

The Images of Mary in the Litany of Loreto

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The titles for Mary in the Litany of Loreto derived from the titles for the Great Lady in Solomon's temple. Known as the Queen of Heaven and Wisdom, she was the Mother of the LORD, but denigrated by the title Asherah. She was purged from the temple by King Josiah in 623 BCE. Traces of her survive in the Bible and other ancient texts, and in icons of the Mother of God, but most remarkably in the Akathist Hymn of the Orthodox Church, and in the Litany of Loreto.

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The origin of the *Litany of Loreto* is not known.¹ In form it is like many other Marian litanies, and some of the titles for Mary were known by 431 AD, when Cyril of Alexandria delivered his elaborate homily during the Council of Ephesus.² There are earlier examples of her titles, evidence of an established and consistent pattern, much of which draws on Old Testament imagery.³ Many of the titles, though, have no obvious link to Mary's role of the Mother of our LORD, and so there are the questions: were these Old Testament images taken at random? Do they have any actual link to Mary as the Mother of our LORD? Thus, in the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary is described as Mother of Christ, Mother most Pure, Mother of the Saviour, but what of the others such as Mirror of Justice, Seat of Wisdom, Mystic Rose, Tower of David, Tower of Ivory, Golden House, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star?

¹ This article was written to celebrate the occasion of the appointment of the Rt Rev. Martin Warner to the Suffragan See of Whitby, in the Anglican Archdiocese of York. Dr Warner continues to be a significant figure in the Ecumenical Society of Mary, as well as a Guardian of the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

² Cyril of Alexandria, Homily 4, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (= PG), 77, 992.

³ L.-M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 70 cites the ark, the temple, the tabernacle, the throne, the golden vase, the lamp, the burning bush, the closed gate, the fleece of Gideon, the rod of Aaron.

All these titles have taken on a life of their own after centuries of love and prayer,⁴ but did they originate in the mind of the composer — albeit in the earliest years of the Church — or in something he knew that we no longer know? Was there an oral tradition about Mary, much older than the first known texts of this Litany and others similar, an oral tradition known perhaps to Cyril in the early fifth century? There is a remarkable similarity between the images used by Cyril and the ancient *Akathistos Hymn* and the *Kanon of the Akathist*⁵ of the Orthodox Church,⁶ and those in the *Litany of Loreto*, but the titles do not correspond. Of the titles in the *Litany of Loreto*, only ‘Ark’ appears also in the *Akathistos Hymn*, and there was a Latin translation of this as early as the ninth century.⁷ The *Litany of Loreto*, however, did not draw on it, which suggests a common tradition of understanding the role of Mary rather than literary dependence. Nor does the *Litany of Loreto* compare Mary and Eve, as had been done at least since the time of St Justin Martyr in the mid second century.⁸

All the titles suggest an origin not in the nativity story in the New Testament, but in the Wisdom tradition, attested in the Old Testament and also in several ancient Jewish texts that did not become canonical. Now known as the *Pseudepigrapha*, they were preserved only by the Church, which indicates their importance to Christians. A story from first-century Palestine says they were to be shown only to the wise: ‘For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of Wisdom and the river of knowledge’ (2 Esdras [4 Esdras] 14.47). ‘Wisdom’ was one of the titles for the Lady of Solomon’s temple, and writings of her devotees and disciples are known as Wisdom texts. Some six centuries before the time of Jesus, there had been a great ‘reformation’ in Jerusalem, and the female figure we glimpse as Wisdom had, until that time, been honoured in the temple as the Mother of the LORD. As early as the *Protevangelion of James*,⁹ Mary was portrayed as Wisdom, and even though this text never became canonical, it has always been the account depicted in the Nativity ikon. The role of Mary is discerned not only in the ‘mainstream’ texts, but also in the art, liturgy, and popular devotion which sometimes have no obvious link to other written sources.

Mary as Wisdom is part of a bigger picture, because the Christians also preserved the traditions and teaching of the Jerusalem temple. This was neither the building nor

⁴ For recent examples see e.g. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Meditations on the Litany of Loreto for the Month of May*. Text in P. Boyce, *Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Newman* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001); or R. Klaver, *The Litany of Loreto* (London: Herder, 1954).

⁵ I quote Arch. Ephrem Lash’s translations of the *Akathistos Hymn* and the *Kanon of the Akathist*, at <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/akathist.htm>. For the Greek text, see *Triodion Katanyktikon* (Athens, 1983), pp. 321–33.

⁶ See Peltomaa, *Image*, pp. 49–101.

⁷ Attested in a ninth-century manuscript from St Gall. Latin text from later witnesses in M. Huglo, ‘Version Latine de l’Acatiste’, *Le Museon*, 64 (1951), 27–61. The St Gall scribe deemed the Latin translation poor, implying that he knew the Greek original.

⁸ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100. He contrasted Eve who listened to the serpent and brought forth disobedience and death, with Mary who heard the words of Gabriel and brought forth the Son of God.

⁹ The earliest manuscript evidence is a third-century papyrus of the complete text; translation in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), pp. 38–48; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 57–67.

the corrupt establishment that Jesus knew, but the ancient ideal that his followers sought to restore, 'a spiritual house . . . a holy priesthood' (1 Pet 2.5). The world of the temple and the teaching of its priests was a sophisticated theology that now has to be reconstructed from many ancient texts, but it is clear that this is where Christianity has its roots. The Christians saw in Jesus the fulfilment of temple rites, which foreshadowed his work of salvation (Heb. 9.11–14),¹⁰ and they described him as Melchisedech, the high priest of the ancient royal house who was, in a way we no longer fully understand, the presence of the LORD on earth (Heb. 7.11–22). It was therefore to be expected that Mary was described as Wisdom, the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the LORD on earth. The titles in the *Litany of Loreto*, and in many other praises of Mary, were drawn from the Wisdom tradition.

Pamela Tudor Craig, in her Walsingham lecture 'The Virgin Mary as the Seat of Wisdom',¹¹ asked why the chapter houses of great cathedrals were dedicated to Mary, and why statues of the type known as *Sedes Sapientiae*, the Seat of Wisdom, were so popular. Why, she asked, was the Virgin so strongly associated in the Middle Ages with Councils of Wisdom?

Because the glorious poetry of the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament was taken to apply to her . . . It does no violence to appropriate to the Virgin the Wisdom literature, which, in the Book of Proverbs, in Ecclesiastes, in Ecclesiasticus, is always and most beautifully, a feminine image. The Wisdom literature, the final flower of the Old Testament, was composed in the last four centuries before Christ, under Hellenistic influence.

All of this is undoubtedly correct, but its implications are not. Appropriating the Wisdom literature to the Virgin suggests that there was no real connection other than the feminine gender. 'Hellenistic influence' implies that this was in some way formative or even decisive, that Wisdom was alien to the Hebrew tradition. In this article I shall show that Wisdom was a fundamental figure in the ancient faith of Jerusalem, that the Church claimed Wisdom's titles for Mary from the very beginning, and that by the time the *Litany of Loreto* was composed, the meaning of some of these titles was fading and their significance already lost. The titles in the *Litany* seem to be a summary of a much older tradition.

In the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary as Wisdom is not so explicit as in the much older *Akathistos Hymn* of the Orthodox Church, where she is addressed as: '[The One who surpasses] the knowledge of the wise . . . You that pour light on the minds of believers' (Ikos 2), 'You who trampled on the error of deception' (Ikos 6), '[The one who enlightens] many with knowledge' (Ikos 9), '[You] who gave counsel to those robbed of understanding' (Ikos 10), '[You] who destroy the corrupter of minds' (Ikos 10), '[The One who] guides all to divine knowledge' (Ikos 11). The date of this Hymn is disputed: many attribute it to Romanos the Melodist, a man of Jewish origin, who worked in Constantinople in the early sixth or the early eighth century,¹² but it could

¹⁰ See M. Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

¹¹ Assumptiontide Lecture, Anglican Parish Church of St Mary and All Saints, Walsingham, 1986 (unpublished).

¹² He was sacristan in the Hagia Sophia, in the reign of Anastasius, but whether Anastasius I or II is not clear.

be older, since the ideas are found in the early Fathers.¹³ In fact, the titles that appear in an extended form in the *Akathistos Hymn*, and in a shorter form in the *Litany of Loreto*, represent one of the little recognised roots of Christian tradition — the high priestly traditions of the temple in Jerusalem that passed into the Church as unwritten teachings. The meaning of the holy of holies was known only to the high priesthood, ‘the matters within the veil’ (Num. 18.7; see also LXX, Num. 3.10), whereas the laity had only to keep the Law: ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law’ (Deut. 29.29). Most of the Marian titles indicate knowledge of the holy of holies, and at the end of the first century AD Ignatius of Antioch said that Jesus the high priest knew the secret things of God.¹⁴

In the *Litany of Loreto*, only one title, Mirror of Justice, *speculum iustitiae*, clearly resembles a title in the Wisdom Literature. In the Wisdom of Solomon 7.26 she is described as the spotless mirror of the power or Glory of God, *speculum . . . Dei maiestatis*. The Greek text here has the spotless mirror of the ἐνέργεια of God, the ‘working’ of God, and there is no Hebrew. This line is, however, one of a triplet in the Hebrew style, suggesting a Hebrew cultural context at the very least: she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, an image of his goodness. Why is Mary the mirror of *iustitia*? The Vulgate uses this word to render the Hebrew *ṣedaqah*, and the Greek δικαιοσύνη,¹⁵ both of which mean ‘righteousness’, and so this is perhaps a better way to understand the word. Now righteousness, in its Hebrew context, describes exactly the role of Wisdom. Righteousness was the process that brought peace, *shalom*, and Wisdom joined all things together, held them in harmony, ἀμύζουσα (LXX Prov. 8.30).¹⁶ ‘Mirror of Righteousness’, the One who shows how God works to bring peace, fits well with the triplet in Wisdom 7.26: reflection of eternal light, mirror of the working of God, image of his goodness. Mary as the *speculum iustitiae* links her to Wisdom.

Of the other titles in the *Litany of Loreto*, the Seat of Wisdom summarises several titles in the *Akathistos Hymn*: ‘A throne for the King’ (Ikos 1); ‘All-holy chariot of him who rides upon the cherubim’ (Ikos 8). In the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is: ‘Fiery throne of the Almighty’ (Ode 1, Troparion); ‘Fiery chariot of the Word’ (Ode 5, Troparion); and ‘Chariot of the spiritual Sun’ (Ode 7, Troparion). Mary is the throne chariot in the holy of holies, seen by Ezekiel, a priest in the first temple in the sixth century BCE (Ezek. 1.3), and recorded in Ezekiel 1 and 10. Jacob of Serug, writing in the late fifth century CE, also knew the chariot throne as an image of the Virgin Mother.¹⁷ The question is: was this a fanciful association, or would Ezekiel himself have known that the throne represented the Virgin Mother? The answer, as we shall see, is that Ezekiel did know of a female figure, described in his visions, but

¹³ Peltomaa, *Image*, p. 114, n. 2.

¹⁴ *Letter to the Philadelphians* 9. See also M. Barker, *The Great High Priest* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 1–33.

¹⁵ For example in Gen. 15.6; Rom. 9.30, 31.

¹⁶ I use LXX to indicate the Old Greek text, or Septuagint.

¹⁷ Jacob of Serug, *On the Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw*, 590.6–7, cited in A. Golitzin, ‘The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug’s Homily “On the Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw”’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 47 (2003), 323–64.

lost in translations. The Lady was Wisdom. The ‘seat of Wisdom’ was not the seat on which Wisdom sat,¹⁸ but was Wisdom herself. The throne in the holy of holies ‘was’ the Lady, and the one enthroned there was her son. Thus she resembled the Egyptian goddess Isis, often depicted with a throne symbol on her head, whose very name meant ‘she of the throne’. The relationship between Wisdom, Isis, and Mary is not easy to establish, but it should not be assumed that the titles of Mary derived directly from Isis and from Hellenistic influence.¹⁹

Before Mary as Wisdom can be explored in detail, however, there are preliminary questions. First: what or who was meant by ‘Wisdom’? She is present throughout the Hebrew Bible, but has been overlooked, often ‘translated’ out of the text, and so an important and indigenous female figure in the oldest religion of Israel can come as a surprise to those schooled in conventional Old Testament study. In the eighth century BC she was the Virgin who would bear a son (Isa. 7.14),²⁰ the woman who would bring forth the great Shepherd of Israel (Mic. 5.3–4), both recognised as prophecies of Mary and Jesus, but not obviously linked to Wisdom. In the fifth century BC, a prophet warned of the Day of the LORD, when the Sun of righteousness [*š^edaqah*, as in the Mirror of Righteousness] would to appear with healing in *her* wings (Mal. 4.2). Since the Hebrew noun ‘sun’ can have a masculine form, this must have been an intended reference to a female figure. She appeared when St John saw the Woman clothed with the sun whose boy child was set on the throne of God, and Satan and his angels were driven from heaven (Rev. 12.1–12). In the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is addressed as the ‘Radiant Dawn’ (Ode 3, Troparion).

The *Book of the Cave of Treasures* says that the magi saw a brilliant star in which was a virgin carrying a child,²¹ and the child wore a crown — an interesting early understanding of St John’s vision. One of the titles in the *Litany of Loreto* is Morning Star, and as the magi saw the star ‘in the east’ that is, at its rising, this would have been a Morning Star (Mt. 2.2). Elsewhere, though, Morning Star is a title for Jesus (e.g. Rev. 22.16), a title with roots in temple tradition,²² and so in the *Akathistos Hymn* Mary is addressed as ‘Mother of the star that never sets’ (Ikos 5). The woman clothed with the sun was the Mother of the LORD, the Mother of the Second Person. The Christians would name her the Bearer or Mother of God, *Theotokos*, a title used by Origen in the early third century, but he was not the first to do so.²³ This title, too, has roots deep in temple tradition.

To set the Lady in her ancient context, we must look briefly at the meaning of the temple itself. The original tabernacle, and the temples built in Jerusalem, all represented the creation, divided by the veil into the visible and invisible worlds. The holy of holies, with the golden chariot throne, was the invisible world of God and

¹⁸ Mary holding the Child on her lap was seen as the throne of Wisdom who was the Child.

¹⁹ For example, W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation* (London: Arnold, 1952), p. 360; R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), pp. 272–74. See rather J. McGuckin, ‘The Early Cult of Mary and Inter-Religious Contexts in the Fifth-Century’, in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. C. Maunder, London (Continuum, 2008), pp. 1–22.

²⁰ Not a virgin, as in many translations.

²¹ E. A. Wallace Budge (trans. and ed.), *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927). Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian (died 373 AD), but now thought to be a fifth- or sixth-century compilation.

²² Thus too Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 19.

²³ For summary, see McGuckin, ‘Early Cult’, p. 9, n. 4.

the angels, the state of uncreated light. The veil, woven from four colours to represent the four elements, represented matter screening the Glory of God and the throne from the material world: 'He encloses the face/presence of the throne and spreads upon it his cloud' (Job 26.9, translating literally). Note that the throne is in a cloud. The holy of holies was beyond matter, and therefore beyond time: a hidden place, often called eternity.²⁴ In Hebrew the two words are written in the same way but voiced differently: *'olam*, eternity, *'alum*, hidden. The mysterious Virgin of Isaiah's prophecy was, literally, the hidden woman, *'almah*, and, as we shall see, she was found in the holy of holies. The great hall of the temple represented the material world; it was the garden of Eden where Adam was the high priest. Rituals in the holy of holies were rituals in eternity, and those who entered the holy of holies passed between heaven and earth. The priests were angels and the high priest 'was' the LORD.²⁵

Other texts show that Wisdom was in the holy of holies, among the angels. Someone writing as 'Solomon' in the first century BC prayed for 'the Wisdom that sits by thy throne. . . Send her forth from the throne of thy Glory' (Wis. 8.4, 10). The Greek text of Ben Sira 24.2 had her speaking in the assembly of the angels,²⁶ and so Mary is described in the *Akathistos Hymn* as 'Initiate of an ineffable counsel . . . Wonder well-known among the angels' (Ikos 2). An ancient poem describing her role in creation (Prov. 8.22–31) says she was brought forth and birthed before the material world was created, in other words, in the state represented by the holy of holies, but her role in the holy of holies is not clear because the Hebrew of Proverbs 8.23 has several possible meanings. It could mean that she was established or hidden away, and was beside the Creator as he worked.²⁷ Even though the LXX has 'set up', implying the Hebrew root *ysd*, the current Hebrew text is different, and implies the root *suk*, meaning either 'shut in' or 'pour out in anointing'; or the root *nsk*, meaning 'pour out', or 'weave', or 'install'.²⁸ The question then becomes: how was the original poet describing Wisdom in the holy of holies? Was she established or was she hidden away, as Wisdom was hidden away from human eyes (Job 28.21), the hidden woman, *'almah*?²⁹ Or was she poured out in anointing, or was she woven together or was she weaving? The problem in translating some Hebrew texts is that choosing only one meaning for the English translation obscures the rich nuances of the original.

When the early Christians told the life story of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*, they depicted her as Wisdom, given to the temple like the infant Samuel when she was three years old, to fulfil her parents' vow (1 Sam. 1.24–28). The high priest received her, and she delighted everyone by dancing in the temple, just as Wisdom described herself as the Creator's delight, playing before him (Prov. 8.30). The child Mary was fed by an angel (i.e. a priest) and when she reached puberty, the angel of

²⁴ See M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2008 [1991]).

²⁵ See M. Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 12–26.

²⁶ The Latin of Eccles 24.2 is different.

²⁷ The Hebrew of Prov. 8.22, 24, 25 has 'birthing' words: *qnb*, beget and *hll*, give birth; *nskty*, v.23, can be from *skk*.

²⁸ The Hebrew letters *d* and *k* are similar, and the various forms of the Hebrew verb mean that two different verbs can be written in exactly the same way. Context decides how they should be read, but in an unknown context, all possibilities are open.

²⁹ This is a different word for hide.

the LORD told Zechariah to find her a husband. She was a weaver, working on the new veil of the temple, when the angel of the LORD told her she would become the Mother of the Son of God Most High. The story is full of detail whose significance is no longer clear — Mary's mother Anna watching a nest of sparrows, for example — but there is no doubt that Mary was Wisdom. She danced in the temple just as Wisdom, a much loved daughter, played before the Creator (Why else include this apparently trivial detail?), and she helped to weave the new veil for the temple. This detail appears in every icon of the annunciation, where Mary is spinning scarlet wool, but is not mentioned in the New Testament — another indication that Wisdom images are to be found outside the biblical texts. The spindle had been a familiar symbol for centuries, and whilst the evidence of other ancient cultures cannot be considered primary, it can be used to illuminate the biblical tradition. The great goddess of ancient Ugarit, a near neighbour of Israel that shared many literary and cultural styles, held a spindle.³⁰ She was the virgin mother of the sons of El, who were stars,³¹ she was known as the Progenitress,³² the Lamp of the gods, the great Lady Sun,³³ and she suckled the crown prince.³⁴

The *Protevangelium* says that Mary gave birth in a cave, but the imagery it employs is really of birth in the holy of holies, the abode of Wisdom. Joseph had gone to find a midwife, and when they returned, they saw a bright cloud over the cave. The cloud withdrew. They saw a light in the cave, and as the light faded, so the Child appeared to them. In the Hebrew Scriptures, this was how the LORD came to the holy of holies: the cloud covered the tent of meeting/witness³⁵ when the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exod. 40.34). A cloud, which was the Glory, filled the temple when it was consecrated (1 Kgs 8.10–11). King David described the LORD coming from the temple to help him, carried by a thick bright cloud (2 Sam. 22.7, 12–13 // Ps. 18.6, 11–12).³⁶ The cloud invariably accompanied the LORD when he came to his people: to Moses on Sinai (Exod. 19.9); to Aaron over the ark in the holy of holies (Lev. 16.2); over the tabernacle when the Israelites were in the desert (Num. 9.15–23). There was a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night to guide the people through the wilderness (Exod. 13.21–22), and the LORD came to the tent of meeting/witness in the pillar of cloud that stood at the door of the tent (Deut. 31.15). Note that the pillar of cloud is at the door. By the end of the second temple period — and so in the time of Jesus — Wisdom declared that she was enthroned in the pillar of cloud (Ben Sira 24.4 = Ecclus. 24.7), implying that Wisdom brought the LORD to his people and led them through the wilderness (Wisd. 10.17–18). In the *Akathistos Hymn*, Mary is addressed as 'Pillar of fire guiding those in darkness' (Ikos 6), and 'Protection of the world wider than the cloud' (Ikos 6). The bright cloud that carried the LORD was Wisdom, and for the Church the cloud became the sign of Mary. Thus, when the holy family

³⁰ See N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and his Friends* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 93.

³¹ For Asherah, as the mother of the 70 sons of El, see J. Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and North West Semitic Literature', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 105 (1986), 385–408, esp. 387.

³² See Wyatt, *Ugarit*, pp. 87 (n. 9), 91, notes on p. 83.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 113, 224.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁵ This is how the LXX understood the Hebrew *mw'd*; the Hebrew could mean either.

³⁶ The Hebrew, and not Septuagint, numbering of the psalms is used throughout.

fled to Egypt, the idols fell and shattered, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: 'The LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence . . .' (Isa. 19.1),³⁷ and the Church sang: 'For [Egypt's] idols, O Saviour, not able to withstand your strength, fell down, while those who were delivered from them cried out to the Mother of God' (*Akathistos*, Ikos 6).

Was this all a fanciful association with no root in temple tradition, or did the Church preserve the original meaning of those texts? Mary as the bright cloud bearing the LORD is not an image in the *Litany of Loreto*, but it is a good example of the complexity and mutually consistent nature of the ancient imagery preserved in Marian devotion. Isaiah, foretelling the Jerusalem's future Glory, prophesied a cloud by day and fire by night over Zion and its congregations — images from the wilderness wanderings — to be a refuge and shelter for Zion (Isa. 4.5). In the *Litany of Loreto* Mary became that refuge and shelter: 'Refuge of sinners, Comforter of the afflicted, Help of Christians.' Some bitter wordplay in Isaiah (a characteristic of this prophet and of his school) suggests that this cloud did represent a 'motherly' presence. When a later disciple condemned the unfaithful people of Jerusalem, he accused them of being the children of an adulterer and a harlot, accusations often made against the second temple and restored city, after Wisdom had been abandoned and driven from the temple. He accused them of being the children of 'a sorceress'. Why that? Because in Hebrew, 'sorceress' is written in the same way as 'cloud', *'nmb*.³⁸ The priests who had abandoned Wisdom were impure, children of a sorceress, implying that true priests were the 'children of the cloud'.

Hence the Transfiguration, where a bright cloud overshadowed Jesus and a voice said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Mt. 17.5; Mk 9.7; Lk. 9.34). Jesus heard the same words at his baptism, and some early Hebrew Christians said this was the voice of his heavenly Mother: the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, quoted frequently by St Jerome and Origen, has Jesus speaking of his Mother the Holy Spirit. She spoke at his baptism: 'My son, in all the prophets I was waiting for thee, that thou shouldst come and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, thou art my first begotten son, that reignest forever.'³⁹ This was cited by Jerome when expounding Isaiah 11.2, thus linking the Mother, the Holy Spirit, and the Davidic kings. In the *Kanon of the Akathist*, Mary is addressed as 'all-bright cloud that unceasingly overshadows the faithful' (Ode 6, Troparion); and Jesus is described as 'the One seated in Glory on the throne of the Godhead, Jesus . . . who has come on a cloud of light' (Ode 4, Irmos). The Church saw in the three great revelations of the Glory — to Moses at Sinai, to Isaiah in the temple, and to Ezekiel when he saw the chariot throne — the Mother of God bearing the LORD: 'All three doxophanies include in themselves a revelation about the Mother of God as the Glory of the world and the Throne of God.'⁴⁰

³⁷ *Arabic Infancy Gospel* 10–12, possibly compiled in the fifth or sixth century, in A. Cleveland Coxe (ed.) *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1885), vol. 8, pp. 404–15.

³⁸ Although pointed, i.e. pronounced, differently: *'on'nab* = sorceress, and *'nanab* = cloud.

³⁹ Origen, *On John* 2.12; Origen, *On Jeremiah* 15.4; Jerome, *On Isaiah* 11.9; Jerome, *On Ezekiel* 16.13. All in James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 1–8. See also Lk. 11.49. The burden of all these texts is that Wisdom is the one who sends the prophets.

⁴⁰ S. Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. T. A. Smith (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 128.

A close reading of Ezekiel suggests that when he attempted to describe the Glory of the LORD leaving the temple and going to Babylon, he did describe the Lady in a bright cloud, but the translators did not expect to find the Lady and so chose other options for the meaning of the text. The Lady is in the detail, but she disappears. Ezekiel saw ‘a great cloud with brightness round about it’. This was the ‘appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD’ (Ezek. 1.4, 28). At the centre of the bright cloud he saw a human figure enthroned, just as Job had described the throne enclosed in a cloud (Job 26.9). This is also what the *Protevangelium* described: ‘Gradually the light diminished until the young child appeared.’ For the *Protevangelium*, Wisdom was giving birth to her child, just as the woman clothed with the sun gave birth to her child in the holy of holies, and he was then set on the throne (Rev. 12.1–6). The *Gospel of Philip*, only extant in Coptic, is found in a collection of material often labelled ‘Valentinian’ or ‘Gnostic’, but is in fact a rich deposit of early Christian temple teaching. It preserves a recollection of this birth from the light, described as the supreme mystery of the faith: ‘The Father of everything united with the Virgin who came down and a fire shone for him on that day. He appeared in the great bridal chamber. Therefore his body came into being on that day. It left the bridal chamber as one who comes into being from the bridegroom and the bride.’⁴¹ The text is broken and not entirely clear, but elsewhere in the *Gospel of Philip* the bridal chamber is to be understood as the holy of holies,⁴² which means that birth there was from the Father, the Virgin, and the fire. The fire is said to be in the anointing oil, ‘the fire whose form is said to be white, bright and beautiful’;⁴³ and the anointing oil itself is the Spirit.⁴⁴ Birth from the Virgin in the holy of holies involved the Spirit, fire, and oil.

Ezekiel saw a bright cloud rising from the temple court as the Glory left (Ezek. 10.3–4), and he described a composite female figure, even though she is invariably translated as plural: ‘the living creatures’. The Hebrew is almost opaque in places — a mixture of singular and plural, masculine and feminine forms — and the most consistent and accurate translation is found in the Authorised Version (which seems confused, but is in fact not) which has preserved the singular where the Hebrew has a singular form: ‘This [or she] is the Living Creature [or Living One] that I saw by the River Chebar’ (Ezek. 10.15); ‘The Spirit of the Living Creature [or Living One] was in them [the “wheels”]’ (Ezek. 10.17); ‘This is the Living Creature [Living One] I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar’ (Ezek. 10.20). When Ezekiel saw the bright cloud by the River Chebar, he saw ‘the Spirit of the Living One within the wheels’ (Ezek. 1.21b, translating literally); he saw ‘the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the Living One, like the gleam of terrible ice [or crystal]’ (Ezek. 1.22, translating literally); and he heard the voice of El Shaddai, a name that means literally ‘God with breasts’ (Ezek. 1. 24; 10.5).

Above the Living One he saw a human figure enthroned, with brightness round about, and the whole picture — the bright cloud, the throne, the fiery human figure

⁴¹ *The Gospel of Philip* §71, trans. W. W. Isenberg, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 143.

⁴² *Ibid.*, §69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, §§57, 67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, §69.

on the throne — was for Ezekiel ‘the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD’ (Ezek. 1.26–28). The ‘temple priest’ (Ezek. 1.3) described the holy of holies as he knew it — the Living One in a bright cloud bearing the God of Israel as a human form, ‘Adam’ (Ezek. 10.20; 1.26). She ‘was’ the cherub throne. On his spirit journey back to the temple, Ezekiel saw the Glory of the God of Israel just as he saw it on the plain in Babylon. The current and almost certainly censored Hebrew text describes the seat of ‘the image of jealousy’, *sml hqn’h* (Ezek. 8.3), but removing one silent letter gives *sml hqnh*, the seat of ‘the image of the Creatrix’, and probably restores the original, especially as this would be the Hebrew equivalent of Progenitress, the title of the Great Lady of Ugarit.⁴⁵ When the prophet saw a vision of the Glory, he saw the seat of the Lady. Those who lamented her expulsion said the priests had lost their spiritual sight and abandoned Wisdom (1 Enoch 93.8); others — including those who transmitted the texts of the current Hebrew Scriptures — said King Josiah had purified the temple.

In the title the Seat of Wisdom, the *Litany of Loreto* sums up an ancient way of describing the Mother of the LORD, and the additional detail found in the *Akathistos Hymn* — that she was the throne of the King, the chariot of the cherubim and the bright cloud — was remembered accurately. Both texts remember something ancient but had received it independently.

The early Christians also remembered the older way of understanding the Hebrew Scriptures, another essential preliminary to any investigation of the titles used for Mary in the *Litany of Loreto*. They had Hebrew texts different from those used for our current translations, and they found in them more than one divinity: there was God Most High, whom they called God the Father, and there was Yahweh, the LORD, the Son of God Most High, just as St Paul explained it: ‘For us there is one God, the Father . . . and one LORD, Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 8.6). Any appearance of Yahweh, the LORD, recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures was an appearance of the Son, as Justin explained to Trypho⁴⁶ in the mid second century. Abraham, for example, saw Yahweh at Mamre (Gen. 18.1), and this was an appearance of the Son. Constantine built a great church at Mamre ‘because it is recorded that here the Son of God appeared to Abraham . . . He who, for the salvation of mankind, was born of a Virgin, there manifested himself to a godly man.’⁴⁷ St John had known this: ‘Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day’ (Jn 8.56), and this understanding of the Old Testament was consistent throughout the early centuries.⁴⁸ Yahweh, the LORD, was incarnate as Jesus. When Isaiah saw the LORD enthroned, he saw the pre-incarnate Jesus (Jn 12.38–41). When Ezekiel saw the human figure enthroned within the bright cloud, the early Christians would have understood this as foreshadowing Jesus and Mary, which explains the bright cloud in the cave at Bethlehem, and Jacob of Serug saying that Mary was the chariot throne which bore the LORD.

There is considerable evidence that the Hebrew Scriptures were changed in reaction to these Christian claims. Justin was saying this in the mid second century, when he

⁴⁵ See Wyatt, *Ugarit*, pp. 87, 91.

⁴⁶ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56–64.

⁴⁷ Sozomenes, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.4.

⁴⁸ See M. Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992).

told Trypho that the Jews had removed parts that were important to Christians.⁴⁹ Pre-Christian biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls are different from the post-Christian Hebrew used today, and are evidence for an older text that knew of God Most High and his mighty angels, the ‘sons of God’ of whom Yahweh was the Firstborn.⁵⁰ The examples Justin used have not been found, but there are texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls with significant pre-Christian readings that did not survive in the later Hebrew, showing that such changes were being made. One of the most remarkable is Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy in the great Isaiah scroll known as 1Q Isaiah A. The current Hebrew text has: ‘Ask a sign of the LORD thy God . . . behold the Virgin shall conceive’, but the Qumran Hebrew has ‘Ask a sign of *the Mother* of the LORD thy God . . . behold the Virgin shall conceive’ (Isa. 7.11, 14).⁵¹ Presumably this is why Elizabeth could say that the Mother of her LORD had come to her (Lk. 1.43). Since the later, altered, Hebrew constituted the basis for Jerome’s Vulgate, these fundamentals have been lost to the Western churches.

All these problems of reconstruction can be traced to King Josiah’s great cultural revolution in 623 BC, when the religion of the temple and the kingdom was changed by force. One generation later the Babylonians sacked the temple, but the real destruction had been the work of Josiah. Piecing together various accounts and memories of those events, it is clear that he expelled a female divine figure and her cult and imposed Old Testament monotheism as we now understand it. The lost Lady was the Queen of Heaven, known as ‘Wisdom’, and she was the main victim of King Josiah’s purge. As a result, students of the Old Testament have not expected to find her, although she can still be glimpsed in damaged and altered texts. Where Wisdom is mentioned, scholars have explained her as a concept or a personification, and a late addition to the tradition. The account of King Josiah’s work in 2 Kings 23 is considered normative, and the purges are described as a ‘reform’. He removed from the temple something called the Asherah, which he burned to dust and cast onto the common graves (2 Kgs 23: 6). It was utterly desecrated, and the houses of the prostitutes, where women wove linen garments for Asherah, were destroyed. This account, however, was written by those who supported Josiah’s actions.

‘Asherah’, the forbidden Canaanite goddess, conceals another of the Lady’s titles. The mother of the king in Jerusalem had been known as ‘the great lady’ (see, for example, 1 Kgs 15.13, where the phrase is usually translated ‘queen mother’), and so the royal couple were mother and son who both had counterparts in heaven. The king ‘was’ Yahweh, the LORD, and his mother ‘was’ the Lady. The first record of a temple purge says that Asa removed his mother from being the great lady of the court because she had made ‘a horrid thing to represent Asherah’ (1 Kgs 15.13, translating literally), presumably because this was her role in the cult. St John saw the Lady in heaven, that is, restored to the holy of holies, and he saw her tree standing [again] by the heavenly throne (Rev. 12.1–6; 22.1–4). The early Christians would not have described Josiah’s work as a ‘reform’.

⁴⁹ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 71–2.

⁵⁰ See Barker, *The Great Angel*, pp. 5–6.

⁵¹ The controversial word ‘*almah*, virgin, is the Hebrew equivalent of the Ugaritic *glmt*, a status restricted to royal women and goddesses; see Wyatt, *Ugarit*, p. 337.

Another poem describes Wisdom as the tree of life, the one who gives true riches, long life, honour, and peace, and makes her followers happy, *'asher*, which is a wordplay on her real name *'Ashratab* (Prov. 3.13–18). The Lady was the tree of life. The story in Genesis which has Adam and Eve rejecting the tree of life, their intended food, and opting instead for the forbidden tree, has long been recognised as a description of losing their glorious state, when they lost the true temple.⁵² Rejecting the tree of life is another reference to rejecting the Lady in the time of Josiah. The perfumed anointing oil — ‘hidden away’ at that time — was blended to imitate the perfumed oil extracted drawn from her tree, the oil that transformed humans into angels and made them wise.⁵³ The tree itself was remembered in later texts as fiery — gold and crimson — and with a wonderful perfume. It stood by the throne of God (2 En. 8.3–4; *Life of Adam and Eve*, 22.4),⁵⁴ just as the tree of life stood by the throne in St John’s vision (Rev. 22.1–4). Enoch saw it on one of his heavenly journeys, the fragrant tree that never withered or faded. After the great judgement, said Enoch’s angel guide, it would be returned to the temple, and its fruit given as food to the chosen ones (1 En. 24.4–25.5; the reference to the return of the Lady, and to the Holy Eucharist, is clear). We recognise the fiery tree as the menorah, described in Exodus (Exod. 25.31–39) as a tree-like object. In the *Akathistos Hymn*, Mary is addressed as ‘Food that replaced the manna’ (Ikos 6), ‘Tree of glorious fruit from which believers are nourished’ (Ikos 7), ‘A lamp that bears the Light’ (Ikos 11).

The other side of the story of the Lady’s expulsion is found in Proverbs 1, in Jeremiah 44 and in 1 Enoch, a text that was Scripture for the early Christians.⁵⁵ It was much used at Qumran, and the remains of many copies have been found. When refugees fled to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, thirty-seven years after upheavals in the time of Josiah, Jeremiah tried to convince them that their sins had caused the disaster, but the refugees would not listen. The disaster happened, they said, because they had ceased to worship the Queen of Heaven, who had protected the city and given them food. They recalled how they had burned incense and poured libations and baked small loaves to represent her (Jer. 44.15–19). 1 Enoch, which preserves much of the ancient temple tradition, incorporates a fragment of stylised history that describes the same events. Just before the temple was burned, the priests lost their vision, because they had godlessly forsaken Wisdom (1 En. 93.8). Wisdom called out to those who had rejected her: ‘I will pour out my Spirit to you, I will make my words known to you’ (Prov. 1.23). She then warned them that as they had rejected her, she would ignore them and punish them by allowing them what they had chosen: ‘Because I have called and you refused to listen . . . I also will laugh at your calamity . . . when distress and anguish come upon you’ (Prov. 1.24–27). These sound like the words of a guardian deity rejected by her people.

Until the time of Josiah, then, the Lady, known as the Queen of Heaven or Wisdom, was the guardian of Jerusalem who gave the priests vision. Those who

⁵² Ezekiel’s vision of the Glory leaving the temple actually describes ‘Adam’, the enthroned human figure, and Eve, *hawwah*, whose name means the same as *hayyah*, the Living One.

⁵³ See Barker, *The Great High Priest*, pp. 129–36.

⁵⁴ See J. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1985): vol. 1, trans. F. I. Andersen, pp. 114f.; vol. 2., trans. M. D. Johnson, p. 281.

⁵⁵ Cf. 1 Enoch (trans. E. Isaac) in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, pp. 13–89.

banished her called her Asherah and linked her to forbidden Canaanite practices, prostitutes, and the host of heaven, that is, the angels. The older texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, however, describe Yahweh as the LORD of Hosts — the same hosts — so they were not always forbidden. After Josiah this title was dropped. And the prostitutes, *q^edešiyim*, when the Hebrew is pointed differently, reappear as the holy ones, *q^edošiyim*, the angels in whose shrines the women wove garments for the Lady. When the Lady appeared again in St John's vision, she was clothed in fine linen, which represented 'the righteous deeds of the saints/holy ones' (Rev. 19.8). More detail about the Lady reappears in the Book of Revelation. Underlying the Greek text was a Hebrew original, where ancient wordplay can still be detected. St John described the evil woman who had usurped the place of Wisdom as 'mother of harlots and of earth's abominations' (Rev. 17.5). In an underlying Hebrew, harlots would have been the same prostitutes who become 'holy ones and angels' with different pointing, and abomination, *mašḥat*, is almost the same as *mašḥah*, the holy anointing oil. Since the evil woman held a cup of abomination and was the mother of harlots and abominations, the Lady whom she had ousted very probably held a cup of holy anointing oil and was the mother of the angels and the anointed ones.⁵⁶

As a result of Josiah's changes, the Moses and Exodus elements in Israel's religion came to prominence, and the older religion of the patriarchs, practised in Judah until that time, was relegated to 'the past'. All of the older divine names were attached to Yahweh, the LORD, the name for Israel's God in the Moses tradition.⁵⁷ Before that there had been God Most High and El Shaddai — 'God with breasts' — and then the sons of God, the mighty shepherd angels who ruled the nations. Yahweh was the Firstborn of these sons, the Shepherd of Israel (Mic. 5.3–4). He was the heavenly King whom Isaiah saw in his vision, enthroned in the temple among the seraphim (Isa. 6.5), a vision the Church remembered as the Mother enthroning her Son. Yahweh, the LORD, was the Son of God Most High, *exactly as Gabriel described him to Mary*, 'He shall be called the Son of the Most High'; and he sat on the throne of David, *exactly as Gabriel described him to Mary*, the human presence of the LORD (Lk. 1.32–33), Immanuel, God with us (Mt. 1.23).

When the Davidic king assumed his royal power, he was anointed and enthroned (Ps. 89.19–20) and became the God and King of his people (Ps. 68.24); in other words, he became the human presence of the LORD, Immanuel, the Son of God Most High. Exactly how this was understood, however, is no longer clear, and the temple ritual has to be reconstructed from fragmented texts, several very familiar to Christians, and several now corrupted and very difficult to read. 'Unto us a child is born' (Isa. 9.6), sang the angels in the holy of holies, and then named the child as the angel who would rule in Jerusalem.⁵⁸ Psalm 110, which is in parts opaque, describes how someone was begotten as the son of God in the Glory of the holy ones,⁵⁹ and became

⁵⁶ See Barker, *Temple Themes*, p. 236.

⁵⁷ See M. Barker, *The Older Testament* (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 167–72; and *The Great Angel*.

⁵⁸ Isa. 9.6 (LXX), the angel of great counsel; cf. the current Hebrew text where the four throne names became those of the archangels Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Uriel. See M. Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 26.

⁵⁹ Reconstructing a damaged Hebrew text from the LXX and Ugaritic parallels. See Barker, *The Older Testament*, pp. 255–57; and N. Wyatt, 'Les Mythes des Dioscures et l'idéologie royale dans les littératures d'Ougarit et d'Israël', *Revue Biblique*, 103 (1996), pp. 481–516.

a priest like Melchizedek. Thus Jesus answered his Jewish critics by appealing to a tradition they all accepted: ‘Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming” because I said “I am the Son of God”?’ (Jn 10.36).

Yahweh, the LORD, was the Son of El Elyon, and he had a Mother who was banished from the Jerusalem temple in the seventh century BCE, banished but not forgotten. She was remembered as the Queen of Heaven and as Wisdom, and it was her images and titles that appeared in Marian devotion.

The Son of God was ‘born’ in the holy of holies, as we have seen implied in the *Protevangelium*, and as is described in Psalm 110. The Hebrew of the psalm, however, is damaged beyond any certain reconstruction. The crucial but unreadable verse 3 mentions begetting, a womb, dew, and a morning star, ‘Shahar’, a name known from Ugaritic texts as a title of the crown prince.⁶⁰ The line is translated: ‘From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you’ (Revised Standard Version), or ‘From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth’ (Authorised Version). Given what can be reconstructed of the temple context and the evidence of the LXX which reads ‘I have begotten you’ instead of ‘your youth’,⁶¹ it is likely that the line originally described the birth of the king as the Morning Star, the title used for Jesus in Revelation 22.16: ‘From the womb with dew I have begotten you as the Morning Star.’ Morning Star was a title for the mighty angels, the sons of God (Job 38.7), but who was the mother of the Son, and what was the dew?

Eusebius, writing in Palestine early in the fourth century, knew Christians who understood Psalm 110.3 differently.⁶² The Hebrew *mrhm*, ‘from the womb’, was read as *mrym*, ‘Miriam’, which is perfectly possible if they were using the archaic Hebrew script in which the letters *h* and *y* are similar.⁶³ The line would then have been: ‘With dew I have begotten you as the Morning Star from Miriam/Mary.’ The One begotten in the holy of holies was the Son generated in eternity, named as the high priest Melchizedek and sent forth as the King, Messiah, and Son of God. The Christians depicted the Lady, with or without her Son, in the apse of many great churches (for example, in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and in Kiev, or in the cathedrals of Torcello and Murano in the lagoon of Venice). Why did Christian iconographers make this link?

Consecration in a temple context implies the holy oil, which Psalm 133 compares to the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion. An Enoch text also compares the anointing oil to dew, which confirms that the mysterious ‘dew’ at the birth of the Son of God was the myrrh oil, returned by the magi, along with the other symbols of the lost temple.⁶⁴ Enoch says the ‘dew’ transformed the recipient into an angel, that is, into a son of God. The setting is the holy of holies, and Enoch is standing before

⁶⁰ See Wyatt, *Ugarit*, p. 332, where the son of El has two names: Shahar = Morning Star; and Shalem = Evening Star.

⁶¹ The Hebrew *ylityk* can be pointed to mean ‘your youth’, *yalduteyka*, or I have begotten you, *yladityka*.

⁶² Cf. Eusebius, ‘Commentary on the Psalms’, in *Patrologia Graeca-Latina*, vol. 23, col. 1344.

⁶³ The ancient script was used until the time of Jesus on coins and is found in some Qumran texts.

⁶⁴ Thus the story in Budge, *Cave of Treasures*.

the heavenly throne about to be made a high priest: 'The LORD said to Michael, "Go and take Enoch from [his] earthly clothing, and anoint him with my oil of delight and put on him the clothes of my glory." Michael did as the LORD said to him. He anointed me and he clothed me. The appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, its ointment is like sweet dew, its fragrance myrrh, and it is like the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself, and I had become like one of his glorious ones' (2 En. 22.8–10). Anointing was the sacrament of *theosis*; it transformed a human into a divine being, and in the world of the ancient temple this was described as resurrection, or becoming a child of Wisdom (Lk. 7.35; cf. Rev. 12.17).

Much of this is lost in translation: when Solomon was made king, he was seated on the throne of Yahweh and then worshipped as the-LORD-and-King (1 Chron. 29.20–23), but the English Bibles translate this as 'they worshipped the LORD and bowed down to the king', thus obscuring the fact that the-LORD-and-the-king was one and the same. Since Psalm 110, a crucial text about the monarchy, is damaged, and this one is often altered by translators to make 'sense', something very important about the Davidic kings continues to be obscured. The original understanding is that the Davidic kings were transformed by their anointing and enthronement into sons of God, that is, into the human presence of Yahweh. One of their titles was 'Firstborn': 'With my holy oil I have anointed him . . . he shall cry to me "Thou art my Father" . . . and I will appoint him the Firstborn' (Ps. 89.20, 26, 27), and so the early Christians, whose name means 'the anointed ones', were the assembly of the firstborns, enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12.23, translating literally), and the new priesthood (Rev. 1.6). The oil and the throne were, in effect, their Mother or rather, symbols of their Mother, images that would be important in the Church.

Enoch was also robed in a garment of God's Glory, the symbol of resurrection, which is why St Luke emphasised the fact that Mary *wrapped her Firstborn* and set him in a manger, a word which, in Hebrew, sounds very like the ancient name for Jerusalem.⁶⁵ In an early Christian text, Wisdom calls again to those who have deserted her and says; 'I am giving you a high priestly garment woven from every wisdom . . . return to your first Father, God, and to Wisdom your Mother.'⁶⁶ Philo, contemporary with Jesus, used Wisdom imagery that has no obvious basis in the Greek scriptures. He was of high priestly descent,⁶⁷ and so probably knew the temple teachings about the holy of holies that were reserved to the high priesthood, 'the matters within the veil' (Num. 18.7: see LXX Num. 3.10). He knew of a divine couple who were parents of the King,⁶⁸ that God was the husband of Wisdom,⁶⁹ and that the Logos was the Son of Wisdom his mother, through whom (the pronoun is feminine) the universe came into being.⁷⁰ Wisdom was the 'first born mother of all things'.⁷¹ In the *Kanon of the Akathist* Mary is addressed as the one who gave

⁶⁵ Manger is 'ebus; Jerusalem, Jebus, is *yebus*.

⁶⁶ *The Teaching of Silvanus*, Coptic Gnostic Gospel, VII.4.89, 91.

⁶⁷ Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 11.

⁶⁸ *On Drunkenness* 30, in *Philo*, 12 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1929–), vol. 3.

⁶⁹ *Cherubim* 49 in *Philo*, vol. 2.

⁷⁰ *Flight* 109 in *Philo*, vol. 5.

⁷¹ *Questions on Genesis* IV.97, in *Philo*, Supplement vol. 1.

back to human beings the robe of incorruption that they had lost through deception (Ode 8, Troparion).

Memories of Josiah's cultural revolution can be traced for centuries. When the Pentateuch was compiled in the second temple period, allusions to contemporary power struggles were encoded in the stories. In Numbers 12, when Miriam and Aaron challenged the sole authority of Moses, Miriam was stricken with leprosy, the sign of divine wrath, and Aaron begged for her to be spared. She was healed, but had no further place in the story. This was a thinly veiled account of developments in the second temple period: Moses represented the Law, Aaron the high priesthood; and Miriam, the *older* sister, disappeared from the scene, punished for challenging Moses. Despite that story, Miriam was remembered as the Great Lady, the deliverer in Israel.⁷² By the time of Jesus, Aaron was the high priest, as we should expect, and Moses had taken on the role of the ancient kings, as attested by Philo: '[Moses] was named god and king of the whole nation and entered . . . into the darkness where God was.'⁷³ This was the process described in Psalm 110, a man becoming the divine king. Miriam was remembered as Wisdom, the Lady, ancestress of the royal house and thus the mother of the kings of Jerusalem.⁷⁴ *Wisdom was remembered in Jewish tradition as Miriam/Mary.*

All the elements of the birth in the holy of holies are attributed to Mary in the *Akathistos*:

Womb of divine incarnation. (Ikos 1)

You through whom we were clothed with Glory. (Ikos 4)

[The one who shows] the bright image of the resurrection. (Ikos 7)

[The one who reveals] the angels' way of life. (Ikos 7)

Source of spiritual refashioning. (Ikos 10)

[The one who gives] new birth to those conceived in shame. (Ikos 10)

In the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is addressed as: 'Cause of the deification of all' (Ode 6, Troparion).

In the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary is addressed as the throne, *Sedes sapientiae*, but not as the oil. This is curious, since the holy anointing oil was the most important symbol of Wisdom and it was her sacrament. The anointed were her children. It is possible that the oil is concealed in the next title: *Rosa Mystica*, Mystic Rose. All the other titles in the middle section of the Litany are either feminine or neuter nouns; the only exception would have been 'dew', which is the masculine, *ros*. If a feminine form of 'dew' had been devised, it would have been *rosa*, giving the title 'the Mystic Dew', the oil by which the Mother gave birth to her children, but now more literally rendered as Mystic Rose. Mary as source of the dew appears in the *Kanon of the Akathist*: 'You dropped down the dew that quenched the flame of idolatry' (Ode 7 Troparia), and she is then described as the fleece Gideon saw wet with dew (Jud. 6.36–40). Gideon's fleece and the Mystic Rose may both indicate the loss of the original context and so of the original meaning of the dew, but both would also witness to the early use of this image before that temple context was lost.

⁷² *Exodus Rabbah*, trans. S. M. Lehrman (London: Soncino, 1961 [1939]), XXV.1.

⁷³ Philo, *Life of Moses I*, in *Philo*, vol. 6, p. 158.

⁷⁴ *Exodus Rabbah* XLVIII.4.

There were many memories of the first temple and the loss of the Lady. In the time of the Messiah, the Jews said, when the true temple was rebuilt, the menorah,⁷⁵ the ark, the Spirit, the fire, and the cherubim would be restored,⁷⁶ along with the anointing oil, which had been hidden in the time of Josiah, the manna, and the high priestly staff.⁷⁷ *All these were associated with the Lady* and these later Jewish traditions link the return of the Lady with the coming of the Messiah. This also survives in Christian tradition: St John saw the kingdom of the Messiah established when the Lady appeared again in the heavenly temple and when the long lost ark was restored (Rev. 11.15–12.6). The *Arabic Infancy Gospel* expanded the text of Mary bringing the Child to the temple: ‘Simeon saw him shining like a pillar of light when the Lady Mary, His Virgin Mother, rejoicing over Him, was carrying Him in her arms. And angels, praising Him, stood around Him in a circle.’⁷⁸ This, surely, was the LORD and his Mother, returning to their temple.

In the *Akathistos Hymn* Mary is addressed with titles that show she has restored the true temple:

All-holy chariot of him who rides upon the cherubim (Ikos 8); [thus, the cherubim are restored].

Scent of Christ’s fragrance (Ikos 11); [the anointing oil is restored].

Ark gilded by the Spirit (Ikos 12); [the ark is restored].

In the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is addressed as

Fragrant incense and myrrh [oil] of great price (Ode 1, Troparion), [the anointing oil is restored].

Mercy seat (Ode 3, Troparion); [above the ark; thus, the ark is restored].

Lampstand (Ode 4, Troparion); [the menorah is restored].

Vessel bearing the manna (Ode 4, Troparion); [the manna is restored].

Mystical staff that blossomed . . . (Ode 7, Troparion); [the high priestly staff is restored].

Pillar of fire (Ode 9, Troparion); [the fire is restored].

Ever-virgin . . . dove (Ode 9, Troparion); [the Spirit is restored].

In the *Litany of Loreto*, the restoration is summarised by Mary’s title ‘Ark of the Covenant’ which appeared again in the temple when the Lady returned to the holy of holies (Rev. 11.19–12.1).

Preceding her title ‘Ark of the Covenant’ is ‘House of gold’, *domus aurea*, which, in the language of the temple, indicates the holy of holies. In the Book of Revelation, the Lady was identified as the holy of holies and as the true Jerusalem. St John saw ‘the Bride of the Lamb’, ‘the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven’ (Rev. 21.9–10), and what he saw was a huge holy of holies, a golden cube: ‘Its length and breadth and height are equal . . . the city was pure gold, clear as glass’ (Rev. 21.16,

⁷⁵ The reference to restoring the menorah is curious; there *was* a menorah in the second temple, so the one to be restored must have been different in some way.

⁷⁶ *Numbers Rabbah* XV.10, trans. J. J. Slotki (London: Soncino, 1939, reprinted 1961).

⁷⁷ *Babylonian Talmud Horayoth* 12a, trans. I. Epstein (35 vols, London: Soncino, 1935–52).

⁷⁸ *Arabic Infancy Gospel* 6.

18). St John's description of the city/holy of holies and its people corresponds exactly to 'Solomon's' description of Wisdom in the *Wisdom of Solomon*.⁷⁹

From all of this, it is possible to show the following:

The city was the Bride: 'I will show you the Bride' (Rev. 21.9), a parallel to Solomon's desire to take Wisdom as his Bride (Wisd. 8.2).

The city has 'the glory of God, radiance like a most rare jewel (Rev. 21.11). We find in Wisdom the following two parallels: 'Wisdom is radiant and unfading' (Wisd. 6.12); '[She] is a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty . . . a reflection of eternal light' (Wisd. 7.25b-6).

The city is a place without pain and death (Rev. 21.4): cf. 'I shall find rest with [Wisdom], for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy' (Wisd. 8.16).

Nothing unclean can enter the city (Rev. 21.27): 'Nothing defiled gains entrance into [Wisdom]' (Wisd. 7.25c).

The city is vast — 12,000 stadia in each dimension (Rev. 21.16): '[Wisdom] reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other' (Wisd. 8.1).

The people in the city 'came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years' (Rev. 20.4): 'Giving heed to [Wisdom's] laws is assurance of immortality . . . So the desire for Wisdom leads to a Kingdom' (Wisd. 6.18, 20).

In a way that seems strange to us, these images of the temple identified the Lady with her city/sanctuary. Throughout the Old Testament there are references to the daughter of Zion or the daughter of Jerusalem, but these are usually understood as no more than poetic images. As early as Isaiah, Zion was 'daughter [of] Zion', a female figure who protected her city. When she was threatened by the Assyrians, the LORD spoke for her: 'She despises you, she scorns you, the virgin daughter [of] Zion' (Isa. 37.22). The city and the Lady were not taken by force. Rather, it was the neglect of the Lady that had caused Jerusalem to fall (Jer. 44.18). Her temple was the Tower of the Flock on the hill of the Daughter of Zion, and Micah prophesied that dominion and power would return to her (Mic. 4.8). If the hill of the LORD (Ps. 24.3) meant the hill of the God of Israel, why should the hill of the daughter of Zion be understood as just a figure of speech? The Tower was remembered in Jewish tradition as the holy of holies, the place where the prophets stood to receive their revelations (Isa. 21.8; Hab. 2.1); and David's tower⁸⁰ in the vineyard (Isa. 5.2) was the holy of holies.⁸¹ In the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary is described as 'Tower of David' and 'Tower of Ivory', both images drawn from the Song of Songs (4.4 and 7.4 respectively), but to look no further for the origin of the titles, or to be content with later imaginative interpretations such as Mary as the Strong Tower against heresy, would be to overlook an important role of the Lady. She 'was' the city and its guardian and its holy of holies.

⁷⁹ Barker, *Revelation*, pp. 320-21.

⁸⁰ 'David's tower', because in Isa. 5.1 the 'beloved' can also be read as 'David'. See N. Wyatt, 'Jedidiah and Cognate Forms as a title of Royal Legitimization', *Biblica*, 66 (1985), 112-25.

⁸¹ Thus R. Yosi, early second century AD, in *Tosfefta Sukkah* 3.15. The tower is also known as the holy of holies in the *Assumption of Moses* 2.4: in 1 Enoch 89.73 the rebuilding of the temple is described as 'rebuilding the tower', a text known in the time of Jesus.

Later prophets described her as a harlot who welcomed foreign rulers (Ezek. 16.15–29), and then like a lonely princess who had become a vassal. The virgin of Isaiah’s prophecy, *’almah*, became like a widow, *’almanah* (Lam. 1.1). Isaiah also prophesied her time of restoration: ‘Speak tenderly . . . that her time of hard service is over, and her iniquity pardoned’ (Isa. 40.2, translating literally). She would be a jewelled city, a sign that the covenant of peace stood firm (Isa. 54.10–13). ‘Arise and sit (on your throne) Jerusalem’, he said (Isa. 52.2, translating the Hebrew literally). The city/queen was ‘a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD’ (Isa. 62.3).

The figure ‘Ezra’, writing around 100 AD, knew that the city was at the same time personified as a woman. He had a vision of a mourning woman transformed into a dazzling city, that is, Jerusalem (2 Esdr. 9.38–10.59). Hermas, the early Christian prophet in Rome, had visions of a Lady who was also the tower that represented the Church, and she read Wisdom teaching to him from a little book. The LORD of the Tower was the Son of God (Herms, *Parable* 9).⁸² This aspect of the Lady is represented more fully in the *Akathistos*, where Mary is addressed as: ‘Unshakeable tower of the Church’ (Ikos 12); ‘Unbreachable wall of the Kingdom’ (Ikos 12); and in the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is ‘Guardian of all, fortress and stronghold and sacred refuge’ (Ode 4, Troparion); ‘City of the King of all’ (Ode 5, Troparion); and ‘All-blessed, protection and defence, rampart and stronghold’ (Ode 8, Troparion). In the *Litany of Loreto*, the titles ‘Tower of David’ and ‘Tower of Ivory’ are the key to temple imagery far more ancient than that of Athena protecting her city, as is sometimes suggested.

The Lady was the genius of Jerusalem, and from the beginning, Mary was presented as the suffering city. The themes of the Magnificat are those of Isaiah to his people in exile: the Lady/city whose time of humble status is over (Isa. 40.2);⁸³ the Servant and the children of Abraham (Isa. 41.8–9). The Magnificat as a whole would not be out of place as a psalm of praise sung in Isaiah’s Jerusalem: ‘He has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden . . . He has helped his servant Israel . . . as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever’ (Lk. 1.43, 54–55).⁸⁴ Isaiah promised the desolate city: ‘As a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you’ (Isa. 62.5a). Is this not the origin of the city/Bride imagery in Revelation, where the Lady marries her Son (Rev. 12.5; 21.9)? The Lady was the holy of holies, that gave birth to the Son of God. In the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary’s title ‘House of Gold’ sums up several of her titles in the *Akathistos Hymn*: ‘Enclosure of God who cannot be enclosed’ (Ikos 8); ‘Best of dwellings of him who is above the seraphim’ (Ikos 8); ‘Tabernacle of God the Word’ (Ikos 12); ‘Greater holy of holies’ (Ikos 12). In the *Kanon of the Akathist* she is: ‘Dwelling place of the Master of creation’, ‘Spacious tabernacle of the Word’ (Ode 5, Troparion); and ‘Dwelling-place of light’ (Ode 8, Troparion). Again, the *Litany of Loreto* and the *Akathistos Hymn* attest a common tradition, but independently of each other.

In the *Litany of Loreto*, Mary is the Door of Heaven, *ianua Coeli*, which may refer to Bethel, the Gate of Heaven where Jacob saw the ladder up to heaven and the LORD

⁸² *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2 and Parable 9 respectively, in K. Lake (ed. and trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols (Cambridge MA, 1970), vol. 2.

⁸³ The Lxx has ταπεινότης, humble status.

⁸⁴ See M. Barker, *Christmas: The Original Story* (London: SPCK, 2008), pp. 67–70.

upon it. The place was formerly called Luz, which means ‘almond tree’, and the almond tree was a symbol of the Lady (Gen. 28.10–19). In the *Akathistos Hymn*, Mary is the ‘Mystical staff that blossomed’ (Ode 7, Troparion), a reference to Aaron’s rod that bore blossoms and almonds (Num. 17.8–11); she is also the ‘Heavenly Ladder by which God came down’ (Ikos 2). Thus Mary as Bethel was part of the tradition, and these titles could have been summarised as ‘Door of Heaven’. Neither the Vulgate nor the Vetus Latina, however, has *ianua*; the word is *porta*.

The temple context that I am suggesting for this imagery could also point to Ezekiel’s prophecy of the temple gate through which the LORD had passed, and which would forever remain closed (Ezek. 44.2), but there is another possibility. The ‘door’ title in the *Akathistos Hymn* implies the entrance to the holy of holies, the way between heaven and earth. Mary is the ‘Door of an awesome mystery’ (Ikos 8), and a key to understanding the origin and significance of this title may lie in the earliest known deposit of Kabbalah, the *Sefer HaBahir* (Book of Shining Light), first known in Provence at the end of the twelfth century. Such a link with Marian titles is not impossible: the *Sefer HaBahir* claims to come from Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKanaḥ, a temple mystic from Emmaus at the end of the first century AD. He would have been familiar with the temple mysticism that shaped the Book of Revelation and the *Protevangeliūm*. Now it is unlikely that a book which ‘appeared’ in Provence in the late twelfth century had direct links to Rabbi Nehuniah, but his disciples could have transmitted temple teachings just as the Christians did. The similarities between the *Sefer HaBahir* and the Marian titles cannot be coincidence. Peter Schäfer suggested that the immediate influence could have been the tradition of Marian devotion of twelfth-century Provence,⁸⁵ but the link between Mary and Wisdom, as we have seen, was made much earlier, by the first Christians, and on the basis of temple tradition.

The *Sefer HaBahir* depicts the ten powers [*sefirot*] of God: the three upper powers were indicated by the ‘Holy Holy Holy’ of Isaiah’s vision (Isa. 6.3), and the third of these upper powers was enigmatically described as both ‘united’ and ‘separated’. This third power was the source of the seven lower powers. The last power, the tenth, was the *Shekinah*, the presence of God in the world. Schäfer says ‘what is most striking is her receptive function, which is emphasised repeatedly . . . She is the vessel (*shiddah*)⁸⁶ into which all of the powers of the upper *sefirot* flow . . . she is a beautiful fragrant vessel that he loves.’⁸⁷ The *Shekinah*, the tenth power, was connected to the third power, and so there are two *Shekinot*: ‘There is a *Shekinah* below, just as there is a *Shekinah* above. It is the light that came from the first light, which is Wisdom. It surrounds all things, as it is written: “The whole earth is full of his Glory” (Isa. 6.3).’⁸⁸ The argument seems to be that the third power collects and transmits the powers of the upper three powers to the seven lower powers, and the tenth power transmits all the seven powers into the material world: ‘Standing on the threshold to the earthly world, the *Shekinah* hands over the divine powers assembled with her to

⁸⁵ P. Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 239–40.

⁸⁶ Doubtless derived from her ancient name *Shaddai*.

⁸⁷ Schäfer, *Mirror*, p. 125.

⁸⁸ *Sefer HaBahir* 171, using Kaplan’s numbering but not his translation.

this world, and at the same time directs them above'; 'the description of the *Shekinah* as mediator between God and human beings, between heaven and earth, represents one of the central concerns of the Bahir and the Kabbalah'.⁸⁹ Thus we can see how she is both 'united' and 'separated'.

Schäfer summarised her roles thus: 'The *Shekinah* is God's feminine potency, and as such is the lowest, and to a certain extent, the weakest of the divine forces in their dynamic interplay with one another. But at the same time she is the most important and strongest among them, because she unites within herself the flow of all the other energies. She bridges the heavenly and the earthly realms . . . Through her God enters the world, and her only task is to unite Israel with God. If she succeeds in this, she will not only lead Israel to God, but will herself return to her divine origin. Only through her does Israel have access to God . . . Because she alone belongs to both worlds, it is only through her that the earthly world can be reconciled with the heavenly one, and only through her that humankind can be united with God.'⁹⁰

Language is a great problem: the roots of Christianity are in Hebrew culture, but there are no Christian texts in Hebrew, with its heritage of nuance and wordplay. Even the primary sources for Christian origins are, in that respect, secondary sources. It is impossible to be certain what, if any, were the Christian equivalents of the Hebrew terms found in the Kabbalah. This complex system can be glimpsed in the Bible: Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is beside the Creator as the material world is made (Prov. 8.22), but she also dances before him in the world of human beings (Prov. 8.31). This implies an upper and a lower Wisdom, 'united' and 'separated'. Seven powers emerge from the holy of holies (Rev. 15.5–8); and Jesus speaks in seven forms to St John, dictating letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2.1–3.22). In the seventh of these forms, Jesus is Wisdom (Rev. 3.14–21),⁹¹ just as she is the last of the seven lower powers in the *Sefer HaBahir*. In the *Litany of Loreto* it is likely that the titles 'Door of Heaven', 'Vessel of the Spirit', 'Vessel of Honour', and 'Vessel of Devotion', as well as Mary's role as Mediator, have their deepest roots in traditions that surface in the *Sefer HaBahir* — traditions concerning Wisdom, the Queen of Heaven, and the lost Lady of the temple.

The problem is gender. Wisdom is feminine, and her other titles imply a female figure. Despite this, the Church has emphasised that Jesus was the incarnation of Wisdom, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 1.24: 'Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.' Taking account of iconography and the texts of the liturgy, it seems that Mary, too, has a strong claim to the title of Wisdom. Fiene has argued that 'from the very beginning of Sophia iconography, images of the Theotokos in association with Wisdom, on the one hand, tended to compete with images of Jesus Christ linked with Wisdom on the other — often yielding provocatively ambivalent compositions. Though [Orthodox] church doctrine insisted on always interpreting any image of Wisdom as Christ or the Logos, the actual iconography (or the feast day associated with it) often seemed to the naive viewer to signify a female figure, the *Bogomater* (Mother of God) in particular.'⁹²

⁸⁹ Schäfer, *Mirror*, pp. 126, 128.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹¹ See Barker, *Revelation*, pp. 109–13.

⁹² D. M. Fiene, 'What is the Appearance of the Divine Sophia', *Slavic Review*, 8 (1959), 449–76, 475.

What do the images of Mary in the *Litany of Loreto* suggest? Surely, that there is an important element of the earliest Christian teaching about Mary that has been neglected and almost lost. There is not enough evidence to tell us where the *Litany* originated, or who composed it. In one sense, those questions are less important than the question: what did that composer know that we no longer know? The composer seems to have been summarising the larger collections of titles, but summarising them under recognisable 'headings'. Mary was recognised and proclaimed as the Lady of the temple in Jerusalem, Wisdom, the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the LORD.

Notes on contributor

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