Aristotle during the early thirteenth-century.⁸⁵¹ When the ban was lifted in the middle of the century and the full corpus of Aristotle's writings was translated into Latin, his reputation became that of the consummate philosopher and source of authority; Dante, in his *Paradiso*, described him as "*Maestro di color che sanno*" (the Master of Those Who Know) and situated him in Limbo.⁸⁵² Paul and Tertullian's declarations that an abyss separated "Athens" (Greek philosophy) from "Jerusalem" were quenched. The cardinal question that arose was whether it was possible to close the gap between what was perceived as Aristotle's most egregious error—namely his view that the world had always existed—and belief in a Creator, in the theology of creation and revelation, in miracles, in

book in which addressed the subject of demonology; he was subsequently accused of heresy and finally burned at the stake in Florence.

847 See Rossi (1968).

848 See Sorabji (1990). On Aristotle and magic see Thorndike (1964, Vol. 1, p. 139). In Clement of Alexandria, there are allusions to the exoteric and esoteric writings of Aristotle. See Jean Daniélou (1973, Vol. 2, pp. 130–135). He writes that "the Aristotle of the second century was the Aristotle of exoteric writing".

849 In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes that when he was twenty, he read Aristotle's *Ten Categories* and derived no benefit from it. Augustine (1961, pp. 87–88).

850 The main work that introduced Aristotle's natural philosophy to the West is *Kitāb al-Mudkhal al-Kabīr fī 'Ilm Aḥakām al-Nujūm* (The Book of the Great Introduction to the Science of Judgement of the Stars) by the Persian astronomer al-Balkhi (787–886); it was translated into Latin in 1133 by John of Seville under the title *Introductorium in Astronomiam*. See also: Burnet (2001); Dod (1982).

851 In 1210, the authorities of the University of Paris, instructed by Pope Gregory IX, ordered the burning of translations of Aristotle's work on physics and mathematics, but by 1255, it was impossible to halt the spread of Aristotelian philosophy, and all of Aristotle's writings were now studied at the university. See Copleston (1959, pp. 232–238).

852 Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, Canto IV:131. In Dante's *Convivio* (The Banquet) III.5, Aristotle is "that glorious philosopher to whom nature most laid open".

the ascension of Jesus to Heaven, and even in magic and witchcraft. This was no simple tension to resolve; we have seen how Marlowe's *Faust* ultimately chooses to burn his books, while Goethe's *Faust* recants his belief in occultism, and his despair of philosophy and theology, in a return to "reason".⁸⁵³

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Thomas Aquinas was the major figure in Western Christianity who combined "Aristotelianism" and the Christian conception of the world⁸⁵⁴ to synthesize a Christianized version of Aristotelianism, or perhaps an Aristotlized Christianity.⁸⁵⁵ In H. Tirosh-Rothschild's perceptive formulation, "Aquinas was confident that Aristotle could be shaped to fit Christian perspectives and purposes, and that he, Aquinas, could create and supply the metaphysical teaching to accomplish that transformation. And this, not in order to Christianize the pagan thinker, but rather because some of his theories were valid and true [...] unlike Maimonides, who reduced faith to reason, Aquinas asserted that a qualitative difference exists between faith and knowledge with faith supreme".⁸⁵⁶ The reconciliation that he proposed encountered harsh opposition by the Franciscans and he was condemned,⁸⁵⁷ but once he and "scientific" theology had prevailed, the Catholic Church regarded any criticism of Aquinas or his interpretation of Aristotle as heresy.⁸⁵⁸ However, Aquinas scarcely quotes from the books of wisdom

853 *Faust*, Goethe (1963, I:354–385). See Ohly (1992, pp. 103–121). Roger Bacon ("doctor mirabilis") wrote the *Epistle on the Marvelous Power of Art and of Nature and Concerning the Nullity of Magic* (c.1270).

854 Markus (1961).

855 Elio (2010).

856 Tirosh-Rothschild (1991, pp. 114–115). See also: Ducos and Giacomotto-Charra (2011). The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) writes "As far as Thomas may have pushed the substantial harmonization of faith and Knowledge, he was still unable to escape the real religious and, above all, genuinely Christian paradox that had confronted Paul as the Wisdom of the World" (1 Corinthians 3:19). See E. Bloch (2019, p. 7).

857 Thomas was not the only one. The thirteenth-century Spanish, or Portuguese, scholar Petrus Hispanus (Peter of Spain), whose identity is a matter of controversy, wrote in the book *Tractatus* (later titled *Summulae Logicales*) that Aristotelian logic was *scientia scientiarum*, the foundation of all study and inquiry, a declaration that led to his condemnation by the bishop of Paris in 1277. Peter Damian (c.1107–1072\3), Benedictine monk, cardinal, and reformer, held that philosophy must exist in the service of theology, since logic was concerned only with the formal validity of arguments.

858 A book by the Italian philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), *De immortalitate animae* (On the Immortality of the Soul), which criticized Aristotle and Aquinas's commentary, was burned in Venice; the author's life came under threat as well. Pomponazzi addressed the differ-

attributed to Solomon. Only as a literary protagonist, escorting Dante to the fourth heavenly sphere in the *Divine Comedy*, does he describe Solomon's wisdom like the wisdom of good governance as well as the wisdom to know that there are questions to which the human intellect has no answers.⁸⁵⁹

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*"Aristotle—is the ultimate of humans, save
For those who received the divine over flow".
Maimonides, "Epistle to Samuel Ibn Tibbon", 1199⁸⁶⁰*

The Aristotelian corpus first entered Jewish culture in the first half of the thirteenth century, initially in the south of France and in Italy, and not only via Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.⁸⁶¹ This new influence provoked a serious controversy between "Aristotelian" and "anti-Aristotelian" thinkers (the former dubbed Aristotle "the philosopher", while the latter termed him "the Greek"). The controversy led to a ban on his books, which were labeled "books of heresy" in the communities of France and Spain.⁸⁶²

The Jewish opposition to Aristotelianism was multifaceted.⁸⁶³ Its most radical critics were Kabbalists who regarded the philosophy of the "Greek sages" in general as the work of Satan and as "forbidden wisdom"; they viewed Aristotle

ence between Platonism (and Hermetism) and Aristotelianism: "The Platonic method of philosophizing by means of enigmas, metaphors and images, which Plato used very frequently, was condemned by Aristotle who completely rejected it". Quoted in Garin (1983, p. 105). Martin Luther described the Catholic church as "Thomist", i.e., Aristotelian. Philosophy, he writes, could not encompass the notion of trans-substantiation; hence, "the divine spirit is stronger than Aristotle". See Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520), Weimarer Ausgabe, VI: 497–573. Luther regarded Aquinas as a man leading Christianity on a false path, and believed it was no wonder that the Thomist theologians in Paris called him "the enemy of science and philosophy". In this context, it is quite ironic that Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) defended Galileo by means of the legend that held that Pythagoras was of Jewish origin, or, alternatively, had studied the Mosaic law. Campanella, in other words, argued that Galileo was following in the footsteps of Moses and Pythagoras rather than those of Aristotle, and that he was correct in maintaining that the sun was central in the celestial system. In relying on Aristotle, the Church was in fact deviating from the holy scriptures. Campanella (1622 [1994]), pp. 1–34, 119–121.

859 Dante, *Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, Canto XIII:97–123.

860 In Kraemer (2008, p. 443).

861 Mavroudi (2015, pp. 28–59); Freudenthal (2013). The archetype of a Jewish magus, or polymath, emerged during the Renaissance under the influence of the image of the Renaissance Man. See Borchardt (1990). Also see Bianchi et al. (2016).

862 The first polemic lasted from 1232–1235 and the second from 1303–1306.

863 See Schwartz (2018).

as the most dangerous representative of this defilement.⁸⁶⁴ Thus, for example, the editor of R. Judah Hayyat's commentary on *Ma'arekhet ha'Elohut* (The System of Divinity) issued a stark condemnation:

"We have also seen that the books of Aristotle and his pupils have spread far and wide and that many of our people are abandoning the study of Torah and hastening to study these theories, though they contain fallacious views and though they who follow them have deviated from the ways of faith and though they are contradictory in the main [...] And we say raze it, raze it to its foundation".⁸⁶⁵

The commentator and preacher Gedaliah ben Joseph (c. 1515–1587) went even further. He relates the legendary tradition according to which Aristotle read Solomon's books, that Aristotle had ultimately discovered that philosophy was a sinister realm, that those who believed in philosophy would perish, and that the Torah, in contrast, was the wellspring of life. If Aristotle could, he would have gathered all of his books and burned them; better to suffocate than to allow his philosophical work to be disseminated.⁸⁶⁶ Judah ben Solomon al Ḥarizi (c. 1165–1234\5), who translated the *Maxims of Philosophers* into Hebrew, wrote that in their first year of study, pupils should learn the moral teachings of Aristotle; only in the tenth and final year should they be taught his philosophy.⁸⁶⁷ The book claims to impart the rules of moral conduct that Aristotle advised Alexander the Great to adopt and follow.⁸⁶⁸ Alexander's mother is said to describe Aristotle not only as exceptionally wise but as a guide towards goodness—a teacher of moral values devoid of skepticism. The book *Sefer haTapuach* (*Risālat al-Tuffāḥa*; *Tractatus de pomo et morte incliti principis philosophorum*; *The Book of the Apple*) is a Hebrew-language translation of a text originally written in Arabic and attributed to Aristotle; its translator, Abraham Ibn Ḥasdai, explains that he chose to bring the words of that philosopher—that great sage and master of all sciences—to the Hebrew-language reader, as they would persuade skeptical Jews who did not believe in the afterlife of the soul. Aristotle, after all,

864 Idel (1983a, pp. 185–266.).

865 The book was printed in Mantua, and cited in Bar-Levav (2011, p. 316).

866 Gedaliah ibn Yahya, *Sefer Shalshet ha-Kabbala* (1578). By 1962 the book had been printed six times, most recently in Jerusalem in 1961. The words quoted appear in an appendix on the genealogy of the Jewish people that deals with the history of the nations among which the Jews have dwelled.

867 *Sefer Shalshet ha-Kabbala*, Part I, Chapter 11. On *Maxims* see Chapter Eight.

868 The Book, ascribed to Aristotle, was edited in Persian and English by David Samuel Margoliouth, 1892.

confessed on his deathbed that he believed in the afterlife and the Creation *ex nihilo*.⁸⁶⁹

The influence of the “Aristotelian sciences” constitutes an important chapter in Jewish intellectual history due to its place in the chronicles of Jewish philosophy⁸⁷⁰ and science.⁸⁷¹ The sciences were introduced into the Jewish intellectual milieu not only through Maimonides but also via translations of Aristotle to Arabic and Hebrew and through the corpus of Hebrew-language books written under the influence of the Aristotelian and anti-Aristotelian corpora.⁸⁷² This latter group includes, among others, *Ruah Hen*, a basic book for the study of Aristotelian sciences that appeared anonymously in the second half of the thirteenth century, apparently in the south of France, and was read for [several] generations thereafter.⁸⁷³ For Rabbi David Messer Leon (c. 1470 – 1526), Thomas Aquinas modeled the successful merger of faith and *studia humanitatis*, or a secular curriculum (he was not alone in his interest: in 1490, the Talmudist Jacob ben David Provençal wrote to R. David about the importance of secular studies, particularly medicine). Johanan Alemanno suggested a four-stage curriculum of study—with each stage lasting seven years—in which Aristotle played a major role. Students

869 Maimonides wrote in his epistle that the Book of Apple belongs to “the spurious works ascribed to Aristotle and it is a “drivel, inane and vapid”. See Kraemer (2008, p. 443).

870 The entry on Aristotelianism in the *Otzar Israel* encyclopedia writes about “Aristotle’s aggressive government towards the Jews of that time” and remarks that “from the time that Aristotle’s views became known to the sages of Israel, a terrible revolution occurred in their ways of thinking and modes of study, and even in our own time we sometimes find signs of that influence in the books of rabbis and the ‘researchers’ who unthinkingly use their true source”, Kraemer (2008, p. 213). The historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) wrote: “Once the supremacy of Aristotelian philosophy was finally broken by English naturalism and by the boost which philosophy got from the Cartesian principle of ‘I think, therefore I am’, Judaism also had to search around for another principle. The Aristotelian-Maimonidean system could no longer satisfy”. Graetz (1975, p. 119).

871 Their influence on Jewish culture in general was minimal. This is demonstrated by, among other things, a comparison between the dissemination of philosophic literature and that of various types of religious literature at the beginning of the age of print via the reading culture of the Jews in the duchies of Mantua. See Baruchson (1993). Esti Eisenmann points out that even those who opposed rationalism in the Middle Ages used Aristotelian philosophy to explain natural phenomena, or to prove its limitations in arriving at an understanding of the world. See Eisenmann (2015).

872 On the corpus see Zonta (2011). Some of the literature on this subject is addressed in Sela (2003); Glasner (2011).

873 The history of the book, its contents, and its readers are the subject of a comprehensive doctoral thesis: Elior (2010). Elior suggests that the author may be Yaacov Anatoli, who lived during the thirteenth century and was the first to translate Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus.

would study rhetoric based on his *Organon*, and natural science and divinity (metaphysics) based on “Aristotle’s Books of Nature and Divinity”.⁸⁷⁴

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Aristotle, whose “rediscovery” in the Latin West in the thirteenth century and subsequent “canonization” were perceived as a distinct manifestation of Catholic Europe’s exit from the “Dark Ages” and its restoration of reason,⁸⁷⁵ had become by the seventeenth century⁸⁷⁶ a figure of great authority, and the fact that he was now championed by the Catholic church⁸⁷⁷ began to obstruct the development of the new science. The emerging challenges to the validity of Aristotelian science did not escape the notice of contemporary Jewish thinkers, whose need for a legendary tradition about Solomon as the source of Aristotle’s wisdom lessened but was not entirely extinguished. Importantly, there was no need for a new legendary tradition in which yet another ancient philosopher would take Aristotle’s place. On the contrary, seventeenth-century Christian philosophers could found support in the words of *Wisdom of Solomon* that God “has disposed of all things in number, weight and measure”.⁸⁷⁸ Other indirect references to Solomon and his books are also found in the work of Galileo Galilei (1561–1642), who asserted that Moses and King Solomon—not Aristotle—“knew the constitution of the universe perfectly”. Francis Bacon quoted Ecclesiastes on the impor-

874 Idel (1979). Alemanno’s division of the sciences into different spheres was also based on the Aristotelian division, and at least in one case—that of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), the poet, biblical commentator, astronomer, and neo-Platonic philosopher—the division into seven was in keeping with Proverbs 9:1: “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars”. See Wolfson (1925) (reprinted in Wolfson (1973, pp. 493–545).

875 A one-dimensional picture of this sort is suggested in Rubenstein (2003); and C. Freeman (2002).

876 During the Renaissance there were already those who rejected Aristotle’s absolute authority in every domain and instead advocated empiricism and reason.

877 Martin Luther wrote that in the universities, “the only one who rules is the idolatrous teacher who is blinder than Jesus”; he suggested discontinuing the study of the literature on physics, metaphysics, and ethics, from which nothing could be learned about the soul or mind. He claimed this because he himself had carefully read, and thoroughly understood, Aristotle. He was prepared to reconcile himself to the study of Aristotle’s books on logic, rhetoric, and poetics, but without commentaries. Luther, “An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung” (1520), Weimarer Ausgabe VI: 404–469. Though Luther rejected Thomist Aristotelianism, Aristotle played an important role in the development of Lutheranism and in the curricula of German universities—largely through the influence of the Lutheran theologian and “humanist” Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560).

878 Cited in Shapin (1998, p. 46).

tance of wisdom and learning, through which one might gain release from the dictatorship of the Aristotelians and advance beyond the Greek philosopher.

Francis Bacon, in his revolutionary essay *The Advancement of Learning* (1804) presents Solomon as a model of a king who encourages and establishes free science: “By virtue of which grant or donative of God Solomon became enabled not only to write those excellent parables or aphorisms concerning divine and moral philosophy but also to compile a natural history of all verdure [...] Nay, the same Salomon the king, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping, and navigation [...], yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of inquisition of truth”.⁸⁷⁹ In his *Nova Atlantis*, Bacon described an academy called “Salomon’s House” which contained a portion of his writings. Bacon mentions only one such book by name: *Natural History*, which Solomon composed on the subject of flora and fauna, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall and all that lives and creeps upon the earth—a book, in other words, about zoology and botany, which fields belonged under Bacon’s classification scheme to the sphere of “natural philosophy.”⁸⁸⁰ Bacon’s “Salomon’s House” was a “research institute” engaged in empirical research in all spheres, and did not represent its activity as miraculous or supernatural.⁸⁸¹

It is not my intent here to detail the controversy regarding occultism, Hermetism, and empirical science, nor the differences between them. Thorndike finds the difference in, among other things, the fact that occultism has nothing new to say, while science advances and innovates constantly without need to rely on ancient authorities. To reinforce this view, he cites Roger Bacon’s observation that many things known in his time were not yet known to Plato or Aristotle, to Hippocrates or Galen. Another source of support is Peter of Spain, who wrote that while the ancients were philosophers, he and his contemporaries were experimenters.⁸⁸² One must add that it is important to distinguish between occultism and speculative science, or science based on false assumptions. That’s still empirical science though. In any event, in general, a scientist is not obliged to seek a correlation between a scientific theory and a sacred or authoritative text.

To return to Solomon, views such as those expressed by Bacon were incapable of undermining believers’ faith in *prisca sapientia*, since any new theories, scientific discoveries, and inventions had already been encoded in his books.

879 F. Bacon (1974, p. 40).

880 In Bruce (1999, pp. 167, 175).

881 See Lomas (2002). Newton, for his part, believed that Solomon used ancient esoteric doctrine in planning the Temple.

882 Thorndike (1964, Vol. 2, p. 979).

Jewish scholars faced the dilemma of deciding whether to change the strategy of their claims and assert that the “new science” was already known to Solomon—but they preferred to attribute that knowledge to the Sages, or to deny its validity. For example, a Jewish physician from Mantua, Abraham Portaleone (d. 1612), claimed in his book *Shiltei hagibborim* (Shields of the Heroes) that many of the new scientific theories had already been known in the time of Solomon. The paradox underlying this kind of claim is that only once the new science had formulated these theories and invented these inventions was it possible to “discover” that Solomon had gotten there first. Claims such as Portaleone’s served primarily to justify the contemporary engagement in scientific activity, rather than to argue that the sciences were known in ancient times.

Wisdom versus Wit

*“But, one thing comforts me,
when that I consider and see
there is so great a company,
me to sustain in my folly
of folks that to fore have be
of wonder great authority
as was King Solomon, and Virgil of great renown,
Cyprian, and Abelard,
And many another in this art”*
Guillaume de Deguileville, *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 18729–18738

During the 16th century, numerous “Solomon plays” in which Solomon serves as a model of a perfect ruler were written in Germany. Among them are Baumgart’s *Juditium Solomonis* (1561), and Sixtus Birck’s (1501–1554) tragicomic play *Sapientia Solomonis* (The Wisdom of Solomon, Basel, 1547)⁸⁸³ in which the eponymous king is described as “righteous, wise, knowledgeable, rich, and powerful (*pius, sapiens, cortatus, dives est potensque*”), his wisdom unsurpassed by any other (*quo nullus est sapientior*”). He earned his fame because of his reputation for wisdom. God sent Wisdom to be his life companion and to guide him, and she brought with her two companions: “Justice, Joined in sure alliance with Peace”. The play was performed (in English) by the boys of Westminster School

⁸⁸³ Adapted to the stage by Hermann Kirscher of Marburg in 1591. See Beam (1920).

before Queen Elizabeth in January 1565/6.⁸⁸⁴ The “lesson” the Queen was supposed to learn from Solomon’s example was how a king should act:

“Heavenly King, who rules magnificently by Thy virtue, who wieldest the scepters of justice, give sovereignty to the King; give him the government of the state an inviolable justice so that he may rule the people with fair laws; that he, as protector, may set free the good by justice and restrain the guilty by rigid law; that he may give charitable aid to those miserably effected [...] The king, just judge of the wretched, the distressed, judge of the poor, righteous judge of the needy, the King, Solomon, will give laws for the pious. The King will resolve any quarrel among fierce adversaries. There shall be no room from oppression in this King”.⁸⁸⁵



Fig. 4 King Salomon and Marcolphus © Wikimedia Commons

Solomon’s wisdom was a frequent subject in popular literary works. The *Dialogus Solomonis et Marcolfi*, the first version of which appeared in the tenth century, exemplifies the trend: it is a parodic work⁸⁸⁶ in which King Solomon and a peasant called Marcolfus (Marcolf),⁸⁸⁷ who is no fool, engage in a comedic battle of

884 Payne (1938). In Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock’s play *Salomo* (1764), Solomon’s wisdom is described as “boatful (*“verstiegene Weisheit”*)”. In Paul Heyse’s play *Die Weisheit Solomons* (Berlin, 1896), Solomon acknowledged the love of Sulamit (from Song of Songs) for the shepherd Hadad, proclaiming that “the beginning of all knowledge is man’s joy at the joy of others”.

885 Paul Heyse, *Die Weisheit Solomons*, Act III, Scene viii, 95–96. In the epilogue, Solomon is “*Regis typus sapientis*” (the model of wise king): “he was pious and wholly dedicated to God. While he was serving Him faithfully and making a sacrifice, holy and sweet to the nostrils of God, he obtained his wish from heaven. Solomon sought wisdom alone; he achieved it. At the same time peace was given to him, and justice. He did not lack the bright ornaments of modesty. He knew /how to temper with mercy....”, 128/129.

886 Bayless (1996).

887 The predecessor of the character Till Eulenspiegel, 1510–11, apparently based on earlier traditions. Luther refers to Marcolf as “Markolf the mocking bird”.

verbal wit⁸⁸⁸; Marcolf's wit ultimately triumphs over Solomon's wisdom. In one version, Solomon describes himself as a lover of wisdom—*prudenciam semper amo*—exclaiming to Marcolf, “Your words are boorish, but mine are of wise men”. To which Marcolf, who describes himself as “a trickster, base, defective, ignorant”, replies, “You speak like a wise man, I speak like a man mocking. Wise men praise you, [the] unwise follow me”.⁸⁸⁹ In any event, Solomon's wisdom emerges intact and is actually enriched by the challenge Marcolf poses to it.⁸⁹⁰ The story was adapted by the German mastersinger, poet, play writer (and shoemaker) Hans Sachs (1494–1576) and by Hans Folz (c. 1437–1513), both residents of Nuremberg. Sachs's version, *Fassnacht-Spiel—mit 4 Personen zu agiern: Von Joseph und Melisso, auch König Salomon* is about two residents who complain about their troubles and decide to seek Solomon's advice. The king advises the rich and unpopular one to seek love, and the other to beat his wife. In the interim, Solomon exchanges words with Marcolf and boasts of his books, achievements, and wisdom. Folz, in contrast, used the plot of his *Schwankhandlung, Fastnachtspiel Salomon und Markolf* to have Solomon voice doubts about the honesty of the Kaiser Maximilian I; his Marcolf represented the tension between the city and the village.⁸⁹¹ *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturn* in Old English, which dates from the tenth or eleventh century, is an enigmatic dialogue between Solomon and a Chaldean prince who represents heathen wisdom. Here, I will only bring a few examples of the English text:

Solomon says: “in the embrace of flames \ most greedily bubbleth. \ Therefore hath the canticle \ over all Christ's books \ the greatest repute: \ it teacheth the scriptures, \ with voice it directeth, \ and its place it holdeth, \ heaven-kingdom's \ arms it wieldeth”. Saturn says, “I will give thee all, / O Son of David, / King of Israel, / thirty pounds / of coined gold / and my twelve sons, / if thou wilt [will] bring me / that I may be touched, / through the word of the canticle, \ by Christ's lime[...].” To which Solomon answers, “Wretched is he on earth / useless

888 On the book and its various incarnations, see Ziolkowski (2008); Paquet (1924); Duff (1892). In *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Solomon is quoted as saying that “The man who ventures nothing wins neither horse nor mule”, to which Marcolf (Malcon) replies: “The man who ventures too much loses both horse and mule”. Rabelais (1976, p. 112). A modern version of that dialogue is also found in Paquet (1924).

889 Ziolkowski (2008, p. 286). See also: Bose (1996, pp. 193–197); Zemon Davis (1975, pp. 227–267).

890 Griesse (2017), “Eine Autorität gerät ins Wanken: Markolfs Worte und Taten gegen Salomon in der Literatur des Mittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit”, in *Die Bibel in der Kunst* (BiKu), 2017; Payne (1938, pp. 30–39).

891 See Dietl (2001); Paquet (1924); Folz, Hans: *Das Spiel von dem König Salomon und dem Bauern Markolf*.

in life, / devoid of wisdom, / like the neat he wandereth / that move over the plain, / the witless cattle, who through the canticle cannot / honour Christ.” Later Saturn asks: “But how many shapes will the devil and Pater Noster taken when they are counted together?” “Thirty shapes,” Solomon replies, and describes them at length.⁸⁹²

892 The quotations are from the translation by Kemble (1848). He writes that “it can hardly excite our surprise, when we find at time a most solemn and serious piece of mystical theosophy reappearing in another form of a coarse but humorous parody” (3). See also Anlezark (2009); Powell (2005).