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THE AMBIGUITY OF GENDER: REPRESENTATIONS OF WICKED WOMEN AS GROUP IDENTITY MARKERS FROM THE BOOK OF *PROVERBS* TO THE PSEUDO- CLEMENTINE *HOMILIES*

The article aims at shedding new light on one of the key-feature of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies' world-view: Eve // female prophecy, as opposed to Adam // True Prophet. By tracing back the sources of such representation to the Wisdom tradition and the book of Proverbs, as well as to ancient assumptions on women innate ambiguity, it attempts to show how an authoritative Biblical model and gendered prejudices came to be 'performed' together in a original and innovative way, in order to make sense of and respond to escalating conflicts among early Christian groups.

Cet article propose un nouvel éclairage sur l'une des données majeures de la conception du monde des Homélie pseudo-clémentines: Ève // prophétie féminine vs Adam // Vrai Prophète. En retraçant les sources d'une telle représentation jusqu'aux traditions de la Sagesse et du livre des Proverbes, ainsi qu'aux présupposés anciens sur l'ambiguïté féminine innée, cette contribution cherche à montrer comment l'autorité d'un modèle biblique et des préjugés sur les genres en vinrent à être mis en œuvre ensemble, d'une manière originale et novatrice pour faire sens et répondre à des conflits croissants parmi les groupes du christianisme primitif.

In three recent contributions, Dominique Côté, F. Stanley Jones and, most of all, Annette Yoshiko Reed have highlighted tropes and rhetorical strategies articulating the narrativization of heresiological discourse in the Pseudo-Clementine novel.¹

1. D. CÔTÉ, *Le Thème de l'opposition entre Pierre et Simon dans les Pseudo-Clémentines* (Collection des études augustinienne. Antiquité 167), Paris 2001; F.S. JONES, "Eros and Astrology in the *Periodoi Petrou*: The Sense of the

In this paper, following up on their work, I will try to focus on the deployment of gender discourse as a means of sharpening the opposition between Peter and Simon and the perception of self-identity and otherness in the *Homilies*. More to the point, I will attempt to assess how discourses on women merge in and shape the representation of the Wicked Woman in Prov 5-7, as well as the converging figures of Eve or female prophecy / the left angel-prince / the false prophets arising throughout history, as developed in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*: as will be shown, the latter's resting on the former as a source of authoritative traditions by itself accounts for the choice and calls for a comparison. Next, I will turn to investigate how, in so doing, such discourses give voice to and articulate conflicts between groups. Finally, I will make a few educated guesses on the nature of these conflicts and on some religious features which the groups involved might actually have displayed.

My first step will be detecting and bringing to the fore social meanings, functions and values associated with women and female representations in the ancient Mediterranean world, here assumed as the broader geographical and socio-cultural context of both Prov and the Pseudo-Clementine novel.

In order not to wrongly leave social and historical complexity out of sight, especially when it comes to a late antique text like the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, we should still keep in mind a few preliminary remarks made forty years ago by Wayne A. Meeks:

If any generalization is permissible about the place of women in Hellenistic society of Roman imperial times, it is that the age brought in all places a heightened awareness of the differentiation of male and female. The traditional social roles were no longer taken for granted, but debated, consciously violated by some, vigorously defended by others. While the general status of women had vastly and steadily improved over several centuries, the change brought in some circles a bitter reaction in the form of misogyny.²

Pseudo-Clementine Novel", *Apocrypha* 12 (2001), p. 53-78; A. YOSHIKO REED, "Heresiology and the (Jewish-)Christian Novel. Narrativized Polemics in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*", in E. IRICINSCHI – H.M. ZELLENTIN (eds.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Texts and Studies in Judaism 119), Tübingen 2008, p. 273-298.

2. W.A. MEEKS, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity", *History of Religions* 13/3 (1974), p. 165-208 (here p. 179; cf. also p. 206-207). It goes without saying that local differences played a big part and must be taken into account as well: the insightful analysis of women's position in Alexandrian society and Christianity, and of Clement's stakes on it offered by A. JAKAB, *Ecclesia Alexandrina. Évolution sociale et institutionnelle du christianisme alexandrin (I^{er} et II^e siècles)* (Christianismes anciens 1), Bern – Berlin – Bruxelles – Frankfurt am Main – New York – Oxford – Wien 2001,

What were then women's traditional social roles that were debated in Roman imperial times?

Locating women

In ancient Mediterranean societies, the basic distinction between man and woman and their respective roles was often articulated in terms of opposition of culturally defined properties: (free) men were strong, fearless, generous, reserved, rational, self-controlled by "nature", as much as women were deemed "naturally" weak, fearful, cowardly, talky, irrational and emotional, with no trace of self-control.³ Exceptionally outstanding women, who gained fame and respect for their virtues and abilities, were thought of as subverting nature and the roles it imposed on them, by "changing" into men and so attaining the positive qualities of male nature; on the opposite, men not meeting social expectations on their roles, behaviors and tasks could be just as easily blamed of turning into women and assuming female weaknesses and vices.⁴

On this basic, dual grid, women were chiefly assigned social functions and symbolic meanings relating to connections between earth, sexual fertility and motherhood, and to physical and cultural processes of *genesis* ("birth, generation") and *sōtēria* ("preservation, salvation").⁵ Their body could then stand as a place and means of continuity through generations, and function both to legitimate debated identities

p. 126-129 and 282-288, provides an excellent example of a geographically sensitive investigation.

3. On the characterization of women's "nature", see Aristotle, *Pol.* 1, 1259b 1-3.1260a 13-14 and 2, 1269b 14-1270a 14, and Tacitus, *Ann.* 1, 4, 5.

4. For examples of such "inversions", cf. Herodotus 7, 99, 1; Lysias, *Or.* 2, 4; Trogu/Justin 2, 12, 23-25; Polienus 8, 53, 2; *Gos. Thom.* 114; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 21, 3; *Historia Augusta*, *Gal.* 13, 2-5; *Tyr. trig.* 27 and 30, 1-12.23; Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 5, 2, 2, 3; Cassiodorus, *Var.* 11, 1, 101. On the overall picture emerging from the evidence at our disposal, see E.W. STEGEMANN – W. STEGEMANN, *Storia sociale del cristianesimo primitivo. Gli inizi nel giudaismo e le comunità cristiane nel mondo mediterraneo* (Collana di studi religiosi), it. ed., Bologna 1998, p. 607-609.

5. Such is the case of Homeric Penelope in her roles as Telemachus' mother and Ulysses' spouse, for whom Ithaca's *basileis* compete: in as much as marrying her would mean for one of them *de facto* being acknowledged as king, Ulysses' return as legitimate husband and biological father results in reaffirming the political *status quo ante*, Ulysses' kingship, and his son's claims on succession, all of which Penelope's suitors more or less implicitly contested. See R. JUST, *Women in Athenian Law and Life*, London – New York 1989, p. 231-234.239-240.244, and L. ARCARI, "Una donna avvolta nel sole..." (*Apoc* 12,1). *Le raffigurazioni femminili nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni alla luce della letteratura apocalittica giudaica* (Bibliotheca Berica. In Domina Nostra. Contributi e studi di mariologia 13), Padova 2008, p. 82-85.

and claims of authority,⁶ and as a symbolic representation of lineages, cities, ethnic and social groups, that it was designated to biologically reproduce.⁷

Moreover, the faculty of giving birth could be interpreted as bringing to light what is hidden to sight and to existence what is no more or has not yet come into being.⁸ Often integrated into discourses on ecstatic experiences, visions and possession, such symbolical association was widely acknowledged, so as to grant women leading roles in oracular and prophetic practices, and within religious institutions or groups centering on them.⁹ The out of self-like state of consciousness common to both the processes of delivering babies and delivering oracles made the connection even more self-evident and cogent.¹⁰

These invisible powers accorded to the *indomitum genus* had nonetheless to be controlled and domesticated: whenever they were exploited either in practices and contexts not socially sanctioned or even prohibited, or on the fringes of institutional life, social order and norms were thought to be at stake and had to be re-asserted and re-established (cf. Num 5).¹¹ Hence, accusations of magic and sorcery, along with suspects and reprimands of lust, deviating or abnormal sexual activity and prostitution, were leveled at women; hence, again, ordeals, processes of purification and reintegration, or exclusion, up to even execution and annihilation, were carried out.

6. Cf. R. JUST, *Women, op. cit.*, p. 221-222, and C. MONTEPAONE, "Penelope nelle trame del potere", in S. MATINO – C. MONTEPAONE – M. TORTORELLI GHIDINI (eds.), *Il potere invisibile. Figure del femminile tra mito e storia. Studi in memoria di Maria Luisa Silvestre* (Frontiere innaturali. Studi di genere 1), Napoli 2002, p. 41-54.

7. Cf. Jer 2, 20; 5, 10; 4, 31; 6, 9, 26; 8, 13; Ezek 16; Aeschylus, *Pers.* 181-196; *Jos. Asen.* 15, 5-6.

8. See Homer, *Hymn. Apoll.* 119; Job 3, 10-16 and 10, 18-19; 1QH^a XI, 7-10; Rom 4, 17-25; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 368c-d; 372e-f; 374b; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6, 30, 8.

9. As can be gleaned, e.g., from the harsh polemical statement by Celsus reported in Origen, *Cels.* 2, 55, and Irenaeus' notice on the Marcosians (*Haer.* 1, 13, 2-3.6 and 14, 1). On the related use of *katabolē* (*spermato*s), literally «ejaculation, insemination», as metaphor for divine inspiration and divinely inspired out-of-self state, cp. Julius Pollux, *On.* 1, 16; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 3, 15; Synesius, *Dion.* 9, 8-9, with Philo of Alexandria, *Migr.* 33-36.

10. See S. BARBIERI, «Letò: il potere del parto», in S. MATINO – C. MONTEPAONE – M. TORTORELLI GHIDINI (eds.), *Il potere invisibile, op. cit.*, p. 55-61, and L. ARCARI, "Una donna avvolta nel sole...", *op. cit.*, p. 88-93.

11. Cf. the analysis in A. DESTRO, *In caso di gelosia: antropologia del rituale di Sotah* (Il Mulino Ricerca. Antropologia culturale), Bologna 1989, p. 145-179, with further remarks by M. DOUGLAS, *Nel deserto: la dottrina della contaminazione nel Libro dei Numeri* (Collana di studi religiosi), Bologna 2001, p. 193-200, 217-227. See also MEEKS, "The Image of the Androgyne", art. cit., p. 206-207.

Therefore, all in all, Helen's parthenogenetic birth out of a self-fecundated egg, her connection with the marsh world of water birds and fishes, her beauty and infidelity causing love and war, her "magical" lore seem all to belong together, and conspire to provide a general model – mythical, but still active in historical present – of autonomous and "ambivalent omnipotence, to harm and to help", to heal and to kill.¹²

This paradigmatic case – not to mention the figures of Kirke, Kalypso, Medea, the Amazons and the Bacchantes – helps us also clarify and locate the probable source of such power and danger in a radically different, yet indistinct and uncertain,¹³ in one word, liminal, space of physiological, social and cultural being: as a result of theories on their biological un-integrity, of their manifest emotional instability, and of their marginality in civic life, women proved to live in betwixt and in between sea and land, wilderness and city, animals and human beings, slaves and free males, children and men, underworld and upper world, dead and living, humans and gods, hidden and manifest things.¹⁴ As such, they embodied ambiguity, formlessness, confusion, disorder, and *πάθη* ("irrational passions"), and channeled both creative and destructive forces: if socially recognized, sanctioned and controlled through approved or tolerated ritual means, they assured biological, social and political survival and continuity; if left to themselves to be exploited beyond any norm or restriction, they threatened social structures, either consciously or unconsciously.¹⁵

On similar grounds, as being both male and female, yet none of the two and thus ambiguous, androgynes were endowed with status,

12. I. CHIRASSI COLOMBO, "I poteri di Helene", in S. MATINO – C. MONTEPAONE – M. TORTORELLI GHIDINI (eds.), *Il potere invisibile, op. cit.*, p. 25-40, here p. 35 (English translation mine).

13. CHIRASSI COLOMBO, "I poteri di Helene", art. cit., p. 30-31.

14. For philosophical and medical evidence, cf. G. SISSA, "Il corpo della donna: lineamenti di una ginecologia filosofica", in S. CAMPESE – P. MANULI – G. SISSA, *Madre materia. Sociologia e biologia della donna greca* (Società antiche), Torino 1983, p. 83-145, here p. 83-96, and P. MANULI, "Donne mascholine, femmine sterili, vergini perpetue: la ginecologia greca tra Ippocrate e Sorano", in S. CAMPESE – P. MANULI – G. SISSA, *Madre materia, op. cit.*, p. 149-185, here p. 173.

15. See M. VEGETTI, *Il coltello e lo stilo: animali, schiavi, barbari e donne alle origini della razionalità scientifica* (L'impresa scientifica 1), Milano 1979, p. 121-128; G. SISSA, "Il corpo della donna", art. cit., p. 85-87; R. JUST, *Women, op. cit.*, p. 153-279. Cf. the two versions of the myth of Pandora in Hesiod, *Theog.* 570-613 and *Op.* 71-105, and Hippolytos' tirade against women in Euripides, *Hip.* 616-624, in the light of some deep-ranging suggestions by M. DOUGLAS, *Purezza e pericolo: un'analisi dei concetti di contaminazione e tabù* (Intersezioni 247), it. ed., Bologna 2003, p. 99.157-170, on contamination, and powers and dangers of anomalies. On the unlimited generative possibilities of the undifferentiated and unstable chaos, see Hesiod, *Theog.* 116ff., and *OF* 104 II; 114; 117.

authority and abilities of *manteis* and healers.¹⁶ In mythical narratives, featuring as representation of fecund primeval indistinctness or divine formless and undefined nature, androgynes were granted creative powers or invested with the function of providing a model or the raw material itself for the development of the differentiated order of things we perceive and live in everyday: according to the principle formulated by Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 731a 11ff., male and female must first become one living being, both male and female at the same time like plants, in order to generate¹⁷. Nevertheless, androgynes were at the same time feared as powerful malevolent agents, “sorcerers” able to kill and destroy bodies and “souls”.¹⁸

16. Cf. the Mesopotamian *kurgarru* and *assinnu*, the *Enareis* in Herodotus 1, 105 and 4, 67, and the sexual metamorphoses of Tiresias as handed down by Hesiod, *fr.* 275, and Ovid, *Met.* 3, 322-330. According to Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 572a 13ff, women practicing “magic” were mostly on the hunt for embryos which mares impregnated by the wind had conceived out of themselves alone and then expelled by the sea. Such a demand was evidently due to the extraordinary powers the embryos were supposed to have derived from their parthenogenetic – that is hermaphrodite, as we will immediately see – conception.

17. Cf. *OF* 80 IV; 121 VI; 139 IV; 148-149 VIII; Plato, *Symp.* 189d-191a; Philo of Alexandria, *Opif.* 69.134-135; Ps.-Simon, *Dem.* in Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6, 18, 4.6-7; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1, 1, 1; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6, 30, 6-8 and 10, 33, 3-4). On gender ambiguity, liminality and related cosmogonical and cosmological functions of the Eros androgynous in different ancient traditions, see M. TARDIEU, *Trois mythes gnostiques: Adam, Eros et les animaux d'Égypte dans un écrit de Nag Hammadi (II.5)*, Paris 1974, p. 143-157.

18. See, for example, the ambivalence surrounding powers and activities of the *kurgarrus* and the *assinnus* in Babylonian society: S.M. MAUL, “Kurgarru und assinnu und ihr Stand in der babylonischen Gesellschaft”, in V. HASS (ed.), *Aussenseiter und Randgruppen. Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des alten Orients* (Xenia 32), Konstanz 1992, p. 159-171. Such comparisons between women and hermaphrodites may appear farfetched at first, but a basic epistemological ambiguity in constructing analogies between and complementarity of male and female does appear in ancient medical writings: pre-Aristotelian biological texts describe women's orgasm as ejaculation (*Genit.* 4); in 4th-3rd century B.C., the andromorphisms of Coan gynecology culminate in the pseudo-Aristotelian tenth book of *Hist. an.*, where women are said to have semen and a penis-like channel inside their womb, issuing and receiving sperm at the same time (636b 16 and 637a 22); five centuries later, Galen asserts that both males and females have testicles producing semen, and so provided with an informing and material principle, and that females can be castrated: that's the way to turn them into the perfect males they could potentially have become, if just their nature had been less weak and more complete (*Sem.* 1, 10.15-16; 2, 5). Elsewhere, this mixing of female and male principles inside female bodies and the resulting impossibility of a univocal definition of women's gender appear as suspect of parthenogenesis, motivated by “una rappresentazione vegetale del femminile, realizzazione di una mitica fecondità spontanea, senza aratura e senza coito, della terra Madre” (MANULI, “Donne mascoline”, art. cit, p. 164, cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 126-132; Aristophanes, *Av.* 693-697; Aristotle, *Gen.*

The making of a literary model

Reading through Prov 1-9, we are confronted with the depiction of two juxtaposed but opposite images of women: Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly. Actually, it would be probably more appropriate to speak of a rhetorical splitting in two of the composite ambiguity of women's nature that we have been dealing with so far: as much as Woman Wisdom is an *insider* "woman of substance", a loving, faithful and chaste bride, granting the young man economic and social prosperity, in sum, the most precious and valuable of his belongings (3, 14-15; 4, 5-10; 5, 15-20; 7, 1-5; 8, 10-11.18-19; 9, 1-12; cf. 31, 10-31), Woman Folly is sketched as economically desirable and sexually intriguing *outsider*, a married, unfaithful and dissimulating woman, playing the adulteress and the prostitute, and enticing young men, bringing shame and disgrace, leading to death and destruction whom-ever she manages to ensnare (2, 16-22; 5, 3-11; 6, 24-26; 7, 6-23; 9, 13-18).¹⁹ Nevertheless, the two women seem to share places of appearance (streets, squares, city walls, high places, doors: 1, 20-21; 5, 8; 7, 11-12; 8, 2-3; 9, 1-3.14), and use the same means to appeal to and win over men: the power and sweetness of their word (4, 20-21; 5, 3.7; 6, 24; 7, 5); indeed, Woman Folly mimics language and attitudes of Woman Wisdom, in order to deceive her victims (9, 1-6 and 13-18).

As already remarked by Bernhard Lang, in the Ancient Near East, streets, market places, city gates were the outdoor spaces where a teacher/master and his followers/disciples used to meet as a "school".²⁰ The German scholar was then probably right in identifying Woman Wisdom as the patroness of Wisdom training and teaching, and of the ideology of a specific Wisdom "school".²¹ As a result, given the already

an. 762b 6-11). Both women and hermaphrodites could be indeed connected with self-fecundated eggs (see the above mentioned case of Helen and the figure of Phanes in Orphic cosmogonies), since eggs and other embryos as well were often considered to be generated without coitus, alone by flow of menstrual blood, by abundance of female sperm or even by wind blowing (cf. Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 730a 28-32; 750b 28-32; 751a 6-7.12-14; 756a 27-29; *Hist. an.* 560b 25ff.; 572a 13ff, and Aristophanes, *Av.* 694-695).

19. See also C.V. CAMP, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series 11), Sheffield 1985, p. 261-271, and C. ROY YODER, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance. A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 304), Berlin - New York 2001, p. 102-110.

20. B. LANG, *Frau Weisheit. Deutung einer biblischen Gestalt*, Düsseldorf 1975, p. 24-32.

21. B. LANG, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority. An Essay in Biblical History and Sociology* (The Social World of Biblical Antiquities Series 1), Sheffield 1983, p. 51-53, and *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess redefined*, New York 1986, p. 135. Cf. also PROV 4, 5-9; 5, 3-23; 7, 1-5, with the interesting, further remarks by C.V. CAMP, *Wisdom and the Feminine*,

discussed collective meanings often attached to female representations, the antithetical parallelism between the two figures in Prov would point to conflicts between teachings and “schools”. Luca Arcari writes:

se la scuola è definita, come entità sociale, soprattutto dagli insegnamenti che vengono impartiti in essa, è quasi ovvio che la scuola è l'insegnamento. Per questo, ritengo abbastanza probabile vedere nelle due rappresentazioni femminili una rappresentazione di entità collettive, ovvero di scuole sapienziali rivali che si autodefinivano e si stigmatizzavano tramite processi simbolici speculari ed antitetici.²²

After all, re-configuring group identities, worldviews and practices, which deviated from the beholder's accepted norms, as illicit sexual behavior of a woman, was a widespread rhetorical strategy in ancient Hebrew literature long before the last redaction of Prov.²³ And it will be thereafter as well.

A polarization between two female figures – and two groups or communities –, analogous to Prov 1-9, does in fact occur in IQH^a XI, 7-18 (1st century b.C.): both women are pregnant and are about to give birth, the first one, identified with the speaker himself, to the elects and righteous, the second one to the wicked and rejected, as linguistic parallels with other hymns show²⁴. The same imagery of a woman bearing the Israel of God will be later applied to himself by Paul as well (cf. Gal 4, 19 and 6, 14-16).

On the other hand, in 4Q184 (1st century a.D.), the Wicked Woman is characterized with features reminding of Woman Folly from Prov: as a seducing host and impure prostitute, she tries to entice and corrupt the righteous, spreading deceit, error and falsehood, and inviting to sin and death. She aims at turning them away from the values and norms they chose to follow, revealed as divine truth. In one word, she sums up the greatest evil in the eye of the community, to the extent of suggesting to modern interpreters her connection with Belial or some of his spirits, in light of the Two Spirits / Princes dualism well documented in other texts from Qumran.²⁵ Be that as it may, once again, the internal references to her plots against the “assembly”, the “elects of

op. cit., p. 269-271.274-281.285-291, and C. ROY YODER, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, *op. cit.*, p. 106-108.

22. L. ARCARI, “Una donna avvolta nel sole...”, *op. cit.*, p. 170. More generally, on scribal schools as *Sitz im Leben* of the Wisdom tradition and the traces of growing religious antagonism which can be detected in the youngest strata of *Proverbs* (10-15 and 1-9), see now R.G. KRATZ, *Historisches und biblisches Israel. Drei Überblicke zum Alten Testament*, Tübingen 2013, p. 98-99.121-124.170-171.

23. Cf. Hos 1-3; Isa 1, 21; Jer 2, 20-3, 13; Ezek 16 and 23.

24. Cf. the analysis in G. IBBA, *Qumran. Correnti del pensiero giudaico (III sec. a.C.-I sec.d.C.)* (Quality Paperbacks 202), Roma 2007, p. 42-47, and L. ARCARI, “Una donna avvolta nel sole...”, *op. cit.*, p. 152-161.

25. Cf. G. IBBA, *Qumran*, *op. cit.*, p. 69-71.

justice” or the “poor” (ll. 2-14-16), along with the external evidence we have been discussing so far, pleads for her interpretation as a collective symbol for some “other” group(s), opposing the teachings and practices of the elects, and endangering their status as such.²⁶

The model performed

We can now move on to the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*. As already spelled out at the outset, I will limit my argument to a few basic passages, all echoing motifs from the Wisdom tradition and centering on one of the three key figures of the *Homilies*' world-view, Eve or: the female prophecy, the left angel-prince, the false prophets (2, 15-16; 3, 13-15.22-25.27-28; 7, 3, 3; 11, 14-15; 17, 13-19).

Different features defining the negative counterpart of Woman Wisdom, *i.e.* Woman Folly, in *Proverbs* seem clearly to merge in the characterization of Eve / female prophecy: she speaks words not her own, promising earthly goods for free (3, 23, 3-4),²⁷ calling to men longing for truth, but leaving them forever searching and never finding (3, 24, 3).²⁸ She defiles everyone who touches her (3, 24, 1); cf. Prov 6, 29), and leads the blind to deceit, adultery and prostitution, and eventually to death (3, 24, 4; 3, 27-28; cf. Prov 7, 26-27 and Sir 9, 1-9). She bears and begets only temporary kings, causing bloody wars (3, 24, 2.4).²⁹

This point can be further corroborated by remarking that the first Adam or Prophet of Truth, to whom Eve is sharply opposed, embodies and represents alone by himself the Spirit of Christ and the pre-existing Wisdom, running and changing form through the centuries (3, 20, 1-2).³⁰ Moreover, the concise summary of his teachings echoes the stock of Jewish-Hellenistic Wisdom traditions, to a certain extent even in its literary form (cf. 3, 26, 3-6 with Wisd 8, 7-8.17-18; 13, 1-2; 14, 22-28). Lastly, female characters belonging to the true Prophet's side in the mirror of the *syzygies* (“couples”) are depicted as chaste and obedient brides, and as diligent house-keepers, thus embodying and exemplifying the ideal of the valuable woman sketched in Prov 5, 9-10.15-19 and

26. Cf. L. ARCARI, “Una donna avvolta nel sole...”, *op. cit.*, p. 161-177.

27. Cf. Isa 55, 1; Prov 9, 5; Sir 7, 11 and 24, 19-21.

28. Cf. Prov 8, 17; Wisd 1, 1-2 and 6, 12-13; Sir 4, 11.

29. Cf. the appeal for justice and wisdom directed to kings and rulers in Prov 8, 15-16 and Wisd 1, 1; 6, 1-5.20-21; 7, 7-14; 8, 2-18. Both works leave no doubt that life-long rule results from the right choice.

30. That the divine Spirit or God's Wisdom had been resting on and electing prophets, sages and righteous in different stages of Israel's history was a widespread idea: cf. Sir 24, 3-12; Wisd 7, 25-27; *Gos. Hebr.* in Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 4, 13, just to quote its most famous literary occurrences.

31, 10-31 (cf. *Hom.* 3, 26, 4, with the praise of the *sōphrōn*, i.e. well-tempered and wise, wife in *Hom.* 13, 18).³¹

As just briefly hinted at, however, the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* do depart in one point from their Biblical source and model, thus creatively performing and innovating it: a fresh and strongly polarized opposition is introduced and developed between a negative female figure, the old Woman Folly of Wisdom tradition, and a positive, no more female but male character, the true Prophet, who lies at the core of the homilist's ideology. Such a gender switch enables the redactor to fully exploit the cultural repertoire of polemical arguments against women as negative and inferior counterpart to men:³² physical and biological weakness and incompleteness, escalating to the need for male semen to procreate (cf. *Hom.* 2, 23, 3; 3, 22, 1.27, 3);³³ double-mindedness and falsehood (3, 23, 3.27, 2); longing for men's nature as improvement of social status (3, 23, 2.24, 1); inclination towards sex – no matter whether licit or illicit – and pleasure, luxury and comfort (3, 25, 4.27, 2). By subsuming into this picture weakening of rational faculties and emotional instability,³⁴ Eve / female prophecy is connected with forms of ecstatic prophecy (cf. 3, 13, 3.16.24, 2-4), involving only temporary possession of the Spirit (3, 14, 1), frenzy, visions and dreams (11, 14-15; 17, 16-17), and producing confused, obscure, incoherent,

31. See M.-A. CALVET-SÉBASTI, "Femmes du roman pseudo-clémentin", in B. POUDERON (ed.), with the collaboration of C. HUNZINGER – D. KASPRZYK, *Les Personnages du roman grec*. Actes du colloque de Tours, 18-20 novembre 1999 (Collection de la Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen 29), Lyon 2001, p. 285-297.

32. On the behavioral features of female living beings, see Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 608a 33-b 15. As G. SISSA, "Il corpo della donna", art. cit., p. 84 points out, "tutte le femmine viventi sembrano somigliare alle donne greche fragili, irresponsabili, materne, la cui sola trasgressione è pensata come mimetismo al loro contrario maschile".

33. On women as not fully developed and weak beings, see Aristotle, *Part. an.* 655a 10; 688a 18; *Hist. an.* 538b 10. On ancient gynecological theories on female semen, cf. Hippocrates, *Genit.* 4-6.24; *Mul.* 1, 17; Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 489a 11; Galen, *Sem.* 2, 1.3-4; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 17, 2. On the connection between menstruations and conception, and the identification of women's semen with menstrual blood, cf. Hippocrates, *Mul.* 1, 6.8.17, and Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 721a 32-b 6, on the one side, and Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 728a 26.30; 728b 21-22; 739b 20; 762b 2ff.; 774a 1-2, on the other. Such cultural theories might help explain the rapid shifts from conception and birth imagery to the mention of menstruations and then back again to birth metaphors in *Hom.* 3, 23, 3-24, 2, so clarifying the overall logic behind them. Further theories on the heat of women's body and blood, not least as cause of menstruation (see, for example, Parmenides in Aristotle, *Part. an.* 648a 28; *Gen. an.* 765b 19, and Hippocrates, *Mul.* 1, 1; 50, 8, 12-14), seem to be implied in passages like *Hom.* 3, 27, 2. A thorough investigation on old and new gynecological theories in antiquity is offered by G. SISSA, "Il corpo della donna", art. cit., p. 110-139, and P. MANULI, "Donne mascoline", art. cit., p. 159-160.171-173.189-191.

34. Cf. Celsus in Origen, *Cels.* 2, 55 and Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1, 13, 3.

and unclear utterances (cf. 3, 24, 4 and 3, 14, 2). Associated as it is with a female patron, such prophesying can be even more aptly labeled as *goēteia* (“sorcery”: 3, 15, 1).³⁵ On the other side, Adam / Prophet of Truth stands for male, rational, intelligible, and clear-cut prophecy, inspired by the innate Spirit and (fore)seeing through the vividness of the mind’s eye (cf. 3, 15.20, 1.26, 6; 17, 17, 5.18, 6).

I must admit that in this brief survey I have taken into account and referred to passages which do not explicitly mention Eve / female prophecy, but deal instead with debates between Simon Peter and his *Doppelgänger* and main opponent in the *Homilies*, Simon the Magician. That was not without reason, though: the Adam and Eve typology clearly aims at defining, rationalizing and making sense of identities of conflicting groups, by means of casting them back to the order of creation itself (*Hom.* 2, 15, 1-3).³⁶ According to this scheme, Eve is the progenitor of the prophets among those born of women, as female and mother begetting children (cf. 3, 22, 2.23, 2 and 2, 15, 3); her line runs through the centuries parallel to the lineage of Adam / male prophet, world’s history being the stage of the conflict between the two. Thus, a double-sided “genealogy” is eventually constructed, culminating in the two main adversaries of the plot, Peter and Simon themselves, and the groups – real or imagined – behind them (2, 16, 1-17, 4).³⁷

On a cosmological level, this conflict may trace its heavenly origins further back to the first created angelic princes (ἡγεμόν, ἄρχων, or βασιλεύς), one good and the other evil (cf. 3, 15, 3-16, 2; 7, 3; 8, 20, 3.21, 1-2). Well, while ἄρχων is used by Theodotus to translate the Hebrew word *sr* when indicating any angelic being ruling over one nation (cf. Dan 10, 13.20-21 and 12, 1 Q), in Dan 10, 13.20, the *Septuaginta* mentions a βασιλεύς. These remarks on language thus bring the world-in-text of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* even closer to the two primeval Spirits/Princes (*sr*) conception we find documented in Qumran, their association with opposing groups, behaviors and “histori-

35. Cf. Celsus, *ibid.* Celsus tended to connect unclear ‘prophetic’ utterances and meaningless sounds with irrationality and *goēteia* as well (Origen, *Cels.* 7, 9). On rumors of unintelligible and idle talking, as well as *xenophonia*, surrounding Montanus, the female prophetesses on his side and their ecstatic experiences, see *infra*, p. 129-130 and n. 54.

36. See the analysis in G.B. BAZZANA, *Autorità e successione. Figure profetiche nei testi del giudeo-cristianesimo antico* (Studi di storia del cristianesimo e delle chiese cristiane 7), Milano 2004, p. 164-165, and ID., “Eve, Cain and the Giants. The Female Prophetic Principle and its Succession in the Pseudo-Clementine Novel”, in F. AMSLER – A. FREY – C. TOUATI – R. GIRARDET (eds.), *Nouvelles intrigues pseudo-clémentines / Plots in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance. Actes du deuxième colloque international sur la littérature apocryphe chrétienne*, Lausanne – Genève, 30 août – 2 septembre 2006 (Publications de l’Institut romand des sciences bibliques 6), Lausanne 2008, p. 317-318.

37. For the analogous construction of two mirroring group genealogies, see *Treat. Seth* NHC VII,2 p. 62, 27-64, 17.

cal” characters included (cf. IQS III,15-IV, 26; CD V, 17-19). The two princes are now connected respectively with right and left (*Hom.* 7, 3, 4-4, 2), which obviously owes much to speculations on the disposition of angelic beings in God’s realm: one may here easily refer to the two cherubs bearing YHWH’s throne, one on its right, the other on its left, in 1 Kgs 6, 23-28, to the disposition of the celestial army on the right and left of YHWH’s throne in the vision of Michaiah ben Imlah (1 Kgs 22, 19), and to the right and left angelic orders surrounding the thrones in the first five heavens ascended by Isaiah all through *Ascensio Isaiae* 7, and culminating in the couple of the Beloved and the angel of the Holy Spirit standing on his left (9, 36).³⁸ In Greco-Roman world, the equivalence right / good and left / evil was a widely shared cultural presupposition as well: suffice it to point to the metaphoric meanings attached to δεξιόν and *dexter* (“fortunate, dexterous, handy, skilful, sharp, clever”), on the one hand, and to σκαιόν, euphemistically ἀπιστερόν or εὐώνυμον, and *sinister* / *scaevus* (“unlucky, ill-omened, mischievous, awkward, clumsy, perverse, wrong-headed”), on the other. However, the whole interpreting grid opposing Good prince // right hand // Adam/man and Evil prince // left hand // Eve/woman results from further juxtaposing right with male and left with female, that is from an inference usually drawn, ‘proved’ and taken for granted in the ancient Greek world – once again on biological level, first of all.³⁹

A fresh look at old parallels

Before drawing any conclusions, I think it’s worth taking a closer look at two other female symbolic representations constructed by early Christian authors. They are both well known, and can clarify some aspects of my analysis, lending themselves to introduce and in a way anticipate and support our concluding remarks.

All through Rev 12-22, John the seer sketches a diptych of opposing women: the mother / bride of the Messiah and the harlot seducing and contaminating the kings of the inhabited earth.⁴⁰ While the mother / bride stands self-evidently on God’s side, the harlot draws life and power from the Satanic forces she is associated with (Rev 17). In a

38. For a general overview on these and related angelological traditions, see G.G. STROUMSA, *Savoir et salut: traditions juives et tentations dualistes dans le christianisme ancien*, Paris 1992, p. 24-37.

39. For more evidence, see Anaxagoras, fr. 59 A 107 Diels-Kranz; Hippocrates, *Aph.* 5, 48; Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 765a 4-b 6; Galen, *Sem.* 2, 5.

40. Cf. P.B. DUFF, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing: Literary Opposition and Social Tension in the Revelation of John”, in D.L. BARR (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students* (Resources for Biblical Study 44), Atlanta 2003, p. 65-79, and E.M. HUMPHREY, “A Tale of Two Cities and (At Least) Three Women. Transformation, Continuity and Contrast in the Apocalypse”, in D.L. BARR (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation, op. cit.*, p. 81-96.

recent and very detailed work, L. Arcari has persuasively argued against current interpretations of the harlot as a one to one- or steno-symbol of Rome and imperial power, and proposed instead a more open reading, envisioning it as polyvalent, or tensive symbol that relates also to different groups of Jesus' followers contesting John's leadership.⁴¹ This suggestion aids the understanding of the evident, but often underestimated, recurring features of the harlot that echo the accusations leveled by John himself, in general terms, at the 'deviances' arisen in the seven churches and, in specific terms, at the self-stylized prophetess Jezebel: first of all, her being a woman and practicing illicit sex (cf. Rev 2, 20).⁴² The symbolical representation of a sexually depraved woman would then refer, among other things, also to a specific group of Jesus' followers gathering around a female prophet and contesting John's leadership. At least, as E.M. Humphrey put it, "one of the major questions broached by these corporate figures, and by the reference to individuals such as 'Jezebel', 'the one who is filthy', and 'the one who is righteous', is the issue of the identity of God's community".⁴³

The same concern about defining the group's identity comes to the fore in the Valentinian exegesis of Gen 1, 27 and 2, 22. The fragment, transmitted by Clement of Alexandria in *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 21, appears all the more interesting as the interpretation focuses on Wisdom, Adam, Eve and their offspring: Sophia / Wisdom brings forth the androgynous primordial Man / Logos / Christ after the image of God (cf. *Exc.* 32-33.35.39), whence the line splits in two. Adam has his male semen kept in himself, and from him male come; all his female semen, on the contrary, is taken away from him, and becomes Eve, the mother of females. Male is the strong spiritual offspring, the angels withdrawing onto the Pleroma with the Logos; female is the weak spiritual descent, embodied in the earthly community of the elects and among them manifested through healings and prophecies by the same Spirit as the prophets of old (cf. 24). The two lineages oppose each other, yet they hold together: the negativity of the female principle is resolved as women are meant to turn into men and the *ekklesia* into angels, thanks to the common origin from Sophia / Lady Wisdom (cf. 21, 3 and 79).⁴⁴

41. L. ARCARI, "Una donna avvolta nel sole...", *op. cit.*, p. 287-320. For the definitions of steno- and tensive symbol, see N. PERRIN, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*, Philadelphia - London 1976, p. 5-6.22-23.29-32.

42. L. ARCARI, "Una donna avvolta nel sole...", *op. cit.*, p. 262-276. Cf. also P.B. DUFF, "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing", *art. cit.*, p. 72-79, and E.M. HUMPHREY, "A Tale of Two Cities", *art. cit.*, p. 82-85, with my own overall analysis of Rev 17-18 in *Apocalisse di Giovanni*. Introduzione, traduzione e commento di Daniele Tripaldi, Roma 2012, p. 197-209.

43. E.M. HUMPHREY, "A Tale of Two Cities", *art. cit.*, p. 95-96.

44. On the relevance and use of Wisdom traditions in 'Gnostic' writings, see recently B.J. LIETAERT PEERBOLTE, "The *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Gnostic

This exegesis of the two passages from the book of *Genesis* shows, *mutatis mutandis*, remarkable similarities with the one offered by 2 *Clement* 14, 2-3: there Adam stands for Christ / Spirit, while Eve represents the spiritual and pre-existing church (the Spirit as well?), manifesting itself and dwelling in the flesh of Christ and of his followers. Both of them agree in integrating the two lines descending from the protoplasts, and not opposing them for the sake of polemics, like the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* do. Anyway, all three texts here discussed share the same basic elements: Adam is interpreted as the pre-existent Christ or Spirit, Eve as the weak counterpart of Adam and the weakened embodiment of Christ / Spirit in the flesh of Jesus and/or in a community of believers. The impression grows strong then that we are confronted with diverging variations on the same exegetical tradition. Moreover, P. Oxy. 1, 5 (3rd or 4th century a.D.) shows that such insisted identification of the Spirit or pre-existing Christ with the body or flesh of Jesus, and the Spirit possessing group or the pre-existing spiritual Church, as we find exegetically legitimized in 2 *Clement*, may serve the purpose of constructing discourses on prophecy and prophetic succession: commenting on Hermas, *Mand.* 11, 9-10, the anonymous author of our text argues that the prophetic Spirit is embodied in the prophetic order (ll. 9-12) and must be identified with «the body of the flesh of Jesus Christ mixed with human nature through Mary» (ll. 13-15). Hermas himself couldn't have been more concise and yet clear (cf. *Sim.* 5, 6, 5-8; 9, 1, 1-2, and *Mand.* 11, 1, 5.9-10). Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 21 and 24 seem to belong here as well (cf. 1; 4, 1-3; 26, 1; 41, 2).⁴⁵

All in all, moving from E. Norelli's conclusions on the relationship between P. Oxy. 1, 5 and *Ascensio Isaiae* 6-11 and broadening their range, we can describe the common core of these conceptions as "Jewish-Christian" traditions developed and spread by groups of prophets and charismatic asserting their central role in the community and understanding themselves in continuity with the Old Testament prophets, "con modalità molto vicine alla linea di una διαδοχή profetica".⁴⁶

Sophia", in A. HILHORST – G.H. VAN KOOTEN (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt. Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 50), Leiden – Boston 2005, p. 97-114, and Z. PLEŠE, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe. Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 52), Leiden – Boston 2006, p. 67-73 and 139-160.

45. See already the discussion in J. DANÉLOU, *Théologie du judéo-christianisme* (Bibliothèque de théologie. Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée 1), Paris – Tournai – New York – Rome 1958, p. 337-339.

46. E. NORELLI, "Al 6 e il profetismo estatico cristiano", in Id., *L'Ascensione di Isaia. Studi su un apocrifo al crocevia dei cristianesimi* (Origini. Nuova serie 1), Bologna 1994, p. 235-248, here 242-245 (quotation p. 245). Cf. also the classical study of these and more passages by J. DANÉLOU, *Théologie,*

Women, prophecy and authority: targets and function of Wisdom polemics in the pseudo-Clementine Homilies

Recent research on the topic has decisively demonstrated that the figure of Simon the Magician as it appears in the *Homilies* is not a one-to-one and coherent representation of Paul and Paulinism.⁴⁷ On the contrary, it is to be conceived and interpreted as a composite personification embodying from time to time various groups which the redactor of the *Homilies* is criticizing, as well as catalyzing all polemical discourses she constructs and deploys against them: by introducing Simon as a disciple of John the Baptizer she might be implying a distancing either from circles of John's followers or from fringes of the Jesus movement still preaching and practicing John's baptism, as much as suggesting a persistent fight with either group over power and "parishioners. Who had them? Who could take them away? And who could keep them?";⁴⁸ Simon's claim of virgin birth and divine nature probably reflects a negative stance towards "orthodox" traditions and assumptions on the birth and divinity of Jesus; Simon's insistence on his visions of Christ as experiences legitimating his mission seems to replicate and question Paul's self-consciousness and authority as apos-

op. cit., p. 321-337, who argues for the existence and widespread circulation of "apocalyptic" speculations based on Jewish-Christian exegesis of the book of *Genesis* (p. 337). If Norelli's conclusions are correct, as I believe, 2 *Clem.* may be bringing home the point that the Spirit has been bestowed upon all Jesus' followers rather than bolstering any specific claim on prophetic status and authority by single individuals or restricted circles within the community. As stressed by the Italian scholar, these two dimensions of pneumatic consciousness, the communal as well as the 'elitist', appear paired in Hermas' text (cf. *Mand.* 11, 1, 9-10.14).

47. B. POUDERON, "Dédoulement et création romanesque dans le roman pseudo-clémentin", in B. POUDERON (ed.), with the collaboration of C. HUNZINGER – D. KASPRZYK, *Les Personnages*, *op. cit.*, p. 278-281; D. CÔTÉ, *Le Thème de l'opposition*, *op. cit.*, p. 191-196; A. YOSHIKO REED, "Heresiology", *art. cit.*, p. 278-298; G.B. BAZZANA, "Eve, Cain and the Giants", *art. cit.*, p. 316-318, correctly integrating his own conclusions as presented in *Autorità e successione*, *op. cit.*, p. 165-166. On the traditional assessment, see G. STRECKER, *Das Judentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (Texte und Untersuchungen 70), Berlin 1981², p. 187-196, and J. WEHNERT, "Petrus versus Paulus in den pseudoklementinischen Homilien 17", in J. ZANGENBERG – M. LABAHN (eds.), *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City. Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome. Studies on the Basis of a Seminar at the Second Conference of the European Association for Biblical Studies, Rome, July 8-12, 2001* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Series European Studies on Christian Origins 243), London – New York, 2004, p. 175-185.

48. A.D. DECONICK, "Gnostic Spirituality at the Crossroads of Christianity. Transgressing Boundaries and Creating Orthodoxy", in E. IERICINSCHI – L. JENOTT – N. DENZEY LEWIS – P. TOWNSEND (eds.), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels. Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*, Tübingen 2013, p. 148-184, here 176.

tle; Simon's preaching on the two Gods, a Just one and a Good one, can be safely assumed to rely on Marcionite teachings.⁴⁹

The multifaceted complexity of the hero's main antagonist shows that in the *Homilies* it all comes to determining and defining the only true and good teachings and practices by contrasting them with multifarious otherness and evil reduced to one. Such otherness and evil are perceived as being dangerous and as close or even apparently similar to and disguised in one's ranks (cf. Jesus' predictions quoted by Peter in *Hom.* 2, 17, 4-5 and 16, 21, 4). This rationale well matches with cosmologies of certain types of social groups, which experience the world as "divided between warring forces of good and evil [...]. The group boundary is the main definer of rights: people are classed either as members or as strangers. [...] Evil is a foreign danger introduced by foreign agents in disguise".⁵⁰

In this article, I have attempted to isolate and analyze one of such discourses and its cultural and historical presuppositions, which lie respectively in the meanings, values and functions attributed to women's ambiguous 'nature' in ancient Mediterranean societies, on a general level, and in Jewish Wisdom literature as authoritative tradition, on a more specific one. The opposition between male and female, and the personifications of Wisdom and Folly turn out to be part of a rhetorical strategy aiming at reifying two diverging concepts and modes of prophetic experience, authority and activities, shared in and practiced by conflicting groups.

We have seen that such a strategy has its antecedents and parallels in early Christian texts. Having already made some comments on John of Patmos' worldview and on more sophisticated Valentinian concepts, I wish now to briefly focus on Hermas and the anti-Montanist source quoted by Epiphanius of Salamis (*Pan.* 48, 1, 4-13, 8), and so bring home a few more points.

In the 11th Mandate of his *Shepherd*, Hermas deals with the problem of how to discern true from false prophecy, and sketches a phenomenology of both not too dissimilar from the one we have highlighted in the *Homilies*: true prophecy is purported to have its source in (the angel of) the prophetic Spirit, the firstborn of God (cf. *Sim.* 5, 6, 5; 9, 1, 1; 9, 12, 2), and cannot be manipulated by human will and money; on the contrary, false prophecy is inspired by an earthly and empty Spirit coming from the Devil, mixes false and true utterances, and indulges in deceit and luxury. Prophesying only when consulted, the false prophet utters oracles intended to please his clients, so resembling 'pagan'

49. See B. POUDERON, "Dédoublément", art. cit., p. 279-281.

50. M. DOUGLAS, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York 1973, p. 169.

street-soothsayers and diviners.⁵¹ As has been shown, most of these features might and do actually find their equivalent in the characterizations of Peter and Simon penned by the author of the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*. However, no use is to be found in the *Shepherd* of polemical clichés against women, nor relevant traces of an explicit and accurate survey of ‘prophetic’ altered state of consciousness can be detected.⁵²

Both begin to appear in the anti-Montanist source (early 3rd century).⁵³ Commenting on Gen 2, 21-24 LXX and Adam’s ἔκστασις, the anonymous author argues against his adversaries that Adam was not out of his mental capacities when he prophesied about Eve, his wife. His knowledge of past, present and future resulted instead from his being able to follow conceptually and having a sound mind (Epiphanius of Salamis, *Pan.* 48, 6, 6). The author makes out of the forefather the prototype of the prophets who were about to come after him, inspired by God, granted visual clarity in contemplation, and speaking plainly (48, 3, 4-5): he aims evidently at contesting and redefining ‘prophetic’ state of consciousness, abilities and authority, and delegitimizing related

51. The classical study on this passage is J. REILING, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy. A Study of the Eleventh Mandate* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 37), Leiden 1973, p. 58-96. As the text of Hermas clearly shows, the covert or even explicit accusation of speaking and acting after the manner of the Gentiles may serve intra-Christian polemic, and doesn’t imply by itself ‘pagan’ adversaries being targeted. That applies to John’s *Revelation* (cf. 2, 20-21) as well as to the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*: the latter do indulge in criticism traditionally leveled at Greco-Roman mantic practices and speech (cf. *Hom.* 3, 12, 3.13, 2-3.14, 2.24, 1-4.27, 1 and 18, 11, 3, with Lycophron, *Alex.* 14 and 1467; Philo, *Spec.* 1, 60-64; Lucian, *Alex.* 10, 17; *Jupp. trag.* 28, 3-6; *Dial. d.* 18, 1; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48, 3, 11), and at banquets and ecstatic cults (cf. *Hom.* 3, 13, 3.24, 1.25, 4.27, 2 and 11, 14-15, with Euripides, *Bacch.* 689-768.1048-1135; Philo, *Contempl.* 40-55.73.83-89; Justin, *Apol.* 27, 4-5; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1, 13, 2.4; Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 4, 2 and 6, 5-9; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49, 3, 1; Augustine, *Civ.* 2, 4-6.26), in order to depict Eve / female prophecy / the false prophets (on this rhetorical strategy, see also J. REILING, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy, op. cit.*, p. 69-70.84.91-96). At a more general level, the author of the *Homilies* tends indeed to present ‘heresy’ as an extension of Hellenism, merging Jewish arguments and pièces against Greek education and religion into his portrait of Simon, his group and their religious practices. Nevertheless, the line between ‘orthodoxy’ / true ‘Judaism’ and ‘heresy’ / ‘Hellenism’ shows up to run rather within groups of Jesus’ followers than between them and any real outsiders, the latter forming a single front with Christian ‘heretics’. See A. YOSHIKO REED, “Heresiology”, art. cit., p. 288-290.

52. See, however, the interesting remarks on the brachiological description of the *mantis*’ inspiration made by J. REILING, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy, op. cit.*, p. 85-96

53. For a thorough interpretation, see L.S. NASRALLAH, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Harvard Theological Studies 52), Cambridge 2003, p. 44-46 and 155-196.

claims and leaders of the frenzy Phrygians.⁵⁴ We know for sure that women now number among his opponents, and fill even leadership roles, like Maximilla did, for example: accusations of irrational behavior and loss of self-control and free will become then more-dimensional and end up merging with the topos of passivity in ecstasy (cf. 48, 4, 1-3), in order both to feminize male prophets such as Montanus, and to put them “in the position of a slave before his master”.⁵⁵

In my view, this comparison of two ancient Christian discourses on prophecy, as sketchy as it is, helps support and clarify the following assessment by Giovanni B. Bazzana:

The choice of the feminine principle as the focus of all the negativity in human history is understandable in the proto-novel religious system, but nevertheless it raises some difficulties when located on the scenery of ancient Jewish-Christianity. We have plenty of information about women in authoritative positions within Jewish-Christian groups (as the Elchasaites) or Christian groups that had an idea of prophetic activity comparable to the Jewish-Christian one (as in the case of Montanism). [...] Arguably, the Jewish-Christian author of the proto-novel turned negative his picture of women’s presence in history exactly to counteract the Gnostic evaluation of revelations and salvation means communicated through feminine agency.⁵⁶

54. The anonymous author’s strategy involves also the attempt to offer a periodization of history, limiting the gift of prophecy to the great men in the past of Israel and at the origins of the holy Church (cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48, 1, 5-7; 2, 1-3; 3, 4-5). On the analogous construction of a prophetic succession and the passage from “prophetism” to “prophetology” in the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, see G.B. BAZZANA, *Autorità e successione*, *op. cit.*, p. 166-168, and G. FILORAMO, “Le prophétisme du roman pseudo-clémentin dans le contexte historico-religieux de l’Antiquité tardive”, in F. AMSLER – A. FREY – C. TOUATI – R. GIRARDET (eds.), *Nouvelles intrigues*, *op. cit.*, p. 351-359. It is worth noting that the other anti-Montanist source too, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea more than half a century earlier, paired the raving ecstasy of Montanus, Maximilla and Priscilla with babbling inarticulate sounds and strange, non-Greek words, which all allegedly broke with the prophetic tradition and succession accorded authoritative status by the Church (*H.E.* 5, 16, 7-9): for a critical evaluation of the evidence, underscoring the polemical intent inherent in such descriptions to equate the “New Prophecy” with ‘pagan’ enthusiastic divination, see now M. TARDIEU, “Les lamelles d’or montanistes et orphiques”, in M. TARDIEU – A. VAN DEN KERCHOVE – M. ZAGO (eds.), *Noms barbares I. Formes et contextes d’une pratique magique*, Turnhout 2013, p. 67-76.

55. L.S. NASRALLAH, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, *op. cit.*, p. 193. As she points out (*ibid.*, p. 187), the author of the anti-Phrygian source clearly and intentionally avoids including any female prophet in his historical review. His choice is radically at odds with other prophetic lists that we know were compiled by the ‘Montanists’ themselves and by the first anonymous anti-Montanist source excerpted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5, 17, 3-4.

56. G.B. BAZZANA, “Eve, Cain and the Giants”, *art. cit.*, p. 317-318.

Trying not to draw too narrow – or too loose – lines between such contiguous groups and to impose restricting and debated definitions on them, moreover, taking into account the already stressed inclusiveness of Simon's portrait, we might better say that the discourse constructing connections between the negativity of the feminine principle, female prophecy and the specular opposition of Man Wisdom and Woman Folly probably reflects and responds to the polemical needs arising from a conflict with other Christian groups – be they called “Gnostic”, “Jewish-Christian”, “Montanist”, or whatever else –, among whom ecstatic prophecy was practiced and leadership roles were open to women. This conclusion becomes even more historically relevant and deep-ranging, if the proto-novel materials developing the ideological framework of the conflict between Peter and Simon, to which the teaching on the *syzygiai* (*Hom.* 3, 22-26) belongs, do really date back to the 2nd century, and so prove to be contemporary with the flourishing of the Elchasaite movement, “Montanism”, and various “Gnostic” groups.⁵⁷

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57. G.B. BAZZANA, “Eve, Cain and the Giants”, art. cit., p. 313-315 and 320.