Exodus as New Creation, Israel as Foundling: Stories in the History of an Idea

Christopher Evangelos John Brenna

Marquette University

Recommended Citation

http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/750
EXODUS AS NEW CREATION, ISRAEL AS FOUNDLING:
STORIES IN THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA

by

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
December 2017
This study surveys the development of two literary phenomena in early Jewish and Christian tradition. The first is the birth story of a portentous child, exemplified by the birth stories of Moses, Noah, Melchizedek, and Jesus in biblical and Second Temple period literature. The second is the mythical expansion of the exodus tradition, which interprets the crossing of the Red Sea as a recreation of the people of Israel. I examine the appropriation of these two phenomena in the late antique Hellenistic story, Joseph and Aseneth. I contend that (1) the early Jewish birth story paradigm is influenced by the ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic tale type of the exposed hero, and that (2) Joseph and Aseneth appropriates the birth story paradigm and is influenced by the tale type in order to subvert expectations about Aseneth’s familial status. I also maintain that Aseneth’s transformative experience in the narrative is likened in an extended metaphor to the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. These two metaphors contribute to the theology of divine providence that forms the main theme of the narrative. Aseneth is both a model for the transformation of the Foreign Woman into an acceptable worshiper of the Most High God and a representative of wandering Israel restored.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... i

ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................................. iii

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

Scope of the Study ............................................................................................................. 6

What is “Joseph and Aseneth”? ...................................................................................... 7

What is Joseph and Aseneth about? .............................................................................. 11

History of Scholarly Approaches ................................................................................. 16

Methodology .................................................................................................................... 20

The Nature of Allusive Discourse ................................................................................. 20

Motifs and their Relationship to Allusions ................................................................... 24

Identifying Subtexts ......................................................................................................... 27

Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish and Christian .................................................................. 31

Dealing with an Eclectic Text ........................................................................................ 35

Summary .......................................................................................................................... 36

CHAPTER ONE: THE EXPOSED HERO/FOUNDLING TALE TYPE

AND JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN BIRTH STORIES ................................................................. 38

1.1. The Tale of the Exposed Hero .................................................................................. 39

1.2. The Birth Story Paradigm in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition ................. 43

1.3. Moses as the Exposed Exemplar .......................................................................... 44

1.3.1. Exodus 1–2 .......................................................................................................... 44

1.3.2. Moses’s Birth in Early Jewish Sources ............................................................ 57

1.3.2.1. Jubilees .......................................................................................................... 57
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2.2. Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2.3. Liber Antiquitatem Biblicalum</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2.4. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Birth of Noah</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Birth of Melchizedek</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6. Birth of Jesus</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER TWO: “DAUGHTER OF THE MOST HIGH”:
ASENETH’S BIRTH STORY ........................................................................ 87

2.1. Introduction .............................................................................. 87

2.2. Birth Story as Spiritual Metaphor ........................................ 90

2.2.1. “Like a daughter of the Hebrews” (Jos. Asen. 1:5) ............... 92

2.2.2. Aseneth and Joseph as Abandoned Children
(Jos. Asen. 4:10; 6:3-4; 13:13) ..................................................... 102

2.2.3. A False Sister (Jos. Asen. 7:5–8:7).................................... 106

2.2.4. Oracular Inclusio: The Foretelling of Aseneth’s New Birth
(Jos. Asen. 8:9; 15:4) .................................................................. 113

2.2.5. Orphanage and Recognition in Aseneth’s Prayers
(Jos. Asen. 11–13) .......................................................................... 118

2.2.6. The Birth Token Robe and Aseneth’s Recognition Scene
(Jos. Asen. 14:12–17; 18) ............................................................... 121

CHAPTER THREE: “OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT”: EXODUS IMAGERY IN
THE ROMANCE, PART 1 ......................................................................... 133

3.1. Introduction .................................................................................. 133

3.1.1. The Archetypal Meaning of “Egypt” ......................................... 135

3.1.2. Joseph and Aseneth as Ideal Figures in the Exodus .................. 140

3.1.2.1. Conforming Identities and Exodus Imagery ......................... 140
3.1.2.2. Aseneth and Joseph as Figures of Wisdom................. 143

3.1.2.3. Joseph as Prefiguration of Israel in the Exodus .......... 147

3.1.3. The Creation and Re-Creation at the Red Sea
in Early Jewish Tradition .................................................. 149

3.1.4. What Exodus Imagery Contributes
to the Theme of Divine Providence ..................................... 153

3.2. Son of God Meets the Foreign Woman (Jos. Asen. 3:5–8:9) .......... 155

3.2.1. Field of Inheritance (Jos. Asen. 3:5) .......................... 155

3.2.2. Joseph Prays for Aseneth (Jos. Asen. 8:9) ..................... 157

3.3. Aseneth at Prayer (Jos. Asen. 10–13) .................................. 162

3.3.1. The Reversal of Idolatry (Jos. Asen. 10–11) ............... 162

3.3.2. The Psalms and the Structure of Joseph and Aseneth 12...... 165

3.3.2.1. “Lord, God of the Ages”: Creational Language
in Jos. Asen. 12:1–2 .............................................................. 168

3.3.2.2. Pursuit and Flight (Jos. Asen. 12:7–10) ....................... 169

3.3.2.3. Elements of Annihilation (Jos. Asen. 12:11) ............. 170

3.3.2.4. Inheritance Reconfigured (Jos. Asen. 12:15) ............ 174

3.4. Conclusion ........................................................................ 175

CHAPTER FOUR: “FOOD OF ANGELS”: EXODUS IMAGERY
IN THE ROMANCE, PART 2 .................................................... 176

4.1. Introduction ...................................................................... 176

4.2. The Identity of the Angel (Jos. Asen. 14:1–11) .................... 177

4.2.1. Heavenly Counterpart of Joseph .................................. 178

4.2.2. Angel of the Name ...................................................... 182

4.3. City of Refuge/Repentance: Forming the New Israel
(Jos. Asen. 15:5–8) ............................................................... 189
4.4. “Who brought me out of darkness” (Jos. Asen. 15:12) ................................. 191

4.5. The Honeycomb ............................................................................................... 196

4.5.1. Inheritance and the Storeroom (Jos. Asen. 16:9) ................................. 196

4.5.2. Honeycomb as Manna: Wisdom, Life, Food of Angels .................... 200

4.5.3. The Honeycomb, Manna, and the Idol-Polemic ................................. 205

4.5.4. The Bees of Paradise (Jos. Asen. 16:14b) ............................................ 208

4.5.5. What Has the Honeycomb Done? ..................................................... 211


4.7. Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 218

CHAPTER FIVE: “A BROAD AND DRY ROAD”: EXODUS IMAGERY IN THE
ADVENTURE ............................................................................................................ 219

5.1. Introduction ..................................................................................................... 219

5.1.1. The History of Scholarship on the Relationship
Between the Romance and the Adventure ...................................................... 221

5.1.2. Common Themes and Imagery of the Romance
and the Adventure .......................................................................................... 229

5.2. Family, Inheritance, and Slavery/Servitude in the Adventure ............. 233

5.3. “Joseph will go up to heaven” (Jos. Asen. 25:6) .................................... 237

5.4. Reprising the Red Sea .................................................................................... 243

5.4.1. Brothers Set Against One Another ..................................................... 243

5.4.2. A Broad and Dry Road Through the Wadi ........................................ 246

5.4.3. Aseneth Calls on the Name of the Lord and Is Afraid ...................... 249

5.4.4. Aseneth Performs a Miracle................................................................. 250

5.4.5. Aseneth’s Miracle Inspires Dread ...................................................... 253

5.4.6. What Was Angelic Is Now Ascribed to the Lord .............................. 255
5.5. Aseneth’s Reconfiguration of the Red Sea .............................................. 256

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................. 260

APPENDIX ......................................................................................................................... 264

Early Formation of Exegetical Traditions Relating to Aseneth ...................... 264
The Development of the Dinah-Aseneth Legend .............................................. 268

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................. 274

Primary Sources ............................................................................................................... 274
Reference Works .............................................................................................................. 276
Secondary Sources ......................................................................................................... 276
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


As I come to the end of a journey that has taken just over seven years, I know that I have many people to thank for their support, and that the chief virtue that I must thank them all for is patience. The members of my dissertation board have each contributed to my success in various ways. I thank Joshua Burns for reading my initial forays into the study of Joseph and Aseneth and encouraging me to pursue my interest in this narrative. I could not have done without his practical advice on how to proceed through the program and prepare for a career. To Deirdre Dempsey I owe gratitude for the coaching she gave me during several boot camps and for encouraging me with her kind and generous spirit. I have Julian Hills to thank for dramatically improving the quality of my writing, for teaching me Greek properly, and for seeing promise in me during a very rough beginning at Marquette. Randy Chesnutt has generously offered his time and energy to read this dissertation. His support as one of the most important Joseph and Aseneth scholars in the world has been invaluable to me over the past few years. Finally, my mentor and guide on a long road to completion, Andrei Orlov, deserves the highest praise. For his determination to continue with me through major revisions to my project and years of work, constantly offering insightful and perceptive critiques, I cannot express a deep enough gratitude.

I would also like to thank my family for so many years of love and encouragement. Without the support of my parents, I could not have reached the end of this long education. They have endured with me longer than anyone else, and I am truly grateful. I would also like to thank my in-laws, Mary and Gary Schumann, who have
encouraged and supported me all these years. I dedicate this work to my children, Zoe and Elias, who have lavished me with a gentle love that has given me immense strength to persevere. Finally, to the one who has been the most long-suffering of all, my darling wife Rachel, endlessly enduring and sacrificial in all things, I give my most profound thanks and love. We had been married only eight months when I asked you to quit your job, sell your house, and move to Milwaukee. I have endeavored to match your sacrifice with my own hard work and determination.
**ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AcT</td>
<td><em>Acta Theologica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnBib</td>
<td><em>Analecta Biblica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td><em>Anchor Bible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANET</td>
<td><em>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AASOR</td>
<td><em>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArBib</td>
<td><em>Aramaic Bible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGJU</td>
<td><em>Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECNT</td>
<td><em>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZNW</td>
<td><em>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td><em>Bibel und Kirche</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td><em>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td><em>Biblica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibOr</td>
<td><em>Biblica et Orientalia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibInt</td>
<td><em>Biblical Interpretation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRLE</td>
<td><em>Brill Reference Library of Judaism</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJS</td>
<td><em>Brown Judaic Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLE</td>
<td><em>Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAr</td>
<td><em>Cahiers archéologiques</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td><em>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQMS</td>
<td><em>Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ClQ</td>
<td><em>Classical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRINT</td>
<td><em>Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTM</td>
<td><em>Concordia Theological Monthly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCO</td>
<td><em>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CurBS</td>
<td><em>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSD</td>
<td><em>Dead Sea Discoveries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECC</td>
<td><em>Eerdmans Critical Commentary</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJL</td>
<td><em>Early Judaism and its Literature</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EgT</td>
<td><em>Église et théologie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EstBib</td>
<td><em>Estudios bíblicos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EstEcl</td>
<td><em>Estudios Eclesiásticos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvT</td>
<td><em>Evangelische Theologie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td><em>Expository Times</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAT</td>
<td><em>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRLANT</td>
<td><em>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td><em>Fathers of the Church. Washington, D.C., 1947–</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCB</td>
<td><em>Feminist Companion to the Bible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDR</td>
<td><em>Harvard Dissertations in Religion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td><em>Harvard Theological Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAR</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Annual Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCS</td>
<td><em>Hellenistic Culture and Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBT</td>
<td><em>Horizons in Biblical Theology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUCA</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Union College Annual</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCS</td>
<td>Hellenistic Culture and Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hen</td>
<td>Henoch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm</td>
<td>Hermeneia Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HvTSt</td>
<td>Hervormde teologiese studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTh</td>
<td>Ho Theológos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBT</td>
<td>Horizons in Biblical Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEGP</td>
<td>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHebS</td>
<td>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJS</td>
<td>Journal of Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNES</td>
<td>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Journal of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSem</td>
<td>Journal of Semitics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAAR</td>
<td>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSJ</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSJSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods: Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSP</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSPSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSHRZ-St</td>
<td>Studien zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistische-römischer Zeit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHBOTS</td>
<td>The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNTS</td>
<td>The Library of New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSTS</td>
<td>The Library of Second Temple Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAe</td>
<td><em>Medium aevum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>Nag Hammadi Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovTSup</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum Supplements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td><em>New Testament Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTOA</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numen</td>
<td><em>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NumenSup</td>
<td>Supplements to Numen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTL</td>
<td>Old Testament Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OtSt</td>
<td><em>Oudtestamentische Studiën</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof</td>
<td>Prooftexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVTG</td>
<td>Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RechBib</td>
<td>Recherches bibliques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSR</td>
<td><em>Recherches de science religieuse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHE</td>
<td>Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHPR</td>
<td>Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJ</td>
<td>Revue des études juives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RivBSup</td>
<td>Rivista biblica italiana supplementi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScEs</td>
<td>Science et esprit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semeia</td>
<td>Semeia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSP</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLTT</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVTP</td>
<td>Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNT</td>
<td>Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBT</td>
<td>Studies in Biblical Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHR</td>
<td>Studies in the History of Religions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDJ</td>
<td>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSAJ</td>
<td>Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUGAL</td>
<td>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TQ</td>
<td>Theologische Quartalschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDI</td>
<td>Vestnik Drevnei Istorii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTSup</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum Supplements Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Westminster Theological Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der ältere Kirche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

After the months
of his pursuit of her now
they meet face to face.
From the beginnings of the world
his arrival and her welcome
have been prepared. They have always
known each other.

-from “Her First Calf,” Wendell Berry

There is a mode of thought in early Jewish and Christian literature that envisions a God who renews the story of his people’s salvation in each generation as the “lord of history.” This mode of thought is manifested not as rote repetition of historical events, but as a symphonic resemblance of events and persons to what has come before. The biblical tradition so conceived is more than a stylistic convention; Scripture is not simply “fraught with background” nor a mere “chain of duplicating patterns.” It is relentlessly imitative so that the invitation to a “sympathetic dialogue of two spirits across ages and cultures” enjoins the reader to encounter the tradition not simply as a critic. Inherent to this mode of theological discourse is the enticement to participate via mimesis, to read Scripture as

1. A reference to Northrop Frye and his description of a typology. He defines typology as “a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously” (The Great Code: The Bible and Literature [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982], 99). I describe two extended metaphors in this study, both of which include some typological and allegorical features.

2. Erich Auerbach describes the biblical Saul and David as examples of the tendency in the Scriptures to provide characters “fraught with background,” though he makes no comment on the theological impetus for such a style (Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask, 50th Anniv. ed. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 12). Edward Said, in his introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of Mimesis, describes Auerbach’s approach as a humanistic act of empathy with an author, which must include an effort, necessarily audacious, to identify oneself with the experience of the author. I assume that such an endeavor is necessary for understanding the Scriptures of early Jews and Christians, including Joseph and Aseneth (“Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition,” in Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], vi).
a contributor to it. This endeavor requires a thoroughgoing literacy in the “encyclopedia of production,” namely, the Scriptures of Israel and the literature of the Second Temple period.³

The primary text for my investigation, the Jewish folktale Joseph and Aseneth, is just such a mimetic contribution to the scriptural tradition. It is ostensibly a story about Aseneth, the Egyptian wife of Joseph the patriarch, and her transformation from pagan princess to beatified bride. But her story, so tersely represented by a few idle verses in Genesis, is told in Joseph and Aseneth as a folktale suffused with biblical idiom.

Aseneth’s character takes on those “greater depths of time, fate, and consciousness” that typify the portrayal of other biblical matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel.⁴ She is introduced to us as a coy virgin, haughty and disdainful of all men. Then Joseph arrives in his glorious chariot, and Aseneth beholds a son of God. She is greeted after her eight days of repentance by the angel of the Most High, who reveals Aseneth’s name, City of Refuge, listed in the rolls of the book of life, and feeds her honeycomb like morning dew. Her marriage to Joseph is ordained, their betrothal eternal. The tale is endowed with a

---

³ The term “encyclopedia of production,” popularized alongside “encyclopedia of reception” by Stefan Alkier and invoked frequently by Richard B. Hays, refers to Umberto Eco’s concept of an encyclopedia of shared knowledge that also contains the semiotic rules that govern interpretation. The encyclopedia is predicated on the idea that “the production and interpretation of signs involve a wide set of norms and information that belong to a multidimensional system of knowledge, which interpreters and producers share and renew in the communicative practice” (Paolo Desogus, “The Encyclopedia in Umberto Eco’s Semiotics,” *Semiotica* 192 [2012]: 501). Eco’s encyclopedia is conceived as containing any sign, but I refer only to what remains to be accessed: the literature of Israel’s culture. Eco describes the concept in “Metaphor, Dictionary, and Encyclopedia,” *NLH* 15 (1964): 255–71.

⁴ She is likened in her beauty to them (Jos. Asen. 1:5), though her story bears more resemblance to the patriarchs, who remember and are “constantly conscious of what God has promised” (Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12).
mythic, timeless quality: Joseph and Aseneth possess ‘world enough and time’ after all; they have transcended the unadorned events of their story.

My goal is to articulate the theology of divine providence exhibited in certain early Jewish and Christian stories, and to situate Joseph and Aseneth within the history of the development of this idea. One of my primary objectives is to describe the features of two extended metaphors in the text, relating Aseneth’s transformation (1) to the experience of God’s people in the exodus; and (2) to the birth of a divine child. The exodus is retold mythically in the Psalms, becomes the antitype of the exile in Isaiah, and the spiritual metaphor for the Christian life in the NT. The plagues, the flight from Egypt, and the theophanic vision on Sinai become metaphorical referents for portraying the renewal of God’s promise to liberate his people from oppression. While the preface to these events, the birth and upbringing of Moses, continues to support typological and allegorical interpretations of the exodus story, it is also one of the most significant contributors to the paradigm of the divine birth story. Moses’s exposure by the river as depicted in Exod 1–2 establishes an association between the people of Israel and a new child born under auspicious circumstances, so as to become an indicator of the divine effort to restore the people of Israel given the looming presence of evil. Portraying the events of the exodus typologically, on the one hand, and depicting the portentous birth of a divinely-appointed child on the other, are axiomatic examples of the mimetic tendency in biblical literature, in which not just the original story but its reiterations may be imitated.
Exodus motifs are expressed in Joseph and Aseneth as a mystical actualization of the primordial myth. The inclusion of mythical elements like darkness, the abyss, and the flame of fire (Jos. Asen. 12:11) characterizes Aseneth’s transformation as an act of new creation and re-creation similar to the crossing of the Red Sea. The portrayal of Aseneth as an abandoned child is communicated in biblical language, particularly of the Psalms, but imbued with motifs borrowed from popular tales of exposed heroes and foundling children. These metaphors connect Joseph and Aseneth with the scriptural tradition as a history of imitation and assimilation, of patterns being repeated and adapted to build a kind of salvation history. Whoever composed Joseph and Aseneth meant for it to read like Scripture, and he possessed familiarity with the cultural repository of early Jewish and Christian thought and proficiency at mimicking biblical idioms and motifs to accomplish his aims.

The eight-day repentance of Aseneth, her encounter with an angelic figure, and her union with Joseph at the end of the romance are conceived as the spiritual discovery and recognition of a foundling child by her divine father. The motifs common to the tales

---


6. What is at work in Joseph and Aseneth is an account of salvation history that perceives the “reiteration of foundational cosmic patterns from a prehistorical period.” In the case of the exodus story, the “mythic configuration of divine combat and victory provides the symbolic prism for disclosing the primordial dynamics latent in certain historical events, and so generates the hope for their imminent recurrence” (Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985], 356).

7. Again, to say that Joseph and Aseneth is meant to read like Scripture is to observe the inherently self-referential quality of the biblical tradition: “almost every book [of the Bible] is charged with allusion: to things and events, above all to the high points in salvation-history” (Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12).
of foundling children (of which Jewish and Christian literature manifest their own versions) influence the way this spiritual transformation is portrayed. Aseneth is an idol-worshiper and the daughter of an Egyptian pagan priest, but is also beautiful like a Hebrew and not like an Egyptian (1:5). After she is rejected by Joseph, she repents of her idolatry and cries out to the Most High God, whom she does not know. She fears that he may not accept her, even as she declares that she has been disowned by her own family (11:3, 12:5). God answers by sending an angel, who confirms to Aseneth that she is the daughter of the Most High and that she belongs in the city where the sons of God reside. Motifs of abandonment, discovery, and recognition frame Aseneth’s transformation. These motifs are expressed in the exposed hero tales of ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic myths and legends, but also find their way into the birth stories of early Judaism, Christianity, and rabbinic Judaism. Joseph and Aseneth draws on a tale type common to the ancient Near East and to the Hellenistic milieu within which it was written, but it does so in continuity with the expression of a paradigm of the divine child in early Jewish and Christian narratives. Aseneth’s penitence and transformation entail familial disjuncture, symbolic disownment, and reinstatement, motifs that are part of the birth story paradigm. These motifs associate the fortunes of an ideal figure with the fate of the people of Israel and contribute to the theology of divine providence.

The mythicized exodus motifs in Joseph and Aseneth are present especially in Aseneth’s prayers. The otherworldly quality of these motifs, as when Aseneth prays to be delivered from the sea monster (12:11) and from the father of her idols (12:9), and when

---

8. Joseph and Aseneth is divided into two parts, a romance (chs. 1–22) and an adventure (chs. 23–29).
she partakes of heavenly manna as food of angels (16:8, 14), all contribute to what Dieter Sänger calls the “spiritualization of exodus motifs.” This correlation of the mythic elements underlying the Exodus account and the assimilation of mythic interpretations of that account in early Judaism are correlated with Aseneth’s spiritual transfiguration. Somehow, the repentance that Aseneth has undertaken, and the transformation that results, is being likened to the cosmogenic renewal of the people of Israel in the exodus.⁹

**Scope of the Study**

This is a study of the adaptation of two spiritual metaphors in Joseph and Aseneth that draw on motifs common to early Jewish and Christian literature. Because the work of analyzing this adaptation necessitates describing aspects of the cultural encyclopedia that comprise the subtextual layers of Joseph and Aseneth, it is also a study about how the exodus was interpreted as a creational event and how the birth of a portentous child came to serve as a symbol for renewal in Jewish and Christian thought. The scope of the literature I am investigating as regards exodus motifs ranges from the book of Exodus in Greek translation, to the retellings, expansions, and typological adaptations of that story in the literature of the Second Temple period, to the literature of the NT and the early Christians. The range of sources I am considering for the tale type of the exposed hero is more broadly defined, since the influence of similar tales from cognate cultures

---

⁹. Sänger contends that Philo has characterized Abraham’s journey from Chaldea as a kind of spiritual conversion and exodus in *Abraham* 70, since he perceives a pure ray of light in profound darkness and follows the light. More importantly, he observes that “the subject of conversion, in our case the proselyte Aseneth, is partaking of the same blessing and the same promise as Abraham, that is, as Israel is rescued through the Red Sea and passes through the desert” (“Bekehrung und Exodus: zum jüdischen Traditionsuntergrund von ‘Joseph und Aseneth,’ ” *JSJ* 10 [1979]: 28).
throughout the development of the Jewish birth story is also evident in the familial motifs of Joseph and Aseneth. I discuss the dating and provenance of Joseph and Aseneth below in more detail, but I simply acknowledge that the developments that inspired the original narrative continued to make an impact long after it was first written down sometime between the third and the fifth centuries CE.

What is “Joseph and Aseneth”?

There are copies of the story of Joseph and Aseneth extant from the sixth century through the nineteenth century, representing a broad and varied transmission history. This makes it necessary to define what I mean when I say “Joseph and Aseneth.” Regardless of differing assessments of authorial identity, provenance or even date of writing, most scholars agree that Joseph and Aseneth was originally composed in Greek.¹⁰ There are

seventeen Greek manuscripts extant, though several contain less than half the narrative, either by omission or premature termination, and two manuscripts are finished with the same early modern Greek plot synopsis. Were the Greek manuscripts all we possessed, efforts to identify a precise locus for investigation would still be difficult, since the manuscripts vary considerably between and within the four recognized text families.

Through the centuries the text was distributed across the European continent. From Greek, Joseph and Aseneth was translated into Syriac most likely in the fifth century CE, followed closely by the Armenian version, perhaps as early as the sixth century, of which there are over forty-five extant examples. It passed into Latin prior to 1200 in two

---


11. Burchard first catalogued the extant Greek manuscripts in his 1961 dissertation and later published them in Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth (WUNT 8 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1965]). He categorized them into four text families: a, b, c, and d. Text family a includes six manuscripts, only two of which (A and P) are complete. Manuscript A is the oldest (11–12th c.) and was used by Battifol. Burchard considers text family b to be the most reliable representative of the longer text and the closest to an original. The c text family is made up of three manuscripts from a common ancestor. Each ends its ancient Greek transcription of Joseph and Aseneth somewhere in ch. 16, though only mss H and K finish with a synopsis of the plot in modern Greek, mixed with hortatory interpolations (ms J ends at 16:10). Text family d contains only two Greek mss, B and D. Of the two, B is written with a more accomplished and knowledgeable hand, D being a deficient and abridged copy of a common ancestor of ms A. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth: A New Translation with Introduction,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. James H. Charlesworth, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 2.178–79. A seventeenth manuscript, palimpsest M, beginning at 16:13 and finishing in ch. 29, was largely unexplored until Uta Barbara Fink published it with some comments in her critical edition (Joseph und Aseneth: Revision des griechischen Textes und Edition der zweiten lateinischen Übersetzung [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], 30–44).


A major edition of the Armenian has still not been published, despite the number of extant manuscripts. Burchard published a short example of the Armenian before releasing a minor edition in
distinct versions, and left its mark in the hymns of the Ethiopian Orthodox Synaxarion.\textsuperscript{13}

In eastern Europe, it passed into Church Slavonic and Romanian in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Meanwhile in western Europe, a condensation of the same Latin version was included in the \textit{Speculum historiale} of Vincent of Beauvais in the early thirteenth century, taking on a life of its own outside the \textit{Speculum}. A strand of the Latin version also became the basis for a fifteenth-century middle English poem.\textsuperscript{14} The details of Joseph and Aseneth so abridged, both adaptations were copied, the former into a number of European languages, the latter into French and German, down into the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} The latest Greek manuscript was copied in 1802, containing an early modern Greek paraphrased ending. The story was popularly adapted again into plays in England and Germany into the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Burchard gives highlights of Ethiopic material in the introduction to “Joseph and Aseneth,” \textit{OTP} 2.195–99.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Battifol conjectured in his critical edition that the Latin version he possessed came from a thirteenth-century English school led by Robert Grosseteste, but later discoveries revealed that all manuscripts in both Latin versions date before 1200 (“Le livre,” 1–4). Vincent of Beauvais’ version was translated by Jean de Vignay after 1317. It was then excerpted as a prose novella and circulated for centuries until it was published by d’Héricault and Moland as \textit{Nouvelles françaises en prose du XIVe siècle} in 1858. The 884-line poetic adaptation was published by Henry MacCracken (“The Storie of Asneth. An Unknown Middle English Translation of a Lost Latin Version,” \textit{JEGP} 9 [1910]: 224–64). MacCracken did not know of Battifol’s work. For more on the Middle English history of Joseph and Aseneth, see R. A. Dwyer, “Asenath of Egypt in Middle English,” \textit{MAe} 39 (1970): 118–19.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} An edition and translation of the Icelandic version of Joseph and Aseneth was just published this year by Robert Cole. He demonstrates that the Icelandic versions go back to Danish, Old Norse, German, and English sources as early as the fourteenth century. Cole’s principal manuscript was copied in Iceland in 1745 (“An Edition and Translation of the Icelandic Book of Joseph and Aseneth,” \textit{JSP} 26 [2017]: 167–200). The historical synopsis provided above is part of Burchard’s analysis in “Present State of Research,” 44–46.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Angela Standhartinger in a recent meeting of the national Society of Biblical Literature meeting provided me with a file containing over nine-hundred pages of nineteenth-century German
\end{flushright}
If I were to include the many adaptations of Aseneth’s story across time and cultures, it would constitute thousands of pages of material. I limit my investigation to the seventeen Greek manuscripts that attest a common archetype and the versions that are associated with the Greek manuscripts, including the two Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Slavonic, and Romanian versions. The early modern Greek endings of three Greek manuscripts cannot be relied upon for text-critical determinations alone, since they are paraphrases.  

The determinations I make regarding what I am considering in this investigation are not just about a common manuscript tradition, but also about a common understanding of how the story of Joseph and Aseneth is, in some sense, supposed to be told. For example, I am excluding the Middle English Storie of Asneth from consideration not only because it is a poetic adaptation of a manuscript in the Latin version, or because it concludes with a semi-detached epilogue that reconditions the purpose of the narrative, but also because it lacks two interrelated features that are present to a significant degree in other manuscripts. It lacks the ostensible reason for writing the story: to resolve the problem of a righteous Jew’s marriage to a foreign woman (if the later injunctions against such behavior are read back into the Joseph story). It also never demonstrates an awareness of the ironic, almost irrelevant solution that the pageantry expanding on the life of Aseneth. Among the most colorful details added to her life was a stint as a mummy!  

17. The modern Greek ending is provided by Burchard (“Joseph und Aseneth neugriechisch,” NTS 24 [1977]: 68–84).  

18. Cathy Hume contends that The Storie of Asneth filled a need among secular English married women that virgin martyr stories did not provide. She characterizes it as having more to do with stories of saints’ lives than with biblical poetry (“The Storie of Asneth: A Fifteenth-Century Commission and the Mystery of its Epilogue,” MAe 82 [2013]: 44–65).
narrative supplies for the problem. To tell the story of Aseneth’s marriage to Joseph without addressing this problem and its unorthodox solution is to tell a story about Joseph and Aseneth that is not “Joseph and Aseneth.”

What is Joseph and Aseneth about?

If the prohibitions against intermarriage in the Torah are read back into the Joseph story, then Joseph’s marriage to Aseneth is a problem. The marriage represents a departure from Joseph’s father Jacob and grandfather Isaac’s efforts to marry kin, which could have created a perceived need to explain why Joseph married a foreign woman. Some of the elements seem to confirm that Joseph and Aseneth is indeed concerned with the problem of intermarriage and eager to provide a solution: the foreign woman must convert. Aseneth is an idol-worshiper and a foreign woman. She is rejected by Joseph as a suitable partner because of her idolatry and because she is not kin. When Aseneth approaches Joseph to kiss him, he pushes her away, saying,

It is not proper for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God, and eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and is anointed [or anoints himself] with the blessed anointing of incorruptibility, to kiss a strange woman, who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of ambush and is anointed [or anoints herself] with anointing of destruction. But a man who worships God will kiss his mother and the sister from his tribe and his

19. It is also useful to note that setting up the midrashic problem and providing a different theological solution (i.e., the Dinah-Aseneth legend that establishes Aseneth’s Jewish descent) is also not “Joseph and Aseneth.” I comment on the rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend in Chapter Two and in the appendix.

family and the wife he shares his bed with, all of whom bless with their mouths the living God. (Jos. Asen. 8:5)\textsuperscript{21}

Here, as with his rejection of the advances from other Egyptian women (7:3), Joseph has upheld his father’s commandments to “guard strongly against associating with a strange woman, for association with her is destruction and corruption” (7:5).\textsuperscript{22} Joseph’s rejection of Aseneth is the result of his effort to follow a commandment to avoid strange women. He includes “the wife he shares his bed with” without specifying that a wife should be his kin, but this criterion seems imply. Otherwise, we must suppose that he intends to avoid foreign women unless he should decide to marry one, which would eviscerate the need to avoid foreign women in the first place.

As quickly as he has rejected her, Joseph blesses Aseneth (8:9). After eight days of penitence and fasting, Aseneth encounters an angelic figure in her tower bedroom, who pronounces her worthy to marry Joseph. After a week’s absence, Joseph returns to behold Aseneth in her new glorified appearance, and the two are married. The problem of one of the patriarchs of Israel marrying a foreign woman has apparently been settled. Aseneth is converted from her idolatry to worship of the Most High God, making her

---

\textsuperscript{21} All quotations from Joseph and Aseneth are taken from Burchard’s English translation in the \textit{Old Testament Pseudepigrapha} volume. I provide my own English translation when the reading of important variants is absent from Burchard’s text. I indicate this by providing a footnote to the effect that the translation is my own and listing the variants.

marriage to Joseph legitimate. The strictures of table fellowship, whereby Joseph assiduously avoided eating with Egyptians, have not only been eliminated for Aseneth, but by association with her, also for Pentephres and his household (20:7–8). These are the events in the narrative that raise the issue of intermarriage implied in the Joseph story and appear to resolve the difficulty.\(^{23}\)

The trouble is that Aseneth’s actions do not actually resolve the problem as it has been presented in the story. After all, Joseph is prepared to reject Aseneth prima facie as a strange woman, regardless of her behavior. Aseneth does not cease to be a foreign woman just because she has repented of her idolatry. Yet Joseph accepts her as a bride as if her identity had never mattered to him, a narrative turn that nullifies the perceived problem without providing a complementary solution. Like other pseudopigraphal narratives and Jewish midrash, the latter of which often do not do a very good job explaining the exegetical problems that occasion their writing nor confine themselves to the themes and purposes of their source material, Joseph and Aseneth is only superficially about intermarriage or even conversion. It does little to enhance our understanding of Aseneth’s role in the biblical Joseph story.\(^{24}\)


\(^{24}\) Bloch concludes that because Joseph and Aseneth “seeks neither to interpret the biblical episode nor to fill in the gaps” that it cannot be granted the status of a midrash. For stylistic reasons, he
poetical conceits,” so Joseph and Aseneth is not primarily meant to bring out the meaning of the Joseph story. This is not to say that Joseph and Aseneth has abandoned completely the concerns of the Joseph story or the themes of Genesis. Joseph and Aseneth cannot be reduced to some other species of discourse devoid of hermeneutical concerns. The issue is that the concern for how a faithful son of Israel could deign to marry the daughter of an Egyptian priest is for neither the Joseph story nor Joseph and

25. Boyarin grounds his own attempt to establish a literary theory of rabbinical literature in Isaac Heinemann’s theoretical efforts. Heinemann had begun his Darkhe Ha’aggadah by quoting Maimonides’s discussion of midrashim in Guide of the Perplexed. There, Maimonides defines two kinds of interpreters of midrash: (1) those who read midrashim as the valid interpretation of a text, and (2) those who reject the validity of midrashim because the plain meaning of the text has clearly been disregarded. Maimonides concludes that both kinds of interpreters are in error, since the midrashic method was employed “just as poets used poetical expressions.” To some extent, I would like to demonstrate that a similar conceit is at work in Joseph and Aseneth. Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1–10.

26. The hermeneutical concerns, in other words, transcend exegesis of a few details in the Joseph story, but still signal an effort to make an “exegetical association” with those details. Joseph and Aseneth conforms to the model of traditional Jewish exegesis, which first “assumes the comprehensive adequacy of Scripture to be an implicit feature of its [own] contents” (Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 3). It is implied in Joseph and Aseneth that the book of Genesis is Scripture, and the effort to expand the Joseph story is an exercise in biblical theology.
Aseneth a hermeneutical problem. Ross S. Kraemer observes that “despite the fact that prohibitions against intermarriage occur in numerous biblical passages, for the authors and editors of the Bible, [Joseph marrying Aseneth] was apparently unremarkable.”

In Joseph and Aseneth, Joseph’s faithfulness to his father’s commandment against associating with strange women is not upheld when he marries Aseneth, since the reason intermarriage is inevitably dangerous does not change. If the problem of intermarriage is therefore itself a kind of “conceit,” then what is Joseph and Aseneth actually about?

Joseph and Aseneth is about the spiritual experience of repentance, how it transforms the person who undertakes to repent of her old life, and the nature of the divine response confirming her acceptance. Aseneth’s experience of repentance and conversion is, first of all, like that of an abandoned child who has been discovered by her true parent, granted an inheritance, and recognized and reinstated. This effect is conveyed by way of the motifs and elements common to tales of a similar sort that circulated over centuries and across cultures. Aseneth’s penitence, her transfigurational encounter with an angelic being, her marriage to Joseph and her flight from the pharaoh’s son are also like those events that led to the people of Israel coming out of Egypt and into the promised land. These two metaphors, which evoke biblical models of Israel’s renewal, indicate the author’s real theological response to the problem of intermarriage. Aseneth’s conversion is presented not as a valid solution to the problem of intermarriage, but as a solution that eviscerates the conception of intermarriage as a problem. More than that, it creates in Aseneth’s experience a metaphor for conversion that vindicates a certain way of conceiving of divine providence.

History of Scholarly Approaches

Most scholarship on Joseph and Aseneth has sought to determine the religious identity of the original author and the social setting of the original intended audience as either Jewish or Christian. Randall D. Chesnutt divides the approaches in Joseph and Aseneth scholarship into two categories. Some scholars have followed a history of religions approach, seeking out parallels in Joseph and Aseneth to the ritual ideas and practices of particular groups in the antique world. Joseph and Aseneth was, under this approach, attributed to the Essenes, the community at Qumran, the Therapeuta, the mystery religions (esp. the Isis cult), merkabah mysticism, and Gnosticism, and it was dated anywhere from the third century BCE to the fifth century CE. Others approached the text with a literary-historical method, sometimes even seeking to establish a kind of social allegory that related the characters and events in Joseph and Aseneth to the religious and political milieu of a certain time and place. Chesnutt advocated a different


29. The two most inventive examples of this approach are by Sänger, who interpreted certain characters in Joseph and Aseneth as corresponding to social groups living in first-century CE Alexandria, and by Bohak, who sought to demonstrate that the whole narrative was an allegorical attempt to
approach to determining the social setting that focused on the narrative dynamics inherent to the text without seeking parallels in the manner of the history of religions school or attempting to ascertain the original date and provenance of the writing by drawing an allegorical comparison.30

My primary purpose is not to determine the social setting of the original intended audience of Joseph and Aseneth, so my orientation toward much of the scholarship is not one that seeks to advance these approaches. I make determinations about the date, authorship, and provenance of the text, but my interest is in how Joseph and Aseneth fits into the history of Jewish and Christian theological storytelling. I am attempting a tradition history, or form critical analysis of Joseph and Aseneth, by investigating the development of theological motifs in early Judaism and Christianity. At times, I draw parallels between elements in the narrative and the stories of other ancient Near Eastern cultures in a similar manner to the history of religions approach. However, my chief interest is in the way Joseph and Aseneth fits into Jewish and Christian narrative tradition and not how Joseph and Aseneth was directly influenced by other religions.

I have been careful to avoid labeling the exodus imagery and the birth story paradigm in Joseph and Aseneth as either allegory or typology. However, the two metaphors I describe do exhibit allegorical or typological features in certain parts of the narrative. I am discerning a kind of hidden meaning in Aseneth’s identity, that she is

30. Standhartinger approaches the text in much the same way that Chesnutt does (Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit: ein Beitrag anhand von Joseph und Aseneth, AGIU 14 [Leiden: Brill, 1995]).
wandering Israel restored. However, this kind of determination has little to do with the attempt to uncover a social allegory in which each character stands for a person or group in a particular historical setting.

Joseph and Aseneth scholarship has also endeavored to answer the question of genre. Scholars have characterized Joseph and Aseneth as missionary literature, an effort to appeal to the potential convert to Judaism by creating an analogue to the initiation rituals of mystery religions. 31 Marc Philonenko characterizes it as a missionary romance, in which Aseneth is depicted as an ideal convert. 32 Sänger challenges the prevailing classification of Joseph and Aseneth as missionary literature by reasoning that it contains too many Jewish traditions for an outsider to understand. 33 Richard I. Pervo contends that Joseph and Aseneth bears the strongest resemblance to sapiential Jewish novels, though it is also influenced by the Hellenistic romances. 34 Stephanie West insists that Joseph and Aseneth cannot be understood merely as a Jewish novel similar to Ruth, Esther, Judith, and Tobit, but needs to be compared to Hellenistic romances as well. 35

My investigation of Joseph and Aseneth is only tangentially oriented toward the issue of genre. I contend that the narrative is indebted to a stylized way of telling stories,

31. This is the argument of Edgar W. Smith, “‘Joseph and Asenath’ and Early Christian Literature: A Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti,” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1974), 32, 35.


one that spanned cultures and centuries and exerted an influence on early Jewish and Christian birth stories. There are only five extant Hellenistic romances, two of which fit as examples of the exposed hero tale type. I agree with scholars who have suggested that the author is influenced by Hellenistic romance, but I discuss this influence only as a part of the potential connections between Joseph and Aseneth and specific exposed hero tales.

Though numerous scholars have identified allusions to the exodus in Joseph and Aseneth, only Sänger to my knowledge has suggested what I contend, that the writer engages in an extended assimilation of Aseneth’s transformative experience with the events of the exodus. Sänger published an article and a monograph on Joseph and Aseneth in the late 1970s. He suggests the possibility that there may be exodus imagery exhibited in the portrayal of Aseneth’s conversion, a kind of “spiritualization” of the exodus story.36 Sänger’s history of religions project leads him away from this consideration, which receives only a cursory treatment in his article. Instead he explores the possibility of whether Joseph and Aseneth may be drawing on the cultic imagery of the Isis mystery religion.37 This made possible a reconception of Aseneth’s transformation in the novel as signifying more than just the concerns of Jewish proselytism, but he never pursued his hypothesis regarding exodus motifs further.


37. Sänger, Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien: religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth, WUNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980). This attempt to connect Aseneth with a Roman mystery cult’s adaptation of an Egyptian goddess comes after he criticizes Philonenko for identifying the name “Aseneth” as a possible adaptation of the Egyptian goddess Neith.
Methodology

The Nature of Allusive Discourse

One of the presuppositions I make is that the intentions of a writer can be discerned by a reader with a thorough enough grasp of the cultural and literary encyclopedia of the writer. When a writer alludes to a source in his milieu, he hopes that his reader grasps the significance of the subtext. The writer of Joseph and Aseneth and the scribes who contributed new readings over the centuries-long transmission and dissemination of the text as readers often comprehended the metaphors built of exodus imagery and birth story motifs. Studies of Joseph and Aseneth have made note of the indirect borrowing of biblical sources that does not appear to have any other purpose than to biblicize the text. Such intertextual discourse does not significantly contribute to the meaning of the narrative. It simply signals the intent of the writer to demonstrate his proficiency at handling his cultural encyclopedia and to reward the astute reader. Kraemer observes the biblicizing tendency in the longer text, for example, using σφόδρα frequently alongside a form of φοβέω, perhaps mimicking the numerous instances of this pairing in the LXX/OG.38 To notice this kind of intertextuality is not necessary for understanding a new dimension of Aseneth’s experience of fear. Conversely, at times it is possible that the biblicized idiom employed by the writer, in phrases such as “my face had fallen,” or “cut them down in the mouth of the sword,” or “by death shall he die,” could seem unintelligible to a reader unfamiliar with the Scriptures. But there is a difference between

the failure to grasp the reason for a turn of style in a narrative and the failure to make sense of the meaning of a word or phrase on one or more levels. A reader with no biblical knowledge may find the phrase “cut them down in the mouth of the sword” awkward, but he can understand that someone has just been killed.\textsuperscript{39}

I am advancing the idea that certain aspects of Joseph and Aseneth can be understood only by reading the exodus tradition and the Jewish birth paradigm informed by the exposed hero tale type as subtexts.\textsuperscript{40} There is, for example, not enough contextual support to make complete sense of the phrase “you have rescued me from darkness into light” in Jos. Asen. 15:12, when Aseneth thanks the angel. The motif of darkness and light has been established in the narrative, and a broad understanding of darkness and light as spiritual metaphors is enough for the reader to make sense of this phrase on one level.\textsuperscript{41} But the writer has not just drawn upon this imagery generically; he has employed

\textsuperscript{39} Bohak, \textit{Jewish Temple}, 87.

\textsuperscript{40} That is to say, there are words, phrases, and sentences in a text that are syntactically correct but are meaningless without context, such that they are considered “ill-formed.” This is another way of approaching the idea of an obligatory intertextual formation. Michael Riffaterre describes this phenomenon: “We are dealing here with a type of intertextuality that the reader cannot perceive, because the intertext leaves an indelible mark in the text which is a formal coefficient that serves as a command for a particular type of reading. This command dictates the deciphering of the text’s literary aspects” (“La trace de l’intertexte,” \textit{La pensée} 215 [1980]: 5, trans. in Jean-Jacques Thomas, \textit{Poeticized Language: The Foundations of Contemporary French Poetry} [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000], 12–13). Hays defines allusions at this level of perception and distinguishes them as imbued necessarily with authorial intent: “it is difficult to separate the concept of allusion from notions of authorial intentionality; the meaning of a text in which an allusion occurs would be opaque or severely diminished if the reader failed to recognize the implied reference to the earlier text” (\textit{Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels} [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016], 10).

\textsuperscript{41} Joseph is described as “the sun from heaven” (6:2), and Aseneth wonders “what womb of a woman will give birth to such light?” (6:4) Joseph also has “great light” inside him (6:6). All created things are said to have been called “from darkness to light” (8:9), and God is the one who has brought “invisible (things) out into the light” (12:1). The angel comes with the light of the morning and as a light-bearing being in ch. 15, and Aseneth after her transformation has the “appearance of light” (20:6). Aseneth fears the darkness as oblivion in her prayers (12:11), but otherwise, there is little mention of darkness. Even
an idiom that alludes to the passage through the Red Sea as a cosmogenic myth. If the reader understands what darkness and light mean in the religious traditions of Israel, he has comprehended generally what is meant, but unless he grasps the significance of the phrase as exodus imagery, he has not met the intertextual demand of the author.  

Yet it is still inadequate to be familiar enough with the source of an allusion only to recognize it as a source; the reader must possess the aptitude to perceive the interpretive meaning of a potential allusion, and that requires hermeneutical proficiency. The reader must be able to comprehend the significance of the connection that the writer is suggesting. This is because exegetical connections are always arbitrary: a decision to liken something in one text with something in another text is never wholly self-evident. As an example, typology, the act of associating one event, character, or setting with another, is never intrinsic to any set of exegetical correlations. It must always be accompanied by an effort to justify the connection, such that “nexuses between distinct temporal data are never something simply given; they are rather something which must always be exegetically established.” The difference between incidental similarities in a text and the kind of allusive work that builds something as complex as typology is always determined in part by the reader, who must ascertain why a text contains an allusion. If a

given the light imagery applied to Joseph and his angelic counterpart, the reader is left wondering what darkness Aseneth has come out of, unless it is simply a generic spiritual darkness.

42. This is the classification of an allusion as an obligatory intertextual figure. It does not mean that all allusions are obligatory. To define all allusions in this way creates the need for another term to describe allusions that are incidental to the meaning of a text. Hays makes a distinction between quotation, allusion, and echo. He distinguishes the phenomenon of an allusion and an “echo” almost entirely in terms of intelligibility, but he also distinguishes them by their distinctiveness or defensibility. I choose to define allusions as modes of intertextual figuration that, to some degree, always increase the comprehension of a text if properly grasped (Echoes, 10).

43. Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 351.
reader cannot recognize the intent of an allusion, he experiences it as incidental, a
connection that could be made in the mind of any reader with the same encyclopedia of
cultural meanings. The relationship between both writer and reader in this kind of literary
discourse can be conceived as a hermeneutical dialectic. It is not enough, in other words,
to perceive the possible sources for the subtext “from darkness into light.” The reader
must be conversant enough in the meanings of the source(s) to which the text refers that
he can respond to the writer’s invitation.

Discerning the presence of an allusion of any sort is therefore always a
probabilistic effort on the part of the reader. Authorial intention is not completely
inscrutable, but neither is it wholly accessible. A method for recognizing potential
allusions that establishes relative probability is a necessity, but the reader must render
judgements about the rhetorical effect of each allusion on an individual basis.44 He must
distinguish between subtextual and incidental language, between allusions that serve to
establish significant connections and ones that do not appear to serve any thematic
purpose. Again, biblicisms that do not appear to refer to a particular biblical passage or
that make use of biblical words, phrases, or conventions to no thematic effect must be
seen as literary adornments, appropriate stylistically but vestigial thematically.45 Mere

44. A reader’s judgment about the subtexts in a particular text are contingent in part on his
proficiency in searching for subtexts in the writer’s sources. My first task is to search for subtexts in early
Jewish and Christian literature so as to reduce the chances that I am misreading coincidence for purpose
and instead comprehending “a series of hermeneutical events” as a latter-day member of the author’s
intended community of readers. Dale C. Allison, Jr., The New Moses: A Matthean Typology (Minneapolis:
Fortress, 1993), 7.

45. Though scholars, for example, have noticed that Benjamin’s actions in the adventure portion
of Joseph and Aseneth are modeled after David’s fight with Goliath, the case for the model serving a
themetic purpose has been weak. Gordon Zerbe argues that the writer “dramatically revises the
precedent” set in 1 Samuel, when David beheads Goliath with his own sword, when in Joseph and
Aseneth he has Levi stay Benjamin’s hand when he is prepared to do the analogous deed (Non-Retaliation
description of intertextual figurations is not enough; what those devices contribute thematically is paramount, and some account of intention necessarily accompanies it.

Motifs and their Relationship to Allusions

The relationship between an allusion and a motif is complex, not least because there is significant conceptual overlap in their definitions. I define a motif not in the literary sense, as a thematic recurring element within a piece of literature, but as it is generally defined in folklore studies, as a storytelling element that recurs in oral and written tales within a specific cultural tradition, though it may have traveled and continue to travel through many other cultures over many centuries. It has its iterations, any number of which a reader may have knowledge of. A writer encodes a motif as such, as something he has seen before, and he modifies it. He is counting on his reader to decode the motif as *déjà lu*, something he has “read” before, but is also hoping that the reader understands his

---

46. Stith Thompson defines “motif” as “the smallest element in a tale having the power to persist in tradition” (*The Folktale* [New York: Dryden Press, 1946], 415). Decades of folklore studies research has taken issue with this definition and the motif-indexes that have been constructed based on it. Melvile Jacobs delivers the most acerbic critique of Thompson’s definition in his 1964 address to the American Folklore Society, in which he observes that “motifs include only some of the grosser features of literary style” (“A Look Ahead in Oral Literature Research,” *JAF* 79 [1966]: 423). I do not, therefore, define a motif by the smallest unit possible, since it is often in the fulsome expression of a motif that it gains its potential to be expressed anew.
purpose in modifying the motif. Motifs thrive in a cultural milieu within which there are enough instantiations of their elements that an author may rely on them to bear the weight of cultural information: “motifs are effective only as they evoke a clear echo in the listeners’ and readers’ minds. . . . An author must feel assured that his audience will react to the conventions he uses . . . and will thus be able to share his own train of thought.”

The element of intentionality that is required for an allusion to be significant is therefore also at work when a motif is expressed.

A motif may allude to any one text or not any text in particular to generate recognition for the reader. When the reader recognizes certain commonalities inherent to the reiteration of a story element for stylized purposes, the element has the quality of a motif. There are several ways that a motif is not necessarily an allusion, and the literary definition of a recurring element within a text is instructive for the difference. The element of a man passing his wife off as his sister recurs a few times in Genesis:

Abraham attempts it twice (12:13; 20:2) and Isaac once (26:7). There is nothing


48. One of the reasons that motif-indexes, academic catalogs of categorized motifs, (sometimes from a discrete group of cultures, often not) are problematic is not just because they are created and organized arbitrarily, but because they do not represent the way that narrators decide to tell stories in a customary fashion. Jacobs implies this much in his critique of Thompson, that “narrators are not always aware of the minimal units into which their stories can be broken up. They perceive the actions, personalities and extraordinary incidents from their own cultural knowledge as integral parts of their own specific traditions, rather than from a universal comparative perspective” (Jacobs, “Oral Literature,” quoted in Dan Ben-Amos, “Are There Motifs in Folklore?” in *Thematics Reconsidered: Essays in Honor of Horst S. Daemrich*, ed. Frank Trommler, Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 74). For the critique of motif-indexes as arbitrary, see, for example, Alan Dundes, “From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales,” *JAF* 75 (1962): 96.

49. The folkloristic definition of a motif encompasses the literary definition, since an element recurring within a single work of literature establishes its irreducibility and distinctiveness as an element and thus its suitability for cultural travel.
necessarily allusive in these instances of the motif. It does not refer Isaac’s actions back to Abraham’s in a way that we are invited to see Isaac as a type of Abraham, and it does not necessarily establish an allusion to a particular instance outside the book of Genesis where a similar type-scene has been expressed. An allusion is too specific by design to allow such ambiguity, and so the utility of a motif transcends the design of an allusion.

That much is also true when the definition of a motif is expanded to iterations between texts. The Christian myth of Barlaam is about an Indian prince named Josaphat who converts and becomes a Christian ascetic. It is recognizable as the story of Buddha, but in this case a tale type has made its way into Christian storytelling by cultural exchange, probably via Georgian sources, from Islam by way of Manichaeism and the Buddhists of Central Asia, who probably inherited the tale from the Hindus. A similar story as a complex of interrelated motifs has been passed through different cultural contexts. That process requires neither familiarity with the path the story took, nor how it was adapted in any case, nor specific knowledge of any one expression of the tale type. That is true of the author, who may construct his story with motifs he may not even consciously be mimicking, and it is true of the reader, who may be influenced by the presence of familiar motifs without fully comprehending their history.

I am examining allusions and motifs to the exodus story, which means that I am looking for allusions to story elements in the book of Exodus and in the retelling and reimagining of the exodus in Jewish and Christian tradition. But I am also looking for

50. I define the term “tale type” in more detail in Chapter One as a structured matrix of motifs whose occurrence together has the same effects as a motif (i.e., to call to mind a stylistic framework for the reader from cultural forms).

51. Allison, New Moses, 13 n. 11.
literary motifs from the exodus story, such as the motif of pursuit/flight or the motif of idolatry. The presence of motifs in Joseph and Aseneth that are common to the exodus increase the probability that the exodus is being evoked for thematic purposes, to call to mind not just the elements of the story, but the purposes of its original context. I am also examining the presence of motifs from the tale type of the hero who was exposed at birth.52 I make my assessment of the birth story paradigm in the tradition as a way of demonstrating that Joseph and Aseneth fits into the development of those kinds of stories. My purpose is to show that the tale type persistently influenced birth stories in the biblical tradition and that the same process is at work in Joseph and Aseneth. Broadly speaking, I am investigating allusions to the exodus story in Joseph and Aseneth, exodus motifs being secondary. I am most interested in how the motifs from a tale type as it developed in early Judaism and Christianity can be perceived in Joseph and Aseneth, though allusions to elements in particular sources in that development are also important.

Identifying Subtexts

I categorize the allusions in Joseph and Aseneth according to Dale C. Allison’s classification of six types of allusion, which he employs to explain the Moses typology in the gospel of Matthew, as my rubric for identifying exodus motifs.53 Allison organizes

52. As I discuss in Chapter One, “exposed hero” is a misnomer for the tale type, since it is not always the central motif. In fact, I contend that no one motif is essential to the transmission of a tale type. The exposure motif in the early Jewish birth paradigm is jettisoned early on, though it continues to influence the tradition. The tale of the exposed hero is sometimes referred to as the “foundling myth,” but favoring that term would make little difference, not least because the presence of a “foundling” in a story usually implies that some form of exposure has occurred.

53. I have referred to the concept of typology often enough in this introduction that it is necessary to clarify whether I am contending that there is typology in Joseph and Aseneth. Typology is a form of extended metaphor that is defined by the correlation of a type with its antitype, which necessarily
his types according to how probable it is that an allusion is present. I list them here with examples:

1. *Explicit statement:* an author makes an explicit analogy between one subject or event and another. For example, John 3:14 (“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”) and Heb 7:15–16 (It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest . . .”).

2. *Inexplicit citation or borrowing:* part of a source is reproduced without explicit citation. This kind of allusion can involve no more than a single word from the source, if that word is distinctive enough. Matthew 2:19–21 parallels Exod 4:19–20 LXX, especially “go to the land of Israel, for those seeking the life of the child have died” (Matt 2:20) and “go back to Egypt, for all those seeking your life have died” (Exod 4:20).

---

*precedes* it in time. This is part of Fishbane’s definition of typology as “a literary-historical phenomenon which isolates perceived correlations between specific events, persons, or places early in time with their later correspondents” (*Biblical Interpretation*, 351). The element of ‘historicity’ was associated with the concept of typology by Jean Daniélou in an effort to disassociate it from its metaphorical cousin, allegory. While Daniélou saw allegory as “a recrudescence of nature-symbolism, from which the element of historicity is absent,” he characterized typology as a phenomenon belonging to sacred Scripture, grounded in the historically verifiable reality that God designed history with “structural unity.” Events in salvation history resemble each other because God has guided events that way (*The Lord of History*, trans. Nigel Abercrombie [London: Longmans, 1958], 140). Divine activity could be discerned in “the real correspondences in historical events,” therefore, typology belongs alongside modern historical criticism as worthy of investigation (G.W.H. Lampe, “The Reasonableness of Typology,” in *Essays on Typology* [London: SCM, 1957], 29).

Ultimately, the events depicted in Joseph and Aseneth precede the exodus; type does not follow its antitype in time. I could insist on a modified definition of typology, but it is a simpler solution to categorize the imagery in Joseph and Aseneth according to the two extended metaphors I have described. There are times that Aseneth seems to fill the role of Moses in the exodus, and in Chapter Five I argue explicitly that there is a typological correlation between Aseneth’s escape from the pharaoh’s son and the crossing of the Red Sea. But, the writer’s project of assimilating the events of the narrative with the exodus is best conceived of as an extended metaphor with typological (and even allegorical) features. Joseph, and by association Aseneth, may at times seem to prefigure the events of the exodus, but I am interested in the theological reconfiguration of the exodus as a salvific event.

---

This example demonstrates that one type of allusion is often coupled with another type.

In this case, similar circumstances of the narrative and the structural resemblance of Matt 1–2 to the Moses birth story work together with the verbatim use of certain words from Exodus.

3. *Similar circumstances:* events in a narrative are portrayed under similar circumstances, as when Joshua’s crossing of the Jordan in Josh 3 resembles the crossing of the Red Sea. I make the case in Chapter Five that this kind of allusive pattern is at work in generating a typological portrayal of Aseneth’s flight from the pharaoh’s son as a reprisal of the crossing of the Red Sea.

4. *Key words or phrases:* the use of key words or phrases that are distinctive to the source. Allison describes this as an effort to “dress up a story with the words of another that is like it and well known.”55 The gospel accounts of the feeding of the five thousand share key words with Elisha’s feeding a hundred men with twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain. Again, another allusive pattern strengthens the presence of key words in this example (similar circumstances: a prophet is challenged to provide food for too many people, his servant doubts him, he insists, everyone is fed and there is leftover food).

——

Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύου ἐις γῆν Ἰσραήλ τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου. 

βάδιζε ἀπελθὲ ἐις Αἰγυπτον τεθνήκασιν γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντες σοι τὴν ψυχήν.

5. *Similar narrative structure*: Like similar circumstances, a narrative may also be structured in a similar way to its source, as when Jesus calls his four disciples in Mark 1 bears a structural resemblance to Elijah calling Elisha in 1 Kgs 19.

6. *Word order, syllabic sequence, poetic resonance*: The details of certain words in a narrative may resemble a source text only on the level of words or syllables. Allison refers to these phenomena as “the rhythm or meter of sentences as well as the patterns of words and syllables [as] imitative in order to allude.” The presence of these kinds of allusions can often be the most difficult to discern, but ultimately it is conversance with the cultural knowledge base of the author that increases the definiteness of an allusion.

   It is important to emphasize that Allison associates explicitness with probability in allusions, but also recognizes the role of innertextual coordination and idiosyncratic usage in establishing an allusion. A solitary similarity in circumstance, narrative structure, or syllabic sequence between one text and another may prove more ambiguous than a direct quotation, but this is why innertextual coordination of potential subtexts is important, since it can increase the probability of each individual instance. ἐν ἀρχῇ in John 1:1 borrows the words from Gen 1:1, but as an allusion it gains credence only when coordinated with other features of the verse: its location at the beginning of a book, the lack of a definite article, the following word being a finite indicative verb, in turn followed by ὁ + a two-syllable subject ending in the second-declension masculine. It is true that the syllabic resonance and word order are less explicit than the expression ἐν

---

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., 19–20.

58. Ibid.
ἀρχῇ, but coordinating these instances with that expression raises the probability that they
correspond. The distinctiveness of ἐν ἀρχῇ strengthens the probability that the phrase
alludes to Gen 1:1 in a way that repetition of the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα, for example, does
not. The latter phrase is a stereotypical temporal marker that is used frequently in the
Bible, though that does not preclude it from being allusive. So Allison concludes that in
the absence of explicit citation or borrowing, the evidence for the existence of an
extended metaphor like a typology must rest on a robust combination of the other, less
explicit kinds of allusion (devices 3–6).\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish and Christian}

The paradigm of the exposed hero or foundling influenced early Christianity as much as
it shaped the way birth stories were told in early Jewish narratives, even apart from the
typology that associates Jesus with Moses. The retelling of the exodus is so important in
early Judaism and early Christianity that the existence of exodus motifs in Joseph and
Aseneth cannot assist in determining its provenance. The metaphors built from these two
patterns could have served the theological interests of anyone who thought the social
event of conversion was worth an \textit{apologia}. The lack of distinctive ethnic or religious
descriptors in Joseph and Aseneth besides the term “Hebrew,” the difficulty of even

\textsuperscript{59} Allison also establishes six ways that non-explicit allusions can be discerned: (1) the source
must precede the text; (2) the likely significance of a source for the writer; (3) a combination of allusive
patterns working together in a text; (4) the prominence of the antitypic figure; (5) precedent for
constructing typology from the same antitype; and (6) unusual imagery and uncommon motifs shared
between the source and the text (\textit{New Moses}, 22). As regards Joseph and Aseneth and the exodus, the
source clearly precedes the text, was likely very significant to the writer, formed the basis of numerous
typologies, and as an event is one of the most prominent in the history of Israel. One of my tasks in the
second section is to prove that there is a strong enough combination of allusive devices in Joseph and
Aseneth and that at least some of them are unique to Joseph and Aseneth and the exodus tradition.
assigning a locus for Aseneth’s initiation, much less finding a good analogy in the cultic practices of early Judaism or Christianity, and the presence of other imagery and symbolism (e.g., manna-like substance, angelic encounter, Edenic imagery) that was theological valuable for either an early Jew or an early Christian, all confound our ability to determine the original provenance and authorial identity of Joseph and Aseneth. At the level of theological discourse, I consider Joseph and Aseneth both Jewish and Christian.60

Joseph and Aseneth and the rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend, a folktale explaining that Aseneth was the exposed daughter of Dinah and Shechem, are both midrashic responses to the problem of intermarriage. While the Dinah-Aseneth legend resolves the potential problem of intermarriage by establishing Aseneth’s Jewish heritage, Joseph and Aseneth provides a spiritualized solution. Only in rabbinic literature does the problem of Potiphar/Pentephres as both the master of Joseph and the father of Aseneth generate a lively response, one that includes explicit competing solutions about how Aseneth came

---

60. The question of provenance has been paramount in the scholarly discussion of Joseph and Aseneth. Faced with the dichotomy between Jewish or Christian authorship, scholars have lined up on either side of the debate decade after decade. Battifol thought the work was fifth-century Christian (“Le livre,” 7–18, 30–37; see also idem, “Apocryphes [Livres],” in Dictionnaire de la Bible, ed. F. Vigouroux, 5 vols., [Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1895–1912], 1.771). After decades of scholars favoring an earlier Jewish provenance, the pendulum of consensus has swung back toward a Christian origin. Rivka Nir has been the most vocal advocate for a fourth-century CE Christian date, following on the heels of Kraemer (When Aseneth Met Joseph; Nir, “Aseneth as the ‘Type of the Church of the Gentiles,’ ” in Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality: Thematic Studies, vol. 1 of Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality, ed. Craig Evans and Daniel Zacharias, LNTS 14 [New York: T&T Clark, 2009], 109–37; idem, Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book, HBM 42 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012]). John J. Collins notes that even though “imaginative fictions betray their historical contexts by the interests that they highlight,” it is still the case that, as a romantic novel, Joseph and Aseneth provides no overt historical markers to establish provenance. He continues, “If Joseph and Aseneth were explicit about its provenance, there would be no debate about it” (“Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?” JSP 14 [2005]: 100). For good accounts of the positions on either side, see Chesnutt, From Death to Life; Humphrey, Joseph and Aseneth, 28–37; Sabrina Inowlocki, Des idoles mortes et muettes au dieu vivant: Joseph, Aseneth, et le fils de Pharaon dans un roman du judaïsme hellénisé, Monothéismes et philosophie (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Standhartinger, “Recent Scholarship on Joseph and Aseneth (1988-2013),” CurBS 12 (2014): 353–406.
to be married to Joseph. Late antique Christianity appears to be almost entirely unconcerned with this perceived problem. In the absence of any other compelling evidence as to the author’s identity, specific religious or social concerns, I have concluded that Joseph and Aseneth or an oral folktale from which it was adapted was told no earlier than the third century CE, but more likely in the fourth or fifth century CE. It is possible that it a Jewish debate arose regarding a perceived problem with Pentephres as an acceptable father for Aseneth along with the problem of intermarriage, the two stories competed, and the conversion story passed into Christian hands. But it does not seem to me that there is enough evidence that this is the case and not that a Christian story of conversion could have been answered by a rabbinic story of rediscovered Jewish heritage.

The entire extant manuscript tradition of Joseph and Aseneth going back to the earliest (sixth-century CE Syriac) copy is a Christian scribal tradition. The variations in the manuscripts attest a lively, evolving adaptation of the story that could show evidence

61. Kohler holds the earlier view that Aseneth is a proselyte and that it was superceded in rabbinic circles by the Dinah-Aseneth legend (“Asenath”). This stands in contrast to Battifol, who argues that the Dinah-Aseneth legend dates to the fourth century CE and that Joseph and Aseneth was written perhaps half a century later, and Aptowitzer, who argues that Joseph and Aseneth is a reaction to the Dinah-Aseneth legend (Battifol, “Le livre,” 11–19; Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 254–60). Kraemer critiques Battifol and especially Aptowitzer for assigning too early a date to his rabbinic sources and finding too little evidence of the Dinah-Aseneth legend in Joseph and Aseneth (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 231–54).

62. Chesnutt repeats the assertion originally made by Philonenko, that the midrashic problem that Joseph and Aseneth establishes is, regardless of the solution it offers, “a problem to the Jewish conscience” (“Social Setting,” 38; Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 101). While conversion as a solution for intermarriage would appeal to Christian scribes and ensure that Joseph and Aseneth was passed down, it is difficult to imagine why a Christian author would even consider it a problem in the first place. Kraemer observes that midrashic style was not unknown or unused by Christians (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 42–43 n. 1). Patricia D. Ahearn-Kroll contends that the concerns about intermarriage, idolatry, and non-retaliation fit “an Egyptian setting of Hebrews interacting with both Hebrews and Egyptians” (“Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt” [Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, Divinity School, 2005], 195–96). Again, these concerns need only be true of the initial composition and early transmission of the story and not what characterized the later Christian flourishing of the texts.
of a continuing oral tradition in Christian circles. Even though I contend that there are no distinctively Christian interpolations in the manuscript tradition, it is the case that Joseph and Aseneth in its literary form is a Christian phenomenon. The theological themes and motifs in this text would have appealed to Christians from its earliest passage into their scribes’ hands. It is also possible that Joseph and Aseneth as a Christian folktale influenced the internecine rabbinic dialogue over Aseneth’s worthiness to be Joseph’s wife. The lack of any historical markers to locate the original composition in a particular time and place, or, as I have said, distinctly Jewish theology that a Christian could not readily appropriate means that there would never have been a perceived need to alter the text. Aseneth’s identity as a foreign woman was simply ignored, since the solution had conceptual analogues in the Christian tradition. As Eva Mussio puts it, “the learned original context of [Joseph and Aseneth] did not collide with the rich popular reception of the novel, which is attested in the long and varied history of the tradition.” What Joseph and Aseneth became in the Christian tradition, in other words, never seems to have acknowledged the Jewish exegetical discourse that ostensibly provided the occasion for

63. See Nicholas Elder, “On Transcription and Oral Transmission in Aseneth: A Study of the Narrative’s Conception,” *JSJ* 47 (2016): 119–42. Elder argues that there is residual orality discernible in Joseph and Aseneth that indicates an oral tradition that preceded and proceeded the manuscript tradition.

64. Traugott Holtz argues that there is clear Christian interpolation in Joseph and Aseneth. But the imagery of rebirth, the honey as a Christian symbol, the supposed gnostic influence, and his assertion that Joseph is being portrayed as a Christ-figure have been unconvincing (“Christliche Interpolationen in Joseph und Aseneth,” *NTS* 14 [1968]: 482–97). Nir’s project has generally been received as more of the same, though she insists even more strongly on Christian provenance, authorship, and transmission (*A Christian Book*). Chuytin sees the crossing of the honeycomb as a “symbolic division into quarters” that is sapiential imagery and not distinctively Christian (*Tendentious Hagiographies*, 234).

the story. The kinds of interpolation we might expect from Christian scribes are conspicuously unexploited.

Dealing with an Eclectic Text

One of the methodological assumptions I make about the formation and development of Joseph and Aseneth’s manuscript tradition is that copyists encounter this tradition, along with its subtexts, as both readers and writers, as both the decoders of intertextual meaning and the creators of new layers of meaning. The modern scholarly project of seeking to recover an understanding of an original literary adaptation of this text has led to judgements about the value of certain patterns of expansion or abridgment in the tradition, which have been labeled the shorter and longer “texts.” The effort to ascertain the form of the original archetype and the rubric of a longer and shorter text has been a valuable part of the scholarship on Joseph and Aseneth, as has the recent effort of Uta Barbara Fink to organize the Greek manuscripts along with their versional adaptations into a stemmatical configuration.\[^{66}\] It is, on the whole, a project oriented toward a greater understanding of the transcriptional relationships between extant manuscripts, an effort to answer the question, “Who copied from whom?”

My approach to the manuscript tradition is conditioned by different kinds of questions, so I designate the value of the variations in it by how well individual readings appear to recognize (and potentially contribute to) the portrayal of Aseneth’s experience as a kind of coming out of Egypt and a new birth story. These kinds of designations need

\[^{66}\] Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 17.
have nothing necessarily to do with when, how, or why a variation came to be a part of the tradition. Each variation in the manuscript tradition begins on an equal footing. A scribe copying in the eleventh century CE who has recognized in the honeycomb an allusion to mystical traditions about heavenly manna (Jos. Asen. 16:8) may choose to add details to other parts of the narrative that strengthen a connection to the exodus story in other ways, or he may choose to interpret the heavenly manna as a figure of the Eucharist and add other details. 67 It is important to make distinctions about the variants that occur in this eclectic tradition and to draw on the scholarship that tries to sort out the history of its transmission. Making note of these variants assists in the explication of the metaphorical structures that are generated by the allusions and motifs I am investigating.

**Summary**

The body of this work is divided into two. First I examine the influence of the exposed hero myth on the paradigm of the Jewish birth story, beginning with (1) the birth of Moses in Exodus; and (2) its development in early Jewish and Christian literature. I include the birth stories of three other representative figures (Noah, Melchizedek, and Jesus) in the first chapter. I attempt to demonstrate the abiding influence of the exposed hero myth in Jewish birth stories and to identify the thematic purpose of certain motific modifications to the tale type, modifications that persisted into the early Christian appropriation of the paradigm. This supports my assessment in Chapter Two of the

---

familial metaphors in Joseph and Aseneth as an expression in part of the Jewish and Christian adaptation of the exposed hero tale type.

I contend that the allusions present in Joseph and Aseneth create an extended metaphor likening Aseneth’s transformation to key events and symbols in the exodus story. I describe the features of the exodus tradition in Second Temple Jewish and early Christian literature that relate symbolically to Aseneth’s experience. I interpret the honeycomb of Jos. Asen. 16 as a heavenly substance, a spiritualized representation of the manna given to the people of Israel in the wilderness. Chapter Five is an attempt to locate a kind of typological reprisal of the Exodus, specifically the tenth plague and the crossing of the Red Sea, in the adventure portion of Joseph and Aseneth. I conclude with an analysis of the way that these metaphors of spiritual transformation contribute to a better understanding of the exodus tradition and of the portentous birth paradigm in the literature of early Jews and Christians.
CHAPTER ONE: THE EXPOSED HERO/FOUNDLING TALE TYPE AND JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN BIRTH STORIES

Joseph and Aseneth exhibits motifs that are common to the exposed hero tale type, which influenced the formation of Jewish and Christian birth stories. To understand the manifestation of these motifs in Joseph and Aseneth requires an examination of the formation of the birth story paradigm in relation to the tale type. This investigation in turn needs a definition for the concept of a tale type and a method for discerning the motifs of the tale type in the tradition. First, I define the concept of a tale type and describe the features of the exposed hero tale type. Then I analyze the birth stories of Moses, Noah, Melchizedek, and Jesus in comparison to this tale type. I also adduce evidence of the persistent influence of specific exposed hero tales on the paradigm of the early Jewish birth story.

The notion of a tale type is an ideal; there are no perfect examples of any tale type in the stories of any culture. It is a theoretically comprehensive description of the discrete storytelling habits of a group of related cultures that has been organized into a composite plot synopsis. It is a hypothetical construction for conceptual analysis and is never synonymous with any particular instance.¹ The building blocks of a tale type are story elements, such as characters, settings, plot turns, objects, events. Within a tale type, there are interrelated elements that tend to recur together in a predetermined order, much like a “fixed constellation of predetermined motifs.”² I refer to this phenomenon as a motif


². A tale type is a type scene more broadly defined, and it is possible to discern type scenes traveling within the larger matrix of a stylized story. Robert Alter made the type scene, a literary convention of Homeric scholarship, a popular term for biblical literary criticism. He describes the phenomenon in the Bible as “a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical
complex, and the individual elements in a complex as components. Lastly, there is a whole new horizon of theory and method that opens up when a technical sense is assigned to the word “myth,” a word that describes some stories about exposed heroes. I refrain from speaking of myth in this manner.

1.1. The Tale of the Exposed Hero

The plot synopsis of the exposed hero tale type begins with an infant being exposed or abandoned. The reasons for the exposure vary. The infant may be exposed in order to save him from danger, or because of fear or shame on the part of the parent(s). The Akkadian Sargon legend, which some scholars argue influenced the Moses story, contains this element, as does the Hittite tale “The Sons of the Queen of Kaneš.” There are often miraculous events surrounding the birth. The gestation or the birth of the infant is often miraculous, or the infant may be preternaturally beautiful or precocious. This is the case with the thirteenth-century BCE Hittite story of the “Sun God and the Cow,” where a cow, impregnated by the sun god, gives birth to a human child. A dream, omen, or prophecy often precedes or accompanies the birth, the contents of which signal danger heroes that are analogous to Homeric type-scenes” (The Art of Biblical Narrative [New York: Basic Books, 1981], 50–51).


to another main character. King Laius receives an oracle regarding Oedipus. King Astyages has a dream about his daughter regarding Cyrus. The announcement of the coming birth can lead to someone hiding the child, usually the mother and/or father, which can happen before or after the exposure. These elements are often accompanied by the motif of fate or destiny, as with Iamus, Oedipus, Cyrus, or Agathocles.\(^5\) The beauty of the infant is indicative of his noble or divine origin, and leads to the extraordinary efforts to save him from his exposure. Gods (e.g., Dionysus and Poseidon) and demigods (Perseus and Hercules) come from the union of gods and mortals, but if an infant is not divine or semi-divine, his parents are royal or noble almost without exception. Because of the circumstances of the exposure, the parent sometimes leaves a birth token that later aids in a recognition scene. This is the case in the tokens that Creusa leaves with Ion, with the ring that accompanies the exposure of Carisius and Pamphila’s infant child, the sword that Thyestes recognizes on the hip of Aegisthus, in the robe that Moses is wrapped in when he is exposed in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian and the swaddling clothes of Jesus.\(^6\)

In many cases, that the child is discovered, adopted, and raised by someone benevolent is the artifice for an escape from danger. The infant is often nursed or

---

\(^5\) The oracle foretells that Iamus will be a great prophet. The tragic prediction in the Oedipus story is well known. The story of Cyrus, details of which probably influenced the Gospel of Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus, is replete with portentous themes. Each of these stories was circulating by the fifth century BCE, but the story of Agathocles, recorded by Diodorus in *Library of History*, is first century BCE. It is an example of how the exposed hero may actually become an exposed villain (Lewis, *Sargon*, 157–59, 163).

\(^6\) The *Ion* is a fifth-century BCE play, Carisius and Pamphila is fourth or third century BCE, and the character of Aegisthus, mentioned by Homer and Pausanius, is a minor figure in the *Oresteia* and *Libation Bearers* of Aeschylus and the *Agamemnon* of Seneca. The recognition element is given by Hyginus, a first-century CE Latin author (Lewis, *Sargon*, 159–60, 173–74).
protected by an unlikely figure, an animal, famously in the case of Romulus and Remus’s wolf mother, or by a bucolic human couple, as in the case of Cyrus, raised by a cowherd, or Sargon, raised by a gardener, or even by royal or divine adoptive parents, such as Oedipus, Hercules, Telephus, or Moses. Growing up in this adoptive household is a common experience for the exposed hero. The true nature of his birth and upbringing are often eventually revealed to him and/or to his parents. The recognition motif is featured in two of the Hellenistic romances (Daphnis and Chloe, Aethiopica) and appears as a common motif in the type. This recognition leads to a fateful denouement, in which the child takes on the identity he had lost knowledge of when he was exposed.

Discerning the presence of the motifs of a tale type, like the process by which allusions may be discerned, is a probabilistic endeavor: the more motifs exhibited from the same kind of tale, the more likely that the storyteller is attempting to draw on the conventions of the type and perhaps allude to specific instantiations. The history of myth theory and folklore studies has been characterized by efforts to define the “central” motif of a tale type, the indispensable core of the tale without which the pattern cannot be


8. There are many listings of the features of the exposed hero tale type. All of them are subjective, since each compiler has made decisions first about which tales from which cultures and time periods should be considered and secondly about which parts of those tales should be considered part of the type. The reason that these lists are important is because they can aid in attempts to describe the travel of story elements through cultures and across time. I have described the pertinent elements above for my own use, though it is certainly not an exhaustive list. Three of the major works that contain these lists or led to their formation, Otto Rank’s The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, Lord Raglan’s The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama, Part II, and Alan Dundes’s The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus, are collected into one volume with an introduction by Robert A. Segal in Otto Rank et al., In Quest of the Hero (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
present. It seems natural to insist that the exposed hero tale type include the exposure motif, but the reality of how storytelling paradigms move through a culture over time militates against this conclusion. If we consider the tale type of the superhero in modern Western culture, it is difficult to establish a “central” motif. Should the hero possesses innate “superpowers”? Then Batman, Iron Man, Black Widow, and Green Arrow cannot be regarded as superheroes. Should he wear a uniform or costume to occlude his identity? Eliminate Jessica Jones, Jonah Hex, Luke Cage, The Spirit, and John Constantine (and even, strictly speaking, Superman). Yet comic book aficionados would defend any one of these characters as a legitimate superhero, in some cases precisely or especially because they lack an element that is expected but missing. It is not because there is an essential motif in superhero stories that, once activated, ensures that the entire story is recognized as a superhero story. In each of these examples, there are other motifs from superhero storytelling conventions that lead an audience to accept the main character as a superhero. This is the case when the exposure element, or any other motif, is absent from an exposed hero tale.10

---


10. The effect of omitting an important motif from a tale type or a motif complex can be rhetorically powerful precisely because the expectations of the reader have been upended. The folklorist who insists that the exposure motif is what makes an exposed hero tale must contend with the freedom of a storyteller to avoid, invert, or exchange story elements however he likes, especially the ones that may be perceived to be the most important. I hope to demonstrate that the exposure element in Jewish birth stories seems to have been considered a theodicean liability and was ultimately jettisoned in the birth story of Jesus. Each folktale has its own purposes, even if it exhibits motifs that evoke a certain kind of story. A tale type does not restrict meaning, though it fosters certain themes in a story over others.
1.2. The Birth Story Paradigm in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition

In the development of the birth story paradigm, I have two concerns that position my argument in Chapter Two. The first has to do with the theme of divine providence and/or divine faithfulness as a theme in the tradition. The second has to do with the influence of this theological concern on the manifestation of the motifs. Even though there is no inherent function in a motif, I contend that there are thematic trends in the way certain motifs operate in the birth stories of Moses, Noah, Melchizedek, and Jesus. Just as many of exposed hero tales in cultures include a motif of fate, necessity, or destiny, the Jewish and Christian birth stories I examine share a corresponding thematic concern for the action of divine providence and/or divine faithfulness. The birth stories of these ideal figures often include an effort to portray God’s faithfulness to his people and to vindicate his actions in their renewal. This influences the choices Jewish and Christian storytellers make about which motifs in the tale type to include or exclude, and how to express them.

11. The birth story paradigm encompasses more than just these four figures. To these should be added the birth stories of Abraham, Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and Elijah. The story of Joash is significant, since he escapes the massacre of all royal claimants by his mother Ataliah (2 Kgs 11:1–2), being hidden by his aunt Jehosheba until he is seven years old (2 Kgs 9). If not in their biblical stories, most of these figures are bestowed with a birth story in the pseudepigrapha, in Josephus and Philo, and in the haggadah. They share a number of characteristics in how they are portrayed. Charles Perrot lists these similarities in “Les récits d’enfance dans la haggada antérieure au IIe siècle de notre ère,” RSR 55 (1967): 505–506.
1.3. Moses as the Exposed Exemplar

1.3.1. Exodus 1–2

I seek to demonstrate that the Moses birth story in Exodus draws on the motifs found in ancient Near Eastern versions of the exposed hero tale. The writer ironically modifies some elements of the tale type to fit his theological concerns. This is the case, for example, with the annunciation motif, conspicuously absent from the book of Exodus. It absence from the annunciation-danger-evasion motif complex has the effect of coupling the fortunes of the people of Israel with the figure of Moses.

Tales of exposed children were common in the ancient Near East long before the story of the birth of Moses was told. There was the Sons of Queen Kaneš, a Hittite myth in which the queen bears thirty sons in one year, decides to abandon them all by placing them in reed baskets caulked with mud or fat and casting them onto the river. The sons are raised by the gods and eventually return to Kaneš. The story contains many of the

---

12. This is not to say that there are not also other generic forces at work in the construction of the story. Timothy D. Finlay has adapted the form-critical idea of Gattung to describe the genre of the birth report in the OT. He defines its features as containing conception and birth elements, naming and etiological elements, and a number of attendant elements that may or may not be present. These elements are present in the Moses birth story (The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible, FAT 12 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]). See also Alter, “How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible’s Annunciation Type-Scene,” Proof 3 (1983): 115–30.

13. The birth announcement as a type-scene is found most often in Genesis, but it occurs often throughout the HB and seems relatively stable. Often the annunciation of the birth occurs as an explanation of a pregnancy that has already happened, though that does not alter its predictive purpose. Finlay has catalogued the annunciation type-scene in the HB in Birth Report Genre.

14. The birth of Moses seems to have been a free-standing story before it was added to Exodus at a late stage (Jonathan Cohen, The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story, SHR 58 [Leiden: Brill, 1993], 27). Lewis postulates that “at some late stage a Hebrew storyteller wished to assign to the figure of Moses an unusual birth history appropriate to his position in the Exodus tradition. To serve this purpose he turned to an ancient and popular literary device, the tale of the hero exposed at birth” (Sargon, 265).
elements of the tale type: a child is abandoned by a royal or divine parent, cast adrift and discovered by a foster parent, raised to adulthood only to return and confront his birth parent. It includes a common element in ancient Near Eastern tales: the exposure is on water.\textsuperscript{15} Many scholars maintain that the birth story of Sargon of Akkad (2296–2240 BCE) is the chief inspiration for the Moses birth story.\textsuperscript{16} The earliest extant copy of the Sargon legend comes from eighth-century BCE Nineveh:

Sargon the mighty king of Agade, am I.
My mother was a high priestess, my father I knew not.
The brother(s) of my father loved the hills.
My city is Azupirau, which is situated on the banks of the Euphrates.
My mother, the high priestess, conceived: in secret she bore me.
She set me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen she sealed my lid.
She cast me into the river which rose not over me.
The river bore me up and carried me to Akki, the drawer of water.
Akki, the drawer of water, lifted me out as he dipped his ewer.
Akki, the drawer of water, appointed me as his gardener.
While I was a gardener, Ishtar granted me her love.
And for four and . . . years I exercised kingship.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} This is true of Sargon, of the child of the sun god and the cow, another Hittite tale, of the Persian king Darius, of the Greek Perseus, and of Romulus (Trevor Bryce, \textit{Life and Society in the Hittite World} [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 221). The Indian story of Karna is remarkably similar to the story of Moses, though it comes perhaps many hundreds of years after the Moses birth story proliferated. Princess Kunti is impregnated by the sun god Surya, and she exposes her offspring in a basket sealed with wax and placed in the river. A charioteer and his wife discover the child and raise him (Lewis, \textit{Sargon}, 176–77).


\textsuperscript{17} “The Legend of Sargon,” E. Spieser, \textit{ANET} (3rd ed.), 119.
In this legend and in Moses’s birth, the mother gives birth to the child secretly, she exposes the child in an ark or basket and seals it with pitch, then a surrogate discovers the child and raises him. There is also an explanation given for the exposure. Although Moses’s mother is not a priestess, she is a Levite woman (Exod 2:1). The father is unnamed and therefore likely illegitimate in the Sargon legend, while the father of Moses is unnamed and almost wholly absent from Exod 2. The pharaoh’s daughter names him.

18. Morton Cogan takes issue with translating tashlikuhu in Exod 1:22 simply “to throw or fling,” maintaining instead that it is a technical term for exposure or abandonment (“A Technical Term for Exposure,” JNES 27 [1968]: 133–35). Arnold Ehrlich had demonstrated that it is so used in Ezek 16:5 to describe the abandonment of Israel in infancy by its parents prior to becoming the Lord’s foundling. The Akkadian verb nadu appears in the Sargon legend and normally means “to throw, cast,” but it is difficult to render it simply thus in that context, since Sargon’s mother takes great care in building an ark for him and placing him gently in the river. Cogan suggests that perhaps the semantic range of nadu is paralleled in the use of tashlikuhu and that the pharaoh’s command is not drowning but exposure. Given a certain anxiety against involvement in bloodshed, Joseph’s brothers, for example, avoid murdering him with their own hands but are content to leave him for dead in an empty cistern (Gen 37:22). Jeremiah’s captors, given the order to carry out his death, prefer to lower him into a cistern (Jer 38:6, 9). Cogan suggests that perhaps the order was to abandon the male children on the banks of the Nile rather than to drown them. Moses’s mother, rather than defying the pharaoh’s edict, is cleverly attempting to insure her son’s safety while still following the command (“Exposure,” 134).


20. He is identified as Amram in Exod 6:18, 20, but his absence in Exod 2 is conspicuous. Dozeman notes that the effect in the Sargon legend is to establish Sargon’s heroic deeds as the reason for his rise to power, but in Redford’s listing of the thirteen parallels to the Sargon legend, ten of them associate the hero with a divine parent. Akkadian enitum refers specifically to a chaste priestess confined to a temple. The motif of a god impregnating a priestess is present in the stories of Telephus, Remus and Romulus, and in an attenuated sense in the story of Mary in the Protevangelium of James. These are disparate sources, but Cohen makes the case that, far from being portrayed as a commoner who succeeded in gaining a throne, perhaps Sargon is being portrayed as a demigod gaining what is his by virtue of his divine conception. The motif of the absent father will be significantly challenged in many of the instances of the Moses story and will be modified in the stories of Noah, Melchizedek, and Jesus, and is important in Joseph and Aseneth (Cohen, Origins and Evolution, 8–9; Dozeman, Exodus, 83–84).
Moses because she has drawn him out of the water (Exod 2:10), while the Sargon legend refers to Akki the drawer of water four times.

But the Sargon legend concerns the rise of a warrior king who establishes an empire with the help of a goddess, while the story of Moses is of a prophet guided by Israel’s god to lead a people into a new land.\(^\text{21}\) Moses never loses his identity because of his exposure, an expected element of the birth legend that applies to Sargon. The pharaoh’s daughter recognizes him as a Hebrew immediately and Moses is left in the care of his Hebrew mother.\(^\text{22}\) While it is true that Moses’s father is unnamed and mentioned in the birth story in Exod 2:1 only, that he is Moses’s legitimate father is clear. This much is a departure from the prototypical father in exposed hero tales, since illegitimacy is often the reason for exposure and abandonment. The need to save the child from danger, a common reason for exposure, becomes the reason to expose Moses.\(^\text{23}\) In the Sargon legend, the child’s mother abandons him because of the taboo against a high priestess bearing a child. In Exodus, Moses is abandoned because of the threat to his life from the pharaoh’s edict. The complex of motifs that usually travel together is truncated in Exodus, since it lacks the annunciation. In the stories that include a ruler who attempts to murder the child, the attempt fails and the exposure effects the child’s escape from

\(\text{---}\)


\(^{22}\) Dozeman, \textit{Exodus}, 84.

\(^{23}\) Loewenstamm observes, “in the light of these cognate legends it is clear that the Bible has adopted the story of the exposure of an illegitimate child but has modified it by prefacing it with express mention of the parents’ marriage . . . there remains the inconsistency that the father of the legitimate child shows a lack of concern which would be intelligible only in the case of a man who has begotten an illegitimate child . . . only in Hellenistic literature is the resulting discrepancy completely adjusted by making the father of the legitimate child behave in a manner which would be appropriate to him” (\textit{From Babylon to Canaan}, 204).
danger. In these stories, there has usually been a prophecy or omen that revealed the danger the child poses to the ruler. The exposure itself in Exodus is attenuated; Moses is carefully placed on the river and monitored closely by his sister. The attenuation of the exposure element is an important aspect in the development of the tale type in early Judaism.

A comparison of the parallels between Moses’s story and Herodotus’s version of the birth of Cyrus the Great indicates that it may have influenced the birth story tradition. In his *Histories*, Herodotus relates that Astyages, the last king of the Median empire and the man whom Cyrus will eventually overthrow, has a daughter named Mandane, who relates a dream to him in which she urinates so much that she fills his capital city and floods all of Asia (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.107.1). When he tells his magi of the dream, the interpretation they give horrifies him: his daughter will bear a son who will overthrow him (*Hist.* 1.108.2). Astyages orders his loyal agent to kill his daughter’s offspring as soon as he is born, while the pharaoh issues his generalized edict to kill every male infant (Exod 1:22). Astyages’s agent defies his order and instead enlists a cowherd to expose the child in the mountains. The cowherd brings the infant Cyrus back to his home, where his own wife has just given birth to a stillborn. The cowherd

---

24. Hagith Zlotnick-Sivan makes the case that the Moses story is conscious of the birth story of Cyrus in Herodotus and posits that Exod 1 was redacted to reflect admiration of Cyrus the Great ca. 530–525 BCE. It is not strictly necessary to establish this sort of literary dependence (“Moses the Persian? Exodus 2, the ‘Other’ and Biblical ‘Mnemohistory,’” *ZAW* 116 [2004]: 189–205). Konrad Schmid assesses the ancestor tradition in Genesis and the Moses story in Exodus as competing traditions that were not combined until P completed his work in the Persian period. His argument does not suggest literary dependence of the Moses story on Herodotus’s *Histories* (*Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut 3, ed. Stephen B. Chapman, Tremper Longman III, and Nathan MacDonald [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010]).

25. When the cowherd relates his side of the encounter with Astyages’s agent, he notices that Cyrus is adorned in birth tokens of gold and precious clothing (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.111.3).
explains that he must expose the child, even though he knows he is the son of the king’s daughter. When his wife beholds the child, however, she sees that he is “large and fair” (μέγα τε καὶ εὐευιδές) and begs her husband not to expose him. Like the cowherd, Moses’s parents are neither royal nor divine, but commoners. When Moses’s mother sees that he is a “fine baby,” she hides him for three months (Exod 2:2). The pattern displayed in the Cyrus story is a complex of motifs that the Sargon legend lacks.

These parallels are significant because they signal a kind of cultural intertextuality of the tale type that lasted over centuries of storytelling. The question of direct influence of either the Sargon legend or the Cyrus story on Exod 2 is difficult to establish, but both tales were likely written before the exodus story. Even if the Sargon legend tells the story of a third-millennium BCE king, it was probably written during the reign of Sargon II. But the ark element and the attenuation of the exposure in the Moses birth story seems to imply that the redactor has appropriated on the one hand a form without concern for its function and on the other a motif with a muted effect. In the Sargon legend, the ark still needs to be sealed to protect the infant because he actually floats on the river, and he is exposed in such a way that he is completely abandoned. Herodotus wrote his Histories

26. Ultimately, the parents contrive to save Cyrus by claiming that he is their own son, dressing their stillborn child in his royal clothes and exposing it to throw off the king’s agents. Zlotnik-Sivan notes that as an adolescent, Cyrus whips a noble playmate and sees it as a parallel to Moses’s murder of an Egyptian foreman in Exod 2:11–12 (“Moses the Persian?” 192).


28. Lewis observes that the orthographic forms and idioms in the story point to a date around the eighth century BCE (Sargon, 98–110).

29. Loewenstamm contends that these two motifs establish the Sargon legend as a source of the Moses birth story (From Babylon to Canaan, 205).
in the fifth century BCE, perhaps around the same time that the book of Exodus was being redacted.\textsuperscript{30} Hagith Zlotnick-Sivan has made the case that there is motivation and opportunity to conform the Moses birth story to the birth of Cyrus.\textsuperscript{31} But establishing direct literary dependence on either of these stories would be missing the point. The question is not strictly one of literary intertextuality, but of cultural transference. Does the Moses birth story in Exodus draw on the motifs and motif complexes that appear in ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic stories like the births of Sargon and Cyrus? More importantly, how have the motifs been modified within the Moses birth story to fit into the broader themes of Exodus?

Moses’s exposure because of the threat of genocide is an innovation in the tale type.\textsuperscript{32} Where we would expect the annunciation motif, which would explain more succinctly the danger leading to Moses’s exposure, we are presented with a generalized threat to all Hebrew infants. Not only that, but the structure of these first two chapters seems to suggest a lack of clarity:

The pharaoh’s designs of murder are directed at the entire people, whereas in the biblical narrative they introduce the birth of the lone child, the sole subject of interest of the [exposed hero] legend; and from the moment he comes on the scene, the entire motif of annihilation or fear lest the people multiply disappears.

\textsuperscript{30} A determination about what stage in the development of the book of Exodus the Moses story belongs to is secondary to when the Moses story was redacted. Childs follows Hugo Gressmann, who concludes that the story of Moses’s birth “belongs to the youngest of the exodus traditions and stands in tension with earlier traditions” (Childs, \textit{The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary} [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 8), but it could just as easily be an old legend that was redacted and modified to suit the theological interests of a post-exilic redactor.

\textsuperscript{31} See Schmid, \textit{Genesis and the Moses Story}.

\textsuperscript{32} Lewis, \textit{Sargon}, 244–50, 262–63.
On the contrary, as the story continues, the desire that the people remain in Egypt comes to dominate.\(^3\)

The problem is that the people are too numerous, but the concern for that problem disappears with Moses’s birth. Why enslave the people as a response to their burgeoning population? Why reduce their numbers by targeting infants, and \textit{male} infants no less?

Ordinarily a ruling nation, particularly in the ancient Near East, would not think of destroying its labor supply, but would look with favor on its increase. Again, one does not reduce the number of a people by destroying the males, but rather the females. . . . Moreover, the later stories in Exodus seem to contradict the picture of Israel’s slave conditions as an exercise in genocide.\(^3\)

Hugo Gressmann remarks that taking away the straw needed to make bricks in Exod 5 would be a “Kinderspiel” compared to the horror of drowning infants in Exod 1.\(^3\) The connection between the birth of Moses and the enslavement of the people seems counterintuitive, since the order to commit genocide ends up having little to do with the rest of the people of Israel and seems like an artifice to justify Moses’s exposure. We never hear whether the plot to murder the sons of Israel succeeds or fails, and unlike the motif of slavery (Exod 2:23), the order to throw Hebrew boys into the Nile elicits no reaction on the part of the people.

The fact that the annunciation motif is an element that would be (1) expected given the way the motif complex usually manifests and (2) instrumental in establishing the significance of Moses’s birth leads Gressmann to posit that an earlier version of the Moses birth story included this element and that it was jettisoned when included in the

---


book of Exodus. He analyzes the parallels to the Moses birth story in light of ancient Near Eastern literature, in Jewish accounts, and in the account of Jesus’s birth in Matt 2, concluding that Moses’s birth in Exod 2 must originally have included the first element in this birth pattern, in which the annunciation of the birth of a savior for Israel led the pharaoh to seek the child’s life. This conforms to the motif complex as it appears in later iterations of Moses’s birth story and in parallels such as the one found in Herodotus mentioned above. In the theoretical earlier version, the pharaoh does not fear the entire people or the male children in particular, just the birth of Moses; it is this birth that he tries to prevent. The original motif, in Gressmann’s account, was expanded to include a threat to the entire people, and the need to integrate this threat with the theme of enslavement in the main narrative resulted in the three edicts in Exod 1.

There is no material evidence to suggest that there was originally a motif of annunciation attached to the Moses birth story in Exodus, but Jonathan Cohen maintains along with Gressmann that the way the birth story is redacted to fit into Exodus suggests that it was extant before it was appended to Exodus. The story elements of the midwives, the creation of the ark of reeds, and the birth of Moses are constructed of two patterns, one conforming more closely to the Sargon legend and the other more like the birth of Cyrus. The birth of Moses is related only to pharaoh’s third edict to throw the sons into the Nile (Exod 1:22) and to the ark element in Exod 2:3. There is no connection between the actions of the midwives to save Hebrew boys and the salvation of Moses. The element of the midwives would make sense if it originally served as part of the effort to

36. Ibid., 1–16.

37. Ibid.
save Moses. Astyages’s agent refusing to kill Cyrus immediately upon his birth is similar to the midwives in Exodus, not a general group of women, but two women in particular, refusing to kill Hebrew boys. The third decree would set up the narrative impetus for the ark element, thus introducing the other pattern. Cohen concludes that the edicts in Exod 1 are a “result of blending three basic elements: the tradition of enslavement, joined with two archetypes of birth stories—the murder pattern and the ark pattern.”\(^{38}\) He notes that by the time these patterns are combined, it is impossible to reconstruct the stages of development in one tradition or another. This fact alone is enough to eliminate the need for speculation about the presence of a annunciation motif in a theoretically independent and prior birth story. The point is that two sub-types in the exposed hero tale, the exposure of a hero by the river in an ark and the avoidance of murder by a child whose destiny was foretold to a ruler, have influenced the way that the story of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt unfolds.\(^{39}\)

Brevard S. Childs rejects the hypothesis of Gressmann, contending that the introduction of the story in Exod 1 is an ideal setting for the events of Moses’s birth in Exod 2. The fate of the people of Israel is tied to Moses’s survival, just as the danger to Moses’s life comes by the common lot he shares with his people. For Childs, this is a clever innovation of the tradition, and any potential excision of an original prophecy or omen motif is an unnecessary postulate.\(^{40}\) We must understand instead why the fate of the whole nation has been substituted for the prediction that a savior will be born to save that


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 15–16.

\(^{40}\) Childs, *Exodus*, 17.
nation as the reason for the attempted murder of the child. Or, at least, we should recognize the assonance of the structure in Exod 1, in which the decree directed against the people (1:16) is answered by the rescue of the people by the midwives (1:17), but the threat of annihilation against the people by drowning (1:22) is answered by the rescue of a single boy (2:1–10). The lack of symmetry has the effect of equating the rescue of Moses with the rescue of the people.\textsuperscript{41} This compositional technique makes the most sense if the writer of Exodus is cognizant of his omission of the annunciation element and expects his readers to be cognizant of the same, but has deliberately passed over it.

The composition invites us to view Moses as a microcosm of the people, but it also hints at the opposite: the people of Israel are metaphorically abandoned on the riverbank, in need of rescue, discovered and saved.\textsuperscript{42} The son who must be reinstated cannot be Moses, since Moses’s origin is from a set of human parents and not from the union of a divine father with a mortal mother. When we look for the element of recognition and reinstatement, Exodus takes a unique turn. In Exod 4:22, God instructs Moses to tell the pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son.” The people have been personified as an element that is missing in the type, the recognition by a divine parent of the abandoned son. This is an important variation, since it is a part of the way that Matthew depicts Jesus and that Aseneth is portrayed in Joseph and Aseneth.

One last motif that I consider in the Exodus birth story is the motif of beauty. In Exod 2, Moses is saved because he is beautiful (Exod 2:2). Specifically, he is \textit{ki tov}, a

\textsuperscript{41} Cohen, \textit{Origins and Evolution}, 16.

\textsuperscript{42} The best indication of this implication is the portrayal of Moses’s exposure in the reeds and in water, which foreshadows the crossing of the Red Sea (J. Cheryl Exum, “ ‘You Shall Let Every Daughter Live’: A Study of Exodus 1:8–2:10,” \textit{Semeia} 28 [1983]: 77; Dozeman, \textit{Exodus}, 81).
phrase that calls to mind the \textit{ki tov} of the Genesis creation account (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Nahum M. Sarna contends that the repetition of the phrase is meant “to inform us that the birth of Moses is another Genesis, an event of cosmic significance.”

Peter Enns goes further, asserting that this phrase fits into a theme of re-creation in Exod 1 and is “not merely about the birth of one man, but represents the birth of a people. The savior of God’s people is born, and through him they will receive a new beginning.”

The motif of beauty occurs in the Cyrus birth story to much the same effect. Here, it is an element that is being adapted to continue the Pentateuchal association between creation and salvation. Beauty saves the savior, which ties his physical appearance to the main themes of the book. James A. Loader makes the case that the motif of Moses’s beauty is tied deliberately and inseparably to the motif of deliverance in Exodus. The recognition of his beauty first by his parents and then by pharaoh’s daughter is an indication of his destiny, just as it is for Cyrus or for other exposed heroes. Through Moses, we are given the subtextual cue to see Israel through Yahweh’s eyes, as beautiful and worthy to be saved. The motif of Moses’s beauty appears again and again in later Moses traditions and is important in Joseph and Aseneth.

The manner in which the exposed hero tale type is appropriated in the book of Exodus is unique, and the influence of Exodus on the biblical tradition means that this adaptation sets the tone for how the exposed hero tale develops in early Jewish and

---


Christian tradition. Two patterns within the tale type are applied to the experience of a single exposed infant. Like Sargon, he is exposed in or near a river in a basket meant to convey him somewhere else. He is drawn out of the water and adopted, then grows up to perform great deeds. Like Cyrus, his life is in danger from the ruler of the land. His beautiful appearance leads to his concealment, exposure, and adoption, whereby he evades the murderous designs of the ruler he will one day usurp and kill. But there are significant differences in how the story is told. The motif of illegitimacy, along with the accompanying reason to abandon the infant because of shame or danger, is suppressed, as is the brutality of the exposure. Moses is carefully attended by his sister. The adoption, with its characteristic loss of identity, is softened; Moses somehow never stops being the son of a Hebrew woman. Most of all, there is no specific threat to Moses because an omen or prophecy has never been spoken of him. The patterns established, the emphasis on beauty and the need for concealment, the attenuation of illegitimacy, exposure, and adoption, persist in the birth stories of other figures in Jewish and Christian literature.

Early Jewish and Christian interpreters of Moses’s birth story did not fail to see the significance of the theme of divine providence in Exodus, a theme that is invited by the portrayal of Moses as an exposed hero. This led ultimately to the introduction of the annunciation motif into Moses’s story as an expression of “the omnipotence of fate and of the predestined event.” But the motif of God’s providence or faithfulness appears in every iteration of Moses’s birth story regardless of whether an annunciation motif is present or not.46 I now survey the portrayal of Moses’s birth in Jubilees, the Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian, Liber antiquitatem biblicarum, and Antiquities of the Jews of

---

Josephus. The purpose of this survey is to situate the Moses birth story as a part of the continued formation of the birth story paradigm in early Judaism specifically as it relates to the exposed hero tale type.

1.3.2. Moses’s Birth in Early Jewish Sources

1.3.2.1. Jubilees

The writer of Jubilees develops the portrayal of Moses as an exposed hero, but conveys the inexorability of Moses’s birth and destiny by a new strategy. The first two edicts of Exod 1 are missing. The pharaoh enslaves the Hebrews because they are multiplying (Jub. 46:13), but because Moses’s father Amram comes from Canaan after the enslavement (Jub. 47:1), the enslavement is causally separated from the edict to throw the male infants in the river. The second edict directed to the midwives, to kill Hebrew boys when they are born, is eliminated. The murder decree is unrelated to the multiplication of the people. Even though the people continue to multiply, pharaoh’s order to murder Hebrew male infants is not portrayed as a new effort to reduce the population. Instead, Moses is born, the pharaoh issues his edict, it is explicitly followed (“they continued throwing [them into the river]”), and then the action ceases when Moses is born (47:3). The implication is that the edict was promulgated as a reaction to Moses’s birth and that it was rendered obsolete when it failed to destroy Moses. Though there is still no annunciation element, Jubilees has signaled the phantom presence of the element to an even greater degree than Exod 2 had.47

47. Ibid., 29–30.
Despite the implied element of an omen signaling the danger to the pharaoh of Moses’s birth, the exposure of Exod 2, attenuated in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern stories, is virtually absent from Jubilees. Moses’s mother hides him for three months, then builds an ark and places it on the riverbank amidst the reeds. She returns to nurse him during the night for seven days, and Miriam guards the ark from birds during the day (Jub. 47:4). After pharaoh’s daughter finds him and hires his own mother as the nursemaid, Moses apparently grows up under his Hebrew parents’ care. He is even taught by his father Amram and only returns to the Egyptian court when he is twenty-one (Jub. 47:10). He spends another twenty-one years in the royal court before the incident in which he murders an Egyptian. The motifs of exposure, abandonment, discovery, and adoption are all present, but Moses is hardly exposed, never abandoned, and nominally adopted. The implication that the pharaoh has sought Moses’s life in particular, combined with the diminished effects of the exposure, abandonment, and adoption, supports the view of God that Jubilees maintains throughout: God determines the outcome of every event, and Moses as his divine agent is guaranteed safety from harm.

The motif of fate is manifested in Jubilees with the character of Prince Mastema, a demonic villain who acts to foil the divine plan but is always unsuccessful. James C. VanderKam has observed the importance of Mastema as a device used to explain some of the actions in Exodus that are attributed to the Lord. When the Lord meets Moses on the road and attempts to kill him (Exod 4:24–26), Jubilees attributes this action to Mastema (Jub. 48:2). Mastema works through the Egyptian magicians and gives them the ability to match the miracles that Moses and Aaron perform. The pharaoh’s heart is not hardened by the Lord, but rather Mastema is unleashed to drive the Egyptians into pursuing the
Israelites. Mastema’s importance transcends mere theodicy and becomes a way of conveying a motif of divine providential power. The burning bush theophany is paired with the appearance of Mastema:

And you know what was related to you on Mount Sinai, and what Prince Mastema desired to do with you when you returned to Egypt, on the way when you met him at the shelter. Did he not desire to kill you with all of his might and save the Egyptians from your hand because he saw that you were sent to execute judgment and vengeance upon the Egyptians? (Jub. 48:2–3)

Mastema is compelled to seek Moses’s life because Moses has been commissioned by God. He knows this because he is able to see, whether by Moses’s portentous birth and upbringing, or by demonic prognostication, that Moses’s destiny is to save Israel. The omen/prophesy motif is present in another variation through a clever recasting of Exod 4:24–26. God delivers Moses from Mastema’s hand and Moses performs the signs he was sent to do in Egypt (Jub. 48:4). The Lord executes his plan of divine judgment on Egypt through the plagues (48:5–8). The paradigm of a demonic antagonist, whose impotent attempts at sabotaging the divine plan are mixed with actions against the righteous that are divinely permitted, demonstrates that God is utterly in control of history and guides every event.48

The portentous quality of Moses’s birth is established not by his beauty but by his seven months’ gestation (Jub. 47:3).49 Moses’s seven months’ birth sustains an aspect of the exposed hero tale, that the importance of the exposed child’s future is manifested in how he appears or behaves. An exposed child is often born more fully developed or


49. Allison notes the importance of a seven months’ birth in pagan, Jewish, and Christian sources as an indication that “betokens a divine origin or a conception supernaturally assisted” (New Moses, 150).
matures more quickly than normal. He may be precocious, demonstrating wisdom or intelligence early, and/or possess superhuman athletic ability. These kinds of motifs are associated in an exposed hero tale with the motif of fate or destiny and can serve to confirm the propitiousness of the child’s future. This is precisely the case in Joseph and Aseneth with Aseneth’s beauty.

1.3.2.2. Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian

In the Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian, the pharaoh’s response to the multiplication of the Hebrew people is to treat them harshly, though this reality seems to prevail long before Moses’s generation (Ezek. Trag. 1–11).50 The Hebrew midwives are absent as in Jubilees, and only the order to cast Hebrew infants into the Nile is given, with no explanation (12–13). Moses’s mother hides him for three months but then she is found out. The ark, functional in the Sargon legend as a way to keep the baby from drowning, is not included by Ezekiel (16). Instead, his mother wraps Moses in a robe and exposes him “in the marsh hard by the river’s edge” (17). The verb for “expose” is the technical term when an infant is exposed, but even so, Moses spends no time at all abandoned and is discovered almost immediately (17–22).51


51. As in Aristophanes, Nub. 531 and in Herodotus, Hist. 1.112, regarding Cyrus’s exposure.
Ezekiel has crafted his play with an introduction evocative of a Euripidean tragedy.\(^{52}\) To begin a play with an opening monologue that recounts a sweeping history, to delay the identification of the prologue speaker, and to recount one’s own birth are all characteristically Euripidean elements. Only Euripides among the tragedians includes quotations in his prologues, and turns of phrase (such as “here comes someone” [Ezek. Trag. 59]) and the use of certain vocabulary that is almost exclusively employed by Euripides appear in the *Exagoge*.\(^{53}\) Euripides often includes an etymology for people in his prologues, an element that Exod 2 has already provided to Moses’s birth story. It is significant, however, that the etymology of Moses’s name is rendered unintelligible by his exposure on the shore of the river.\(^{54}\) The desire to include the etymology despite a lack of clarity demonstrates that the exclusion of the ark element is deliberate and that the inclusion of the etymology element may be influenced more by Euripides than by Exodus. The exposure of Moses on land reveals that Ezekiel has not just conformed his play to Euripidean style and vocabulary; he has modified certain elements to evoke a similarity with the birth of Ion in particular. Creusa exposes Ion in a basket, hidden in a

---

52. Avital K. Pinnick notes the similar vocabulary of the *Exagoge* and Hellenistic tragedies, most of all the *Ion* (“The Birth of Moses in Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period” [Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1996], 54). Though Ezekiel does not include an annunciation element, either by a dream or portent, he does incorporate a dream vision of Moses in which he sits down on a celestial throne and is granted a scepter. His dream is interpreted for him by his father-in-law. The closest parallel of this portentous dream is the Joseph story, but Erich S. Gruen notes that this pattern is quite common in Hellenistic stories as well (*Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998], 130–31).


cave, with two tokens of serpents to guard his body as well as broidery from her robe. Moses is exposed with a robe, a κόσμος ("an adornment"), which is a common birth token in the legends of exposed heroes.\textsuperscript{55} Exposing the infant with a birth token almost always aids in a recognition scene later, in which the true parent recognizes the identity of the child because he or she recognizes the birth tokens. The inclusion of such an element without a corresponding recognition scene indicates an effort to conform the portrayal of Moses to exposed heroes like Ion. The addition of this element brings Moses’s story closer in line to the birth of Cyrus, a potential influence on Exod 1–2. Cyrus is saved because he is “adorned in gold and embroidered clothing” (Herodotus, \textit{Hist.} 1.111). Given that Ezekiel has omitted both the element of beauty, which saves Moses in the Exodus account, and a seven months’ birth as in Jubilees, he must supply a reason that the child will be saved.

1.3.2.3. \textit{Liber Antiquitatem Biblicarum}

Pseudo-Philo’s account of the birth of Moses combines the enslavement and murder motifs. The pharaoh fears the multiplication of the Hebrews, so he orders the male children thrown into the river, but lets the females live (Exod 1:22).\textsuperscript{56} The Hebrew elders fear the annihilation of their sons and a life of idol worship for their daughters, so they decide on a period of enforced sexual abstinence (LAB 9:2). Amram defies the “decree”

\textsuperscript{55} Lanfranchi: “But the word κόσμος suggests that these are not ordinary clothes. . . . In Euripides, the word means ‘adornment,’ and it is always distinct from the jacket or tunic” (\textit{L’Exagoge}, 135).

\textsuperscript{56} His Egyptians subjects are a degree more malicious, however, and suggest that all Hebrew men be killed and all the Hebrew women married to their existing (presumably non-Hebrew) slaves.
of the elders and decides to sire children (LAB 9:4), tying his decision to the covenant and to God’s faithfulness. Unlike the Hebrew people in Exodus, who have no knowledge of their God, in LAB the people know the Lord and remember his covenant. God responds with a divine announcement: Moses will save his people. The annunciation of the birth comes as a providential utterance directly from the mouth of the Lord. This element is finally expressed in an ironic reversal of the usual order and the expected recipients in exposed hero tales. Instead of a dream or prophecy inciting the danger to the child, a divine utterance explains why the child will be spared from existing danger. Instead of delivering the omen to the pharaoh, the divine response and oneiric elaboration is delivered to the people of Israel and to Moses’s family. Amram takes a wife from his own Levite tribe and she gives birth to Aaron and Miriam. Miriam has a dream that Moses will be cast into the water, but that the water will dry up (LAB 9:10). Her parents do not believe her when she reports the dream, but Miriam’s mother takes action to fulfill what is prophesied in Miriam’s dream: that Moses will be thrown into the water (LAB 9:10). Even pharaoh’s daughter is compelled by a dream to bathe in the water of the Nile in order to discover Moses (LAB 9:15).

More than any of the other Moses birth stories, LAB makes use of dream visions and prophecy as a way of portraying the divine hand in the events of Moses’s birth and

57. “God will not abide in his anger, nor will he forget his people forever, nor will he cast forth the race of Israel in vain upon the earth; nor did he establish a covenant with our fathers in vain; and even when we did not yet exist, God spoke about these matters” (LAB 9:4).

58. “Because Amram’s plan is pleasing to me, and he has not put aside the covenant established between me and his fathers, so behold now he who will be born from him will serve me forever, and I will do marvelous things in the house of Jacob through him and I will work through him signs and wonders” (LAB 9:7).

59. “I will burn an eternal light for him, because I thought of him in days of old” (LAB 9:8).
rescue. The formal elements of exposure, abandonment, discovery and adoption still
endure, but the exposure and abandonment elements are now almost wholly aleatory.
Moses is exposed on the riverbank because that is how the story goes. The ark has long
ago ceased to be functional, and any danger that Moses will actually die of exposure has
been eliminated by constant care and immediate discovery.\(^{60}\)

1.3.2.4. *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*

Josephus gives an account of the birth of Moses in *Antiquities of the Jews* that includes
the annunciation-danger-evasion motif complex while including many of the elements
that have developed in early Jewish tradition. The Egyptians are already oppressing the
Israelites before Moses is born, not out of fear of their multiplication, but because they
are prospering materially. A sacred scribe reports to the pharaoh that a child will be born
among the Israelites who will lower Egyptian hegemony, raise the Israelites, and excel in
virtue and glory (*Ant.* 2.205). The pharaoh, out of fear of what the scribe has discovered
and not to reduce the numbers of the Israelites, issues the order to cast every male infant
into the Nile. Josephus establishes a contrast between the impotence of the sacred scribe’s
power in scrying the destiny of Moses with the power of God to ensure that his divine
plan comes to fruition.\(^{61}\) The motif of foreknowledge is associated with the annunciation-

\(^{60}\) Moses is gently exposed and almost immediately discovered. His adoption is more complete
than any other version; the pharaoh’s daughter herself nurses him, and we learn only that Moses’s
mother had a different name for him: Melchiel (LAB 9:16).

\(^{61}\) δείσας δ’ ὁ βασιλεὺς κατὰ γνώμην τὴν ἑκείνου κελεύει. γνώμη does not mean “opinion” or
“advice”; it appears to have more force. The pharaoh is relying on the result of whatever means of
knowing that the scribe has used to foresee the child. Not an opinion but real knowledge drives the
pharaoh’s fear and the decree. Though this is an everyday word, in his aside about the purposes of God,
Josephus uses the same word again only a few sentences later with a different meaning: κρατήσειε δ’ ἂν
οὐδεὶς τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ γνώμης οὐδὲ μυρίας τέχνας επὶ τούτῳ μηχανησάμενος (“But no man can defeat the
danger-evasion motif. Moses’s father Amram becomes the righteous antitype of the sacred scribe, which heightens the contrast between their opposing experiences of divine necessity. Amram receives his knowledge of Moses’s destiny in a dream, tells his wife what will happen, and they hide Moses for three months. Fear that his son will be discovered overtakes him, however, and he decides that he must expose Moses in order to save him from death. The act of exposure is depicted as an act of faith and a belief in the power of God’s plan. For Josephus, the wicked can do nothing to frustrate God’s purposes, and the righteous are able to participate in his designs only if they are willing to trust God.62

As in biographies of illustrious men, Moses is beautiful and precocious. The pharaoh’s daughter is so overwhelmed by Moses’s size and beauty that she defies her father’s edict to destroy any Hebrew male infant (Ant. 2.224–227). She tells her father that she is bringing up a boy of “divine beauty (παῖδα μορφῆς θείου) and generous spirit” (Ant. 2.232). She gives him to the pharaoh to hold and he playfully gives him his crown to wear. When Moses throws the crown on the ground and tramples it, the sacred scribe who had predicted the birth of Moses recognizes him and attempts to kill him on the

62. Josephus supplies the theme of divine providence through his own exegetical asides. When Moses is exposed on the river, he comments: “Then once again did God plainly show that human intelligence is nothing worth, but that all that He wills to accomplish reaches its perfect end, and that they who, to save themselves, condemn others to destruction utterly fail, whatever diligence they may employ, while those are saved by a miracle and attain success almost from the very jaws of disaster, who hazard all by divine decree. Even so did the fate that befell this child display the power of God” (Ant. 2.222–223 [Thackeray, LCL]).
The pharaoh’s daughter protects her adopted son from the sacred scribe, but the pharaoh himself is disinclined to eliminate Moses, even after what the scribe has said, because God’s providence protects Moses (Ant. 2.233–236). Josephus has interpreted Exod 2:2, in which Moses is saved because he is beautiful, as an indication of divine providence, making explicit the connection between beauty and deliverance.  

1.4. Birth of Noah

Noah is never exposed or abandoned in his birth story literally, and therefore never discovered and adopted. He is born legitimately to Lamech and his wife, who are not

---

63. The sacred scribe exclaims, “O king, this is that child whom God declared that we must kill to allay our terrors; he bears out the prediction by that act of insulting thy dominion and trampling the diadem under foot. Kill him then and at one stroke relieve the Egyptians of their fear of him and deprive the Hebrews of the courageous hopes that he inspires” (Ant. 2.235 [Thackeray, LCL]).

64. I have not included an analysis of Moses’s birth story as it appears in On the Life of Moses by Philo of Alexandria. It is unique among early Jewish birth accounts, since it is part of a biography of Moses meant to imitate aretologies and biographies of illustrious men written in Hellenistic style. Philo’s purpose is to portray Moses as fitting within classical paradigms for how rulers should comport themselves, following the conventions of an aretology, an ancient biographical account aimed at providing moral instruction by the example of the main character. In this sense, On the Life of Moses should be compared to Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, by Diogenes Laertius, and Life of Apollonius of Tyana, by Philostratus. Hindy Najman establishes three characteristics of aretologies: the hero’s education includes travel and initiation into mysteries, he treats others well and establishes codes of conduct, and he is portrayed as superhuman or almost divine (Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism, JSJSup 77 [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 90–91). Louis H. Feldman adds the characteristics that the biography focuses solely on the hero to the exclusion of developing any supporting characters and that "the perfect copy of the Law of Nature is to be found in the life of the sage" (Philo’s Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 15 [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007], 16). Philo includes all of these characteristics in Moses, save perhaps that Moses lacks the requisite travel experience. But his father, mother, sister and brother are never named, nor are his sons or the leader of the rebellion against him in the Sinai. Philo is writing within a genre that has a penchant for making use of a characteristic selection of the exposed hero tale type’s motifs, but because his purpose is to offer not just an apology for Jewish antiquity but for the Jewish religion, he punctuates the birth and upbringing of Moses with narrative asides (much like Josephus) about the sovereignty and providence of God; the providential hand of Yahweh guides all events, especially those in the life of a great hero. Despite such continuity with the tradition, I have not analyzed Philo’s Moses in detail because it does not provide evidence of having carried forward the tendency to include new elements or modify the expression of existing elements in the paradigm.
royal or divine. Noah is similar to Moses because he represents the righteous as an ideal figure. He is an exemplary model of righteousness whose actions guarantee the preservation and salvation of a righteous remnant. Like Moses, the fate of the righteous is bound up with Noah’s faithfulness to God. That Moses is placed in an ark (tevah), a word that is elsewhere used in the Flood story alone (Gen 6:14–9:18), invites a comparison between Noah and Moses.65 Both avoid death, being saved in an ark coated with bitumen. Most importantly, Noah and Moses are “the vehicles through whom God “creates” a new people for his own purposes.”66 What happens to Moses on the Nile is prefigured by Noah’s ark and, by association, the crossing of the Red Sea becomes a fulfillment and a kind of inversion of the salvation achieved by Noah, even as it draws on the imagery of the deluge myths of surrounding cultures.67 These are characteristics of the Noah and Moses birth stories that make them similar and that are a part of the way that early Jews and Christians tell the story of the birth of a portentous child. I contend that there are discernible elements of the exposed hero tale type in the birth tradition of Noah. The tale type continues to develop in early Jewish tradition not just inter-culturally, but by

65. Sarna, Exploring Exodus, 9; Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 18–19; Dozeman, Exodus, 81.


67. Dozeman, Exodus, 81.
continued cross-cultural influence. I describe the Noah birth stories in early Jewish literature and discuss the motifs of the tale type.

There is an account of the birth of Noah in 1 En. 106–107, in which Lamech is startled by Noah’s newborn appearance. Noah’s body is white as snow and red as a rose. His hair is white, his eyes light up the whole house, and he immediately speaks to the Lord (1 En. 106:2–4). Lamech is afraid and flees to his father Methuselah saying, “I have begotten a strange son. He is not like an (ordinary) human being, but he looks like the children of the angels of heaven to me; his form is different, and he is not like us. . . . It does not seem that he is of me, but of angels” (1 En. 106:5–6). The mystery is resolved when, after a visit from Noah, Methuselah turns to his father Enoch for an

68. There is no need to posit dependence of the Noahic traditions on specific exposed hero tales. The mere fact that the birth of Moses has been conformed to the stories of the sons of queen Kaneš, Sargon, Cyrus, and Ion, shows an eagerness in early biblical tradition to make use of certain storytelling conventions for stylistic concerns. The birth of Noah expresses similar elements to similar dramatic ends as the Moses birth tradition. Evil looms, the question of theodicy is raised. How will God respond to his people’s suffering? The birth comes propitiously, it is received as such. The child will be a savior; God has designated him so. The pattern in early Jewish storytelling persists, of portraying the birth of a child as a signal of God’s providential response to his people’s plight.

69. There are expansions of the life of Noah in Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 1Q20 (1QapGen ar [Genesis Apocryphon]), 1Q19, 4Q534–536, LAB, and Josephus. Only 1 Enoch, the Genesis Apocryphon, and 1Q19 contain the expanded story of Noah’s birth. Wayne S. Baxter considers the possibility that these sources have some relationship to a so-called “Book of Noah” in “Noachic Traditions and the Book of Noah,” JSP 15 (2006): 179–94.

70. Though not always an indication of divine conception, a motif of precociousness or maturity often characterizes the exposed hero, as does the presence of identifying marks on his body. On Moses’s maturity, especially as it developed from the LXX translation of gadol (“big”), ἀδρυνθέντος (“mature”) (Pinnick, “Birth of Moses,” 9–11).

71. The parallels of this text in 1Q19 and apGen II, 1 make explicit that Lamech fears that his son is one of the Nephilim. In apGen II, 1, Lamech confronts his wife Batenosh before going to seek his father Methuselah. I examine these parallels in more detail below. Lamech’s fear creates a moment of suspense in the narrative: in this darkest of hours, has Adam’s progeny been tainted by this tide of wickedness propagated by the fallen watchers? The absence of Lamech’s conflict with Batenosh increases the tension, since we are left as readers of the Ethiopic with only the vague implication that Lamech has been cuckolded.
explanation. Enoch says he has had a vision concerning Noah that includes the coming flood and destruction. Methuselah is to inform Lamech that his son is not the offspring of angels, but “indeed righteous” (1 En. 106:13, 15–16, 18).

The separation of Noah’s birth story from the rest of his story in 1 En. 10 obscures the way that motifs from the exposed hero tale are at work in 1 Enoch. In 1 En. 106–107, there is an annunciation of the birth along with a motif of foreknowledge. That motif is present in 1 En. 9:11 in the mouths of the archangels right after the threat of evil has been demonstrated. The Most High responds by instructing Noah to hide himself and evade the looming danger. The motif of hiddenness is usually manifested as the mother hiding her offspring before exposing him, as with Moses’s three months, but also as in the Olympian Ode of Pindar, in which Pitane first hides Evadne, her daughter by Poseidon. Then Evadne when she is grown hides Iamus, her son by Apollo. Here Noah is grown, so he is told to hide himself, but it is still an effort to conceal the hero because of mortal danger. Like Exod 2, the narrative shifts from a generalized danger to interest in the fate of one person, whose rescue seems to turn the tide in the conflict against evil. Much like the rulers of the land who are informed of their impending death at the hands of the exposed child, Semyaz had been granted authority to rule (1 En. 9:7) and Michael tells him that his fate will be death and decay (10:11).

72. In 1 En. 9, the oppression of the giants is so great that the archangels petition the Most High to respond. The basis for their petition is divine foreknowledge: “And you know everything (even) before it came to existence, and you see (this thing) (but) you do not tell us what is proper for us that we may do regarding it” (1 En. 9:11).
The Genesis Apocryphon (apGen) gives a fragmentary version of the birth account found in 1 En. 106–107, though with some changes.\textsuperscript{73} Lamech’s suspicions are made explicit; it occurs to him that the conception of his son is “from the Watchers, and the seed from Holy Ones, and to Nephilim” (apGen II, 1). Before consulting his father Methuselah, however, Lamech confronts his wife Batenosh, accusing her of infidelity. She adamantly denies the charge and insists that Noah is Lamech’s son “and not from any stranger, nor from any of the Watchers, nor from any of the sons of Heaven” (apGen II, 16). The story runs much the same as 1 En. 106–107, but because of its fragmentary condition, it lacks some details of that account. There is no mention of distinguishing features on Noah’s body, though the implication at the beginning of column two is that Lamech is reacting to the miraculous appearance of Noah, which likely includes some of the same descriptions found in 1 En. 106:2–4. Though the relationship between 1 En. 106–107 and the Genesis Apocryphon is still not entirely clear, it is notable that the latter begins with the events that are found at the beginning of the Book of Watchers (1 En. 1–36): the decision of the watchers to take human women as wives and to teach them certain technologies (apGen I, 1–28). This invites the possibility that the fall of the watchers in 1 En. 7–10 should be related conceptually to the birth of Noah in 1 En. 106–107.

Lamech’s conflict with Batenosh in the Genesis Apocryphon is over the presumed illegitimacy of Noah’s conception, an element that demonstrates the influence of exposed hero tales in which the father figure is unknown or unmentioned, encounters the mother

as a stranger, or even forces himself on the mother. When Lamech accuses Batenosh of infidelity, he mentions “the sons of Heaven” as those he suspects of cuckholding him. Batenosh replies that her child is not from “any stranger.” It cannot be the case that Batenosh is putting Lamech’s mind to rest about other human men as the potential father of Noah, since he has expressed his doubts purely in terms of Noah’s angelic appearance and listed only the “the sons of Heaven” as potential culprits. Noah’s appearance seems to preclude the possibility of any human being having impregnated Batenosh, which is exactly why Lamech is upset. Rather than assuming that Batenosh is adding another kind of possibility for her pregnancy, the idea that she has just slept with another man, it makes more sense to conclude that she is emphatically denying the interference of any kind of supernatural being (i.e., not the sons of Heaven nor any other sort of being like that). Even though the text is broken at the moment when Enoch would reassure Methuselah that Noah is the child of Lamech, there is no reason to presume that the Genesis Apocryphon has not told the story in the same way as 1 Enoch: confirming that Noah is Lamech’s legitimate, human son. Still, it is an unavoidable conclusion that “the

74. Sargon does not know his father. The father of the thirty sons of queen Kaneš is not mentioned. Seuechorus’s daughter sleeps with a man of no distinction to give birth to Gilgameš. In the Arbitrants of Menander, Charisius rapes Pamphila, who does not know her assailant, but steals his ring. Hercules has a one-night stand with King Aleos’s daughter, who gives birth to Telephus. Greek gods often impregnate mortal women in a single night, never having encountered the woman before and often never returning after that night. This is the case with Poseidon (Pitane bears Evadne), Apollo (Creusa bears Ion, Evadne bears Iamus), and Zeus (Antiope bears Amphion and Zethos). In the Pythian Odes of Pindar, Coronis lays in bed with a “stranger” (ξένος) from Arcadia (Pyth. 3:25), who turns out to be Apollo. He later saves his offspring (Asclepius) from the immolated corpse of his mother, similar to how Nir saves his son from Sopanim’s corpse.

75. The text, like most of apGen, is fragmentary, but there is not enough room for much more than sons of Heaven in the gap, and the flow of the text does not seem to include the possibility that Lamech is suspicious of other human men. Aryeh Amihay and Daniel A. Michaela, “Traditions of the Birth of Noah,” in Noah and His Book(s), EJL 28, ed. Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amihay, and Vered Hillel (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 58.
idea of another sort of conception is at least entertained in the *Genesis Apocryphon.*”\(^{76}\)

The dissonance between the portrayal of Noah as merely human and his appearance as somehow angelic, semi-divine, or superhuman, is part of a pattern of adaptation in early Judaism of granting supernatural characteristics to a child that would be, in many other versions of the tale, the product of a divine-human union.\(^ {77}\)

In 1 Enoch and the Genesis Apocryphon, it is Enoch whose prophetic knowledge of heaven confirms the coming destruction and Noah’s divinely appointed role in saving the remnant. The Book of Giants contains a story about Noah, though the motif of foreknowledge is placed in the mouths of the giants first and only later interpreted by Enoch. 4QBook of Giants\(^ {b}\) (4QEnGiant\(^ {b}\) ar) is an account of a watcher’s vision in which he sees a garden full of trees and a fire.\(^ {78}\) The council of the watchers is disturbed by this vision and they send this watcher to find Enoch. He confirms that the two hundred trees are the watchers themselves. These Aramaic fragments from Qumran correspond to a vision in which the two hundred trees are destroyed by fire and water/flood, leaving a single tree with three branches, or a three-rooted tree, or three shoots. In any case, the

---


77. This is the case in the birth of Mechizedek and in some of the portrayals of Moses’s birth.

78. Because of Józef Milik’s work in identifying the Manichaean writings found at Turfan (the *Kawán*) with fragments that correspond to the Book of Giants at Qumran, we can now be reasonably sure of which published fragments from Qumran should be identified with this book. Milik was able by means of the names of the giants preserved in Aramaic form in the Middle Persian to identify which Qumran fragments represented remnants of the Book of Giants (Florentino García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, STDJ 9 [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 98–99). Of the fragments at Qumran that have been identified as part of the Book of Giants, 1Q23 and 1Q24 were published by Milik as “Deux apocryphes en Arameen,” in DJD I, 97–99, PI.XIX-XX.
remaining tree represents Noah and his sons surviving the Flood. Like the sacred scribe in Josephus’s version of Moses’s birth, or like Mastema in Jubilees, a revelation to the antagonist produces the motif of foreknowledge, and he ironically remains incapable of altering the outcome of this revelation. It is the giants who foresee the Flood and the destiny of Noah and his sons to survive as the righteous remnant. They are granted an interpretation of their premonitions by Enoch, whose righteousness has given him knowledge of the heavenly secrets.

What is evident in the story of Noah, as with the story of Moses, is that certain motifs of the tale type, alien to the early Jewish theological and cosmological system, were adapted to fit the needs of Jewish storytelling. The God of Israel does not create demigods, nor does he ever engage in this kind of carnal activity with human women. The nearest equivalent in Jewish stories to the conception of a child by a god is an angelic conception. There are no kings or royal bloodlines in the early history of Israel, when the stories of Noah, Moses, Melchizedek, and others have their birth stories set.


80. Note that the editorial addition in 1 En. 106:19 ("for I do know the mysteries of the holy ones; for he, the Lord, has revealed (them) to me and made me know—and I have read (them) in the heavenly tablets") synthesizes the Birth of Noah with the rest of 1 Enoch, but it also brings it into line with the account of the Book of Giants, in which the watchers need Enoch’s ability as preternatural scribe. See also 1 En. 93:2. Noah has prophetic abilities according to rabbinic tradition, and Noah is a prophet in Tob 4:19, Jub. 8:18, Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 3.77, S. ‘Olam Rab 21. Noah prophesies the coming flood in Sib. Or. 1.180–89, and Noah sees a vision in apGen 6 of the coming flood (Devorah Dimant, “Noah in Early Jewish Literature,” in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998], 131).


82. Ibid., 410.
Nobility or royalty must be conveyed in other ways. The elements in the tale type have been reconfigured, the expression of individual motifs recalibrated for different purposes. Most importantly, the exposure motif, unlike its attenuated presence in the Moses birth tradition, is absent in the birth story of Noah. This absence has in no way eliminated the potential for some elements in the tale type to persist or for others to be added, something that is apparent in the birth stories of Melchizedek and Jesus and is evident in the story of Aseneth.

1.5. Birth of Melchizedek

The birth story of Melchizedek in 2 En. 71–72 manifests the continuing influence of exposed hero tales, while developing the unique permutations of the early Jewish birth story paradigm. Melchizedek as an angelomorphic figure arises in Second Temple literature in part from a particular reading of Gen 14 and Ps 110. He is a messianic figure in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a type of Christ in Heb 7, and an angelic figure in gnostic literature. His birth story appears at the end of the Slavonic Book of Enoch, written sometime in the first century CE. Like the birth of Noah, the conception of Melchizedek


85. Mechizedek research up to 1991 is surveyed by Christfried Böttrich ("Recent Studies in the Slavonic Book of Enoch," *JSP* 9 [1991]: 35–42). In the research on Melchizedek traditions, 2 Enoch is usually given short shrift because it exists only in Slavonic and in Coptic fragments, and the earliest manuscript is from the fourteenth century. A bibliography of the research on 2 Enoch up to 2012 is
is the cause of great distress to his father Nir, who has not had sex with his wife Sopanim since assuming the priesthood. Sopanim is described as sterile and barren (2 En. 71:1), so she is ashamed and hides the pregnancy from Nir.86 Nir is also ashamed when he notices her pregnancy after calling her to the temple.87 Suspicion of cuckoldry leads Nir to upbraid his wife so severely that she drops dead in front of him (71:9). Nir is shocked and seeks out his brother Noah. Together they agree to bury Sopanim secretly.88 As they are preparing for the burial, Melchizedek is born from his mother’s corpse. He sits up on the bed and brushes his clothes off, being fully formed and mature, and bearing “the badge of priesthood” on his chest, which is glorious in appearance (2 En. 71:17–19). Noah proclaims to Nir that “God is renewing the continuation of the blood of the priesthood after us” (2 En. 71:20). They wash Melchizedek, dress him in the garments of the priesthood, and feed him holy bread (71:21).

86. The motif of the barren/infertile woman conceiving is common in other biblical and post-biblical birth stories, as I have already observed. Beverly A. Bow compares the Melchizedek birth story with Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Roman birth stories and contends that it bears the greatest resemblance to Christian stories. See “Melchizedek’s Birth Narrative in 2 Enoch 68–73: Christian Correlations,” in For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity, ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 35.

87. The attempt to conceal the pregnancy is common in the exposed hero tale type: Moses’s mother conceals him, as does Pitane of Evadne and Evadne of Iamus.

88. In the shorter recension of ms A, the angel Gabriel visits and informs Nir that “this child which is to be born of her is a righteous fruit, and one whom I shall receive into paradise, so that you will not be the father of a gift of God.” A quotation from ms A, which is translated and printed as an example of a shorter recension pattern by F.I. Andersen (OTP 1:207).
This account bears the most similarities to the Noachic birth traditions. Noah and Melchizedek are born without the aid of their fathers to women who are ashamed of the birth. A similar confrontation between father and mother ensues, the mother is accused of infidelity, and the father seeks the counsel of a family member. Each son is born with miraculous characteristics: a glorious appearance, birth marks, physical maturity, and possessing the gift of speech, all of which leads the father to the conclusion that the conception is angelic or divine. The father receives an annunciation regarding the significance of his son’s birth, which reveals his son’s salvific and/or eschatological role. As in the Noachic traditions, however, there is good evidence that the creator of 2


90. Exposed children are often abandoned out of shame. Among them queen Kaneš is ashamed of her thirty sons, a muse impregnated by a river god is ashamed of her son Rhesus (Euripides, Rhes. 917–31), Creusa is ashamed of the product of her rape by Apollo (Ion), as is Pamphila of her son by Charisius. Derceto slays her own lover and exposes Semiramis out of humiliation. Hierocles, a high ranking official, exposes his son Hieron because he is ashamed of his slave girl mother’s low station, and Gargoris, king of Cunetes, exposes his grandson when his daughter is impregnated illicitly.

91. Delcor notes that Lamech’s affirmation in the beginning of the Genesis Apocryphon (“Behold, then I thought in my heart that the conception was the work of the watchers and the pregnancy of the Holy Ones”) can be compared with the words of Noah in 2 Enoch uttered at the time of the examination of Melchizedek (“This is of the Lord, my brother”) (“Melchizedek from Genesis,” 129, quoted in Orlov, The Enoch-Metatron Tradition, TSAJ 107 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 315).

92. Crispin Fletcher-Louis states that Noah and Melchizedek are born by “autogenesis” (Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology, WUNT' 94 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997], 155). But it is perhaps more accurate to say that Noah and Melchizedek are born without the aid of their fathers. These similarities have been noted by Orlov, Enoch-Metatron, 315–17.
Enoch has developed the elements of the exposed hero tale type as he would have received them traditionally, while drawing on examples of the tale from outside the Jewish birth story paradigms.

The annunciation-danger-evasion motif complex is expressed in what has become a characteristic Jewish modality. The annunciation is given after the birth and serves to reassure those who will benefit from the child’s destiny (71:11–13). The generalized threat of extraordinary and looming evil is present, and action is taken to preserve or protect the child from this danger, even though it does not seem to be directed specifically at the child. Noah counsels his brother to hide the child because “people have become treacherous in all the earth, and in some way when they see him, they will put him to death” (71:23). No one person seeks Melchizedek’s life; it is just that wicked people are a threat to the righteous.\(^93\) The danger necessitates concealment, so Melchizedek is spirited away to Eden, ultimately to weather the flood and survive to act as God’s eschatological agent (71:28). Like the stories of Noah and Moses, this motif complex supports a motif of divine providence.\(^94\) There are additional aspects of the portrayal of Melchizedek, however, that are not shared with the birth stories of Noah, Moses, or any other early Jewish birth story.

\(^93\) The identification of the righteous representative with the people of righteousness is present: “and Melchizedek will be my priest to all priests, and I will sanctify him and I will change him into a great people who will sanctify me” (2 En. 71:29).

The story of the birth of Asclepius in the *Pythian Ode* of Pindar, written in the fifth century BCE, is remarkably similar to the depiction of Melchizedek’s birth.\(^95\) Coronis is visited by a stranger, Apollo, who impregnates her. She later falls in love with a mortal named Ischys, which enrages Apollo, who sends Artemis to kill Coronis, but decides to save his unborn child by rescuing him from her burnt corpse.\(^96\) Pausanius knows this version of Asclepius’s birth, but he first describes Asclepius as an exposed child. In Pausanius’s version, Coronis hides her pregnancy from her father, gives birth to Asclepius and exposes him on Mt. Myrtium. The child is suckled by a goat and guarded by a watchdog. When the herdsman discovers Asclepius and attempts to save him, he sees lightning shining from the child and turns away, recognizing Asclepius as divine (*Description of Greece* 2.26.3–5). There is also a strong resemblance between Melchizedek’s birth and the birth of Dionysus.\(^97\) There are several versions of the story, but in the *Bacchanals* of Euripides, Zeus loves a mortal woman named Semele, who is convinced by Hera to demand proof of Zeus’s divinity. Zeus reveals his glory, and Semele is consumed by it. He snatches up his unborn son Dionysus and implants him in his thigh until he is ready to emerge.

---


96. In the *Library* of Apollodorus, Coronis is married to Ischys against her will, Apollo argues with her about her unfaithfulness, kills her himself in a rage, then rescues his child from her burnt corpse (*Lib.* 3.10.3). Ovid has Coronis as simply unfaithful to Apollo, who shoots her with an arrow. As she burns on her funeral pyre, Apollo cuts her open and rescues the child (*Metam.*, 2.542–47, 596–648).

In the biblical stories of barren women, God opens the womb of the barren woman and then her husband impregnates her. There is usually an announcement before the birth that God has done this, as with Isaac, Jacob, and Samson, and in each case this fact is made clear even without a pre-birth announcement. Sopanim is proclaimed barren and, like Sarah, past child-bearing age, but there is only implicit confirmation that God has opened her womb, and Nir never has sex with his wife. Sopanim is unlike the young, beautiful, fertile virgins who are usually coupled with the gods in Greco-Roman myths, but she reacts with the shame with which they often do. 

Like Apollo arguing with Coronis about her unfaithfulness, Nir’s argument with Sopanim leads to her death. Dionysus, Asclepius, and Melchizedek are all snatched from necrotic wombs by their own fathers.

There are two exposed hero tales in which the mother of the hero is a celibate priestess. I have already discussed the influence of Sargon’s high priestess mother on the birth of Moses to a Levite woman. The other story is the birth of Romulus and Remus to Rhea, a vestal virgin. In each case, it is not just premarital pregnancy but transgression of sacerdotal celibacy that compounds the mother’s shame. Considering that the Jewish adaptation of exposed hero motifs often includes ironic reversals of those motifs, we can observe such a reversal of the humiliated celibate priestess motif in Nir’s sacerdotal role. Instead of a disgraced temple attendant being impregnated by the god of the temple, the

---


99. Ibid., 35–36.

100. This story is extant in Plutarch, Romulus (3.1–9.1), from the second century CE, but Plutarch attributes his source to Diocles of Peparethus (ca. late-fourth/early-third cent. BCE). It is also attested by Dionysus of Halicarnassus, Ant. rom. 1.76–83.
God whom Nir serves at the temple, by service which requires his celibacy, effects the miraculous impregnation of the priest’s wife.

Nir is unable to claim Melchizedek as his son because of his absence in the temple, which leads to perhaps the most peculiar element in the birth story, Melchizedek’s adoption by Nir. In his prayer of blessing for Melchizedek, Nir says, “by his word, [the Lord] has created a great priest, in the womb of Sopanim, my wife. For I have no descendants. So let this child take the place of my descendants and become as my own son” (2 En. 71:30–31). In a sense, Nir becomes the foster father of Melchizedek while claiming that the continuity of the priesthood has been upheld. The adoption element is a natural solution to what had always been explained in the Jewish birth paradigm by making the father legitimate. There is no particular reason that Nir needs to adopt Melchizedek, since Melchizedek will be brought up in Eden after only forty days with Nir.

The reticence with which Jewish storytellers encountered and assimilated the exposure motif is paralleled by the modification of the motif of fate or destiny that usually accompanied the exposure with a complementary yet polemical motif of divine providence. The gods allowed children to be exposed to die, and while fate sometimes ensures that they are discovered and adopted, there is no moral orientation to fate, so the hero’s moral decisions are uncoupled from his destiny. An exposed hero may just as easily be an exposed villain, as with Agathocles (Diodorus), who, despite the best efforts of Carcinus, survives exposure to become the tyrant of Syracuse.101 The exposure can just as easily lead to tragedy as to a happy ending, as Oedipus shows us. With the birth of

101. Lewis, Sargon, 163.
Melchizedek in 2 Enoch comes a thoroughgoing elimination of any possibility that the child will be exposed to any danger combined with the concern with the divine plan. Not even Jesus’s birth and upbringing in the Gospels is as sheltered as Melchizedek’s existence in 2 Enoch. Melchizedek arrives by supernatural birth, spends a sheltered forty days on earth, then is whisked away from danger to Eden. The result of this portrayal is that the child Melchizedek is superficially exposed to the danger of the Flood and to the looming evil described by Nir.102

1.6. Birth of Jesus

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew’s “compositional habit” of drawing comparisons between Jesus and other biblical figures is manifested in the typological correlation he draws between Jesus and Moses.103 Commentators on this “new Moses” typology have


103. Allison has provided the most comprehensive account of the evidence for a Moses typology in the Gospel of Matthew and discusses the major contributions in an appendix (New Moses, 293–328). Bitrus A. Sarma reviews the scholarship of those who have discerned a similar typology in Hermeneutics of Mission in Matthew: Israel and the Nations in the Interpretive Framework of Matthew’s Gospel (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2015), 72–77. Scholars who argue against the existence of a new Moses typology in Matthew have either qualified its existence as redaction or diminished its importance for Matthew’s broader purposes (see Howard M. Teeple, The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet, SBLMS 10 [Philadelphia: SBL, 1957]; Tadashi Saito, Die Mosevorstellungen im Neuen Testament, Europäische Hochschulschriften Series 23, Theology, vol. 100 [Bern: Peter Lang, 1977], 51–72). One way of doing the latter has been to discern an Israel typology instead of a Moses typology. In the quotation of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15, Jesus is compared to Israel as God’s son and not to Moses. Some scholars have taken this turn to mean that Matthew has abandoned his Moses typology in favor ultimately of an Israel typology. As the argument runs, “Jesus the Son corresponds to Israel the son, not to the lawgiver; hence, on the redactional level, there can have been no interest in a Moses typology” (Allison, New Moses, 142, reciting the argument of Saito, Mosevorstellungen). Allison acknowledges the redactional arguments of Saito, who contends that the Moses typology of the pre-Matthean tradition was transformed by Matthew into an Israel typology, and Teeple, who maintains that it is the Israel typology of Q that has been turned into a Moses typology, but points out that either argument does not reach above the level of perspective. Following Vögtle, Allison sees no reason to reject one typology for the other: nothing prohibits Matthew from portraying Jesus as both a new Moses and as the embodiment of true Israel (New Moses, 142). Ben Witherington III rejects a new Moses typology on different grounds, simply contending that it is not a major motif in Matthew, judging the comparison with Moses in Matt. 1–2 to be “a secondary interest.” He insists that “It is Jesus as Son taking on the role of Israel (not Moses) that God is calling forth from Egypt”
recognized that Matthew’s project extends beyond the birth story into the rest of the
gospel. There is some sense in which Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus as having had a birth
like Moses is part of the effort to demonstrate that Jesus’s whole life is like Moses’s and
that his salvific ministry is like a new exodus for God’s people. Drawing on Allison’s
comparison of Jesus’s birth in Matthew with the birth of Moses in Josephus, I maintain
that the development in the Mosaic birth traditions represented in these two accounts
emerged as an attempt to eliminate the ambiguities in the story by restoring certain
established conventions in the tale type. Matthew shows cognizance of the exposed hero
tale not just from its residue in the Moses birth tradition or even from the early Jewish
birth story paradigm. He modifies Moses’s birth story as it appears in Exodus, but
maintains the association of Moses with the people of Israel in his presentation of Jesus.
The most significant modification Matthew makes is in eliminating the exposure element
altogether, transferring the fear or shame that often leads to the exposure to the father.

The birth of Jesus in Matthew bears a strong resemblance to the portrayal of
Moses by Josephus, in terms of the inclusion of story elements and in the structure of the

(Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998], 350. Those scholars who have
recognized in Matthew’s use of Hos 11:1 an interpretation of Exod 4:22 (“Israel is my first-born son, . . .
Let my son go that he may serve me”) have recognized that the same kind of identification made in Exodus
between Moses and the people is being evoked in the case of Jesus, but being given new expression. God’s
son is, in some sense, both the man Jesus and the Jewish people who are being restored by his ministry

104. It is also true that the Gospel of Luke shows familiarity with the exposed hero tale. Luke
gives us an annunciation and plenty of dreams and oracles to accompany the birth. Like Matthew, there is
no exposure. Jesus is born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. Creusa swaddles Ion, her son by
the god Apollo, and those swaddling clothes become a token by which she later recognizes her son. It
occurs to me to suggest that when Peter’s disbelief changes to faith when he sees the linen cloths in Luke
24:12, that this is a kind of recognition element, even though they are not necessarily the swaddling
clothes he was wrapped in. J. Duncan M. Derrett has elucidated the connections between Jesus in the
narrative. These two accounts are roughly contemporaneous and likely attest the same development in the formation of the tradition. *Antiquities* and Matthew both introduce a cause and effect relationship between the annunciation of the birth of a usurper and the subsequent attempt to murder the child. The salient features of this pattern and their order are (1) the overt expression of the annunciation element in the form of an omen (the star in Matt 2:2; the implied scrying of a sacred scribe in *Ant*. 2.9.2); (2) a scribe or sage informs the ruler of the omen; (3) the ruler reacts with distress, since the omen informs him of the rise of a usurper (Matt 2:3; *Ant*. 2.9.2); (4) the ruler attempts a negation of the omen by eliminating the child (Matt 2:16–18; *Ant*. 2.9.2). Each of these elements is an addition to the story, since only the attempt to destroy the child by murdering children of a certain sort is present in any part of the Moses birth traditions up to this point.105

In both accounts the father of the child has a portentous dream (1) to explain the child’s conception and (2) to offer a prediction of the child’s future greatness (Matt 1:20–24; *Ant*. 2.9.3). The sequence of the dream element in relation to the motif complex is different in each source. Joseph receives his dream before Herod receives his omen, but Amram is reassured of his son’s destiny in response to the danger posed to him by pharaoh’s order.106 The element manifests as reassurance about the conception and as a

105. Allison conforms his account of the pattern to fit with later rabbinic traditions about Moses in The Chronicle of Moses and in Sefer ha-Zikronot, in Tg. Ps.-J. on Exod 1:15 and Sefer ha-Yašar. He lists them as (1) indirect sign is given to the king; (2) troubled feelings in response to that sign; (3) consultation of advisors; (4) interpretation of sign by scribes; (5) resolution to slaughter Hebrew infants. There are problems with comparing these rabbinic traditions with Matthew, but regardless, the external sign of a star, a sign which the magi must make Herod aware of along with an interpretation, seems less like a dream in need of interpretation than other exposed hero tales, like the birth of Cyrus, for example, in which a dream has been interpreted for the villainous ruler in exactly the same manner (*New Moses*, 157–58).

106. God appearing to someone in a dream to explain something that has already happened appears in Genesis (Gen 20:3, 6; 31:10–24). Elsewhere in the HB, dreams have a prognosticative feature, in the sense that the content of the dream explains something that will occur entirely in the future, as in
prediction of future greatness. In this form the element has appeared in Pseudo-Philo’s version of Moses’s birth, though it is to Miriam that the dream is given (LAB 9:10). The birth stories of Noah and Melchizedek contain an annunciation following after the birth in the form of a prophecy, one that contains an explanation for the miraculous appearance of the child and a prediction of his destiny.\textsuperscript{107} This is certainly somewhat similar to a dream given after a conception. Ultimately, though, a dream that gives the reason for the conception of a child appears to be an innovation that develops in the story of Moses’s birth around the same time that the annunciation-danger-evasion motif is reestablished. In rabbinic tradition, it is the pharaoh who receives a dream that has to be interpreted for him, an element that differs in kind from both Antiquities and Matthew.\textsuperscript{108} Taken together, the Moses birth tradition in the first century CE and its rabbinic developments conform closely to the birth of Cyrus.

In the birth story of Cyrus, King Astyages has a dream one night that requires interpretation. He summons magi, who inform him that his dream predicts the rise of a usurper. When Astyages hears the message of the magi, he is terrified. He takes indirect action by marrying his daughter to a man he trusts. When Cyrus is born anyway, Astyages takes action by commissioning one of his advisors to take the child and kill

\textsuperscript{107} Taken as a whole, the Noachic birth tradition contains the building blocks for complementary elements of foreknowledge existing together in one story, since the annunciation to the father is contained in 1 Enoch and the Genesis Apocryphon, while an annunciation to the watchers is present in the Book of Giants.

\textsuperscript{108} Allison contends that this brings the tradition into even closer alignment with Matthew, since “the prophecy to the enemies is an ambiguous sign (a star) that has to be interpreted (by the magi and by Jewish scribes)” (\textit{New Moses}, 157).
him. His advisor does not do so, but instead delivers the child to a herdsman, who adopts Cyrus as his own. Herod in Matt 2 does not have a vision or dream, nor does he summon his own magi to interpret such a dream. Instead, magi arrive from the east and inform Herod of the omen along with its interpretation. Herod reacts with the same terror that Astyages feels, but takes a different sort of indirect action by sending the magi to look for Jesus. When Jesus is born without report, Herod takes action to destroy him. The correspondences are not perfect, but the sequence of elements is remarkably similar to our pattern.

The evolution of the birth story in early Judaism and Christianity continues into late antique Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Here I would like to summarize its formation thus far. Its origins lie in the birth story of Moses in Exodus, in which an annunciation motif is sundered from its expected place in a motif complex and the rest of the complex is combined with the origin story of the people of Israel in their escape from Egypt. The exposure motif is present, complete with discovery and adoption by a royal parent. As the Mosaic tradition is passed down, motifs of the tale type are added, modified, or eliminated. The annunciation of Moses’s birth continues to manifest its phantom presence until it finally returns in Josephus’s Antiquities. The exposure element generally diminishes in importance, is absent in the birth stories of Noah and Melchizedek and in the stories of other biblical figures (e.g., Samson, Samuel). Motifs in Moses’s birth story are carried over into the births of Noah and Melchizedek (generalized danger to the child, flight), others are not (exposure, discovery, adoption). The continued influence of the tale type is apparent, though the Jewish birth story is unique. The developments of the first century CE in Josephus’s account of Moses and the Matthean
birth story demonstrate that the tale type’s influence has been constant and continues to affect the formation of the paradigm. No one motif has been deemed essential for generating a connection between these early Jewish figures and their ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic counterparts. This is an important aspect of the formation of birth stories in early Judaism and Christianity, since it assists in understanding the manner in which the writer of Joseph and Aseneth appropriates such elements. What follows in the next chapter is an examination of Aseneth’s exposed hero tale.
CHAPTER TWO: “DAUGHTER OF THE MOST HIGH”: ASENETH’S BIRTH STORY

2.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I sought to demonstrate that the early Jewish and Christian birth story tradition manifests the persistent influence of the exposed hero tale type. The birth story paradigm consistently supports a theme of divine providence and/or destiny. In this chapter, I contend that the writer(s) of Joseph and Aseneth adapts the story elements of the tale type in a way that stylistically and thematically places his narrative in continuity with early Jewish and Christian birth traditions. The exposure motif is attenuated from the start in Moses’s birth story until it ultimately disappears in the Matthean birth story of Jesus. The lethal threat to the child is also characteristically generalized, either in whom it targets (e.g., all Hebrew male infants in the Exodus) or in where the threat originates (e.g., the wicked who seek the life of Noah). After being suppressed for stylistic reasons in Exod 2, the annunciation motif develops in importance until surfacing as a component in the annunciation-danger-evasion complex in the Mosaic birth story of Josephus and in the Matthean birth story of Jesus. These developments are a characteristically Jewish way of telling the story of a child who goes on to play an important role in the drama of Israel’s redemption.

The elements of the exposed hero tale in Joseph and Aseneth support a spiritual metaphor of Aseneth’s transformation while ironically reconfiguring the mundane details of her life. We are introduced to a young, beautiful virgin who by all accounts is the legitimate daughter of an Egyptian high official. Even though the natural parentage of Pentephres is never explicitly challenged, the writer conveys Aseneth’s family
disjuncture by creating subtexts that correspond to elements of the tale type. Aseneth is portrayed as a kind of foundling who encounters the Most High God as the true father who discovers his daughter. The purpose of framing Aseneth’s spiritual transformation in this way is to support the idea that divine providence is at work in the life of a convert. Aseneth is represented as a foundling, paradoxically abandoned by her natural father, discovered by her true spiritual father.

In my analysis of the influence of the exposed hero tale type on the birth story paradigm in Chapter One, I classify the elements and motifs as they appeared in each story I examine according to the general characteristics of the type (i.e., how elements in the type often appear in stories across a variety of cultures and time periods). I also assess the likelihood that a particular story in the tradition may rely on a specific exposed hero tale as a source. In this chapter, I analyze Joseph and Aseneth as an instance of the spiritualization of the birth story paradigm. I also compare each motif in Joseph and Aseneth as an element in the tale type, just as I do in Chapter One, as well as evaluating the probability that the writer may have certain examples of the exposed hero tale in mind.

As regards my evaluation of potential sources, I consider the influence of Hellenistic romances that portrayed their main characters as exposed heroes: the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus and *Daphnis and Chloe*, by Longus. As part of my assessment,

1. West positions Joseph and Aseneth as a forerunner of the Greek novels (“Joseph and Asenath”), as does Braginskaya (“Case of the ‘First Novel,’” 96), but Pervo (“Aseneth and Her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in the Greek Novels,” in “Women Like This”: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World, SBLEJL 12 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 145–60) and Ahearne-Kroll (“Jewish Identity,” 142) surmise some amount of influence from the Greek novels. Lawrence M. Wills sees only a “strained connection” with Greek novels, describing Joseph and Aseneth instead as a Jewish novel similar to Greek Esther, Tobit, and Judith (*The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*, Myth and Poetics).
I review the scholarly discussion of Hellenistic romance as a genre. The kinds of stories exemplified by these two romances provide a structural and stylistic subtext for how Aseneth’s transformation is represented. The writer reworks the theme of erotic desire characteristic of these romances to bolster his theological project. Just as the lovers in a Hellenistic romance overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles thanks to the power of fate, so the suspense created during Aseneth’s penitence, whether she will be accepted by God or not, is finally resolved. When the angel pronounces the inexorability of the divine purpose to save Aseneth from her idols, he reveals her as the eternally destined bride of Joseph.

My primary objective in this chapter is to analyze the influence of the exposed hero tale type on the metaphorical birth story in Joseph and Aseneth, with a special interest in how the two exposed hero romances compare, in order to delineate the features of the theology of divine providence at work in the narrative. I attempt to show that Joseph and Aseneth conforms the experience of Aseneth’s transformation to certain motifs common to the birth story paradigm described in Chapter One.

Given what I am seeking to demonstrate, that Joseph and Aseneth develops its portrayal of Aseneth’s transformation as a kind of exposed hero tale, I am obliged to make a determination about the status of the rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend, which is a rather conventional exposed hero tale. Early scholars of Joseph and Aseneth were convinced that there was a connection between these two stories because they both attempt to resolve the problem of intermarriage in the Joseph story. Recent scholarship

has generally rejected the idea that these two stories are related, since the argument that
the legend is an influence on Joseph and Aseneth relies on questionable dating of rabbinic
sources. I do not consider the rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend as a potential source for
Joseph and Aseneth, since the material evidence for the origins of the legend are almost
certainly much later than even the earliest extant manuscript of Joseph and Aseneth (sixth
century). There is also not enough evidence to demonstrate that the Dinah-Aseneth
legend is a reaction to the story of Joseph and Aseneth, though this possibility would be
more plausible. I analyze each of the parts of Joseph and Aseneth that have been adduced
by certain scholars as subtexts of the Dinah-Aseneth legend. However, I have relegated
my consideration of the scholarly discussion and my own judgment about how these two
stories are related to an appendix.

2.2. Birth Story as Spiritual Metaphor

What follows is an exegetical analysis of the exposed hero motifs and the elements of the
traditional Jewish and Christian birth story. I assess the parallels between Joseph and
Aseneth, the Aethiopica, and Daphnis and Chloe. I also attend to the parts of the narrative
that have generated the scholarly discussion about the Dinah-Aseneth legend. The
exposed hero motifs in Joseph and Aseneth, like the early Jewish and Christian
developments of the type, are adapted to fit the concerns of a Jewish audience. The
elements of the type are associated with Aseneth’s spiritual family and contrasted with
her earthly family. Presented with an orphaned and abandoned child (Jos. Asen. 11:3–5,
whom a kind of oracle is spoken (Jos. Asen. 8:9; 15:4), whose life is in danger (11:13;
12:7–12; chs. 23–29), readers familiar with the tale type anticipate the conclusion of the pattern: recognition of the true identity of the child as nobly born. Because the narrator has denied us the usual introductory aside, in which he informs the audience of what the characters will be ignorant of throughout the drama (i.e., the true origin of the foundling), we are left wondering not just when and how the recognition scene comes about but who the child’s parents will finally be revealed as. The reader could assume that before the action even begins, abandonment, discovery and adoption have already occurred. Instead, Aseneth proclaims her own abandonment by Pentephres (11:3–5; 12:5), which upsets the expectation that a revelation will occur. Aseneth is found ironically by her own true father, the Most High God.

This peculiar stratagem heightens the drama of Aseneth’s transformation from abandoned child to City of Refuge (Jos. Asen. 15:7). Better than an unadorned assertion of Aseneth as a child of God, something that may have been hard for ancient readers to accept of a proselyte from paganism, the pattern has been adapted for distinctively Jewish theological themes, which lends unique force to Aseneth’s transformation and advances the theological aims of the writer. Aseneth must become an orphan by repudiating her pagan identity as daughter of an Egyptian priest. She abandons a family to which she does not properly belong in order to embrace the family she was always actually a member of: the family of the Most High. She is recognized both as the daughter of the Most High and the sister of Joseph, the son of God, by the association of her identity with that of her heavenly counterpart, Repentance.
2.2.1. “Like a daughter of the Hebrews” (Jos. Asen. 1:5)

In Jos. Asen. 1:5, Aseneth is described in this way:

an eighteen-year-old virgin, tall, alluring and beautiful to behold beyond all the virgins of the land. And she was nothing like the virgins of the Egyptians, but she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was tall like Sarah and alluring like Rebecca and beautiful like Rachel. (Jos. Asen. 1:5)

We know little else about Aseneth to this point, save that she is the daughter of an Egyptian priest and chief official, Pentephres (Jos. Asen. 1:3). Her beauty is legendary; even pharaoh’s son as the most eligible bachelor in the land has designs on marrying her.

In Jos. Asen. 2:1, we learn that Aseneth is haughty, “boastful and arrogant” toward everyone. She worships the gods of the Egyptians, her bedchamber adorned as a kind of pagan temple. She fears the idols that surround her and offers sacrifices to them every day (2:2–4). She is the picture of pagan pomp, a beautiful and devout idol-worshiper.

The discordance between her pagan way of life and her beauty creates ambiguity about Aseneth’s identity from the start. Scholars have been divided about exactly what this ambiguity implies. The many explanations offered for her physical resemblance to the Hebrews can be classified broadly as either figurative or literal. Aseneth looks like a daughter of the Hebrews either because the writer would like us to associate her figuratively with the Jewish matriarchs and foreshadow her conversion, or because Aseneth is literally a descendent of the tribe of Israel.

Burchard offers what amounts to one of the simplest explanations: that the writer is Jewish, and as such, he can imagine no one more beautiful than the patriarchs’ wives, whose beauty was well known.² The protagonist in a Hellenistic romance, to which

---

² *OTP* 2:203 n. k. Collins concludes that this passage might make the Jewish provenance more likely, since Hebrews “here are an ethnic group, with distinctive features” (*Between Athens and*...*)
Aseneth has often been compared, must always be impossibly beautiful (e.g., Callirhoe). If a Jewish writer was looking for an analogue to these beauties, he would naturally look to the wives of the patriarchs. Nina Braginskaya postulates that the comparison to Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel is meant not merely to establish an association with these romances, but “to inscribe Aseneth into the line of female progenitors, for she is also a progenitor of two tribes of Israel.” Gideon Bohak imagines that the writer simply has a dislike for Egyptians, which is why he makes Aseneth look like a Jewish girl.

Joseph Modrzejewski, placing the novel in a second-century CE Alexandrian Jewish milieu, maintains that Joseph and Aseneth is an apology for mixed marriages between Jews and Greeks. The Alexandrian Jewish readers would not have thought of Aseneth as an Egyptian girl because she ended up converting to the Jewish religion in order to marry Joseph. The marriage of a Jew and a Greek was symbolic of the union of Hellenistic and Jewish culture in second-century CE Alexandria. For Erich S. Gruen, resemblance to the Jewish matriarchs is nothing more than a case of foreshadowing, with an undertone that in the matchup between Jew and Egyptian Greek, Jewish “physical as well as

---

5. Bohak, Jewish Temple, 42–43.
spiritual superiority” can be expected. It is part of her future identity as a Jewish matriarch that she is portrayed as an “archetypal Jewish mother figure.” Chesnutt sees the inclusion as part of the motif of exalting Aseneth and establishing the “propriety of her marriage to Joseph.” Aseneth is portrayed in such a way “that her worthiness to be Joseph’s wife is affirmed.” Aseneth’s resemblance to the matriarchs helps to foreshadow and legitimate her conversion to those who saw her foreign identity as problematic.

But if the real problem is that being a foreign woman disqualifies a person for inclusion in Israel, then a foreign woman stands no chance of acceptance regardless of the sincerity of her conversion. Would the readers of this story who were interested in resolving the problem of intermarriage have accepted the solution of conversion? If the writer really saw Aseneth’s foreignness as a problem, then he could have introduced the idea that she actually was a descendent of Israel. If it was not a problem for him, then why introduce the idea of resemblance to the patriarchs’ wives in the first place? If the writer needed a model for a pious convert, he need look no further than Ruth or Rahab. Why use a resemblance to Jewish matriarchs, especially physical resemblance, to foreshadow Aseneth’s conversion, a solution to intermarriage that disregards physical kinship? It makes little sense to create an expectation that intermarriage is not allowed (as the narrator does in 8:5) and then make an exception to that rule that eviscerates the reasons for the prohibition. But it makes even less sense to imply that Aseneth has more

---


to do with the Hebrews physically than she does with Egyptians, but then never capitalize on a narrative turn that confirms that she is actually a Hebrew.

Some early commentators on Joseph and Aseneth cite this passage as proof that the Dinah-Aseneth legend lies behind the composition and even that Aseneth is being portrayed as a Hebrew and the daughter of Dinah. Pierre Battifol acknowledges the influence of the Dinah-Aseneth legend, though he conjectures that the rabbinic legend begins in the fourth century CE and that Joseph and Aseneth is a Christian composition of the fifth century CE. The Dinah-Aseneth legend has been “retouched” by a Christian author, whose main contribution is to make Joseph and Aseneth into symbolic figures.¹⁰ Victor Aptowitzer, who rejects the Christian ascription of Battifol, characterizes Jos. Asen. 1:5, along with the conversation between Joseph and Pentephres (Jos. Asen. 7:5–8:7), in which Pentephres suggests that Joseph and Aseneth are like brother and sister because they value virginity, as lapses in the editorial judgment of the author. He calls it “an unmistakable struggle with the legend of Asenath’s descent, . . . every now and then [the author] gave in to it and was influenced by it, the result being the impairment and weakening of the plan of the narrative.”¹¹ According to this view, the author has set out to write a story in which Aseneth is an Egyptian pagan woman whose only qualification to marry Joseph comes in her earnest conversion to Judaism, but despite his best efforts, he cannot resist alluding to a rival legend in which Aseneth is the daughter of Dinah and

---


related to Joseph. His project muddled, he stumbles again and again back into the legend he seeks to avoid.¹²

What scholars of neither the figurative nor the literal reading have considered is the possibility that Joseph and Aseneth is deliberately calling to mind the idea that Aseneth may be biologically related to Joseph to create an expectation that he will overturn with his version of the story. The comparison of Aseneth’s outward appearance to the matriarchs implies not just that she is a Hebrew but that she is related to Joseph, since the beautiful appearance of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebecca in Genesis and in extrabiblical tradition is coupled with their eligibility to marry their husbands. The larger purpose of the author to evoke physical resemblance to the matriarchs lies in the effort to portray Aseneth as belonging to a different family than that of Pentephres. Aseneth looks like a daughter of the Hebrews but also “in no way” does she resemble the daughters of the Egyptians.

The biblical accounts of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebecca make no connection between their physical beauty and their righteousness, but they do connect their physical beauty with kinship to the patriarchs. According to Gen 20:12, Sarah is Abraham’s half-sister. She is depicted as strikingly beautiful in Genesis and in apGen 20. Genesis Rabbah says that Sarah retained her beauty even in her old age (Gen. Rab. 40:4; see also b. Sanh. 39b). Rachel is described in Gen 29:17 as “shapely and beautiful,” and Jub. 28:5 says that

---

Rachel is “very beautiful,” and that in contrast to Leah’s weak eyes, Rachel has “good eyes and good appearance and she [is] very beautiful.” Rebecca is hospitable to strangers and kind to animals (Gen 24:14, 18, 20), perhaps the only indication in the biblical texts that any of these women is characteristically righteous. ὀραία, which describes Aseneth in Jos. Asen. 1:5, is used of Rachel in Gen 29:17 LXX and of Rebecca in Gen 26:7 LXX. The two biblical characteristics of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebecca are that each is devastatingly beautiful and each fits into the family tree of Israel. Taking Aseneth’s physical resemblance to the Jewish matriarchs principally as a device to foreshadow her conversion to Judaism ignores the pairing of beauty and genealogy in the biblical accounts of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebecca and creates an association between Aseneth’s outward appearance and her spiritual experience that is never substantiated later in the narrative.

Aseneth’s first encounter with Joseph is similar to Rebecca’s meeting with Abraham’s servant and Rachel’s with Jacob. In Gen 24, Abraham’s servant goes to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac. When he arrives in Nahor, he prays for his encounter with Isaac’s future betrothed to occur in such a way that Yahweh’s providence will be made manifest (“By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master” [Gen 24:14]). His prayer is answered when Rebecca responds appropriately and returns with him to Canaan to become Isaac’s wife. In Gen 29, Jacob discovers Rachel much the same way, at a well to which she comes to draw water. Jacob offers no prayer

as Abraham’s servant did, but he encounters Rachel in a similarly providential way. The search for a suitable wife brings Abraham’s servant and Jacob out of the land of Canaan and into a foreign land. Despite the journey, each man immediately encounters a woman who fits his only criterion for an eligible wife, and that criterion is explicitly met (Gen 24:24; 29:6, 12). In Joseph and Aseneth, Joseph arrives at Pentephres’s house on his tour of Egypt. Joseph is “from Canaan” (Jos. Asen. 4:10; 6:2) and has arrived in a foreign land, albeit under duress. Joseph is not seeking a spouse, but providentially arrives at the house of his future wife, who outwardly appears to fit the same criterion for eligibility to marry a patriarch as Rachel and Rebecca have. Joseph later confirms that he does not even associate with foreign women, much less consider them marriage material (Jos. Asen. 8:5). The description of Aseneth as resembling Rachel and Rebecca corresponds in the sequence of events to the confirmation of kinship in Gen 24 and 29. The assimilation of Aseneth’s initial encounter with Joseph to the type-scene in Genesis invites the reader to anticipate confirmation of Aseneth’s Hebrew heritage and eligibility to marry Joseph and not at all to connect these details with her eventual conversion.

In exposed hero tales, the hero is often recognized as looking unlike his adoptive parents and may sometimes even be recognized as belonging to his true birth parents because of his or her beautiful appearance. Cyrus is raised by a cowherd and his wife, but when he inflicts injury on a nobleman’s son during a game in which he is playing at

14. Isaac had admonished Jacob in the same way Abraham charged his servant on Isaac’s behalf, not to marry a Canaanite woman (Gen 28:1). Better than being given only a geographical area in which to search, Jacob is told exactly from which family he is to acquire a wife. Gen 28:5 implies that Jacob immediately traveled to Laban’s house, but Gen 29:1 (“Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east”) depicts Jacob as arriving almost incidentally at a place where he happens to encounter Rachel. This along with the other features of Gen 29 conforms the type-scene to Gen 24.
being king, he is brought before King Astyages. While Astyages is speaking to Cyrus, it occurs to him that he recognizes the boy, the character of his face being like his own and his mannerisms freer than those of the average peasant (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.116). So also Carcinus takes notice of the impressive qualities of his lost son Agathocles, which leads him to recognize him as his own (Diodorus, *Library* 9.2.2–7). It is the example of the two Greek romances as exposed hero tales, the *Aethiopica* and *Daphnis and Chloe*, that provide the best examples of this dynamic.

In the *Aethiopica*, the queen of Ethiopia, Persinna, gives birth to a white child because she had been gazing upon a certain painting during the conception. Her daughter, Chariclea, is exposed for fear that the dark-skinned Persinna will be accused of adultery by her husband. The child is given to a gymnosophist and brought to Egypt, where she is raised by Charicles, a Pythian priest, and eventually taken to Delphi and made a priestess of Artemis. Near the climax of the romance, Chariclea is about to be sacrificed to the Moon by her own birth father, Hydaspes, who does not even know of her existence. The suspense of the scene centers around whether Persinna will recognize Chariclea as her daughter. Chariclea gazes steadily at Persinna, who is moved and protests to her husband against the sacrifice. She remarks on Chariclea’s beauty and courage, insisting that if her daughter had lived, she would have been the same age as this girl. Hydaspes disregards her protests, but Chariclea herself knows the truth, that she is the exposed child of Hydaspes and Persinna, a fact she now reveals to her parents. Birth tokens and a letter explaining her exposure, written by Persinna herself, help to convince her parents, but her white skin is still an obstacle to recognition. The gymnosophist who first saved her, Sisimithras, remarks that, even though it has been many years, he recognizes the beauty
of Chariclea’s form from when she was a child. Chariclea is described as so beautiful as to be almost divine, and her beauty, characteristic of her royal blood, aids in the recognition scene.\(^{15}\)

Silvia Montiglio observes that a person’s beauty may be characteristic and signify that he does not belong in a lowly position. She analyzes a remark in the Testament of Joseph as reminiscent of New Comedy and romantic novels. While Joseph is a slave, he keeps his true identity a secret so as not to defame his brothers, but his captors exclaim, “You are no slave, for I can tell from your appearance.” Montiglio contends that “these words could come straight from New Comedy, from Callirhoe, and especially from Daphnis and Chloe.”\(^{16}\) When Callirhoe is purchased as a slave, it is her divine beauty that leads Dionysius to mistake her for Aphrodite. He scolds his servant, saying, “Impious man! Do you speak to gods as if they were humans? Are you calling her a bought slave?”\(^{17}\) Toward the end of Daphnis and Chloe, Daphnis is in danger of being taken as a

---


16. Montiglio, Love and Providence, 204.

personal slave with his master’s son Astylus. Daphnis’s foster-father Lamon confesses that he found Daphnis exposed and abandoned long ago and that he has the γνωρίσματα to prove it. When Lamon’s master, Dionysophanes, reviews the case for the veracity of Lamon’s claim, he remarks to his wife Cleariste that it had been hard to believe from the start that such an old man like Lamon and such a cheap slave woman as his wife could have produced such a handsome son (Daph. 4.20). The birth tokens are brought and it is finally revealed that Dionysophanes and Cleariste are the ones who exposed Daphnis.

The same pattern manifests in Chloe’s recognition scene. Her foster-father Dryas admits that he only found Chloe being suckled by a ewe and that she is not his natural daughter. Again, before he confirms her identity with birth tokens, he asks his listeners to observe that she “does not look like us” (ἔοικε οὐδὲν ἡμῖν; Daph. 4.30). Dryas does all this in the hopes that Chloe will be confirmed as a suitable match for the nobly-born Daphnis.

I return to the similarities between Joseph and Aseneth and Daphnis and Chloe when I discuss the recognition scene below. Here, I offer this assessment of the portrayal of Aseneth in Jos. Asen. 1:5. The author would like to call to mind the biblical type-scene in which the beautiful future wife of a patriarch is also found to be his relative and thus eligible for marriage. He would also like to recall the phenomenon of beauty as an indicator of true heritage in exposed hero stories, especially when it leads in the Hellenistic romances to the eligibility of two lovers to marry (e.g., Daphnis and Chloe). However, his theological aims run contrary to the biblical type-scene he brings to mind: Aseneth is not, in point of fact, a Hebrew. The higher kinship she shares with Joseph is revealed as spiritual, and the recognition scene in which she is determined to be eligible to marry Joseph reveals her spiritual heritage. The author placed a literary device in the
first few sentences of his narrative, by which he hopes to entice his readers to expect certain turns in the plot to follow. He continues to create expectations not only that Aseneth is a Hebrew, but that she may be related to Joseph.

2.2.2. Aseneth and Joseph as Abandoned Children (Jos. Asen. 4:10; 6:3-4; 13:13)

Both Aseneth and Joseph are portrayed as abandoned children, which conforms their story to other exposed hero tales, especially Daphnis and Chloe. One of the conspicuous indicators of Joseph’s abandonment, one that has generally been disregarded, appears in Jos. Asen. 4:10. Aseneth is giving a diatribe on how unfit Joseph is to be her future husband. She says,

Is he not the shepherd’s son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught in the act (when he was) sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him into the prison of darkness? And the pharaoh brought him out of prison, because he interpreted his dream just like the older women of the Egyptians interpret (dreams)? And [wasn’t] he notoriously caught sleeping with his mistress? (Jos. Asen. 4:10)

Representatives of both the longer and shorter versions add “and [wasn’t] he abandoned by him?” Given the context, it appears that Aseneth believes Joseph to have been abandoned by Jacob. In Jos. Asen. 11:3, Aseneth is praying and says, “What shall I do, miserable as I am? Or whither shall I go? With whom shall I take refuge? Or what shall I

---

18. Daphnis and Chloe are the only examples of complementary exposed heroes whose destiny is revealed at the end of the novel. Daphnis’s noble heritage is revealed, which puts Chloe’s eligibility to marry him in danger, but Chloe’s heritage is subsequently revealed as also noble. It is also unique in that the exposure scene, including who exposed each child and why, is missing from the usual place at the beginning of the story. The symmetrical relationship between hero and heroine is characteristic of Hellenistic erotic novels (Catherine Hezser, “Joseph and Aseneth in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels,” Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge 19 [1997]: 10–19).

19. BD AP (Slavonic adds “and from there he was lead here?”). Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 97.
say? I the virgin and an orphan and alone and abandoned and hated?

In the *a* text family, specifically mss *A* and *P*, the idea that Joseph was abandoned by Jacob and that Aseneth considers herself abandoned by her own father are both attested. Neither of these assertions is true. Joseph was not at all abandoned by his father. On the contrary, he was abducted into slavery without his father’s knowledge. It is conspicuous that Aseneth, so well informed of many of the other details of Joseph’s story, has this one wrong. There is no indication in the later meeting with Jacob that Joseph considers himself to have been abandoned (22:1–10). Even though Aseneth considers herself abandoned in her penitential prayers, there is no indication that Pentephres ever even disowns her, much less abandons her. He is still friendly with her and even offers to throw her a wedding, something that would be expected of a father (20:8). The congruence between Joseph and Aseneth is that each is considered abandoned, in whatever sense, but neither truly is.

What I contend is happening in *Jos. Asen.* 4:10 is that Joseph and Aseneth, in addition to the many other ways that they are made similar in their identities, are both being portrayed as abandoned children. In the case of Joseph, his betrayal and enslavement by his brothers is recast in the mouth of Aseneth as abandonment by his father. As for Aseneth, she proclaims that her own father has abandoned her, by which she identifies herself as an abandoned child. It is characteristic of the author’s style to introduce ideas to his readers that suggest a subtext that he does not wish to confirm as true. He suggests that Aseneth is Hebrew, but she is not. He lets the idea surface that Joseph and Aseneth are brother and sister, even metaphorically, only to dismiss it (Jos.

---

20. Text families *a* and *c* have “orphan,” G L1 omit; BD E 436 435& do not have this verse. *a* G Q Arm 435& have “abandoned,” G Syr omit, E 436 BD do not have this verse. Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 114; Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 144.
Asen. 7:5). He describes his two main characters as abandoned children, even though neither of them is. Like *Daphnis and Chloe*, which only reveals the exposure scene of its main characters in the denouement of the novel, our writer has introduced the idea that Aseneth is an abandoned child only after she has experienced a kind of spiritual death and rebirth in her penitence. The irony that the writer has presented to us is that Aseneth has forcibly caused herself to be abandoned, severing the relationship with her legitimate father, Pentephres. She is discovered by her spiritual father, the Most High God, yet confirmed as his true daughter, not as an adopted child.\(^{21}\)

Regarding Jos. Asen. 4:10, only Philonenko makes a suggestion to resolve the difficulty. He maintains that an “anti-Jewish folktale” is at work, “analogous to those we know from a number of Greek and Latin authors.”\(^{22}\) He does not refer to any examples of these tales or explain why Jacob’s abandonment of Joseph would denote the presence of an anti-Jewish folktale. Again, the implication that Jacob abandoned Joseph stands out in the list given by Aseneth as being demonstrably false. Joseph is the son of a shepherd, a foreigner, an exile and a former slave (Jos. Asen. 4:9). He stands accused at least of having been caught in adultery with his mistress and was in fact thrown in prison. Certainly, Aseneth despises dream interpretation as something the “older women of the Egyptians” do, but she does not deny that this is how Joseph achieved his own release from prison. A Jewish storyteller would stand to gain nothing by portraying Jacob as the one who abandoned Joseph, even presented as vitriol in the mouth of a pagan princess. If

\(^{21}\) It is significant that, even though Aseneth speaks of herself as an orphan and is identified with her heavenly counterpart, Repentance, in her meeting with the angel there is never any language of adoption employed to describe her transformation.

\(^{22}\) Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 145.
he is trying to make Aseneth spiteful and derisive, he has achieved that by her indictment of Joseph and not his father. It would also be hard to imagine that a Christian interpolator has inserted this detail. Why slander one of the patriarchs with an unbiblical, insubstantial detail? From the manuscript tradition, it is clear that this was a difficult reading that scribes struggled with. But its inclusion creates a connection between Joseph and Aseneth: they are both abandoned children.

The ambiguity of Joseph’s true patrimony is heightened in Jos. Asen. 6:3–4, in which Aseneth laments the slander she has leveled against Joseph earlier. She says that she “did not know that Joseph is a son of God. For who among men on earth could produce such beauty, and what woman could give birth to such light?”23 Moyer V. Hubbard argues that the writer has associated divine radiance with divine birth. Joseph has demonstrated that angelomorphic radiance and it is to this that Aseneth is reacting. After her transformation, Aseneth takes on the same radiance as evidence of her new birth (20:6). Only a few chapters after he has introduced doubt as to Aseneth’s true family, our writer has created a different kind of doubt as to Joseph’s lineage. Joseph may appear to be a man, even fitting aspects of the derisive description she gives of him. But Joseph has been portrayed as angelomorphic in order to convey his true family membership. He introduces Aseneth to his father Jacob later in the narrative, but that meeting seems to imply that Jacob himself has angelomorphic characteristics. The writer is engaged in an attempt to challenge readers’ expectations about the familial affiliation

23. The verbs active in this question are in the future middle (γεννήσει [though this could be a defective aorist subjunctive] and τέξεται). Burchard has translated them as future, but clearly the sense is subjunctive (OTP 2.209). See also Aseneth’s prayer in Jos. Asen. 13:14, in which she speaks very similarly of Joseph.
of Aseneth and Joseph. Aseneth may not be a proper member of Pentephres’s household, and Joseph may possess such exalted divine standing that he must be considered first of all as a son of God and only in some derivative and mundane sense as the son of Israel. This is a unique appropriation of another element in the exposed hero tale type: the divine origin of at least one of the child’s parents. In this case, we are not dealing with anything so suggestive as ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic tales supply, but it resembles the way in which the Jewish birth story paradigm conveys the same kind of element.

2.2.3. A False Sister (Jos. Asen. 7:5–8:7)

When Joseph is suspicious of Aseneth starring down at him from her bedroom window, it is because she is a strange woman (Jos. Asen. 7:5). Joseph has avoided the advances of numerous Egyptian women because he has remembered Jacob’s warning that associating with a foreign woman leads to destruction and corruption (7:4). He is eating apart from the Egyptians at his noon-day meal, observing a cultic separation from them that extends especially in the case of contact with a foreign woman. Pentephres responds to Joseph’s fears:

Lord, this one whom you see standing in the upper room is not a strange woman, but she is our daughter, a virgin hating every man, and there is not another man who has ever seen her except you alone today. And if you will, she will come and address you, because our daughter is your sister. (Jos. Asen. 7:7)²⁴

Joseph is overjoyed by the news specifically that Aseneth is “a virgin who hates men,” because he is afraid she will “molest” him. He replies to Pentephres, “If she is your

---

²⁴ E Arm 435& c ACP have ὡς: “like your sister”; L1 Slav Syr have “she is our daughter and your sister”; 436 BDPhil Q omit ὡς (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 113).
daughter and a virgin, let her come, because she is my sister, and I love her from today as my sister” (7:8). Having established that Joseph avoids foreign women and that Aseneth is the worst of foreign women since she is a devoted idol-worshiper, the reader expects Joseph to protest against Pentephres’s facile redefinition of what it means to be family as simply sharing the status of virginity.

Battifol, who has tried to make sense of this strange turn in the dialogue, raises an important question: “How could Joseph be satisfied by Potiphar that Aseneth was not really one of those strange women condemned by the Law, and that he could marry her without incurring the stigma of impurity?” Battifol’s solution is to see the idea that virginity is a basis for kinship as a Christian interpolation in this passage, which would have originally established Joseph’s real kinship with Aseneth. Joseph and Aseneth as a Jewish folktale would have started out as a way to explain the lives of the actual Joseph and Aseneth and lacked any symbolic significance. The symbolic turn is something to be ascribed wholly to Christian redaction. Aptowitzer acknowledges that the use of the concept of virginity as kinship is clumsy and that the writer is engaged in “an unmistakable struggle with the legend of Aseneth’s descent.” He recognizes that if the introduction of virginity as kinship were left out, there would have been a smooth transition from Jacob’s prohibition in Joseph’s recollection about associating with foreign women and his rejection of Aseneth as a foreign woman in Jos. Asen. 8:5. The writer is a man who simply cannot help himself. He knows that introducing an allusion to the


Dinah-Aseneth legend interrupts the original plan for his narrative, but he does it anyway.\textsuperscript{27}

Both Battifol and Aptowitzer characterize the Dinah-Aseneth legend as a source that contains certain indelible details and Joseph and Aseneth as a somewhat poorly executed redaction. A redactor has failed in his attempt to erase the fact that Joseph and Aseneth are related, even though he retains the concept of kinship and links it metaphorically with virginity. But Joseph rejects the kiss Aseneth offers based on their virginal kinship by reiterating that she is a foreign woman and that he will suffer pollution if he touches her. If this is an intercalation into the text designed to make virginity a new criterion for kinship, then it has not just been done unreflectively, it has been done to no effect. Virginity is ultimately rejected as a proper basis for kinship, even metaphorical kinship. Battifol does not appear to have considered the idea that if a redactor were adapting the Dinah-Aseneth legend, there is nothing to keep him from eliminating any trace of familial language if he considers it problematic. Aptowitzer notes that if the whole exchange had been left out, Joseph would have been opposed to foreign women and then logically enough, rejected an encounter with Aseneth as a foreign woman. The artifice of virginity does move Aseneth from her upstairs window down to meet Joseph, since she is not considered to be a threat if she is a virgin, and makes possible the encounter in 8:5, but it still need not have been tied to the idea of kinship to accomplish this action.

\textsuperscript{27} Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 265–66. Brooks suggests that a Christian redactor was horrified by the Dinah-Aseneth legend’s implication that Joseph had married his niece and that he scrubbed the narrative clean of it by the use of the concept of virginity (\textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, xv).
Philonenko follows Battifol and others who see the influence of the Dinah-Aseneth legend at work, but suggests that the author passes over the legend in silence. If the author uses some of the details, he never makes the central claim of the legend explicit, that Aseneth is the daughter of Dinah, since he is interested in the higher kinship of heaven offered by virginity. There is an implicit polemic against the salvation offered in the rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend, which is to retouch the genealogy of Aseneth by depicting Aseneth’s salvation through conversion. The author introduces elements from the legend not because he would like us to disregard it altogether, but because he would like to call it to mind so that it may subsequently be rejected. The higher kinship Philonenko indicates is at work is virginity, but the relationship between virginity and kinship is complicated by how it is subsequently rejected as a suitable basis for an encounter between Joseph and Aseneth.²⁸

Brooke suggests that Pentephres has mistakenly introduced the idea that virginity makes people of different religions siblings. Aseneth’s conversion is made possible in part because of the conduit that virginity creates for her. This is why Joseph prays for God to bless her as a virgin (8:10), why her new outfit in 14:12 includes the “new twin girdle of virginity,” and why she is repeatedly referred to as “chaste virgin” by the angel (15:2–6) and by Joseph (19:9). The purity of her bed, that no man has ever sat on it, is further confirmation for Brooke that Aseneth is actually primed for purity because of her virginity.²⁹ Virginity is not enough, but it creates potential for transformation. But Edith

²⁸ Philonenko, Joseph et Asénaeth, 37.

²⁹ Brooke, “Joseph, Aseneth, and Lévi-Strauss,” 191–92. Burchard agrees that virginity “paves the way toward acceptance by God, but it does not by itself warrant it” (“The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord’s Supper,” NTS 33 [1987]: 128 n. 5). Chesnutt suggests that the repeated emphasis on Aseneth’s virginity would have
M. Humphrey points out the impotence of Aseneth’s virginity in light of her spiritual state. We are constantly reminded of her virginity, even that she has nurtured it, that she has fought to keep it until the age of eighteen (2:7). She is surrounded by virgins who have never spoken with a man. She has a storeroom for the articles of her virginity. But the very emphasis of her physical purity stands in remarkable contrast to her spiritual state: “physical virginity and spiritual ‘adultery’ are juxtaposed; her inner chamber is a shrine to both states.”

Kraemer observes the ironic confluence of Aseneth as both the Foreign Woman and as Lady Wisdom expressed in the exchange between Pentephres, Joseph, and Aseneth. Aseneth has already begun the process of transformation by showing her fear at having made an error about Joseph in her soliloquy (5:3–8) and in how she approaches Joseph to greet him (8:2). That Aseneth is identified as Joseph’s sister is the incipient rise of her identity as Lady Wisdom, just as in Prov 7:4–5 the speaker tells his son to “say to Wisdom, you are my sister, and call insight your intimate friend, that they may keep you from the strange woman.” Brooke sees the pristine condition of Aseneth’s bed as confirmation that the introduction of virginity is indeed foreshadowing. When the angel sits on the bed with Aseneth and partakes of divine food with her, he is confirming “from the heavenly realm that Aseneth’s purity is a reflection of the culture to which she truly


belongs, a culture in which purity is the hallmark of the ongoing realization of divine pleasure and purpose through right worship.” Virginity is both a dispositional route by which conversion is foreshadowed and a substrate of Aseneth’s proleptic identity.

While it is reasonable to contend that virginity primes Aseneth for her transformation, ultimately virginity and kinship are being associated so that they can be reconfigured. The possibility that Aseneth and Joseph may somehow be related is once again dismissed, though this does not indicate that the writer is alluding to the Dinah-Aseneth legend. It is kinship defined any other way than by inclusion in the family of God that is being challenged. The scene foreshadows the spiritual kinship of Aseneth and Joseph.

The motif of virginity creates ambiguity and eliminates certain claims to power. Virginia Burrus maintains that virginity in Joseph and Aseneth is neither upheld nor finally rejected, even when the lovers are married. Rather, virginity, like marriage, is “continually revised, rendered ever more ambivalent, but thereby perhaps all the more potent in its signification.” This revision, Burrus contends, is furthermore part of the larger project of challenging ethnic identity. That identity for both Joseph and Aseneth is “visible only at the borderlines, nameable neither as unity nor as diversity but rather


33. Chyutin lists references to the bride as sister and groom as brother, but only Song 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1–2 and Tob 7:9 make this analogy explicit. He notes the kinship language in Jos. Asen. 1:3/7:5 and concludes that “with this broad definition, when Joseph accords Aseneth a status equivalent to a sister, he legitimizes his later marriage with her.” In Proverbs, the man who follows after Wisdom calls her “my sister.” Chyutin cites this as another instance of a bride being called a sister, but Proverbs never makes this connection explicitly. He further contends that just as the two angelic mirror of Joseph and Aseneth are both siblings and spouses, so Aseneth is transformed from “strange woman” (7:5–7) into Joseph’s bride-to-be, his “sister” (7:7–8), but the spiritual kinship in 15:8 is established using criteria that transcend the quality of virginity (Tendentious Hagiographies, 251–52).

performed in the unspeakable play of differences as irreducible as virginity.”\textsuperscript{35} Again, the opposition to ethnocentrism is not an adequate indicator that the Dinah-Aseneth legend is the source of the polemic.

It would be easy to see the reconfiguration of virginity as having a consequence only for Aseneth, since she is the only one who seems to undergo a transformation. But we are invited to see virginity’s reformation as a challenge to the power demands not just of competing ethnicities, but of the religious identities tied to them. Joseph presents his virginity to us in an obnoxiously abstemious manner. His commitment to purity is expressed as part of an aloof disposition towards his Egyptian host. He is ungracious and uncivil, boasting that he has had to fight off waves of lascivious Egyptian women to maintain his virginity. Joseph’s virginity can no more be a basis for his membership in Israel than Aseneth’s virginity is suitable preparation for it.\textsuperscript{36} It is not because Joseph’s virginity is valid and Aseneth’s is not that he rejects her advances. It is because she is a foreign woman. The ambiguity with which virginity is presented makes it a modifier of the status of both protagonists. It effects neither a “false universalism of cultural transcendence nor the illusory purity of ethnic integrity, but rather slyly [subverts] both hegemonic claims.”\textsuperscript{37} Affixed as it is to the concept of kinship, it serves to amplify the ambiguity of Aseneth’s family membership, but also to anticipate the spiritual kinship between Aseneth and Joseph.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 82.

\textsuperscript{36} Gruen, \textit{Heritage and Hellenism}, 96–99.

\textsuperscript{37} Burrus, “Mimicking Virgins,” 84.
Aseneth cannot rely on her virginity to be an acceptable bride for Joseph or to be accepted by Joseph’s God. In fact, her hatred of men is what has safeguarded her virginity and what eventually becomes the liability and the epitome of her formerly unacceptable pagan way of life. Perhaps virginity is acting as a valence for a kind of haughty self-righteousness that comes from having adhered to Jewish law. And if there is a polemic against kinship defined by ethnicity, then it only makes sense that Joseph has no greater claim by way of ancestry to membership in Israel than Aseneth does. This possibility makes sense because of how Joseph responds after he rejects Aseneth. He does not pray that she will somehow be made a member of Israel by lineage or that her virginity will somehow become an acceptable criterion for kinship. Instead, he prays that she be included in the book of life and numbered among the chosen ones (8:9). The only hope for someone who seeks to be included in Israel, or for someone who already identifies himself as a member of Israel, is that he be chosen by the Most High for inclusion. The effort to vindicate divine providence extends not just to those who apparently join Israel from outside, but to those who seem guaranteed, either by ancestry or by adherence to tradition, to be reckoned as insiders.

2.2.4. Oracular Inclusio: The Foretelling of Aseneth’s New Birth (Jos. Asen. 8:9; 15:4)

There are two scenes in Joseph and Aseneth that together foreshadow and confirm the inclusion of Aseneth in the community of the Most High: Joseph’s prayer in 8:9 and the greeting that the angel gives to Aseneth in 15:4 do the same thematic work as the omen or

---

prophecy in exposed hero tales. The omen or prophecy about the child on a performative level signals to the audience that the story will conform to the pattern, but it also usually introduces the motif of fate, delimiting the range of potential decisions available to certain characters, especially to the child who is exposed. If it is an ill omen, then the foundling will be a tragic hero like Oedipus and Prometheus, destined despite a heroic exercise of free will to meet with an insuperable conclusion. If it is a prophecy, we can be assured that the foundling’s rise to greatness will proceed despite any obstacle. In Jos. Asen. 8:9, with Aseneth still stinging from Joseph’s rejection, Joseph prays on her behalf, and that prayer has the triumphant ring that signals that Aseneth’s fate will be a good one:

And let her eat bread of life, and let her drink a cup of your blessing and number her with your people, that you have chosen before all things came into being, and let her enter into your rest, which you have prepared for your chosen ones, and let her be made alive in your eternal life unto eternity. (Jos. Asen. 8:9)\(^{39}\)

Instead of “and number her with your people,” mss B and D read “and let her drink a cup of your blessing—\textit{whom you have chosen before she was born}—and let her enter into your rest,” referring to Aseneth herself.\(^{40}\) The shorter text seeks to resolve a perceived difficulty in the longer text, namely, that Joseph is asking God to include Aseneth in the elect, but that this group has already been determined in the eternal past. Joseph is asking not that God will include Aseneth in the elect, but that she be confirmed as having been chosen for inclusion in that number already. The prayer provides the same kind of assurance as an omen or prophecy, that the supplicative action Aseneth is about to take


\(\footnotesize{40}\) \textit{ἡν ἔξελέξω πρὶν γεννηθῆναι} (Philonenko, \textit{Joseph et Aséne}, 158–59).
will not be vain. Aseneth’s prayer and fasting can be to no effect if the Most High God has not already chosen her to be part of his chosen people.

That this is the intended effect of the prayer is confirmed in the opening colloquy between Aseneth and the angel in 15:4–5. There the angel tells Aseneth:

_Courage, Aseneth, holy virgin. For behold, your name is written in the book of life, at the beginning of the book, first of all your name is written by my finger and it will never ever be blotted out._\(^{41}\) Behold, from today, you will be renewed and formed anew and made alive again, and you will eat blessed bread of life, and drink a blessed cup of immortality, and be anointed with blessed ointment of incorruptibility._ (Jos. Asen. 15:4–5)

If we take the prayer in 8:9 as a request that Aseneth be numbered in a group she did not previously belong to, then we would understand the angel’s message here to mean that Aseneth’s repentance has worked and that Joseph’s request has been fulfilled. But that does not make sense of the way that Joseph’s prayer is presented in 8:9, nor does it cohere with the sense of 15:4–5. Humphrey recognizes that the angel’s announcement has a performative thrust: it enacts Aseneth’s revealed identity.

Aseneth’s name, the mother of converts, has been and will be ‘in the book’ eternally, just as God’s will is eternal. The aorist [of ἐγράφη] indicates finality and security in God’s will, not an event which has just now been precipitated by Aseneth’s confession. . . . this divine initiative is mirrored in the structure of the piece as a whole.\(^{42}\)

She comments elsewhere that “Joseph’s preliminary prayer . . . and the angel’s revelation that her name ‘has been written’ in a heavenly book, makes the metamorphosis appear

---

41. (F) W 435& c; Armenian has “by the finger of God”; 436 omits, the Syriac is lost. Burchard, _Joseph und Aseneth_, 189.

42. Humphrey, _Joseph and Aseneth_, 44. The aorist is in the manuscripts assigned to text family f. Manuscripts G and L1 have the perfect γέγραπται. The Latin L2 and Armenian versions have an equivalent perfect, and ms E and the manuscripts in the c family also have γέγραπται. F is illegible, the Syriac is lost. Burchard, _Joseph und Aseneth_, 189; Fink, _Joseph und Aseneth_, 119.
more as an epiphany of what actually is, in spite of her initial pagan appearance.” The angel is resolving Aseneth’s doubt by confirming not just that she has been heard by God, but that she belongs in his family. Leslie Baynes notes that Aseneth’s name being written at the beginning of the book demonstrates that “Aseneth was always meant to be a Jew, a citizen of the people of Israel.” The context for this passage “echoes a vocabulary of eternity” that can be discerned through ch. 15. Joseph will be Aseneth’s bridegroom forever. Aseneth’s bridal gown has been in her chamber “since eternity” (15:10). All of this language serves to demonstrate that “God ordained them from the beginning, just as Aseneth’s name had been written at the very beginning of the book of the living.” Divine forbearance is vindicated in the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth not merely because of the strength and sincerity of the repentance that Aseneth undertakes, but because God has revealed, through his angelic agent, that Aseneth’s inclusion in the community of the faithful was always preordained.

After Aseneth has washed and returned with her new garment, the angel pronounces a blessing over her. As part of this blessing, Aseneth is given a new name and her eschatological role delineated:

And your name shall no longer be called Aseneth, but your name shall be City of Refuge, because many nations will take refuge in you for the Lord, the Most High

43. Humphrey, Ladies and the Cities, 48 n. 46.

44. Baynes also contends that Aseneth’s name being written by the finger of the angel/God is an allusion to Exod 31:18 (“And he gave to Moses . . . the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God”). This indicates that the book is “as authoritative as God and the heavenly tablets.” As noted above, the Armenian version says that Aseneth’s name was written by the finger of God, which strengthens Baynes’ assertion. Baynes cites Jos. Asen. 15:4 as an instance of the book of life motif. This instance represents an unusual example of a person being told her name is actually written in the book of life (The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses, 200 BCE-200 CE, JSISup 152 [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 76–77).

45. Ibid., 78.
God, and many people who trust in the Lord God will be sheltered under your wings, and those who attach themselves to the Most High God through repentance will be protected by your walls. For Repentance is in the heavens, an exceedingly beautiful and good daughter of the Most High. And she herself petitions the Most High God for you . . . since he is the father of Repentance. . . . Repentance is an exceedingly beautiful, pure virgin, and she is gentle and meek. And because of this the Most High Father loves her and all the angels praise her. And I love her very much because she is my sister. (Jos. Asen. 15:7–8)\textsuperscript{46}

Here, finally, the angel reveals to Aseneth which family she truly belongs to. She receives a new name, City of Refuge, and the angel describes her heavenly counterpart, Repentance. The connection of Aseneth with the angelic Repentance serves to establish her family identity as wholly spiritual. Repentance is the daughter of the Most High and the sister of the angelic figure, who is the counterpart of Joseph.\textsuperscript{47} She has been transformed from an orphan, a person whose place in society means that she has no one with which to take refuge, into a walled metropolis where anyone who repents may take refuge. The longer version makes explicit the brother/sister relationship between the angel and Repentance, which implies a filial relationship between Joseph and Aseneth as well.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} This is an important passage, so I have offered my own translation of ms A with supplements to it from the manuscript tradition. Again, mss B and D do not have this sentence, but because they do not have the context for it. EFW G Arm 435& Slav also do not have this context. Q omits. (436) L1 c AP attest this reading (Burchard, \textit{Joseph und Aseneth}, 194).

\textsuperscript{47} Brooke, “Men and Women as Angels,” 194.

\textsuperscript{48} Aseneth’s role is much like the one given to Jerusalem or to the daughter of Jerusalem in prophetic literature. Jos. Asen. 15:7 is worded similarly to Zech 2:15 LXX: “and many nations will take refuge with the Lord (καὶ καταφεύγουσιν ἐθνη πολλὰ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον) on that day and they will be like a people to him and they will take shelter in his midst” (noted by Burchard, \textit{Untersuchungen}, 119). Aseneth as “walled mother-city” (16:16) is also imagery associated with Jerusalem (Bohak, \textit{Jewish Temple}, 77–78). Jer 27:4–5 LXX reads, “In those days and in that time the sons of Israel shall come, they and the sons of Judah together. . . . They shall ask the way to Zion . . . and they shall come and flee for refuge to the Lord God” (my trans.).
2.2.5. Orphanage and Recognition in Aseneth’s Prayers (Jos. Asen. 11–13)

When Aseneth begins her supplicatory prayer in Jos. Asen. 11, she says, “With whom shall I take refuge? Or, what shall I say? I the virgin and an orphan and alone and abandoned and hated?” But she is not apparently being pursued or persecuted by anyone in her own bedroom, and she has not been (and will never be) abandoned by Pentephres and his wife. This literary turn of declaring Aseneth an orphan and abandoned upsets the pattern that has thus far been presented in feints and ruses. Aseneth looks like a Hebrew, and the idea has been introduced and quickly dismissed that she is related (even if only figuratively) to Joseph. Joseph rejects Aseneth as a foreign woman and a defiled worshiper of idols. In the despair of rejection, Joseph prays that Aseneth will be renewed, reformed, and recreated. She dons sackcloth, black clothing fit for a funeral, and mourns her old life.49 The suggestion that Aseneth may share a heritage with Joseph has been challenged by the persistent reality that Aseneth is, apparently, Pentephres’s daughter, a foreign woman, a pagan, and with that challenge, the idea that Aseneth is an exposed child also seems implausible. That is the situation within which the author introduces a new twist: Aseneth is now an orphan and has been abandoned by her own father, spiritually exposed in her own tower bedroom.50

49. Aseneth’s black robes of mourning could be just a simple sign of penitence, part of the theme of repentance that is central to the narrative. Chesnutt deals specifically with the possibility of an Isis connection with the black clothing, but is very cautious. There is a step in the Isis cult’s initiation ritual in which the candidate abstains from meat and wine for ten days, and then later is clothed in a new white linen garment and partakes of a sacred meal. Chesnutt notes that Isis herself mourned the death of her brother and consort Osiris by dressing in a black cloak. But he also observes that wearing black as a sign of repentance is a sign of mourning in many antique sources, including many Jewish sources, as is her sackcloth (From Death to Life, 248–49).

50. That Aseneth is an orphan is a different idea than that she has been abandoned. Philo characterizes conversion to Judaism as orphanage. The proselyte has left his country and his family, whom he has made enemies, so he is utterly cut off from a means of support and only God may help him (Spec.
Aseneth’s abandonment and disownment are put into cultic terms; the enemies she faces are not ultimately her own family, but the gods she used to worship. She has been disowned because she has committed sacrilege, smashing her household idols and throwing the sacrifices to them out the window (12:12, 13:8). Even though Pentephres never performs liturgical acts and never wears the symbols of idol worship as Aseneth does, it is through Aseneth’s rejection of the Egyptians’ gods that Aseneth’s disownment is determined. A sinister caricature of the Most High God appears in the “wild old lion” of 12:9. Aseneth’s describes him as

the father of the gods of the Egyptians, and his children are the gods of the idol maniacs. And I have come to hate them, because they are the lion’s children, and have thrown all of them from me and destroyed them. And the lion their father furiously pursues me. (Jos. Asen. 12:10)

More dire than abandonment by her earthly father is the prospect of spiritual persecution by the father of her former gods. Like the Jewish birth story paradigm, a tyrannical ruler seeks the life of a child who has been abandoned. In this case, the danger is created by a demonic pseudo-father figure who has become a threat only because Aseneth has abandoned his service. Enter the God of Israel who is the father of orphans. Aseneth can only hope that this divine father will rescue her:

Who knows if he will notice my mortification and have mercy on me? Perhaps he will notice this desolation of mine and take pity on me, or notice my orphanage and protect me? For he is the father of orphans and protector of the persecuted and a helper of the afflicted. (Jos. Asen. 11:12–13)

---

*Laws* 1:9, 57; 4:34; *Virtue* 20). Chesnutt observes that Joseph and Aseneth, like Philo, is drawing on “a traditional motif wherein the proselyte is put on a par with and described in the same language as the orphan because of the loss of familial support which both have experienced” (*From Death to Life*, 168).

51. Bons makes note of the LXX of Ps 67:5, that God is the “father of orphans and the judge of widows” ("Psalter Terminology,” 440–41).
She pleads with the Most High to treat her like a fearful child who flees to his father and is snatched off the ground into his father’s embrace (12:8). Aseneth is too afraid to claim the God of Joseph as her own father, but nevertheless asks him to treat her as a daughter.52

Kraemer recognizes some similarities between the imagery used of Aseneth and that used of Jerusalem in Ezek 16. Jerusalem is chosen as God’s bride because she is a beautiful woman, but she lusts after other men and commits idolatry. The analogy is not perfect, since Aseneth is a virgin and apparently remains faithful to Joseph after they marry. But, as Kraemer points out, adultery is a “favorite metaphor for Israelite idolatry and Aseneth is clearly an idolater.” Among the other similarities, Jerusalem is described as tall, mature and beautiful, things applied to Aseneth as well (1:3). In Ezek 16:9–13, God bathes Jerusalem in water, anoints her in oil, and clothes her with a robe of fine linen, hyacinth, and gold. She is adorned with bracelets and other jewelry, including a golden crown. Aseneth also dresses in a similar manner in 3:9–11, but there it is a manifestation of her pagan, idolatrous identity.53

In Ezek 16:3–5, God reveals to Jerusalem that she was born as a foreigner, the daughter of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother. She is abandoned in a field, unwashed and naked, and no one pities her. God finds her “flailing about in [her] blood” (Ezek

52. Chesnutt suggests that “the imagery of God’s lifting Aseneth up from the ground may reflect Roman practices surrounding birth and adoption. . . . A Roman father literally ‘lifted’ a newborn infant from the ground to indicate his intent to ‘raise’ (rather than expose) the child” (“Prayer of a Convert to Judaism [Joseph and Aseneth 12–13],” in Prayer From Alexander To Constantine: A Critical Anthology, ed. Mark Kiley [London: Routledge, 1997], 71 n. 10). Chesnutt observes that, given Aseneth’s lament that she is an orphan, perhaps she is being lifted up by an adoptive father. The imagery matches up with the portrayal of Aseneth’s transformation as a new birth, even more so if the Roman practice of treating an infant this way can be seen as a choice between adoption and exposure.

and commands her to live. In a strange suspension of time, God seems to allow Jerusalem to mature into adulthood without doing anything about her condition in the field! Ezek 16:6 says, “You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.” It is only when Jerusalem is “at the age for love” (Ezek 16:8) that God covers her nakedness and pledges himself to her.

Much closer to Ezek 16 than Aseneth’s attire in 3:9–11 is her change of clothes in 14:12–15. There, Aseneth is commanded to put off her mourning garment and the ashes from her head, wash her face with water, and dress in a new linen robe as yet untouched. The movement from humiliation to adornment, the washing with water, and the description of her clothing as “untouched” makes this a better analogy to the metaphor in Ezek 16.54 In Jos. Asen. 14–16, Aseneth encounters a man who takes her out of her orphaned state, commands her to wash, anoints her with oil, clothes her in a fine linen robe, and enters into mystical union with her.55 Like Ezek 16:3, in which Israel is accused of foreign birth, we know that Aseneth’s identity as a strange woman will not be an impediment to divine acceptance.

2.2.6. The Birth Token Robe and Aseneth’s Recognition Scene (Jos. Asen. 14:12–17; 18) Aseneth changes her clothes three times in Joseph and Aseneth, and each wardrobe change seems to have symbolic significance. When she removes her black sackcloth and

54. The anointing of oil that takes place in Ezek 16:9 has its analogue in Aseneth’s partaking of the honeycomb in Jos. Asen. 16.

55. The longer text associates Aseneth’s meal of honeycomb with the triad of bread, cup, and anointing (Jos. Asen. 16:16).
dons a new robe in 14:12–17, Aseneth removes the symbol of her spiritual death and puts on the symbol of her new life. Because of the way that the new robe is described, I maintain that its purpose is similar to γνωρίσματα, birth tokens, in exposed hero tales, especially the Ion. After she is greeted by the angel, Aseneth arises and the angel says to her:

Put off your black tunic of mourning, and the sackcloth put off your waist, and shake off those ashes from your head, and wash your face and your hands with living water, and dress in a new linen robe as yet untouched and distinguished and gird your waist (with) the new twin girdle of your virginity. And come (back) to me and I will tell you what I have to say. (Jos. Asen. 14:12–14)

The description of Aseneth’s repentance has been suggestive of Isa 3:16–26, which depicts the repentance of Israel as Daughter of Zion:

Instead of perfume, there will be a stench, and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame . . . her gates shall lament and mourn; ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground. (Isa 3:16–26)

Kraemer argues that Aseneth’s act of stripping off her fine clothing and putting on black sackcloth symbolizes the death of her old identity as the Foreign Woman and the

---

56. Only Graham Anderson suggests that there is a birth token element in Joseph and Aseneth and, moreover, recognizes that there are a number of typical features in common between Joseph and Aseneth and the Dinah-Aseneth legend, though he categorizes both stories as versions of Cinderella. He compares Aseneth’s washing of Joseph’s feet with her throwing of the inscribed ring at Joseph in the Dinah-Aseneth legend as adaptations of the “slipper test.” In Anderson’s account of Joseph and Aseneth as Cinderella story, Joseph is a kind of “prince” of the land and spies Aseneth from afar. Aseneth rolls in ash (cinders) and is visited by a supernatural helper, who changes her name and gives her new clothes. The “token test,” what is normally meant “to establish parentage and marital eligibility,” is replaced by a ritual involving the feet. Anderson has failed to recognize the features of earlier scenes that establish Aseneth’s divine parentage and thus condition her marital eligibility long before the foot-washing scene, but his insights on the similarities between the motifs in Joseph and Aseneth and the Dinah-Aseneth legend are pertinent (Fairytale in the Ancient World [London: Routledge], 33–38).

57. Among the tokens left with Chloe is a μίτρα διάχρυσος, “a girdle embroidered with gold” (Daph. 1.5). When Aseneth dresses in new clothing as commanded by the angel (14:12), she puts on a ζώνη τῆς παρθενίας σου (“new twin girdle of your virginity”).
beginning of her transformation into Lady Wisdom.\textsuperscript{58} There is an irony being conveyed in Aseneth’s identity, however, that goes beyond a mere transformation from pagan to true worshiper of the Most High.

Aseneth is reborn, having cast off her old identity symbolically and clothed herself in her new identity. But there are aspects of her symbolic robe that conveys a deeper truth, that the robe she is putting on is one that she has always had and will serve as a kind of birth token identifying her as the daughter of the Most High. When the angel tells Aseneth to dress in her robe, it is described as “new, untouched, and distinguished” (καινὴν ἄθικτον καὶ ἐπίσημον). When ἄθικτον refers to a person, it can mean virgin, so it may mean that it is the robe of Aseneth’s virginity. It could also mean that Aseneth has never worn this garment or that the garment is holy.\textsuperscript{59} Α σῆμα is a sign, mark, or token. It is used of signs from heaven that indicate an omen, or a mark that indicates who someone is. The adjective ἐπίσημος means something that serves to distinguish by means of a mark or sign. It can, by that logic, mean “distinguished” or “remarkable,” even “notorious.”\textsuperscript{60} The purpose this robe has in this scene is more than just a phenomenal looking piece of clothing.

Aseneth proceeds to her second chamber to retrieve the robe, drawing it from a κιβωτός. The second chamber persists as a location from which Aseneth draws her new identities throughout the narrative. Notably, though she appears to enter a chamber in 3:6 to retrieve the attire that distinguishes her as a pagan priestess, it is not called her

\textsuperscript{58} Kraemer, \textit{When Aseneth Met Joseph}, 23.

\textsuperscript{59} LSJ, s.v., “𝐴θικτός.”

\textsuperscript{60} LSJ, s.v., “Επίσημος.”
“second” chamber and she does not pull those robes from a chest. Aseneth draws only the symbols of her new identity from the chest in her second chamber: her black robe of mourning, symbolizing the death of her old self, the new, untouched, and distinguished robe of 14:12, and the wedding gown she dresses in to meet Joseph in 18:5. These are the three aspects of her identity that are drawn from the same symbolic object: her need to repent of and destroy her idolatrous life, the recognition of her true belonging in the family of God, and her eternally fated marriage to Joseph. The κιβωτός or an object like it is a common means of exposure in the exposed hero tale type. Whether it is an exposure on land or in water, such a receptacle has religious and ritual connotations. It serves as the cradle of new-born gods like Zeus and Hermes, and so divinely conceived children are also exposed in a box or basket. This is true of the κίστη of Erichthonius, also called κιβωτός (Pausanias, Description of Greece 1.18.2) or τεῦχος (Euripides, Ion 273), which has a cultic correlation to the “cista mystica” of the Eleusinian mysteries. The correspondence of elements in Joseph and Aseneth to the Ion is especially pertinent as regards this object.

61. “And Aseneth hurried into the chamber, where her robes lay, and dressed.” Burchard notes that the reading “into . . . lay” is only attested by APCR and B and omitted by the rest (OTP 2.205 n. k).

62. There are many different words used to describe what is, in effect, the same kind of object: a box, basket, or cradle in which a child is exposed, often along with birth tokens. The LXX uses the word θίβις, while Josephus uses the words κοιτίς and πλέγμα. Huys also notes the common use of the words λάρναξ, κίστη, or τεῦχος. Though the word θίβις is used in the LXX, effectively decoupling Moses’s basket from Noah’s ark, the word used for Noah’s ark is κιβωτός (Tale of the Hero, 201).

63. Ibid., 201.
Ion is exposed in a basket with three objects indicating his heritage, including a characteristic robe. He is raised by a Pythian priestess, whom he considers to be his mother, and he engages in the cultic activity of the sun god Apollo, who is his father. When his foster-mother brings out the basket in which he was exposed, it appears new and untouched by time or age, though Ion recognizes it as very old. It is Ion’s birth mother Creusa who describes in detail each of the objects in the basket, leading to their reunion. The birth tokens left with Ion are not just symbols of nobility, but conduits for the acquisition of Athenian identity for Ion. They are not just proof that Ion is Creusa’s son, but guarantees of Athenian citizenship. There is something paradoxical for an exposed child, however, in recognizing that he has an identity he cannot remember having: “Recognition presupposes familiarity, whereas Ion’s story is that of a foundling baby, abandoned at birth, then rescued and raised by Apollo in a foreign city.” In Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth is raised by a priest of the city of the sun, and serves as a cultic attendant to the gods. When she repudiates those gods, she also sheds her identity as a daughter of Pentephres and declares herself orphaned and abandoned. An agent of the Most High God commands her to put on a robe that is new, untouched, and distinct, drawn from a chest in her bedroom. The robe is not remarkable in the sense that it is extraordinarily fashioned or adorned. The robe serves to distinguish Aseneth as the person whom the angel will now describe: City of Refuge, the counterpart of the

64. Moses in the Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian is also exposed on land with a robe, though not in an ark or a basket.

heavenly Repentance, who is the sister of the angelic visitor and part of the family of God.

From the same κιβωτός comes the robe that symbolizes Aseneth’s destiny as Joseph’s bride. That robe is described by the angel in 15:10 as “your wedding robe, the ancient and first robe which is laid up in your chamber since eternity.” This robe, like the new and untouched robe in 14:12, signifies Aseneth’s transformation as both new, since she has repented of her old life and experienced a transformation, and old, even eternal, since the transformation she has undergone is made possible by God’s providential action. It is this robe that Aseneth retrieves in her second recognition scene, one that conforms more closely to the versions of the exposed hero tale type found in the Hellenistic romances.

The recognition scene in Jos. Asen. 18 occurs only in the texts that represent the longer text of Burchard. In the shorter text of Philonenko, Aseneth is told by a young slave that Joseph is returning, she summons “the one over the house” (τὸν ἐπάνω), that is, the steward, and commands him to straighten up the house and prepare a meal. Then she goes to her bedroom, takes out her “first robe” and puts it on.66 She washes her face and looks at herself in the water, her face luminously transformed. A young slave announces Joseph’s arrival, Aseneth descends from her bedroom and meets Joseph. Joseph calls Aseneth over, says he has heard a good report about her from heaven, and they embrace. The scene in the longer text contains a great deal more detail and is structured as a

66. Only some of the manuscripts associate the robe in 15:10 with the one in 18:5–6: AP c (d) L2; omit EFW; destroyed Syr; gaps Q G Arm L Slav Ngr (OTP 2.227 n. γ).
recognition scene similar to the ones found in exposed hero tales and especially Hellenistic romance, but with a few unique twists.67

Immediately after the angel has ascended into heaven, Aseneth calls her τροφεύς. The word means a “foster-father,” but it can also mean simply a personal attendant or a slave.68 It would be an abrupt change to label Pentephres as a “foster-father” without specifying that he had been relegated to that role. And, it makes sense to take the word τροφεύς to mean servant, given that Aseneth orders him around and he obeys orders. But he also behaves much like a father would, and his actions in this scene bear a resemblance to the kinds of things foster-fathers in exposed hero tales do. The ambiguous definition of the word τροφεύς means that two distinct interpretations were combined into one scene.

67. In addition to sharing characteristics of Hellenistic romances, here and in her prayers, Aseneth shows similarities with the figure of Esther in the Greek Esther. In her moment of crisis, Esther fasts and prays for three days, involving her own attendants and the entire nation in collective repentance (Add Esth OG 4:16-17). She sheds her “splendid apparel” and puts on “the garments of distress and mourning.” Instead of perfume, she covers her head with “ashes and dung” and covers her whole body with her tangled hair (4:12). Aseneth also strips off her splendid clothing and puts on a black robe of mourning, dumping ashes on her head. She fasts for seven days and offers her prayer to the Lord. Esther prays at the end of her three days: “O my Lord, you only are our king; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you” (14:3). Chesnutt notes the similarity of the prayers here, in Judith, and in Prayer of Manasseh and Jos. Asen. 11–13 (From Death to Life, 74). See also Burchard, Untersuchungen, 104–6; Charlesworth, “Prayer of Manasseh,” OTP 2.631. Braginskaya contends that Joseph and Aseneth corresponds much more convincingly with the Jewish pseudepigrapha, apocrypha and the LXX than with Hellenistic love novels. It happens to have the plot of a love novel, but its concerns are quite different. “Joseph the Beautiful,” a character well-developed in early Judaism, must have a suitable bride, and so Aseneth takes on the protagonist role of Jewish heroines like Esther and Ruth (“Greek Literary History,” 83).

68. “Foster-father” in Sophocles, Phil. 334, but an old servant in Euripides, El. 16. In the version of Oedipus found in the Phoenissae of Euripides, Polybus is called Oedipus’s τροφεύς. The manuscript tradition of Joseph and Aseneth is divided on the identity of this figure. The man appears as a “foster-father” in 18:3–5, 7, 11 in FW G Syr Arm 436 671 (if extant), as “steward” or “overseer” in 435& and the a text family (if extant), L1 and the d text family omit both, and only ms E at 18:11 includes both. Manuscripts 436 and 435& use nutritorem, clearly copying a manuscript that had τροφεύς, but taking it to mean a “breeder” or “a bringer up.” Fink, Joseph und Aseneth, 306.
The figure of a steward has already made an appearance in Jos. Asen. 3:4, so the impulse to portray the τροφεύς as the same servant in ch. 18 makes sense. In Jos. Asen. 3:2, Joseph sends messengers ahead of him to announce his arrival at Pentephres’s house. Pentephres rejoices, and then says, “Hurry (σπεύσων) and make my house ready (ἐντρέπσον) and prepare (ἐτοίμασον) a great dinner, because Joseph, the Powerful One of God, is coming to us today” (3:4). A few manuscripts add before this “And Pentephres called (ἐκάλεσε) the one over (τὸν ἐπάνω) his house and said.” Perhaps this clause dropped out of some parts of the tradition, but it may also have been added to explain to whom Pentephres is giving orders. Regardless, Pentephres is commanding “the one over” (τὸν ἐπάνω), probably the steward of the house, to execute his commands.

Aseneth hears that her parents are home and puts on an elaborate dress with jewelry. When she comes down to meet her parents, they rejoice because they see her “adorned like a bride of God” (4:1). Pentephres decides to speak to his daughter about marrying Joseph, calling her “my child” (4:3). The command that Aseneth gives to the τροφεύς in 18:2 is almost identical in structure and language to 3:4. Aseneth calls the man, telling him to “Hurry and make the house ready and prepare a good dinner, because Joseph the Powerful One of God is coming to us today.” Since Aseneth goes off to engage in the same behavior she had done in ch. 4, it makes sense that the same figure, the steward, is making similar preparations.

However, the longer text departs from the shorter by adding an extended encounter between Aseneth and the τροφεύς that gives a very different impression. Aseneth’s τροφεύς notices that her face is fallen from her week of weeping and penitence. He is distressed and begins to weep. Taking her right hand and kissing her
tenderly, he says, “What has happened to you, my child/my daughter, because your face has fallen so (much)?” As naturally as a translator might conclude that the τροφεύς is a servant from Aseneth’s orders in the preceding verse, so much more might a translator be inclined to render it as “foster-father” given this touching scene. I do not mean to suggest that the writer of Joseph and Aseneth wants us to understand Pentephres as Aseneth’s foster-father. But the role of the foster-father in the prelude to a recognition scene is often to assist in the revelation of the true identity of his foster-daughter with the aid of the birth tokens. After Aseneth clothes herself in her “first robe,” her foster-father returns and is terrified by her beauty. While it is true that terror is a common reaction to angelophanies in the Bible, it is also the case that it is the response to the preternatural beauty of a hero or heroine in Hellenistic romances. For example, men are struck dumb with wonder or rendered speechless by Callirhoe’s beauty. The writer is not asking us to believe that Pentephres has actually been revealed as an illegitimate father. He is engaging in a ruse, introducing the idea of a foster-father right at a place in the narrative when he might be expected to do something for an exposed child who is in need of recognition. It is as if a godmother has shown up right when the heroine is in need of a

---

69. E L1 and d omit all of this. Oppenheim translates the Syriac for τέκνον “filia mea” (Fabula, 36), as does Burke, Lost Gospel, 356.

70. Brooke (“Men as Angels,” 168) notes the biblical connections. See also Braginskaya, “Greek Literary History,” 91.

little help. If the heroine is in need of a miracle, the reader has a good idea of just what kind of godmother has arrived, even if she does not end up offering the kind of supernatural assistance we expect from her. There are any number of words for servant or slave available, many of which are used in Joseph and Aseneth elsewhere, but here, the word τροφεύς is employed. The presence of the foster-father in this scene primes us for the romantic recognition that occurs next.

After Aseneth changes clothes and washes, her form has been so transformed that not even her destined lover Joseph can recognize her. This is an element that is influenced by Jewish angelophanies, but it is also simply the beauty enhanced by adornment of romances. When Daphnis and Chloe are finally recognized at the end of the novel as nobility, they are both adorned for a wedding feast commensurate to their newly-revealed station. Chloe is dressed in finery, her hair is braided and she washes her face. Her appearance is so transformed that everyone marvels, and even Daphnis barely recognizes her (καὶ Δάφνις αὐτὴν μόλις ἐγνώρισεν; Daph. 4.32). When in Jos. Asen. 19:4, Joseph gazes upon Aseneth, he is amazed by her beauty and proclaims, “Who are you? Quickly tell me.” Even Joseph, divinely beautiful himself, experiences the epiphanic reaction that is so common to romances. Not only that, in Aseneth’s reply there is the implication that Aseneth is able now to establish her royal heritage.

72 Montiglio comments at length on this scene: “By underscoring Aseneth’s transfiguration, Joseph’s failure to recognize her paradoxically intimates that she has become like him: his marveling at her beauty echoes her physical and psychic turmoil at the discovery of his.” Recalling that Aseneth looks like a daughter of the Hebrews, Montiglio suggests that perhaps Aseneth has, finally, become who she actually is, in the paradoxical sense that “her conversion is inscribed in her appearance: it is the fulfillment of her visible identity” (Love and Providence, 209).
The royal language of the preceding scene, used to describe Aseneth’s “first robe,” the one that the angel said had been “laid up in [her] chamber since eternity” (15:10), indicates that Aseneth’s heritage has been revealed as royal. She makes her claim of marriage eligibility based on her rejection of idolatry, her participation in the meal elements, the arranging of her marriage to Joseph by Joseph’s angelic counterpart, and on her new name: City of Refuge. As in Jos. Asen. 16:16, her new name is connected to the Lord God as “king of the ages.” Aseneth will be the protectress of “many nations,” just as “the Lord God will reign over many nations forever” (19:5; 8). Aseneth is the daughter of the king, which simultaneously establishes her royal pedigree and her kinship with Joseph, the respective criterion for marriage eligibility in *Daphnis and Chloe*.

Lastly, the pharaoh and Pentephres confirm the royal and divine kinship of Joseph and Aseneth as the basis for their marriage. Joseph asks the pharaoh for Aseneth’s hand in marriage, to which the pharaoh replies, “Behold, is not this one betrothed to you since eternity?” The pharaoh does not, ultimately, give Aseneth in marriage to Joseph, the only detail of the account in Genesis to which Joseph and Aseneth has failed to remain faithful. The lovers are eternally destined, so the pharaoh has no need to betroth them. Again, language of eternal destiny is mixed with the language of newness. The pharaoh sees Aseneth and is amazed by her beauty, exclaiming, “the Lord, the God of Joseph, has chosen you as a bride for Joseph, because he is the firstborn son of God. And you shall be called daughter of the Most High and a bride of Joseph from now on and forever” (19:4). The pharaoh confirms that Joseph and Aseneth are destined lovers because they are part of the family of God. This establishes a spiritual kinship that transcends anything as mundane as natural kinship. The combination of this theme of divine providence with the
profundity of Aseneth’s repentance is a kind of facsimile of the dynamic interplay between eroticism and fate in Hellenistic romances.
CHAPTER THREE: “OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT”: EXODUS IMAGERY IN THE ROMANCE, PART 1

3.1. Introduction

In the first section, I explored the ways in which elements from the exposed hero tale were appropriated to fit the theological concerns of early Jewish and Christian narratives and how those permutations influenced the writing and transmission of Joseph and Aseneth. These Jewish and Christian adaptations were often told as stories of divine providence, a concern that I have shown also appears in Joseph and Aseneth.

In this section, I seek to demonstrate that a similar concern is at work in the development of exodus imagery in Joseph and Aseneth. By evoking the exodus story and imaginatively and proleptically placing Aseneth in the events of the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the wandering in the wilderness and the giving of the Law on Sinai, the writer of Joseph and Aseneth explicates a theology of divine providence, to which the pattern of the exposed hero is also brought to bear. But why assimilate Aseneth’s experience to the people of Israel in the exodus, and how does it demonstrate a theological concern that is similar to the exposed hero tale? The depiction of Israel in the exodus, especially in extrabiblical tradition, is as a people created and recreated by God, in faithfulness to the promise given to Abraham. In the book of Exodus and in early tradition, Israel is presented as a nation whose God is faithful to his promises and as a people who stand in need of repentance because of their waywardness. Aseneth is depicted as an exemplar of Israel in its journey out of Egypt, but she endeavors to make this passage as a pagan, someone who stands in need of conversion. The exodus imagery
is meant to establish a comparison between the experience of a convert to the religion of the Most High God and the experience of Israel coming out of Egypt.

This extended metaphor addresses a theological quandary. If God has elected his people before the foundation of the world, then how can someone who does not belong among the chosen ones be considered a part of Israel? If God makes provision for a convert, then does that not eviscerate the faithfulness of God to his people, to pay singular devotion to them and no other nation? To answer these questions, the writer of Joseph and Aseneth overlays the metaphor of an abandoned child onto his narrative.

Aseneth’s conversion from a pagan priestess to a worshiper of the Most High is like the stages of abandonment, discovery, recognition, and reinstatement that an exposed hero often encounters. An exposed hero tale is frequently told as a story about destiny: a child who is fated to be a certain sort of person accomplishes great deeds, despite any of the obstacles to fame or love. The writer of Joseph and Aseneth has adapted the motifs of the tale type by rearranging and ironically reconfiguring their expected sequence. Instead of being exposed by noble parents and fostered by adoptive parents, Aseneth proclaims herself abandoned by her natural-born father and asks the Most High to claim her as his own. Aseneth may have appeared to be a convert, but she is not. She is the true daughter of the Most High, chosen before the foundation of the world.

I make use of the method I described in the introduction for determining subtextual data. Most of the exodus imagery found in Joseph and Aseneth is subtle, with none of the allusions rising to the level of direct quotation or explicit statement. However, there is inexplicit citation and borrowing from the book of Exodus and from the mythic substrate of the events of the Red Sea crossing, as well as structural and circumstantial
similarity between certain events in Aseneth’s transformative experience and the exodus. I proceed in the next two chapters through the romance (chs. 3 and 4), making note of the allusions to the exodus story. In the fifth chapter, I discuss the structural similarity between the events of the flight from Egypt and crossing of the Red Sea and Aseneth’s escape from pharaoh’s son in the adventure (chs. 23–29).

In this chapter, I examine the first part of the romance, up to the end of Aseneth’s lengthy prayers in chs. 10–13. I first indicate the theological significance of the Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth as a valence for the exodus story. Then I describe the sapiential and angelomorphic features of Aseneth and Joseph’s portrayal that make them ideal figures in the exodus story. Joseph is presented in early Jewish tradition as angelic, full of wisdom, and a prefiguration of the exodus generation. That characterization of Joseph finds expression in Joseph and Aseneth. Before proceeding to exegesis of the text, I discuss the formation of a traditional interpretation of the exodus as a creational event, in which the people of Israel are recreated in their passage through the Sea.

3.1.1. The Archetypal Meaning of “Egypt”

Aseneth is the daughter of an Egyptian priest, and Joseph meets and marries her in Egypt while he is vice-regent to the pharaoh. There does not need to be any other explanation than that for why Joseph and Aseneth is set in Egypt. But the history of modern Joseph and Aseneth scholarship has been taken up with the question of how “Egyptian” the book is, since the answer carries with it the potential to establish the social setting of its composition, its dating and its provenance. To introduce the topic of exodus imagery in Joseph and Aseneth, I want to consider the question of how Egyptian this book is from a
theological perspective. By way of example, I provide an analysis of János Bolyki’s attempt to make a connection between the Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth and the evident thematic concerns.¹

Bolyki considers whether the Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth is incidental, simply because it is the setting of the biblical Joseph story, or exploited deliberately as a connection to the Egyptian milieu of the intended audience in a particular time and place. Bolyki concludes that the Egyptian setting provides the necessary thematic structure to express the theological concerns of Egyptian diasporic Jews living with Gentile converts. For Bolyki, as for many scholars, the Egyptian setting serves the social concerns of the intended audience: Egyptian Jews of the Ptolemaic period.² My purpose in this section of the study is not to repudiate that possibility, but to

¹ I am analyzing the argument of Bolyki because of how he frames the question. He also provides a thorough analysis of the arguments for and against an Egyptian provenance (“Egypt as the Setting,” 89–92).

² A number of scholars connect the Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth with an Egyptian provenance for writing. For Burchard, the Egypt provenance is clear: the story is set in Egypt, in the city of Helíopolis, and constantly refers to “the gods of the Egyptians” and “the idols of the Egyptians.” Egypt is the most likely place for Joseph and Aseneth to have been written, and evidence that it was written elsewhere has not materialized (Untersuchungen, 142–43; so also Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 61, 101, 109; Sänger, “Bekehrung und Exodus,” 35; Chesnutt, From Death to Life, 76–80; cf. Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 286–93). Stephen Taverner sees in the “foreign dogs” of Jos. Asen. 10:13 an allusion to their Egyptian role as symbols of death, but admits that “explicit animal reverence” is elsewhere absent (“Jewish Depictions of Non-Jews in the Graeco-Roman Period: The Meeting of Joseph and Aseneth,” Jewish Culture and History 2 [1999]: 79). Ahearne-Kroll suggests that Aseneth’s diadem and veil and Joseph’s crown recall the Ptolemaic kings (“The Portrayal of Aseneth in Joseph and Aseneth: Women’s Religious Experience in Antiquity and the Limitations of Ancient Narratives,” in Women and Gender in Ancient Religions, ed. Paul A. Holloway, James A. Kelhoffer, and Stephen Ahearne-Kroll, WUNT 263 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 189–94). Jürgen Zangenberg matches the day of the angel’s visit to Aseneth with the day when Osiris’s birth was celebrated, even though there is nothing in the text to signify that the angel himself is experiencing rebirth (“Josef und Aseneths Ägypten: oder: von der Domestikation einer ‘gefährlichen’ Kultur,” in Joseph und Aseneth, ed. Eckart Reinmuth, Sapere 15 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 162–63). Martina Hirschberger (“Aseneths erstes Brautkleid: Symbolik von Kleidung und Zeit in der Bekehrung Aseneths [JosAs 1-21],” Apocrypha 21 [2010]: 183–87) makes the case that Aseneth’s tower resembles an Egyptian temple, something that Bohak had observed years earlier (Jewish Temple, 71–74). But Zangenberg observes that Joseph and Aseneth seems to manifest a complete lack of interest in Egyptian culture (“Joseph und Aseneths Ägypten,” 181–86). There does not seem to be any particularity assigned to even the most conspicuously “Egyptian” details. Aseneth’s
assert that the Egyptian character of Joseph and Aseneth (i.e., that Egypt is not the setting incidentally) serves to introduce us to the theological concerns of the writer.

The value that Bolyki’s article provides is in his discussion of the core thematic concerns of Joseph and Aseneth. His reason for positing an Egyptian origin for writing comes down to the “literary motifs and psychological archetypes” inherent to setting a story in Egypt. He contends (following Luttikhuizen) that the Hymn of the Pearl in the Acts of Thomas provides the strongest “network of allusions” to Joseph and Aseneth as evidence of these motifs and archetypes. The Hymn tells the story of a Parthian prince

---

3. Bolyki remarks on the affinities between Joseph and Aseneth and the Aethiopica. His argument is that since the Aethiopica is set mostly in Egypt, one can compare the “Egyptian features” in it with similar details found in Joseph and Aseneth. For example, since the main characters in the Aethiopica eat walnuts, figs, dates, and other fruits, similar to the produce Aseneth’s parents bring her in Jos. Asen. 4:4, that proves an Egyptian provenance for writing. Bolyki seems to disregard that Heliodorus, the writer of the Aethiopica, was from Emesa, in Syria, which makes the likelihood of an Egyptian provenance for the Aethiopica unlikely (“Egypt as the Setting,” 92–93).

4. Ibid., 94–96. Bolyki follows the argument of Gerald P. Luttikhuizen (“The Hymn of Jude Thomas, the Apostle, in the Country of Indians [ATh 108–113],” in The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas, ed. Jan N. Bremmer [Leuven: Peeters, 2001], 114). Hans Priebatsch characterized Joseph and Aseneth as a Valentinian imitation of the Prayer of Joseph (Die Josephsgeschichte in der Weltliteratur: eine legendengeschichtliche Studie [Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1937], 11–12, 135). Philonenko suggested that Joseph and Aseneth is a “Gnostic drama” (Joseph et Asénéth, 83–89). See also M. de Goeij, Jozef en Aseneth; Apokalyps van Baruch, De Pseudopigrapha 2 (Kampen: Kok, 1981), 13–22. Cf. Humphrey (Joseph and Aseneth, 50–51), who eschews the history of religions approach altogether, stating that “the genre of Aseneth renders it stubbornly resistant to such analysis.” Bolyki is accepting an interpretation of the Hymn of the Pearl that is itself subject to critique. See, for example, Chông-hun Kim, “Clothing Imagery in The Hymn of the Pearl,” in The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus, JSNTSup 268 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 70–78. If there is any connection to Gnosticism in Joseph and Aseneth, Andrea Lieber has identified a much more compelling analogue than the Hymn of the Pearl. In a text from Nag Hammadi, there is a description of a bride who is rescued from the world, fed the “word” of knowledge and has it also placed on her eyes to make her see, which opens her mind to perceive who her true kinsmen are. The similarity to the angelic figure, who is a counterpart of her bridegroom Joseph, giving Aseneth the honeycomb, which represents wisdom, and the revelation of her spiritual kinship to Joseph is, except for the imagery of uncovering blindness, a strong relationship (“I Set a Table before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth’s Conversion Meal,” JSP 14 [2004]: 74 n. 23). Standhartinger (“Recent Scholarship,” 386) discusses the contention of Maddalena Scopello (L’exegese de l’ame: Nag
who travels to Egypt in search of a precious pearl, only to lose his royal robe and forget his birthright, debauching himself with Egyptian extravagances. Bolyki does not introduce the Hymn to claim literary dependence for Joseph and Aseneth, but to establish the “archetypal nature of Egypt.” Without mentioning examples, he suggests the broad influence of an enduring desire “to be freed from the Egypt of sin” by rising to a higher sphere of existence.\(^5\)

While Bolyki does not provide much more discussion of this suffusion of certain archetypal views of Egypt in ancient storytelling, he has prompted another question to ask concerning the Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth.\(^6\) Instead of seeing the Egyptian character of Joseph and Aseneth as “a necessary consequence of its literary motifs and psychological archetypes,” the Egyptian setting may serve as an opportunity, especially for a writer steeped in the scripture of ancient Israel, to make use of certain motifs and archetypes. The novel does not acquire an Egyptian “character” from the motifs and archetypes it employs. It is not primarily the Egypt of the Greek romance novels nor of the Hellenistic apologists for the Jewish diasporic communities. It is the Egypt of the Joseph story, which means that we must first ask, “Why is the Joseph story set in Egypt?”

\(^5\) Bolyki, “Egyptian Setting,” 95.

\(^6\) Bolyki cites Karl Kerényi (Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung: ein Versuch [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1927], 229), who contends that “the heroes of all ancient romances can be traced back to the legend of Isis and Osiris” as the archetypal couple. Even if this assertion were true, it would also not establish the Egyptian provenance of Joseph and Aseneth.

---

In the Joseph story, we are presented with the righteous Joseph, pure and incorruptible, able seemingly without effort and apart from the immediate guidance of his father Israel to resist the aggressive advances of the foreign woman, that paragon of lasciviousness and prototype for the profligacy of a holy nation. Joseph in the land of Egypt becomes a kind of antitype of Israel. Joseph is brought into slavery in Egypt, but does not forget his God. Yahweh is faithful to him, even as he is tempted by foreign immorality. The contrast between Israel under slavery three hundred years later is not difficult to recognize: the exodus story begins with Israel enslaved, forgotten and forgetful of Yahweh, and this Israel continues to be drawn back to the comfort of Egypt, with its fine food and its golden gods.

Egypt is a symbolic location for the struggle between wayward Israel and Yahweh, and so the prophets often use imagery of the exodus to describe Israel in the exile. What is at stake when Israel is enslaved in Egypt, just as when Israel is in exile, is God’s faithfulness to his promise to Israel. Will God act to save his chosen people from oppression in a foreign land? The Joseph story supplies us with an example like that of Daniel: a righteous Israelite, by his trust in the God of his fathers, succeeds in overcoming the pervasive temptation to succumb to foreign mores. In the exodus, Egypt

---

7. The account in Jubilees of Joseph in the house of Potiphar tells us that Joseph’s ability to resist Potiphar’s wife was because he “remembered the Lord and the words which Jacob, his father, used to read, which were from the words of Abraham, that there is no man who (may) fornicate with a woman who has a husband (and) that there is a judgment of death which is decreed for him in heaven before the Lord Most High” (Jub. 39:6). Docherty observes that “throughout Jubilees, the author shows a particular concern to condemn fornication and encourage strict adherence to the ancient Jewish Law” (“Joseph the Patriarch: Representations of Joseph in Early Post-Biblical Literature,” in Borders, Boundaries and the Bible, ed. Martin O’Kane, JSOTSup 313 [New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 211). Absent the concern for the Law, Joseph’s ability to resist the overtures of many women throughout Egypt is attributed in Joseph and Aseneth to remembering his “father’s commandments” (7:5).

8. I address the issue of Joseph as antitype of Israel in the exodus below (§3.2.2).
is a stumbling block for Israel, the place that they long to be free of but to which they
desire to return. The question of God’s faithfulness is, strangely enough, answered in the
same way in the Joseph story and in the exodus. God is faithful to the paragon of
righteousness and God is faithful to his wayward people. These two paradigms are
represented together in a sacred marriage in Joseph and Aseneth. Egypt loses its power
as a the archetype of a foreign nation. The righteous man, Joseph, conquers it, and the
pagan Egyptian women, Aseneth, metaphorically flees from its temptations and its gods
and is united to her bridegroom.

3.1.2. Joseph and Aseneth as Ideal Figures in the Exodus

3.1.2.1. Conforming Identities and Exodus Imagery

To understand Aseneth and Joseph as characters, it is important to notice the dual pattern
of resemblance between Aseneth and Joseph and with their respective angelic
counterparts. When Joseph arrives at the estate of Pentephres, he does so as vicegerent of

---

9. Ahearne-Kroll, who sees the book of Daniel as the primary influence on the depiction of
Aseneth, observes that “Daniel in many ways is on par with Joseph, and it is likely that this association
influenced the decision to characterize Aseneth, at least in part, in the image of Daniel” (“Jewish Identity,”
86; idem, “Portrayal of Aseneth”). The description of Daniel (Dan 1–6) is similar to that of Joseph in
Genesis (Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends, HDR 16
[Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990]; idem, Jewish Novel; Collins, Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of
Nickelsburg [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986], 291). Pervo (“Aseneth and Her Sisters”) compared Joseph and
Aseneth to Hellenistic romances, but ultimately decided that it bore more resemblance to Jewish novels
the description of Joseph in Jos. Asen. 4:7 evokes the description of Daniel and his companions (“Aseneth:
Ascetical Practice, Vision and Transformation,” in With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls,
Early Jewish, ed. Andrei Orlov and Daphna Arbel, Ekstasis 2 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010], 327). Hicks-Keeton
compares at length the phrase “living God” in both Daniel and Joseph and Aseneth in “Rewritten Gentiles:
Conversion to Israel’s ‘Living God’ and Jewish Identity in Antiquity,” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2014),
80–100, 107–199.
the nation of Egypt. He is glorious, but human, a powerful man, but still just a man. It is through Aseneth’s eyes that we are given an angelomorphic description of Joseph:

Behold, the sun from heaven has come to us on its chariot and entered our house today, and shines in it like a light upon the earth. But I, foolish and daring, have despised him and spoken wicked words about him, and did not know that Joseph is (a) son of God. For who among men on earth will generate such beauty, and what womb of a woman would give birth to such light? (Jos. Asen. 6:2–4)

Joseph is both an earthly reflection of his heavenly counterpart and the mirror of his future consort Aseneth, who will be described in angelic terms after her transformation (18:9). His role as the latter is developed appropriately through Aseneth’s desiderative gaze: her longing is for the Joseph who possesses the divine characteristics she will come to possess. Joseph has already been identified by Pentephres as “a man powerful in wisdom and experience,” upon whom the spirit of God rests (4:7). For Aseneth he is the “sun from heaven,” an image that has less to do with analogies to Helios or Apollo and more to do with biblical conceptions of Wisdom and the notion of the son of God in early Jewish thought.10 Joseph’s beauty is superhuman, suffused with angelic luminescence. Aseneth’s question (“what womb of a woman would give birth to such light?”)

10. Philonenko compares Joseph with the sun-god Helios, though he draws a number of religionsgeschichte connections in Joseph and Aseneth (Joseph et Aséneth, 79–83). Kraemer adopts Philonenko’s position, stating that Helios imagery in the description of Joseph is prominent and insisting that it proves a late antique provenance for the novel (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 156—63). Nir repeats Kraemer’s case, but maintains that Joseph only resembles Helios insofar as Helios becomes a model for Christ in late antiquity (A Christian Book, 116–127). Collins qualifies Kraemer’s argument: “Solar imagery was not a novelty of late antiquity, as can be seen from its widespread use in Philo, but the best parallels we have to the figure of Joseph riding on his chariot are in mosaics of the third century CE or thereabouts. But this passage in ch. 5 is not what we might call a structural pillar of the story. It is more in the character of an embellishment” (“Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?” JSP 14 [2005]: 111). Ahearne-Kroll concurs with Collins, determining that the features that Kraemer labels “late antique” could just as easily be early antique, such as in “the influence of biblical paradigms in the portrayal of Aseneth’s encounter with the angel, the perpetuation of Helios imagery associated with royalty during the Ptolemaic period, and the connection between bees and the divine realm” (“Portrayal of Aseneth,” 40). See also Kee, “Socio-Cultural Setting,” 402; Buchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.208 n. k; Docherty, “Rewritten Bible,” 39; Bolyki, “Egypt as the Setting,” 87; Hirschberger, “Aseneths erstes Brautkleid,” 186.
anticipates her response to the angelic figure’s departure in Jos. Asen. 17:9. There, she will wonder how she has beheld God and lived; here she wonders at the beauty of a son of God. This literary strategy of conforming the two main characters to each other and to their angelic mirrors is key to understanding Aseneth and Joseph as ideal figures in the story of the exodus. They are described using sapiential and angelomorphic language that supports the assimilation of their experience to the exodus of Israel out of Egypt.

Though scholars have discerned images and allusions to the exodus in individual pericopes of Joseph and Aseneth, few have considered the possibility that exodus motifs are present to such a thoroughgoing degree as I claim. However, Nina Braginskaya has recognized parallels between imagery in Joseph and Aseneth and the Passover haggadah:

[Each] story contains all of the major elements: passage from death to life, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, passage through lethal waters, trials through hunger, thirst, salvation through miraculous water and miraculous food, i.e., manna (honey in Jos. Asen.), and when the refugees finally reach Canaan, they become a people, adepts of the new religion, and, in time, Jerusalem will become the bride of God.

Before analyzing the parallels between the events of the exodus and the events of the romance, it is necessary to identify the parallels between Aseneth and Joseph and the figures of Wisdom in early Jewish writings.


12. Braginskaya makes this suggestion in the midst of a comparison of the Metamorphoses of Lucian and Joseph and Aseneth as novels of conversion. She characterizes the Passover haggadah as a “mystery-like drama” (“Greek Literary History,” 86).

13. Among the allusions to the exodus there exists the possibility that Aseneth is being compared or likened to Moses. The comparison to Moses is important in Chapter Four, but I maintain that there is never what could be called a “Moses typology” in Joseph and Aseneth.
3.1.2.2. Aseneth and Joseph as Figures of Wisdom

The romance in Joseph and Aseneth portrays Joseph and Aseneth as ideal figures, suggestive of personified Wisdom and the Angel of God, each of whom leads the people out of Egypt in different parts of early Jewish tradition. The romance relies on the depiction of Wisdom in both her cosmogenic and patronal angelic roles in early Judaism and makes use of the juxtaposition of creational language with the event of the crossing of the Red Sea. It depicts Joseph as the angelic son of God, an earthly counterpart to his own divine ἄνθρωπος. But the adventure also associates him with the angel of God who leads the people out of Egypt through the wilderness and who fights for them on God’s behalf. However, both Joseph and Aseneth take on the attributes of wisdom and the angelic characteristics that imply an association with the angel of the Lord.14

Leading the people of Israel through the Red Sea fits into Wisdom’s broader role not just in the life of Israel but in the whole creation. Wisdom is present at the creation of the world (Prov 9:9) and engages in cosmogenic/demiurgic activities (Wis 9:2; 11QPs xxvi.13–15). She is created at the beginning of the Lord’s work and dwells in the highest heavens (Prov 8:22–31; Sir 24:4). She is life-giving (Prov 8:35–36; Bar 4:1). She has compassed the “vault of heaven” and “traversed the depths of the abyss” (Sir 24:5). The “vault of heaven” in Job 22:14 is the place where God walks, and the abyss evokes the

14. It is the Lord who leads the people out of Egypt (Exod 12:51, 13:3). In the Song of Moses (Exod 15:1–18), the action previously ascribed to the “angel of God” in Exod 14:19 is attributed instead to the Lord, though in Exod 14:25, the Egyptians exclaim that “the Lord is fighting for them.” Ps 105:9 LXX says that the Lord “rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert” (see also Isa 51:10, 63:12–13). Humphrey makes note of the many biblical uses of that idea, as in Josh 10:14, 23:10; Deut 3:22; 2 Kgs 6:16; Neh 4:14, 20; Jer 21:5; Dan 10:20; Jdt 16:2; Sus 59–60; 2 Macc 3:25; and 3 Macc 6:18. She contends that in Jos. Asen. 28:1, in which Joseph’s profligate brothers claim that “the Lord fights against us for Aseneth,” that the most apt parallel is Exod 14:25 (Humphrey, Joseph and Aseneth, 42). I return to Jos. Asen. 28:1 below.
pre-creational chaos of the deep in Gen 1:2. 15 She makes her dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel she receives her inheritance (Sir 24:8, 12), but she is also forsaken in Israel, as in Bar 3:9–4:4 (esp. 3:22: “She has not been heard of in Canaan, or seen in Teman”). The memory of Wisdom is sweeter than honey, and the possession of her is sweeter than the honeycomb (Sir 24:20).

The creational motifs in Joseph and Aseneth are associated with the events of the exodus in part because Wisdom is a model for such a connection. Aseneth is described using many of the same characteristics as personified Wisdom. She becomes a source of wisdom and life for all who come to her as the newly transformed City of Refuge, and through her marriage to Joseph she makes her dwelling with Jacob/Israel. She is transformed by partaking of a honeycomb, a substance that is redolent of life, wisdom, and angelic existence. Her destiny as Joseph’s wife and as a daughter of the Most High is established eternally, before all ages, by her inclusion in the book of life and by the fact that, like Wisdom, she is chosen and set apart by God before her birth (Prov 8:22; Ps 139:16, Sir 24:9, Wis 9:9).

Wisdom leads Israel as a “holy people and a blameless race” out of Egypt. She “guides them along a marvelous way” and she is a “shelter to them” by day and a “starry flame” by night. It is Wisdom who leads Israel through the Red Sea and who drowns Israel’s enemies (Wis 10:15–21), since her throne is “in the pillar of cloud” (Sir 24:4b). Aseneth becomes Wisdom, sheltering and leading the people who seek repentance in the name of the Most High (Jos. Asen. 15:7). Aseneth’s flight from pharaoh’s son also

evokes her sheltering role as the City of Refuge in the adventure. There she offers mercy instead of fiery judgment.

Joseph is also portrayed as a sapiential figure in Joseph and Aseneth, since he resembles the depiction of personified Wisdom. I have already noted that he is beautiful and “shining like the sun” (6:2–3, 5–6; 21:4; 23:10; comp. Wis 7:26, 29–30). But he is also the “power of God,” in whom is “the spirit of wisdom and understanding” (Jos. Asen. 3:4, 4:7, 8:9, 18:1). Ulrike Mittmann-Richert notes that this description evokes Isa 11:2 LXX: “And the spirit of God shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and godliness.”

Joseph is dressed in gold and white and wears a golden wreath with twelve golden rays (5:5), which symbolizes the divine Glory and identifies him as the power of God with Wisdom. The ascription of the title “son of God” to Joseph is also an indication of his association with Wisdom. The fact that he sees all and that nothing is hidden from him (6:6) indicates this, since in Wis 7:20, 9:11, the same is said of Wisdom. Philo calls the word of God “the firstborn, the eldest of his angels, . . . the great archangel of many names; for he is called the authority, and the name of God, and the Word, and man according to God’s image, and he who sees Israel” (Confusion 146). In Jer 31:9, God has become a “father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” and in Jer 31:20, God asks, “Is Ephraim my dear son?” (see also Isa 30:1, 45:11). The Lord calls Israel his firstborn son in Exod 4:22–23: “Then you shall say to the pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.” But you refused to

let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.’ ” The motif of Joseph as son of God or firstborn son of God continues to pervade Joseph and Aseneth as an important identifier of Joseph’s angelomorphic identity.\textsuperscript{17} The titles used to describe Joseph can all be connected to the motif of wisdom, and that motif is closely tied to the exodus imagery in Joseph and Aseneth.

Although both Joseph and Aseneth continue to be represented as sapiential figures throughout the romance, Aseneth is the receiver of Wisdom and becomes Wisdom by the agency of Joseph’s heavenly counterpart, while Joseph is portrayed as always having possessed wisdom.\textsuperscript{18} Through eating the mystical honeycomb offered by the angelic figure, Aseneth gains the wisdom that Joseph already possesses. This is transferal of wisdom is also confirmed when Joseph kisses Aseneth later in the narrative (19:11). The honeycomb is a wisdom meal, specifically wisdom as Torah. Understanding Aseneth and Joseph as figures of wisdom is important for grasping the significance of this scene.\textsuperscript{19}

Wisdom is a complex figure, whose role in early Jewish tradition is so broad that a mere association between Wisdom and Aseneth or Joseph does not indicate an effort to evoke the exodus. It is only combined with a matrix of other allusions to the exodus that this correlation is significant. In a similar way, the angel of God is a complex character,

\textsuperscript{17} Sänger, \textit{Antikes Judentum}, 199–200.


\textsuperscript{19} Mittmann-Richert observes that Aseneth is the one who receives Wisdom, who becomes wisdom by the agency of Joseph’s heavenly counterpart, while Joseph is portrayed as always having possessed wisdom from the beginning. She suggests that Joseph represents Israel and Aseneth the nations, but the narrative points us to a more complex construction (“Joseph und Aseneth” 255). Although Aseneth is a representative for the nations who seek after the God of Israel, with the application of her new name, City of Refuge, and its exposition in the adventure, she becomes a refuge for all who repent. There is no other city of refuge in heaven, and in that city reside those who repent as well as the “sons of light” and the “elect ones of God” (16:14).
whose role in the salvation history of Israel transcends the protection of Israel in its flight from Egypt. It is also the case that parts of his role are taken on by other angelic figures in early Judaism. Michael, the mighty archangel and patron of the nation of Israel, takes on his military role, as does Melchizedek, the priestly-king of Salem turned angelic warrior.²⁰ I discuss the role of Joseph’s heavenly counterpart as angel of God in Chapters Four and Five.

3.1.2.3. Joseph as Prefiguration of Israel in the Exodus

To infuse an adaptation of the Joseph story with exodus motifs seems anachronistic. However, Ps 105 establishes an early exegetical interpretation of the Joseph story in light of the exodus. Susan Docherty observes that in Ps 105:16–22, there are a number of developments to the character of Joseph. His enslavement is portrayed as more brutal, his sufferings are interpreted as a test from God (105:19), and the idea that Joseph possessed wisdom is introduced (105:22). Docherty concludes that “in this passage, it seems that Joseph’s life and career are being depicted in terms of the exodus, a central concern of Psalm 105.”²¹ Before Docherty, Aptowitzer observed that this development in Ps 105 is expanded in haggadic interpretations of Joseph’s story. The destiny of Israel is prefigured in the destiny of Joseph in Egypt: “Joseph, the favorite of his father, is hated, separated from the house of his father, taken to a foreign country, calumniated, persecuted,


humiliated, only to attain to rulership and power subsequently.”

As Joseph had been treated,

so Israel has been enslaved in Egypt, and later invaded and exiled in Babylon. As Joseph subsequently attained rulership and power in Egypt, so the people of Israel hoped for future vindication and glory. The emphasis in Psalm 105 on the themes of Joseph’s sufferings as a slave, his steadfastness under trial and his eventual success in Egypt serve therefore to remind the people of God’s great deeds on their behalf in the past and to assure them that God can act to save even in the most desperate of situations.

Docherty makes note of how the Babylonian exile appears to parallel the exodus in prophetic literature. Does the Joseph story invite exilic and diasporic themes as well? Arndt Meinhold has proposed that the theme of the genre of the diaspora novel of Esther is the portrayal and interpretation of Jewish life in the diaspora, and that this is true of the Joseph story as well. The Joseph saga can be seen as a kind of diasporic novel on the level of Daniel or Esther, since it shares many of the central concerns.

The idea that the writer of Joseph and Aseneth may have been conversant with an interpretation of Joseph as a prefiguration of the exodus generation makes sense of the exposition of certain exodus motifs in Aseneth’s prayers. If Joseph is an antitype of the people of Israel, then Aseneth is, by association, living out a different version of the story. As I hope to demonstrate in my exegesis of the text, Aseneth is symbolically reliving the events of the exodus as a microcosm of her own transformation. In the


23. Ibid.

moments when God reveals his intention to fulfill his promise to Abraham by rescuing Israel, Aseneth is rescued instead. When the moment of Israel’s profligacy looms in the episode of the golden calf, Aseneth makes a different decision and is brought into a new relationship with God. This metaphorical construction is all the more tenable if the writer assumes of his audience a certain familiarity with the formation of the Joseph story as a subtext in Joseph and Aseneth. To portray Aseneth’s experience as a recapitulation of the exodus is not an anachronism, but an imitation of the prefiguration of the exodus in the early Jewish development of the Joseph story.

3.1.3. The Creation and Re-Creation at the Red Sea in Early Jewish Tradition

The creational language in Joseph and Aseneth supports the connection of Aseneth’s transformative experience to the motifs and language of the exodus. Imagery of new creation is connected to the exodus, especially the crossing of the Red Sea, in a way that associates Aseneth with God’s people in the exodus but also interprets the exodus of Israel from Egypt as a creational event. The writer of Joseph and Aseneth is drawing on an interpretive tradition that developed the creational metaphors in the book of Exodus. This tradition manifests in the Psalms, in the Wisdom of Solomon, and in the LAB of Pseudo-Philo.

The event of the Red Sea crossing fits into a larger theme in the OT of the “taming or controlling of the waters of the Sea” as a symbol of creation.25 The imagery of cloud and darkness, a light in the night, the splitting of the sea by means of the wind and

the revelation of dry land in Exod 14:19–22, all suggest the creation account in Gen 1, especially of separating and dividing the waters in Gen 1:6–7. The Israelites cross through the sea from darkness to light into the morning dawn. “Due to God’s antiphrastic use of the sea as his creational tool, Israel’s passage through chaos and death paradoxically results in their creation and life.”

Israel’s position as an enslaved people is destroyed and they are reborn as a free, recreated people. The creational imagery serves as a metaphor for the transformation of Israel’s identity. “Israel’s redemption from Egyptian slavery is their creation as a new humanity, in recovery of God’s creational purposes.”

In the crossing of the Red Sea, the creation of the people is also an act of salvation or liberation; the natural elements that appear to mimic the creation in Genesis are the conditions within which God’s re-creation of Israel takes place as a saving act. Aseneth’s transformation is similarly framed as an act of new creation; Aseneth is both liberated from her old life and capable of bestowing that new life on others.

---


29. Enns observes that this is given fuller expression in Exod 15:16 through the use of a peculiar Hebrew verb, qanah. The verse is part of the song of Moses and manifests an odd repetition: “Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O Lord, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by.” The word qanah in the MT is usually taken to mean “to buy, acquire or beget,” but it can also mean “to create.” The Greek textual tradition witnesses to this ambiguity, translating qanah usually as ἐκτήσω (“you acquired”), but also attesting ἐκτίσω (“you created”). It is possible to conclude with Enns that this is the source of other creational language in later interpretations of Exodus, but the parallels to the creation account in Genesis alone would give any later exegesis enough fodder to maintain the connection. For Enns’s discussion, see Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 15–21 and 19:1–9, Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs 57 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 71.
The development of the creational imagery of the book of Exodus in the Psalms provides the language for Joseph’s prayer in 8:9, for Aseneth’s prayers (chs. 10–13), and for the angelic confirmation of Aseneth’s acceptance in 15:4. The way that the Psalms interpret the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the wandering in the wilderness augments the understanding of the exodus as a creational act. In Aseneth’s prayers especially, many of the elements are invoked, as are exodus motifs of knowing/not knowing and pursuit/flight. The poetic structure of creation, exodus, and inheritance found in Ps 136 is present in Jos. Asen. 12–13. These prayers are framed by the oracular inclusio of Joseph’s prayer for Aseneth in 8:9 and her encounter with the heavenly ἄνθρωπος in 15:4, both of which contain creational language.

Wisdom of Solomon provides its own understanding of the crossing of the Red Sea as an act of new creation which is relevant to the exodus motifs in Joseph and Aseneth:

For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with your commands, so that your children might be kept unharmed. The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp, and dry land emerging where water had stood before, an unhindered way out of the Red Sea. (Wis 19:6–7)

The people of Israel recall the plagues of Egypt as a punitive parallel to the acts of creation in v. 19:10, and the quails that God provides as their food in Exod 16:13 long after they have passed through the Red Sea are said in Wis 19:11–12 to have come from the sea itself. The parting of the Red Sea is seen as an analogue to God’s direct action in creation. Walter Vogels observes that “the way the writer of Wisdom describes the salvific liberation from Egypt indicates that he is more inspired by the creation narrative
than by the exodus story itself.” In that salvation, Wisdom is responsible both for the act of creation and for leading and protecting the people of Israel in the exodus. The language of new creation in Joseph and Aseneth is, in a sense, a mirror of the imagery in Wisdom. Aseneth’s new creation is specified as having more to do with the creative acts of God at the Red Sea than with the primordial creation of the world.

Solomon’s prayer in Wis 9 begins by ascribing the creation of all things to the word of God and the creation of humanity to Wisdom (vv. 1–2). Wisdom is the “breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory” (7:25), as well as “a reflection of eternal light” and “a spotless mirror of the working of God” (7:26). She is capable of renewing all things and is depicted as the one who guides every generation of righteous men and women, including Moses and the Israelites during the exodus (Wis 7:27, 10:16). The account of personified Wisdom is of a being whose roles as creator, guide and protector are considered inseparable.

The allusion to the exodus in Deborah’s song found in LAB draws on the same creational interpretation of the Red Sea event. In the context of describing the plague of the firstborn, LAB introduces the crossing of the Red Sea:

For I will sing a hymn to him in the renewal of creation. And the people will remember his saving power, and this will be a testimony for it. And let the sea with its abyss be a witness, because not only has God dried it up before our fathers, but also he has diverted the stars from their positions and attacked our enemies. (LAB 32:17)

Once again, the creation is renewed at the Red Sea and tied to the salvific act of bringing the people through on dry land. The image of the abyss is one that appears both as an

---

element in the creation and in the retelling of the Red Sea crossing, and it is an important element exhibited in Joseph and Aseneth. The depiction of an astral host fighting on behalf of Israel is also relevant to the portrayal of Aseneth’s escape from pharaoh’s son in the adventure. This short passage combined with the characterization of Wisdom in the book of Wisdom demonstrates that there was an established tradition of interpreting the Red Sea crossing as an act of new creation, in which the divine fashioning of the elements is a metaphor for the renewal of the people of Israel. This same metaphor is present in Joseph and Aseneth, but it is related to the personal transformation of Aseneth. The climax of that transformation is nourishment from a honeycomb that is described as it is in Ps LXX 104(105):40 and in Wis 16:20 as “food of angels.”

3.1.4. What Exodus Imagery Contributes to the Theme of Divine Providence

Creational motifs appear in Joseph and Aseneth just as they do in the exodus story. Aseneth’s surroundings often seem to represent her identity. The apex of this phenomenon comes in the mystical meal of honeycomb that Aseneth partakes of with the angelic figure. The honeycomb is presented as if it were manna, and is symbolic of wisdom, eternal life, and angelic nourishment. It is a symbol of the eschatological

31. In Jos. Asen. 2, there is a garden in Aseneth’s courtyard with a stream running through it. Scholars have commented on the paradisiacal imagery, which seems to suggest that Aseneth’s courtyard is like the Garden of Eden (Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 39, 41, 117–18; Portier-Young, “Sweet Mercy Metropolis,” 139; Nir, *Christian Book*, 53, 59; Chyutin, *Tendentious Hagiographies*, 222; Hicks-Keeton, “Rewritten Gentiles,” 119–28). In v. 16:14, the honeycomb itself is said to have been made by “the bees of the paradise of delight,” an image that Mussio along with the stream in Aseneth’s courtyard indicates that Aseneth has received the divine λόγος (”Allegory,” 197–99). When Aseneth is transformed in v. 16:16, the angelic figure says that her “bones will grow strong like the cedars of paradise of delight of God” (Tyson L. Putthoff, “Aseneth’s Gastronomical Vision: Mystical Theophagy and the New Creation in *Joseph and Aseneth*,” *ISP* 24 [2014]: 109–10). Aseneth’s “first” robe may also be an allusion to the primal garments of light worn by Adam and Eve (Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 70).
journey that is undertaken in wisdom and ends in the promised land of eternal life. But how does exodus imagery contribute to the theological message that Aseneth is both a convert and renewed Israel?

First, the narrative places Aseneth in Egypt as an Egyptian, enthralled to the idols she has inherited from her pagan father. When Joseph prays that she be brought “from darkness into light” and “made alive again,” he is evoking the exodus of Israel from Egypt using the language of the Passover haggadah. Even before she has taken the penitential step of her seven-day fast, Joseph prays for an Egyptian to be included in a performance of the exodus as a representation of the nation of Israel. The concept of renewal, the same language early Jewish writers used to describe the people of Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea, is spoken over a firstborn Egyptian.32

Secondly, Aseneth’s representative role as City of Refuge (15:7) and her relationship to her heavenly counterpart Repentance establish her not only as a model for all who repent, but as the conduit for that repentance to be actualized. Her new ability to protect whoever follows her example is played out in the adventure as a reconfigured version of the crossing of the Red Sea, where mercy is offered to the enemy instead of judgment.

The convert as exemplified by Aseneth is not just a merciful addition to the people of God. She is the divine instrument by which even those who have been considered part of the people of God must enter. Repentance, in other words, is for

32. Of course, the analogy is not exact since Aseneth is not a son of Pentephres, and the manuscript tradition differs on whether Aseneth is the firstborn or second-born in comparison to her deceased brother. Text family b, the Syriac, Armenian, and L1 436 435& say that Aseneth’s “younger” brother died. Text family c says her “second” brother died, and text families a and d say her “firstborn” brother died (Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.216 n. t).
anyone who has lost her way, not just for the convert. The adventure mimics the events of
the flight from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, but the characters are ironically put
in opposing roles and the result is not judgment but repentance and salvation, which
come by means of Aseneth’s mercy to her enemies.

Joseph and Aseneth is not just a story about a convert whose claim to salvation
must be legitimated. It is the story of Israel gone astray, Israel abandoned, Israel who has
forgotten and been forgotten. The themes of the Joseph story, together with the themes
and motifs of the exodus, are incorporated into a conventional conversion account. This
involves the life of a convert in the salvation history of Israel in a unique way and is, at
the same time, a subversion of the exodus story as journey that offers mercy and not
judgment to Israel’s enemies.

3.2. Son of God Meets the Foreign Woman (Jos. Asen. 3:5–8:9)

3.2.1. Field of Inheritance (Jos. Asen. 3:5)

The poetic recounting of the exodus, the “Song of the Sea” in Exod 15, ends with a
proclamation about where the Lord has led his people: “You brought them in and planted
them on the mountain of your own inheritance” (Exod 15:17). Before the events of the
rest of the Deuteronomistic History have ever unfolded, the Song makes a proleptic
pronouncement regarding the telos of the exodus: namely, that Israel will inherit the
promised land. The motif of inheritance is important in Joseph and Aseneth and it is
integrated into the reprise of the exodus in the adventure. Aseneth’s inheritance begins as
earthly and is changed into an eschatological and spiritual one.
The motif first appears in Jos. Asen. 3:5: “Aseneth heard that her father and mother had come from the field, which was their inheritance.” And she rejoiced and said, “I will go and see my father and my mother because they have come from the field which is our inheritance.” What is apparent at the outset is that the field of inheritance is something that Aseneth herself believes she has the right to lay a claim on as the daughter of Pentephres. Aseneth refers to the field as “our” inheritance, even though it is described by the Narrator as “their” (i.e., Pentephres and the people he is with [his wife and family]) inheritance. In this first occurrence, Aseneth’s parents have not returned from the field empty-handed. Jos. Asen. 4:2 lists the produce that Pentephres and his wife have brought for Aseneth: fruit, grapes, dates, doves(?), pomegranates, and figs. Aseneth is pleased with this produce, because it is attractive and tastes good.

After Joseph rejects Aseneth’s advances, she is devastated and retreats to her tower bedroom to begin her penitence. Joseph decides to continue his journey against the protests of Pentephres that he stay the night: “And Joseph left, and Pentephres and all his family (συγγένεια αὐτοῦ) went out to their (his) lot/inheritance/field of inheritance (κλῆρον/κληρονομίας/ἀγρὸν τῆς κληρονομίας)” (Jos. Asen. 10:1). Pentephres and his

33. Manuscripts E c (Syr) 436 D Slav omit “their,” but all other extant mss attest it (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 87). Oppenheim translates the Syriac into Latin as “rus,” a country estate (Fabula, 36), but Burke has “village” (Lost Gospel, 320). Fink lists Latin mss 436 and 435& villa possessionis (Joseph und Aseneth, 264). The argument in this section about the subtle recalibration of the “field of inheritance” motif is made on the thematic level and does not rely on the text critical issues present in the tradition. The variations across manuscripts and versions as to what the “field of inheritance” is called (a field, a house, a villa, an estate, etc.) continue throughout the narrative. It could prove valuable at a later time to collate the terms used and compare them across manuscripts and versions, but it is not necessary for this study.

34. Most manuscripts have “our,” P (Q) have “their,” L1 has ubi erant. Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 88.

35. συγγένεια αὐτοῦ FW (Syr) (Arm) L2 L1 c BD( Slav) a; E G omit. Add “and his wife” after “Pentephres”: W L2. εἰς τὸν κλῆρον αὐτῶν (αὐτοῦ E) E F c B(D) ( Slav) ACP; ἀγρὸν τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτῶν
wife, this time accompanied by their kin, return to the same location they arrived from in 3:5. This time, there is no claim on this inheritance for Aseneth. It is the field of inheritance of the people who are returning to it: Pentephres, his wife, and now their συγγένεια, those others who are related to them. This is a subtle change that is present in nearly every manuscript, an addition to the motif of inheritance that foreshadows Aseneth’s estrangement from her family. She has been quietly disinherited, a fact that she confirms in her prayers. I return to this motif as it arises again throughout the narrative.

3.2.2. Joseph Prays for Aseneth (Jos. Asen. 8:9)

After Joseph rejects Aseneth because she is a foreigner and an idolater, he has compassion on her and prays for her. In his prayer, Joseph makes use of language of new creation:

Lord God of my father Israel
Most High and Power of Jacob
You who gives life to all things
And calls them out of darkness into the light
And from error into the truth
And from death to life
You, Lord, do give life to and bless this virgin
and renew her by your spirit
and remold her with your hidden hand
and give her life again by your life
and let her eat bread of life
and drink a cup of your blessing. (Jos. Asen. 8:9)36

W; “to the field of our inheritance” Syr; κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ G; in possessionis suis L2; Q omits (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 125).

36. My translation of Burchard (Joseph und Aseneth, 120). The bread, cup and anointing mentioned here and in 8:5 add to the creational language, especially in the manuscripts that later associate Aseneth’s meal of honeycomb with these elements. They are life-giving, something that connects them to the honeycomb as it is described in Jos. Asen. 16:8, since it resembles life-giving manna. Manuscripts F and W, and the d text family do not make an explicit connection between the bread, cup
The creational language evokes the Genesis creation account, but it reconditions it to fit the thematic concerns of the narrative. The God of Jacob is not just the one who has given life to all things, he has called them out of darkness into the light.

Although Joseph prays that Aseneth will be renewed and remolded, and given life again, he also prays for an utter transformation: from darkness into light, from error to truth, from death to life. Chesnutt has argued that the imagery need not be anything but creational. Aseneth’s prayer in 12:1–2 conditions Joseph’s prayer in 8:9 and the angelic figure’s exchange with Aseneth in 15:5–12 by utilizing many of the same words and phrases. It is not just for creating the world that Aseneth praises the Most High, but for the hope that she might be transformed into a new creation:

There is an obvious connection between the thought of God as one who brings things to life, who gives life to all his creatures, and the request which Aseneth lays before God. It is as the giver of life, the creator of being out of non-being, that God is urged to resolve Aseneth’s predicament. God’s salvific activity is conceived as analogous to his creative activity.

Aseneth’s new identity is, in one sense, being created out of nothing, fashioned wholly by the Most High God and not from anything Aseneth has done. But the new creation she experiences is specified in the use of a distinctive phrase that evokes a particular interpretation of the exodus in Jewish and Christian tradition.


37. Aseneth praises the Lord who “gave the breath of life to all your creation, who brought the invisible things into the light, who made the things which exist and are seen out of those which are not seen and do not exist, who raised up the heaven and founded it on a firmament upon the back of the winds, who founded the earth upon the waters, who placed big stones upon the abyss of the water” (12:1–2).

The phrase “from darkness into (great or marvelous) light” in 8:9 and again in 15:12 is significant as a liturgical descriptor of the exodus in early Christian and rabbinic tradition. The passage from darkness to light is paired with creational language and used to describe conversion, but the phrase “from darkness into (great or marvelous) light” is an expression that appears to have referred specifically to the crossing of the Red Sea. First Peter 2:9 attests a version of the phrase: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Daniel Keating suggests that the selections from the Greek of Isa 43:20–21 and Exod 19:6 are combined to evoke the similarities between the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and the deliverance from exile in Babylon. The early Christians who are the writer’s audience are on a spiritual journey out of darkness and into light through their conversion experiences:

The salvation of the Christian believers is depicted here in language reminiscent of the terms with which Isaiah portrayed Israel’s deliverance . . . it [also] echoes the Festival Psalms, recounting the “marvels” of God’s deliverance of his resident aliens and elect covenant people from Egypt and from darkness into light.41

40. Keating, First and Second Peter, Jude, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 55.

41. John H. Elliott, 1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 440. Elliott cites the use of θαυμᾶσια in Ps 77(78):4, 11, 12; 104(105):2, 5; 105(106):7, 22 LXX; θαυμαστά: Ps 97(98):1 LXX, Wis 19:9; cf. Ps 117(118):22 LXX. To these should be added Ps 106 (107):14–15 LXX: “and he brought them out of darkness and death’s shadow, and their bonds he broke asunder. Let them acknowledge the Lord for his mercies, and for his wonderful works (τὰ θαυμᾶσια αὐτοῦ) to the sons of men.”
Proclamation of God’s “mighty acts” places the early Christian audience of 1 Peter in the event of the singing of the song of Moses in Exod 15. This historical vision, putting the celebrant in the moment of God’s deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, is not a uniquely Christian theological turn. The Passover liturgy (m. Pesah. 10:5) also commemorates the exodus in a similar way:

In every generation one must so regard oneself as if he/she came forth from Egypt. . . . Therefore we are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a festival day, and from darkness to great light . . . so let us sing before him the Hallelujah.  

There is a remaking of the people of Israel in every generation, and it is conveyed as a reprisal of the exodus. The writer of 1 Peter makes use of building language and applies it to the eschatologically-oriented journey of the Christian community:

The notion that Christians are coming to the “living stone” (2:4) in order to build a temple is very similar to the journey image in 1 Enoch. Just as God’s call precipitates the return journey from Exile and dispersion, so also in 1 Peter, God’s call (1:15, 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10) initiates the present Christian journey.

The combination of the building language with the journey of the exodus is not so dissimilar to the way Aseneth is identified as a City of Refuge while also being placed on an eschatological journey.

In Joseph’s prayer (8:9), God is the one “who gives life to all things and calls them out of darkness into the light,” and Joseph is invoking that pivotal event not just as a generic use of creational imagery, but as a supplication to God that Aseneth be included

42. Ibid.

43. Martin, Metaphor and Composition, 154 n. 69.
in the crossing of the Red Sea. The combination of the rest of the prayer is even more indicative of this. Melito of Sardis echoes both the words of m. Pesaḥ. 10:5 and Joseph’s prayer (Jos. Asen. 8:9) in Peri Pascha 68: “He is the one who rescues us from bondage to freedom, from darkness into light, from death to life, from tyranny to eternal kingdom.”

Exodus Rabbah 12:2 contains similar language to this: “It is like a king who has released his son from prison and proclaims: Make this day each year a festival day, this day when my son passed from darkness to light, from the iron yoke to life, from bondage to freedom, from servitude to redemption.” Hall emphasizes that Peri Pascha, the Passover haggadah, and Exodus Rabbah all seem to attest a common Jewish liturgical tradition. I return to a discussion of this phrase when Aseneth recalls it in Jos. Asen. 15:12.

Its importance here is in qualifying the ἀνα- prefixes of Joseph’s prayer. Aseneth will be made anew, molded again and given life again. If she is being renewed, what is the manner of that renewal? Combine the imagery of renewal and rebirth with the prayer to call Aseneth from darkness into light, and that renewal becomes that which Israel underwent at the Red Sea. There was remade not just the creation itself, but a people.

44. Οὐτός ἐστιν ὁ ρυσάμενος ἡμᾶς ἐκ δουλείας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐκ σκότους εἰς ἱλαρίαν ἐκ θανάτου εἰς ζωήν ἐκ τυραννίδος εἰς βασιλείαν αἰώνιον. Provided by Stuart G. Hall (“Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah,” JTS 22 [1971]: 31–32).

45. Hall’s translation of the Hebrew is given by Roger le Déaut (La nuit pascale, AnBib 22 [Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1963], 235).

46. Enns even suggests that perhaps the people of Israel were receiving back again their national identity at the Red Sea. In Wis 19:8a, it says that Israel passed through the sea “as one nation” (πανεθνεί). Asking us to accept the reading of Exod 15:16d as “until the people you created passed by,” Enns suggests that the “mixed multitude” of Exod 12:38 is being coalesced into one people, including those foreigners who accompanied the Hebrews (Exodus Retold, 125). It is possible that the writer of Joseph and Aseneth sees in the Red Sea event not just a new creation for the earth but also for the people of Israel, one that includes a mixed multitude of foreigners.
3.3. Aseneth at Prayer (Jos. Asen. 10–13)

3.3.1. The Reversal of Idolatry (Jos. Asen. 10–11)

Aseneth is propelled by her humiliation into seven days of penitence, fasting and prayer. Before she prays, she decides to destroy her idols: “[Aseneth] took all her gods that were in her chamber, the ones of gold and silver who were without number, and ground them to pieces” (συνέτριψεν αὐτοὺς εἰς λεπτά; 10:12). This is a reading that only occurs in certain manuscripts, while representatives of Burchard’s longer reconstruction do not attest it. The manner by which Aseneth destroys her idols is reminiscent of Moses’s destruction of the golden calf in Exod 32:20 LXX: he grinds it into powder (κατήλεσεν αὐτὸν λεπτὸν). Aseneth seems to be placing herself in the moment of Israel’s profligacy in the wilderness, when they created the golden calf and Moses smashed the tablets of the law in a fury. This event also conditions some of the language that Aseneth uses in her prayers.

Increasing the probability that 10:12 is an allusion to the golden calf are two attributions that Aseneth makes to the Most High in her prayers: she has heard that the Most High God is a “jealous and fearsome” God, and she has heard that he is a merciful God. Both of these ascriptions show up in Exod 34 after Moses has returned from Sinai. The way they are employed in her prayers together with the motif of idolatry conveys a kind of reversal of the golden calf incident.

47. B [D] [Slav] AP attest this reading, E F Arm L2 L1 c omit; W G Syr Q do not have this context (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 135). Aseneth says in Jos. Asen. 12:12 that she has “destroyed and ground” her idols, with much the same manuscript attestation as 10:12. The attestation for this phrase is found only in manuscripts that belong to the ad (ι) stemma according to Fink’s analysis (Joseph und Aseneth, 17). It seems likely that the scribe of that ancestor or earlier jettisoned the reading.
Aseneth’s first mention of the Most High is after she has acknowledged her bereft condition as an orphan, hated by her parents for destroying her idols (11:4–5). She describes him as “the Lord God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High” and says that he “hates all those who worship idols, because he is a jealous and terrible god” (11:7). She decides that he must hate her, too, since she has worshipped “dead and dumb idols” (11:8). Her decision to abandon idolatry has placed her in a liminal state, hated by her family and by all others, guilty before the Most High God. God is depicted as a “jealous” God almost exclusively in the context of idolatry in the OT. In the context of the giving of the Law, the prohibition against worshipping other gods is because God is jealous (Exod 20:5; Deut 4:24, 5:9, 6:15). Deuteronomy 32 says that Israel “made [God] jealous with strange gods” and with “what is no god” (Deut 32:16, 21; cf. Josh 24). Psalm 78:58 says that they “moved him to jealousy with their idols.” Most importantly, Exod 34:14, in which Moses is renewing the covenant, resembles Aseneth’s description of God as jealous. Moses is told that idolatry will be a threat when the Israelites enter the land, since the end result will be eating the sacrifices made to those gods and intermarriage (Exod 34:15–16). Aseneth reiterates in Jos. Asen. 11:9 that she has eaten from the sacrifices of her idols and that her mouth is defiled. This defilement she decides is what has disqualified her from even being able to cry out for help to the Most High.

Aseneth decides to be bold and appeal to the Most High anyway, on the basis of what else she has heard about him, namely, that he is “a merciful, compassionate and long-suffering God, rich in mercy and goodness” (θεὸς ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων καὶ μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἐπιεικής; 11:10). Kraemer points out that this is an almost verbatim quote of Exod 34:6 LXX and, by association, Ps 85:15, 102:8, and 144:8 LXX.
According to Kraemer, the language and theological motifs of the Psalms that appropriate the short song in Exod 34:6–7 are present in Aseneth’s prayers as well.⁴⁸ The song in Exod 34:6–7 comes immediately before the warning against idolatry in Exod 34:15–16. Aseneth has heard that the God of the Hebrews “does not count the sin of a humble person, nor expose the lawless deeds of an afflicted person at the time of his affliction” (11:10). She explicitly identifies herself as lawless as she evokes the moment that the Lord offers forgiveness for the people of Israel through the giving of the Law again.⁴⁹

Chesnutt establishes that Aseneth is particularly concerned with lawlessness in her prayers and observes that manna is sometimes equated with Torah. The motif of lawlessness in her prayers foreshadows the honeycomb as a symbol of manna. Jos. Asen. 11:10 seems to be evoking the lawlessness of the Israelites in the Psalmist’s exegesis of Exod 34.⁵⁰ An Egyptian pagan priestess smashes her own idols of gold and silver into bits and throws them out of her window. Could she be symbolically destroying the very thing that the Israelites created for themselves? Or is she dissociating herself from the corruption that the Israelites will face in the promised land? Whatever the case, Aseneth’s abandonment of idolatry is described in language of Exod 34.

By destroying her idols in much the same way that Moses destroys the golden calf in the exodus, Aseneth is either being portrayed as a kind of new Moses for converts, or


⁴⁹. Psalm 102:10–11 LXX says “Not according to our sins did he deal with us, nor according to our acts of lawlessness did he repay us.” It seems likely that the Psalmist envisions Israel’s worship of the golden calf, since he has quoted Exod 34:7 in the preceding verses (vv. 8–9) and in v. 7 he says “He made known his ways to Moses, to the sons of Israel his will,” probably referring to the giving of the Law at Sinai.

she is replaying the drama of the golden calf incident, smashing her gods instead of worshiping them. She then calls to mind the moment of repentance for Israel, when they cried out through Moses for forgiveness. The angel descends in the following scene to offer Aseneth a substance that is associated with both Wisdom and Torah. This conditions Aseneth’s reception of the honeycomb as her own reception of the Law. That makes Aseneth’s bedroom transformation more closely aligned with the angelic food that Moses and the elders partook of on Sinai than with the gift of manna to recalcitrant Israel in the wilderness. The events of the exodus are being called to mind asynchronically, since the next part of Aseneth’s prayer mimics the structure and language of an exodus psalm about the plagues.

3.3.2. The Psalms and the Structure of Joseph and Aseneth 12

The structure of the prayers in ch. 12 follows a poetic pattern of praise for God’s creational power, utilizes imagery from the exodus story, and finally calls to mind the motif of inheritance. This pattern is similar to one found in some of the psalms. Psalm 136 exhibits this progression the best. In vv. 4–9, God is praised for his “great wonders,” for making the heavens and spreading out the earth over the waters, and for making the day and the night. It then recalls the exodus in vv. 10–16. The same god divided the Red Sea in two by his hand (vv. 12–13) and led Israel through the midst of it. Then it invokes the idea that God gave Israel the lands of Canaan as an inheritance (vv. 21–22). When Pss 104 and 105 are read together, a similar pattern can be adduced. Psalm 104 offers praise for God’s creation, for setting the earth on its foundations, and covering the deep with waters (vv. 5–6). Midway through, it proclaims of God, “how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” Psalm 105 takes up this language at its beginning: “O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works” (vv. 1–2), and again, “Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered” (v. 5). Praise for God’s creation is associated with praise for his miraculous saving works during the exodus. The rest of this psalm recounts the salvation history of Israel, including the exodus. It ends with a proclamation about the promised land: “So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the Lord!” (vv. 43–45). Psalm 106 continues the association between God’s works and his saving action in the exodus, but inserts the element of heritage or inheritance before it. In v. 5, the psalmist asks God to remember him that he may “glory in your heritage.” But then he gives a negative assessment of Israel’s behavior throughout the exodus and in their conquest of the promised land. The sequence is not the same, but all of the same elements are used.

The pattern that these psalms are exhibiting may be taken from the presentation of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod 14–15. Creational language is used to describe the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod 14:19–22, then the pursuers are destroyed. The song of Moses continues this creational language and includes a poetic recapitulation of what has just been narrated in the previous chapter. The song ends with a declaration about the people: “You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own inheritance” (Exod 15:17 LXX). The psalms that recall the exodus have developed their
own pattern, but the thematic elements for that pattern are all present in the exodus story already.⁵¹

Enns demonstrates that Ps 95 combines creational language with imagery of the exodus in a similar manner. God is a great king and god over other gods (v. 3). He shows mastery over the sea and the dry land (v. 5). The psalm concludes by warning its readers against unfaithfulness by recalling the wandering in the wilderness and the punishment of not entering the “rest” of the promised land. Psalm 95 establishes God as both the creator of the world and the creator of his people. When in v. 6 the psalmist enjoins his readers to “kneel before the Lord, our Maker,” Enns insists that this refers to God’s creation of Israel, similar to Hos 8:13–14: “They will return to Egypt. Israel has forgotten his maker.”⁵²

The threefold sequence of a creational hymn followed by the recollection of the events of the exodus and finished with reference to inheritance finds expression in Aseneth’s prayers in chapter 12. The events of the exodus undergo a cosmological modification, but the connection that the Psalms and other biblical texts make between

---

⁵¹ Kraemer discerns the broader pattern of poetic recapitulation of prose narrative in ch. 13, rather than ch. 12: “In chapter 13, Aseneth recapitulates in hymnic form the prior narrative of her abasement. The juxtaposing of a poetic version of the story with a prose version may itself be an artificial device intended to evoke biblical forms, such as the duplicative telling of the story of Deborah, Barak, Jael, and Sisera in Judg 4–5 or the deliverance of the Israelites and the celebratory songs of Moses and of Miriam in Exod 15. In all three instances, the poetic form follows the prose narrative” (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 58). Humphrey detects the same phenomenon not in chapter 12 or 13 but in the concluding psalm of the romance in 21:11–21. She observes that it is especially evocative of Exod 15 (Ladies and the Cities, 41–42). The fact that our author is familiar with a common biblical convention proves only his knowledge of the scriptures and proficiency in imitating them, but taken together with the exodus imagery in Aseneth’s prayers, I see it as proof that he is concerned to imitate Exod 14–15 in particular.

the crossing of the Red Sea and the \textit{Chaoskampf} myth, in which Yahweh triumphs over both the Sea and the primordial sea monster, make the connection more tenable.

3.3.2.1. “\textit{Lord, God of the Ages}”: Creational Language in Jos. Asen. 12:1–2

Aseneth’s first prayer in ch. 11 ends with her being willing even to be struck down by God in the belief that she will be healed by him again.\textsuperscript{53} The prayer in chapter 12 starts again:

Lord God of the ages,
who created all (things) and gave life (to them),
who gave breath of life to your whole creation,
who made the invisible (things) out into the light,
who made the (things that) are
and the (ones that) have an appearance from the nonappearing and non-being,
who lifted up the heaven
and founded it on a firmament upon the back of the winds,
who founded the earth upon the waters,
who put big stones on the abyss of the water,
and the stones will not be submerged,
but they are like oak leaves (floating) on top of the water,
and they are living stones
and hear your voice, Lord,
and keep your commandments which you have commanded to them,
and never transgress your ordinances,
but are doing your will to the end.
For you, Lord, spoke and they were brought to life,
because your word, Lord, is life for all your creatures. (12:1–2)

\textsuperscript{53} “I will rather take courage and open my mouth to him and invoke his name. And if in fury the Lord strikes me, he himself will again heal me; and if he chastises me with his whips, he himself will look again on me in his mercy; and if he is furious at me in my sins, he will again be reconciled with me and forgive me every sin” (11:18). It is possible that Tob 13 has influenced the language and rhetoric of Jos. Asen. 11:18. Hosea 6:1 says “Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.” But most compelling of all is the almost verbatim quotation of Isa 19:22 LXX (καὶ πατάξει κύριος τούς Αἰγυπτίους πληγὴ μεγάλῃ καὶ ἱάσεται αὐτούς ἱάσει) in Jos. Asen. 11:18: καὶ εἰ θυμῶ κύριος πατάξει με αὐτὸς πάλιν ἱάσεται με. Aptowitzer recognizes a connection to the prophecy in Isa 19:18–25, but he does not comment on the strong resonance between this passage in Joseph and Aseneth and Isa 19:22 in particular (“Asenath,” 298–99). Kraemer suggests that if Aptowitzer is right, chs. 22–29 may be an attempt to elaborate on Isa 19:17, 22 (\textit{When Aseneth Met Joseph}, 48 n. 80).
Aseneth praises the Lord as the one who has “created all things and gave life . . . who brought the invisible into the light.” She praises him as the one who has “founded the earth upon the waters, who put big stones on the abyss of the water” (12:2). The language of coming into the light and the concept of the abyss are also present in the psalms referred to above. But light and the abyss also connect God as Creator with God as Liberator at the Red Sea. The first indication of this is the motif of pursuit and flight.

3.3.2.2. 

Pursuit and Flight (Jos. Asen. 12:7–10)

Aseneth’s prayer continues with much of the stereotyped language of ch. 11. She is afraid to open her mouth to the Lord because of the defilement of her idolatry. She is an orphan, abandoned and alone (12:5). For Aseneth’s bold act of destroying her gods, she is persecuted, or rather pursued (διώκω) by the “wild, ancient lion.”54 The action of the leonine villain in 12:9 parallels the little child’s action that Aseneth identifies herself with in the preceding verse. The little child flees to her father (12:8), but Aseneth is pursued by this “father of the Egyptian gods” (12:9). Subsequent clauses maintain the metaphor of Aseneth’s enemy as predator. She must be rescued from the lion’s mouth, lest she be carried off by him or torn to pieces (12:11). The image of a lion finally pouncing on his prey is at the fore in this part of the prayer, so pursuit is the most natural rendering of

54. Burchard and most others translate διώκω “persecute” in every instance, but there are several reasons that this verb should be translated “pursue.” I have commented elsewhere on a possible identity of the enigmatic “wild, ancient lion.” Christopher Brenna, “The Lion, the Honey, and the New Timnite Woman: Joseph and Aseneth and the Samson Cycle,” JSP 26 (2016): 144–63.
διώκω. This action of fleeing and being pursued also foreshadows pharaoh’s son’s pursuit of Aseneth in the adventure. The pharaoh’s son may even be identified as a villain who is mimicking the actions of his spiritual, even demonic, counterpart, the lion. Pursuit and flight are the driving actions in the drama of the Red Sea crossing. Their expression helps Aseneth’s prayer conform to the pattern of creation-exodus-inheritance from the exodus psalms.

3.3.2.3. Elements of Annihilation (Jos. Asen. 12:11)

Naturally, Aseneth is afraid that if the lion catches her, he will tear her to pieces.

Strangely, however, she is afraid that the lion will do much more than just that:

Lord, rescue me from his hands, and from his mouth deliver me, lest he carry me off like a lion, and tear me up, and throw me into the flame of fire, and the fire will throw me into the whirlwind, and the whirlwind wrap me up in darkness and throw me out into the deep of the sea, and the big sea monster who (exists) since eternity will swallow me, and I will be destroyed for ever and ever. (12:11)

The flame of fire, the whirlwind, the darkness, the deep of the sea and the sea monster are all elements that comprise the mythic retelling of the parting of the Red Sea. These elements are punitive and purgative for the Egyptians, but signs of salvation and victory for Israel.

55. The language of pursuit by an enemy and rescue by the Lord is reminiscent of Ps 7: “O Lord, my God, in you I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me, or like a lion they will tear me apart; they will drag me away, with no one to rescue.”

56. Manuscripts E and W and the L1 versions are missing this portion of Joseph and Aseneth. The d text family has “lest he carry me off like a wolf,” even though it attests “lion” in the previous verse. It has “abyss of fire” for “flame of fire” (Arm: “fiery furnace”) and “whirlwind of the sea” while omitting any mention of darkness (Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 172; Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 160–62).
In Wis 17, the Egyptians as “lawless people” imagine that they hold the Hebrews in captivity, but in the plague of darkness they become “captive of darkness and prisoners of a long night” (Wis 17:2). The emphasis is on a preternatural fear brought on by specters and ghosts, an inescapable darkness that comes from Hades itself (Wis 17:14). Indeed, the darkness is a manifestation for the Egyptians of their “inescapable fate”; they become “exiles from eternal providence” (Wis 17:2, 14), and the darkness is merely “an image of the darkness that was destined to receive them.” The association with darkness and eternal punishment in Hades is made clear. There is “no power of fire able to give light . . . except a dreadful, self-kindled fire, and in terror they deemed the things they saw to be worse than that unseen appearance” (Wis 17:5–6). The darkness the Egyptians experience is a gut-wrenching terror, an exaggeration of their deepest fears, and, most importantly, entirely generated by their wickedness: “The delusions of their magical arts lay humbled, and their boasted wisdom was scornfully rebuked” (Wis 17:7). They are a disillusioned people who have learned that their whole religion has been a farce, one that has created in them a deeper presence of wickedness as darkness than that which can be generated around them (Wis 17:21).

The light, conversely, is a great light for the righteous alone. In contrast to the Egyptians, during the plague of darkness, the “whole world was illumined with a brilliant light and went about its work unhindered” (Wis 17:20). It is a light that shines only for God’s holy ones, a light that can be sensed by the wicked but that is inaccessible. Most importantly, this great light is explicitly associated with the pillar of fire: “Therefore you provided a flaming pillar of fire as a guide for your people’s unknown journey” (Wis 18:3). This, Enns notes, “cements the connection between the punishment of the
Egyptians in the ninth plague and the pillar of fire.” The fire as guiding light for the people of Israel is experienced by the Egyptians as a punishing fire, a prefiguration of their ultimate fate. But there may also be a conflation of the imagery of the plagues with the parting of the Red Sea miracle.

Psalm 76(77) LXX adopts not fire, but lightning and a whirlwind for the same effect in its retelling of the Red Sea events:

The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and were afraid, and the depths (ἄβυσσοι) were troubled, a great roar of waters. The clouds gave a sound, for your bolts were passing through, the sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind (τροχός), your lightning flashes lit up everything, the earth shook and trembled. (Ps 76:17–20 LXX)

The whirlwind that Aseneth fears appears to be part of the plague of darkness as it was believed to have extended into the event of the Red Sea. Unlike the HB, the LXX describes the plague of darkness as γνόφος θύελλα. The first word is simply a synonym for darkness, normally σκότος, whereas the second indicates a kind of storm with a great

57. Enns, Exodus Retold, 66.

58. The plague of hail was accompanied by fire. The Exagoge follows the Exodus account by calling it “hail and fire,” while Artapanus presents it as “hail and earthquakes.” Philo presents it as “rainstorms, a great quantity of heavy hail, violent winds, clashing and roaring against each other, cloudbursts, continuous claps of thunder and flashes of lightning and constant thunderbolts. These last provided a most marvelous spectacle, for they ran through the hail, their natural antagonist, and yet did not melt it nor were quenched by it, but unchanged coursed up and down and kept guard over the hail” (Moses 1.118, quoted in Samuel Cheon, The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation, JSPSup 23 [Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 61).

59. It is a strange use of the word τροχός, which normally means wheel. Psalm 82(83) LXX treats τροχός and καταυμίς as synonyms.

60. Ginzberg cites Philo, Moses 1.21 and a number of rabbinic sources for the plague of darkness (Legends of the Jews, 532) and similar rabbinic sources for the darkness at the Red Sea. The darkness enveloped the Egyptians at the Red Sea, but they could still see the Israelites and attempted to fire darts and arrows at them, which were caught up by the cloud or blocked by the angels. Pirqe R. El. 42 says that Michael made himself “a wall of fire” between Israel and the Egyptians (Legends of the Jews, 555).
deal of wind, such as a hurricane or a wind squall. Psalm 18 is often interpreted in early Judaism as referring to the exodus because it refers to fire, darkness, the whirlwind, and the foundations of the earth laid bare by the Lord (Ps 18:7–15).

Aseneth fears this flame of fire, the whirlwind, and the darkness, but her ultimate demise would be in the depth of the sea, because of the sea monster that will swallow her up. The imagery of the abyss or the deep/depths is the common element in biblical descriptions of (1) the battle of Yahweh against the primordial sea monsters (Rahab or Leviathan) and (2) the parting of the Red Sea. Isa 51:9 reads “Awake as in the days of old, in ages long ago! Was it not you who crushed Rahab, you who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, you who made the depths of the sea into a way for the redeemed to pass through?” Isaiah envisions the eschatological deliverance as a new exodus, a new Red Sea event, and as a new creation.

The same mastery over the sea is paired with the setting of earth on its foundations and covering the abyss with the waters in Ps 104:5–7. Ps 74(75).12–17 LXX says, “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.” It is an aspect of God’s creative power that he is able to suppress the chaos of the sea and characteristic of his victory at the Red Sea.

Aseneth fears being swallowed up by that same primordial chaos and by the sea monster rules the sea. It is the fear of the spiritual death she experienced in her idolatry, but it is expressed in terms that correspond to the miraculous natural elements made

---

61. Philo indicates that there was “the prevailing storm wind” (τῆς κατεχούσης ζάλης) in the plague of darkness (Moses 1.124; Cheon, Exodus Story in Wisdom, 72 n. 4).

evident at the Red Sea: fire, whirlwind, darkness, the sea. She prays to be spared from them as an Egyptian, to be counted as part of the people of Israel who experience the same elements as justice.

### 3.3.2.4. Inheritance Reconfigured (Jos. Asen. 12:15)

In Jos. Asen. 12:14–15, Aseneth returns to the thematic elements of Exod 34:6 first introduced in 11:10. Aseneth’s prayer in ch. 12 ends by recalling the motif of inheritance. Aseneth’s inheritance is reconfigured from the earthly inheritance she possessed as a daughter of Pentephres to a heavenly, spiritual inheritance as a daughter of the Most High: “For behold, all the gifts of my father Pentephres, which he gave me as an inheritance, are transient and obscure; but the gifts of your inheritance, Lord, are incorruptible and eternal” (12:15). In contrast to the produce that Pentephres brought to Aseneth in Jos. Asen. 4:2, Aseneth envisions an eternal inheritance. She has confirmed her disownment and embraced her heavenly father’s inheritance. This shift orients any subsequent mention of inheritance as having an otherworldly quality to it. The field of inheritance, especially the journey to that inheritance in the adventure, is mythic and eschatological rather than mundane.

---

63. Jos. Asen. 11:10: "Have mercy upon me, Lord . . . because you, Lord, are a sweet and good and gentle father. What father is as sweet as you, Lord, and who as quick in mercy as you, Lord, and who as long-suffering toward our sins as you, Lord?"
3.4. Conclusion

The structure that I have been describing (God is praised for his mighty works of creation, the exodus story is recounted, then the inheritance of the promised land is evoked) is present in Aseneth’s prayers. The writer has matched the prayer to this structure so that Aseneth may be associated with Israel. Creation imagery has been mingled with elements from the mythic retelling of the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, and Aseneth’s idolatry has been framed in terms of the smashing of the golden calf and regiving of the Law.

Aseneth discovers on the eighth day of her penitence that God has listened to her prayer and has sent a messenger to give her good news (14:1). The content of that message mirrors the prayer that Joseph prayed in 8:9, and his heavenly counterpart leads Aseneth through a mystical meal of honeycomb. Having smashed her idols as Moses smashed the golden calf, while identifying God as both “jealous and fearsome” and “merciful and long-suffering,” she recalls the moment when Moses asks God for mercy and a second chance. Aseneth is transformed but also confirmed by partaking of the honeycomb. She receives Wisdom and is identified with her heavenly counterpart, Repentance, who has existed eternally. Her fear of being drawn into the wrong side of the drama of the Red Sea crossing is assuaged, but conjured up again and relived in the adventure.
CHAPTER FOUR: “FOOD OF ANGELS”: EXODUS IMAGERY IN THE ROMANCE, PART 2

4.1. Introduction

The tower bedroom scene in Joseph and Aseneth (chs. 14–17) builds on the portrayal of Aseneth as Lady Wisdom. It portrays the heavenly ἄνθρωπος as Joseph’s heavenly analogue by overlaying elements from an eclectic mix of early Jewish angelophanies. Joseph’s prayer from 8:9 is answered by the angelic figure from heaven in 15:12, employing a similar contrast between death and life, darkness and light. The angel’s message and the ritual he performs with Aseneth serve as a way of drawing Aseneth out of the liminal state she inhabited in her prayers. Her participation in a liturgical meal of honeycomb confirms the identity she has possessed eternally through her association with Repentance, transforming her into an acceptable daughter of God and bride for Joseph.

The role of the angel that Aseneth encounters in her bedroom is as Joseph’s heavenly counterpart and as the angel of the Name. After I establish the evidence for this role, I examine the characterization of Aseneth as City of Refuge, which confirms her identity as wandering Israel being led out of Egypt. Aseneth verifies that Joseph’s prayer for her in 8:9 has been answered by echoing its language. When Aseneth partakes of the honeycomb, it is as manna, a symbol of the wandering in the wilderness. This substance symbolically configures Aseneth’s bedroom as that wilderness, as the mountain upon which Moses received the Law and where he and the elders partook of “food of angels,” and as paradisiacal promised land. Aseneth is both partaker of the symbolic attributes connected to the honeycomb (Wisdom/Torah, angelic identity, eternal life) and
representative source of that element for all those who repent as she does. After assessing the multifaceted symbolism of the honeycomb, I conclude this chapter by considering Moses imagery after Aseneth’s transformation.

4.2. The Identity of the Angel (Jos. Asen. 14:1–11)

After Aseneth confesses her sin, she realizes that it is morning of the eighth day. She sees the morning star rise out of heaven in the east. When she sees it, she realizes that the Lord God has answered her prayer, since it is “a messenger and a herald of the light of the great day.” Near to the morning star, a rift in heaven opens and unutterable light appears. A man (ἄνθρωπος) comes down from heaven and stands by Aseneth’s head. He identifies himself as the “chief of the house of the Lord and the commander of the whole host of the Most High” (Jos. Asen. 14:8). His appearance is “in every respect similar to Joseph, by the robe and the crown and the royal staff.” The rest of the description of his appearance is typical of a Jewish angelophany: face like lightning, eyes like sunshine, hair like flames of fire, and hands and feet like iron in a fire. Aseneth falls to the ground trembling, but the angel responds with a traditional exhortation: “Courage, and do not be afraid” (14:11).

The depiction of the angel who greets Aseneth follows many of the early Jewish and Christian conventions for angelic-human encounters. There are two aspects of his identity that are relevant to my discussion of exodus imagery: (1) he is the heavenly counterpart of Joseph; and (2) he is depicted as the angel of the Name, who leads the

1. θάρσει... καὶ φοβηθής. See 4 Ezra 6:33; LAB 6:9, 20:5; esp. Mark 6:50. Exod 14:13 LXX: θαρσείτε στήτε καὶ ὁράτε; see also Exod 20:20 LXX.
people of Israel out of Egypt. I compare the relationship between Joseph and his angelic double to the apocalyptic convention of simultaneously identifying and distinguishing a human seer from his angelic mirror. This comparison helps support the claim I make about Joseph’s role in the adventure (Chapter Five), but also implies a connection with the angels of the presence in apocalyptic visions.

4.2.1. Heavenly Counterpart of Joseph

The simultaneous distinction and identification of an earthly man and his heavenly double fits into a larger pattern in visionary-mystical traditions. The earthly seer beholds the divine presence of God and also beholds “a secondary divine figure who bears the name of God and embodies the divine Glory.” The seer is transformed “into an angelic being and enthroned as vice-regent, thereby becoming identified with the angel of the Name, who either is or is closely associated with the kavod itself and who functions as a second, intermediary power in heaven.”2 The similarity of the portrayal of Joseph and the angelic figure to this pattern in apocalyptic literature invites us to identify the angel in chs. 14–17 with the angel of the Name.

The angelic appearance of Joseph the man relates him more closely with the angelic figure, just as the anthropic characteristics of the man from heaven help bring his identity more in line with Joseph. As Brooke observes, this does not “humanize the angel, since the ensuing portrait hardly permits that, so much as confirm the angelic character of

---

Joseph.” In Jos. Asen. 14:3, Aseneth has her head to the ground, so she does not initially see the one who visits her, but when she finally looks up, she sees a “man in every respect similar to Joseph, in the robe, and the crown and the royal staff.” The resemblance is one of position and authority, not necessarily of physical resemblance, especially since the narrative subsequently adopts the exalted language used in other common angelophanies. The term ἄνθρωπος does not suggest that he is any less of an angel than, for example, the “man clothed in linen” in Dan 10.

The complementary descriptions of Joseph and the angelic figure encourage us to associate them, but the narrative also differentiates the two characters. There exist numerous examples of this same paradoxical identification and differentiation between a sage and his celestial counterpart in early Jewish apocalypses. Several scholars suggest that this is the relationship between the Son of Man figure and Enoch in 1 Enoch. Andrei A. Orlov notes a similar relationship in 2 En. 39:3–6:

---


4. Burchard suggests the analogy of rank in OTP 2.225 n. p. The one detail that suggests physical resemblance is this: as Joseph appears like “the sun from heaven” in Jos. Asen. 6:2, so the heavenly man is described as having “eyes like sunshine” (14:9).

5. Michalak, Angels as Warriors, 112–13. He is also called ἄνηρ. Ezek 8:2 LXX describes the angel there as “like a man (ἄνηρ)” (Humphrey, Joseph and Aseneth, 96).

6. The expansions that include the differentiation between Joseph and the angel, in which Joseph says he has spoken with the angel, are only present in some manuscripts, but the pledge from the angel that he will communicate with Joseph in 15:9 is present in almost all the Greek manuscripts and the versions.

Enoch’s description reveals a contrast between the two identities of the visionary: the earthly Enoch (“a human being created just like yourselves”) and his heavenly counterpart (“the one who has seen the Face of God”). Enoch describes himself in two different modes of existence: as a human being who now stands before his children with a human face and body and as a celestial creature who has seen God’s Face in the heavenly realm. These descriptions of two conditions (earthly and celestial) occur repeatedly in tandem.  

Second Enoch depicts the simultaneous existence of Enoch in human form and his celestial double, from whom he can be distinguished, but into whose angelic form he is transformed. In T. Ps.-J., the angels can behold Jacob both in the image inscribed into the throne and as sleeping on earth below. Orlov contends that the Exagoge fits into this same paradigm when it depicts Moses taking the seat of the angel on the celestial throne. Moses is granted his counterpart’s crown and scepter and told to sit down on the throne in his place (Ezek. Trag. 67–90). The visionary thus speaks to his mirror as another subject. The sage may even be entirely ignorant of his angelic double’s existence, as in the Prayer of Joseph. Both Aseneth and Joseph appear to have a similar relationship to their respective angels in 15:5–8. Aseneth’s connection to Repentance is declared, and Joseph’s angelic analogue behaves just as the angel Israel does for Jacob in the Prayer of Joseph:

---


9. Ibid., 158. In Tg. Ps.-J. to Gen 28:12: “He [Jacob] had a dream, and behold, a ladder was fixed in the earth with its top reaching toward the heavens . . . and on that day they (angels) ascended to the heavens on high, and said, Come and see Jacob the pious, whose image is fixed (engraved) in the Throne of Glory, and whom you have desired to see” (Maher, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, 99–100, quoted by Orlov (“Moses’ Heavenly Counterpart,” 155)).

I, Jacob, who is speaking to you, am also Israel, an angel of God and a ruling spirit. Abraham and Isaac were created before any work. But, I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel, am he who God called Israel, which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life. (Pr. Jos. 1–3, frag. A)¹¹

Philonenko notes that the description of Jacob in Jos. Asen. 22:6–10, especially in the longer text, is reminiscent of the Prayer of Joseph.¹² However, it is the comparison of the character of Joseph with the depiction of Jacob in the Prayer that helps establish his association with the angelic figure. The Prayer proclaims that Jacob is “firstborn of every living thing.” Joseph is often referred to as “firstborn son of God” (Jos. Asen. 18:11; 21:4, 20; 23:10). Jacob wrestles with Uriel over the status of his name and rank in heaven and claims the titles “archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God.” In a reading of Jos. Asen. 15:12 preserved in the c text family and the Armenian version, Aseneth asks the man from heaven what his name is. He replies, “My name is in the heavens in the book of the Most High, written by the finger of God in the beginning of the book before all (the others), because I am the chief of the house of the Most High” (Jos. Asen. 15:12x).¹³ The same sort of assertion of rank and pairing with the status of ἄρχων is made in both texts, and the place of the angel’s name in the divine book creates a link to Joseph’s identity as “firstborn son of God.”

¹¹ OTP 2.713. Priebatsch proposes that Joseph and Aseneth is imitating the Prayer of Joseph, (Josephsgeschichte, 11), though there is so little extant of the latter that there is not much to imitate.

¹² Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 39. Kraemer suggests that “the angelic portrait of Jacob common to the Prayer of Joseph and to the longer recension of [Joseph and Aseneth] could easily have come from a common source” (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 235).

¹³ The c text family gives this reading, but “I am the chief of the house of the Most High” is a reading constructed by Burchard. Armenian, ms F, c text family, and mss L1 L2 432 (equiv. Latin) have ὅτι ἐγὼ ἄρχων εἰμὶ τοῦ οίκου τοῦ υψίστου. Armenian omits the equivalent of τοῦ οίκου. Latin ms 431 has dei for υψίστου. Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 198.
The angel who is the mirror of the glorified seer is often depicted as the angel of the Name. Joseph and Aseneth establishes Joseph and the angelic figure as counterparts, but also confirms that Joseph’s angelic mirror is indeed the angel of the Name. This portrayal serves as part of the larger pattern of exodus imagery in the narrative.

4.2.2. Angel of the Name

Beginning with Battifol, scholars attempted to identify the angel in Joseph and Aseneth with a named angel: Michael. But after decades of a consensus, Bohak criticized the ascription of any name to the angel, especially Michael, as an “imprudent interpretive move.” We must, he tells us, let angels “have things their way, and keep their name secret.

---

14. Battifol identified the angel as the archangel Michael, and few dissented from this position for many decades (“Le livre,” 32–34). Even though the warrior angel in Joseph and Aseneth refuses to utter his own name, since it is too wonderful (15:11–12), many scholars followed suit in this ascription (Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 239–306; Kilpatrick, “Living Issues,” 5; Jeremias, “Last Supper,” 91; Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 178; Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature, 259; Doran, “Narrative Literature,” 292; Dschulnigg, “Überlegungen zum Hintergrund der Mahlformel in Joseph und Aseneth: ein Versuch,” ZNW 80 [1989]: 273). Some scholars seem to disregard the issue of identification: Burchard refers to the angel as the “prince of angels” and rarely comments on his identity, though he does note that “Michael holds the post in heaven that Joseph holds in Egypt: second only to the supreme ruler” (Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.225 n. p). Chesnutt refers to him as the “chief angel” without commenting much on his identity (From Death to Life, 6; idem, “Perceptions of Oil in Early Judaism and the Meal Formula in Joseph and Aseneth,” JSP 14 [2005]: 118). Ahearne-Kroll maintains that the similarities between Jos. Asen. 14:9 and Dan 10:5–6 LXX are far too compelling to be ignored, as both describe an angel with a face like lightning, eyes like flame or sunshine and limbs like glowing metal (“Portrayal of Aseneth,” 47). On this possibility, see also Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.225 n. q; Delling, “Einwirkungen,” 48; Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 33–35; Standhartinger, “From Fictional Text to Socio-Historical Context: Some Considerations from a Text-Critical Perspective on Joseph and Aseneth,” in Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers, SBLSP 35 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1996), 306–7. It is compelling that the context for the stories of Joseph and Daniel are similar: both have to use wisdom to survive in a foreign land. Aseneth is expected to match Joseph in wisdom and so is portrayed as having a similar angelic encounter. But, the Danielic angelophany is not so distinct as to create a definitive parallel. Bohak assesses the description of the angelic being in Joseph and Aseneth as “run-of-the-mill” and cites other texts with similar descriptions in addition to Dan 10:6 (Apoc. Zeph. 7:11–12, Apoc. Abr. 11:2–3, 2 En. 1:4–5; Rev 2:18 [Jewish Temple, 3]).
if they so wish.” This is a helpful distinction to make, but it is leaves us without an answer to the question of identification. In addition, the angel has not told us that his name is a secret; it is only that he has a name too wonderful to utter. There are two questions, one of identification, one of role, that the portrayal of the angel provokes: (1) Which angel in early Jewish literature cannot utter his name? and (2) Why does the angel in Joseph and Aseneth invoke his rank as commander of the angelic host?

The literature of Israel, the Second Temple period, early Christianity, Gnosticism, and the Samaritans attests a tradition in which the Name of God is hypostatized. In merkabah mysticism, the “Great Glory” or the “Power” is enthroned in heaven. This representation in hekhalot literature is a development of scriptural accounts of the enthroned deity (Dan 7, Isa 6, Ezek 1). For example, in Ezek 1:28, the figure on the throne is called “the Glory of the Lord.” But it is also carried into pseudepigraphal literature, such as T. Levi 2:4 (“In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies”) and 1 En. 14:20 (“And the Great Glory was sitting upon it [the Throne]”). In many of these early sources, the Glory and the Power are equated with the Name of God. This conforms to a broader pattern of the divine name standing both in parallelism to the Tetragrammaton (e.g., Ps. 20:1: “YHWH hear you in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend you”) and as an independent subject.

15. Bohak, Jewish Temple, 6.

16. See also Mart. Ascen. Isa. 11:32, where Christ sits at the right hand of the “Great Glory”, Mark 14:62 (“You shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power”) and parallels (Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 2–3).

17. The Name is to be praised or exalted (Ps. 54:6; 148:13). The Name of the Lord is a strong tower (Prov. 18:10), and the Name will become great and receive offerings from the gentiles (Mal. 1:11). Fossum, The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism, WUNT 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 85–86.
The Name of God is said to create and sustain the world, which complements his redemptive role in Israel’s history. In Jub. 36:7, there is no greater oath to make than “by the glorious and honored and great and splendid and amazing and mighty name which created heaven and earth and everything together.” A similar idea is found in early Christian literature, that “the Name of the Son of God is great and infinite and sustains the whole world” (Herm. Sim. 9.14.5). A similar attribute is given to the Power of God, that it fills every place and created and sustains the world (Let. Aris. 132, 157). Philo says something similar of the Logos having made the whole universe, which depends on and clings to him (Dreams 1.157). The equation of the Glory, Power, Word, and Name of God is widely attested in numerous and varied sources, many of which hypostatize these divine attributes and ascribe to them demiurgic/cosmogonic qualities. The combination of a part in the creation and maintenance of the world along with a role in protecting and guiding Israel through the exodus is characteristic of personified Wisdom, but is also given to these other angelomorphized attributes, including the Name.

The Name comes as a destroying warrior in Isa 30:27, burning with anger, his tongue like a devouring flame. The Word of God has a similar role in Wis 18:15: “Your

18. Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 4–5. Justin Martyr explicitly makes this connection: “God has begotten of Himself a certain rational Power as a Beginning before all other creatures. The Holy Spirit indicates this Power by various titles, sometimes the Glory of the Lord, at other times the Son, or Wisdom, or Angel, or God, or Lord, or Word” (Dial. 61.1, quoted in idem, 5). Kraemer examines the affinities between the angel in Joseph and Aseneth and Metatron in hekhalot literature. Metatron is the “angels of the Lord” and the “prince of the presence,” but he is also the “celestial transformation of the human patriarch Enoch” (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 125). As the heavenly vice-regent of God, Metatron conducts the heavenly liturgy and sits on the throne of the Glory of God and wears a glorious robe. He is the agent of God in creation, the intermediary and guide between God and man, and the ruler and judge of the world (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 120–27).

19. The role of the Name in the creation of the world is developed to a great extent in merkabah mysticism and Samaritan traditions (Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 5; Fossum, Name of God, 87–94).
all-powerful Word leapt from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land
that was doomed [i.e., Egypt], a stern warrior.” These two passages evoke the Destroyer
in Exodus, who killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Most importantly, the angel
of the Lord is the bearer of the Name in Exod 23:20, in which God sends the angel to
guard and guide Israel on its way. God cautions: “Be attentive to him and listen to his
voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is
in him” (Exod 23:21). The Power and the Name are connected in the Psalms: “God, help
me by your name and save my by your power” (Ps. 54:3). In Deut. 4:37, God has brought
his people out of Egypt “by his face and and by his great power.” The role of the angel of
the Lord in the exodus is linked to the Name explicitly in Exod 23:20–21 and developed
in early tradition.

In Jos. Asen. 15:12x (longer text only), after the angel has revealed Aseneth’s
relationship to her own heavenly counterpart, Aseneth responds with a blessing. I
comment in more detail regarding the repetition of darkness/abyss as exodus motifs in
this blessing below. Here I am contending that Aseneth in her blessing identifies the
figure as the angel of the Name. The shorter text of 15:12 reads: “Blessed is the Lord, the
one who sent you to deliver me from the darkness and to lead me up into the light, and
blessed is his name forever.” However, the longer text, which establishes an association
between this figure and the angel of the Name, reads as follows: “Blessed be the Lord

20. First Chronicles 21:16 gives this martial role to the angel of the Lord (Fossum, Name of God,
86).

21. Reading of B and D mss. Slav omits. L1 441 share the reading “his name” with BD (Burchard,
Joseph und Aseneth, 197). This is the only place where the Name of God is mentioned in the shorter text,
though in the longer text it is mentioned in Aseneth’s prayers (11:15, 17–18; 12:7, 11).
your God the Most High, who sent you out to rescue me from the darkness and to bring me up from the foundations of the abyss, and blessed be your name forever.” Although the self-presentation of the angel in the shorter text is one of sharp distinction from God, in the longer text, this distinction is not maintained. The angel characterizes the content of his revelation as “what I have to say” (14:8, 11, 13). It is not God but the angel himself who has heard Aseneth’s confession. He is the one who gives her as a bride to Joseph (15:3, 6). In his description of Repentance, he speaks of God in the third person but also draws an analogy between himself and God. The capacity of viceregency, to speak on behalf of the ruler by speaking as him, is characteristic of the angel of the Name, though the role is not exclusive to this figure. It is also his refusal to speak his name and his role as commander of the angelic host that indicate his identity as angel of the Name.

It is within the context of Aseneth’s blessing that she also asks the angel his name. In the longer text, Aseneth asks, “What is your name Lord? Tell me, in order that I may praise and glorify you for ever and ever.” The angelic figure refuses to tell Aseneth his name; it is written in the “book of the Most High, written by the finger of God in the beginning of the book before all” (15:12x). When the angelic figure disappears in a fiery chariot into heaven, the longer text adds that the chariot is “like a flame of fire, and the horses like lightning.” As she watches the chariot ascend, Aseneth exclaims, “Foolish and bold am I, because I have spoken with audacity and said that a man came into my


23. Heavenly seers who sit down on the throne of their heavenly counterparts assume a position of viceregent in apocalyptic traditions (Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 13). Kraemer contends that the longer text promotes the angelic figure to the position of “divine co-regent” (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 125–26).
chamber from heaven; and I did not know that god (θεός) came to me” (17:9–10). Here there are a number of similarities to the appearance of the angel of the Lord in Judg 13: (1) the angel’s name is obfuscated (Judg 13:6, 17–18; Jos. Asen. 15:12x); (2) food is offered to the angel (Judg 13:15–16; Jos. Asen. 15:14); (3) prostration at the ascent of the angel is accompanied by awe at having seen a divine manifestation and lived (Judg 13:22: “We shall surely die, for we have seen God and lived”; Jos. Asen. 17:10: “I did not know that god came to me”). These similar circumstances and key words strengthen the idea that Aseneth has encountered the angel of the Lord, who bears the divine name.

When I describe the typological features of the adventure in Chapter Five, I speak in more detail about the importance of the title “commander of the whole host of the Most High” for the angelic figure in Jos. Asen. 14:7. I contend that the angel invokes his title because he does battle on Aseneth’s behalf as the angel of the Lord. Some scholars have recognized the title of “commander of the whole host of the Most High” as suggestive of the angel of the Lord, especially as he appears in Josh 5:13–15. Joshua is scouting near Jericho and encounters a man who reveals himself as the “commander of the army of the Lord.” Joshua falls to the earth and worships him, and the man commands him to take his sandals off, since he standing on holy ground. Aleksander R. Michalak

24. Only E FW G (Arm) L1 c 4358 436 671 have this question. a and d text families omit (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 197). Kraemer notes that the ascent of the angel on a chariot here may be a reference to the merkabah and to the imagery of heavenly ascent and divine chariots that is common to what she calls the “literary iconography of the Name-Bearing Angel” (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 123). Kee had suggested as much years earlier when he said that the quadriga that Joseph pilots at the beginning of the novel and the vehicle the angelic figure departs in are both allusions to the merkabah (“The Socio-Cultural Setting of Joseph and Aseneth,” NTS 29 [1983]: 407–408).


26. For Delling, who introduced this connection, the allusion is ultimately still to Michael, as a way of showing that Aseneth is included in the people of Israel (“Einwirkungen,” 48). In his 1984 article (“Die Kunst des Gestaltens in ‘Joseph und Aseneth,’” NovT 26 [1984]: 1–42), Delling refers to the figure as
proposes that originally in Josh 5:13–15 there would have been a message to Joshua, presumably about the outcome of the coming conquest of Jericho. “Josh 5:13–15 leads one to the conclusion that Yahweh’s heavenly armies, led by their commander, would assist those of Israel.”  

The appearance of an angelic warrior on the eve of a successful military engagement (Josh 5:13–15) or right before a battle is joined (Exod 14:19) serves to indicate that the Lord’s army will fight a celestial battle in concert with the earthly one and that the success of the celestial warriors will constitute the victory achieved by Israel. Already, before the interpretations at Qumran of the divine warrior traditions, there was fodder for understanding a battle being waged in the celestial realm on behalf of Israel, and both the angel of the Lord and Michael, in different ways, were filling that role.  

A particular kind of imagery, of darkness and the abyss, and a coming out into the light, combines with a reference to the angel’s name in 15:12x. In the longer text, the angel has filled the role of vice-regent. Aseneth blesses his name, but when she asks him to reveal it, he refuses to speak it, since it is wonderful. His martial role, undeveloped in the tower bedroom scene of the romance, is expanded in the adventure, where a heavenly battle accompanies the earthly struggle of Aseneth against the forces of the pharaoh’s son. The angel is not Michael, nor Gabriel, nor Melchizedek, nor Metatron, nor any other named figure who performs the same activities. He is the angel of the Lord, the possessor of the divine name, the one who leads Israel out of Egypt.

---

Michael throughout. Braginskaya notes the same connection, but characterizes it as the mark of “the beginning of a new life in one’s own land for the adepts of a new religion” (“Case of the ‘First Novel,’ ” 86).

27. Michalak, Angels as Warriors, 43.

4.3. City of Refuge/Repentance: Forming the New Israel (Jos. Asen. 15:5–8)

Aseneth clothes herself in a new linen robe and returns to face the angelic figure, who confirms Aseneth’s new role. Her name is indelibly written in the book of the living (Jos. Asen. 15:4). He echoes the words of Joseph’s prayer in 8:9, this time not as a prayer but as validation of her position. She is given a new name: City of Refuge. The city is a refuge for “many peoples,” especially for those who “seek shelter with the Most High in the name of Repentance.” The manner of entrance into the city is what characterizes it as a destination. One finds refuge in the city by means of repentance.

Anathea Portier-Young notes that Deut 32:10–13 LXX and Jos. Asen. 15:7 use similar language and imagery to describe Israel and Aseneth as City of Refuge, respectively. Just as the Lord supplies Israel with what he needs in the wilderness, encircles him (ἐκύκλωσεν) and guards him carefully (διεφύλαξεν) like the apple of an eye (see Jos. Asen. 26:2), and shelters him like an eagle (σκεπάσαι) spreading its wings (τὰς πτέρυγας αὐτοῦ), so Aseneth’s identity as City of Refuge includes sheltering under her wings many people and carefully guarding them (15:7). The benefits that the Lord provides for Israel in the wilderness are given as a commission to Aseneth, “to guard and shelter, on God’s behalf, those who repent and devote themselves to God in the midst of the land of Egypt, a different kind of wilderness.”29 Aseneth’s ability to guard those on the way through the wilderness is reminiscent of the angel in the pillar of cloud and fire, who is protection for the Israelites in their encounter with the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Philo says that the guiding cloud served as safe protection for the Israelites, and T. Ps.-J.

---

to 14:19 says that the cloud protected them by receiving and intercepting the arrows and stones of the Egyptians.\textsuperscript{30} But, Aseneth is a city of refuge and not just a guide and protector along the way. This evokes the vision of the eschatological city, but also the journey to it.

Mittmann-Richert insists that City of Refuge be seen not as a mere metonym, but as a real indicator of Aseneth’s exemplary role.\textsuperscript{31} The life she is granted is eternal, and the emphasis on eternity in Joseph and Aseneth highlights the eschatological importance of Aseneth’s role. It associates her with the image of the heavenly Jerusalem in much the same way as the figure of Wisdom. Wisdom’s role in early Jewish literature transcends the merely creational and demiurgic to include the theophanic: the self-revelation of God to his people. So, Aseneth is not just receiving a symbolic name; City of Refuge delineates Aseneth’s heavenly purpose as the protector and shelter of those who seek repentance.\textsuperscript{32}

The membership of the city, the mark of citizenship for all of its members, is repentance, regardless of how any group within is described. When the angelic figure says that “behind your walls will be guarded those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance,” he does not specify that such people are proselytes. The language is reminiscent of Zech 2:15 LXX and Jer 27(50).5 LXX, both of

\textsuperscript{30} T. Ps.-J. and T. Neof. take the root qarav in Exod 14:20 not to mean “to come near,” but “to wage war.” Thus, they both interpret the two camps as having been kept apart from each other by the cloud. In other words, instead of one army not “coming near” the other all night, the armies did not “wage war” with each other all night (Enns, Exodus Retold, 59).

\textsuperscript{31} Burchard claims that City of Refuge is mere metonymy (Introduction to “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.189–90).

\textsuperscript{32} Mittmann-Richert, “Joseph und Aseneth,” 244–49.
which speak of the people of Israel, not proselytes, who will take refuge in Zion. The
citizens of the city are “the chosen ones” (17:6) and “sons of the living God” (19:8) as
well as the “many nations” and “many peoples” (15:7). So, while distinctions are
evisioned amongst the citizens of the city once they have been welcomed through its
gates, there is every indication that there is only one way by which to pass through them.
That even those chosen by position or birth may still stand in need of repentance is made
evident in the actions of Dan, Gad, Naphtali and Asher in the adventure story, and
perhaps in the symbolic action of the bees in ch. 16. If repentance is the way to be
included in the people of God, or at least, the path for people like Aseneth, then
Aseneth’s identity as City of Refuge must be described accordingly. She is not “das Zion
der Proselyten”; she does not simply represent converts prototypically. She represents
assembled Israel as the eschatological Jerusalem and the guardian of the whole people of
God on their journey to that city, especially those who have strayed from God.33

4.4. “Who brought me out of darkness” (Jos. Asen. 15:12)

Aseneth’s response to the angelic figure and his good news specify his identity, not just
as the angel of the Lord recognized throughout Israel’s history, but as the one who leads
the people of Israel out of Egypt. Her response serves not only as confirmation that
Joseph’s prayer for her in 8:9 has been answered, but that she has been counted as part of
the people of Israel on the journey of the exodus.

33. Bohak, Jewish Temple, 77–78.
Aseneth rejoices and says, “Blessed is the Lord (your) God, who sent you to rescue me out of darkness and lead me up from the foundations of the abyss/into the light” (15:12). Nearly every manuscript attests the reading “to rescue me out of darkness,” though one modern Greek manuscript (671) and the L1 manuscripts have “liberate me” for “rescue me.” Most manuscripts that have this context use a verb for “lead up” (ἀνάγω/ἀγω), though Latin ms 436 uses educeres me. The tradition is divided about where Aseneth is being led (up) from. Almost every manuscript includes some version of the phrase “from the foundations of the abyss.” Manuscripts B and D omit this phrase entirely, and read “rescue me from darkness and lead me up into the light.” Manuscripts A and P retain both readings: “lead me up from the foundations of the abyss into the light.” It seems likely that the phrase “into the light” was added by an ancestor of the a and d text families to create a resonance with v. 8:9 and to maintain the pairing of darkness and light. Regardless, both “from the foundations of the abyss” and “into the light” as variants are alluding to the same exodus motif.

The parting of the Red Sea is portrayed in early Jewish interpretation as the exposure of the abyss and/or as coming into the light. The use of the concept of abyss in particular creates a valence between creation and exodus. According to Enns, there must have been some connection early on between the waters of creation and the crossing of the Red Sea: “as God gathered the waters together and dry land appeared in Gen. 1:9,

34. ἐλευθέρωσέν με 671; liberavit me L1 (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 197). Reading “liberate me” instead of “rescue me” may strengthen O’Neill’s proposal that the angelic figure resembles Melchizedek (“What Is Joseph and Aseneth About?” 197).

35. ἀναγαγέν με G (Arm) B D; καὶ ἀναγενέμε εἰς c; καὶ ἀναλαβέν με F W; et educeres me 436; et subtraxit me L1; καὶ ἀνέβασέν με 671 (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 197). Educere is the verb that the Vulgate uses to translate ἐξάγειν, bringing the reading even more in line with the argument that Sänger makes, which I examine below (“Bekehrung und Exodus,” 27–28).
God separated the waters of the Red Sea to reveal the dry land so that the Israelites could walk through.\(^{36}\) 

\(άβυσσος\) as a Septuagintal word is used of little else than the creation and the crossing of the Red Sea. Psalm 105:9 LXX says that the Lord “rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up, and he led them through the abyss as through a desert.” In Isa 51:10, it says, “Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great abyss, who made a road in the depth of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?”\(^{37}\) The Red Sea according to Wis 10:19b was a “bottomless abyss,” and LAB 10:5 says that when God parted the Red Sea, the “depths of the earth were visible, and the foundations of the world were laid bare.” The return to the motif of darkness and light and/or the addition of the concept of the abyss conditions the prayer of Joseph in 8:9 and the characterization of the Most High in Aseneth’s prayers as the one who founded the earth upon the abyss (12:2). The passage from darkness to life is not a generic description of spiritual transformation; Aseneth is being led out of darkness, through and up out of the abyss.

Sänger maintains that Aseneth’s prayers bear a resemblance to the psalms of praise, in which God is praised as being the creator. These psalms often refer to the exodus or make use of exodus motifs. In Jos. Asen. 12:2, the Lord is “the one who created all things and who gave life to them,” and he is the one “who leads the invisible things out into the light” (ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν τὰ ἀόρατα εἰς τὸ φῶς).\(^{38}\) This is not necessarily a

---


37. See also Isa 63:12–13.

38. Mss KJ AP; EFW G L1 extraxisti; BD Slav have ἐξενέγκας or ἐνέγκας, “to carry out or bear out.” Several mss have ὀρατά (d:D; c:H; a:Q; b:FWG), which is clearly defective given the subsequent clauses. In Fink’s *stemma*, one might suspect a corruption in ancestor η from ἀόρατα to ὀρατά, which was corrected by some later copyists (Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 155; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 166; Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 17).
significant turn of phrase, but it seems strange to apply the word ἐξαγαγόν to the act of creation, especially when God is ὁ ἐξαγαγόν in constant reference to leading the people out of Egypt.39 The specific phrase does not appear in any of the psalms of praise that Sänger refers to, so it would be insignificant if it were not for the use of ἀνάγειν in Jos. Asen. 15:12.40 Sänger points out that this word or its equivalent ἐξάγειν is used often in the LXX to refer to the exodus, and that it is being applied to Aseneth’s own transformation.41

The exodus motif, according to Sänger, is being updated to apply to the spiritual transformation of a prototypical convert.42 When Aseneth refers to God as the “one who leads invisible things out into the light” and blesses that God as the one who has rescued her and led her up from the foundations of the abyss and into the light (15:12), she is evoking the language of an exodus motif. Sänger calls this “a spiritualization of exodus motifs,” a historic event being subjectively interpreted for the inner self.43 I have


41. Lev 11:45; Ps 80:10 LXX; Num 16:13; Amos 2:10; Mic 6:4. It is εἰσάγειν in 2 Esd 19:23 LXX and διάγειν in Ps 135:14, 16 LXX (Sänger, “Bekehrung und Exodus,” 27). Chesnutt rejects Sänger’s argument about the exodus motif in Jos. Asen. 12 as overly technical, placing too much emphasis on the significance of εἰσάγειν and failing to recognize the emphasis on creational language. He contends that the creational language is merely presented as a metaphor for the act of conversion and should be taken as such (From Death to Life, 147 n. 62). He exposes the monotonic quality of Sänger’s argument, that he did not adduce other evidence to back up this parallel. Inasmuch as there is more at work in this passage, Sänger’s argument may be rehabilitated.

42. He cites Philo’s Abraham 70: Philo says that Abraham, when he was called by God out of the land of the Chaldeans, was a man who began to perceive with the eye of his soul a pure ray of light instead of profound darkness. Sänger cites this as an instance in which the imagery of coming out of darkness into light is applied simultaneously to a conversion experience and in the context of exodus imagery (Sänger, “Bekehrung und Exodus,” 27–28).

43. Ibid., 28.
maintained that Aseneth is not merely a prototypical convert, but a representation of wandering Israel being restored. The crossing of the Red Sea is not just the liberation of a people whom God has chosen, though it is most certainly that. It is the remolding and reforming of a people by a God they have not known but who has made himself known in a miraculous, creational event.

The concept of rescue or (in some examples of the tradition, liberation) is linked to the imagery of darkness (and light) and/or the abyss. Aseneth says, “Blessed be the Lord your God the Most High, who sent you out to rescue me from the darkness” (15:12). Besides echoing the multiple times she asks to be rescued from danger in her prayers (in which Red Sea imagery is also being employed), Aseneth has also recalled the imagery from Joseph’s prayer for her in 8:9. When Aseneth comes out of darkness into the light, it is not merely the creational light breaking into primordial darkness. There is no need to be rescued from that darkness; there is no motif of rescue or liberation in the creation account. Aseneth is being rescued from the darkness, and, according to the language of her prayers, from something pursuing her in the darkness. Joseph’s prayer is an adjuration to his own heavenly counterpart to accomplish Aseneth’s journey from darkness to light as an act of rescue or liberation.

What is the nature of the darkness Aseneth is being drawn from and what does it say about her identity? The early Jewish tradition attested by the paschal haggadah and by Melito of Sardis identifies the people of Israel as the ones who have come out of the darkness into great light. Aseneth is coming out of the darkness as Israel did, but she is undeniably pagan, a priestess who has worn the symbols of her gods on her sleeves, who has sacrificed to countless idols of gold and silver. She is an Egyptian. Conceived in the
drama of the exodus, she is doomed, and as an Egyptian the darkness means something very different. It is the penultimate plague, the harbinger of the death of the firstborn, a darkness that can be felt. The rescue of Aseneth from darkness is simultaneously an illustration of wandering Israel being created/recreated at the Red Sea and the depiction of a convert being identified as something she did not appear to be at the start of the story: a member of the family of God.

**4.5. The Honeycomb**

After he has renamed Aseneth and confirmed that she will be a bride for Joseph, it appears that the angel has completed his mission and will soon depart. Aseneth speaks up and asks that she be allowed to set a table for him and serve him some bread (15:14). He agrees to this, but asks her to bring him a honeycomb. Aseneth is distressed because she does not have honeycomb in her bedroom’s food supply. Her immediate reaction, her understanding of what the honeycomb is, and the description of the honeycomb are all important for understanding the angel’s identity (and by proxy Joseph’s identity) and for understanding Aseneth’s identity, especially as it is reconfigured by partaking of the honeycomb.

**4.5.1. Inheritance and the Storeroom (Jos. Asen. 16:9)**

Before examining the symbolism of the honeycomb itself, I address the manner in which it materializes in Aseneth’s storeroom. When the angel requests a honeycomb, Aseneth replies, “I will send a young slave to the suburb, because the field of our/my inheritance
is close.”44 The first detail to note is the location of Aseneth’s field of inheritance: it is so close that a young child can walk to it.45 When Aseneth travels to the field of inheritance in the adventure (26:1–2), she travels in a carriage guarded by hundreds of soldiers, presumably because the trip involves the danger of traveling a long distance. She encounters a dried up riverbed on her adventure (24:19–20; 26:5), a feature that still does not apparently bring her to the field of inheritance. Aseneth is traveling to a different inheritance in the adventure than her parents are traveling to in the romance, and the location of the field of inheritance in 16:9 indicates that the real inheritance for Aseneth has shifted already.

The angel reinforces this shift by rejecting Aseneth’s offer to retrieve a honeycomb from the field of inheritance, instead instructing her to go to her inner chamber and retrieve the honeycomb from there. She is surprised to find a honeycomb there, but wonders if this honeycomb has mystically been produced from the man’s mouth, since it smells like the breath of his mouth (16:9). Her suspicion is confirmed: the honeycomb has a heavenly origin, specifically from the breath of the man himself. In Aseneth’s “storeroom” or “treasury” there would presumably be placed the produce and “good things” that she had received from her parents, the production of her earthly field of inheritance. Instead, Aseneth finds the produce of a new inheritance, one that comes directly from the mouth of the Lord’s angel. This is a way of augmenting the contrast

44. “our inheritance” F W Arm; “my inheritance” c a BD(Slav); E omits; G Q missing context; Syriac lost (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 203).

45. Some manuscripts lack the detail of Aseneth sending a young slave to fetch the honeycomb and instead depict Aseneth as the one who will retrieve it. But it makes little sense that Aseneth would volunteer after eighteen years of solitude to leave her tower just to run an errand (Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 186).
between Aseneth’s earthly and heavenly inheritances (see 12:15). Aseneth no longer needs to travel to the field of her earthly inheritance; she has been divested of the possession of that field at any rate.

The honeycomb itself, the description of it as a substance, is redolent of manna. As I discuss below, manna is often associated with wisdom, as is honey or honeycomb. Sirach 24:20 says that the remembrance of wisdom is sweeter than honey, and that “my inheritance is sweeter than honeycomb.” Portier-Young makes a connection between the honeycomb and the promised land as “a land of milk and honey.” In Exod 3:8, the Lord promises the people that they will be delivered from the hands of their oppressors by entering into the land. Together with the image of Aseneth as City of Refuge, Portier-Young demonstrates that the “land of milk and honey” presents a “fulfillment of the divine promise, and both will provide a safe haven for the chosen people of God.”46 The prophets qualify this promise by reiterating the need for the people of Israel to keep themselves pure (Ezek 20:7). In Jer 11:2–10, the “land flowing with milk and honey” could be the possession of Israel if they had not turned to foreign gods. “By casting aside her Egyptian idols, Aseneth models the covenant fidelity that is required for entry into the promised land.”47 In Numbers and Leviticus, the “land flowing with milk and honey” is described as an inheritance (Lev 20:24; Num 16:14).

In Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth has her field of inheritance set in contrast to what is truly life-giving and valuable: the celestial honeycomb. Aseneth’s inheritance has been reimagined not as a place but as a symbolic substance: “the biblical land of promise for


47. Ibid., 150.
God’s chosen is likewise transformed into the promise of life eternal.” But the use of spatial imagery and contrast is how the author introduces and subsequently modifies this message, and he does not abandon this spatial imagery later on. He transforms the image of the field of inheritance from a mundane image of what a rich young pagan girl can expect from her parents into the eschatological hope of eternal life, portrayed as a new field of inheritance.

Common imagery underscores the parallel between God’s saving activity toward and covenant with the Israelites, as exemplified in the biblical record of the Exodus and entry into the promised land, and God’s promise to and salvation of Aseneth and those who will take refuge in her.

This offer of eternal life precedes the Mosaic covenant in time, but it is clearly a much more lasting promise, one that clearly reveals the eschatological hope inherent to the narrative.

To imagine that when the field of inheritance resurfaces in the latter part of the narrative, that Aseneth has simply usurped her father’s right to physical land through her marriage to Joseph diminishes the force of the associative work being done with the imagery of the honeycomb. Identification of the honeycomb with manna as a symbol of wisdom and life sets the reader up to anticipate a new field of inheritance, one that is a representation of the journey out of Egypt and into the promised land.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 150–151.

50. Bohak argues that Aseneth has simply acquired her father’s land (Jewish Temple, 66–67).

51. Aseneth’s understanding of how the honeycomb came to be present in her storeroom reveals its symbolic importance by tying it, the angel, and Aseneth to the motifs of wisdom and life. When Aseneth returns with a honeycomb from her storeroom, the angel asks her for an explanation. Aseneth is afraid and says, “Lord, I did not have a honeycomb in my storeroom at any time, but you spoke and it came into being. Surely this came out of your mouth, because its exhalation is like breath of your mouth” (16:11). The angel smiles at her understanding and replies, “Happy are you, Aseneth, because the
Honeycomb as Manna: Wisdom, Life, Food of Angels

The honeycomb is described as “big and white as snow” (16:8), and the honey that comes from it is “like dew from heaven and its exhalation like the breath of life” (16:14). Manna in the OT appears once the dew has lifted in the morning (Exod 16:14). It is white and tastes like a cake or wafers made of honey (Exod 16:31).

The honeycomb is a celestial substance, since “all the angels of God eat of it and all the chosen of God and all the sons of the Most High, because this is a comb of life” (Jos. Asen. 16:14). Because of its life-giving properties, manna is deemed “bread from heaven” (Ps 105:40; Neh 9:15), and Ps 78:25 LXX calls it “bread of angels” (ἄρτον ἄγγέλων), a translation that Talmudic sources attest.

Manna traditions define it as celestial nourishment, imbued with wisdom, and life-giving. These three characteristics of manna are related to the honeycomb in ineffable mysteries of the Most High have been revealed to you, and happy are all who attach themselves to the Lord God in repentance, because they will eat from this comb” (16:14). The angel’s ability to speak something into being reveals his creational power and designates the honeycomb as a life-giving substance. Of Wisdom it is said that “she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times” (Wis 8:8). So Aseneth’s preternatural ability to understand the significance of the honeycomb establishes her as the possessor of wisdom and connects her to the honeycomb as full of wisdom.


Joseph and Aseneth. Taken together, they enhance the exodus imagery in Aseneth’s transformation.⁵⁴

Manna is equated in post-biblical Jewish tradition with Torah and Wisdom, both of which are said to give life.⁵⁵ Philo often identifies manna with wisdom or knowledge. It is a heavenly substance, sent directly by the agency of God and therefore symbolic of heavenly wisdom bestowed upon souls that long for virtue (Confusion 258–60a). The pursuit of wisdom by the righteous is analogous to the privation by which the substance of manna is made necessary for the people of Israel. The manna is freely given; it does not require the same work that earthly food requires (Prelim. Studies 170, 173–74). It is a heavenly form of knowledge or wisdom (Alleg. Interp. 2.86–87), one that is given to the soul who desires it daily. Manna is a life-giving substance and has creational imagery attached to it. It is one of the ten objects created in the twilight on the eve of the seventh day of Creation (’Abot 5:6). Anyone who eats it gains strength equal to the angels (Tanḥ Besh., Exod 67).

Not only does the association of the honeycomb with eternal life and with paradise orient the manna imagery eschatologically, but so does the allusion to manna as the “food of angels.” Psalm 78:24–25 LXX translates Hebrew ʿabbirim (“powerful

---

⁵⁴ In the longer text, the honeycomb is associated with the bread, cup, and anointing that Joseph refers to in 8:5. Orlov suggests that there is an implicit anointing in Joseph and Aseneth, similar to 2 En. 22:9. Michael disrobes Enoch and anoints him with oil that is “greater than the greatest light and its ointment is like sweet dew, and the fragrance like myrrh; and it is like rays of the glittering sun.” In 2 Enoch, the seer is transformed into a being that no longer enjoys earthly food (2 En. 56). The description of the oil in 2 Enoch resonates strongly with the description of the honeycomb in Jos. Asen. 16:14. This strengthens the association that many parts of the textual tradition make between the bread, cup, and anointing and the honeycomb in 16:16 (Divine Scapegoats: Demonic Mimesis in Early Jewish Mysticism [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015], 79–80).

⁵⁵ Portier-Young, “Sweet Mercy Metropolis,” 142.
beings”) ἄγγελοι, interpreting manna as the “bread of angels.” Wisdom 16:20 says
“Instead of these things you gave your people food of angels, and without their toil you
supplied them from heaven with bread ready to eat, providing every pleasure and suited
to every taste.” God teaches the people of Israel with the manna that “it is not the
production of crops that feeds humankind but your word that sustains those who trust in
you” (Wis 16:26). By interpreting the manna as more than just a way of sustaining the
people of Israel through the wilderness, early exegetes created a spiritual metaphor. The
manner in which the manna was given, its purpose in establishing for Israel a position of
utter dependence on the Lord encourages this metaphorical turn.

Andrea Lieber analyzes the symbol of the honeycomb in Joseph and Aseneth as
an interpretation of the encounter that Moses and the elders of Israel have with the glory
of God on Sinai in Exod 24:9–11. Philo interprets this passage as a heavenly ascent and a
divine vision, in which the food and drink that Moses and the leaders of Israel partook of
was the vision of God itself. Since Philo’s cosmology and angelology cannot
countenance the idea of food being consumed in heaven, he characterizes the
consumption of food as looking upon the divine. Israel is uniquely suited to this
endeavor as the nation that sees God, and this ability is connected to the concept of
manna as food of angels. The manna is a mediating substance, one that enables the

56. See also LAB 19:5 (Chesnutt, “Bread of Life in Joseph and Aseneth and in John 6,” in Johannine

57. Lieber, “I Set a Table,” 69–70.

58. Chesnutt notes: “According to the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 75b, Akiba considered the
manna to be the food of angels, but the sages came to the consensus that this was not the case since
according to Deuteronomy 9:18 angels neither eat nor drink” (“Bread of Life,” 13 n. 36). Orlov also notes
that Josephus holds the same beliefs about angels and food and that this idea is attested in
pseudepigraphal and targumic sources (Divine Scapegoats, 79).
knowledge and wisdom of God to be transferred to human beings. Though it appears to provide physical sustenance, it is actually a spiritual nourishment because of the way in which it is provided. So Philo resolves an exegetical problem posed by Exod 24:9–11 and in the process interprets the manna as wholly spiritual. Lieber cites Leviticus Rabbah, a midrashic collection redacted in the fifth century, which teaches that no provisions were taken up to Sinai, since the vision of the shekinah proved to be “actual nourishment” for those present. Moses and the leaders of Israel ate and drank as the angels perpetually do, feasting on the divine presence: “The image of the sacred meal shared among angels symbolizes the transformative nature of the divine–human encounter. Feasting with the angels, the righteous assimilate the angelic qualities of blessedness and eternal life.”

The Apocalypse of Abraham (Apoc. Abr.) provides an example of this image of angelic food from centuries earlier. It also contains several common elements in the transformation of its main character, Abraham, with the transformation that Aseneth undergoes.

In the Apocalypse, Abraham is led on a journey to the divine throne room by his angelic guide Yahool. Abraham must be purified and transformed in such a way as to “reshape his ontology into an eschatological state suitable for the upper realm.” He is robed in the heavenly attire of Azazel, who has been disinherited, but first, he learns to abstain from earthly sustenance and feed instead on the vision of his angelic guide (Apoc. Abr. 12:1–2). Orlov demonstrates that when Abraham partakes of the celestial vision as

---


60. Ibid., 76.

61. Orlov, Divine Scapegoats, 75.
food, the Apocalypse is drawing on more than just the biblical tale of Abraham’s table fellowship with angels. It is the tradition that Moses partook of the divine glory as food and drink that informs the portrayal of Abraham, since “the theme of Abraham’s sustenance on Yahoel is situated within a cluster of distinctive Mosaic motifs.”62 Long before the rabbis established that Moses partook of the shekinah on Mt. Sinai, there is a tradition that celestial food both eliminated the necessity for earthly food and could be taken in by the vision of the divine or by an angelic substance: food (manna) or even an anointing of oil.

Aseneth’s encounter with the angel includes putting off her old black sackcloth and donning a new and remarkable robe. She has been promised food, drink, and an anointing, but these materialize only in the symbol of the honeycomb. Though the honeycomb in Joseph and Aseneth is portrayed as substantial, it is equated to the breath of life coming from the mouth of the heavenly ἄνθρωπος. Though it is physical, it is constituted from the angel himself. It is not compared to the manna that the fathers ate in the wilderness, but conditioned by Ps 77 (78) LXX, in which the angels are the ones who eat this food. Aseneth has prepared herself to partake of this angelic substance by denying herself earthly food and drink for eight days. The presentation of the honeycomb, combined with the sapiential language and the manna imagery, brings Aseneth’s transformation in line with the Mosaic traditions Orlov identifies in Apoc. Abr. and contributes to the exodus typology.

Peter Dschulnigg suggests that the bread and wine (and oil) identified with the honeycomb in some texts of Joseph and Aseneth represent the Passover meal, especially

62. Ibid., 84. See also Halperin, Faces of the Chariot, 111.
as it was celebrated in the diaspora. The honeycomb represents the manna in the wilderness, so the bread and cup come to be regarded as a refraction of the symbol of the manna back to the elements of the Passover. Dschulnigg contends that the honeycomb represents a cultic meal, since it is equated with the bread, wine and anointing. The polluted pagan opposite of this meal is portrayed as cultic. This would mean that Aseneth is partaking in the honeycomb as a kind of Passover meal that saves her from the Destroyer by including her with the people of Israel. She has been brought out of the darkness in the nick of time to be included in the Passover. It is more compelling to suggest that Aseneth has been in danger of being “destroyed by the Destroyer” (1 Cor 10:10) as a wayward member of Israel until she repents from idol worship and partakes worthily of the honeycomb.

4.5.3. The Honeycomb, Manna, and the Idol-Polemic

A similar antithesis exists between the meals in Joseph and Aseneth and the two ways of partaking that Paul sets up in his discussion of the Lord’s supper in 1 Cor 10. Dschulnigg makes note of this, that the antitheses are the same (the Lord’s supper/the honeycomb vs. sacrifices of idols) and that they are incompatible. This indicates for Dschulnigg once again that the meal is cultic and that it symbolizes the Passover.63 But even if Joseph and Aseneth does appear to draw on a similar interpretive tradition to the one that Paul employs in 1 Cor 10, that does not necessitate a cultic connotation for the honeycomb. Paul envisions the manna given in the wilderness as properly a spiritual substance that

---

did not render an individual immune to the profligacy of idolatry. Like the Lord’s Supper for Paul, the manna is only spiritually effective when a person partakes of it worthily, specifically by abstaining from the worship of idols. That Paul is applying that understanding of manna to the Eucharist is clear; that the symbol of the honeycomb is therefore being deployed to the same effect in Joseph and Aseneth is not necessarily so, even if the honeycomb appears by analogy with its pagan opposite to be a cultic meal.

Burchard also comments on the parallels between 1 Cor 10 and Joseph and Aseneth, though he does not propose that the honeycomb is a Passover meal. The bread, cup and anointing that Aseneth partakes of are symbols of her idolatry, and her escape from them comes in partaking of an analogue to the spiritual food and drink that Paul refers to in 1 Cor 10–11. Burchard’s understanding of Aseneth as a proselyte whose conversion is being signaled by her participation in the new meal as manna informs his interpretation of how Paul is characterizing the people of Israel in the exodus, which is to “present the Exodus generation as a people of converts who did not live up to their conversion.”64 The characteristics of those who wandered in the exodus as Paul presents them in 1 Cor 10:1–5 are similar to the θεοσεβής in Jos. Asen. 8:5–7. The exodus generation is made up of “converts” who lost their way and rejected the spiritual food and drink that they were offered. Aseneth is the mother of the proselytes, the convert who exemplifies the choice that Israel must make.

Burchard acknowledges that the emphasis in each case is different. Paul is warning his readers as partakers in the blessing of the Eucharist not to lose their way as the fathers did, but Aseneth is identified first as a partaker in idolatrous food and only

64. Burchard, “Importance,” 122.
later given the chance to share in the heavenly manna. The whole thrust of the exodus imagery in 1 Cor 10 is to contrast true participation in the Eucharist through righteous behavior with idolatry. Thus, it is the table (τράπεζα) of the pagan gods that is dangerous.\(^65\) Putthoff, recognizing that “the honeycomb may also be tied to the broader motif of calling, exodus and the sustained obedience to God,” emphasizes that Israel must continue to obey in order to receive the benefits of angelic food. When Israel remains faithful, Israel is rewarded with “honey and oil” (Deut 32:13; Ps 81:16 LXX). That faithfulness is characterized by abstinence from idolatry (Deut 32:12: “The Lord alone guided him, and there was no foreign god with him”).\(^66\)

Aseneth’s participation in the eating of food of angels situates her conversion as one that involves the utter abandonment of the table of idol sacrifices. She must be brought into a completely different way of life and leave her old life behind. That is a choice she has clearly made by smashing her idols and abandoning the inheritance of her father’s house. But, the honeycomb as manna connects to a complex of early Jewish traditions. These traditions emphasize the quality of the manna as spiritual nourishment for the righteous, even angelic food that can bring about the requisite ontic change needed to dwell in the celestial and paradisiacal realms. It is also considered by Paul as a substance that is useless to those who engage in idolatry. Paul is drawing on a similar tradition when he interprets the Lord’s Supper. In so doing, he is characterizing the exodus generation as converts who have forsaken or abandoned their own conversion. Only Israel properly oriented toward God partakes of this spiritual food in a way that

\(^65\) Ibid., 123.

\(^66\) Putthoff, “Gastronomical Vision,” 104.
imparts wisdom and life, and even Israel can lose its way through idolatry in such a manner that it ceases to receive the benefits of that angelic substance.

The honeycomb as food of angels orients Aseneth’s transformation toward a transcendent reality. Its synonymity with manna orients the recalling of the exodus an eschatological journey. The destination for the journey in this reprisal of the exodus is the promised land, an image I consider below when I discuss Aseneth’s personification as Lady Wisdom.

4.5.4. The Bees of Paradise (Jos. Asen. 16:14b)

The honeycomb is breath of life, an exhalation from the angel’s mouth (16:9), but it is also created by the “bees of the paradise of delight.” They have made it from the “dew of the roses of life that are in the paradise of God” (16:14). The honeycomb described as dew once again recalls the idea of manna, but it is now a paradisiacal substance. The image of the bees renews the creational motif juxtaposed with exodus imagery and adds complexity to the eschatological vision of Aseneth’s identity.

John C. O’Neill comments on the detail that the honey gathers by these bees is like dew gathered in the garden of paradise. Accepting the reading that explicitly identifies the honeycomb with the bread, cup and anointing, O’Neill suggests that the bread and the cup are part of the “special new meal associated with entry into the promised land, a meal founded by Melchizedek and celebrated at Qumran.”67 In a few manuscripts, Aseneth’s consumption of the bread, cup and anointing means that her

“flesh will burst forth like flowers of life from the land” (Jos. Asen. 16:16: mss G Syr Arm 436). The restorative imagery is paradisiacal but also applied directly to the ontic change that Aseneth has undergone. Her very body is being transformed into a paradisiacal body.

Aseneth undergoes the angelic transformation that prepares her to participate in the eschatological blessing by partaking of and producing the substance that is paradisiacal and part of a biblical metonym for the promised land. Hubbard explores the imagery of rebirth and renewal in this part of Jos. Asen. 16 and in Barn. 6. She notes that Barn. 6:17 says that “you see an infant is first made alive by honey, then by milk.” The context for the imagery of honey in this part of Epistle of Barnabas is entrance into the eschatological promised land. Milk and honey are symbols of the new life one experiences in the new birth of the eschatological hope. Epistle of Barnabas enhances the connection that the Psalms make between new exodus and new creation, but also provides an important parallel to the imagery of this part of Joseph and Aseneth.68

Aseneth’s destruction of her Egyptian idols establishes the kind of covenant fidelity that makes entry into the promised land possible. Rather than being tempted to unfaithfulness by the allure of foreign gods and forfeiting the right to enjoy the promised land, Aseneth as foreigner destroys her gods and not only gains entry into the promised land but actually becomes a symbol of it. Likewise, Numbers and Leviticus describe the “land flowing with milk and honey” as an inheritance that means the people will never go hungry and will enjoy earthly benefits. But in Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth’s inheritance is reconfigured from what is earthly and fleeting to what is eternal:

The biblical land of promise for God’s chosen is likewise transformed into the promise of life eternal. Common imagery underscores the parallel between God’s saving activity toward the covenant with the Israelites, as exemplified in the biblical record of the Exodus and entry into the promised land, and God’s promise to and salvation of Aseneth and those who will take refuge in her.69

By portraying the honeycomb as “bread of angels” and a symbol of wisdom, the narrative has symbolically located Aseneth in the wilderness, to some extent, but more importantly, at Sinai in the giving of the Law. Aseneth is a personification of Wisdom partaking of a symbol of Wisdom. With the introduction of the paradisiacal bees, Aseneth’s identity has been both fed to her and constructed upon her mouth for the benefit of others. Some parts of the tradition have the angel touching the honeycomb and calling forth bees, who make a new honeycomb on Aseneth’s mouth (16:19–20). As symbols of paradise, the bees configure the honeycomb to be a symbol of the promised land as eternal life. Aseneth both partakes of this symbol of her inheritance and becomes this inheritance as a destination: a walled city, the New Jerusalem, and the site of a new honeycomb.

Aseneth partakes of her own new identity as Lady Wisdom, as full of life, as angelic, but she also demonstrates a new aspect of her identity that is salvific through the performance of the bees which come out of the honeycomb. The bees are white as snow, just as the honeycomb is. Their wings are purple, scarlet, and like gold-woven linen. They wear golden diadems just as Aseneth is clothed in Jos. Asen. 13:3. The act of these bees building a new honeycomb on Aseneth’s mouth and their activity in the garden of

69. Ibid., 151.
Aseneth’s courtyard help to establish her representative role and condition her identity not just as wandering Israel restored but also as faithful Israel leading the wayward.70

4.5.5. What Has the Honeycomb Done?

I have explored what the honeycomb represents, the contours of its symbolism, as manna, a substance that imparts life and wisdom, and as “food of angels.” Aseneth is transformed by eating the honeycomb, but there is also an important sense in which she is confirmed in a role she already enjoys. Like Abraham in Apoc. Abr. and Moses in the Talmud, she is able to partake of the heavenly nourishment because she has prepared herself and been prepared by her angelic guide. Her role as daughter of the Most High is confirmed, not bestowed. Consequently, the moment of her conversion cannot be located in the honeycomb scene. Chesnutt has demonstrated as much, that Aseneth’s transformation in chs. 14–17 serves only to authenticate the conversion that has already taken place “by showing that her professed change corresponds to transcendent objective reality . . . his visit is neither the cause nor the occasion of her conversion.”71 The visit from the angel simply confirms that Aseneth’s conversion has been ratified in heaven and delineates the benefits of it.72

70. Of this scene, Humphrey says that “Aseneth, once incorporated into Israel, has been so transformed as now to become herself an agent of reconciliation within Israel” (Joseph and Aseneth, 44).

71. Chesnutt, From Death to Life, 112.

72. Chesnutt, From Death to Life, 113; Sänger, “Bekehrung und Exodus,” 29–30. Lieber still insists that the honeycomb is a “conversion meal” and the “culmination of [Aseneth’s] conversion process” (“I Set a Table,” 77).
Aseneth’s identity as Wisdom personified is constructed by way of simple analogy. She behaves like and looks like Wisdom as portrayed elsewhere. But, the association with Lady Wisdom is also reinforced by Aseneth’s consumption of the honeycomb as a symbol of wisdom, and by the generation of the same substance upon her lips in v. 16:19. The breath and emanation of this heavenly manna from the angelic figure’s mouth is reproduced on Aseneth’s mouth in such a way that her identity is effectively a reproduction of his. The entire account calls to mind the imagery of Wis 7:25–26: “For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.”

Aseneth’s identity is applied to her both by analogy to her heavenly counterpart Repentance (who is herself so like Wisdom) and by direct analogy to Wisdom herself. But the phagic reinforcement of that identity through a mystical meal is performative. There is “a complex relationship between Aseneth and Wisdom, one where not only is the honeycomb from the angelic figure’s mouth Wisdom, but the consumption of that Wisdom transforms Aseneth not merely into a wise person but also into Wisdom herself.”  


74. Ibid., 228–29.
If Aseneth is Wisdom personified but also partakes of wisdom in the form of the honeycomb, then what does that say about the angel? Is he merely a kind of intermediary of heavenly wisdom, or is he, too, a sapiential figure? Karl-Gustav Sandelin dissents from those who identify Aseneth as Wisdom, instead locating the source of wisdom in the angel alone, not as personified Wisdom but as the Word of God. The Word of God is called “firstborn,” “eldest of his angels,” and “son of God” by Philo (Confusion 146). Aseneth is the recipient of wisdom, the sage, an image of the Word (Confusion 146), a royal figure (Moses 1.158), like a son of God (Names 131) and a person clothed in light (Moses 2.69) by identification with Joseph, who is also portrayed as a sage (Jos. Asen. 4:7).

Sandelin has observed an important connection with the Word of God, but has ignored the similarities in the depiction of Word and Wisdom that make it possible for both the angelic figure and Aseneth to be sapiential figures. For Philo, manna is a metaphor for both the word of God and for Wisdom (Sacrifices 86). The Word of God is identified elsewhere with Wisdom. God has “made all things by [his] word, and by [his] wisdom have formed humankind” (Wis 9:1). The Word of God is identified as the creational force analogous to Wisdom in John 1 and serves as the divine warrior much like Wisdom protects Israel (Wis 18:15–16). Identifying the angelic figure as the Word of God only strengthens his association with Wisdom and does not preclude a sapiential

75. Sandelin dismisses the idea that Wisdom personified is alluded to at all because there is no explicit mention of the image. Moreover, he contends that the angelic figure is not Wisdom personified because he is portrayed as masculine, and elsewhere Wisdom is feminine (“A Wisdom Meal in the Romance ‘Joseph and Aseneth,’” in Wisdom as Nourisher: A Study of the Old Testament Theme, its Development within Early Judaism, and its Impact on Early Christianity [Åbo, Sweden: Åbo Akademi, 1986], 153).
identity for Aseneth. The transference of the angel’s identity to Aseneth is, like Aseneth’s transformation, multifaceted.

What aspects of the exodus has the honeycomb brought to mind, and why? Like the mode by which Aseneth’s identity is refashioned, the answer to this question involves layers of imagery working together to educe connections with the exodus story. Like the Passover meal, the honeycomb represents the passage from death to life. That metaphor frames Aseneth’s prayers and therefore conditions the honeycomb as a sort of Passover meal. But because the honeycomb is portrayed as manna, it represents a reprisal of the wandering in the wilderness. Unlike the Israelites, whose profligacy and idolatry stand in contrast to God’s faithful provision of manna, Aseneth has smashed her idols and denounced her lawless ways. Her encounter with the divine figure is a new Sinai, where she partakes of the “food of angels” as Wisdom and Torah. The honeycomb is breath of life, made by the bees of paradise. It is a new inheritance for Aseneth, a new destination in the promised land of eternal life, and an image of Aseneth herself as a symbol of that destination. Aseneth is symbolically moving through the events of the exodus and reversing the decisions that the wandering generation made. Joseph’s prayer in 8:9 initiates the call for her inclusion in these events, at the beginning of Israel’s recreation at the Red Sea. In that sense, viewing the honeycomb scene as a culmination of Aseneth’s conversion or even merely as a confirmation of a conversion that has already taken place fails to account for the significance of the exodus imagery that has been exhibited thus

---

76. Kraemer suggests that Aseneth’s consumption of the honey may allude to the story of Adam and Eve in Gen 2–3 and thus establish the angelic figure as the primordial ἄνθρωπος, “whose full identity can only be explicated by a close analysis of the traditions associated with the Name of God, the Glory the Name-Bearing Angel, and so forth.” This, Kraemer says, is another detail in the honeycomb scene that helps identify the angelic figure with the Word of God (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 124).
far. Aseneth has been converted on the level of the mundane. She used to worship idols, but now she does not. However, her conversion has been couched in terms that associate her with the renewal of Israel in the Exodus. The prototypical convert is the paradigm of wandering Israel restored through repentance.

4.6. Moses Imagery After the Transformation (Jos. Asen. 16–17)

After the angel leaves, Aseneth encounters her τροφεύς, her “foster-father,” who tells her that her “face has fallen” (18:3). She remembers the instructions that the angel gave her, to dress in a new robe (14:12; 15:10), so she enters her second chamber and dresses in an elaborate new robe. She asks for a basin filled with water from the spring (18:8), intending to wash her face. When she leans over to look at her face, she is amazed, because it is “like the sun and her eyes [are] like the morning star” (18:9). Various manuscripts add their own elaborations to this description. Burchard gives his reconstruction as follows:

and her cheeks like fields of the Most High, and on her cheeks (there was) red (color) like a son of man’s blood, and her lips (were) like a rose of life coming out of its foliage, and her teeth like fighting men lined up for a fight, and the hair of her head (was) like a vine in the paradise of God prospering in its fruits, and her neck like an all-variegated cypress, and her breasts (were) like the mountains of the Most High God. (Jos. Asen. 18:9)77

Aseneth decides not to wash her face because she is afraid she will wash off her beauty. When she returns to face her foster-father, he is so amazed at her beauty that he is frightened and falls at her feet, saying, “What is this, my mistress, and what is this great and wonderful beauty? At last the Lord God of heaven has chosen you as a bride for his

firstborn son, Joseph?” (18:11). Aseneth’s transfigured beauty is proof that she has been favored by God, and the similarity of her appearance to Joseph’s angelomorphism in Jos. Asen. 6 helps to constitute her suitability as a bride for Joseph.

I have already made note of the affinity that Aseneth’s honeycomb episode shares with the ascent at Sinai of Moses and the elders. The transformation of Aseneth’s face also corresponds to the transfiguration of Moses’s face on Sinai in Exod 34:29–34. As part of her new wardrobe, Aseneth dons a new veil over her face (18:6). Kraemer suggests that Aseneth’s veiling may be analogous to that of Moses: just as Moses spoke with God face to face and beheld an aspect of God, so Aseneth has conversed with God or at least with God’s manifestation in the form of the angel. Therefore, like Moses, her face shines and requires a veil to protect others from the brilliance of her face.

Aseneth’s foster-father is surprised and amazed by the transformation that her face has undergone. In a Qumran fragment (4Q374 frag. 2, col. ii) that Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis maintains is a description of the angelomorphic appearance of Moses, line 9 says “and though no one had known you, they melted and trembled,” which Fletcher-Louis recognizes as “an element in the theophanic constellation which has elsewhere been transferred to the Jewish divine man tradition.” He contends that “it is a recurrent feature of the angelophany form that the angel is not, at first, recognized by the mortal to whom

---

78. Mss FW Arm Syr 436 add “like a bride” (ὡς νύμφη). Aseneth is being adorned for her encounter with Joseph, when their betrothal will be confirmed. That does not make this veil exclusively a bridal veil (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 234).

they [he] appears.” This lack-of-recognition element can be applied to an angelomorphic mortal, as, for example, in the case of David after he slays Goliath in LAB 61:8–9. Perhaps even more significant than the foster father’s frightened reaction to Aseneth’s beauty is the seeming lack of recognition of Aseneth by Joseph in the following scene.

Joseph returns to the home of Pentephres and stands at the doors of the court. Aseneth hurries downstairs with her attendants to meet Joseph. He enters the courtyard and sees Aseneth. In the shorter version, Joseph sees Aseneth and says, “Come to me, holy virgin, for I have been given a good report about you.” But in the longer text, there is a lengthier scene. Joseph is amazed at her beauty, and asks, “Who are you? Quickly tell me” (19:4). Aseneth identifies herself and explains what she has done, that she has thrown away her idols and been visited by a heavenly messenger. She confirms that she has eaten bread of life and drank a cup of blessing, and that she has been given a new name: City of Refuge. Aseneth explains that the angel planned to visit Joseph, adding that Joseph will know whether he has been visited or not. Joseph acknowledges that he has been visited by the angelic figure, revealing this information at the end of his response just as Aseneth had (Jos. Asen. 19:9).

Aseneth’s preternatural beauty makes her unrecognizable to Joseph, like the beauty that Moses is said to have possessed upon coming down from Mount Sinai. Joseph’s inability to recognize Aseneth, besides filling the role of a recognition scene as

---


81. This is the reading of ms B (Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 194).
part of the exposed hero story-type, helps to evoke yet another connection with Moses as a person who has been transfigured by beholding the divine presence.

4.7. Conclusion

The romance concludes with Joseph’s return to Pentephres’s houses and the lovers’ embrace. What follows the romance is an adventure story that is written in a different style and genre. I evaluate the thematic relationship between the romance and the adventure in the next chapter. Aseneth has been portrayed as both a pagan convert in need of repentance and as wandering Israel on the road to the promised land. The textual tradition has at times drawn from the elements and imagery of the exodus tradition to help convey this seemingly contradictory identity. The effect has been to imply that the conversion of a pagan to the religion of the Most High God is not so unlike the story of Israel’s journey out of Egypt. It offers an intertextual opportunity for the reader of the exodus story in the Torah and in its development throughout early Judaism and Christianity as well. If the story of an Egyptian pagan coming to faith in the Most High can be framed as a kind of exodus, then could the exodus be read as a kind of conversion story for the people of Israel?
CHAPTER FIVE: “A BROAD AND DRY ROAD”: EXODUS IMAGERY IN THE ADVENTURE

5.1. Introduction

After the pharaoh presides over the marriage ceremony of Joseph and Aseneth, they consummate their marriage and Aseneth gives birth to Manasseh and Ephraim (21:9). The remainder of the chapter is taken up with a confessional psalm uttered by Aseneth (21:10–21). If we did not have extant anything following 21:9 or 21:21, the romance by itself would read as a complete story. Instead, many manuscripts continue with ch. 22, which gives the details of Aseneth meeting her new father-in-law, Jacob. Following this chapter is a short adventure, in which pharaoh’s son attempts to kidnap Aseneth and insinuate some of the sons of Jacob in a plot to kill Joseph.1

---

It is the thesis of this chapter that the adventure (chs. 23–29) dramatizes the eschatology of the romance through a reprisal of the crossing of the Red Sea. This reprisal is an exodus typology within the extended metaphor established in the romance. The features of this typology occupy the less explicit categories under which Allison has classified allusions. The adventure, no different than the romance, lacks any explicit citation of the book of Exodus, and contains little indirect borrowing of it. The typology manifests in a similar narrative structure, in the use of key words and phrases, and in similar circumstances. My argument for the presence of this typology also depends on the case I have made for the exodus imagery in the romance. The typology of the adventure, in other words, enacts the portrayal of Aseneth’s transformation in the romance as similar to the exodus.

I describe the relationship between the romance and the adventure and offer a proposal for how the adventure advances the theological interests of the romance. Then I indicate where the allusions and parallels to the crossing of the Red Sea appear in the adventure. Finally, I analyze how this presentation supports the theme of divine providence that was developed in the romance. The relationship of the romance to the adventure is one of symbolic presentation to typological exposition, whereby the theme of divine providence developed in part using exodus imagery in the romance is exhibited to a somewhat different end in the adventure: to chart Aseneth’s fortunes into the future.

5.1.1. The History of Scholarship on the Relationship Between the Romance and the Adventure

As noted, the romance could end with the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh in 21:9. There is nothing necessarily lacking in the plot of the romance that the adventure supplies. But the adventure is widely attested.² Burchard determines that the style and content of the adventure is so similar to the romance that they must have been written by the same hand.³ He advances this view as the champion of the precedence of the longer version over the shorter, since the longer version apparently contains more details that link it stylistically with the romance. Philonenko is more likely to recognize the disparities in style between the two parts, but he does not take a strong stance on the unity or disunity of the text.⁴ Humphrey regards the romance as a “well-conceived whole” and examines its chiastic structure apart from the adventure, though she does not dismiss the possibility that the romance and the adventure were written together. The sections differ considerably in shape and genre, one a slow moving romance, the other having a “breathless, adventurous quality.”⁵ If the central concern of Joseph and Aseneth is to explore the theological issues attendant to the social reality of conversion, then the adventure at first blush appears to be, as Hubbard characterizes it, merely “extraneous.”⁶ Pervo considers the adventure a “brief exemplum of the divine blessings poured upon

² Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 5.


⁴ Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 27.

⁵ Humphrey, Ladies and the Cities, 43.

Aseneth’s earthly life after her conversion.” He supposes that chs. 22–29 could have come from a source, while the romance is an original work by the author. Most commentators do not address the issue, but still assume that the romance and the adventure belong together.

The material evidence does not seem to indicate whether the adventure had always accompanied the romance or was added some point. The sole example that we have of the romance ending somewhere that might separate it from the adventure is ms H, which ends its ancient Greek rendering of the romance at 16:17y and finishes with a synopsis of the plot in modern Greek through what would have been 21:9. Otherwise, even with lengthy omissions, if a manuscript reaches the end of the romance, it includes the adventure. Arguments from genre and style beg the question, since the aims of the adventure are obviously different from the romance and do not preclude the possibility that the romance and the adventure were written together.

I am investigating the theological work that the adventure does by expanding the themes and motifs developed in the romance. I mention in the introduction of this chapter that there appears to be redactional work in ch. 22, but without more analysis it is


8. Chesnutt, From Death to Life, 55, 85, 90, 106, 108; Bohak, Jewish Temple, 52, 55, 81; Bolyki, “Egypt as the Setting,” 90; Brooke, “Narrativity,” 199; Hacham, “Loyalty, Traitors,” 56–57. Jacques Schwartz argues that Joseph and Aseneth has a discernible ancestor that bears less resemblance to the longer or shorter versions of our extant tradition than it does to certain Byzantine hagiographies. Still, even when he fixes the original composition of the text before 117 CE in an Egyptian provenance, he contends that it is only possible that the adventure was composed alongside an attenuated form of what we now have (“Recherches sur l’évolution du roman de ‘Joseph et Aseneth,’” REJ 143 [1984]: 273–85). Burchard doubts that Schwartz has provided enough evidence to demonstrate the kind of access to an archetype that he asserts (“Present State of Research,” 35).

9. Ms K, which was probably copied from H, also ends this way (Fink, Joseph und Aseneth, 17).
difficult to determine whether two independent sources were stitched together or the romance was completed first and later added to. It is important to address the scholarship regarding the themes of the adventure, especially as they appear to match up with the romance. Rivka Nir, who devotes an entire chapter to the content of the adventure in her book, is one of the few scholars to investigate the thematic relationship between the two sections.10 I analyze her argument to distinguish my own claims and to extend my thesis. The adventure develops the exodus imagery of the romance to enhance the theme of divine providence, but also to develop the theme of repentance.

Nir argues that the differences in style, mood and rhythm between the romance and the adventure are clear indicators that there were two different authors. Besides carrying with it the unnecessary assumption that a single writer is incapable of producing work in two different modes, this assertion does little to advance her belief that “the two stories are complementary, together forming a cohesive theological and conceptual whole.”11 The purpose of the adventure for Nir is to give an aretology for Aseneth, an exposition of the moral vision that Aseneth’s character displays in the romance. Because Nir considers Joseph and Aseneth to be a Christian composition, she determines that it is the Christian principle of mercifully dealing with one’s enemies that establishes the

10. Other scholars have commented generally on the second part, but few on the level that Nir has. Kraemer briefly describes a few issues (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 40–41, 78–80). Bohak is convinced that this second part fits into his account of Joseph and Aseneth as an apology for the Oniad dynasty and the Jewish temple at Heliopolis (Jewish Temple, 42–55). Chesnutt recognizes that in the second part there is social conflict inherent between Jew and gentile (“Social Setting,” 29–30). Sänger proposes that the pharaoh’s son represents Alexandrian gentiles who were unhappy with the Roman administration of Alexandria’s favorable treatment of the Jews (“Erwägungen,” 86–106). Chesnutt responds to Sänger that “Nothing in the text invites us to compare the hostility of Pharaoh’s son toward Joseph with the anti-Judaism that led to the pogrom in 38 CE” (“From Text to Context: The Social Matrix of Joseph and Aseneth,” in Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers, SBLSP 35 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 1996], 290).

raison d'être of the adventure. The key phrase that places the romance and the adventure on a common ethical horizon is “it is not right for a man who worships God to . . . .” In the romance, this notion defines the social boundaries of the Christian church. In the adventure, it highlights the Christian value of loving one’s enemies and not repaying evil with evil.12

Nir recognizes some important connections between the two parts of Joseph and Aseneth. The adventure does provide an aretology of sorts by a casuistic performance, in which violence is met not with vengeance but with mercy and forgiveness.13 The injunction against repaying evil for evil is found throughout the adventure. Levi reprimands Simeon when he has the urge to draw his sword against the pharaoh’s son by saying, “we are the children of a man who worships God, and it is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil” (23:9). Aseneth reassures the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah that their brothers, the sons of Leah, will not take revenge on them for assaulting Aseneth by quoting this same aphorism (28:4). She repeats it to Simeon when he angrily arrives to kill his brothers (28:14), and when Benjamin is about to deliver the killing blow to the pharaoh’s son, Levi stays his hand with the same maxim

12. Ibid., 169–70.

13. As I discuss below, this is not an unqualified principle. Mercy and forgiveness are presented as the standard, but only to a certain degree. John M. G. Barclay characterizes the emphasis on not repaying evil for evil as “reflect[ing] a social context where Jews are under pressure and tempted to take retaliatory measures” (Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan [323 BCE–117 CE] [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], 216 n. 58). Chesnutt envisions a similar Jewish social setting and observes that “Although some of the sons of Jacob do become involved in the plot instigated by Pharaoh’s son, the Jewish characters who are positively portrayed consistently reject any such subversive activity and denounce retaliation of any sort beyond what is necessary for defense” (From Death to Life, 107). The purpose of the NT ethic of non-retaliation is often to promote peace and to discourage added violence against the Christian communities. Barclay and Chesnutt observe that Jews may invoke the same principle to achieve the same result: harmony with their neighbors in a foreign setting.
Non-retaliation against one’s enemy or neighbor is a well-established motif in the adventure, but it has its limits.

Nir claims that this ethic is distinctly Christian and that the motif of non-retaliation is related to the symbol of Aseneth as a city of refuge in the romance. However, there are a number of reasons that Nir’s claim should be rejected. The ethic that is summed up in the command “do not repay evil for evil,” while a characteristically Christian expression (1 Pet 3:9; Rom 12:17), is one that is endemic to early Jewish thought as well. Bolyki compares the phrase in Joseph and Aseneth to the ethics of non-retaliation in the NT. He concludes that “although the OT roots in the novel Jos. Asen. and the NT parenesis are the same, the latter supplements them with a positive admonition, which is an application of Jesus’ general love command to the Christians’ situation.” The NT ethic cannot be a source for Joseph and Aseneth, since it is only the low standard of deciding not to repay that forms the principle.

Although the motif of non-retaliation features strongly in the adventure, it exists alongside details that seem to contradict it. It is true that Levi reprimands Simeon for intending to kill the pharaoh’s son after he enjoins Simeon and Levi to kill their brother Joseph (23:7–9). But even after reiterating this idea to the pharaoh’s son, that a man who


worships God does not hold a sword in his hands (23:12), he still concludes by saying, “But if you insist on this wicked purpose of yours, behold, our swords are drawn in our right hands before you” (23:13). Simeon and Levi then draw their swords and remind the pharaoh’s son that these very swords were used to kill the inhabitants of Shechem (23:14). Even though the ethic of non-retaliation is being evoked, it is qualified by a threat of violence that recalls the brothers’ participation in the massacre of an entire town.

Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll considers the principle of non-retaliation in light of this allusion to Shechem, which establishes in the ancient reader’s mind an expectation of justified violence. Simeon’s reaction to the pharaoh’s son is predictable, but Levi restrains his brother. Non-retaliation is the guiding principle, but it has its limits. Ahearne-Kroll has described the principle that is actually at work in the adventure accurately, while also exposing it as not particularly Christian. I do not know of an early Christian source that modifies the idea to include this limit. The character of Levi, whom Nir calls an exemplar of this Christian ethic, himself leads five of his brothers in slaughtering the two thousand troops led by Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher. When they arrive at the wadi, Levi and his brothers seek these sons of the concubines with the intent to kill (28:9). Benjamin delivers a fatal wound to the pharaoh’s son and kills his escort of horsemen with stones from the riverbed. There is plenty of violence and bloodshed in the adventure alongside these efforts to extend mercy and forego vengeance. Though the

---


18. Never mind that after Simeon argues with Aseneth, Levi perceives in his spirit that his brothers are hiding nearby. It is for Aseneth’s sake that he decides it is a good thing not to reveal where they are (28:15–17).
motif of non-retaliation suffuses the adventure, the biggest threat to its expression is the activity of the very characters who are meant to serve as paragons of it. If it is inadequately expressed in the adventure, the motif of non-retaliation is entirely absent from the romance. There is no clear wrongdoing warranting repayment for which this ethic could be deployed, yet still Nir insists that “the moral injunction indicated in chs. 22–29, to love the enemy and not repay evil with evil, conforms to the comprehensive Christian ethical teaching of Joseph and Aseneth as a whole.” Docherty similarly claims that the theme of “mercifulness” is conveyed through the character of Joseph, who offers the same meek and merciful attitude to Aseneth in Jos. Asen. 8:8 as he had to his brothers in the Joseph story. She considers the “refusal to exact vengeance and the determination to treat even enemies with kindness and magnanimity” in the adventure part of this same motif of mercifulness. Even the angel in 16:20–23 raises the bees from the dead as a lesson on showing mercy. But Joseph is described in 8:8 as having mercy on Aseneth when he sees her distraught because he has rejected her. He is cut to the heart because he is “meek and merciful and fearing God.” This hardly establishes the same principle of non-retaliation against a violent enemy that is exhibited

19. Bohak suggests that the wickedness of the sons of the concubines is revealed in their willingness to commit violence against their own kin. Simeon and Levi show restraint in dealing with the pharaoh’s son, and in the confrontation at the wadi, the good brothers refrain from using weapons against their own brothers, though they have no qualms about using sword and stone against the pharaoh’s troops. This imparts a degree of subtlety to the motif of non-retaliation, but does little to eliminate the problems that arise with the attendant violence. (Jewish Temple, 53–55).

in the adventure. Aseneth has not assaulted Joseph, and the character of his mercy is in
taking pity on a jilted suitor and not in foregoing physical violence.\(^{21}\)

Nir also claims that Joseph has invoked the same principle that is found in the
adventure when he rejects Aseneth as a pagan woman (8:4–7).\(^{22}\) Joseph compares proper
use of the bread, cup and anointing to the proper kinds of women with whom he is
willing to consort. He returns to this principle much later concerning his marriage to
Aseneth: “It is not proper for a man who worships God to have intercourse with his wife
before the marriage” (20:8). Nir stipulates that each of the values that Joseph institutes in
the formula “It is not proper for a man who worship God to . . .” are characteristically
Christian. But the notion that maintaining religious purity and foregoing premarital sex
ought to be considered peculiar to the Christian tradition, much less that either behavior
has anything to do with not repaying evil for evil is untenable. Although this formula
appears in both the romance and the adventure, there is no clear connection between one
instance and another, much less any indication that they are distinctly Christian values.

There must be an entirely different basis upon which to connect the adventure and
the romance thematically that cannot rely on the ethic of non-retaliation nor the
peculiarly Christian perspective from which such an ethic could derive. The motif of non-
retaliation does serve a purpose, but it is subordinate to the broader themes inherent to
both parts of Joseph and Aseneth, themes for which exodus imagery provides a much

\(^{21}\) Docherty, “Joseph the Patriarch,” 202. The idea that the angel has resurrected the bees does
not fit as an act of non-retaliation either. There is no retaliation needed when dealing with dead bees.

\(^{22}\) Nir, A Christian Book, 170.
more satisfying connection. The adventure story recasts the crossing of the Red Sea as an opportunity for mercy.

5.1.2. Common Themes and Imagery of the Romance and the Adventure

The themes in the romance center around repentance as it constitutes membership in the community of the Most High and repentance as a definition of wisdom. The adventure provides an exposition of exodus imagery to bolster both themes. Joseph and Aseneth revolve around Aseneth’s penitence and her consequent acceptance into the family of the Most High God, and the contours for the central metaphor of her character, City of Refuge, are delineated by repentance. Aseneth provides refuge for “many nations” (15:7; 19:4), “many peoples trusting in God,” but specifically, “those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance” or “all who repent” (15:7). These are ideal designations, conditions for citizenship in the city, and they apply to whoever meets the conditions. They are not actual characters in the romance. The repentance of Joseph’s brothers supplies a concrete example of the model citizens of the city of refuge. The motif of non-retaliation in the adventure is absent in the romance, but as a literary device in the adventure it ensures that the brothers’ repentance is met with a positive result. The element of ambush is merely hinted at in Aseneth’s prayer and in the reference to the “cup of ambush” (8:5; 21:14) as one of the elements in the polluted triad.23 But it is the device by which the need for repentance is introduced to the adventure (i.e., it is a foil to

23. The word “ambush” does not appear, but Aseneth is pursued by an imagined foe and by the “wild, ancient lion.” She implores God to rescue her and snatch her out of the lion’s mouth (12:7, 9—12). The latency of the element of ambush in Aseneth’s prayers is only activated when Aseneth needs to be rescued from the ambush in the adventure.
the main theme of repentance). Inheritance continues to be an important motif, but it is reconfigured eschatologically and becomes the goal of Aseneth’s journey.

Aseneth’s role as personified Wisdom, which is constructed in part using imagery from the exodus tradition, is carried into the adventure. Aseneth’s new identity as City of Refuge/Repentance is represented through Aseneth’s actions in the adventure. Wisdom as repentance is the complementary theme to repentance as the criterion for entrance into the city of refuge, so Wisdom’s role in leading the people of Israel out of Egypt is reconfigured as having to do with mercy and forgiveness rather than judgment.

Joseph takes on his counterpart’s role as angelic captain in a military campaign to protect Aseneth. The angel’s role as “commander-in-chief of the armies of the Lord” remains vestigial when he is presented to us in the romance: he never commits himself to a single military endeavor. If he leads an army or fights a celestial battle, we never hear of it. But in the adventure, we are given a subtle cue that Joseph has taken on his celestial counterpart’s military post. Far from being conspicuously absent from the adventure, Joseph as angelic warrior works behind the heavenly scenes to fight for Aseneth in the guise of his celestial double. Likewise, Joseph’s celestial, otherworldly appearance at the beginning of the romance imbues his job as grain-giver with extraordinary significance when he returns to this task in the adventure. Just as the significance of Aseneth’s relationship to her inheritance shifts from the romance to the adventure, Joseph’s grain-giving, merely the excuse for him to visit Pentephres’s estate in the romance, becomes an eschatological analogue for Aseneth’s journey to her field of inheritance in the adventure.

Finally, the character of the pharaoh’s son is strangely undeveloped in the romance. He appears briefly in the introduction, but never reappears. He is presented as
the most eligible of the royal bachelors who pursue Aseneth on rumor of her preternatural beauty alone. He is reprimanded by his father for even considering a marriage with Aseneth, since he is already betrothed to the daughter of the Moabite king Joakim (1:7–9). The effort to portray Aseneth’s beauty as superlative is standard practice for a Greek romance, so the addition of the detail that even the prince of princes is interested certainly heightens the drama. But the pharaoh’s son never reappears, such that his mention seems like the kind of gun Chekhov would hang on the wall. The adventure fires that gun for us in a supremely satisfying manner not only by making the pharaoh’s son the main antagonist, but also by expanding on the encounter between the pharaoh and his son in 1:7–9. There, the father shows a certain amount of disregard and even contempt for his son, which is the attitude that saves him from patricide in 23:3.

The adventure provides the pageant within which the symbolic identity latent to each character is embodied. The romance, in turn, supplies the *dramatis personae* without which the adventure would seem rather lackluster. If the characters presented to us in the romance are construed as representative, then the adventure is a symbolic depiction of these ideal figures. Such a performance helps give fuller expression to the themes of repentance as membership and wisdom as repentance. The motifs of ambush

24. Aptowitzer proposes that the way the pharaoh’s son asks his father for Aseneth’s hand parallels how Shechem asks his father for Dinah’s hand (“Asenath,” 267). Bohak believes that in the mention of Joakim of Moab we are witness to an Oniad jab at Alcimus-Iakimos, the high priest of Jerusalem who usurped Oniad IV (*Jewish Temple*, 61–62).


26. The pharaoh later weeps for the death of his son, so much so that he himself dies from grief (29:8). This is out of place and is perhaps designed only to align the plot of the adventure with Genesis, making Joseph the new pharaoh and explaining how the throne passed back into the old dynasty after his death.
and inheritance, lacking a certain amount of dramatic force in the romance, drive the plot of the adventure.

The extension of the themes, motifs, and characters into a sort of tropological reenactment develops the romance’s latent eschatological symbolism. It is a way of building a theology of divine providence reminiscent of the synopses of future events as history exemplified by 1 Enoch or Jubilees. The eschatology of the adventure augments the theology of providence in the romance. God has not just had a plan for Aseneth that extends beyond her pagan past and into the primordial pre-existence of her celestial exemplar, but it also continues into the eschatological future. In the drama of the adventure, Aseneth’s inheritance is threatened by the last, desperate attempts of the forces of evil represented by the pharaoh’s son. This eschatological journey draws from the creational imagery of the crossing of the Red Sea, but sets it within the circumstances of the seven-year famine in the Joseph story. The anachronism is deliberate; it invites us to consider the transcendence reality of an eschatological salvation story.

The abundance provided by Joseph’s providential knowledge amid famine is the occasion for an eschatological exodus of the people of God, and the one who leads them out is Aseneth. The romance associates Joseph and his heavenly twin and identifies the angelic figure with the angel of the Lord, a divine warrior, the possessor of the name and power of God. This portrayal is also exhibited in the adventure, which implies that the angelic Joseph is fighting on Aseneth’s behalf. Aseneth’s identity as Wisdom personified is developed through her role in the adventure. She is portrayed both as Israel being led by the angel of the Lord and as Wisdom, formed especially as Repentance, leading Israel back to God. The multifaceted angelic imagery in the adventure builds on the thematic
complexity of the romance; Aseneth is depicted as both a pagan convert and as Israel being restored to a right relationship with her God.

As Aseneth prepares to take her journey, the pharaoh’s son builds his artifice against her and Joseph. The ideas common to both preparations are (1) what constitutes inheritance; and (2) how family is conceived. I examine how these ideas are expressed and then how the flight from Egypt to the eschatological promised land unfolds.

5.2. Family, Inheritance, and Slavery/Servitude in the Adventure

The pharaoh’s son, sick with envy after spying Joseph and Aseneth walking together from atop a wall, determines to break up the marriage, initially by seeking to involve the powerful Simeon and Levi in his scheme (23:2–5). He offers inheritance and brotherhood to the them, but Simeon and Levi refuse to betray Joseph and threaten the pharaoh’s son with the swords they used at Shechem (23:14). Frightened but undeterred, the pharaoh’s son is told by his servants that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (Dan, Gad, Naphtali and Asher) will be more pliable than Simeon and Levi were.

When the pharaoh’s son pulls these brothers aside, they respond favorably and identify themselves as servants. He is overjoyed by their response and makes his offer:

And the pharaoh’s son lied to them, saying, “Behold, blessings and death are before you. Choose blessing, and not death, because you are powerful men. Do not die like women, but be manly and repay (go out to meet) your enemies. For I heard Joseph your brother saying to the pharaoh my father, ‘Dan and Gad and Naphtali and Asher are the children of my father’s maidservants, and they are not my brothers. I await my father’s death, then I will blot them out from the earth and all their offspring lest they share the inheritance with us, because they are children of maidservants. For they sold me to the Ishmaelites, and I will repay them for (every (insult of theirs) which they committed against me wickedly. Only let my father die.’ ” (24:7–9)
The lie that he tells about Joseph recalls the language of slavery as a contrast to the language of family in the rumor that Aseneth hears about Joseph in 4:9: “Why does my lord and my father speak words such as these, to hand me over, like a captive, to a man (who is) an alien, and a fugitive, and (was) sold (as a slave)?” Aseneth rejects her father’s overture to become the spouse of Joseph as an act of slavery; she would be held captive by a slave, the antithesis of the secure family member. The pharaoh’s son tells the lie that is most compelling to the brothers, that Joseph has laid the blame for his enslavement not at the feet of all his brothers, but more precisely at the feet of the brothers that he considers to be slaves. The re-classification of his brothers as slaves in Joseph’s mind would result in dispossession of the inheritance.27

The pharaoh’s son establishes a kind of rival inheritance to the one that Joseph and Aseneth share.28 He rewards the brothers with family membership and inheritance for conspiring with him against Joseph and his father the pharaoh. He will take Aseneth as his new wife, and the concubines’ sons will become “brothers” and “fellow heirs” to him (24:14). This will sunder them from their own family and redefine for them what family means simply in terms of earthly reward. The pharaoh’s son is reviving the definition of inheritance that Aseneth enjoyed as a pagan daughter of Pentephres. This materialistic,

27. From Abraham’s spurning of Hagar and Ishmael there is a biblical basis for dispossession of the surrogate’s son (Gen 21:10). From Esau’s intention to kill Jacob on the death of their father comes the idea of awaiting the father’s death and seeking revenge for the loss of inheritance (Gen 27:41). Hacham refers to the Testaments of the Twelve, which attest fierce hatred between Joseph and Dan and Gad (T. Dan 1:4–8; T. Gad 1:8–2:2), but the same work ascribes to Gad and Simeon the sale of Joseph into slavery (T. Gad 2:3–4; T. Zeb.4:3; “Loyalty, Traitors,” 30). Aptowitzter makes note of rabbinic traditions that interpret Gen 37:2 (“and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father”) as pertaining only to the sons of the concubines and that cast Joseph as showing open antipathy to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah for being illegitimate (“Asenath,” 284–85).

28. It is characterized by ambush and destruction, attributes ascribed to the cup and the anointing in Aseneth’s idolatrous version of the elements (8:5; 21:14).
fleeting inheritance is one that he cannot even wait for his father’s death to obtain. It stands in marked contrast to the new, spiritual and eschatologically-oriented definition of inheritance that Aseneth possesses in her marriage to Joseph.

In a response to the pharaoh’s son’s request, the sons of the concubines reduce themselves to the status of slaves. Repeatedly, the brothers call themselves servants and slaves and agree to do whatever the pharaoh’s son orders them to do (24:12–13, 15, 19). They do not accept their new status as brothers and fellow heirs, which is offered in exchange for betraying their brother Joseph. Instead, the brothers seem doomed to remain servants. In Gen 50:15–21 LXX, it is Joseph’s brothers who fear his vengeance against them for his enslavement. First they pass over their own familial affiliation by calling themselves “the servants of the God of your father” (τῶν θεραπόντων τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ πατρός σου). Then they place themselves in the position into which they had unjustly forced Joseph: “we are your servants!” (οἴδε ἡμεῖς σοι οἰκέται). The choice of Dan and Gad, Naphtali and Asher to indenture themselves to the pharaoh’s son mimics the Joseph story and prepares the reader to expect, even in the midst of their betrayal, that perhaps the brothers will be offered forgiveness as they are in the biblical account.

Aseneth and Joseph speak of a common inheritance, one that no longer involves Pentephres and his family. In this chapter and in 26:1, the field of inheritance element

29. In 24:15, Dan and Gad overhear Joseph and Aseneth speaking about the trip to the field of inheritance. Bohak contends that this field is still Pentephres’s inheritance, only Joseph is speaking of it as if it now belongs to Aseneth and him. The field of inheritance has now been deeded to Joseph and Aseneth; Pentephres is no longer the possessor of it. There is no indication in the text that this is true. I contend that this is another field altogether. It would be strange for an orphan to inherit the property of the father who has disowned her. The angel makes it clear during Aseneth’s transformation that there is no longer a need to harvest from this field. And the field in the adventure has been reconfigured. Bohak is heavily invested in the field imagery being taken as a transfer from Pentephres to Joseph, since he wants it to be an allegory for the transfer of large tracts of land to Onias from Ptolemy VI (Jewish Temple, 65–66).
appears for the last time. In 24:15, Dan and Gad tell the pharaoh’s son: “we have heard Joseph saying to Aseneth today, ‘Go tomorrow to the field (which is) our inheritance, because it is the hour of the vintage.’” The act of harvesting grapes is likely a symbol that intensifies the eschatological character of Aseneth’s destination. Joel 3:13–16 depicts the day of the Lord, in which the harvest and the vintage act as metaphors for judgment. Revelation 14:14–20 envisions the angelic warrior undertaking the harvesting and grape-crushing. Aseneth’s reason for journeying to the field of inheritance appears not unlike the divine warrior’s task of judgment manifested through the gathering and crushing of grapes. Joseph’s “grain-giving” is a mirror to Aseneth’s task: he gives “bread to all men.”

In ch. 26, Aseneth says goodbye to her new husband: “I will go, just like you have said, to the field (which is) our inheritance.” She is anxious, but Joseph responds: “Courage, and do not be afraid, but go, because the Lord is with you, and he himself will guard you like an apple of the eye from every wicked deed.” The inheritors have changed. No longer does Aseneth speak of the field of inheritance as a possession that is her own or that she shares with her father and mother. Now the field belongs to Joseph and Aseneth, and they are employed at complementary tasks: Aseneth gathers the grapes of the vineyards, Joseph distributes grain. There is famine in the land, and this setting combined with the motif of inheritance evokes Ps 36:18 LXX: “The Lord knows the ways of the blameless, and their inheritance is eternal. They will not be put to shame in a time of evil, and in days of famine they will be fed.”

---

30. Kraemer notes how this psalm uses inheritance and refuge to describe God’s relationship to the righteous. To this psalm should be added Ps 60:5–6 LXX: “Let me be sheltered under the shelter of your wings. For you, O God, have heard my prayers, you have given me the inheritance of those who fear your name” (my trans.; When Aseneth Met Joseph, 83–84 n. 30).
involves violence and war, which introduces an element of tribulation that is common in apocalyptic texts.

What has also changed is the location of the field. In Jos. Asen. 16:4, the field is within walking distance, just outside the city. Now Aseneth must prepare for a longer journey, one that she takes by carriage and that appears not to be over even after she comes to a wadi. She is accompanied by a large escort of six hundred men and is prepared for a confrontation, indicators that the field of inheritance is something altogether different.

The ambush at the wadi is a battle between competing inheritances, one built on violence and insidiousness, earthly and fleeting, conditioned by servility, the other a transcendent manifestation of the eschatological hope shared by Joseph and Aseneth. Aseneth is both a combatant in the battle and the one who must be protected at all costs. Far from being absent from this conflict, Joseph takes on the role of an angelic warrior and fights like the angel of the Lord in the battle at the Red Sea.

5.3. “Joseph will go up to heaven” (Jos. Asen. 25:6)

One of the strangest turns in the plot of the adventure is that Joseph is nearly absent from it. He assuages Aseneth’s fears that she will face danger alone by sending a large personal guard with her and assuring her that the Lord will watch over her (26:1). Leaving Aseneth with such a large force implies that Joseph expects Aseneth to encounter trouble in the mundane task of visiting a vineyard. As the scene is set, we are left with numerous

31 She arrives at the “place of the wadi” in 26:5, but when she is ambushed, she flees ahead in her carriage. I examine the significance of χειμάρρους below.
questions. Why does Joseph not accompany his wife to their common inheritance? When Aseneth falls into danger, why is it Levi and not the husband with whom she has shared a mystical marriage who senses that Aseneth needs rescuing? Why are Benjamin and Leah’s sons the heroes of the battle that ensues and not Joseph? The variants in a relatively unexamined portion of the adventure (25:6) provide a way to answer these questions.

Two of the scheming brothers, Naphtali and Asher, have a change of heart as they lie in wait with Dan and Gad, ready to ambush Aseneth. As they begin to rebuke their older brothers, they say, “And now again, if you should attempt to act wickedly against [Joseph], he will cry to the Most High, and he will send fire from heaven, and it will consume you, and the angels of God will fight for him against you” (25:6). There are a few variants for this verse that, to my knowledge, no scholar has addressed. The differences between manuscripts and versions are important, especially since a determination on the relative merits of each of three main variants provides clarity.

Burchard suggests the most likely reading: “he will cry to the Most High” (βοήσει πρὸς τὸν ὄψιστον). This is the reading of the α text family. Representatives of the δ text family read “he will call upon the God of Israel (saying)” (ἐπικαλέσεται τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραήλ [λέγων]). However, manuscripts from a few different text families and versions read

32. Bohak sees 26:5 as an echo of 17:3, where the angel creates fire that consumes the honeycomb. The honeycomb in Bohak’s schema stands for the Jerusalem temple, and the brothers fear a similar destruction (Jewish Temple, 81). The connection is an important component for establishing the relationship between Joseph and the angel, but Bohak does not investigate the variants in this verse.

33. AP (Q) have “he will cry to the Most High.” A adds “from heaven” (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). P Q add “from [the] heaven” (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 307.

34. B has “he will call upon the God of Israel (from heaven) saying.” D has “he will call upon the God of Israel from heaven” (Ibid.).
“he will go up into heaven” (ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν). One reading envisions Joseph petitioning the Most High to punish his brothers, another portrays him mounting up to heaven as an angelic warrior and administering justice himself. The latter reading encourages us to correlate Joseph with the angelic commander-in-chief who visits Aseneth. The difficulty with the manuscript tradition is that there is not enough information about who the subject of the subsequent verse is “and he will send fire.” If Joseph cries unto the Most High, then it is likely that it is the Most High who sends down fire. But if Joseph is going up into the heavens, then it is as a kind of destroying angel whose actions bear a resemblance to the angel of God at the Red Sea. Every extant manuscript that has this context reads the same: πέμψει τὸ πῦρ. Though there are some variants in the verbs for burning or consuming in the next clause, none of them affect the overall meaning.

Fink addresses this passage at length in her revisions of Burchard’s Greek critical edition. She provides a stemmatical analysis of the manuscript tradition that is pertinent. Each of the readings that envision Joseph in a supplicatory mode go back to a common ancestor. What those readings share is the subject for the verb πέμψει in the second clause. Whether Joseph cries out to the Most High or goes up to heaven, Fink recognizes that “God must be the subject of πέμψει, since only he has the power to send fire from heaven: fire symbolizes the presence of God.”

35. E W G (Syriac) 436 Slav “he will go up into heaven.” F is illegible. Ibid.

36. Fink, Joseph und Aseneth, 137. She cites passages from the OT as evidence that God sends fire to consume his adversaries, among them Exod 3:2, when the angel of the Lord stands inside the fire of the burning bush. But the burning bush event is not the kind of punitive, consuming fire that Naphtali and Asher dread in our text. Fink also cites Lev 6:2, by which she must certainly actually mean Lev 10:2: “And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.” This is
warrior could be the agent of consuming fire is just as plausible. In Judg 6:21, the angel of the Lord burns up with the tip of his staff the meat and unleavened cakes offered by Gideon, which is reminiscent of what the angelic figure does to the honeycomb in 17:3. Making Joseph the sender of consuming fire would associate his action with the miracle Aseneth performs in 27:6–11, which implies heat strong enough to melt swords. There is a sufficient basis for either the Most High or Joseph as angelic commander-in-chief to be the subject of πέμπει, which means the merits of one or another reading for the first clause must be determined by context.

The reading ἀναβήσεται has much to commend it. It is attested as “climb up to heaven” in the Syriac, which is the oldest extant version, in one of the Latin versions (436) from which Fink contends a common ancestor (ε) with the Syriac can be traced, and in two different stemmata of the Greek manuscripts. Although Fink’s hypothetical ms θ is a relatively intervention-free ancestor that passes on most of its content, Fink concludes that the motif of ascent is better attested throughout the narrative and therefore that ἀναβήσεται fits better as a more reliable reading. But if βοήσει and ἀναβήσεται existed together in an earlier stage of the tradition, then two scribes (E and the copyist of ancestor f) would have had to omit βοήσει independently of each other, which is implausible. Manuscript M and text family a have βοήσει, but B and D have ἐπικαλέσεται, which Fink maintains is defective or derivative of βοήσει, since B and D

about the inappropriate sacrifice offered by Aaron’s two sons. Psalm 50:3 and Ps 97:3 also portray the Lord using fire from heaven to consume his adversaries or reveal his presence.

37. In the next verse, Gideon cries, “Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.” When Kraemer makes note of the resonances between Joseph and Aseneth and Judg 13, she also noted Gideon’s encounter (When Aseneth Met Joseph, 33–34).

38. Ibid., 136.
add “Israel” to “God of,” and that reading does not fit with the rest of Joseph and Aseneth. But there is no reason that “God of Israel” could not fit into this context. "βοήσει" could easily have been derived from "ἀναβήσεται," and the ancestor θ could have changed it to correct for a more difficult reading. It is notable that “from heaven” is only present in descendants of θ, which may indicate a residual reading of “he will go up into heaven.”

"ἀναβήσεται" could be seen in context as the more difficult reading, but the fact that Joseph has an association with the angelic figure means that his ability to transcend the boundary between heaven and earth is heightened. It fits better with the association of the angel in chs. 14–17 with Joseph and with the exodus imagery I am investigating. It is more consistent with the last clause in the sentence: “and the angels of God will make war against us on his behalf.” This reading is present in a and d text families and in Greek mss E and F as well as other descendants of text family f. It seems strange that God would employ angels to wage war against his adversaries when he has just made use of all-consuming fire. But if the action is seen in apposition to Joseph ascending to heaven and sending fire, then it strengthens the idea that he has appropriated the role of

39. It is used over a hundred times in the Hebrew Bible of the Lord, including Exod 5:1, 24:10, 32:37, 34:23.

40. I.e., there is no reason to specify that God will act from heaven. We can assume that that is where God usually acts from (Fink, Joseph und Aseneth, 37–38).

41. “Joseph’s unique association with God (see fire motif, e.g., 6:2: ὁ ἥλιος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔκ πρὸς ἡμᾶς) and his likeness to the heavenly archangel may indicate that Joseph can more easily cross the threshold between heaven and earth” (Fink, Joseph und Aseneth, 137).
commander of the army of the Lord ascribed to his heavenly counterpart in the romance.42

Exodus typology is present in either of the other variant readings. βοήσει is from the root of ἀνεβόησαν, the word used in Exod 14:10 LXX by the Israelites when they cry out in fear to the Lord. With ἔπικαλέσται, there is a parallel to Aseneth crying out to the Lord in 26:7 (ἤπεκαλέσατο τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου). Joseph could be either crying out as the Israelites did at the Red Sea or crying out with Aseneth in her moment of need. From the perspective of theme-building, these two readings are less compelling because they do not augment the connection between Joseph and his heavenly counterpart made throughout the romance. ἔπικαλέσται is a deficient reading attested in two manuscripts of the same text family, and βοήσει occurs in three manuscripts of the a family and none of the versions. It appears that neither the scribes of the a nor the d text families picked up on the allusions to the angel of the Lord traditions in the romance and corrected a seemingly problematic reading.

If we read ἀναβήσεται, then Joseph is acting out the role of the angel in the romance, who is commander-in-chief of the armies of the Lord only nominally. Without this connection, the emphasis that the romance places on the angel’s role as a warrior remains without exposition and Joseph’s absence is a conundrum. If we take this reading together with other aspects of the adventure, it strengthens the evidence that the adventure is an eschatological reprisal of the crossing of the Red Sea. In that reprisal,

42. Only the Slavonic version omits the construction altogether while retaining the “cry out” reading. Other texts that employ βοήσει or ἔπικαλέσται as an artifact of what should be considered an earlier reading (Ibid., 138).
Joseph is the angelic guide and guardian of Israel, while Aseneth leads the people of Israel as a representative figure.

Since the brothers end up going through with their plot to kidnap Aseneth, it may be more apt to consider 25:6 a prediction of the angelic response and a foreshadowing of the outcome. If it is as the commander-in-chief of the angelic host that Joseph would send fire, he does not actually ever appear to do so. But perhaps we are meant to associate this fiery judgment with the miracle of turning swords to ashes that Aseneth soon undertakes (27:7–11). The placement of that miracle in the sequence of events at a roughly analogous place to when the angel of the Lord would send fire against the pharaoh and his army in the exodus and the nature of the action as fiery strengthens this possibility.

5.4. Reprising the Red Sea

5.4.1. Brothers Set Against One Another

The ambush that is set for Aseneth is perpetrated in part by her own new family, the sons of Jacob by his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah: Dan and Gad, Naphtali and Asher. Rather than having the pharaoh’s son muster his own troops, the narrator has him enlist the help of Joseph’s own brothers. The intrigue is heightened and the treacherous personality of the pharaoh’s son is given added dimension. I have considered how the stratagem perpetrated by the pharaoh’s son by involving the sons of the concubines supports the theme of family membership by developing the motifs of family and inheritance from the romance. But why set brother against brother in the adventure in this way?

Some have explained the brothers’ antipathy as representing internal conflict within the Jewish community over the issue of proselytes. There is a gradient of
responses in the conflict between Joseph and his brothers that could correspond to
divisions within the community. Levi and Benjamin acquit themselves bravely, the
former in rallying his brothers to fight for Aseneth, the latter in facing fifty men alone.
Simeon is aligned with his brothers as well, but demonstrates a brashness that his brother
Levi must correct (23:7). Reuben, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun come to their brother’s
aid, but without distinguishing themselves from the crowd. Of the wicked brothers, there
are Naphtali and Asher, who agree at first to the artifice of the pharaoh’s son, but later
express doubt and even rebuke their co-conspiratorial brothers (25:5–7), and Dan and
Gad, who remain unrepentant, when they are disarmed by Aseneth’s gaze (27:7–11).

Docherty points out that the envy of the brothers, anxiety that they will be
destroyed by Joseph after Jacob dies, and perhaps even the bad report brought to Jacob by
Joseph in Gen 37:2 derive from the Joseph story in Genesis. But the division of the
brothers in Joseph and Aseneth, who behaves favorably toward Joseph and who is
hostile, does not match up with how the brothers are portrayed in Genesis. Reuben and

43. Chesnutt ("Social Setting," 30–31) and Bohak (Jewish Temple, 53–55) provide thorough
treatments of the various responses of the brothers. Bohak relates the bees in 16:22–23 with the
internecine conflict between the good and bad brothers in chs. 22–29. In both instances, “forces of evil try
to hurt Aseneth, fail, and are soon forgiven.” Because they are what Bohak calls an “inner-Jewish conflict,”
the bees foreshadow the fight between the brothers on the narrative level and the fights between the
priests of Heliopolis and Jerusalem in the Oniad period on the historical level (Jewish Temple, 52).
Certainly, there are some similarities between the episode of the bees and the conflict between the
brothers. The difficulty is that the parallel is deficient. The battle at the wadi is not only internecine,
involving the pharaoh’s son as the main antagonist. He and his troops are the only ones who die at the
battle, and they obviously do not experience resurrection of any sort. The similarities that Bohak points
out are enough to foreshadow the sort of conflict that takes place in the adventure, but not enough to
indicate an allegorical reading. There are several conspicuous details in how the bees are portrayed that
simply do not have an analogue in the portrayal of the brothers, including the way the bees are dressed,
that they die and are resurrected, and that they all go away to an outer courtyard. The textual tradition of
the bee episode is confused, making the nature of what is happening difficult to establish in the first
place. But even taking the reading that Bohak favors, we are left with a dissatisfying disjuncture between
what the bees do in ch. 16 and what the brothers do in chs. 23–29.
Judah are prominent in helping Joseph (Gen 37:21–22, 26–27), which is not the case in Joseph and Aseneth. Why set the brothers against one another in this configuration?

There is an early Jewish tradition that the tribes argued and even fought one another at the crossing of the Red Sea. The earliest instance of this tradition is found in LAB 10:3–6. When they find themselves cornered at the Red Sea, the tribes are divided between themselves according to three strategies. Reuben, Issachar, Zebulun and Simeon advocate suicide, drowning themselves in the Red Sea to avoid being killed by the Egyptians. Gad, Asher, Dan and Naphtali want to surrender and return to slavery. Only Judah, Levi, Benjamin, and “Joseph” want to take up weapons and fight. The parallels are not quite exact when it comes to which brothers/tribes are willing to fight or capitulate, but the tribes in LAB who consider re-enslavement are the same brothers who decide to serve the pharaoh’s son, putting themselves in a servile condition.

As I have noted, this condition is stressed twice in Joseph and Aseneth. Dan and Gad answer the proposal of the pharaoh’s son: “We are your servants and slaves (οἰκέται καὶ δοῦλοι σοῦ), and we will kill together with you” and “we are your servants today and will do everything which you have ordered us” (24:12). It is Benjamin and Levi who are the main heroes of the retaliation. Through Aseneth’s deeds and Joseph’s implied action, the tribe of “Joseph” decides to fight. Judah and Simeon as the sons of Leah also

44. Docherty points to the portrayal in Jubilees of Levi, Judah and Joseph in assisting their father against an Amorite attack as a possible connection to the exaltation of Levi in Joseph and Aseneth, but there are far more favorable portrayals of Levi that could explain his importance, as she acknowledges (“Rewritten Bible,” 40–41). Bohak also recognizes the absence of a role for Reuben and Judah, the latter so absent that it is Benjamin who is described as a “lion’s whelp” instead (Jos. Asen. 27:2; Jewish Temple, 51).

45. a text family at 24:12, though G, Syr Arm 436 omit, gaps in the rest. Burchard suggests that this may anticipate 24:13. There the brothers identify themselves as παῖδες σου (“your servants”; OTP 2.242 n. n; idem, Joseph und Aseneth, 296).
fight with their brothers, so there is a mismatch only in that Simeon fights in Joseph and Aseneth, whereas in LAB he advocates a noble suicide. In LAB, the tribes of Dan and Gad, Naphtali and Asher advocate turning back and returning to slavery, in Joseph and Aseneth the eponymous brothers enslave or indenture themselves voluntarily, despite an offer of kinship and inheritance and having never been considered slaves by anyone except in the treacherous hearsay of the pharaoh’s son. A reader familiar with the account in LAB of the inter-tribal conflict at the Red Sea would notice the correspondence.

5.4.2. A Broad and Dry Road Through the Wadi

Aseneth’s journey to the field of her inheritance takes her to what I have thus far referred to as a *wadi* (24:19–20; 26:5; 27:2), χείμαρρος, a winter torrent or a river that is either only present in winter flooding or is swollen during that season. In the LXX, it refers to a river or a brook that is swollen or to the valley or ravine through which that water passes. The situation that bears the strongest resemblance to the ambush is the one that Saul sets at the valley near Amalek (1 Sam 15:5). The wadi is dry, but this is the single place in the LXX in which this is the condition of the wadi. Given that a χείμαρρος can

---


47. LEH, s.v., “χείμαρρος”; also listed as χείμαρρους.

48. In Psalm 123 LXX it means “flood.” Psalm 17:5 LXX: the “torrents of lawlessness alarmed me.” In both cases, the enemy has surrounded and overwhelmed the Psalmist like the torrents of an overbanked river. Psalm 35:9 LXX: “you will give them drink from the flood of your delights.” In the creational interlude found in Ps 73:15 LXX, God is said to have “broken through spring and wadis” (my trans.; NRSV has “springs and torrents, you dried up ever-flowing streams”). In the hymn to Melchizedek in Ps 109:7 LXX, he will “drink from the wadi by the road.” This word in later usage almost always means “flood” or “torrent.” Epiphanius in his *Panarion* refers to Christ (among many other titles) as Christ χείμαρρος (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 34, on the Areiomanitoi, PG 2021:002).
be full or empty, the tradition is thoroughly confused about what is happening. In 24:19, Dan and Gad plan to wait in ambush for Aseneth εἰς τὸν χείμαρρον. Most manuscripts in the Latin version translate εἰς τὸν χείμαρρον as in torrente, a poor strategy for the brothers. The Syriac sidesteps the issue by having the brothers hide in the reeds by the wadi, and the Armenian merely reports that they hid “on the road.” 49 When the brothers execute their plan, they divide into four groups of five hundred soldiers each. Burchard gives the reading of the only manuscript that makes sense of it (A):

And they were sitting across the wadi, on the forward section as it were, on this side of the road and the other five hundred men each; likewise on this side of the wadi the rest were waiting, and they, too, were sitting in the thicket of the reeds, on this side of the road and the other five hundred men each. And between them the road (was) wide and spacious. (Jos. Asen. 24:20) 50

The road appears to cross the wadi, and the brothers are surrounding the intersection of the road and the wadi from all sides while advising the pharaoh’s son to head the road off up ahead. 51 How the ambush will unfold has been made clear, but what is still unclear is why it must happen at this ambiguous geographical feature. Why is there a χείμαρρος on the way to Aseneth’s inheritance, and why, besides being a suitable place for an ambush, have her enemies decided to attack her here?

The Egyptian setting of Joseph and Aseneth is not accidental. Egypt is the home of the idols, the foreign gods whose father is a wild, ancient lion (12:9). Aseneth has escaped the grasp of that lion and his children and eschewed her fleeting inheritance in favor of an eternal inheritance, one that is configured in the adventure as an

49. FW omit εἰς. (E) FW G d a have χείμαρρον (Burchard, Joseph und Aseneth, 300).

50. Ibid., 303.

eschatological destination. If Aseneth is moving from Egypt to the field of her inheritance, which is a new promised land, then what better place for her enemies to ambush and defeat her than at the border between Egypt and the promised land? In Num 34:5 LXX, the southern border of the promised land is demarcated by the χείμαρρος Aἰγύπτου, the wadi of Egypt. Wherever this wadi is, what is most important is that it forms the border between Egypt and the promised land and that the Red Sea also is said to comprise that same border (Exod 23:31). While Aseneth may not have reached the Red Sea, she has reached the border between Egypt and her inheritance.

After the mystical, spiritual marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, the pharaoh’s son decides to ambush Aseneth and kidnap her; the embodiment of diabolical Egypt seeks to destroy the representative of Israel and win back the prototypical convert. He decides to trap her on her way out of Egypt to the field of her inheritance, places that seem by the imagery employed in the romance to be mapped onto a metaphorical geography. He sets a trap for her at a χείμαρρος, which happens to be the feature by which the border between Egypt and the promised land is established. It is a geographical feature that is not just a valley, but a dried-up body of water through which runs a wide and spacious road. Perhaps in the eschatological reconfiguring of a Red Sea crossing, the “waters of the great deep” have been dried up and there is already a “road in the depth” (Isa 51:10 LXX). What transpires in the wadi on that broad and dry road continues to evoke the battle at the Red Sea.

52. As the border of Egypt this expression is also used in Josh 15:7 LXX; 2 Kgs 24:7 LXX.
5.4.3. Aseneth Calls on the Name of the Lord and Is Afraid

When the trap is sprung, it is not the pharaoh’s son who chases Aseneth as the pharaoh pursued after the Israelites, but Levi who perceives in his spirit and pursues after Aseneth (26:6). Aseneth flees in fear and sees the pharaoh’s son ahead of her, barring her way on the road. The narrative has a similar structure and similar circumstances with Exod 14:10 LXX: the Israelites look up and see the pharaoh (καὶ ἀναβλέψαντες οἱ νῦν Ἰσραήλ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ὀρφῶσιν), they are exceedingly afraid (καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα), and they cry out to the Lord (ἀνεβόησαν δὲ οἱ νῦν Ἰσραήλ πρὸς κύριον). In 26:8, Aseneth sees the pharaoh’s son (καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν) ahead of her, she is exceedingly afraid (ἐφοβήθη . . . σφόδρα), and she calls on the name of the Lord (ἐπεκάλέσατο τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου). Aseneth is identified with the multitude of the Israelites at the Red Sea, which stands in contrast to her portrayal later as a type of Moses and as the angel of God.

Aseneth’s six hundred troops face over two thousand men commanded by her seditious brothers-in-law. Against these overwhelming odds her troops are obliterated, and she flees in her carriage. The pharaoh’s son with his fifty horsemen meets her on the road, and it appears that all is lost for Aseneth (26:5–7). But Levi and his brothers are pursuing Aseneth, and Benjamin is riding at Aseneth’s left hand in her carriage. Benjamin leaps down, picks up a large stone from the wadi and throws it at the pharaoh’s son, striking him in the temple. The pharaoh’s son falls off his horse half dead, and Benjamin eliminates the personal guard by throwing fifty more stones from the wadi.

53. The manuscript tradition is remarkably stable here (Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 314).
Meanwhile, Levi and his brothers catch up to their brothers’ forces and six men kill two thousand (27:6), leaving their brothers alive. A victory against overwhelming odds is typical of the kinds of battles Israel wins because the Lord is fighting on their behalf and characterizes the victory of a fleeing band of refugees against an army of chariots and horsemen.

5.4.4. Aseneth Performs a Miracle

After the overwhelming victory of the six sons of Leah over two thousand troops lying in ambush, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, having somehow eluded their brothers, decide to assassinate Aseneth and Benjamin and then flee. They come toward Aseneth with drawn swords dripping blood, ready to kill. There are two different accounts of what happens next, and Ljubica Jovanovic has, through a careful study, discerned the significance between these two versions. In Burchard’s text, Aseneth sees the brothers and cries in fear to God: “Lord my God, who made me alive again and rescued me from the idols and the corruption of death, who said to me, ‘Your soul will live for ever,’ rescue me from the hands of these wicked men” (27:10). Right away, the brothers’ swords fall on the ground and are reduced to ashes. Burchard adopts the reading of the _a_ text family, even though he considers it deficient to the _b_ text family. Jovanovic reconstructs the shorter reading

---


55. _OTP_ 2.245 n. m.
as “Aseneth gazed upon them, and their swords flew from their hands and fell to the ground and were reduced to ashes.”

Only four Greek mss (AP FW) include the detail that Aseneth became afraid when she saw the brothers. The rest of Aseneth’s prayer and God’s response are attested by every extant manuscript to varying degrees, save for mss B and D (the Greek mss in the d text family) and the Armenian version. Even though the Slavonic is considered part of the d family, it has a version of the longer reading, but the wording is typical of Slavonic prayers in the Eastern Orthodox church.

Jovanović notes that in the shorter reading of this passage, it is Aseneth’s gaze that reduces the swords to ash. To maintain her argument that the shorter reading is closer to the Hellenistic novel as it was written and that the longer reading is an Eastern Orthodox ecclesiastical interpolation, she draws on the evidence from Hellenistic theories relating to the nature of light and energy. Light was not only reflected by the eyes from external sources, but there was an internal source of light for the eyes, which, if it were emitted with enough intensity, could move objects. Jovanović reasons that there would

56. Εἶδεν αὐτοὺς Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἐγρήγορον αἱ ῥομφαίαι ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἔπεσον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ διέλυθαν ὡς τέφρα (in Jovanović, “Aseneth’s Gaze Turns Swords into Dust,” JSP 21 [2011]: 84). This is my own slight modification of Jovanović’s reconstruction, since I favor the reading of τέφρα as “ashes” and not as “dust.”


59. Jovanović refers to what happens throughout as swords being reduced to dust, but 28:10 reports that the swords shattered and “melted on the ground like wax from the presence of fire” (OTP 2.246). This is the reason I favor “ashes” instead of “dust.”
have been greater motivation for a medieval scribe to insert a prayer that followed a common formula of petition to God with a divine answer than for a scribe to omit it.60

This reading provides a connection between this episode and the parallels to the crossing of the Red Sea. The Psalms and rabbinic tradition attest that there were miracles at the Red Sea. In Wis 19:8b, Israel passes through the sea “after gazing on marvelous wonders (τέρατα).” Exodus 15:11 LXX declares that the “Lord is renowned, working wonders (τέρατα).” These two instances of τέρατα point to an early tradition that knew of several miracles at the sea. Could there have been, in addition to the miracles relating to the parting of the waters, a fiery intervention by the Lord, executed by the angel in the pillar of fire?

In Exod 14:24–25, it is the Lord who turns from the pillar of fire and cloud to gaze upon the Egyptians as they enter the seaway: “And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily” (Exod 14:24–25a). The implication is that the Lord uses his gaze from the pillar of fire to accomplish the confusion and the clogging of the chariot wheels. Some rabbinic traditions regarding the Red Sea event confirm the implication that the Lord’s attack on the Egyptians was imbued with the fiery nature of the pillar. The Lord answers the arrows fired by the Egyptians by launching fiery darts at them, and as the pharaoh hurled missiles, so “the Lord discharged hailstones and coals of fire against them.”61 It is this


fiery attack that consumes their chariot wheels. The rabbis are reading Ps 18:13–15 as referring to the crossing of the Red Sea, as does Josephus (Ant. 2.16.3), who also speaks of thunder and lightning at the destruction of the Egyptians.

If Aseneth’s miracle can be said to have been performed by her fiery gaze, then the adventure has effected a great reversal of Aseneth’s identity. In her supplicatory prayers, she begs to be spared from God’s judgment (11:17–18; 12:4–5). Here, she turns her opponents’ swords into ash with her fiery gaze as the agent of God’s judgment. She must therefore, in some sense, be linked with the angel of the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud, a move that would be consonant with the tendency in Joseph and Aseneth to apply similar imagery in different ways and at different times to both Aseneth and Joseph and to portray Aseneth as both Israel being led and the one who leads Israel out of Egypt.

5.4.5. Aseneth’s Miracle Inspires Dread

Just as the transformation of Aseneth’s face in 18:9–10 evokes fear in her foster-father, so in 28:1, the brothers’ reaction to Aseneth’s miraculous power mirrors the terror that surrounded Moses’s power at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Egyptians’ recognition of his power:

62. Ibid., 559.

63. Ibid., 561 n. 46. See also Ps 18:13–15 LXX: καὶ ἔθετο σκότος ἀποκρυφήν αὐτοῦ· κύκλω αὐτοῦ ἢ σκηνή αὐτοῦ, σκοτεινόν ὤδωρ ἐν νεφέλαις ἀέρων. ἀπὸ τῆς τηλαυγήσεως ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ αἱ νεφέλαι διήλθον, χάλαξα καὶ ἄνθρακες πυρὸς. καὶ ἐβρόντησεν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κύριος, καὶ ὁ υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ ἐδωκεν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐξαπέστειλεν βέλη καὶ ἐκτόπισεν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀστραπὰς ἐπλήθυνεν καὶ συνετάραξεν αὐτούς. καὶ ὑφίστησαν αἱ πηγαί τῶν υδάτων, καὶ ἀνεκαλύφθη τὰ θεμέλια τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀπὸ ἐπιτιμηθείς σου, κύριε, ἀπὸ ἐκμακρύνσεως πνεύματος ὀργῆς σου. (My trans.: “And he made darkness his hiding place, his tent surrounded him as dark water in clouds of air. The clouds passed away from the brightness before him, hail and coals of fire. And the Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High gave forth a sound. He sent out arrows and scattered them, he multiplied lightning and confounded them. And springs of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were uncovered, at your rebuke, Lord, at the blast of the breath of your anger.”)
of the Lord’s power (Exod 14:25). Sirach attests in the third century BCE that Moses performs “swift miracles,” that he is made like the angels in glory, and, in at least one recension of Sir 45:2, that he strikes terror in his enemies.64 Fletcher-Louis recognizes in Sirach an early association between the description of Moses as an elohim for the pharaoh in Exod 7:1 and the glorification of Moses in his divine ascent at Sinai. The members of the Qumran community possessed of a copy of Sirach, as well as two sectarian documents that attest this exegetical connection. According to Fletcher-Louis, 4Q374 Frag. 2 col. ii relates the deification of Moses on Sinai using the language of Exod 7:1. He proposes that the bulk of this fragment is about the divine Moses, that the fear and trembling that is caused by this figure is because of his divinity. Lines 6–7 allude to Ps 107:26–27, which helps to identify Moses with the angel of God at the Red Sea. The angel of God stirs the seas and their courage melts away. So, Moses is being related to the angel of God in the cloud, perhaps not just because he is instrumental in the parting of the seas, but because he has been configured as a divine agent through the interpretation of Exod 7:1. Although Aseneth has reprised the role of the Israelites at the Red Sea in her earlier fear of the impending ambush, she instills fear in her enemies because of her miraculous deed, which creates another link between her and the angel of God.65

Just as Moses instills great fear, even crippling fear, in his enemies, he possesses the theophanic power to restore his enemies. In Artapanus, the earliest witness to this idea, Moses causes the pharaoh to fall down speechless when he utters the divine name

64. Fletcher-Louis, All the Glory, 138.

65. Ibid., 136–37.
(Eusebius, *Praep. ev*. 9.27:25; see also Sir 45:2). But as in Artapanus, so in 4Q374 frag. 2, Moses revives those who have been struck by the divine beauty of his face.

The brothers throw themselves before Aseneth and beg for mercy from the avenging sons of Leah. Aseneth instructs them to hide in the thicket of reeds so that she may appease them. Aseneth convinces the sons of Leah not to kill their brothers on the grounds that the Lord protected her from them by melting their swords. She adds that “this is enough for them that the Lord fights against them for us” (28:10). Aseneth’s miracle and the Lord’s fight against her enemies are synonymous. Simeon is not convinced, but Levi demonstrates his characteristic perspicacity by agreeing not to kill them and perceiving that his brothers are hiding in the nearby thicket of reeds (28:15–17). Levi’s prescience does not overshadow, however, the analogy to Moses in this climatic moment. Aseneth has been identified momentarily as a Moses figure, specifically as Moses is envisioned as divine, luminous and dreadful.

5.4.6. What Was Angelic Is Now Ascribed to the Lord

In Exod 14:24, it is the “Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud” who looks down on the Egyptians. He throws the Egyptian forces into a panic and clogs their chariot wheels. In the Exodus account as well as in Jos. Asen. 27:7–11, the military might of the enemy is neutralized by a miracle, one that is attributed ultimately to the Lord. In Exod 14:25, the Egyptians’ reaction to their chariot wheels being clogged is to remark, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.”

---

66. This expression is used often of biblical warriors who depend on God: Exod 14:14, 25; Josh 10:14, 23:10; Deut 3:22; 2 Kgs 6:16.; Neh 4:14, 20; Jer 21:5; Dan 10:20; Jdt 16:2; Sus 59–60; 2 Macc 3:25; 3 Macc 6:18. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 42. See also Delling, who notes that the same turn of phrase,
of Moses declares that “The Lord is a warrior, the Lord is his name.” This is the reaction that the brothers have when Aseneth melts their swords: “And the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah saw this great thing and were exceedingly afraid and said, ‘The Lord fights against us for Aseneth’ ” (28:1).67 Joseph’s wicked brothers conflate divine action with what Aseneth has done in the same way. They have beheld Aseneth’s miracle and inferred that the Lord has done this through her angelomorphic power.

The faithful of Israel, represented by Benjamin, Simeon, Levi and Leah’s sons, achieve a great victory despite overwhelming odds, and Aseneth achieves the final victory miraculously. When the wicked sons assign agency to this action, it is the Lord himself who has done it. The angel of God in Exodus goes in front of Israel (Exod 23:20, 23; 32:34) and bears the name of God (Exod 23:21). Whenever the angel acts, what he has done is attributed ultimately to the Lord. It is the Lord who leads the people out of Egypt (Exod 12:51; 13:3).68

5.5. Aseneth’s Reconfiguration of the Red Sea

How has the presentation in the adventure of exodus imagery reinforced the thematic project of the romance? In what ways have the motifs of inheritance, family membership,

καταδιώκω ὁπίσω τινός is used in Exod 14:4, 8—9 to describe the pharaoh’s pursuit of Israel (“Einwirkungen,” 31).

67. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” OTP 2.245 n. a. This is one of the places that Delling considers to be an allusion to the Red Sea (“Einwirkungen,” 29–56, esp. 45).

ambush/treachery, slavery/servitude enhanced the themes of repentance as membership and wisdom as repentance that were first expressed in the story of Aseneth’s conversion? What role does Aseneth’s identity as Wisdom personified and City of Refuge play in this eschatological exodus?

At the very moment in the crossing of the Red Sea when judgment comes for Egypt, Aseneth offers mercy for the penitent brothers. She is even able to convince Levi to show mercy to the arch-villain, the pharaoh’s son. When Benjamin wants to finish the pharaoh’s son with a sword, Levi intervenes and declares “it does not befit a man who worships God to repay evil for evil nor to trample underfoot a fallen (man) nor to oppress his enemy till death” (29:3). At the emblematic site of Israel’s victory over the Egyptians, where the Israelites celebrated not just their deliverance from the Egyptians but also the utter destruction of their enemies (Exod 15:4–12), the figure of Aseneth redefines how the victory is achieved. The victory that recreates Israel as a people at the Red Sea has been given a different basis and thus how that people is recreated happens differently. Aseneth becomes a newly configured personification of Wisdom as repentance and mercy, leading out a people of God whose identity is characterized by repentance.

The adventure has done what the romance did not do. It has enacted an eschatological pageant that confirms the representative titles conferred on Aseneth in the romance and has demonstrated what they mean. If the romance shaped the theme of

69. Aseneth as the merciful one again bears a resemblance to the depiction of Moses. In the appendix to 3 Enoch, Moses meets Metatron when he ascends to the throne of heaven, where he petitions God on Israel’s behalf for mercy (vv. 1–2), and in 2 En. 48A:10:6, Moses seeks mercy for the Israelites many times in the wilderness. In Sir 44:23–45:5, Moses is “a man of mercy.” In a salient moment of Israel’s formation as a people, in which God’s judgment is an essential part of the event, Aseneth has extended mercy in an extraordinary manner and even surpassed Moses in mercy.
divine providence by developing Aseneth’s relationship to her eternally-elected ideal, Repentance, during her transformation from pagan to daughter of the Most High, the adventure sought through an eschatological depiction to produce its own effect on that theme. Rather than affirming the eternal election of the prototypical profligate, the adventure dramatizes the (re)creation of the people of Israel as an act not of judgment, but of repentance and forgiveness. The citizens of the City of Refuge, mere abstractions in the romance, pass through its gates because of the mercy offered by Aseneth in the climax of the adventure. The result is a surprising consonance in the theme of divine providence between the two parts of Joseph and Aseneth.

What has been said about Aseneth, and by proxy about the people of Israel, reconditions the theodicean question that the idea of divine providence seeks to answer: if God has chosen Israel as a people, how can Israel include a person in a reprobate life who subsequently chooses a life of virtue? How can God’s providential plan include such a person? The answer that Joseph and Aseneth gives in the romance is that the penitent has always been part of the plan because repentance is crucial to the life of the city. The complementary answer given by the adventure is that the conduit for the eschatological renewal and deliverance from danger of God’s people is the same repentance.

But what about Joseph? He has been the paragon of purity in the romance and an angelic warrior in the adventure. What has he to do with repentance? Perhaps he is that part of the people of God who represent the faithful ideal of Israel, the unadulterated, those who do not stand in need of repentance. Perhaps he represents the ‘faithful angelic.’ Regardless, that ideal, personified in Joseph, is wed to Aseneth, the model of repentance and a reflection of Joseph’s righteous identity. Their eternal betrothal communicates
something about the people of the Most High God, but more importantly, about the expression of that God’s providence as regards his people. If there appear to be two modes of election, it does not mean that God has devised two different plans, one conceived in the primordial past and one as a sort of contingency for those who convert. The representatives of faithful Israel are depicted as betrothed from eternity to convey something about divine providence: whether faithful to the end or standing in need of repentance, God’s plan for Israel is already decided. The innovation that the adventure adds to this idea is that some of those who may have been considered part of the ever-faithful because of ancestry may find themselves in need of repentance in exactly the same way as a convert has. When they recognize the necessity to repent, it is the consummate convert who stands as the gatekeeper to the city of refuge.
CONCLUSION

My investigation of Joseph and Aseneth began six years ago when I submitted a final paper for a doctoral seminar on Judaism in the Hellenistic Age, taught by Dr. Joshua Ezra Burns. It has been through years of reading and rereading this text that the metaphors I have described in this study have come to my attention. Because neither of these phenomena had been adequately explored in the scholarship, I endeavored to make a contribution. Throughout my research, I have been unable to answer one question adequately: why are these two metaphors related?

In lieu of a satisfying answer, I have sought to answer the question of how they are related. I have answered that question thematically, since that has been the only compelling way I can now see that they do relate. The exposed hero tale nearly always includes the theme of destiny or fate. Heroes are exposed so that the audience may witness the limits of fate, for good or ill, stretched to their utmost. A child consigned to the wilderness is expected to perish, but through some intervention, often noble or even divine, he endures. The Jewish adaptation of the motifs of this tale type contains an implicit polemic against other ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic accounts of constraint, or necessity. The God of Israel is faithful to his people and his covenant, so the child is created as an expression of the divine providence and faithfulness of Yahweh. Moses is the first and best example of this in Jewish literature, the consummate example of a child whose birth comes as a direct response to the looming presence of evil in the lives of the people.

As I examined the birth stories of numerous early Jewish figures, I noticed similarities with Joseph and Aseneth, especially in the story of Jesus. The birth story
developed under a constant influence from the same kinds of stories that inspired the story of Moses’s birth. Because I am convinced that this is the case, I was also dissuaded from concluding that what I was noticing in Joseph and Aseneth was simply an exodus typology. In other words, I could not, given the development of the birth story quite apart from the exodus tradition in Jewish literature, assume that the presence of exposed hero motifs alongside exodus imagery in Joseph and Aseneth indicated that she was simply a new Moses. I have pointed to numerous cases in the narrative where she is compared to Moses, but I have avoided making the case that Aseneth is a new Moses. Keeping the two paradigms in tension rather than placing the exposed hero motifs under the rubric of an exodus typology has generated a trajectory for my own research and a chance to answer the question of why these two phenomena were ever paired with each other.

I found a similar ambiguity in the expression of exodus imagery alongside exposed hero motifs in the Gospel of Matthew. There are certain elements in Matt 1–2 that seem to support an Israel typology, not just a Moses typology. This is a possibility that I explored in Chapter One. What is clear in the scholarship is that those who argue for a new Israel typology cannot deny that there is also a Moses typology, at the very least, deployed in the service of it. That should compel us to recognize that it is not enough to acknowledge Matthew’s penchant for figural comparison and his comfort in layering such comparisons onto his portrayal of Jesus. We must ask why the assimilation of Jesus’s birth story to Moses’s supports the depiction of Jesus as the personification of Israel.

A new Moses typology supports a new Israel typology in Matthew because Moses is also typologically associated with Israel in his birth story in Exodus. What suffering
the people of Israel undergo is the driving force behind the events of Moses’s birth, and his exposure signals the end of their persecution while symbolizing their future redemption. The writer of Exodus has combined the plight of the people of Israel in Egypt with the deliverance of a single child from danger to unite the fortunes of those people to that child. The Gospel writer has drawn upon a development in the Moses birth story that restores missing elements, bringing it closer in line with other exposed hero tales. His birth is assimilated to the birth of Moses, then comes the appropriation of Hos. 11:1, which together with the Moses typology has the effect of recapitulating the compositional development of Exod 4:22. Moses begins as the exposed hero, but it is ultimately Israel who is God’s son. The tale type begins with an actual exposed child and ends with a representation of the people of Israel personified as the true son.

It occurs to me that a similar kind of figurative exchange is happening with Aseneth, with who we expect Aseneth to be and who she is actually revealed to be. She begins as a person that we suspect does not belong in the family she is a part of. She does not look like an Egyptian. But instead of the revelation of a mundane kinship, that she looks like a Hebrew because she is one, Aseneth is taken up by her heavenly father, the Most High God. Aseneth becomes a representation of wandering Israel, of all those who repent of their idolatry and unite themselves to the Most High. Perhaps there is something in the way that Jesus is depicted as both an exposed hero and a figure of the exodus that transcends a mere Moses typology. Perhaps there is something in that portrayal that may begin to provide an explanation for why there is an exposed hero tale as part of the book of Exodus in the first place. I intend to investigate the typologies in the Gospel of
Matthew and in the book of Exodus in the light of what I have learned because of this study.
APPENDIX

What follows is a short treatment of the history of exegesis of the passages in Genesis where Aseneth is mentioned. Interest in Aseneth as a character in the Joseph story is not attested at all in the Second Temple period. It is a late antique phenomenon that leads eventually to the composition of Joseph and Aseneth and later to the medieval rabbinic Dinah-Aseneth legend. I survey the history of the exegesis of the Joseph story, then describe the Dinah-Aseneth legend as it appears in rabbinic sources. My purpose is to address the potential relationship between this legend and Joseph and Aseneth without including it as an integral part of the argument in Chapter Two.

**Early Formation of Exegetical Traditions Relating to Aseneth**

The effort to address Aseneth’s marriage to Joseph in any respect does not appear until the third century CE in the *Commentary on Genesis* of Origen. Joseph and Aseneth is the first attempt to address the issue of the propriety of Aseneth’s marriage to Joseph because Aseneth is a foreign woman, and I posit that it is a composition that existed no earlier than the third century. The literary development of the Dinah-Aseneth legend cannot be dated before the seventh century CE, at least a century after the Syriac version of Joseph and Aseneth. What follows is an assessment of the history of exegesis of the Joseph story as regards Joseph, Aseneth, and Aseneth’s father Potiphar (Pentephres). I conclude this section by providing my own assessment of the relationship between Joseph and Aseneth and the Dinah-Aseneth legend.

The earliest exegetes of Gen 41:45, 50 and 46:20 did not apparently see Joseph’s marriage to Aseneth as a problem. Instead, it was Aseneth’s father who created the
earliest challenges. In the Hebrew of Genesis, there are two characters with distinct names: *Potiphar*, the master of Joseph, who was an “official (*seris*) of pharaoh” and a “captain of the guard” (*sar hattabbakhim*; Gen 37:36; 39:1, 4–6), and *Potiphera’*, “priest (*kohen*) of On”, the father of Aseneth (Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20). But in the LXX, these two names are translated as the same name (Πετεφρης or Πεντεφρη). The trouble with assimilating these two different characters arises with the word *seris*, which LXX translators took to mean “eunuch,” rendering it with the word σπάδων in Gen 37:36 LXX and as εὐνοῦχος in Gen 39:2. The conflation of the names of Joseph’s master and his father-in-law combined with an ambiguous term creates some troubling implications: Pentephres, as a eunuch, would find a wife unnecessary and a daughter prohibitive.

There is no attempt to address the problem either of the assimilation of characters or the use of ambiguous titles until Origen reports on a Jewish pseudepigraphon he calls

---

1. That is, the names are translated either as Πετεφρης in both cases or as Πεντεφρη in both cases (Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 321 n. 39). Jubilees is the earliest attestation of the association between these two figures. Joseph’s master in Gen 37:36 is “Potiphar, the pharaoh’s eunuch, the chief of the guard” (Jub. 39:2) and Aseneth’s father in Gen 41:45, 50 “Potiphar, priest of Heliopolis, the chief of the guard” (Jub. 40:10). It appears that the master of Joseph is the natural father of Aseneth, since the same name and title (“chief of the guard”) are assigned to what are two different men in the HB. Jubilees’ rendering is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that Joseph’s master and the father of Aseneth may have been viewed as the same person regardless of the LXX translation that gives them identical names. In other words, the problem of an identical spelling may have existed in the Hebrew tradition despite the Greek translation. Secondly, Jubilees makes no effort to resolve any perceived difficulty with the term “eunuch.” So, although there is an implied exegetical problem, Jubilees is uninterested in addressing it.

2. Kraemer comments that the “use of two different terms to translate the same Hebrew word may point to some concern about the identification of Potiphar as a eunuch” (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 314).

3. In some rabbinic sources, Potiphar bought Joseph to satisfy his own sexual desires. As a result, either the angel Gabriel (b. Sotah 13b) or God himself (Gen. Rab. 86:3) castrated Potiphar as punishment for his desire (Ibid., 316).
the Prayer of Joseph. The first significant mention of Potiphar/Pentephres, Joseph, and Aseneth is in Genesis Rabbah, a midrash probably redacted sometime in the fifth century CE. It equates Joseph’s master with Aseneth’s father in 86:3. Rabbi Joshua of Siknin in the name of Rabbi Levi is noted as saying that Joseph caused his master Potiphar to eat priestly food, the impetus for which is the tradition that a priest named Eleazar married a daughter of Joseph. Potiphar is made to eat priestly food because he is reckoned, strangely enough, as one of his own descendants. The convoluted argument aside, this assumes that Joseph is related to his master, and that makes sense naturally if Potiphar is also Aseneth’s father and Joseph is married to Aseneth. Combined with 85:2, which relates that Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph because she foresaw through astrology that she was to produce a child by Joseph (not realizing it would be from her daughter), Gen. Rab. confirms twice that Aseneth was the natural-born daughter of Potiphar and his wife. Genesis Rabbah also portrays Potiphar as a eunuch, but he is castrated by God as a punishment for buying Joseph to satisfy his own sexual desires (86:3).

4. Origen relates the following: “Asenath brought charges against her mother in the presence of her father, stating that she had laid a trap for Joseph, and not Joseph for her. For this reason, therefore, Potiphar gave her in marriage to Joseph in order to prove to the Egyptians that Joseph had committed no wrong of this kind against his house” (quoted in Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 257). There is no mention of Potiphar being a eunuch, but Potiphar as Joseph’s master is clearly identified as Aseneth’s father. The problem Origen seems most concerned with, one that his reference to the Prayer of Joseph resolves, is not that Potiphar is (potentially) incapable of fathering a daughter nor that Aseneth is an unworthy bride for Joseph, but that a man would marry off his daughter to a slave accused of taking advantage of his own wife.

5. T. Onq. and T. Neof., which predate Gen. Rab., simply translate the seris of Gen 37:36; 39:1, 4–6 as “officer” (sli) or “magnate” (rab) instead of eunuch, thus retaining the identification of Joseph’s master with Aseneth’s father, but eliminating the problematic definition of seris. T. Onq. could have been composed as early as the third century CE, with a proto-Onqelos existing as early as the second century CE (Bernard Grossfeld, The Targum Onqelos to Genesis: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes, ArBib 6 [London: T&T Clark, 1988], 33–35).

6. The Talmud (b. Sot. 13b) has the same tradition, but the angel Gabriel castrates Potiphar (Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 316).
Genesis Rabbah supports the tradition that the sons of Jacob married their own sisters (84:21; 82:2). The idea that a biblical figure was born with his own twin sister to be his wife is found in Epiphanius (Pan. 40:5), in which Cain kills Abel because they fight for the love of their own sister. The implication in Gen. Rab. is that each son of Jacob was paired with a sister. The tradition of Jacob’s sons having corresponding sisters is repeated in Pirqe R. El. (36, 39), but it adds that Joseph is lacking a counterpart because he married Aseneth. By the fifth century CE, it appears that Potiphar’s identity as both Joseph’s master and Aseneth’s father was well established, that more than one solution to the attendant exegetical problems had been devised, and that the impetus for a version of the Dinah-Aseneth legend, the pairing of each of Jacob’s sons with a sister-wife, was already part of the traditions relating to the Joseph story.7

I would like to observe the place Joseph and Aseneth seems to occupy in the history of exegesis so far as regards the character of Pentephres. In Joseph and Aseneth, Pentephres is called “a satrap of the pharaoh, a chief of satraps and of all the leading officials of the pharaoh” and a “priest of Heliopolis” (1:3). In 4:10, Aseneth seems to identify Joseph’s mistress and master as someone other than her parents. But 1:3 presents Pentephres as both an official of the pharaoh and a priest of Heliopolis. He is not the ἄρχιμάγειος (“chief steward”) of Gen 37:36/39:2 LXX, but he is a chief of all the leading men. The combination of both the administrative and priestly roles into one

7. Harry Freedman comments on Gen. Rab. 90:4 in his edition of the Midrash Rabbah. In Gen. Rab. 90:4, Rabbi Aḥa says that the new name that the pharaoh gives to Joseph, Zaphenath-Paneah, means “the one that was hidden here, thou hast come to reveal her.” Freedman suggests that this could be an allusion to the Dinah-Aseneth legend, specifically to the version in which Jacob ties a disc around Aseneth’s neck to indicate that she is family, “but he saw the disc and hid it, so that her identity might not be known” (Midrash Rabbah: Genesis II, ed. Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon [London: Soncino Press, 1939], 829). It is an intriguing suggestion, but certainly nothing on which to rest an argument for literary evidence of the Dinah-Aseneth legend in the fifth century CE.
shows that the writer knew of the targumic solution of making Potiphar a chief or officer of the pharaoh instead of a eunuch as a way of resolving the difficulty of assimilation. The writer is including Pentephres’s position as an official in order to signal to his readers that he is aware of the issue of identification and that others have understood Pentephres to be a eunuch. Combined with the influence of Hellenistic novels of the second and third centuries CE, the presentation of Pentephres in Jos. Asen. 1:3 indicates a date of composition no earlier than the third century CE and perhaps even as late as the fifth century CE, only a short time before it was copied into Syriac. 

8 Kraemer demonstrates that establishing a terminus ante quem for Joseph and Aseneth in the fourth century CE based on the idea that it influenced the composition of the Passion of Saint Christine and other late antique martyrdom accounts is only tenable when scholars (e.g., Philonenko, Burchard) first posit a much earlier date for the writing of Joseph and Aseneth. Without this constraint, there is no reason not to entertain the possibility that all three came from another source or that Joseph and Aseneth was influenced by these martyr acts (Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 235–36).

9 Most scholars have dated the final redaction of T. Ps.-J. to sometime after the Muslim conquest of the East, between the seventh and ninth centuries CE, but with traditions dating back much earlier. The difficulty with dating T. Ps.-J. is that it contains clear knowledge of Islam, but also seems to contain ancient traditions. See the summary of scholarly views by Michael Maher, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis, Translated, with Introduction and Notes, ArBib 1B, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher,
Manasseh and Ephraim, to have been the daughter of Dinah, and to have grown up in the house of Potiphera, the chief of Tanis. Like T. Onq. and T. Neof., T. Ps.-J. calls Potiphera a chief instead of a eunuch. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan lacks an exposition of the Dinah-Aseneth legend, and the identification of Potiphera with Potiphar cannot be assumed, since “Potiphera” is used. Given the uncertainty of the dating of this targum, the mention of the Dinah-Aseneth legend does little more than establish its literary existence potentially as early as the seventh century.

The version in Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer is the fullest expression of the legend. Each of the sons of Jacob is born after seven months, “with his partner with him, except Joseph, whose partner was not born with him, for Asenath, the daughter of Dinah, was destined to be his wife, and (also) except Dinah, whose partner was not born with her.” Dinah’s brothers threaten to kill her if they even catch sight of Aseneth, but Jacob

---


11. Philonenko notes the paraphrase of T. Ps.-J. to Gen 41:45, “The pharaoh named Joseph “the man who uncovers what is hidden,” and he himself gave Aseneth, whom Dinah had had by Shechem and whom the wife of Potiphar, the prince of Tanis, had raised” (Joseph et Aseneth, 33).

12. Hermann L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger date this work to the eighth or the ninth century, at least after the rise of Islam. It is quoted by Pirqoi ben Baboi at the beginning of the ninth century. The joint rule of two brothers is referred to, identified as either ninth-century or seventh-century rulers. Reference to four kingdoms lasting a total of a thousand years has been reckoned to end anywhere from the seventh to the ninth century CE. Issues similar to those found in dating Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also make it hard to know how old any particular part of Pirqe R. El. is (Introduction to Talmud and Midrash, trans. Markus Bockmuehl, 2nd rep. ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 328–30).

intervenes. He suspends a golden plate around Aseneth’s neck, inscribed with the divine name, and sends her away. The archangel Michael brings Aseneth to Egypt where she is brought up in the house of Potiphar.\textsuperscript{14} The motif of destiny is explicit and functions as a kind of annunciation of Aseneth’s future birth. Her destined lover is born in seven months. The danger of annihilation causes her exposure, but not before she is given a birth token. She is discovered by an angelic figure and transported from harm to be fostered by nobility. The idea that Potiphar is a eunuch is not mentioned, but Potiphar’s wife is described as “barren.”\textsuperscript{15} The legend concludes simply that when Joseph went down to Egypt, he married Aseneth, though the other examples of the legend in which Aseneth uses her birth token to establish her kinship with Joseph give credence to Aptowitzer’s suggestion that Pirqe R. El. may have contained such a recognition scene originally.\textsuperscript{16}

The legend develops in the early medieval sources, gaining details that fit with the tale type. None of these sources can contribute to the discussion of a potential relationship between Joseph and Aseneth and the early Dinah-Aseneth legend, but they demonstrate that the legend continued to develop as an exposed hero tale. In one version, Jacob again suspends a golden tablet around Aseneth’s neck, but this time it is inscribed

\textsuperscript{14} See Pirqe R. El. 36, 38–39. Soperim 21 claims that Dinah was only six years old when she was raped by Shechem. It also contains the detail that Michael conveyed Aseneth to Egypt. The final redaction of Soperim cannot be earlier than the eighth century CE (Strack and Stemberger, \textit{Introduction} to the \textit{Talmud and Midrash}, 227).

\textsuperscript{15} Adoptive parents in exposed hero tales are often childless. See Polybus and his wife, who raise Oedipus. The herder and his wife who raise Cyrus and the charcoal man and his wife who raise the child of Charisius and Pamphila have both lost children at birth. Simmus adopts Semiramis because he has no children of his own, as does Thermutis of Moses in Josephus’s version of the Mosaic birth story (Lewis, \textit{Sargon}, 215).

with the story of what Shechem did to Dinah. Instead of Michael’s intervention, Jacob exposes Aseneth at the base of the walls near an Egyptian city. Potiphar is taking a walk that day and hears Aseneth crying. When he notices the tablet and reads the inscription, he says to his retinue, “This child is the daughter of eminent people. Carry it into my house and procure a nurse for it.” 17 In another text, Jacob intervenes on Aseneth’s behalf when his sons threaten to kill her. He puts an amulet around her neck and exposes her in a thorn bush. Potiphar finds the child and brings her home. Years later, Joseph is riding through the streets of Egypt after his royal accession, with women crowded around him to behold his beauty, throwing ornaments to him as presents. Aseneth uses her amulet to this effect, throwing it at Joseph. Joseph picks it up, examines it and learns from it that Aseneth belongs to his tribe and family. In yet another text, this version is taken up largely without change, save that Jacob hangs a document reading “whoso joins himself unto thee joins himself unto the seed of Jacob,” rather than an amulet. 18

Lastly, there is a late Syriac story that relates that when Shechem raped Dinah, Jacob discovers that Dinah was pregnant, and Simeon and Levi put the entire town of Shechem to the sword. They threaten Dinah that if they see the child that was conceived by Shechem, that she will die. Dinah flees into the desert and gives birth, then an eagle from Egypt takes the baby girl and deposits her on the altar of On. Potiphar discovers

17. Aptowitzer’s translation of the Hebrew given by Salomon Buber, Midrash Agada (Vienna, 1894), 97, in “Asenath,” 244.

18. Pentateuch-Tosafot in Hadar-Zekenim, 19c (cf. Da’at of Gen. 41.45) contains this last detail. Aptowitzer suggests that the use of the amulet or plate to reveal Aseneth’s lineage must have been part of Pirqé R. El. originally, though it is lacking in what is extant. The second part of this narrative, in which Joseph and Aseneth meet, is present in Pirqé R. El. 39. The whole reason for giving Aseneth such a token in the first place is clearly so that she might understand her identity and reveal it later in life (Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 245–46; Ginzberg, Legends, 349 n. 97).
Aseneth on the altar, and he and his wife are happy to adopt the child, since they are childless. Potiphar builds a large house for Aseneth and appoints virgins to serve her. Many princes’ sons pursue Aseneth’s hand in marriage, but she rejects them. The pharaoh gives Aseneth to Joseph in marriage. Jacob goes down to Egypt, and Dinah with him. When Dinah sees Aseneth, she is struck to the heart, asking whose daughter Aseneth is. Aseneth responds that she is the daughter of Potiphar, but when Dinah learns of how Aseneth arrived in Egypt, wrapped in swaddling clothes, Dinah asked to see them and recognizes her daughter. The Syriac manuscripts of this version both date to the 1800s, but a fifteenth century CE rabbi, Aaron ben Gerson Al-Rabi, includes the detail of the eagle and of Aseneth being raised in a house.¹⁹ Although these manuscripts are very late, they do attest a combination of some details from Joseph and Aseneth and the Dinah-Aseneth legend, something that early scholars of Joseph and Aseneth made note of.²⁰

Ultimately, there is not enough evidence to establish that there is a connection between Joseph and Aseneth and the Dinah-Aseneth legend. Though they appear to respond to similar exegetical concerns and even have knowledge of common traditions, the material evidence for the flourishing of the Dinah-Aseneth legend is so late that it

---

¹⁹. I have paraphrased the text given by Oppenheim (Fabula, 6–7). Philonenko gives a French translation of the Latin (Joseph et Aséneth, 34) and Burchard gives an English translation of part of Philonenko’s translation (OTP 2.183). The legend is picked up in medieval rabbinic tradition by Aaron ben Gerson Al-Rabi in his Commentary on the Pentateuch-Rashi to Gen 46:6. He mentions the eagle, which is the most salient characteristic of this version of the legend (Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 250). Philonenko, Battifol, and Aptowitzer all assume a very early date for these manuscripts, but besides the possible connection with Al-Rabi, there is no evidence that they are not late medieval works.

²⁰. Philonenko deems it unlikely that Joseph and Aseneth drew on the detail of the eagle in the Syriac text as a source. He follows Aptowitzer’s assertion that the attribution of Gen. Rab. 97 to Rabbi Ammi and the description of Aseneth in that passage as half-blind demonstrates that the Dinah-Aseneth legend existed as early as the third century CE (Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth, 36–37; Aptowitzer, “Asenath,” 252–54).
seems highly unlikely that the two stories existed in a common milieu. The only possibility that remains is that Joseph and Aseneth, written sometime between the third and fifth centuries CE, influenced the formation of the Dinah-Aseneth legend. I do not contend that this is the case, since it is unnecessary to my argument in Chapter Two. There, I maintain that the writer of Joseph and Aseneth would like his readers to suspect that Aseneth does not belong in Pentephres’s household. It does not mean that the writer would like his readers to suspect that she is the daughter of Dinah, or even that he knew this legend at all.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


**Reference Works**


**Secondary Sources**


Bohak, Gideon. “Aseneth’s Honeycomb as the Possible Key to *Joseph and Asenath*.” Pages 163–70 in Assaf, *Proceedings*.


Krašovec, Jože. “Etymological Explanation of Proper Names in the Hebrew Bible and the History of their Forms in Bible Translations.” Chapter 1 in Mein and Camp, Transformation of Proper Names.


Pervo, Richard I. “Aseneth and Her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in the Greek Novels.” Pages 145–60 in Levine, “Women Like This.”


———. “Joseph und Asenath.” Columns 889–90 in vol. 2 of Reicke and Rost, Biblisch-historisches Handwörterbuch.


van der Woude, Adam S. “Melchisedek als himmlische Erlösergestalt in den neugefundenen eschatologischen Midraschim aus Qumran Höhle XI.” *OtSt* 14 (1965): 354–73.


———. “A Robe Like Lightning: Clothing Changes and Identification in *Joseph and Aseneth*.” Pages 137–53 in Upson-Saia, Daniel-Hughes, and Batten, *Dressing Judeans*.


