

## THE SOCIAL SETTING AND PURPOSE OF JOSEPH AND ASENETH

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After decades of neglect because of the late date and Christian character assigned to the apocryphon by its early interpreters,<sup>1</sup> Joseph and Aseneth has attracted considerable interest in recent years among specialists in Early Judaism and Christian origins, and a strong consensus has emerged on some of the basic literary and historical questions. There is now general agreement that the original language of JosAsen is Greek,<sup>2</sup> that its provenance is Egypt,<sup>3</sup> that it is Jewish and not Christian in its earliest attainable form,<sup>4</sup> that it dates prior to 115 CE,<sup>5</sup> and that the longer form of the text lies closer to the original than the short recension.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this growing consensus, no accord has been reached on the nature and history-of-religions affinities of Aseneth's conversion and on the social setting and purpose of the apocryphon in which that conversion is central. Among the paradigms of conversion and initiation which have been suggested as analogous to Aseneth's case are those of the Qumran sect,<sup>7</sup> the Therapeutae,<sup>8</sup> the mystery religions (especially the cult of Isis),<sup>9</sup> Merkabah mysticism,<sup>10</sup> and gnosticism,<sup>11</sup> and it is largely on the basis of these alleged parallels that the social context and function of the document have been understood. Thus, for example, those who have drawn a close connection between JosAsen and the mystery religions have typically understood the work as missionary propaganda designed to attract converts by representing conversion to Judaism in the guise of a mystery initiation.<sup>12</sup> Those who find in Aseneth's experiences close parallels to the beliefs and practices of Jewish groups such as the Essenes or Therapeutae naturally understand JosAsen and the community behind it in terms of the sociological and theological complexion of those groups as they are known to us from other

sources.<sup>13</sup> However, most such suggestions rest on the premature effort to elucidate phenomena in JosAsen by reference to other sources without sufficient prior attention to those phenomena in their own right within their own literary context. The result of this misplaced emphasis is that our understanding of the social setting and purpose of JosAsen has been influenced too much by superficial and methodologically flawed comparisons and too little by the social profile which can be reconstructed from the document itself.

The twofold purpose of the present study is to provide a methodological alternative to such approaches by (1) giving priority to descriptive (synchronic) over comparative (diachronic) analysis in an examination of the social tensions evidenced in the story itself; and (2) offering a proposal regarding the purpose of JosAsen which is suggested by this determinative social context and by other neglected features in the text rather than by supposed analogies with external phenomena.

### *Social Tensions Reflected in the Narrative*

The context of Aseneth's conversion, at least at the literary level, is one of deep-seated tensions among several groups of people. Since this complex social matrix is so pervasive in the narrative, we must reckon with the possibility that it is not merely literary but echoes social reality in the author's community and betrays his very purpose for writing. Three principal frontiers of social distinction and conflict appear in the story: (1) that between Jews and gentiles; (2) that within the Jewish community centering on the marriage of a convert and a born Jew; and (3) that between the convert to Judaism and the convert's gentile family and former associates.<sup>14</sup> We now consider each of these in turn as it is reflected in the narrative and suggests something about the social setting and function of the work.

### *Jews and Gentiles*

The most obvious and categorical of the distinctions mentioned above is that between Jew and gentile. That the author proceeds on the assumption of, and in some sense is concerned with, this distinction and its ramifications is implicit already in the opening lines, according to which Aseneth 'bore no similarity to the virgins of the Egyptians but was in every way similar to the daughters of the Hebrews' (1.5).<sup>15</sup> In her virulently anti-Judaic response to her



father's suggestion that she marry Joseph, Aseneth herself voices from the gentile point of view the kind of suspicion that underlies uneasy relations between Jews and gentiles (4.9-12). The glorified portrayal of Joseph upon his arrival among his gentile hosts (5.4-7), including something very close to an ascription of angelic status to him by the startled Aseneth (6.1-8), reinforces the reader's initial impression that the author wishes to set Joseph and his people qualitatively apart from all others and generates the expectation that the story will somehow revolve around this fundamental difference.

This initial impression receives explicit confirmation in the narrative of Joseph's entry into the house of Pentephres and the explanation that the hosts 'set before him a table by itself, because Joseph would not eat with the Egyptians since this was an abomination to him' (7.1). In the same vein, when Aseneth comes forth to kiss Joseph, he refuses to allow it, saying:

It is not proper for a man who worships God, who blesses with his mouth the living God and eats blessed bread of life and drinks a blessed cup of immortality and is anointed with blessed ointment of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman, who blesses with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eats from their table bread of strangling and drinks from their libation a cup of deceit and is anointed with ointment of destruction. Rather, the man who worships God will kiss his mother and the sister born of his mother and the sister from his tribe and kinsfolk and the wife who shares his bed, who bless with their mouths the living God (8.5f.).

In this very important passage, which sets up the conflict to be resolved by the story of Aseneth's conversion, the contours of the dichotomy adumbrated earlier become clear. It is a fundamental dichotomy between those who worship God and those who worship idols. In terms which are anachronistic in the patriarchal context but descriptive of the author's own social world, it is a dichotomy between Jews and gentiles. A fourfold series of antitheses expressed in relative clauses spells out the difference between the two classes of people:

The man who worships God	The strange woman
1. Blesses with his mouth the living God	1. Blesses with her mouth dead and dumb idols

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|--|--|
| 2. Eats blessed bread<br>of life                           | 2. Eats bread of<br>strangling from the<br>table of idols  |
| 3. Drinks a blessed<br>cup of immortality                  | 3. Drinks a cup of<br>deceit from the<br>libation of idols |
| 4. Is anointed with<br>blessed ointment of<br>incorruption | 4. Is anointed with<br>ointment of<br>destruction          |

The contrast is such that there can be no intimacy, and certainly no intermarriage, between the worshiper of God and the idol worshiper. Whether or not some ritual meal lies behind the language of bread, cup, and ointment,<sup>16</sup> that language has as its primary function here that of setting the Jew apart from the non-Jew and justifying the social separation which the former must maintain from the latter.

That the social concerns reflected here are not merely literary but are real ones in the author's community is decisively confirmed by 8.7: 'Likewise, it is not proper for a woman who worships God to kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God'. This additional interdiction is different from what has preceded it in that nothing in the story line calls for it; there is no Jewish woman in the story for whom exogamy is a possibility. The generalization from the specific case at hand to a related situation beyond that actually represented in the narrative betrays a didactic interest in clarifying Jewish self-identity and appropriate Jewish conduct in a gentile environment. The story is addressing vital social issues. The milieu of JosAsen evidently was one in which Jews lived in dynamic tension with gentiles and struggled to maintain a distinctive Jewish identity. The polluting effect of intermarriage and of table fellowship with gentiles was of grave concern to the author.

The prayer of Joseph on Aseneth's behalf (8.9), which immediately follows the passage just examined, further heightens the contrast between existence as a pagan and existence as a member of God's elect people: the one is darkness, the other light; the one is error, the other truth; the one is death, the other life. Meal terminology makes its second appearance here, and, as in the first occurrence, the context is one in which a contrast between two categories of people, two realms of existence, is being drawn. Again leaving aside the question whether a ritual meal is in view, the language about eating the bread of life and drinking the cup of blessing is functionally



parallel to that about being formed anew, entering God's rest, and living in eternal life; it expresses the unique blessings of the chosen people of God, by way of contrast to the darkness and death which is the lot of those outside the pale of God's elect.

The most fundamental ground of distinction in JosAsen between Jew and gentile is that the former is a worshiper of God and the latter an idolater. This fact is evident already from the use of the stereotyped appellation 'one who worships God' as a standard Jewish self-designation. C. Burchard is quite right that in JosAsen *theosebēs* should not merely be translated 'religious' (which would dilute the true meaning) or 'god-fearing' (which would provoke false association with the *phoboumenoi* [*sebomenoi*] *ton theon*, 'God-fearers').<sup>17</sup> It is rather a technical term denoting one who is God-fearing in the exclusive sense of a Jew who recognizes the only true God, as its usage in antithesis to various expressions for 'idol-worshiper' makes abundantly clear.<sup>18</sup> This definitive feature of the Jewish self-understanding receives forceful narrative expression in the account of Aseneth's conversion and in the way she is described before and after her conversion.

Aseneth is depicted graphically in the early chapters as one whose life is utterly bound up in idolatry (2.3; 3.6). The barrier that separated Aseneth from Joseph, gentile from Jew, was nothing other than idolatry and the pollution associated with it, as we have seen in 8.5. So fundamental a distinction between gentile and Jew did this matter of idolatry represent to the author that he takes pains to accentuate Aseneth's utter repudiation of the idols she had formerly worshiped. Not only does he narrate in vivid detail her smashing of the idols and disposal of the sacrifices and sacrificial vessels (9.2; 10.12f.), taking care to note that she disposed of all of the sacrificial food in such a way that not even her dogs could eat it (10.13); he also has Aseneth reiterate this accomplishment and express her contempt for the gods repeatedly in the remainder of the story. In her soliloquies in ch. 11, her prayer in chs. 12 and 13, and her psalm in ch. 21, Aseneth links her reluctance to call upon God, as well as her alienation from Joseph and Judaism, directly to her former idolatry. Even Aseneth's announcement to Joseph that she has converted is expressed in terms of her having renounced idolatry (19.5).

It is clear that for the author of JosAsen idolatry is what comprises the gulf separating Aseneth from Joseph, gentile from Jew. Jewish self-identity, the essence of gentile existence as viewed from the

Jewish standpoint, the predicament of Aseneth which the account of her conversion resolves, and the nature of conversion itself are all conceived in terms of idolatry and its opposite, the worship of the true God and dissociation from the defilement of idols. Only with great peril to the understanding of JosAsen can this basic fact be ignored and hasty comparisons drawn with other texts or phenomena where the underlying concerns are quite different.

The advantages of Jewish over non-Jewish existence are brought out clearly in chs. 14–17 in the narrative of the visit of the man from heaven. Even the physical description of this heavenly visitor betrays the Jewish bias of the narrator: he was 'in every way similar to Joseph' (14.9). The first recorded acts of the man from heaven are to command Aseneth to dress in a manner consonant with her new status (14.12) and to assure her that her name has been written in the book of the living in heaven (15.4). He further tells her that she will be 'renewed and refashioned and given new life' and that she will 'eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and be anointed with blessed ointment of incorruption' (15.5). This whole complex of expressions implies an unmistakable contrast with Aseneth's former existence. Already the table of idols in which Aseneth has participated has been declared to be the source of defilement and destruction. On the other hand, those whose names are written in the book of the living—and this group now includes Aseneth (15.4)—participate in life, immortality, and incorruption. Whatever the origin of the meal terminology used to convey this contrast, the contrast itself between the end of the idol-worshiper and that of the worshiper of God is plain: for the one it is wretchedness and defilement and destruction; for the other it is blessedness and renewal and immortality. Thus the same contrast seen earlier between the wretchedness of Aseneth's former (gentile) existence and her newfound (Jewish) status is implicit here as well.

The heavenly man next tells Aseneth that she is to be Joseph's bride (15.6)—a striking indication of her elevation in status since earlier as a 'strange woman' she could not even sit at table with Joseph or kiss him or have any association with him (7.1–6; 8.5–7). Aseneth is then informed that after her—indeed, *in* her—many other gentiles will repent, be renewed, and find refuge in the God of the Hebrews (15.7f.). When the heavenly man has finished speaking, Aseneth herself graphically expresses the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish existence: in turning to the true God she has been



rescued from the darkness and brought up from the foundations of the abyss (15.12).

The incident involving the honeycomb in ch. 16 provides a further occasion for the author of *JosAsen*, through the mouth of Aseneth's heavenly visitor, to articulate the blessings that accrue to the people of God. All those who penitently attach themselves to the true God eat from this comb and thereby eat the same immortal food as that eaten by the angels of God in paradise. This honeycomb is the spirit of life; everyone who eats from it will live forever; to perceive its true origin and nature is to know 'the ineffable mysteries of the Most High'; to eat it is to eat bread of life, drink a cup of immortality, and be anointed with ointment of incorruption (16.14-16). Whether or not liturgical practice underlies this scene, both the eating of the honey and the triadic formula with which it is equated are part of a larger series of highly symbolic expressions used to describe the blessed status which Aseneth now enjoys as one of the people of God.

The fifth passage in which bread-cup terminology appears is 19.5:

I am your maidservant Aseneth; and all the idols I have put away from myself and they have perished. And a man came to me from heaven today, and he gave me bread of life and I ate, and a cup of blessing and I drank . . .

These first words of Aseneth to Joseph upon his return to her on the eighth day presuppose that he is oblivious to all that has transpired in his absence. Indeed, he does not even recognize Aseneth because of her increased beauty. The obvious function of the introductory words placed on Aseneth's lips is therefore to identify her as a convert who now has the privileges and status of a Jewess. To this end Aseneth's idolatry is again treated as quite the essence of her heathen existence, and the whole of her conversion is epitomized in the one definitive act of repudiating idols. Once again, whether the bread and cup referred to here echo some sort of ritual meal or only symbolize the benefits of life as a Jew, the language clearly serves to mark the difference between the gentile and Jewish phases of Aseneth's life.

In the psalm of Aseneth in ch. 21, bread-cup language is used one final time, and the pattern that has emerged in previous occurrences continues. In 21.14 Aseneth confesses to having eaten 'bread of

strangling' and drunk 'a cup of deceit from the table of death', so it is not surprising that in 21.21 she balances this with a reference to her having received 'bread of life' and 'a cup of wisdom'. Once again expression is given to the blessings Aseneth now enjoys as a convert to Judaism that she did not formerly enjoy.

The author's sense of the ever-present potential for conflict when Jews live in a gentile environment is given its most emphatic narrative expression in JosAsen 22-29, where the attempt by Pharaoh's son to murder Joseph and abduct Aseneth is recounted. In the course of this narrative the formula 'it is not proper for the man who worships God to . . .', which was used earlier to prescribe proper Jewish behavior toward gentiles (8.5, 7; 21.1), appears several more times for the same purpose (23.9, 12; 29.3). Closely related are several other passages which do not follow the expanded formula but nevertheless specify how 'men who worship God' must behave in various situations of conflict (23.10; 28.5, 7). The repeated use of these stereotyped expressions to define the proper ethic for the people of God in their dealings with gentiles suggests both the importance of this concern in the shaping of the narrative and the existence of uneasy relations with gentiles in the real social world of JosAsen.

Also in the final part of the story, the author's high estimation of Jews and Judaism is evident in his glorified portrayals of Jewish characters. Joseph himself again is described in exalted language: he is 'the mighty man of God' (18.1f.; 21.21), 'the firstborn son of God' (18.11; 21.4). Jacob also receives a lofty description: he is like God (a god?) (22.3); though very old he is like a handsome young man; he has some of the qualities of an angel, others of a giant (22.7); he is a friend of God (23.10). Levi is portrayed as one especially gifted with prophetic insight into heavenly mysteries (22.13), ability to read people's minds (23.8), and perception of things happening far away (26.6; 28.17). He is also a meek and benevolent person, not in the least prone to hatred and subversion (23.10; 28.15-17; 29.5). Pharaoh himself recognizes these qualities and prostrates himself before Levi to bless him (29.6). Even young Benjamin is represented as far superior to his gentile counterparts. Not only is he described as extremely handsome and as strong as a lion; in language obviously inspired by the biblical account of David and Goliath, he is also said to have killed Pharaoh's son and his fifty troops single-handedly with fifty-one stones (27.1-5).



In addition to these glowing individual portraits, Jewish characters in general are rather favorably portrayed in these closing chapters *vis-à-vis* gentile characters. Pharaoh's son acknowledges the Hebrews as 'mighty men above all men on the earth' (23.2; 24.3, 7). Even though in the context of the story this represents flattery employed by Pharaoh's son as he seeks to enlist the aid of Joseph's brothers for his plot, it also reflects the author's own sense of Jewish superiority and is even reinforced by a reference to a biblical episode illustrating the military superiority of Jacob's sons (23.2; Gen. 34). Later the author has Pharaoh's son tremble and fall on his face before Jacob's sons at the very sight of their swords—this time not in flattery but in genuine fear (23.15–24.1). Still later in the narrative, the ascendancy of Joseph's family is displayed when six of his brothers are able to kill two thousand of their opponents in battle (27.6).

While giving unmistakable expression to his sense of Jewish supremacy, the author is careful to avoid leaving the impression that the Jews are vengeful people who take undue advantage of their superiority. They rather hold the ideal that 'it is not proper for us to repay evil for evil' (23.9; see also 28.5, 10, 14; 29.3), that 'it is not proper for a man who worships God to harm anyone in any way' (23.12), that 'men who worship God' respect every man (28.7). 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. Indeed, Jewish characters on both sides of the conflict periodically articulate the principle of clemency toward offenders which clearly represents the author's own view and which he wishes to convey as the Jewish ideal.

The tension between Jews and gentiles which permeates *JosAsen* and which has been summarized briefly here is more than the literary backdrop for Aseneth's conversion to Judaism; it is programmatic for the way the narrative unfolds. The very predicament of Aseneth which her conversion story resolves is that she is a gentile and a worshiper of idols, and the emphasis in the narrative of her conversion is therefore not upon ritual formalities but upon her renunciation of idols. The Jewish self-identity that emerges from the story is defined *vis-à-vis* the characteristic elements of heathenism, namely, idolatry and the defilement associated with it. The hostile action instigated by Pharaoh's son and narrated in chs. 22–29 pits

gentile against Jew. The ethical instruction which is sprinkled throughout the narrative has to do largely with Jewish relations with gentiles, disallowing social interaction with gentiles but urging respect and magnanimity toward them in situations of conflict. The pervasiveness of this tension, the expression of Jewish self-identity in terms of it, and the obvious concern to regulate Jewish conduct within it make it difficult to resist the conclusion that the tension is not merely literary but echoes social reality in the community of JosAsen. To the author's particular purposes we shall return. Here it is sufficient to register the methodological point that the author's purpose should be seen as somehow bound up in the social tensions that permeate the story, the most obvious and acute of which is that between Jew and gentile.

#### *Internal Jewish Dissension*

In addition to the tension between Jews and gentiles, there is an obvious conflict among the Jewish characters in JosAsen following the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth. This may be seen from the fact that the hostility these two encounter in chs. 22–29 comes not only from the son of Pharaoh but from some of the sons of Jacob as well. Even before Pharaoh's son proposes his plot against Joseph and Aseneth, we learn of a rift among the sons of Jacob over the way the couple is to be perceived.<sup>19</sup> Simeon and Levi treat them cordially, 'but the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah, the maidservants of Leah and Rachel, did not accompany them because they were envious and hostile toward them' (22.11; see also 24.2).

The variety of responses to the plot proposed by Pharaoh's son against Joseph and Aseneth illustrates the scope of the discord among the sons of Jacob over this matter. Simeon and Levi together refuse to have any part in such a plot and pledge their support for Joseph, but with divergent ideas about appropriate retaliation against the gentile instigator. Simeon is inclined to take up the sword immediately against Pharaoh's son, while Levi counsels non-retaliation unless Pharaoh's son persists in his evil plan (23.6–17). Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher align themselves against Joseph and Aseneth, but there is at least some vacillation on the part of Naphtali and Asher. At one point these two even try to restrain Dan and Gad (25.5f.), and when those hostile to Joseph and Aseneth are mentioned by name, it is always 'Dan and Gad', 'the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah', and once 'Dan and Gad and their brothers', but never Naphtali and Asher by



name. These latter two are consistently represented as more ambivalent and less aggressive in their opposition to Aseneth and Joseph. The remaining sons, Reuben, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, all join Simeon and Levi in coming to the aid of Aseneth and Joseph, but again with varying notions of appropriate vengeance against the plotters (e.g. 29.1-5).

By itself the hostility of some of the sons of Jacob toward Joseph and Aseneth in the last part of the story would not warrant the claim that real dissension existed within the author's Jewish community, much less the suggestion that such dissension centered upon the perception of the gentile convert and the marriage of a convert and a born Jew. But the presence of bitter hostility in the Israelite community at the literary level combines with several recurrent motifs of a more subtle nature to suggest that problems of this very type did in fact exist in the author's community and that the work is designed in part to address them.

The most elaborate such motif is the author's obvious concern to exalt Aseneth and establish the propriety of her marriage to Joseph. In spite of the distance at which Aseneth stands from the people of God as the story opens, she is also carefully portrayed in such a way that her worthiness to be Joseph's wife is affirmed. Thus the reader is informed already in 1.5 that Aseneth bore no likeness to Egyptian women but was 'in every way similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was as tall as Sarah and as graceful as Rebecca and as beautiful as Rachel'. The author is even careful to portray Aseneth in terms which correspond in many specific ways to his portrayal of Joseph. For example, just as Joseph is depicted as an extremely handsome man who was the constant object of the desires and seductions of all the women of Egypt (7.3), so Aseneth is described as 'very tall and graceful and beautiful to behold more than all the virgins on the earth' (1.4), so that the fame of her beauty spread and there was great strife among those who competed for her hand (1.6). Yet, just as Joseph consistently rejected these annoying advances and remained a virgin (*parthenos*; 4.7; 8.1; see also 7.4f.), so Aseneth was 'a virgin (*parthenos*) hating every man' (7.8; see also 1.4-6; 2.1). Similarly, exalted attributes are ascribed to Joseph, as we have seen: he is 'the mighty man of God' (3.4; 4.7; 18.1f.; 21.21), 'the son of God' (6.3, 5; 18.11; 21.4); but even early in the story this exalted language has a counterpart in the description of Aseneth as one 'adorned as the bride of God' (4.1), and later, after she has converted

to Judaism, Aseneth is called 'a daughter of the Most High' in the same context wherein Joseph is called 'the firstborn son of God' (21.4). The description of Joseph in 6.2-6 borders on an ascription of angelic status, but the same can be said of the descriptions of Aseneth in 18.9-11 and 20.6f.: she is likened to the sun just as Joseph is; heavenly beauty is ascribed to both; both are said to radiate great light. When Joseph arrives at the house of Pentephres the first time, he is clad in an exquisite white tunic and a golden crown with precious stones and has a royal staff in his hand (5.5); later Aseneth too dresses in a radiant white garment and wears a golden crown with costly stones and has a scepter in her hand (14.12-15; 18.5f.). In the heat of the conflict among the sons of Jacob in the last part of *JosAsen*, Joseph's brothers acknowledge that 'the Lord is guarding him [Joseph] like the apple of his eye' (25.5); soon thereafter Aseneth too is assured, '... the Lord is with you and he will guard you like the apple of his eye' (26.2). In the same context, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah realize 'the Lord is fighting against us for Aseneth' (28.1), just as earlier they had warned each other, 'the angels of God will fight for him [Joseph] against you' (25.7).

In addition to the parallels between the portrayals of Aseneth and Joseph, there are significant parallels between the portrayals of Aseneth and Levi, who is highly esteemed in *JosAsen*. Aseneth has access to 'the ineffable mysteries of the Most High' (16.14) just as Levi does (22.13); she urges clemency toward enemies with the same magnanimous language used earlier by Levi for the same purpose (28.7, 10, 14; cf. 23.9-12; 29.3); she ranks among 'those who devote themselves to the Most High God' (15.7; see also 16.14: 'all those who devote themselves to the Lord God') just as Levi is characterized as 'one who devoted himself to the Lord' (22.13).

That the author wishes the proselyte to be considered a full-fledged member of the Israelite community is also suggested by the affable reception which he has both Jacob and Joseph accord to the converted Aseneth. Early in the story we are told of Jacob's attitude toward 'strange women':

For Jacob used to say to his son Joseph and to all his sons, 'My children, be on strong guard against a strange woman so as to have no association with her, for association with her is destruction and corruption' (7.5).

However, later this same Jacob warmly receives the converted



Aseneth as his daughter-in-law, blessing her, kissing her, and eating and drinking with her (22.8f.). Similarly, Joseph's own perception of Aseneth undergoes a radical *volte-face*. When she was a 'strange woman' he would have nothing to do with her and in fact articulated in no uncertain terms the most intransigent interdiction against intimacy between Jews and gentiles (8.5-7), but he eagerly receives her as his wife following her conversion to Judaism (19.8-21.9). Far from violating the prohibition regarding 'strange women', Joseph's marriage to Aseneth and Jacob's full acceptance of her serve to show that Aseneth is no longer a 'strange woman'; by crossing over to the Jewish religion she has become Jewish; she is now one of the people of God.

In every way the author seems intent upon portraying Aseneth as deserving of full acceptance into the Israelite community and as worthy to be the wife of the patriarch Joseph. The frequency and variety of means by which he labors to verify this suggests the existence in his Jewish world of some less favorable opinions about the proselyte and especially about marriage to the proselyte. Again it seems that we are dealing with something which is not merely literary but which reflects real social tensions in the author's community.

Still other motifs in JosAsen corroborate this basic insight. Thus, for example, the detailed narrative of Aseneth's self-abasement, asceticism, and repudiation of idolatry serve to confirm the sincerity and genuineness of her conversion. The emphasis that as a convert Aseneth was no longer a 'strange woman' but a legitimate member of the Israelite community and a legitimate mate for Joseph would have been undermined had the author left any room for doubt that her conversion was genuine; hence the extended narrative of Aseneth's destruction of her idols, bitter mourning in sackcloth and ashes, fasting, confession, and prayer. No one tells Aseneth to do these things; they are rather represented as self-imposed acts of penitence; they are Aseneth's personal response to what she has heard of the mercy of God (11.10f.). Moreover, when Aseneth does all this, she is fully aware of the ostracism from her family and friends that will result (11.4-6; 12.12-14; 13.1f.); she is under no illusion that worldly advantage will accrue to her; she has no ulterior motives. The stress on Aseneth's self-abasement, voluntary ascetic rigor, humiliation, and decisive abandonment of idolatry in full cognizance of the social consequences, together with the very biblical and Jewish flavor of the

piety expressed in her soliloquy and prayer,<sup>20</sup> leave little room for the reader to doubt that her repentance is sincere and her conversion genuine and complete. Indeed, within *JosAsen* itself, Aseneth's affliction and acts of penitence are cited as signs of the genuineness of her conversion (e.g. 13.1-11; 15.2f.).

In particular the visit of the man from heaven in chs. 14-17 serves to authenticate Aseneth's conversion by showing that her professed change corresponds to transcendent objective reality. As D. Sanger has perceived, the angel's visit is not the cause nor the occasion of Aseneth's conversion but functions to provide heavenly confirmation of a conversion that has already taken place and to articulate the benefits of conversion to the true God and membership in the elect people of God.<sup>21</sup> To these ends, the man from heaven says to Aseneth, among other things: that she should remove her garments of mourning and dress in a glorious garment consonant with her new status (14.12f.); that her humiliation and acts of repentance have been duly acknowledged (15.2f.); that her name has been written irrevocably in the heavenly book of the living (15.4);<sup>22</sup> that henceforth she will be 'renewed and refashioned and given new life' (15.5); that she will participate in life, immortality, and incorruption (15.5); that she has been given to Joseph for a bride and will be his wife forever (15.6, 9); that she will be a mother-city for all who will repent as she has (15.7f.; 16.16); that 'the ineffable mysteries of the Most High' have been revealed to her (16.14); and that in eating from the honeycomb she has eaten of the same food eaten by the angels of God and the chosen ones of God and has become a partaker of life, immortality, and incorruption (16.14-16). This heavenly ratification of Aseneth's conversion expressed in such exalted language by God's chief angel—the veracity of whose words is itself confirmed by the miraculous appearance of the honeycomb at his command (17.1f.)—leaves no room for any perception of this convert as inferior or unworthy. That she qualified to receive the heavenly visitor and the many blessings announced by him is positive proof of the heavenly recognition of her conversion and her full status as one of the people of God.

God's protection of Aseneth from her persecutors in the final chapters provides further proof of his regard for this proselyte and his disfavor toward any who would challenge her rightful place in the community of Israel. When Aseneth is the intended victim of a murderous conspiracy at the hands of Jews, God intervenes more



than once to deliver her, by such means as enabling the clairvoyant Levi to anticipate and foil the plot (26.6) and causing the swords of the assailants to fall from their hands and disintegrate (27.11; 28.10). Joseph's words of assurance to Aseneth before the ambush thus proved true: '... the Lord is with you and he will guard you like the apple of his eye' (26.2). Even the sons of Jacob who had tried to kill Aseneth come to realize: 'the Lord is fighting against us for Aseneth' (28.1).

Not only does the narrative clarify God's stance in this situation; it also incorporates more direct appeals for those 'men who worship God' to be indulgent and respectful in their treatment of their 'brothers... who worship God' (23.9-17; 25.5-7; 28.5-14). This ethical material is couched in the same stereotyped language used to define proper Jewish conduct in situations of conflict between Jews and gentiles, and it is directed toward both the aggressors and those in a position to retaliate. Here again we have a strong indication that the tension within the Israelite community at the literary level reflects actual internal conflict in the author's Jewish community.

The enigmatic episode involving the bees in 16.17-23 should also be mentioned at this point, though its interpretation is so uncertain that any conclusions drawn from it must be viewed as tentative.<sup>23</sup> If, as seems likely, an allegorical meaning is intended in this scene, then the bees who die because they want to harm Aseneth likely represent her Israelite antagonists (Israelite because at least some continuity, if not absolute identity, is implied between the malicious bees here and those mentioned in 16.14), and the restoration of the dead bees to life represents the eventual restoration of those antagonists to good standing in the community of Israel. On such an interpretation the episode parallels the narrative of the plot against Aseneth by some of the sons of Jacob, who have the prospect of pardon in spite of their treachery (28.10-16). It should be emphasized, however, that this line of interpretation is uncertain and provides at best only corroborative evidence for the pattern of social conflict we have deduced from other, less problematic passages. In any case, the presence of bees who wanted to sting Aseneth surely implies antagonism toward her from some quarter.

The cumulative effect of the intertwined motifs discussed here is to suggest the existence in the author's Jewish community of some disharmony centering on the perception of the convert to Judaism and the Jew by birth who marries the convert. As in the case of the

tension between Jews and gentiles discussed earlier, so also in the case of the internal Jewish discord treated here, we are dealing with social issues which had a decisive role in shaping the narrative and which therefore must be taken seriously into account in any explanation of the purpose of JosAsen.

*Familial Ostracism of the Proselyte*

A third area of social tension evident in JosAsen is that between the new convert to Judaism and the convert's former friends and family. Upon destroying her idols and turning to the God of Israel, Aseneth finds herself 'an orphan and desolate and abandoned and hated' (11.3). Even her parents have disowned her: 'and therefore my father and my mother and my whole family have come to hate me, and they have said, "Aseneth is not our daughter because she has destroyed our gods"' (11.5; see further 11.12-14; 12.5-12). Ostracized by family and friends, cut off from all familial and social support, Aseneth has reason to expect severe persecutions and can seek refuge only in God, who is 'the father of the orphans, and a protector of the persecuted, and a helper of the oppressed' (12.13).

Even though this motif of familial and social ostracism runs throughout Aseneth's soliloquy and prayer, there is nothing corresponding to it in the story line itself, where Aseneth has only the most cordial relations with her parents. Whether this motif reflects a significant social conflict in the author's community is therefore difficult to judge. The motif is a traditional one, attested most clearly in Philo,<sup>24</sup> and it no doubt reflects the true plight of many Jewish proselytes in the hellenistic world. But in JosAsen this motif does not impact the plot in the way we might expect at those points where Aseneth and her parents actually interact, and it is doubtful that we should see in it a strong social current underlying and influencing the composition of JosAsen in a major way.

Why, then, does this motif figure so prominently in Aseneth's soliloquies and prayer, aside from the fact that it is traditional? It may be suggested that the literary function of this motif in Aseneth's soliloquies and prayer is to buttress the aforementioned case for the proselyte's sincerity and worthiness. That she was fully aware of the familial and social ostracism and persecution which often accompanies conversion to Judaism provides another link in the chain of arguments that she was sincere in embracing the God of Israel; she had no ulterior motives, no illusion that she stood to gain worldly



advantage. Rather, she crossed over to Judaism in full awareness of the serious problems that would ensue. Thus it appears that the theme of the proselyte's severance from parents, kinsmen, and friends is not a programmatic social undercurrent in *JosAsen* on the order of the other two areas of tension treated above. It seems rather to be subsidiary to the concern over the tension within the Jewish community in that it serves to enhance the perception of the convert among Jews who held divergent opinions about the convert's relative status.

### *The Readership and Purpose of JosAsen*

From the foregoing it is evident that the events narrated in *JosAsen* are permeated by social conflict which is not merely literary but which reflects to a significant degree the real social matrix in which the work was composed: one in which Jews lived in dynamic tension with gentiles and struggled to maintain a distinctive Jewish identity; one in which intermarriage, including even marriage between a proselyte and a born Jew, was a live issue; and one in which there existed some divergence of opinion regarding the relative status of the convert within the Jewish community. If it seems unnecessary to stress these tensions—which, after all, were the common experience of Jews throughout the hellenistic world and scarcely unique to this document—it must be reiterated that precisely this sociological dimension of the narrative has been obscured by the preoccupation with the ritual elements of Aseneth's conversion as the basis for comparative study and the key to the socio-religious setting and purpose of *JosAsen*. On the premise that the social tensions reflected in *JosAsen* itself are more reliable indicators of the purpose of the work than are the concerns imported from other texts and phenomena with which *JosAsen* has been compared, it is appropriate now to offer some account of the intended readership and purpose which is informed by the foregoing investigation.

The most common assumption regarding the purpose of *JosAsen* is that it is missionary propaganda designed to win gentiles to the Jewish faith.<sup>25</sup> While this possibility cannot be excluded, it is not the one which accords best with our conclusions above, and there are other aspects of the text which suggest that the work is not well-suited for missionary purposes. For one thing, the author presupposes too much. He assumes throughout that his readers are familiar with

the biblical story of Joseph (e.g. 1.1; 4.9f.; 22.1-5; 24.1-9) and can understand references to other patriarchal narratives as well (e.g. see 1.5; 23.2, 14). These biblical references, at least in the case of the story of Joseph, are not incidental but are central to the narrative and crucial for a full appreciation of it. Moreover, the author's repeated use of the formula 'it is not proper for a man (woman) who worships God to . . . ' (8.5, 7; 21.1; 23.9, 12; 29.3) and his other attempts to define the conduct befitting 'those who worship God' (e.g. 23.10; 28.5, 7) are clearly directed inward, to Jews, and not outward. The very problem in scripture for which JosAsen furnishes a midrashic solution—namely, the marriage of the patriarch Joseph to the daughter of a pagan priest (Gen. 41.45, 50; 46.20)—is a problem to the *Jewish* conscience. Such considerations seem to justify G. Delling's comment that 'der Erzähler denkt also an jüdische Leser seiner Geschichte (oder zumindest an dem Judentum sehr nahestehende)'.<sup>26</sup>

The opposite conclusion—that the author of JosAsen had a gentile readership in mind—is defended by G.W.E. Nickelsburg, who advances two arguments. The first is that 'the story is written from Aseneth's viewpoint. . . The author has recounted a proselyte's progress *from the point of view of the proselyte*'.<sup>27</sup> But while the gentile Aseneth is certainly the central figure and it is indeed *her* thoughts and emotions that are described, the *literary function* of this perspective seems to be that of establishing *in the Jewish mind* the worthiness of the true convert to be accepted fully into the community of Israel and to marry a born Jew. The existence of such a concern on the author's part has been documented above. Thus the detailed description of Aseneth's self-castigation, asceticism, and prayer—though certainly recounted from Aseneth's viewpoint in the sense that she is alone and is the only one whose thoughts, words, and actions are described—seems designed to respond to intramural Jewish questions about the relative status of the convert and the propriety of marriage to a convert.

Nickelsburg points secondly to the 'blatant religious syncretism' of JosAsen as an indication that the book is directed to gentiles: 'Judaism is made attractive and understandable through the use of motifs and elements to which gentiles are accustomed'.<sup>28</sup> The premise of this argument is correct, but the conclusion is debatable. That JosAsen is quite syncretistic is beyond dispute, in spite of the author's vehement opposition to the corrupting influence of paganism.<sup>29</sup>



However, we must not assume that only *gentiles* would have been accustomed to and attracted by motifs drawn from hellenistic and Egyptian culture and that *Jews* living in that cultural milieu could not have appreciated the expression of their faith in such terms. If the Jewish author of JosAsen was open to the influences of hellenistic religion and culture, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the same sort of openness characterized the Jewish community which he represents. Thus the syncretism of JosAsen is consistent with either a gentile or a Jewish readership and affords no exclusive support for either view.

Not even the fact that JosAsen polemicizes so strongly against idolatry suggests that the work was written for gentiles, any more than the polemic against idolatry in the Hebrew Bible indicates that these writings were directed to non-Israelites. Jews themselves needed to be reminded of their distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* gentiles and of the danger of assimilation to gentile culture, and indeed it is precisely 'the one who worships God'—that is, the *Jew*—whose proper attitude toward exogamy and the corruption of idolatry is clarified in the formulaic ethical instruction in 8.5-7 and elsewhere. Moreover, Jews who were not accommodating toward proselytes and who had reservations about the propriety of marriage to proselytes—and we have argued above that such concerns did in fact exist in the Jewish community behind JosAsen—needed reassurance that the conversion reported in JosAsen entailed the utter repudiation of idols and everything associated with idols, and therefore that the marriage to a convert was no concession to idolatry. Such intramural concerns seem best to account for the detailed narrative of Aseneth's renunciation of her idols; there is no good reason to think that the polemic against idolatry is propaganda calculated to attract outsiders.

Similarly, the exalted opinion of Jews and of the Jewish life and religion which permeates JosAsen and is expressed in explicit contrast with gentile life and worship is no indication of a gentile readership. V. Tcherikover has correctly insisted that Jews themselves needed to hear their religion praised and that they found it easier to cling to Judaism as long as they were assured that the Jewish way of life stood on an equal level with or was superior to hellenistic civilization.<sup>30</sup> In the case of JosAsen, the extolling of Jews and Judaism is juxtaposed with an obvious interest in clarifying Jewish self-identity and defining appropriate Jewish attitudes and conduct

in such a way as to suggest that the author envisioned a primarily intramural readership and purpose. We must not, of course, distinguish too rigidly between explanations or appeals offered by a group to outsiders and usually labeled 'apologetic', and the teaching offered by the group to its own members. The possibility should not be excluded that a given work served both purposes. Perhaps J.J. Collins is right that *JosAsen* is 'addressed to all interested parties, both Jew and gentile'.<sup>31</sup> But in view of the considerations above, it remains likely that any gentile readers envisioned by the author were indeed already 'interested parties' standing very close to Judaism, and unlikely that *JosAsen* was designed to support any zealous missionary enterprise.

The Jewish community represented in the narrative certainly reflects no such missionary impulse. Joseph does not attempt to proselytize Aseneth and in fact urges that she be sent away when he first sees her (7.2, 6); later he prays for her conversion only after her parents have taken the initiative to bring the two together (7.7f.), and following the prayer he leaves and does nothing more for her. Joseph shows no interest at all in converting Aseneth's family, and even the narrator seems unconcerned about the conversion of Pharaoh or Pentephres in spite of the fact that both are favorably disposed toward Judaism and the God of the Jews (3.3f.; 4.7f.; 20.6f.; 21.4-6). This disinterest seems incompatible with the view that one of the author's primary purposes was to proselytize gentiles. *JosAsen* certainly reflects openness to converts and a high opinion of them, but not an active desire to seek them.

Many of the particular concerns which led to the writing of *JosAsen* have been mentioned already, but it is appropriate now to speak more directly of the purpose of the work. The variety of social and religious tensions underlying and influencing the narrative makes it unwise to think of a single overarching purpose. Yet, these tensions as described above reflect a few fundamental and related concerns that provide our most reliable guide to the major purpose(s) of *JosAsen*. In keeping with the foregoing discussion of the social context in which the work was written, it may be suggested that the author's purpose centers on the clarification of proper Jewish attitudes and conduct on two fronts: (1) in relations with gentiles outside the Jewish community; and (2) in relations with gentile converts to Judaism. From the former group the Jew is to maintain rigid separation. Physical intimacy, intermarriage, and table fellowship



with gentiles are expressly forbidden because of the contamination of idolatry. Nevertheless, gentiles are to be treated with magnanimity and respect, even in situations of conflict; they are not to be repaid evil for evil. The second group, converts to Judaism, are also to be treated with respect. They are beneficiaries of all the blessings and privileges appertaining to those who are Jews by birth, and as such they are to be received fully into the community of Israel. Having renounced idols, they—no less than Jews by birth—are worshipers of God and are therefore suitable mates for Jews.

The responses to the two areas of tension isolated here do not constitute two separate purposes but are integrally related and mutually inclusive. The emphasis on separation from gentiles naturally raises the question of the status of the gentile who has converted to Judaism: Is marriage to such a person forbidden by the prohibition of exogamy? What is the relative status of the proselyte within the Jewish community? In turn, the emphasis on the worthiness of the true convert to be accepted fully into the community of Israel raises the whole issue of the relationship between Jews and gentiles: Is not such openness to gentiles a threat to Jewish monotheism, a concession to pagan idolatry and its corrupting effect? Does it not detract from the unique blessings and privileges of being Jewish? Does not exogamy lead inevitably to the loss of Jewish identity?

Whether one of the two sets of concerns described above is primary and the other subsidiary is difficult to say. If such a distinction is to be made, it seems most likely that the primary purpose was to enhance the status of the convert within the Jewish community and that a derivative purpose was to emphasize the privileged status of Jews and to clarify appropriate Jewish conduct in a gentile environment. The variety of means by which the author of *JosAsen* labors to establish the worthiness of the true convert to be accepted fully into the Jewish community and to be married to a Jew suggests the central importance of this theme. But in responding to the possible inferences from this theme—namely, compromise with idolatry and loss of distinctive Jewish identity and blessings—the author emphasizes Jewish monotheism, Jewish privilege, and Jewish responsibility, so that these, too, become thematic. He is careful to narrate Aseneth's conversion and marriage to Joseph in such a way that the paradigmatic distinction between Jews and gentiles is maintained. Joseph refuses table fellowship with gentiles (7.1) and

expresses stern opposition to intimacy or intermarriage between the worshiper of God and the outsider corrupted by idolatry (8.5-7). Only after her conversion is Aseneth acceptable as a mate for Joseph, and—lest there be any doubt about the legitimacy of that conversion—the author takes pains to narrate in vivid detail her utter repudiation of idolatry and everything associated with it, her genuine repentance in full cognizance of the familial and social ostracism that could result, and even the heavenly endorsement of her marriage to Joseph and her full recognition as one of the people of God by God's own chief angel. There is no concession to idolatry here; Aseneth has renounced idolatry. The opposition to exogamy is not abandoned but confirmed in this story; Aseneth can marry a 'son of God' only because she has become a 'daughter of the Most High' (21.4). There is in Aseneth's story no diminution of the blessed status enjoyed by Jews as the people of God; these blessings are in fact affirmed and articulated at great length, but with the emphasis that the Jew by conversion participates in them every bit as fully as the Jew by birth. Membership in the people of God according to JosAsen is not even determined by ethnic descent but by acknowledgment of the true God and is characterized by 'proper' conduct; thus genuine converts are on equal footing with Jews by birth, and the latter must themselves avoid the contamination of idols and engage in 'proper' conduct in order to retain God's favor.

Thus it appears that the concern to enhance the status of gentile converts in the Jewish community was the central purpose of JosAsen even if there were important subsidiary purposes, including especially the reminder to Jews (born or converted) of their privileged status and their appropriate behavior in the context of tensions both within the Jewish community and with outsiders. Such an understanding of the purpose of JosAsen seems best to accord with the social tensions discussed above.

Explanations of the purpose of JosAsen offered in previous studies overlap with that offered here but have differently placed emphases and varying assessments of the interrelationships among the several concerns reflected in the work. Thus M. Philonenko, in addition to seeing JosAsen as a missionary appeal to gentiles, correctly describes the apocryphon as an apology for the marriage of a born Jew to a proselyte.<sup>32</sup> However, he does not see this latter purpose as part of a larger concern to clarify and enhance the status of proselytes within a Jewish community divided over the issue of how converts were to be



perceived. H.C. Kee perceptively acknowledges the problem of exogamy and the related issue of the admission of proselytes as 'central concerns' for the author of JosAsen.<sup>33</sup> However, in describing that which is most characteristic of the work and most definitive of the Jewish community from which it originated, Kee focuses instead on the supposed affinities with Merkabah mysticism and especially with the cult of Isis.<sup>34</sup> C. Burchard maintains, as we have also argued, that JosAsen is not *Missionsliteratur* designed to entice gentiles to convert; he suggests instead that the purpose of JosAsen was to remind Jews of the privileges they had always enjoyed and to articulate for proselytes the blessings they had gained by crossing over to Judaism.<sup>35</sup> However, Burchard does not relate this to the author's apparent purpose of redressing the less favorable estimations of converts that seem to have existed in the Jewish community behind JosAsen. What is proposed in the present study is that the exalted estimation of converts in JosAsen was designed not so much for the converts themselves as for Jews who did not hold converts in such high esteem, and that even the reminder to Jews of their privileged status and responsibilities was designed for a community in which the perception of converts was the basic issue which brought these other issues to the fore.

## NOTES

1. See especially the influential introduction to the *editio princeps* by P. Batiffol, *Le Livre de la Prière d'Aseneth* (Studia Patristica: Études d'ancienne littérature chrétienne, 1-2; Paris: Leroux, 1889-90). Batiffol suggested a date in the fifth century CE. This assumption was popularized in the introduction to the first English translation by E.W. Brooks, *Joseph and Asenath* (Translations of Early Documents, Series 2; London: SPCK, 1918).

2. Among others, C. Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung-Ortsbestimmung* (WUNT, 8; Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), pp. 91-99, argues this convincingly.

3. Ibid., pp. 142f.; and M. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (SPB, 13; Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 99-109.

4. Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 99-107: 'Es gibt, negativ gesprochen, in ihr keinen Satz, der nicht jüdisch sein könnte. Es gibt dazu, positiv

gesprochen, reichlich Beziehungen zu jüdischen Denk- und Redeformen, Motiven und Sitten. . . ' (pp. 99f.). The question of Christian elements in JosAsen was reopened by T. Holtz, 'Christliche Interpolationen in "Joseph und Aseneth"', *NTS* 14 (1968), pp. 482-97. Holtz argued that the work 'nicht jüdisch ist, sondern mindestens die christliche Umprägung eines ursprünglich andersartigen jüdischen Berichts' (p. 486). However, these arguments have been unconvincing to most, and the consensus which Holtz summarized and set up as a foil at the outset of his article has remained in force: 'Die meisten und vor allem die neueren Forscher, die sich mit "Joseph und Aseneth" (JA) beschäftigt haben, halten diese Schrift für reinjüdisch' (p. 482). One recent exception to this trend is the view of D. Cook, 'Joseph and Aseneth', in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H.F.D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 465-503, that the bread-cup-ointment passages betray Christian interest and influence even in the earliest recension of JosAsen.

5. So Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 143-51; and Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 108f. This *terminus ante quem* is for the most part a corollary of Egyptian provenance, though corroborative data can be cited. Since Egyptian Jewry was reduced to virtual oblivion by the revolt of 115-17 CE, a Jewish document concerned with conversion and reflecting a viable Jewish community must predate that devastating revolt. A *terminus post quem* of ca. 100 BCE is established by the dependency of JosAsen upon the LXX; on this dependence see G. Delling, 'Einwirkungen der Sprache der Septuaginta in "Joseph und Aseneth"', *JSJ* 9 (1978), pp. 29-56.

6. See especially the compelling arguments in C. Burchard, 'Zum Text von "Joseph und Aseneth"', *JSJ* 1 (1970), pp. 3-34. A preliminary edition of the long version has been published by C. Burchard, 'Ein vorläufiger griechischer Text von Joseph und Aseneth', *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament* 14 (1979), pp. 2-53; and supplemented in 'Verbesserungen zum vorläufigen Text von Joseph und Aseneth', *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament* 16 (1982), pp. 37-39. However, in the absence of an edition of the long text which is both more recent than Batiffol's and more accessible than the recondite journal in which Burchard's preliminary mimeographed edition appears, some continue to rely on Philonenko's edition of the short recension by default. For instance, the recent translations of JosAsen into Dutch by M. de Goeij (*Jozef en Aseneth. Apokalyps van Baruch* [De Pseudepigraphen, 2; Kampen: Kok, 1981]), and into English by D. Cook (*Apocryphal Old Testament*, pp. 473-503), follow Philonenko's Greek text.

7. K.G. Kuhn, 'The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran', *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 65-93; W. Nauck, *Die Tradition und der Charakter des ersten Johannesbriefes* (WUNT, 3; Tübingen: Mohr, 1957), pp. 169-71; and more recently R.T. Beckwith, 'The Solar Calendar of Joseph and Asenath: A Suggestion', *JSJ* 15 (1984), pp. 90-111.



8. Kuhn, 'The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran', pp. 65-93; and M. Delcor, 'Un roman d'amour d'origine thérapeute: Le Livre de Joseph et Aséneth', *BLE* 63 (1962), pp. 3-27.

9. G.D. Kilpatrick, 'The Last Supper', *ExpTim* 64 (1952), pp. 4-8; M. Philonenko, 'Initiation et mystère dans Joseph et Aséneth', *Initiation*, ed. C.J. Bleeker (Supplements to Numen, Studies in the History of Religions, 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 147-53; idem, *Joseph et Aséneth, passim*; idem, 'Un mystère juif?', *Mystères et syncrétismes* (Études d'histoire des religions, 2; Paris: Geuthner, 1975), pp. 65-70; and most recently H.C. Kee, 'The Socio-Cultural Setting of Joseph and Aseneth', *NTS* 29 (1983), pp. 394-413.

10. H.C. Kee, 'The Socio-Religious Setting and Aims of "Joseph and Aseneth"', *SBL 1976 Seminar Papers*, ed. G. MacRae (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 183-92; and idem, 'The Socio-Cultural Setting', pp. 394-413.

11. H. Priebsch, *Die Josephsgeschichte in der Weltliteratur* (Breslau: n.p., 1937), esp. pp. 11, 135; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 83-89; and de Goeij, *Jozef en Aseneth*, pp. 13-22.

12. Kilpatrick, 'The Last Supper', pp. 4-8; and E.W. Smith, Jr, "'Joseph and Aseneth" and Early Christian Literature: A Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti' (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1974), pp. 23, 32-45.

13. A recent example is R.T. Beckwith's revival of the view that JosAsen has strong Essene affinities and his claim that an intricate calendrical pattern, slightly different from but closely related to the solar calendar championed in 1En, Jub, and the Qumran Scrolls, pervades the narrative. See n. 7 above.

14. The terms 'Jew', 'Jewish', and 'Judaism' are obviously anachronistic in the patriarchal context and in fact are not used in JosAsen. Nevertheless, because JosAsen was written in an age when such designations and the socio-religious distinctions they represent were quite current, and because the author employed patriarchal characters and events to address the concerns of such an age, these terms have been used accommodatively in investigating the social tensions in the narrative and the social context and function of the document.

15. This and all subsequent quotations of JosAsen are my own translation of Burchard's provisional Greek text; see n. 6 above.

16. This and the other formulaic references in JosAsen to bread, cup, and ointment have most often been taken as allusions to some sort of ritual meal. A minority have questioned this assumption, suggesting that the meal language refers not to a special ritual but to the daily Jewish meal, which itself had a solemn religious character, or to the entire Jewish way of life. The issue remains unresolved. See most recently C. Burchard, '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), pp. 109-17.

17. Among the numerous recent publications on this controversial subject, see A.T. Kraabel, 'The Disappearance of the "God-Fearers"', *Numen* 28 (1981), pp. 113-26; M. Wilcox, 'The God-fearers in Acts: A Reconsideration', *JSTNT* 13 (1981), pp. 102-22; T.M. Finn, 'The God Fearers Reconsidered', *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 75-84; and three articles in *BAR* 12 (1986): R.S. MacLennan and A.T. Kraabel, 'The God-Fearers—A Literary and Theological Invention', pp. 46-53, 64; R.F. Tannebaum, 'Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite', pp. 54-57; and L.H. Feldman, 'The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers', pp. 58-69.

18. 'Joseph and Aseneth', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), vol. II, p. 206 n. m; and see further G. Bertram, 'θεοσεβής, θεοσεβεία', *TDNT*, III, pp. 123-28, esp. pp. 124-26.

19. The fact that eight years have elapsed between the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth and this first hint of opposition from within the Israelite community (1.1; cf. 22.1f.) is of no consequence. This time frame is dictated, not by anything in the plot of *JosAsen* itself, but by the inherited framework of biblical chronology. Given the chronological framework of the Genesis narrative, the seven years of plenty, which provided the occasion for Joseph's travels that first brought him together with Aseneth, had to end before the couple could be represented as interacting with Joseph's family, since the latter did not come to Egypt until the seven-year period of famine. But in terms of the narrative flow within *JosAsen*, the events follow one upon another; it is as if opposition arose immediately following the marriage.

20. The prayers in *JosAsen* need thorough form-critical investigation. Several formal and substantive elements which are readily observable in the prayers suggest the rich potential of comparative research in this area. Among these are the direct address to God followed by specific attributions of praise in the third person or participial form (8.9; 12.1f.; also a regular feature of berakoth in the statutory prayers), the conventional address of God as creator (8.9; 12.1f.; in addition to numerous instances in the Hebrew Bible, see *PrMan* 2; *2Bar* 21.4f.; *1En* 84.2f.; *Jub* 12.19; *Acts* 4.24; and the berakoth before the morning and evening Shema), the description of God as one who calls from darkness to light (8.9; 12.1; as in the introduction to the Hallel in the Passover Haggadah); and the strong verbal and thematic affinities with some of the Jewish apocryphal prayers, especially *AddEsth* 14.3-19 and *PrMan* 12. On *JosAsen* and *PrMan*, see the preliminary observations by J.H. Charlesworth, 'Prayer of Manasseh', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. II, p. 631. See more generally idem, 'A Prolegomenon to a Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers in the New Testament', *JJS* 33 (1982), pp. 265-85; idem, 'Jewish Liturgies: Hymns and Prayers (c. 167 B.C.E.-135 C.E.)', in *Early Judaism*



and its *Modern Interpreters*, ed. R.A. Kraft and G.W.E. Nickelsburg (SBL Centennial Publications, 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 411-36; and D. Flusser, 'Psalms, Hymns, and Prayers', in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. M.E. Stone (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, 2.2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), pp. 551-77.

21. 'Bekehrung und Exodus: Zum jüdischen Traditionshintergrund von "Joseph und Aseneth"', *JSJ* 10 (1979), pp. 29f.; and idem, *Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* (WUNT, 2.5; Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), pp. 156f., 182.

22. Because of the long-standing Jewish tradition regarding the inscribing of the names of the righteous in the book of life (e.g. see Exod. 32.32f.; Ps. 69.28; Dan. 12.1; Mal. 3.16f.; Jub 30.22; 1En 47.3; 1QM 12.2; Lk. 10.20; Rev. 3.5; 13.8; 20.12, 15), Aseneth's enrollment in this book is especially expressive of her elevation to full standing as one of the people of God.

23. See the brief discussion by Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. II, p. 230 n. h2.

24. *Special Laws* 1.9, 57; 4.34; *On the Virtues* 20. Proselytes, according to Philo, 'have left. . . their country, their kinsfolk and their friends' in crossing over to the Jewish religion. They are to be classified along with orphans and widows as those who have been cut off from their natural means of protection and support and who stand 'most helplessly in need' of God's pity and compassion. Having 'turned his kinsfolk. . . into mortal enemies', the convert has entered the most humble and desolate circumstances, an 'orphan-like desolate state'. Only in God can he hope to find a helper and a place of refuge. The striking verbal similarities between JosAsen and Philo at this point confirm the traditional character of the motif. See also Numbers Rabbah 8.2 and Josephus, *Ant.* 20.2.4; 20.4.1f.

25. Among many others, see K. Kohler, 'Asenath, Life and Confession or Prayer of', *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols., ed. I. Singer et al. (New York, London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902), vol. II, p. 176; V. Aptowitzer, 'Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study', *HUCA* 1 (1924), pp. 305f.; Kilpatrick, 'The Last Supper', pp. 4-8; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth*, pp. 106f.; and G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 262.

26. 'Die Kunst des Gestaltens in "Joseph und Aseneth"', *NovT* 26 (1984), p. 5.

27. *Jewish Literature*, p. 262 (emphasis his).

28. Ibid.

29. Kee, 'Socio-Religious Setting', p. 188, correctly observes that the community behind JosAsen 'regarded itself as able to maintain its own integrity and its own distinct Jewish identity, . . . This is not a syncretistic movement, at least not *consciously*, since the goal is to bring "aliens" into the household of Israel's faith rather than to create an amalgam of religions'

(emphasis supplied). Yet Kee would agree, and indeed emphasizes, that the Jewish community reflected in JosAsen was heavily syncretistic in the sense that it was open (at least unconsciously) to many aspects of hellenistic culture.

30. 'Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered', *Eos* 48 (1956), p. 180.

31. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 218. Similarly, M. Goodman, in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols., rev. and ed. G. Vermes et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1973-), vol. III.1, p. 548, concludes: '... it may well have been intended to convey different messages to Jewish and to gentile readers; both audiences were probably intended'. So also Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth*, pp. 106f.; and Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', p. 410.

32. *Joseph et Aseneth*, pp. 106f.

33. 'Socio-Religious Setting', p. 187.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-90; and 'Socio-Cultural Setting', pp. 399-411. In a forthcoming monograph I deal more fully with these and other suggestions regarding the history-of-religions affinities of Aseneth's conversion.

35. 'Joseph and Aseneth', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. II, p. 195. Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, p. 142 and n. 5, uses the term *Missions-schrift*, but only 'in einem weiten Sinn, ohne damit sagen zu wollen, dass JA speziell für Heiden geschrieben wäre'.



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