Joseph and Aseneth

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Joseph and Aseneth

A Christian Book

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Preface and Acknowledgments

It is more than twenty years since I first turned my attention to the riveting issues of pseudepigraphic–apocalyptic literature. My chief concern was always to uncover its theological and ideological identity, to expose whether it is Jewish or Christian. My doctoral dissertation dealt with *2* and *4 Baruch*. My next few years were spent on the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve*. As I searched for a new topic, my mentor, Joshua Efron, suggested that I should consider reading *Joseph and Aseneth*. 'You will find it most interesting', he promised. How right he was. I was immediately captivated by this fascinating love story, abounding in symbols and fantastic scenes focused on a religious conversion. Yet what appealed to me most was its unmistakably Christian appearance. I was especially attracted to the following three expressions: the 'blessed bread of life', the 'blessed cup of immortality' and the 'blessed unction of incorruption'. They, particularly the first two, evoked in my mind the sacred meal —the Eucharist. This striking association, at my very first encounter with the book, beckoned further inquiry.

As soon as I applied myself to the bibliography on *Joseph and Aseneth*, it became clear that I would, once more, be compelled to row against the mainstream of research. On reading books and articles that argue for its Jewish identity, I asked myself how it is that a composition, allegedly written by a Jew in the Jewish Hellenistic Diaspora of the Second Temple period, would provide nothing, not even the slightest hint, on observance of Torah commandments or any other Jewish customs, aside from Aseneth's abandoning of idols and acceptance of the belief in one God, which could just as easily be interpreted as initiation into the Christian church.

Prevailing opinion, which understands Aseneth's conversion as *giyyur* (conversion to Judaism), determined my point of departure. I would start with finding out to what extent the description of Aseneth's conversion fits with our data on women's conversion to Judaism in antiquity. Are we to read Aseneth's conversion as *giyyur*, or rather as initiation to Christianity?

The first conclusions of my research were presented in a symposium organized by the Open University on Hanukkah 2005. The title of my paper was 'Second Temple Judaism—Was It Judaism without Boundaries? Re-reading *Joseph and Aseneth*'. In the summer of that year, 2006, I attended the

International Conference of the Society of Biblical Literature in Edinburgh. My paper was entitled 'The Conversion of Aseneth in a Christian Context'. In both papers, I argued that Aseneth's conversion cannot be understood as *giyyur*, but rather as Christianization. Up to this point, I assumed that the main message of the composition was a call to idol worshipers to renounce the world of idols and join the church, with Aseneth serving as the model for such transformation.

The key to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the story, its tendencies and symbols fell into my hands later, when I came across the image of Aseneth as a 'type of the church of the Gentiles' in the Syrian fathers of the church Aphrahat and Ephrem Syrus. This image of Aseneth was the first step to uncovering the whole range of theological and symbolic relations between *Joseph and Aseneth* and Syrian Christianity.

Of special import to my understanding of *Joseph and Aseneth*, was the discovery of the central role virginity and sexual continence played in the Syrian church of the first centuries CE. In light of these affinities, I could immediately interpret images such as the 'city of refuge', the heavenly bridal chamber and the most difficult and unsolved scene of the honeycomb and bees. At that point, the message of the composition became broader. I realized that it was a call to idol worshipers not merely to join the church but also to take the vow of virginity and sexual abstinence.

From that moment on, the ideological and theological structure of *Joseph and Aseneth* became clear. It turned out to be a very coherent and united piece of literature in which the ideas stem from each other to produce a tight Christian composition.

In 2007, at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego, California, I gave a paper entitled 'Aseneth as the "Prototype of the Church of the Gentiles"'. On my return, I found an e-mail request to send an article based on this paper. It was intended for a collection edited by Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality* (Library of New Testament Studies, 391, 392; 2 vols.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009).

That same year, I applied to the Israeli Science Foundation for a grant. Although my submitted proposal did not rank first, it was awarded the highest mark and received very favorable comments.

But my way was not always without obstacles. Enraptured by the ideological and symbolic affinities with the Syrian church, and with the call for virginity and sexual abstinence, I went too far in interpreting Joseph and Aseneth's marriage as based on 'spiritual marriage', a phenomenon popular in the church of the first centuries. I realized the book provided no solid ground for such a claim, that I had overloaded the text and would have to alter my course. I eventually dropped this claim, to the great benefit of my research. Two new discussions have now been added: the marriage of

Joseph and Aseneth analyzed against Jewish and Christian marriage customs in antiquity, and an analysis of the second story in chs. 22–29.

This study was originally written in Hebrew, the language in which I think and express myself. The project was far too extensive and complex to be tackled in a foreign language. It would have encumbered my progress and enthusiasm. The English version of this volume is a joint venture. It was translated in parts by Professor Ranon Katzoff and Esti Prizker, and nally edited by Murray Rosovsky. I want to thank them all.

Many have assisted me in this enterprise and deserve my gratitude. First and foremost, Joshua Efron, my teacher and mentor at Tel Aviv University, who regrettably passed away last May and did not have the chance to see the publication of my book. It was Joshua Efron, a unique scholar and charismatic teacher, who introduced me to the world of the Pseudepigrapha and apocalyptic literature. He inspired all my views and methods in this eld, as is evident also in every line of my present study. He towers as the most in uential gure in my development as a historian of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity.

I owe profound thanks to my beloved friend Dr Rachel Zelnik-Abramovitz, a member of the academic staff of the department of Classics at Tel-Aviv University. She accompanied my research from the start and helped me, generously and wholeheartedly, to translate the Greek and Latin Christian texts into Hebrew. The hours we spent together browsing through the expanded Greek-English lexicon and sharing our personal and academic experiences sustained me all along the way.

I am immensely grateful to my best friends and longtime companions along this road: Dr Menachem Ben-Shalom, Israel Ronen and Dr Raz Mustigman, with whom I share unconditional friendship.

I extend my thanks to Professor Aharon Oppenheimer, who kindly read the manuscript. His helpful comments, personal concern and support were a source of encouragement for me.

Special thanks are due to all the library staff of the Open University. To Rachel Shapira, Dafna Shur and head librarian, Dr Hava Mustigman. They did their utmost to assist me, always with interest and a cheerful face. But it is to Margalit Halutz that I am indebted most particularly. Because of her extraordinary skills and experience, not a book or article, even in the remotest journal, was beyond her reach. None failed to land on my desk. I fondly remember my visits to her of ce at the Open University, as I came to collect a book or article that had just arrived from around the world. She would share my excitement and my ideas.

I want to thank the former president of the Open University, Professor Gershon Ben Shahar, who, for the rst time in the history of the Open University, established a new degree (degree 4) and a half-year sabbatical for the academic staff of teachers-researchers. This sabbatical was one of the

happiest periods in my academic career and enabled me to complete my present study. I also want to thank the Research Authority of the Open University, especially Dr Milly Perry and Eva Friman, for providing the nancial aid for editing my research and presenting it in conferences abroad. Thanks are due to Prof. David Clines, chief director and general editor of the Phoenix Press, who brought me the good news that the manuscript has been accepted for publication, signi cantly enough on such a symbolic day as the Passover eve; to Maurya Horgan, the copy-editor at The HK Scriptorium, whose meticulous editing saved me from stumbling into so many pitfalls; to Ailsa Parkin, with whom I embarked on the long road to this publication at the Annual SBL Book Exhibition in New Orleans.

Special thanks are due to my beloved friend Lesley, the ultimate optimist on earth and for over ten years my partner at the gym. She was, and still is, the one who accompanied my daily work, the rst to know every idea that crossed my mind during those early morning hours, the person with whom I shared all my feelings throughout these years. Her willingness and persistence to converse with me in English transformed my whole academic life and paved my way to participation in conferences abroad. Our mutual love of sport has built a close and intimate friendship that will last forever.

Last but not least, I want to thank my family: my three beloved daughters, Rinat, Gali and Dana, my two charming grandsons, Nir and Ariel, and my dear partner, Beni, whose continuous support in our evening hours, 'over a bottle of wine', gave me the strength and peace of mind to execute this project and bring it to its end. This book is dedicated to them with love and affection.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
BLE	*Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*
BYU	Brigham Young University
BZAW	Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
BZNW	Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
CIJ	*Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
EC	Ephraim, *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant* (Diatessaron); Arm. = Version arménienne, ed. L. Leloir; Syr. = Version syriaque, ed. L. Leloir. Chester Beatty Monographs 8. Dublin, 1963.
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*
ETL	*Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HR	*History of Religions*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*
JSJSup	Supplements to *Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSPSup	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
Mus	*Muséon*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OrChr	*Oriens christianus*
OrSyr	*L'orient syrien*
OTP	James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).
PG	J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia cursus completus . . . Series graeca* (166 vols.; Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857–83).
PL	J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia cursus completus . . . Series prima [latina]* (221 vols.; Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1844–65).
PO	Patrologia orientalis
PS	Patrologia syriaca
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti graece
PW	August Friedrich von Pauly and Georg Wissowa (eds.), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894–).
RB	*Revue biblique*
REJ	*Revue des études juives*
RSR	*Revue des sciences religieuses*
SAPERE	Scripta antiquitatis posterioris ad ethicam religionemque pertinentia
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and its Literature
SBLSP	*SBL Seminar Papers*
SPB	Studia postbiblica
SC	Sources chrétiennes
ScEs	*Science et esprit*
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
ST	*Studia theologica*
StPatr	*Studia patristica*
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1964–76).
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZTK	*Zeiteschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction

From just a few biblical verses (Gen. 41.45, 50-52) about the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, the daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, and the birth of their sons Manasseh and Ephraim, a love story was spun in later antiquity, a work known today under the title *Joseph and Aseneth*.[1] In this story, Aseneth, a daughter of Pentephres,[2] a priest of Heliopolis, is a beautiful virgin and an idolater, who despises all men. No man has ever seen her; she lives in a tower, where she worships all the gods of the Egyptians. Joseph, in the service of Pharaoh, has come to her parents' home in Heliopolis to collect grain. Pentephres wishes to marry his daughter to Joseph but she refuses. But when she sees him, she is amazed at his beauty and desires to become his maidservant to serve him forever. When Joseph catches sight of her, he fears she will tempt him, like the other women who have seen him. But Pentephres tells him that she is a virgin, that no man has ever seen her, and that he should look upon her as his sister. Pentephres encourages his daughter to kiss Joseph. But as she draws close to him, Joseph refuses to kiss her, saying,

> It is not right for a man who worships God, who with his mouth blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life (□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□) and drinks the blessed cup of immortality (□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□-□□□ □□□□□□□□□□), and is anointed with the blessed unction of incorruption (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□), to kiss a strange woman, who with her mouth blesses dead and dumb idols, and eats of their table the bread of anguish, and drinks of their libations the cup of treachery, and is anointed with the unction of destruction. A man who worships God will kiss his mother and his sister that is of his own tribe and kin, and the wife that shares his couch, who with their mouths bless the living God. So too it is

1. In manuscripts the title is variously given as 'The Book of Aseneth', 'The Prayer of Aseneth', 'The Confession and Prayer of Aseneth', and the like.

2. The name of Joseph's father-in-law in the MT is Potiphera (Gen. 41.45, 50; 46.20). Following the LXX, he is called here 'Pentephres'. See H.W. Hollander, 'The Portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature', in Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 237-63 (250).

> not right for a woman who worships God to kiss a strange man because this is an abomination in God's eyes (8.5).[3]

Hearing Joseph's words, Aseneth resolves to accept belief in God. She destroys her idols and for a full week practices acts of penance. She puts ashes on her head, dons sackcloth, fasts, prays, confesses her sins as an idol worshiper and begs forgiveness. On the morning of the eighth day, a Sunday, she suddenly sees the morning star in the east. Miraculously a 'man of God' (ἄνθρωποςτοῦθεοῦ)[4] appears in her room and instructs her to remove her mourning garments, to wash her face in pure water and to put on a new white robe never worn before. He informs her that henceforth her name will be inscribed in heaven in the Book of Life. She will eat the bread of life, drink the cup of immortality, anoint herself with the ointment of purity and be united with Joseph as his bride forever. Her name will no longer be Aseneth but 'City of Refuge', for under her wings all who give their allegiance to God in penitence (διὰμετανοίας) will nd shelter. Aseneth offers the man of God food and drink, but he asks for a honeycomb, which miraculously appears in her inner chamber. This honeycomb, he explains, made in paradise, is the food of angels and confers immortality on whoever eats from it. He breaks off a small piece and eats it; the rest he places in Aseneth's mouth.

Then, the story continues, after blessing Aseneth, the man of God marks on the honeycomb with his nger a line from north to south and another line from east to west. The path his nger has drawn appears as blood. Bees come forth from the honeycomb, all white with wings of purple and blue interwoven with gold strings, wearing gold crowns on their heads and having sharp stingers, and encircle Aseneth from head to toe. More bees, like queen bees, settle on Aseneth's lips. At the order of the man of God, the bees leave Aseneth and fall lifeless to the ground. At his further order they revive and y into Aseneth's adjacent courtyard. Once again the man of God touches the honeycomb, which is immediately consumed by a ame, and a fragrance lls the room. The scene ends with the ascension of the man of God to heaven,

3. The English citations of *Joseph and Aseneth* in this book are adapted from D. Cook, 'Joseph and Aseneth', in .F.D. Sparks (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 465-503 (480), based on the group of short texts, and Christoph Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), II, pp. 177-247 (211-12), based on the group of long texts.

4. In the Greek manuscripts he is invariably called a man, ἄνθρωπος (ἄνθρωποςἐκτοῦοὐρανοῦ F [Bucharest Gr. 966, seventeenth century] G [Virginia Beach (before: Chillicothe, Ohio), sixteenth century]; ἄνθρωποςφῶτοςἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ B [Rome, Bibliotheca Vaticana, Palatinus Gr. 17, eleventh century]; ὁ ἄνθρωποςτοῦ θεοῦ D [Oxford, Baroccianus Gr. 147, fteenth century]).

borne eastward by a four-horse chariot. After Aseneth's conversion, Joseph marries her, and she bears him their two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

At this point, the story of Aseneth's conversion and marriage to Joseph ends. A second story follows, focusing on a conspiracy of Pharaoh's son, together with four of Joseph's brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, to kill Joseph and marry Aseneth. They fail, and the story ends with the death of Pharaoh's son and the coronation of Joseph as king of Egypt.

Joseph and Aseneth is an anonymous work. Though it has reached us in several languages, scholars agree that it was originally composed in Greek.[5] Its existence is first documented in the sixth century CE, in Syriac, though in the West it became popular only during the later Middle Ages.[6]

How should we grasp this story? What can we discover about the religious identity of its author and his theological purposes? Was he a Jew, a Christian or something else? To whom was it addressed and what did the

5. There are 16 Greek manuscripts, dating from the tenth century to the nineteenth, out of a total of over 80 texts in various languages. The Greek manuscripts can be divided into two groups: a shorter text published by Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, text critique, traduction et notes* (SPB, 13; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), on which is based the translation by Cook, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*; and a longer text published by Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung — Ortsbestimmung* (WUNT, 8; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965), and Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth* (PVTG, 5; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003) with Carsten Burfeind. On the manuscripts and the history of scholarship on the subject, see further Dieter Sänger, *Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* (WUNT, 2.5; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1980), pp. 11-87; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, pp. 177-201; Randall D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (JSPSup, 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 20-93; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and his Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-9, 225-26.

6. The two earliest manuscripts, in Syriac apparently translated from Greek, dating from the sixth and seventh centuries, contain *Joseph and Aseneth* as part of an anonymous collection of historical works relating to the period from creation to 569 CE, known as 'Church History' or as 'the Syriac Chronicle' of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor. Book 6, chapter 1, is devoted to Aseneth. See F.J. Hamilton and E.W. Brooks (trans.), *The Syriac Chronicle Known as that of Zachariah of Mytilene* (Byzantine Texts; London: Methuen, 1899; New York: AMS Press, repr., 1979). The first certain indication of *Joseph and Aseneth* in the West is to be found in the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1250). He gives a Latin version of the story, introducing it with the words 'Ex historia Assenech'. This Latin version was reprinted by Fabricius in the first volume of his *Codex pseudepigraphus Veteris Testamenti* (2 vols.; Hamburg: T.C. Felginer, 1722, 1733), I, pp. 774-84, and in his second volume (II, pp. 85-102) he added a fragmentary Greek text copied for him by J.C. Wolff from the mutilated Bodleian Cod. Gr. Barocc. 148. See Cook, 'Joseph and Aseneth', p. 465.

author want to tell to his readers through this story? How should we interpret the story's rich symbolic language? My study centers on these questions.

I argue that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Christian work, composed by Christians for Christian purposes. Only in a Christian setting can this story be understood as an integral literary and theological unit with all its symbols and metaphors. In this Christian setting Aseneth and Joseph are comprehended as symbolic and typological images: Aseneth symbolizes the church and Joseph is a prototype of Christ; their marriage represents the marriage of Christ and his church. But besides their being typological gures, Aseneth and Joseph are represented also as models for the ideal Christian way of life, to be followed and imitated by other Christians.

My thesis is not entirely new. Toward the end of the nineteenth century Pierre Batiffol published the rst critical edition of *Joseph and Aseneth*, presenting it as a fth-century Christian composition based on a Jewish aggadah probably from the fourth century. He maintains that it is a Greek literary product of a catholic center somewhere in upper Asia Minor. Joseph and Aseneth, he asserts, are symbolic gures—Joseph represents Christ; Aseneth the consecrated bride represents the church, or virginity; and the story as a whole is a symbolic interpretation of the process of initiation into sacramental life in the church. Accordingly, Aseneth's conversion signi es a soul's transition from paganism to Christianity. The story as a whole is a valuable document for the history of ritual theology and Christian life.[7]

Following Batiffol, the view became widespread that the work was Christian. Scholars pointed especially to the eucharistic character of the triadic meal formula—the blessed bread of life, the blessed cup of immortality and the blessed unction of incorruption. E.W. Brooks, for example, maintains that Aseneth's conversion represents Christian monasticism, with its exaltation of virginity and penitence. The references in the description of Aseneth's meal to the sacred bread, cup and chrism clearly mean the

7. Pierre Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', in his *Studia patristica: études d'ancienne littérature chrétienne* (Paris: Leroux, 1889–90), pp. 1-87 (23-25, 29, 36-37). He returned to the issue of the identity of the work several years later in response to the arguments of M. Duchesne and M. Massebieau that the work was a Jewish invitation to pagans to join the Jewish community. Batiffol did not deny the possibility of this proposition, but he reiterated his stand that the work bears strong marks of Christianity, especially in the description of the Eucharist. 'L'hypothèse est très séduisante, toutefois je n'y souscrirais pas sans réserver la possibilité de fortes retouches chrétiennes, notamment en ce qui a trait à l'eucharistie' (review of *Apocrypha Anecdota II* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897], by Montague R. James, in *RB* 7 [1898], pp. 302-304 [303]).

Eucharist and Con rmation, and put the Christian authorship of the work in its present shape beyond doubt.[8]

In the mid-twentieth century, however, a new consensus began to emerge—that *Joseph and Aseneth* is rather a Jewish work composed in the Hellenistic Diaspora, probably Egypt, sometime between 100 BCE and 115 CE. Many hold that it re ects missionary propaganda used by Jews in their efforts to proselytize among their Gentile neighbors. Scholars are divided as to the theological and ideological meaning of the book, the interpretation of its symbols and its intended readership. But they all share the perception that Aseneth's transformation should be seen as a Jewish conversion, namely *giyyur*.[9]

8. E.W. Brooks, *Joseph and Asenath: The Confession and Prayer of Asenath Daughter of Pentephres the Priest* (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. xi, xv. So also August Dillmann, 'Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments', in J.J. Herzog (ed.), *Real-encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Hamburg: R. Besser, 1854–68), XII, pp. 318-19; F.J.A. Hort, 'Aseneth, History of', in Henry Wace and William C. Piercy (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D.* (London: John Murray, 1911), pp. 176-77; Gustav Oppenheim, *Fabula Josephi et Asenethae apocrypha e libro syriaco latine versa* (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1886); Albrecht Wirth, *Danae in christlichen Legenden* (Prague: F. Tempsky and G. Freytag, 1892), pp. 27-29, 85, 94; Montague R. James, 'Aseneth', in James Hastings (ed.), A *Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898–1902), I, pp. 162-63; Montague R. James, 'Apocrypha', in T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (eds.), *Encyclopædia Biblica* (London: A. & C. Black, 1899), I, p. 254; Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christ* (3 vols.; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 4th edn, 1901–1909; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, repr., 1964), III, pp. 399-401; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1906), p. 24; Paul Fiebig, 'Pseudepigraphen des AT's', in Friedrich Michael Schiele and Leopold Zscharnack (eds.), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch in gemeinverständlicher Darstellung* (5 vols.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1909–13), IV, pp. 1952-64; Otto Stählin, 'Die hellenistisch-jüdische Literatur', in Otto Stählin and Wilhelm Schmid (eds.), *Wilhelm von Christs Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (Handbuch der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, 7.1-2; Munich: C.H. Beck, 6th edn, 1912–20), II/1, pp. 587-88.

9. For example, Victor Aptowitzer, 'Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study', *HUCA* 1 (1924), pp. 239-306; Kaufmann Kohler, 'Asenath, Life and Confession or Prayer of', in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (12 vols.; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1906), II, pp. 172-76; George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 258-63; Ulrich Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung im hellenistischen Diasporajudentum* (BZNW, 44; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1978), pp. 115-23; John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 217; David Flusser, 'Joseph and Aseneth, a Jewish Hellenistic Novel' (in Hebrew), *Dapim: Leaves for Research in Literature* [Haifa University] 2 (1985), pp. 73-81. Some scholars argue that it was addressed

The main problem with this widespread view is the total absence in the work of any reference to the Torah and its commandments. No concern is apparent for the dietary laws[10] or for the rules of ritual purity; there is no sign whatsoever of the halakhic rules of *giyyur*.[11] One solution proposed for this problem is that the pseudepigraphic guise of the work, setting the story in the pre-Mosaic period, precludes any intimation of the commandments of the Torah.[12] But this solution would be more convincing had the work as a whole maintained the pseudepigraphic illusion of the biblical setting consistently: it does not. Joseph's refusal to kiss Aseneth because she is idolatrous, his refusal to eat at the table with Egyptians and Aseneth's con-

to Jews and converts within the Jewish community (Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 195; Randall D. Chesnutt, 'The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth', *JPS* 2 [1988], pp. 21-48; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 108-15, 256-65). For surveys of interpretation and the history of research, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 20-93; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, pp. 177- 201; Burchard, 'The Present State of Research on Joseph and Aseneth', in Jacob Neusner *et al.* (eds.), *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism,* II, *Religion, Literature, and Society in Ancient Israel, Formative Christianity and Judaism. Ancient Israel and Christianity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987); repr. in Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* (SVTP, 13; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 315. One issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* (14, no. 2, January 2005) was devoted to *Joseph and Aseneth*, comprising ve studies that present the now prevailing view of the work: Christoph Burchard, 'The Text of Joseph and Aseneth Reconsidered', pp. 83-96; J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', pp. 97-112; Randall D. Chesnutt, 'Perception of Oil in Early Judaism and the Meal Formula in Joseph and Aseneth', pp. 113-32; Anathea Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth's Honeycomb', 133-57; George J. Brooke, 'Men and Women as Angels in Joseph and Aseneth Tradition', pp. 159-77. See also the recent collection *Joseph und Aseneth* (SAPERE, 15, ed. E. Reinmuth; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

10. In 7.1 Joseph refuses to eat at the same table with Egyptians, but otherwise he shows no reluctance to eat at Pentephres' home. He eats and drinks together with Aseneth's family in 20.5; he participates in a great banquet given by Pharaoh in 21.8. Yet not a word is said about concern for the purity of the food. The emphasis on Joseph's restraint is directed only to his not eating with Egyptians, not to whether the food is kosher. I will argue below that his refraining from eating with Egyptians is in accord with early Christian practice.

11. Howard Clark Kee, 'The Socio-Cultural Setting of "Joseph and Aseneth"', *NTS* 29 (1983), pp. 394-413 (399, 410). see also Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, p. 103; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 199-202.

12. S. West, 'Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance', *CQ* 24 (1974), pp. 70-81 (78); Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 156; James R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other*? (JSJSup, 105; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005), p. 194; Christine Gerber, 'Blickwechsel. Joseph und Aseneth und das Neue Testament', in *Joseph und Aseneth* (SAPERE, 15, ed. E. Reinmuth; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 203-17 (212)

version are all based on knowledge of the Torah and have no place in the pre-Mosaic world of the biblical Joseph and Aseneth.

A more usual response to this challenge is that the work was composed in a Jewish Diaspora milieu that did not concern itself with Torah commandments or adhere to rabbinic halakha. Such a Jewish milieu, in this view, would not be uncharacteristic of Second Temple Judaism, which, contrary to what was thought in the past, was not a uniform and normative Judaism providing a fixed standard of comparison, but was multifaceted and pluralistic.

For example, Randall Chesnutt, in refuting Howard Clark Kee's assertion that in Joseph and Aseneth 'the standards of proselytism are not observed', said that this statement

> smacks of the old assumption that there existed, in the centuries prior to the compilation of the Mishnah, a uniform, normative Judaism which provides a fixed standard of comparison . . . it must be insisted that it produces a false paradigm against which to examine the conversion reported in Joseph and Aseneth. The procedures for the conceptions surrounding proselytism cannot be considered immune to the rich diversity that we now know characterized virtually every phase of early Judaism.[13]

Contrary to Chesnutt's statement and to the general opinion nowadays, my research starts out by assuming the existence in the first century CE of a distinct Jewish society highly conscious of its religious, ideological and ritual uniqueness. All its component groups and movements, with the Pharisees at the fore, shared fundamental principles, beliefs and ideas despite differences. This common ground marked the boundary between Judaism and what was outside it. This Judaism's inner world, its faith and its hopes of redemption, its cult and its religious commandments, which dictated its way of life, are reflected in the clear and quintessential Jewish sources at our disposal: the Hebrew Bible, which furnished the religious, ritual and cultural basis for the Judaism of the Second Temple period; the Apocrypha;[14] Josephus, Philo and the early layers of Talmudic literature. In the margins of this central Judaism, groups and sects existed such as the Qumran sect and the community that produced the apocalyptic works of the Pseudepigrapha. The affinities between these marginal groups and Christian theology raise the possibility that we have to look for a Christian origin and nascent milieu in them. To resolve the puzzle that *Joseph and Aseneth* makes no allusion to the laws of *giyyur*, it has further been argued that we have no idea when

13. See Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', p. 410; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 154.

14. (Apocrypha) as distinct from the Pseudepigrapha, which in my view do not reflect mainstream Judaism; see Rivka Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (SBLEJL, 20; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

these laws, as we know them from Talmudic sources, developed. Conceivably, the present work may date to an earlier time in the Second Temple period, before the laws took shape.[15] In any case, Aseneth, being a woman, would not have been required to perform circumcision, the central part of the *giyyur* ritual. This argument is the subject of detailed treatment in the first chapter of this book. Analysis of all our data on women who converted to Judaism in the periods of the Second Temple and of the Mishnah, whether fully and in a halakhic process of *giyyur* or partially to become 'God-fearers', reveals that even an intermediate status such as that of the God-fearer, to say nothing of full *giyyur*, entailed some, at least partial, observance of Torah commandments and performance of Jewish customs such as Sabbath, dietary laws, Jewish festivals, and public expressions of identification with the Jewish people.

The main argument raised against the Christian identity of the work is that it contains no explicitly Christian features. There is no reference to Christ, to the Christian church, to the sacraments or to christological salvation. As Chesnutt writes,

> It is difficult to imagine that a Christian author would have represented conversion to Christianity in such general religious terms that its specifically Christian profile is lost. There is in the conversion story in Joseph and Aseneth no Christ, no redeemer figure of any sort, no historical salvation event, no baptism, and no talk of such Christian *Hauptbegriffe* as faith, love justification, salvation and church.[16]

Chesnutt's statement raises the methodological problem that is now at the center of the discussion of the religious identity of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.[17] Is a work that does not display explicitly Christian fea-

15. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 73, 149, 154-55; Edith McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas* (JSPSup, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 33-34; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 52; Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 298; Judith M. Lieu, 'Circumcision, Women and Salvation', *NTS* 40 (1994), pp. 358-70 (365); Catherine Hezser, '*Joseph and Aseneth* in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels', *Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge* 19 (1997), pp. 1-40 (33).

16. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 74; Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (SBLEJL, 10; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), p. xiii; G.D. Kilpatrick, 'The Last Supper', *ExpTim* 64 (1952), pp. 4-8 (5); S. Legasse, 'Le pain de la vie', *BLE* 83 (1982), pp. 248-61 (250).

17. The story of *Joseph and Aseneth* is not told in the person of either of the main characters in the work, Joseph or Aseneth, as is the case in most pseudepigraphic works. Still, its concentration on the biblical figures of Joseph and Aseneth justify the work's categorization as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. It was not included in the early collec-

tures necessarily Jewish? And conversely, must a Christian work necessarily display explicitly Christian features?

The starting point of the dominant view today, as expressed by Chesnutt, is that a pseudepigraphic work that does not contain Christian features is Jewish.[18] However, in recent years some scholars have challenged this assumption. They show that Christians could write works based on the Hebrew Scriptures and could even incorporate in them Jewish traditions of the Second Temple period and of Talmudic literature without mentioning Christ or salvation in the church or leaving any explicit Christian traces at all.[19] All the more with pseudepigraphic works whose plot, based on the Hebrew Scriptures, thereby attempts to create the illusion that the work is contemporaneous with the events recounted.[20]

The issue has been treated extensively by James R. Davila in his recent book *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*.[21] In it he asks, 'Did Christians write Old Testament pseudepigrapha in antiquity and if so, did they always include Christian signature features, or might they sometimes have written them strictly from an Old Testament and therefore apparently Jewish perspective?' Davila is not content with theoretical answers but examines the questions empirically. In the book's second chapter he analyzes in detail works known to be written by Christians: sermons of John Chrysostom and Augustine, commentaries of Ephrem the Syrian on Genesis and Exodus, and the like, that treat subjects in the Hebrew Scriptures or traditions related

tions of Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha by E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen u. Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1900), and Robert Henry Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), because it was considered Christian (Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 25).

18. Robert A. Kraft, 'The Pseudepigrapha in Christianity', in John C. Reeves (ed.), *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (SBLEJL, 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 55-86 (62); Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, p. 3, with examples of this approach.

19. Robert A. Kraft, 'Reassessing the 'Recensional Problem' in Testament of Abraham', in George W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (SBLSCS, 6; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 135; Kraft, 'The Pseuepigrapha and Christianity Revisited: Setting the Stage and Framing Some Central Questions', *JSJ* 32 (2001), pp. 371-95 (372); Marinus de Jonge, 'Developing a Different Approach', in de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (SVTP, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 29-38 (33).

20. Johannes Tromp, 'The Story of our Lives: The qz-Text of the Life of Adam and Eve, the Apostle Paul, and the Jewish-Christian Oral Tradition Concerning Adam and Eve', *NTS* 50 (2004), pp. 205-23 (213).

21. Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, pp. 74-119.

to them. He concludes 'that there are Pseudepigrapha which were written by Christians, and that Christians wrote Old Testament Pseudepigrapha that appear to be Jewish'. Furthermore, Christians wrote sermons and commentaries on biblical texts that were openly intended to reinforce Christian communities and Christian readers yet displayed no overt Christian features at all, no reference to any speci cally Christian doctrine and no quotation from or allusion to the New Testament. If well-known Christians could write Christian works about the Hebrew Scriptures without leaving visible Christian traces, certainly pseudonymous Christian authors writing Old Testament pseudepigrapha—who, seeking to persuade their audience of the truth of their story or revelation, would have an interest in suppressing Christian markers—could do the same.

In determining the religious identity of the works of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, these more recent scholars also stress that the transmission process of these works is exclusively Christian: they were preserved by Christians and reached us in manuscripts, often quite late, written and copied by Christians. In their view, the Christian manuscripts must be the starting point of the discussion. As Robert Kraft writes,

> From my perspective, 'the Christianity of the Pseudepigrapha' is not the hidden ingredient that needs to be hunted out and exposed in contrast to a supposed native Jewish pre-Christian setting. On the contrary, when the evidence is clear that only Christians preserved the material, the Christianity of it is the given, it is the setting, it is the starting point for delving more deeply into this literature to determine what, if anything, may be safely identi ed as originally Jewish.[22]

The fact that Christians preserved these works indicates that the writings were relevant to their lives and to the lives of their fellow Christians among whom they lived. Marinus de Jonge writes this:

> They were transmitted because copyists regarded them as important, and were of the opinion that they could function meaningfully in the communities for which they copied them. Transmission clearly presupposes the enduring relevance of what is transmitted. In early Christianity as well as in the Middle Ages and even later, Christians all over the Christian world were interested in narratives, wisdom books, apocalypses, testaments etc. centering around gures known from the Old Testament.[23]

22. Kraft, 'Pseudepigrapha in Christianity', p. 75.

23. Marinus de Jonge, 'The So-called Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament and Early Christianity', in Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen (eds.), *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), pp. 59-71 (59); Michael A. Knibb, 'Christian Adoption and Transmission of Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of 1 Enoch', *JSJ* 32 (2001), pp. 396-415 (396-400); Daniel C. Harlow, 'The Christianization of Early Jewish Pseudepigrapha: The Case of 3 Baruch', *JSJ* 32 (2001), pp. 416-44 (416-20).

In summing up the recent research on the Pseudepigrapha, Michael D. Eldridge called this process 'the New Climate', and he anchors this new approach in three propositions:

1. The fact that this literature was transmitted throughout the centuries by Christians should be taken into account when considering whether it is Jewish or Christian.
2. The old assumption that whatever is not clearly Christian is Jewish has been found to be baseless. A document composed or compiled by a Christian need not necessarily contain obvious 'Christian' contents.
3. A text about a Hebrew Bible gure can be a Christian composition *ab initio,* rather than a Christian editing or reworking of an essentially Jewish writing, as was thought earlier.[24]

By these principles the Christian identity of *Joseph and Aseneth* appears to be a very reasonable possibility. The entire transmission history of the work is Christian, and there is no indication that it ever was in Jewish hands. Furthermore, the great popularity of the work, attested by the plethora of manuscripts and translations—Slavonic, Syriac, Armenian, Rumanian, Latin, Middle English, Coptic, Ethiopian—and by the considerable freedom that all sorts of redactors, rewriters and translators took in handling the material, is evidence that the work was relevant to those who read it.[25] Davila observes that the translation of *Joseph and Aseneth* from Greek to Syriac by Christians in two sixth-century manuscripts attests that the work was suf ciently important to them for the translation effort. In the Syrian church the work was considered Christian.[26]

The absence from the work of any visible Christian features—no explicit reference to Christ or to the church—does not mean that it must be Jewish. The choice by a Christian writer to use the gures of Joseph and Aseneth as vehicles for his thoughts is natural, given that the Hebrew Bible would have been an integral part of his theological and cultural heritage, in which Joseph played a conspicuous role as the typological image for Jesus and Aseneth was perceived, at least in the Syrian church, as a metaphor (□□□□□) for the church of the Gentiles. But I agree that the religious identity of *Joseph and Aseneth*'s author cannot be unequivocally determined by such general considerations. I concur with John J. Collins: 'the question of Jewish or Christian authorship of any particular document cannot be decided by general considerations or principle, but requires close analysis of the speci c

24. Michael D. Eldridge, *Dying Adam with his Multiethnic Family: Understanding the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (SVTP, 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), pp. 237-38.
25. Burchard, 'Present State of Research', p. 315.
26. Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, p. 7.

text in question'.[27] My attempt in this book to pursue this course is through critical analysis of the ideas expressed, the symbols employed and the theological objectives that are promoted in the work.

Some scholars, particularly those who reject Batiffol's interpretation and argue for the Jewish identity of *Joseph and Aseneth*, dismiss an allegorical interpretation of it.[28] But without symbolic and allegorical interpretation, how can we possibly explain, for instance, the wondrous honeycomb that bestows immortality; the myriads of bees that emanate from the honeycomb, surround Aseneth and build a new honeycomb on her lips, die and are resurrected; the naming of Aseneth City of Refuge? Quite obviously, Aseneth and Joseph are symbolic gures representing certain concepts, and the whole story should be interpreted allegorically.[29]

The allegorical and symbolic character of the work was observed already by an anonymous writer, according to an introduction that was added to the Syriac translation included in the collection *Historia miscellena* published in 569 CE. It relates that the anonymous person wrote to Moses of Aggel that in the personal library of the bishop of Beroea, in Syria, an ancient Greek book was found containing a story (□□□□□□) and an allegory (□□□□□). He understood the story, he wrote, but not the allegory. So he sent the little book to Moses, who apparently was experienced in reading allegorical works, requesting him to translate it into Syriac and interpret the allegory.

It is indisputable, I believe, that the work should be interpreted allegorically or symbolically, for allegories and symbols are found together in the story indiscriminately. The debate can only be on how to interpret these allegories and symbols. Are Aseneth and Joseph symbols respectively of the church and of Christ, as Batiffol argues, or does Aseneth symbolize the goddess Neith, as Marc Philonenko asserts?[30] Do Joseph and Aseneth perhaps represent, respectively, the sun god Helios and the moon goddess

27. J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', p. 99.

28. West, 'Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance', p. 77; Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth,* pp. 112-21; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 189; Sänger, *Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien,* p. 20.

29. See Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 45: 'it is clear that the marriage of Aseneth and Joseph in this story is a metaphor'; Lawrence M. Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 121.

30. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 61-79; Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', pp. 400, 410.

Selene?[31] Alternatively, does Aseneth represent Wisdom?[32] Or perhaps she symbolizes the city of refuge, Zion-Jerusalem.[33]

All agree, more or less, that the work has allegorical and symbolic elements, yet Chesnutt states that the trend common nowadays is to concentrate on methods that detect overt symbolic and allegorical elements in the story rather than elements putatively encoded deep in it.[34] However, given that the author chose to express his ideas by symbols and allegories, there is no reason to believe that he would limit himself to an explicit allegory. On the contrary, he had very good reason to choose hidden allegory as well. This emerges also from the pseudepigraphic nature of the work, that is, his use of figures from the Hebrew Bible to express ideas and realities of an entirely different period. In fact, all the works of Old Testament pseudepigraphic literature are symbolic and allegorical in that in all of them characters are extracted from their scriptural context and planted covertly in a very different setting to express new ideas. The characters thus served the authors of the works as means to further their theological goals and aspirations. Allegory and symbolism were especially used in Christian missionary activity, based not only on overt methods but also on 'camouflage and bor-

31. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 81.

32. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 83-89; Hans Priebatsch (*Die Josephsgeschichte in der Weltliteratur: Eine legendengeschichtliche Studie* [Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1937], cited in Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 30, 72) detected in Aseneth's deliverance by Joseph the redemption of Sophia-Achamoth by Christ-Soter; see Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 22-27. On the various proposals, see Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag anhand von Joseph und Aseneth* (AGJU, 26; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 13-14.

33. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 27-30; Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth,* pp. 118-20; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 189.

34. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 45, 72. See others who view the work as an allegory: L. Duchesne, 'Studia patristica: Études d'ancienne littérature chrétienne, publiées par M. L'abbé Batiffol', *Bulletin Critique* 10 (1889), pp. 461-66 (465): 'Aseneth est une figure, le type d'une catégorie de personnes . . . Aseneth est le symbole du proselyte . . . Il ne s'agit plus du Joseph et de L'Aseneth historiques, mais de la propaganda juive des conditions de l'agregation des Gentils à la communauté civile et religieuse d'Israël.' See also Richard I. Pervo, 'Joseph and Aseneth and the Greek Novel', *SBLSP* 10 (1976), pp. 171-81 (173, 175, 176); Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), I, p. 265; Dieter Sänger, 'Erwägungen zur historischen einordnung und zur datierung von 'Joseph und Aseneth', in *La Littérature intertestamentaire: Colloque de Strasbourg* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp. 181-202 (191-94); J.J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 216; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 170-84. In Wills's view the story has two layers, the second being allegorical.

rowed disguise such as the ancient archaic Israelite and biblical costume'.[35] As Averil Cameron claims, metaphor in particular stood 'at the heart of Christian language'.[36]

Joseph and Aseneth is not usually considered an apocalyptic composition.[37] However, I will argue that, under the guise of a love story, *Joseph and Aseneth* exhibits distinct apocalyptic features. This is so even though the tale does not portray the end of the world and the foreboding cataclysms, or the war of the Messiah with the forces of Satan or Belial or otherworldly journeys and primordial events. The genre project of the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature states that '"apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world'.[38] *Joseph and Aseneth* is a revelatory work with an evident narrative framework. The center of the story is the miracle of the honeycomb and the bees, which is mediated by an otherworldly being, the man of God, to a human recipient, Aseneth; and it discloses a transcendent reality—the promise of personal eschatological salvation, resurrection and eternal life in paradise, in the heavenly Jerusalem. It can be classi ed as an apocalypse with 'Only Personal Eschatology (and no heavenly journey)' (Type Ic) in the classi cation of the SBL project.[39]

35. Joshua Efron, *Origins of Christianity and Apocalypticism* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), p. 39; Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, p. 110. The vast majority of Christian works on the Old Testament introduced Christian signature features through allegory, hermeneutical re ections, apologetic reworking or other means.

36. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Sather Classical Lecture, 55; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 58, 155-56, 179, 181; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'The Celibate Bridegroom and his Virginal Brides: Metaphor and the Marriage of Jesus in Early Christian Ascetic Exegesis', *Church History* 77 (2008), pp. 1-25 (3).

37. Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 194; Christoph 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', in Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* (SVTP, 13; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 264-95 (269).

38. John J. Collins, 'Introduction: Towards the Morphology of A Genre', *Semeia* 14 (1979), pp. 1-20 (9); Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Early Christian Apocalypses', *Semeia* 14 (1979), pp. 61-121 (64).

39. See also Humphrey, *Ladies and the Cities,* p. 37. By David E. Aune's de nition, *Joseph and Aseneth* also contains 'the Reveal/Conceal Dialectic': the literary devices and imagery function to 'conceal' the transcendent message that the text 'reveals' so that the recipients of the message will be encouraged 'to modify their cognitive and

Joseph and Aseneth is de ned by modern scholars as a novel. According to Lawrence M. Wills's de nition, 'The novel can be identi ed as written popular narrative ction, expanded signi cantly beyond a single episode, which focuses on character and virtue'.[40] *Joseph and Aseneth* can indeed be seen as a novel: it is a written story, as the many manuscripts attest; it was popular narrative expanded beyond a single episode; and it is ction. Moreover, it bears the main characteristics of Hellenistic-Roman novels: it offers a mixture of love and adventure; its hero and heroine are young and handsome; their marriage is disrupted or temporarily prevented. Their virginity or chastity occupy a central place, and their delity to each other and their trust in the gods ultimately guarantee a happy ending.[41] Catherine Hezser pointed out the similarity of *Joseph and Aseneth* to the Greek erotic novels: like them, *Joseph and Aseneth* emphasizes the lovers' equality in their high social status, beauty, attractiveness to rival suitors, and initiation of erotic acts.[42] Both Aseneth's father, Pentephres, and Joseph are said to have been high of cials in Pharaoh's service. Both Joseph and Aseneth are described as exceptionally beautiful, and the beauty of both is said to have been divine, just like the beauty of the protagonists of the pagan novels. Because of their beauty, both have had many noble suitors before their marriage, and Aseneth is pursued by Pharaoh's son even after her marriage to Joseph. As in some of these novels, Joseph is introduced as a 'virgin' who despised every 'strange' woman, just as Aseneth scorned every man.

Eric S. Gruen, however, writes: 'Placement of Joseph and Aseneth in a particular genre, even if that were an appropriate process, cannot illuminate the intent and signi cance of the tale',[43] let alone its Jewish or Christian theological identity—the question at the center of my research. The work can be identi ed as a novel and still be a product of a Christian author who wrote this story to enhance Christians' theological purposes.

behavioral stance in conformity with the transcendent perspectives' (David E. Aune, 'The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre', *Semeia* 36 [1986], pp. 65-96 [87]); see also Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypses', *Semeia* 36 (1986), pp. 1-11 (6-7); Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, pp. 17-18; Humphrey, *Ladies and the Cities,* pp. 35-40*;* Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Shef eld: Shef eld Academic Press, 2000), p. 41.

40. Lawrence M. Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

41. On the characteristics of Hellenistic-Roman novels, see B.P. Reardon (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 2; Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

42. Hezser, '*Joseph and Aseneth* in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels', pp. 14-16.

43. Eric S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism, The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Hellenistic Culture and Society; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 94.

The thesis I propose ows directly from that of Pierre Batiffol and his followers.[44] Like Batiffol, I interpret the gures of Joseph and Aseneth as personi ed abstractions representing Christ and the church, Aseneth's conversion as Christianization, the term 'pure virgin' (□□□□□□□□ □□□□) as meaning a virgin dedicated to Christ in a mystical marriage, and the bees as a symbol of virgins. From Batiffol I drew the insight that exhortation to virginity is the principal aim of the work. However, I have gone much farther than Batiffol in my argument. Not only are the main characters of the story, or some symbol or concept, clari ed in the context of Christianity, but the story as whole, as a literary, symbolic and conceptual unity describing Aseneth's conversion and her marriage to Joseph, is best explained in Christian terms.

I also see my book as a continuation of the work of Ross Shepard Kraemer, who spoke out against the *communis opinio* and offered a fresh and independent vision of *Joseph and Aseneth* along with a detailed, comprehensive textual and historical analysis. Though Kraemer does not take a decisive stand on the work's religious identity, she does address the many aspects it shares with Christianity and surmises that it could have been authored by a Christian.[45] She notes the similarity of its vocabulary and ideas to those of the Syrian church; the af nity of *Joseph and Aseneth* with early Syrian Christian works such as the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Acts*

44. Burchard and Chesnutt, at the forefront of those who identify the work as Jewish, attempt to portray Batiffol's position as an accidental error that brought about considerable damage causing the work to be identi ed for decades as Christian. This is an astonishing claim. It is inconceivable that prominent scholars such as Montague R. James, August Dillmann, Emil Schürer, and Wilhelm Bousset would have established the Christian identity of *Joseph and Aseneth* merely because Batiffol said so. Nor is it conceivable that a scholar of the stature of R.H. Charles would have excluded the work from his monumental collection simply because of a 'mistake' of Batiffol. Surely we must assume that these scholars indeed held and were convinced that *Joseph and Aseneth* was a Christian work.

45. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 5-6, 237-39, 253-74. Other modern scholars who proposed Christian authorship or Christian interpolation include Traugott Holtz, 'Christliche Interpolationen in "Joseph und Aseneth"', *NTS* 14 (1967–68), pp. 482-97; Cook, 'Joseph and Aseneth', p. 469; Michael Penn, 'Identity Transformation and Authorial Identi cation in Joseph and Aseneth', *JSP* 13 (2002), pp. 171-83 (182); Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, p. 195. E. P. Sanders rejects Holtz's position but admits that the longer text contains Christian interpolations (see Sanders, 'The Covenant as a Soteriological Category and the Nature of Salvation in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism', in Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs [eds.], *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies* [SJLA, 21; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976], pp. 11-44 [25]. Satlow (*Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 46) admits that in a Christian context the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth and Aseneth's name City of Refuge will be interpreted accurately.

of Thomas, and the writings of the fourth-century Syrian church fathers Aphrahat and Ephrem; the descriptions of Joseph and of Aseneth as *typological figures* for Christ and the Gentile church in the works of Aphrahat and Ephrem. She analyzes the images of Aseneth and Joseph as bride and groom; connects the appearance of Joseph holding an olive branch with the symbol of Christ in Aphrahat and Ephrem; observes the importance of the image of a city of refuge in Syriac sources; and presents many other details that she links to the historical background of the third and fourth centuries. I also accept her analyses and conclusions as to the interpretation of the symbols that the author of the tale drew from Hellenistic and Roman culture such as the honeycomb, the bees, the depiction of Joseph as Helios, and the relation of these descriptions to Neoplatonic philosophy. I follow Kraemer on the work's date and provenance. Like her, I believe that the work should be dated to the third or fourth century CE, a conclusion for which I argue emphatically, and I incline to see in the work the influence of the ideals and ascetic spirit of the contemporary Syrian church.

The present study however also diverges substantially from Kraemer's. She does not treat the narrative of Aseneth's conversion as a literary, theological and symbolic unit with a distinctive narrative and conceptual structure, nor does she discuss its affinity with Christian conversion rituals. In her view, the focus of the work is not the conversion of Aseneth but the mystical encounter of a mortal woman and a heavenly angel: 'a tale of the adjuration of an angel by a woman'.[46] Kraemer notes the connection of various details in the story to traditions current in the Greco-Roman world, to Neoplatonic philosophy, to Jewish mystical literature, and to Christian theology, but she fails to illuminate the story as a whole, with all its details and images, against the background of any one of these sources of inspiration. Her book assembles disparate ideas that do not meld to present *Joseph and Aseneth* as a literary, conceptual and theological whole. By contrast, I believe that the story in *Joseph and Aseneth* does constitute a well-made literary and theological unity, whose focus is Aseneth's conversion. True, the symbols employed in the work, such as the bees and the honeycomb, were taken from the surrounding environment, but the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* worked them with great skill and ingenuity into the new plot he constructed to further his Christian theological aims.

The Greek manuscripts at our disposal differ significantly in their readings. Following Christoph Buchard and Marc Philonenko they are divided into four groups (designated a, b, c, d), which reflect two versions of the text—a long version and a short one. Scholars have debated over what is the earlier and more reliable of the two. Is it the long text (b), as argued by

46. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 90; see also pp. 89-109, 110-54, 297-98.

Burchard and most of his followers,[47] or is it represented by the short text (d), as held by Philonenko?

I do not deny that there are differences between the two versions that affect the question of *Joseph and Aseneth*'s theological identity. Such a difference can be seen, for example, in their attitudes to the ideal of virginity and sexual abstinence: just as the short version stresses this theme, the long one tries to efface it.[48] But as I show, despite these differences, both texts, the short and the long, express the Christian outlook and theology and were composed by Christians and for Christians.[49] My main text in this research will be the short version, with which I will compare the long version and discuss the differences and their meaning

Structure of the Present Book and the Method of Research

The first chapter discusses Aseneth's conversion, which occupies the first part of that work. The central question in the chapter is whether her conversion can be seen as Jewish *giyyur*, as most scholars today believe, or as a Christian conversion procedure. In its first part, I analyze the available sources for the conversion of women to Judaism in the time of the Second Temple, the Mishnah, and the Talmud, the time in which the work is usually said to have been composed.[50] I demonstrate that Aseneth's conversion cannot be likened to what is known of Jewish conversion at that time. In the second part of the chapter, I analyze this conversion in terms of the rituals that accompanied conversion to Christianity in the early centuries of that era. In particular, I decode the symbol of the honeycomb, central to this part of the story, and relate its significance to the ritual meal of the 'bread of life', the 'cup of eternity' and the 'unguent of purity'. The honeycomb, I argue, symbolizes the body of Jesus, and the scene as a whole, the sacrament of the Eucharist. I then examine Aseneth's actions and gestures in the course

47. See Burchard, 'Text of Joseph and Aseneth', pp. 83-96. See also note 5 above.

48. See, for example, 'heavenly bridal chamber' (15.7 in the short text) and 'place of rest in heavens' (15.7 in the long text). Or the description of the *metanoia* in the short text (15.8) and its description in the long one (15.8). The long text ends in ch. 21 with Aseneth's praying, in which she says clearly that she has sinned because she wanted to stay a virgin (21.19).

49. See J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', p. 101: 'It does not seem to me, however, that the issues that I will discuss here stand or fall on the choice of text. It is not the case, for example, that the long form of the text is Christian and the short form Jewish.'

50. A similar attempt is made by Chesnutt (*From Death to Life,* pp. 153-84), but with different results.

of her penitence and show that they accord with everything we know about the practices and gestures of catechumens, namely candidates for baptism who were converting to Christianity. These practices, performed before the Eucharist, were conditions for communion. In this chapter I address the two main objections that have been raised against the Christian interpretation of Aseneth's conversion: the inclusion of a blessing over the oil with those over the bread and wine, and the supposed absence of baptism.

The second chapter is devoted to the symbol of Aseneth as City of Refuge. In the first part, I show that 'city of refuge' symbolizes paradise, heavenly Jerusalem, and the Gentile church, and that in that church not only polytheists who have repented and accept the Christian faith like Aseneth will find refuge, but more especially the 'virgins', who renounced earthly marriage and committed themselves to sexual abstinence, like Aseneth. To these virgins the work holds out the promise of entry into the 'heavenly bridal chamber' and a 'rest' in heaven.

The second part of the chapter discusses the symbolism of the bees. I establish that the white bees with golden crowns, sharp stingers, and colored wings which surround Aseneth symbolize these 'virgins'. Like the bees, virgins are pure, sexually abstinent and immortal. After taking the vow of virginity upon their baptism, the virgins wore white clothes and they won the 'crown' of the eternal Lord with which they are prepared for the challenges and struggles of the ascetic life. These virgins are resurrected in paradise, in the heavenly 'city of refuge', that is, in the church.

Chapter 3 examines the images of Joseph and of his counterpart, the 'man of God'. I argue that Joseph, pictured as Helios, or Sol Invictus, represents a prototype of Christ, portrayed as the sun, and the 'man of God' is his heavenly reflection.

Chapter 4 covers the marriage of Aseneth and Joseph. I argue that the figures of Aseneth and Joseph as bride and groom symbolize the marriage of Christ and the church. The kiss that separated them before Aseneth's conversion, the sacred Christian kiss, now unites them as fellow members of the same ascetic religious community; the description of the event is based on Christian wedding ceremonies in the first centuries CE.

The fifth and last chapter is dedicated to the work's other story, about the unsuccessful attempt of Pharaoh's son and some of Joseph's brothers to abduct Aseneth. The highlight of chs. 22–29 is the Christian moral commandment: not to repay one's neighbor 'evil for evil' but to overcome evil with grace and consolation. Only God has the right of judgment and vengeance. This idea is connected to the image of Aseneth as City of Refuge and the church. The story in chs. 22–29 exemplifies the moral values at the foundation of this church.

Research Method

The research presented here is historical critical in its aims, the questions it raises, and its method. Chesnutt divides research methods on *Joseph and Aseneth* and its sociohistorical setting and purpose into two types. He calls the first a 'history-of-religions' approach in that it relies heavily on supposed parallels between the religious ideas and practices reflected in this text and those typical of one or more known groups in the broader religious world of late antiquity. The second is a 'literary-historical' approach, which attempts to relate the characters, plot and language of *Joseph and Aseneth* to known and datable events in the history of Judaism, especially Egyptian Judaism.[51] My method of research, according to this division, decidedly belongs to the first type. Chesnutt, however, objects that 'most such approaches rest on premature effort to elucidate phenomena in Joseph and Aseneth by reference to external sources without sufficient prior attention to those phenomena in their own right within their own literary context'. Moreover,

> understandings of the social setting and purpose of the work have been influenced too much by premature and methodologically flawed comparison and too little by the social profile which appears in the text itself. What is needed is more careful attention to the social tensions in the narrative as possible indicators of the social reality behind the text. Surely such data provide a more reliable index to the milieu of Joseph and Aseneth than do support analogies with external phenomena.[52]

But Chesnutt does not explain why scholars have to use this strategy in analyzing *Joseph and Aseneth*. One reason for this is that we are dealing with a pseudepigraphic work, which disguises its author's identity, the place it was written, to whom it was addressed, and its theological aims. Its rich symbolic language raises more impediments to resolving these matters through the content of the work itself. The difficulty regarding the milieu in which it was composed lies within it. For example, accepting Chesnutt's assumption that this is a Jewish work from the Second Temple period, a view that most scholars today share, will oblige us to resolve many difficulties arising in the text: Why is there not even a hint of the Torah and commandments? Why does Aseneth's conversion not accord with any data we possess on women's conversion in antiquity? How may we understand the 'kiss' and its central place in the story? What do the symbols of the honeycomb and the bees

51. Randall D. Chesnutt, 'From Text to Context: The Social Matrix of *Joseph and Aseneth*', *SBLSP* (1996), pp. 285-302 (287-92).

52. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 96, 149-50, 185-253.

mean? Where in Judaism do we encounter a meal consisting of the ‘blessed bread of life’, the ‘blessed cup of immortality’ and the ‘blessed unction of incorruption’? Many more questions can be added that are not answered in the story itself. So scholars are obliged to turn to similar religio-social features elsewhere for solutions to all these mysteries here. Chesnutt rightly highlights the danger in resorting to arti cial comparisons, in exaggerating the af nities and ignoring the differences. I do not deny these dangers; they put at risk not only those looking for parallels in the world around but Chesnutt himself, and all who assume that this is a Jewish work and try to assert its harmony with the Jewish worldview and to blur the differences.

So let us embark on the voyage.

1

Aseneth—Jewish Proselyte or Christian Convert?

1. *Could Aseneth Be a Jewish Proselyte?*

All scholars who maintain that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Jewish work assume that Aseneth's conversion has to be seen as a Jewish *giyyur*. Does the account of Aseneth's conversion t with what we know about the procedure of Jewish conversion in antiquity?

The leading and most detailed source for the halakhot of *giyyur* of both men and women in Talmudic literature is *b. Yeb.* 47a-b. It appears from there that for men the act of *giyyur* consists of the acceptance of *mitzvot*, circumcision, and immersion. For women, a *beraita* says the following:

> [In the conversion of a] woman, women place her in water up to her neck, and two scholars stand outside and instruct her on some light *mitzvot* and on some severe *mitzvot*.

In this *beraita* the essential act of *giyyur* for women is immersion, accompanied by women, and is conditional on acceptance of *mitzvot* as they are told to the proselyte by two scholars.[1] In the parallel to this *beraita* in tractate *Gerim* the *mitzvot* that a female proselyte is taught are speci ed: 'that she be careful about the laws of menstruation, *halla*,[2] and lighting the Sabbath candle': these are the three *mitzvot* observed particularly by women, according to the Mishnah.[3] Otherwise there was presumably no difference

1. In *b. Yeb.* 47b the amora Rabbi Yohanan required three. See Lawrence A. Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish–Christian Schism', in E.P. Sanders *et al.* (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-De nition,* II, *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (London: SCM Press, 1981), pp. 115-56 (134 n. 52).

2. The heave-offering from bread (Num. 15.18-21).

3. *Gerim* 1.1 (Higger), *m. Šab.* 2.6. Tractate *Gerim* is a composition of undetermined date, rst explicitly attested about 1300. Some consider it to be post-Talmudic, hence later than the parallel text in *b. Yebamot.* See Frank Stanton Burns Gavin, *The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments* (1928; New York: Ktav, repr., 1969), p. 32; Shaye J.D. Cohen, 'The Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', *JJS* 41 (1990), pp. 177-203 (187); repr. in Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncer-*

between male and female proselytes with respect to halakhic instruction.[4] It is generally accepted that the *beraita* in *Yebamot* re ects the conversion practices for both men and women in the period following the destruction of the Temple. This is apparent from the use of the term 'at the present time' in the phrase 'A proselyte who comes to convert at the present time', that is, after the destruction.[5] Furthermore, the *beraita* makes no mention of the requirement of a sacri ce, known from traditions re ecting the period of the Second Temple.[6]

Immersion as a part of the conversion process is not mentioned in the Mishnah. However, several *beraitot* report statements by sages of the period of the Mishnah that con rm the place of immersion in the conversion ritual in the post-destruction period. The most important of these is a dispute between two leading gures of the Yavneh period, R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus and R. Joshua b. Hannania: 'A convert was circumcised but not immersed, or immersed but not circumcised—R. Eliezer says the circumci-

tainties (Hellenistic Culture and Society, 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 198-231 (211). Others maintain that *Gerim* re ects an earlier text than that of *b. Yebamot.* See Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 547; Moshe Samet, 'Conversion in the First Centuries C.E.', in I. Gafni *et al.* (eds.), *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishna, and Talmud Period: Studies in Honor of Shmuel Safrai* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993), p. 327.

4. Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', pp. 124-25; repr. in Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985), p. 21; similarly, Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', pp. 185, 196-99 (= *Beginnings of Jewishness,* p. 208). An expression of this is found in *Ruth R.* 2.22 (Vilna), 'She [Naomi] began to set out for her [Ruth] the laws of conversion. She said to her, "My daughter, Jewish women do not go to the theaters and circuses of the gentiles." She [Ruth] said to her, "Wherever you go, I will go." [Naomi] said, "My daughter, Jews do not dwell in a house without a *mezuza.*" [Ruth] said to her, "Wherever you lodge, I will lodge." "Your people shall be my people": this refers to prohibitions and punishments. "And your God my God": this refers to the rest of the commandments.'

5. So Ze'ev Falk, 'Hilkhot Gerim Harishonot' (in Hebrew), *Sinai* 91 (1982), pp. 44-48 (46).

6. According to Urbach (*Sages,* p. 547), the procedures for conversion described in the *beraita* re ect conditions following the Hadrianic persecution. Schiffman ('At the Crossroads', p. 123 = *Who Was a Jew?* p. 20) infers from the stress on the persecution and downtrodden condition of Israel that it is most likely to have been composed in its present form in the aftermath of either the Great Revolt of 66–74 CE or the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE). Similarly Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', p. 192 (= *Beginnings of Jewishness,* pp. 210-11, 217) concludes that the text is a Palestinian *beraita* of the second century, but possibly with some later expansions and interpolations.

sion is determinant; R. Joshua says immersion is also required.'[7] The two sages address two components of the *giyyur* ritual, circumcision and immersion. They agree that circumcision is a *sine qua non* of *giyyur*; they dispute whether immersion is also essential. R. Eliezer, here following the House of Shammai, holds that circumcision is itself suf cient to complete *giyyur*; R. Joshua holds that *giyyur* is not complete without immersion.[8] However this be, ever since Yavneh circumcision and immersion have been considered components of the process of *giyyur*.

In the parallel passage of the Bavli the conversion of women becomes part of R. Joshua's argument: 'A convert was immersed but was not circumcised—R. Joshua says, he is a convert, for so we see that the matriarchs were immersed but not circumcised.'[9] Accordingly, for women immersion was the equivalent of circumcision. This is con rmed by other Talmudic sources relating to the Mishnaic period, in which immersion is seen to be a necessary component of *giyyur.*[10] Though the sources do not refer speci - cally to women, they do con rm the general picture: women's conversion from the second century CE onward consisted of immersion and acceptance of the commandments.

The story of Aseneth's conversion makes no hint at all at any of the *halakhot* on conversion from the Yavneh period onwards. No women place her in water up to her neck; no pair of scholars instructs her on some severe and some light commandments; she does not declare her acceptance of the *mitzvot;* and she does not perform any *mitzva*, not even those special to women—concerning menstruation, *halla*, and lighting the Sabbath candle.

7. *Yerushalmi Qid.* 3.12 64d.

8. Israel Ben-Shalom, T*he School of Shammai and the Zealots' Struggle against Rome* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1993), pp. 166-67.

9. *Bavli Yeb.* 46a. This is a later version of the tradition that treats circumcision and immersion as equal in importance. This version, astonishingly, attributes to R. Joshua the view that only immersion is essential. For various scholarly views on this, see Bernard Jacob Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York: Ktav, 1939), pp. 46-52; Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger within your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 94-96; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp. 220-21; Adela Yarbro Collins (*Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* [JSJSup, 50; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996], p. 227) deduces from this tradition that immersion began to be recognized as an essential part of conversion ritual at about the turn of the second century CE.

10. In *b. Ker.* 9a, Rabbi Judah the Prince explicitly declares both circumcision and immersion essential: 'Rabbi says, "['You and the stranger shall be alike' (Numbers 15.15).] 'You', that is your forefathers. Just as your forefathers entered the covenant by circumcision, immersion and sprinkling of blood [on the altar], so the proselytes will enter the covenant by circumcision, immersion and sprinkling of blood [on the altar]".'

If, as many maintain, *Joseph and Aseneth* was composed earlier than Yavneh, in the Second Temple period, does Aseneth's conversion correspond to what is known about conversion of women in that earlier period? Here too the answer must be negative. Talmudic literature contains traditions apparently dating to Second Temple times, holding that conversion consisted of three acts: circumcision, immersion, and sacri ce.[11] Inasmuch as circumcision is irrelevant to the conversion of women the importance of the other two components arises.

The requirement of immersion as part of conversion in the Second Temple period has been disputed. Those who deny it, do so on the grounds that neither the apocryphal literature nor Philo and Josephus—our main sources of information on Jewish society of that period—mention it explicitly as part of conversion of either men or women.[12] Josephus frequently notes circumcision as an act required of converts, but never immersion, even when mention of it is called for.[13] The silence of the sources notwithstanding, Gedalyahu Alon maintains that immersion indeed was a component of conversion in the Second Temple period.[14] His conviction stems from his conception of the

11. *Sifre Numbers* 108 (Horovitz ed., p. 112), *b. Ker.* 9a, *Gerim* 2.4 (Higger), *Mek. SbY.* 12.48, Maimonides, *Isurei Bi'ah* 13.4: Conversion requires circumcision, immersion and sacri ce. Since sacri ce is included, these traditions may re ect the Second Temple period.

12. T.M. Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Jewish Proselyte Baptism', *NTS* 2 (1955–56), pp. 193-98; Shaye J.D. Cohen, 'Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Postbiblical Judaism', *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1983), pp. 31-45 (37-39); Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 156-61; J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?' p. 106.

13. A. Plummer, 'Baptism', in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898–1902), I, pp. 238-45 (239); Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 160-61; Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 83; Menachem Finkelstein, *Proselytism. Halakha and Practice* (in Hebrew; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994), p. 206. On circumcision as a requirement of conversion in Josephus, see, e.g., N.J. McEleney, 'Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law', *NTS* 20 (1974), pp. 319-41 (322). It has been argued that immersion became a requirement of conversion at the end of the Second Temple period, just before the Great Revolt, as part of the 'Eighteen Decrees' in which the House of Shammai prevailed over the House of Hillel (*t. Zab.* 2.1 [Zuckermandel 677]; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 36b; *b. Nid.* 34b), intended to deepen the separation between Jew and Gentile. See S. Zeitlin, 'The Halakha in the Gospels and its Relation to the Jewish Law at the Time of Jesus', *HUCA* 1 (1924), pp. 358-59.

14. Gedalyahu Alon, 'The Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles', in Alon *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*: *Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1977), pp. 146-89 (172-76). Similarly George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Cen-*

nature of the immersion of the convert, which, like all other immersions in the halakha, cleansed the body of an external physical impurity—in this case the ritual impurity of Gentiles, a function of the ritual impurity of idolatry and of foreign lands. Since the halakha concerning Gentile ritual impurity is early—its roots, in his view, are found in the prophetic literature and its halakhot are pre-Hasmonean—it follows that the immersion of converts to purify them from Gentile ritual impurity was also early. That immersion for conversion was practiced during the Second Temple period is also evinced, according to Alon, from the dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua quoted above. Both agree, Alon argues, that immersion is a component of *giyyur*; the dispute is only about whether conversion fails in the absence of immersion. Hence, by implication, immersion was practiced before their time, in the Second Temple period. A nal additional argument for the anteriority of immersion is that baptism was one of the two major rituals of Christian conversion as New Testament literature was coming into being in the mid- rst century CE. One can hardly imagine that Jews would have adopted immersion as a conversion ritual after it had become a feature of Christianity.[15]

The requirement of a sacri ce by converts is generally inferred from the following *beraita*: 'A proselyte at the present time must set aside a quarter

turies of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim (2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), I, pp. 331-32; Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (trans. David Cairns; Library of History and Doctrine; London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 28-29: 'The silence of Philo and Josephus must be judged accidental.' See also Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents,* p. 30; McKnight, *Light among the Gentiles,* pp. 84-85; Samuel Bialoblotzki, 'The Attitude of Judaism to Proselytes and Proselytism', in *Bar-Ilan Yearbook* (in Hebrew; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1964), II, pp. 53-54; Lawrence H. Schiffman, 'Proselytism in the Writings of Josephus: Izates of Adiabene in Light of the Halakhah', in Uriel Rappaport (ed.), *Josephus Flavius: Historian of Eretz-Israel in the Hellenistic-Roman Period. Collected Papers* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), p. 262; Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', p. 198; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness,* pp. 222-23.

15. Schiffman, 'Proselytism in the Writings of Josephus', p. 262; Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', p. 128; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* p. 26. Further evidence of immersion in the Second Temple period is found in the following passages: *m. Pes.* 8.8 ('A proselyte who converts on the eve of Passover, say the House of Shammai, immerses and eats his paschal lamb that evening. The House of Hillel say that one who separated from a foreskin is as [impure as] one who separated from a tomb'); *m. 'Ed.* 5.2; *t. Pes.* 7.14. Immersion for conversion is attested also by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus of Hierapolis (c. 55–c. 135 CE) as preserved by Flavius Arrianus, *Dissertationes* 2.9.19-21. See Menahem Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), I, p. 543; Stern denies any basis for the suggestion that Epictetus confused Judaism and Christianity. Cohen ('Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', p. 195, and *Beginnings of Jewishness,* p. 222 n. 56), remarks on Epictetus's puzzling failure to mention circumcision.

(of a shekel, or of a dinar) for his "nest offering". R. Simon says Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai initiated a decision to abolish that because of the danger of mishap.'[16] So in the immediate aftermath of the Temple destruction proselytes would set aside a quarter of a shekel for the required sacri ce of a pair of doves in the expectation that the Temple would soon be rebuilt, but the practice was suppressed because of the prospect of misuse of that money.[17] This and other Talmudic traditions imply that when the Temple stood, proselytes were required to offer a sacri ce as part of their conversion.[18] Lastly, in addition to circumcision, immersion and sacri ce, a fourth requirement for conversion was apparently acceptance of the commandments.[19] This is an expression of the proselyte's commitment to live as a Jew. The matter is put well by Lawrence Schiffman. The Torah that the convert had to accept is to be understood in its widest sense. The proselyte must identify fully with the past, present and future of the Jewish people and live in accordance with halakha, namely the Jewish way of life. The Tannaim expected the convert to become part of the nation of Israel and to experience its collective destiny. Since it would have been too much to expect the new convert to master the entirety of the halakha before converting, the proselyte would be informed in advance of a sampling of the Torah commandments, some easier to ful ll, others harder. [20]

Though none of these texts mentions women expressly, we may fairly assume that the same requirements—immersion, sacri ce and instruction in

16. *Bavli Roš Haš.* 31b; *b. Ker.* 9a, *y. Šeq.* 8.8 51b; *Gerim* 2.4; *Sifre Zuta* on Num. 15.15 (Horovitz ed., p. 283).

17. Alon ('Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles', p. 177) holds that the repeal of the obligation to set aside the quarter shekel is later than R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, because details of the obligation were still a matter of dispute among his disciples.

18. *Mishnah Pes.* 8.8; *t. Pes.* 7.14; *m. Ker.* 2.1; *m. 'Ed.* 5.2. See Moore, *Judaism,* p. 332; Bamberger, *Proselytism*, p. 45; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–87), III, p. 173 n. 86, p. 174 n. 89; Bialoblotzki, 'Attitude of Judaism to Proselytes', p. 54; Alon, 'Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles', p. 176; Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', pp. 122, 131; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* pp. 31-32. According to *Gerim* 2.4, the tannaim disputed whether conversion failed in the absence of the sacri ce: 'Just as the People of Israel entered the covenant by three *mitzvot*, so proselytes enter by circumcision, immersion and sacri ce. Two are necessary; one is not. R. Eliezer b. Jacob says the sacri ce too is necessary.'

19. The requirement of acceptance of the Torah appears also in a later narrative about Shammai, Hillel and the proselytes (*b. Šab.* 31a). Potential proselytes approach Shammai asking to convert on the condition of accepting only the written but not the oral Torah, or to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai rejects them; Hillel accepts them, but after the conversions shows each why his condition is incapable of ful llment (Ben-Shalom, *School of Shammai,* pp. 95-96; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp. 218-19).

20. Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', pp. 122-39; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?,* p. 19.

the commandments—were imposed on women. Several narratives of conversion of women dating from the time of the Second Temple are instructive for the understanding of the conversion of Aseneth.

One of the best known instances is that of Helene, queen of Adiabene, a veritable model of what conversion of women in the Diaspora would have been at the time. The events, which took place about the mid- rst century CE,[21] are recounted by Josephus (*Ant.* 20.17-96), who provides a detailed report of the stages of the conversions of Izates son of Monobazus, king of Adiabene, and of his mother, Helene.[22] In Josephus's account, when Izates was residing at Charax Spasini (near the Persian Gulf between the estuaries of the Tigris and the Euphrates) 'a certain Jewish merchant named Ananias visited the king's wives and taught them to worship God after the manner of the Jewish tradition. It was through their agency that he was brought to the notice of Izates, whom he similarly won over with the co-operation of the women' (34). Meanwhile, Josephus continues, it appeared that Izates' mother, Helene, had been instructed by another Jew and had converted to the Jewish religion' ([illegible], 'brought over to the laws'; 35). Later Helene

> conceived a desire to go to the city of Jerusalem and to worship at the temple of God, which was famous throughout the world, and to make thank-offerings there. She consequently asked her son to give her leave. Izates was most enthusiastic in granting his mother's request, made great preparations for her journey, and gave her a large sum of money. He even escorted her for a considerable distance, and she completed her journey to the city of Jerusalem. Her arrival was very advantageous for the people of Jerusalem, for at that time the city was hard pressed by famine and many were perishing from want of money to purchase what they needed. Queen Helene sent some of her attendants to Alexandria to buy grain for large sums and others to Cyprus to bring back a cargo of dried gs. Her attendants speedily returned with these provisions, which she thereupon distributed among the needy. She has thus left a very great name that will be famous forever among our whole people for her benefaction (49-52).

Josephus further reports that Izates 'sent ve sons of tender age to get a thorough knowledge of our native language and culture', and his mother to worship at the temple (71). When Helene died, her elder son Monobazus,

21. In the *Jewish Antiquities,* the account appears among the events during the term of the procurator Cuspius Fadus (44–46 CE). Schiffman ('At the Crossroads', p. 125, and *Who Was a Jew?,* p. 23) dates the episode to c. 30 CE.

22. For the reliability of Josephus's testimony, see Lawrence H. Schiffman, 'The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources', in Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 293-312 (306).

who had in the meantime succeeded to the throne of Adiabene, sent her bones and those of his brother Izates to Jerusalem with instructions that they be buried in the three pyramids that Helene had built three stades from the city of Jerusalem (95).

This narrative illustrates well what conversion involved for women in the Diaspora. Before conversion, the candidates ('the king's wives') learn to worship God according to the ancestral practice of the Jews. In other words, their conversion requires them to be instructed in the Torah. Similarly Helene was instructed by a Jew.[23] This is consistent with the Talmudic requirement that proselytes accept the Torah and for this purpose be instructed in some onerous and some light *mitzvot*. After conversion in her own country, Queen Helene went to Jerusalem to offer a sacri ce, identi ed by some scholars as the sacri ce required of proselytes.[24] Though immersion does not appear explicitly in the narrative of Queen Helene's conversion, we may assume that it took place, if only to permit her to enter the Temple precincts. Immersion was required of everyone who wished to enter there, even one who was already pure,[25] all the more so of Gentiles, who were not permitted to enter at all.[26]

23. Schiffman, 'Proselytism in the Writings of Josephus', p. 260; Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', p. 125; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* p. 23.

24. Schiffman, 'Proselytism in the Writings of Josephus', pp. 262-63; Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads', pp. 132-33; Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?*, p. 31. On the sacri ce of the proselyte, see also *Sifre Deuteronomy* 354, 'They call the peoples to the mountain' (Deut. 33.19): . . . [Nations and kings] ascend to Jerusalem and see the Jews worshiping a single God and eating a single food. . . . They do not depart before they convert and offer sacri ces, as it is said, "There they will offer sacri ces of righteousness" (33.19).' Conceivably the reference is to sacri ces above and beyond to the obligatory ones. See Samet, 'Conversion in the First Centuries', p. 320.

25. *Mishnah Yom.* 3.3; *y. Yom.* 3.3 40b; *t. Neg.* 8.9. See Josephus, *Apion* 2.104: 'To the second court all Jews were admitted and, when uncontaminated by any de lement, their wives'; Josephus, *War* 6.425-26, describing the large numbers of people assembled at the Temple for the paschal sacri ce: '. . . all pure and holy. For those af icted with leprosy or gonorrhea, or menstruous women, or persons otherwise de led were not permitted to partake of this sacri ce, nor yet any foreigners present for worship.' See also S. Safrai, 'Early Testimonies in the New Testament of Laws and Practices Relating to Pilgrimage and Passover', in R. Steven Notley *et al.* (eds.), *Jesus' Last Week* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), pp. 41-51 (44-45); Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', p. 194 n. 46; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness,* p. 222.

26. Elias J. Bickerman, 'The Warning Inscription of Herod's Temple', *JQR* 37 (1946–47), pp. 387-405. For the notion that immersion for purity effects conversion, see the opinion of Rav Asi (*b. Yeb*. 45b). Some would distinguish between immersion for puri cation from the ritual impurity of Gentiles and immersion for conversion, and would maintain that the former is not part of *rites de passage* or initiation (see A.Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology,* pp. 224-26). Put more generally, the question is whether the halakhot of *giyyur* are properly seen as initiation rituals or as ritual acts required of the convert as of any other Jew. In Cohen's words, the rabbinic conversion

Beyond the halakhic requirements, Helene's conversion was expressed in public acts and gestures that manifested her commitments to Judaism and the Jewish people. She ascends to Jerusalem to worship in God's Temple and there sacri ces thanksgiving offerings. While in Jerusalem she comes to the aid of the poor who were af icted by the famine and undertakes massive purchases of food. She erects three pyramids at the outskirts of the city to be tombs for herself and her two sons. Her commitment to Judaism and the Temple is con rmed in rabbinic traditions as well.[27]

We know a little about some other women in the Diaspora who converted to Judaism during the Second Temple period. Josephus tells of one Fulvia, a woman of high rank, who converted to Judaism (□ □□□□□□ . . . □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□) and contributed gold and purple to the Temple in Jerusalem.[28] The catacombs of Rome yield evidence of seven certain instances of conversion to Judaism, mostly of women.[29] One of these inscriptions tells of a Vetoria Paula, who after converting to Judaism received the name Sarah and attained the position of 'Mother of the Syna-

ceremony of *b. Yeb.* 47a-b is not—at least is not primarily—an initiation ritual. It is not concerned with the convert's spiritual state. There is no mention of God or of the eternity of the Torah. There is no denial of paganism or of the pagan gods, no repentance for the sins of a life lived under the sway of foreign deities, no abjuration of evil, no language of rebirth and renewal. There are no gifts, no meal, no benedictions, no rejoicing. The ceremony lacks the symbolic actions and theatrical trappings that often accompany initiation rituals, for example, a procession, special garments, or some action that symbolizes the break with the past and the assumption of a new identity. The rabbinic conversion ceremony lacks rites of separation, transition, and incorporation; in other words, it lacks virtually all the distinctive features of an initiation ritual. It therefore bears little resemblance to Christian baptism rituals (Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', pp. 201-202, 235-36). Similarly Samet, 'Conversion in the First Centuries', p. 343: '*Giyyur* is not "conversion", but a process of moving from one group to another, or in theological terms, a "return" to the original group, an "entering under the wings of the *Shekhina*".' These considerations can explain the absence of explicit mention of immersion in the description of Helene's conversion. Schiffman ('Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene', p. 305) suggests that, since the immersion was part of the puri cation preparatory to sacri cing, Helene performed it not abroad but in Jerusalem.

27. See, e.g., *m. Naz.* 3.6; *t. Suk.* 1.1; *m. Yom.* 3.10. Isaiah Gafni, 'The Giyyur of the Kings of Adiabene in Light of the Talmudic Literature' (in Hebrew), *Niv Hamidrashia* (Spring-Summer 1971), pp. 204-12 (Hebrew Section). Schiffman, 'Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene', pp. 298-99.

28. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.82; see also *War* 2.560, on the women of Damascus, 'who, with few exceptions, had all become converts to the Jewish religion'.

29. Menahem Stern, 'Sympathy for Judaism in Roman Senatorial Circles in the Period of the Early Empire', *Zion* 29 (1964), pp. 155-67; repr. in his *Studies in Jewish History: The Second Temple Period* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1991), pp. 505-17 (505).

gogue' in two synagogues, that of the Campus and that named for Volumnius.[30] An inscription found in Smyrna from the third or fourth century CE mentions a woman named Ru na, a Jewish woman, head of the synagogues (), who consecrated a grave to her liberated slaves and the slaves who had grown up in her house. The inscription contains a prohibition against interment of any other persons in it, with a warning that a contravention would carry a ne payable to the Jewish community. According to Kraemer, the feminine form of the adjective 'Jewish' inscribed beside her name attests that Ru na was a Jewish convert. [31]

In all these instances of women becoming Jewish at the time of the Temple, we see that the conversion was expressed in meaningful acts and in displaying commitment to Judaism and its sacred institutions and traditions. E.P. Sanders put the matter succinctly: '[For] both native-born Israelites and proselytes, *accepting* the covenant both requires and is evidenced by *obeying* the commandments . . . It is the acceptance of the covenant which establishes one in Israel . . . Thus the de nition of a proper proselyte is that he is a *ger tsaddiq*, a "righteous proselyte"; that is, like a righteous (native-born) Israelite he obeys the Torah.'[32]

Furthermore, not only full conversion required some explicit recognition of Judaism. 'God-fearers' too, those of a sort of intermediate status between Jews and pagans, observed some of the commandments of the Torah.[33]

In his description of the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene, Josephus repeatedly uses the phrase 'worship God' (). Ananias would visit the king's wives and teach them to worship God in the Jewish tradition. Then he taught Izates likewise. When Izates expressed his desire to convert and become a true Jew, Ananias argued that the king could worship God even without being circumcised. Here Josephus again uses the term , which must be clearly distinguished from conversion. In pagan and Christian sources, as well as in Josephus (*Ant.* 15.110), the term refers to the notion of 'God-fearing' (

30. *CIJ* 523, I, pp. 383-84; David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe,* 577 (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), II, p. 457.

31. *CIJ* 741, II, p. 10. Ross Shepard Kraemer (ed.), *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 218; Kraemer, 'Hellenistic Jewish Women', pp. 195-96; Kraemer, 'On the Meaning of the Term "Jew" in Greco-Roman Inscriptions', *HTR* 82(1989), pp. 35-53 (45-46).

32. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 206.

33. Contrary to Hezser, '*Joseph and Aseneth* in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels', pp. 34, 36, who argues that 'through her transformation Aseneth does not become a "real" Jewish woman but "a woman who worships God"'.

[illegible]).[34] God-fearers believed in the God of Israel and observed some of the commandments, but did not convert according to the halakha. This status is related to the widespread conversion to Judaism during the Hellenistic and early Roman period, a movement that declined only after the persecution by Hadrian, the Bar-Kokhba revolt and the spread of Christianity.

There is considerable evidence of extensive God-fearing, especially among women. People of this intermediary status expressed their inclination to Judaism in such acts as observance of the Sabbath and fast days, lighting candles and compliance with dietary laws. Josephus writes:

> The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed . . . As God permeates the universe, so the Law has found its way among all mankind (*Apion* 2.282-84).[35]

Juvenal, in the early second century CE, notes the gradual diffusion of Jewish practice in Roman society. Fathers, he says, abstained from work on the Sabbath, from eating pork, and from worshiping anything but the spirit of the sky. Their sons remove their foreskins, and 'study, observe and revere the Judaic law as handed down by Moses in his mystic scroll'.[36] Presumably this was characteristic of the women in such families as well.

We know of several women of the senatorial circles in Rome who were particularly well disposed to Judaism. Such were Poppaea Sabina, wife of the emperor Nero[37]; Julia Severa, an aristocrat of Acmonia in Phrygia, who built a synagogue there[38]; and the wife of Ti. Flavius Clemens, the consul

34. The attribute [illegible] in inscriptions may refer to God-fearers; see Stern, 'Sympathy for Judaism', pp. 509-10.

35. See also Josephus, *Ant.* 14.115; *War* 2.560.

36. Juvenal, *Sat*. 14.96-106; Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, II, pp. 103-106; Leah Roth-Gerson, '"God-Fearers" in Jewish Inscriptions from Sardis' (in Hebrew), *Eshel Beer-Sheva: Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1976), pp. 88-93 (91); Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942), pp. 81-82; Lieberman, *Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1984), pp. 61-62.

37. Josephus, *Ant.* 20.195. Tessa Rajak ('The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries', in Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak [eds.], *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* [London: Routledge, 1994], pp. 9-28) points out the importance of keeping the Sabbath and the dietary laws for the identity of Jews living among Gentiles.

38. *CIJ* 766, II, p. 28; Stern, 'Sympathy for Judaism', pp. 508-11; Roth-Gerson, '"God-Fearers" in Jewish Inscriptions', p. 92.

of 95 CE.[39] A dedicatory inscription found at Trallis in Caria records that one Capitolina, a God-fearer, contributed to the reconstruction of the synagogue in ful llment of a vow.[40]

What emerges from all the sources is that even an intermediate status such as God-fearer, to say nothing of full *giyyur*, entailed some, at least partial, observance of *mitzvot* and performance of Jewish customs such as Sabbath, dietary laws, Jewish festivals and public expressions of identi cation with the Jewish people. What of all this does Aseneth do? Nothing at all! There is no hint of any such custom in the account of Aseneth's conversion. She observes none of the rules of *giyyur*. She does not immerse herself for purity;[41] she is not seen to observe *mitzvot*, either onerous or light; she does not refrain from forbidden foods; she does not go up to Jerusalem; and of course she does not offer sacri ces.

Scholars who nonetheless characterize Aseneth's actions as Jewish conversion do so on the grounds that Aseneth abandons the pagan idolatrous world and adopts belief in one God.[42] The absence of any mention of observance of other Jewish laws is explained as characteristic of certain converts in antiquity, who may be called 'monotheistic proselytes'. These apparently abandoned idolatry and worshiped the one God but did not adopt any other Jewish practices; and males remained uncircumcised.[43] The argument rests, *inter alia,* on a passage by Philo in which it is stated that a proselyte is one who circumcises not his foreskin but rather his lust and his sensual pleasures, who quits the worship of idols and accepts belief in God.[44] According to Cohen, 'the romance *Joseph and Aseneth,* probably written in Egypt by a contemporary of Philo, describes Aseneth as a proselyte of this type. She destroys her idols, renounces polytheism, and becomes a servant

39. Cassius Dio, *Historia romana,* 67.14.1-2; Gedalyahu Alon, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age, 70-640 C.E.* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, repr., 1989), p. 124.

40. Roth-Gerson, '"God-Fearers" in Jewish Inscriptions', p. 92. The proclivity of women to convert to Judaism, especially in the upper strata of society, is apparent also in Josephus's account of the conversion of Helene and the women of the royal house of Spasini (McEleney, 'Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law', p. 323).

41. I will argue below that there is indeed a description of a 'washing', but this is not the Jewish immersion for purity but Christian baptism.

42. J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', pp. 102-107; McKnight, *Light among the Gentiles,* pp. 88-89; Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah,* p. 262; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 97-108, 171-76.

43. McEleney, 'Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law', pp. 328-33; Shaye J.D. Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew', *HTR* 82 (1989), pp. 13-33 (21); Cohen, 'Conversion to Judaism', 38; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness,* p. 151.

44. Philo, *Quaest. in Exod.* 2.2

of the one God'.[45] Rabbinic tradition too, in his view, is familiar with the 'monotheistic proselyte', as is evident in such statements as 'Anyone who denies idolatry is called a Jew.'[46]

On the other hand, John Nolland scrutinized the same sources and concluded that none of them is proof of a first-century Judaism that was open to receiving uncircumcised converts.[47] Even Cohen admits that these sources show that such 'monotheistic proselytes' did not become part of the Jewish community. If a Gentile destroyed his idols and declared complete loyalty to the God of the Jews, his neighbors could have thought him Jewish, but there is no indication that Jews would do the same.[48]

Rejection of idolatry was certainly an indispensable component of Jewish conversion. It implied avoidance of idolatrous cult and sacrifices, as indeed the Torah required. It is also possible to describe in these terms Joseph's refusal to eat with Egyptians (7.1) or to marry the Gentile Aseneth. But these prohibitions characterize not only the Jewish attitude but also the Christian attitude to the pagan world.

In Christian theology, idolatry symbolized the world of darkness and the realm of Satan and was the most grievous sin. One of the foremost aspects of Christian baptism, the Christian conversion ritual, was the struggle with Satan. Baptismal ceremonies included the expulsion of Satan, a drama in which the convert, until then subject to Satan's control, was released from his hold, assumed belief in Christ and achieved a new life within the walls of the church. The ceremony was intimately connected with the rejection of idolatry.[49] Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, asserted that prayer in idolatrous temples as well anything in honor of inanimate idols must be seen as wor-

45. Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary', p. 21; Cohen, 'Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony', p. 151; Samet, 'Conversion in the First Centuries', pp. 329-30; John J. Collins, 'A Symbol of Otherness: Circumsision and Salvation in the First Century', in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (eds.), *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 171-77.

46. *Bavli Meg.* 13a; *Sifre Numbers* 111 (Horovitz ed., p. 116), *Sifre Deuteronomy* 54 (Finkelstein, p. 122): 'Anyone who acknowledges idolatry denies the whole Torah; anyone who denies idolatry acknowledges the whole Torah'; *b. Ned.* 25a: '"The whole Torah" is the [denial of] idolatry'; *b. Hul.* 5a.

47. John Nolland, 'Uncircumcised Proselytes?', *JSJ* 12 (1981), pp. 173-94.

48. See also Samuel Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law: The Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah* (Harvard Semitic Series, 11; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 47.

49. Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), pp. 21-27; Jeremias, *Infant Baptism,* p. 23; R. Michiels, 'La conception lucanienne de la conversion', *ETL* 41 (1965), pp. 42-78 (49-54).

ship of Satan.[50] References to avoidance of marriage with polytheists and a ban on eating with them are frequent in Christian writings, and this very frequency testi es to the importance of the issue for early Christian communities.[51] Paul instructs Christians to ' ee from the worship of idols' (1 Cor. 10.14), 'not to associate with . . . an idolater' and 'not even eat with such a one' (1 Cor. 5.11). Idolaters 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 6.9-10). 'Do not be mismatched with unbelievers', Paul writes.[52] 'For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?' (2 Cor. 6.14-16).[53] Idolaters will not enter paradise, being classed with 'the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers . . . and everyone who loves and practices falsehood' (Rev. 22.15). At the apostolic council in Jerusalem, according to Acts, it was laid down that Christians would be required 'to abstain from things polluted by idols' (Acts 15.20). In the *Didache* Christians are instructed to 'especially abstain from food sacri ced to idols; for this is a ministry to dead gods' (6.3). The writer of *Second Clement* claims, 'We who are living do not sacri ce to dead gods or worship them' (3.1). In the early Christian Pseudo-Clementine literature, Peter is made to explain the Christian way of life to a woman as follows:

> We do not take our food from the same table as Gentiles . . . inasmuch as we cannot eat along with them, because they live impurely. But when we have persuaded them to have true thoughts, and to follow a right course of action, and have baptized them with a thrice blessed invocation, then we dwell with them. For not even if it were our father, or mother, or wife, or child, or brother, or any other one having a claim by nature on our affection, can we venture to take our meals with him; for our religion compels us to make a distinction.[54]

50. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 1.8 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1072-73; *NPNF*, VII, p. 146; SC 126 A, pp. 94-97).

51. As against J.J. Collins ('Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', p. 104), who commented that intermarriage 'does not appear to have been a major issue for the early Christian communities'—though Collins himself provides ample evidence of its importance. See Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, p. 193.

52. By 'unbelievers' Paul means idolaters who have not accepted the Christian message (Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* [AB. 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], pp. 361, 363, 372).

53. Cf. Col. 1.12-13: 'giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.'

54. B. Rehm, *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien* (GCS 42; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1969), p. 194; *Hom.* 13.4.4 = *Recogn.* 7.29; cf. *Hom.* 15.1.2, *Recogn*. 1.19; 2.70,

In the *Acts of Thomas* 9.82-118, a certain Mygdonia, wife of Charisius the kinsman of the king, having been very much affected by Thomas's preaching, converts to Christianity. After her conversion, she refuses to dine or cohabit with her husband on the grounds that he has no place beside her since her lord Jesus is greater than her husband and resides within her (98).[55] In the *Acts of Paul,* the first manifestation of Thecla's conversion is that she breaks her betrothal to Thamyris (2.7-10).[56] In the *Acts of John,* Drusiana does not cohabit with her husband, Andronicus, because he did not become a Christian (63).[57] Gregory of Nazianzus says in praise of his mother, Nonna, 'that she never grasped the hand or kissed the lips of any heathen woman, however honorable in other respects, or closely related she might be' (*Oratio* 18.10; *PG*, XXXV, 996). In the *Acts of Andrew,* Maximilla refuses to kiss her husband, Aegeates, presumably because he is not Christian.[58]

Some have sought evidence of Jewish conversion in the new name that Aseneth receives after her conversion. The man of God informs Aseneth that after she will 'eat the bread of life, drink the cup of immortality, and be anointed with the ointment of incorruptibility' she will become Joseph's bride, and she 'will no more be called Aseneth, but City of Refuge (□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□), for many nations will take refuge in her, and under her wings many peoples will find shelter, and within her walls those who give their allegiance to God in penitence (□□ □□□□□□□□) will find security' (15.4-6).[59] In the view of Philonenko, the giving of a new name proves that Aseneth became Jewish, in accordance with a general practice that Jewish proselytes changed their names in expression of their new life after conversion.[60]

True, taking on new names was often a feature of Jewish conversion. But Aseneth's new name is not typical of proselytes' new names, which were mostly Jewish, that is, biblical, such as Sarah and Miriam, or names that affirm the proselyte's commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people.

72; see further Einar Molland, 'La circoncision, le baptême, et l'autorité du décret apostolique dans les milieux judéo-chrétiens des pseudo-clementines', *ST* 9 (1955), pp. 1-29 (21-24).

55. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 479-93.

56. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament,* pp. 365-72.

57. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha* (Eng. trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1963, 1965), II, p. 245.

58. Michael Penn, 'Identity Transformation and Authorial Identification in *Joseph and Aseneth*', *JSP* 13 (2002), p. 180; Penn, 'Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship', *JECS* 10 (2002), pp. 151-74 (168-69).

59. See also 19.5-7.

60. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 52; Jeremias, *Infant Baptism,* p. 35.

Many added 'Jew' or 'Israel' to their name.[61] Aseneth's new name cannot be explained as belonging to Jewish conversion customs. As I will show, City of Refuge is a symbolic name that expresses Aseneth's pivotal task in the whole story: after eating 'the bread of life' and drinking 'the cup of immortality' she becomes the City of Refuge, a symbol of the church and heavenly Jerusalem; she will give refuge and shelter to all converts who accept the Christian faith and take the vow of virginity (15.7-8). The giving of a new name with associations of Jerusalem and the church recalls Isa. 62.2: 'Nations shall see your victory, and every king your majesty; and you shall be called by a new name which the Lord himself shall bestow' (cf. Isa. 65.15), which early Christians interpreted as referring to Christianity.[62]

In sum, I conclude that Aseneth's conversion cannot be understood against the background of Jewish conversion of women as practiced in antiquity. In the next section I attempt to demonstrate that Aseneth's conversion can best be understood in terms of Christian conversion ceremonies.

2. *Aseneth as a Model of a Christian Convert*

The account of Aseneth's conversion centers on her eating from the honeycomb, which she nds miraculously in her house. The honeycomb is described as 'white as snow and full of honey, and its smell was like the breath of life' (16.4). 'The bees of the Paradise of Delight made this honey ["from the dew of the roses of life", in the long version; 16.14], and the angels of God eat of it, and no one who eats of it shall ever die' (16.8).

It is generally thought that this honeycomb symbolizes the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert.[63] Like Aseneth's honeycomb, manna was

61. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, III, pp. 174-75; Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire romain*: *leur condition juridique, économique et sociale* (2 vols.; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1914; New York: Burt Franklin, repr., 1960), p. 234; K.G. Kuhn, '[illegible]', *TDNT*, VI, p. 733; Kraemer, 'On the Meaning of the Term "Jew"', pp. 35-53; Paul Figueras, 'Epigraphic Evidence for Proselytism in Ancient Judaism', *Immanuel* 24–25 (1990), pp. 194-206 (198); Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* (TSAJ, 91, 126; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

62. For a new name, see *T. Levi* 8.14 and the comments of Harm W. Hollander and Marinus de Jonge on this text (*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* [SVTP, 8; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985], p. 154). See also Rev. 2.17; 3.12.

63. Aptowitzer, 'Asenath', pp. 282-83; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* pp. 96, 187; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, pp. 190, 212, 228; Marc Philonenko, 'Initiation et mystère dans Joseph et Aséneth', in C.J. Bleeker (ed.), *Initiation: Contributions to the Theme of the Study-Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions Held at Strasburg, September 17th to 22nd 1964* (SHR, Supplements to *Numen,* 10; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), pp. 147-53 (152-53); Barnabas Lindars, '"Joseph and Aseneth" and the Eucharist', in Barry P. Thompson (ed.), *Scripture: Meaning and*

perceived as a white, miraculous bread descended from heaven. It too is described as the food of angels and is associated with honey and sweetness; it is connected with dew and generates eschatological hopes.[64] However, a singular characteristic of Aseneth's honeycomb is that it grants immortality to whoever eats of it. Now in all of Jewish literature manna is never described as bestowing immortality.[65] This element connects *Joseph and Aseneth* instead to the traditions of the ancient Greek and Roman world, to the cults that proliferated in Egypt, and to the Mithra cult, in which honey and honeycombs occupied a central position. Honey, like ambrosia and nectar, was thought to be produced in heaven, food for gods and kings. It excels in its sweetness, its odor, and its healing properties; it prevents decay and destruction of the body of the dead and confers immortality on the living.[66]

But the place of honey in either Jewish or Hellenistic and Roman traditions cannot alone explain the centrality of the honeycomb in our story or the complex of ideas and symbols attached to it in the description of Aseneth's conversion. The explanation can only be found in the theology and liturgy of Christianity, which combines both these sets of traditions. The honeycomb, as I will show, represents here the Eucharist, the ritual

Method. Essays Presented to Anthony Tyrrell Hanson for his Seventhiet Birthday (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), pp. 181-99 (187); Holtz, 'Christliche Interpolationen', p. 483; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 258; Moyer Hubbard, 'Honey for Aseneth: Interpreting a Religious Symbol', *JSP* 16 (1997), pp. 97-110 (98); Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', p. 142; Gerber, 'Blickwechsel', p. 207.

64. Manna is described in the Bible as a miraculous white bread descended from heaven: Exod.16.14-15, 31, 35; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.30. Hence it is termed 'bread from heaven' (Ps. 105.40; Neh. 9.15) or 'a hero's meal' (Ps. 78.25). Following the LXX translation of the last verse as 'bread of angels' (□□□□□ □□□□□□□), Talmudic sources consider manna food of angels: see *b. Yom.* 75b; *Tanḥ. Beshalaḥ* 33 (ed. Buber, p. 67), *Eliahu R.* 23 (ed. Ish-Shalom, p. 129). The manna descended with the dew (Num. 11.9). For manna as part of a future ritual that Elijah will establish, see *Mek. Beshalaḥ* 5 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 172). In later sources it is food for the righteous, ground by mills in the third heaven (*shehakim*, *b. ag.* 12b). It is associated with the appearance of the Messiah in *Pes. R.* 15 (ed. Ish-Shalom, p. 73), *Cant. R.* 2.9, and elsewhere. Philo says of manna, it was 'sweeter than honey' (□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□; *Fug.* 138; *Det.* 117). See further Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem,* pp. 140-42.

65. Rudolf Schnackenburg, 'Das Brot des Lebens', in Gert Jeremias *et al.* (eds.), *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt. Festgabe für Karl Georg Kuhn* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 328-42 (339-40).

66. See, e.g., Virgil, *Georg.* 4.149-52; Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.22.19-20; Porphyry, *Antr. nymph*., 16-19; Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes,* III, p. 401; W. Michaelis, '□□□□, *TDNT*, IV, pp. 552-54; Holtz, 'Christliche Interpolationen', p. 483; M. Schuster, 'Mel', *PW,* XV.1, pp. 364-84 (381); Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher, 'Ambrosia und Nektar', *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1884–86), I, pp. 281-82; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 167-72, 200.

based on the Last Supper, in which the believer, by eating bread and drinking wine, partakes of the esh and blood of Christ and gains immortality.[67]

Consider the following:

1. Christian tradition identi ed manna, the bread from heaven—which we have identi ed as the model for the description of Aseneth's honeycomb—with the body of Jesus, a pre guration of the Eucharist. Unlike the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert, Jesus was 'the true bread from heaven', which 'gives life to the world' (Jn 6.32-33). 'I am the bread of life', Jesus declares. 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever' (Jn 6.48-51). Paul connects the miracle of manna with the Last Supper (1 Cor. 10.1-4); Jesus promises 'hidden manna' (Rev. 2.17), which, according to Christian tradition, is the messianic meal to be served in the new world. Origen, in a dispute with the Quartodecimans, observes that the manna fell not on the day of the rst Passover, that is, the 14th day of Nisan, but on the 15th day of the next month, the date of the second Passover, the Christians' Passover, in which the paschal lamb is Christ.[68]

2. The link between the honeycomb and the Eucharist, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, is apparent also in the identity of the honeycomb with the three components of the sacred meal: the bread, the wine (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠), and the ointment (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠).[69] 'Bread of life' and 'cup of eternity' are common terms

67. Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', p. 29; Brooks, *Joseph and Asenath,* pp. xi, xv. For a survey of the main suggestions for identi cation of the honeycomb, see Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', pp. 141-42.

68. Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 7.4 (*Homélies sur l'Exode* [trans. Marcel Borret; SC, 321; Paris: Cerf, 1985], pp. 215-17; Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate* [CSCO, 223, 224; 2 vols. in 1; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962], 37.2. See also Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 114. For hidden manna as food in the heavenly paradise, see 'The Pseudo-Titus Epistle', in Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, II, p. 166; *2 Bar.* 29.8.

69. The formulaic references to 'bread', 'cup' and 'ointment' appear in the longer text six times: three times in the trio 'blessed bread of life', 'blessed cup of immortality' and 'blessed ointment of incorruption' (8.5; 15.5; 16.16) and three times in the pair 'bread of life' and 'cup of blessing'. In the shorter version they appear three times (8.5; 8.11; 15.4). See Chesnutt, 'Perceptions of Oil in Early Judaism', p. 113. The triple formula is at the center of the controversy over the theological identity of the work. Of the scholars who consider the work Jewish, some have suggested that the formula re ects the blessings said at the beginning and end of daily meals of *havurot*. See, e.g., Joachim Jeremias, 'The Last Supper', *ExpTim* 64 (1952), pp. 91-92. In the view of Burchard ('Importance of Joseph and Aseneth', pp. 274, 278, and *OTP,* II, p. 212), the trio refers not to a meal but to essential human needs for food, drink, and ointment, and correspond to the biblical trio of grain, wine and oil, which can provide life, immortality and purity.

for the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Their origin is in the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples, at which he

> took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Cor. 11.23-25).[70]

Ignatius of Antioch says of the bread of the Eucharist that it 'is a medicine that brings immortality, an antidote that allows us not to die'[71]; and Irenaeus, writing of the Eucharist, says that 'our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity'.[72] In the *Acts of Judas Thomas* we read, 'And when they were baptized and had put on their clothes, he brought bread and wine, and placed it on the table, and began to bless it, and said: "Living bread, the eaters of which die not! Bread, that lls hungry souls with your blessing! You who are worthy to receive the gift and to be for the remission of sins, that those who eat you may not die!"'[73] Ephrem calls the Eucharist, symbolizing as it does the body of Christ, 'a living sacri ce'.[74] The chalice of the

For Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*, p. 38, and 'Perceptions of Oil', pp. 113, 121, 126-31), these passages are intended to demonstrate that life and immortality are achieved by the proper Jewish use of food and ointment with their appropriate blessings, as distinct from idolatrous meals, which lead to death. The daily meals of Jews are compared to manna, and Aseneth and all other proselytes achieve immortality when they lead their lives in the Jewish manner (*more Judaico*). In the same direction, see J.J. Collins, 'Symbol of Otherness', p. 176. John C. O'Neill ('What Is Joseph and Aseneth About?', *Henoch* 16 [1994], pp. 189-98 [193]) connects the trio to the Passover meal as it was celebrated, without sacri ce, in the Diaspora. See also Peter Dschulnigg, 'Überlegungen zum Hintergrund der Mahlformel in JosAs: Ein Versuch', *ZNW* 80 (1989), pp. 272-75. Many other scholars have discerned here a ritual formula associated with sacred meals in various religious groups, including the Qumran community, the Therapeutae, Jewish mystic groups, and gentile mystery cults, especially that of Isis. See Karl Georg Kuhn, 'The Lord's Supper and Communal Meal at Qumran', in Krister Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957, pp. 65-93 (74-77); Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 92, 94; Kilpatrick, 'Last Supper', pp. 4-8; John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), pp. 211-12.

70. So Mk 14.22-25 and parallels.

71. Ignatius, *Eph.* 20. See Bart D. Ehrman (ed. and trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (LCL;Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), I, p. 241.

72. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.18.5.

73. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in William Wright (trans.), *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (1871; Amsterdam: Philo Press, repr., 1968), p. 268.

74. Ephrem the Syrian, *HVirg.* 36.1 (ed. Beck, CSCO, 223; Scr. Syri, 94, p.130).

Eucharist is considered a cup of eternity. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa, 'After he gives him wine, which gladdens the hearts of men, he (Christ) pours into the soul that liquor which does not inebriate, directing thoughts away from the ephemeral to the eternal.'[75] The identi cation of the honeycomb with this meal is explicit in the long version of *Joseph and Aseneth*, in which after Aseneth has eaten from the honeycomb the man of God tells her that she has 'eaten bread of life, and drunk a cup of immortality, and been anointed with ointment of incorruptibility' (16.16). This identi cation is made all the more plausible by Joseph's readiness to kiss Aseneth after she has eaten from the honeycomb, since the reason for his earlier refusal (8.5) has ceased to exist.

3. The order in which the components of the meal are listed by the man of God— rst the 'bread of life' then the 'cup of immortality'—is that of the Eucharist, in which the benediction on the bread precedes that on the wine.[76] That order in turn re ects the order of the bread and wine that Melchizedek offered Abraham (Gen. 14.18-20). As Cyprian says,[77] 'In the priest Melchizedek we see pre gured the sacrament of the sacri ce of the Lord, according to what divine Scripture testi es, and says, "And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine". Now he was a priest of the most high God, and blessed Abraham.'[78]

75. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ascensionem Christi* (*PG*, XLVI, 692b); Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* p. 185. In *Joseph and Aseneth* 8.11, the version is '[illegible]' as in 1 Cor. 10.16 (Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 270). Note, however, that in *Joseph and Aseneth* there is eating of a honeycomb, but not drinking from a cup. This accords with the more central place of the breaking of bread in the Eucharist ritual. See Acts 2.42; 20.11; Lk. 24.30; Pseudo-Clementine *Hom.* 14.1.

76. Mark 14.22-25, Mt. 26.26-29, 1 Cor. 11.23-26; *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,* p. 257.

77. Cyprian, *Epistles* 63.4 (*Correspondance, texteétabli et traduit* by le chanoine Bayard [Collection des universités de France; 2 vols.; Paris: Société d'édition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1961], II, p. 201).

78. The same order, bread–wine, appears in a meal in the Qumran community: 1QSa 2.11-12 (1Q28). The opposite order, wine–bread, is found in Lk. 22.17-20; *Did.* 9.2-4; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.25; 161.3 (SC, 463; Paris: Cerf, 2001), p. 324. According to Hans Lietzmann (*Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979], pp. 162-63), the order wine–bread is the later one, in uenced by the Jewish practice of *kiddush*. David Flusser ('The Last Supper and the Essenes', *Immanuel* 14 [1982], pp. 23-27, repr. in Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988], pp. 202-206) maintains the opposite position, that the order wine–bread in Luke re ects the original practice, with the implication that Jesus and his disciples followed the traditional Jewish custom. See also R. Steven Notley, 'The Eschatological Thinking of the Dead Sea Sect and the Order of Blessing in the Christian Eucharist', in R. Steven Notley *et al.* (eds.), *Jesus' Last Week* (Jewish and Christian

4. Honey and honeycombs appear in the context of the liturgy of the Eucharist in the early church. Hippolytus of Rome testi es that, in addition to blessing the bread and the wine, the sacrament representing the body of Christ, the bishop would in the course of the Mass bless the 'mixed milk and honey', to indicate the ful llment of the promise of a land of milk and honey, a promised land open to the believer who partakes in this sacrament.[79] Ambrose interprets Song 4.16, 'Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy its luscious fruit', as the invitation of the church to Christ to join the heavenly banquet in which the baptized take part. 'The Lord Christ receives this joyfully and responds to his Church with heavenly honor: "I have come to my garden, my own, my bride; I have plucked my myrrh and spice, eaten my bread and honey, drink my wine and my milk".' For Ambrose this verse, Song 5.1, describes the Eucharist, at which the bread is accompanied by honey, and the wine by milk.[80]

5. The fragrance, or the 'breath of life', which emanates from the honeycomb, also symbolizes the body of Jesus. Aseneth asks the man of God if the honeycomb came from his mouth 'for it smells like myrrh' (16.6), and when the honeycomb is burned a refreshing fragrance lls the room (17.3). The body of Jesus gives off perfumed fragrance that is the fragrance of paradise, which he embodies. This fragrance lls the house in preparation for his death and burial, and will spread throughout the world after his death.[81] Ephrem uses the expression 'scent of life' in a sense very close to 'bread of life', and explains the fragrance given off by Christ's body as his being the true sacri ce: 'When Christ offered himself as a sacri ce, the scent that emanated from the sacri ce was "the fragrance of his life".'[82]

6. In the long version, the honeycomb was made by the bees of paradise 'from the dew of the roses of life that are in Paradise' (16.14). The dew of the owers of paradise is a common image in Christian descriptions of paradise and symbolizes the word of the Lord, his gospel, which descends

Perspectives, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), pp. 121-38; Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem,* pp. 146-51.

79. B. Botte (ed. and trans.), *Hippolyte de Rome, La tradition apostolique* (SC, 11. Paris: Cerf, 1946), 21, pp. 92-93; *Barn.* 6.8-19; *Odes* 4.10; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed*. 1.6 and 34ff.; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc*. 1.14 and *Cor.* 3; *Apoc. Paul* 22-23 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament,* pp. 629-30); Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman &Todd, 1964), p. 332; Frederick E. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church* (London: SPCK, 1912), pp. 59, 79.

80. Ambrose, *Sacr.* 5.15; *Myst.* 9.57; Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* p. 202.

81. John 12.3; 19.39-40; Mt. 26.6-13; Mk 14.3-9. See Rivka Nir, 'The Aromatic Fragrances of Paradise in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve and the Christian Origin of the Composition', *NovT* 46 (2004), pp. 20-45.

82. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'St Ephrem on the Scent of Salvation', *JTS* 49 (1998), pp. 113, 117.

like dew and is sweet as honey.[83] The dew of the roses of life is the 'healing dew', 'the dew of the Lord',[84] which resurrects from death and promises eternal life, as does the one bread 'which is a medicine that brings immortality, an antidote that allows us not to die but to live at all times in Jesus Christ'.[85]

The clearest proof, however, that the honeycomb symbolizes the bread of the Eucharist derives from the liturgical elements that accompany the scene. From Christian sources it appears that the eucharistic liturgy of early Christianity included four elements.[86]

1. A table was set, on which bread and wine were placed (*offertio*).[87] The ritual setting of the table for the Eucharist is based on Ps. 23.5, 'You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my drink is abundant', interpreted by Church Fathers as an image of the eucharistic meal. The association of the verse with the Eucharist is found in many Christian sources.[88] In Acts 16.34, after the jailer of Paul and Silas converted, and he and the members of his family were baptized, 'he brought them up into the house and set a table (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠) for them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God'. The setting of the table there symbolizes the Eucharist, and notably it comes in the context of conversion to Christianity. St Cyril of Jerusalem writes:

> If you wish to know the effect of the sacrament, ask blessed David who says: 'Thou hast prepared a table before me in the face of those who persecute me.' See what he wishes to say. Before your coming, the demons prepared for men lthy tables, full of diabolic powers. But when You come, O Lord, You prepared a table before me, which is none other than the sacramental and spiritual table which God has prepared for us *over against*,

83. D. Amand and M.C. Moons (eds.), 'Une curieuse homélie grecque inédite, sur la virginité adressée aux péres de famille', *Revue bénédictine* 68 (1953), 13, pp. 18-69 (38-39).

84. LXX Isaiah 26.19. See also *2 Bar.* 29.6, there too in the context of eschatological dew; *Odes* 35.1, 5: 'The gentle showers of the Lord overshadowed me with serenity . . . and He gave me milk, the dew of the Lord.' Cf. 11.13-16.

85. Ignatius, *Eph.* 20.2 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, p. 241).

86. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 48; Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* p. 127; Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954)*,* p. 75; Gerard Rouwhorst, 'Bread and Cup in Early Christian Eucharist Celebration', in Charles Caspers *et al.* (eds.), *Bread of Heaven: Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion. Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture* (Liturgia condenda, 3; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), p. 30.

87. From this developed the *offertorium*, the procession to place the elements of the Eucharist on the altar.

88. Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* pp. 182-83.

> that is, contrary and in opposition to the evil spirits. And very truly; for that had communion (□□□□□□□□) with devils, but this, with God.[89]

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, puts the verse from Psalms into the mouth of the newly baptized convert as he approaches the altar, symbolizing the body of Christ,[90] to join in the Mass for the first time: 'He approaches, and when he sees the holy altar set he recites, "You spread a table for me".'[91] Gregory of Nyssa refers to this table as 'the sacramental table'.[92]

2. The second part is the Eucharist, based on a prayer of thanksgiving recited over the bread and the wine.[93]

3. The third part is the 'breaking of bread' (□□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□), which symbolizes partaking of the body of Jesus and is at the center of the rite and the liturgy of this sacrament.[94] Acts 2.42 states that the earliest converts 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'. Ignatius describes the 'breaking of bread' when 'all of you to a person are gathering together one by one in God's grace, in one faith and in Jesus Christ . . . breaking one bread, which is a medicine that brings immortality, an antidote that allows us not to die but to live at all times in Jesus Christ'.[95] The *Didache* refers to 'the Lord's own day, when you gather together, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist'.[96]

4. The fourth part is the 'communion' (□□□□□□□□), that is, the believers 'sharing' a common meal, together eating the sacred elements of the ritual, the bread and the wine, and thus partaking of the body of Christ and being united with him.

Finally, inseparable from these four elements is the mystery of the Eucharist, which brings about believer's inner renewal and mystic transformation when the sacrament is performed.[97]

89. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 4.7.1-13 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1101; *NPNF*, VII, p.152).

90. Ambrose, *Sacr.* 5.7 (trans. B. Botte; SC, 25; Paris: Cerf, 1961), pp. 122-23.

91. Ambrose, *Myst.* 8.43 (Botte, pp. 178-81); *Sacr.* 5.13 (Botte, pp. 124-27).

92. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ascensionem Christi* (*PG*, LXVI, 692b).

93. This is in the most literal sense the Eucharist, in Greek 'thanksgiving'. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 65, 67; *Acts of Thomas* 49.

94. Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church*, p. 26; Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, p. 20; G.D. Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy* (The Moorehouse Lectures, 1975; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 67; Rouwhorst, 'Bread and Cup', pp. 26-27.

95. Ignatius, *Eph.* 20.2 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, p. 241).

96. *Didache* 14.1 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, p. 439); Lk. 24.30; Acts 20.7; 1 Cor. 10.16; Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, p. 20.

97. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatecheses* 12 (*PG*, XXXIII, 552-53; *NPNF*, VII, p. 4); *Acts of Judas Thomas* 5, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 189; Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper,* p. 20; K.C. Felmi, 'Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy

All these characteristic features of the eucharistic liturgy are found in the scene of the honeycomb in our work, and in the same order. First, Aseneth offers to 'set a table' ( ) for the man of God, and to place on it bread and wine (15.14). After she discovers the honeycomb, she 'placed that on the table which she had set for him' ( ).[98] The man of God then recites a blessing of thanksgiving over the honeycomb:

> The man stretched his hand out and placed it on her head and said, 'You are blessed, Aseneth, for the indescribable things of God have been revealed to you; and blessed too are those who give their allegiance to the Lord God in penitence, for they shall eat of this comb. The bees of the Paradise of Delight have made this honey, and the angels of God eat of it, and no one who eats of it shall ever die' (16.7-8).

He then stretches out his hand and breaks off a piece of the honeycomb ( ).[99] In the final stage of the ritual, the 'communion', the man of God shares the honeycomb with Aseneth. He himself eats of the honeycomb and then, with his hand, places what is left of it in Aseneth's mouth saying, 'Eat', and she eats (16.15). As in the Eucharist, so in our work the ritual is performed by a single individual, who must himself also eat of the bread.[100] In many liturgical texts the performer of the ritual must instruct the participants to eat, as the man of God instructed Aseneth, 'Eat', and she ate.[101] This instruction recalls that of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper: 'Take and eat; this is my body.'[102]

Like the Eucharist, the miracle of the honeycomb in *Joseph and Aseneth* is described as a 'mystery' ( ).[103] It too has

Communion in the Eastern Orthodox Churches', in Charles Caspers *et al.* (eds.), *Bread of Heaven: Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion. Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture* (Liturgia condenda, 3; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), pp. 41-60 (47); Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 49, 83; Raniero Cantalamessa (ed.), *Easter in the Early Church: An Anthology of Jewish and Early Christian Texts* (trans. Alan Neame; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. xiv.

98. So the long version (Burchard, 'Joseph und Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 206).

99. As against Kilpatrick, *Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy,* p. 61, who dismisses the identification of this meal with the Eucharist because no bread is broken. Compare the meal in Qumran: 'When they set the table to eat or wine to drink, the priest will stretch his hand first to bless at the beginning the bread and the wine' (1QS 6.4-5, 1QSa 2.18-21). Kuhn, 'Lord's Supper and Communal Meal', p. 75 n. 39.

100. *Acts of John* 109-10 (Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, II, pp. 255-56). Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 22 (Botte, p. 97).

101. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper,* p. 22.

102. 'The Divine Liturgy of James' (*ANF,* VII, p. 544); Justin, *1 Apol.* 65.

103. Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety,* p. 75.

eschatological signi cance. In the long text, when Aseneth eats the honeycomb paradise is opened to her and she becomes a City of Refuge, identi ed with the heavenly Jerusalem and with the church. Eating the honeycomb, or manna, symbolizes the advent of paradise and the establishment of the heavenly Jerusalem.[104] In fact, the entire meal in *Joseph and Aseneth* can be identi ed with the messianic meal, which in Christian sources will come to pass at the end of days and the beginning of the new world. This meal in turn is a re ection of the Last Supper of Jesus on earth.[105] Finally, like the Eucharist, this meal takes place on Sunday,[106] perhaps even Easter Sunday itself.[107]

One of the main arguments against the identi cation of Aseneth's meal as a Eucharist arises from the mention of 'blessed unction (ointment) of incorruption' (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□) as a third component, along with the 'bread of life' and the 'cup of eternity'. Unction, most scholars believe, does not t the pattern of the Eucharist.[108] Some who wish to explain Aseneth's

104. See 16.16 (long version) (Burchard, 'Joseph und Aseneth', *OTP,* II, pp. 212-14). I will argue below that the scene of the bees represents the resurrection in paradise of the souls of Christian believers and emphasizes virginity as a condition for entry into the heavenly marital chamber.

105. Such a messianic meal took place in Qumran as well. On messianic meals, see Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem,* pp. 132-51; Feeley-Harnik, *Lord's Table,* pp. 108-15.

106. For the custom of performing the Eucharist with baptism on Sunday, the 'Day of the Lord', see *Did.* 14; Justin, *1 Apol.* 67; *Didascalia* 13; R. T. Beckwith, 'The Solar Calendar of Joseph and Asenath: A Suggestion', *JSJ* 15 (1984), pp. 90-111 (101); Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 102.

107. Joseph is sent by Pharaoh on the fth day of the second month and arrives at the home of Aseneth's parents on Sunday, the eighteenth of the fourth month (18 April). Pentephres invites Joseph to stay in his home, but Joseph refuses, saying, 'I must be going now, for this is the day when God began his works: in eight days' time, when this day returns, I will come back' (9.5). Joseph, then, returns on the following Sunday, 25 April. Admittedly, Easter in the early centuries CE generally fell on 25 March or 6 April (Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* [New York: Pueblo, 1986], pp. 8-13). However, in the year 387, for instance, Easter was celebrated in Alexandria and in northern Italy on 25 April. See Paul F. Bradshaw, 'The Origin of Easter', in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (eds.), *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Two Liturgical Traditions, 5; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 81-97 (93). J. van Goudoever (*Biblical Calendars* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2nd rev. edn, 1961], p. 120) argues that the eighteenth of the fourth month must be an indication of the summer solstice. On baptism at Easter, see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Christian Initiation* (Ecumenical Studies in History, 10; London: Lutterworth, 1969), p. 20. For the chronology, see van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, p. 63; Beckwith, 'Solar Calendar', p. 106; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 202; Burchard, 'Le livre de la prière d'Aséneth', in Albert-Marie Denis *et al., Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique* (2 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 293-94.

108. Chesnutt, 'Perceptions of Oil', p. 113; Burchard, 'Importance of Joseph and Aseneth', p. 274; Burchard, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aséneth', pp. 319-20; Kilpatrick,

meal in a Jewish context point to passages in Talmudic literature that refer to a blessing over oil.[109] Others connect the oil to the biblical trio of grain, wine and oil,[110] and see its appearance here as re ecting the importance of oil in Jewish life and in ancient Near Eastern commerce.[111] But all admit that the trio of bread, wine and oil, in that order, is not a feature of Jewish meals.[112]

But I maintain that a blessing over the unction of incorruption along with the blessings over bread and wine does indeed belong in the early Eucharist. A papyrus fragment of a Coptic version of the *Didache* found in Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, paralleling sections 10.3–11.2 of the Greek, has a short passage that is not in the Greek: 'Concerning the matter of the ointment (*stinou*), give thanks, saying, "We give you thanks, O Father, for the ointment (*stinou*) you have made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever. Amen".'[113] Admittedly, it is disputed whether the blessing in the Coptic version, dated no later than the fth century, re ects the original Greek text or is a later addition, and whether the Coptic term *stinou* should be translated as ointment (□□□□□) or as fragrance or incense, in which case the blessing is not on ointment at all.[114] There can be no doubt,

Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy, p. 61; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 91; J.J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 214.

109. *B. Ber.* 53b, 43b.

110. For example, Deut. 7.13; 12.17; 14.23; 18.4; 28.51; 2 Chron. 31.5.

111. Chesnutt, 'Perceptions of Oil', p. 122; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 132, 134; Randall D. Chesnutt, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Meal Formula in Joseph and Aseneth: From Qumran Fever to Qumran Light', in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Second Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins* (3 vols.; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), II, pp. 413-23.

112. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 134: 'Oil was of course used in meals, but there is little if any evidence that an anointing with oil played a part in Jewish meals.' Chesnutt, 'Perceptions of Oil', p. 122: 'Oil was used in a variety of ways in ancient Jewish meals, but as far as we can tell, a meal of bread and wine followed by an anointing with oil is without parallel.' See also Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 91. These explanations understand the term □□□□□ as denoting olive oil, □□□□□ in Greek. The meaning of □□□□□ is scented unguent, thicker than □□□□□ □□□□□, likewise, denotes a fragrant oil, an ether extract of the myrrh plant used for perfume. But it seems that even in the Christian liturgy there is confusion among all these terms.

113. F. Stanley Jones and Paul A. Mirecki, 'Considerations on the Coptic Papyrus of the Didache (British Library Oriental Manuscript 9271)', in Clayton N. Jefford (ed.), *The Didache in Context: Essays on its Text, History, and Transmission* (NovTSup, 77; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 47-87 (53); Stephen Gero, 'The So Called Ointment Prayer in the Coptic Version of the Didache: A Re-Evaluation', *HTR* 70 (1977), pp. 67-84 (67).

114. See Arthur Vööbus, *Liturgical Traditions in the Didache* (Papers from the Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 16; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1968), pp. 42-57. For the literature on the dispute, see Jones and Mirecki,

though, that in *Constitutiones apostolorum* 7, the first part of which is an adaptation of the *Didache*,[115] the blessing was understood as one over oil: 'And on the oil (□□□□□), bless as follows: "We give you thanks, O God creator of the universe, also for fragrance of the oil (□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□) and for the eternal life which you have made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory and the power forever. Amen."'

Further evidence of a blessing over oil at the Eucharist is found in the *Apostolic Tradition* 5, attributed to Hippolytus, in the instruction that the blessing of the oil should be said using the same formula as for bread and wine.[116] Cyril of Jerusalem too connects oil to the blessings over the bread and wine in the Eucharist:

> Therefore Solomon also, hinting at this grace, says in Ecclesiastes, *Come hither, eat your bread with joy* (that is, the spiritual bread); *Come hither*, he calls with the call to salvation and blessing), *and drink your wine with a merry heart* (that is, the spiritual wine); *and let oil be poured out upon your head* (you see he alludes even to the mystic Chrism); *and let your garments be always white, for the Lord is well pleased with your works*; for before you came to Baptism, your works were *vanity of vanities*.[117]

Yet more evidence is found in Cyprian, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Ephrem, among others.[118] The connection of oil and the Eucharist is expressed in the custom, still observed in the rite of the Easter Vigil, to introduce at the

'Considerations on the Coptic Papyrus of the Didache' pp. 84-85; Joseph Ysebaert, 'The So-Called Coptic Ointment Prayer of Didache 10,8 Once More" *Vigiliae christianae* 56 (2002), pp. 1-10.

115. Franciscus Xaverius Funk (ed), *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum* (2 vols.; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1905), p. 414, lines 10-14; Marcel Metzger (ed.), *Les Constitutions apostoliques: Introduction, text critique, traduction et notes* (SC, 336; Paris: Cerf, 1987), 27, p. 59. See also the blessing over oil in the Ethiopic translation of the *Didascalia*: John Mason Harden, *The Ethiopic Didascalia* (London: SPCK, 1920), p. 172.

116. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 5 (Botte, pp. 54-55): Oleum offert secundum oblationem panis et vini, sic gratias agens secundum hunc ordinem. Si eodem sermone non dicit, propria virtute gratias agat et alio sermone. *Oleum* is indeed an olive oil.

117. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 4.8 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1104; *NPNF*, VII, p. 152).

118. Cyprian, *Epistles* 70.2 (ed. le chanoine Bayard, II, p. 254): Porro autem eucharistia est unde baptizati unguntur oleum in altri sancti catum; Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *Hier. eccles.* 4.472d-473a (*Corpus Dionysiacum* [ed. G. Heil and A.M. Ritter; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991), II, p. 95; Ephrem the Syrian, *HVirg.* 37.2-3 (CSCO, 223; Scr. Syri, 94, p. 133). A. Baumstark ('Aegyptischer oder antiochenischer Liturgietypus in A K 1-7?', *OrChr* 1, 7 [1907], pp. 388-407 [395]) holds that this blessing matches practices of the church in Egypt; see also E. Segelberg, 'The Coptic Gnostic Gospel of Philip and its Sacramental System', *Numen* 7 (1960), pp. 189-200 (195).

communal meal a lamp, called by Hippolytus 'light of incorruption' (*lux incorruptibilis*), equivalent to the 'unction of incorruption' in *Joseph and Aseneth*.[119]

Other actions of Aseneth before she takes part in the Eucharist correspond to the liturgy and practices of Christian conversion rites in the first centuries CE, as they are described by early Christian writers.[120]

After resolving to convert, Aseneth removes her clothes and dons a black garment, puts sackcloth around her waist and ashes on her head and fasts for seven days. On the eighth day she rises to her knees, faces east, stretches her arms forward, raises her eyes heavenward and prays and confesses, exorcising Satan (chs. 10–13). Sackcloth and ashes are characteristic of the penitence rituals associated with conversion (□□□□□□□□), as evinced in Jesus' words in Lk. 10.13: 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented (□□□□□□□□□□) long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.'[121] Prayer and fasting were also widely practiced in Christian conversion rituals. Before anyone could be baptized and take part in communion he or she had to fast.[122] Justin Martyr in the second century writes, 'As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we pray and fast with them.'[123] In the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, attributed to Clement, bishop of Rome, we find, 'Whoever of you wish to be baptized, begin from tomorrow to fast, and inquire about what matters you please.'[124]

119. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 25 (Botte, p. 101); Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety,* p. 123; *Acts of Thomas,* 2.26-27 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 457-58).

120. For descriptions by four fourth-century authors—Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, see H.M. Riley, *Christian Initiation* (Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity, 17; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), pp. 54-84.

121. So Mt. 11.21; the 'History of John the Son of Zebedee', in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50. On the wearing or stepping on sackcloth before baptism, see Jonathan Z. Smith, 'The Garments of Shame', *HR* 5 (1965), pp. 217-38 (226-29).

122. Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 63; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 320; W. Rordorf, 'Baptism according to the *Didache*', in Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Didache in Modern Research* (AGJU, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 212-22 (216); Franz Joseph Dölger, *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1909), pp. 80-86.

123. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 61.2 (*PG,* VI, 420).

124. Pseudo-Clementine *Hom.* 3.73.1 (ed. Rehm, p. 83); Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20 (ed. Botte, pp. 78-79); Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20 (*PL*, I, 1223; *ANF*, III, pp. 678-79); *Didascalia* 4 (R.H. Connolly, *Didascalia apostolorum* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929], pp. 52-53); 21 (Connolly, p. 180); Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 61.

So fasting was the accepted means of achieving puri cation and atonement for sins, especially idolatry, and especially among women.[125] But along with prayer, fasting also was considered effective in exorcising the demon of idolatry.[126] Jesus tells his disciples, who failed to cure a boy seized by a demon, 'But this kind (of demon) does not come out except by prayer and fasting' (Mt. 17.21).[127] Exorcism of Satan became central to the rites preparing candidates for baptism and was the rst step in the initiation into Christianity.[128] Exorcism is also central to the prayers of Aseneth. In her confession she describes her ight from Satan:

> Deliver me from my persecutors . . . and snatch me from the hand of my enemy. For lo, the wild primeval lion pursues me; and his children are the gods of the Egyptians that I have abandoned and destroyed; and their father, the Devil, is trying to devour me. But do thou, O Lord, deliver me from his hands . . . lest he snatch me like a wolf and tear me, and cast me into the abyss of re, and into the tempest of the sea; and let not the great sea-monster swallow me (12.7-10).[129]

The lion represents Satan, as in 1 Peter: 'Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering' (5.8-9). In the Christian *Apocalypse of Elijah* (2.6-15), similar to Aseneth's prayer, Satan is described as a king who will arise in the west, will cross the sea as a roaring lion and will guilefully circle the cities of Egypt and encourage idolatry.[130]

125. Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 220-53.

126. *Didascalia*, 21 (ed. Connolly, p. 184); *Apoc. Elij.* 1.20-22 (*OTP,* I, p. 738); *Acts Pet.* 22 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 415); Dölger, *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual,* pp. 80-86; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 321; N. Mitchell, 'Baptism in the Didache', in Clayton N. Jefford (ed.), *The Didache in Context: Essays on its Text, History, and Transmission* (NovTSup, 77; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 226-55 (251); Vööbus, *Liturgical Traditions,* p. 20.

127. See also Mk 9.29; *Apoc. Elij.* 1.20-22. Wearing sackcloth, placing ashes on the head and fasting were common expressions of remorse and penance in Judaism and were adopted from there by Christianity.

128. In the fourth century, the ritual was called *apotaxis* or *abrenuntio*. The origin of the Greek term is the rst word of the formula of the ritual, ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠('I renounce, give up, part company with, leave the ranks of').

129. For the sea-monster, see *4 Ezra* 6.49-52; *1 En.* 60.7-9, 24-25; 62.7-16; Revelation 12–13.

130. Based on Pss. 7.2 and 22.14. See Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah,* pp. 259, 263; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 221. For similar descriptions by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom, see

A week-long fast before Easter, corresponding to that of Aseneth, is attested also in Dionysius of Alexandria, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in the *Itinerarium* of Egeria, and in Cyril of Jerusalem.[131] In the early church, Easter was the occasion for a communal ceremony of baptism and acceptance of new converts. It is appropriate, then, for Aseneth's conversion to take place at Easter and in the week preceding it.[132]

Aseneth's posture during prayer, kneeling, also corresponds to that of Christian prayer. Origen maintains that kneeling is required for confession of sins before God.[133] Eusebius quotes Hegesippus describing James, the brother of Jesus: 'his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God'.[134] Genuflection symbolizes the worshiper's connection to Satan but, on the other hand, expresses the recognition of the absolute rule of Christ, according to Phil. 2.10-11, 'so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'.[135]

Riley, *Christian Initiation* p. 47; Methodius, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* (trans. Herbert Musurillo; ACW, 27; New York: Newman Press, 1958), logos 4, p. 76.

131. Dionysius of Alexandria, *Ep. ad Basilidem* 1; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 20 (Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, II, p. 359); *Itinerarium* of Egeria 28 (John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* [London: SPCK, 1971], p. 130); Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 2.12 (*PG*, XXXIII, 400; *NPNF*, VII, p. 11). See further *Didascalia* 21.10 (ed. Connolly, p. 183); *Acts John*, Virtutes Iohannis 8 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 345). See also Bradshaw, 'Origin of Easter', p. 86; Warren *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 92; Maxwell E. Johnson, 'Preparation for Pascha? Lent in Christian Antiquity', in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (eds.), *Passover and Easter: The Symbolic Structuring of Sacred Seasons* (Two Liturgical Traditions, 6; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), pp. 36-54 ((37-38). In Johnson's view Aseneth's fast should be identified with Holy Week, the last week before Easter, which commemorates the events of the last week of Jesus' life. In the fourth century, Athenaeus interpreted the week as an iteration of the week of creation (Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year,* p. 31).

132. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily 13: Exhortation to Holy Baptism* 1; Jeremias, *Infant Baptism,* p. 74; Wainwright, *Christian Initiation,* p. 20; R. Falsini, 'Confirmation', in Domenico Sartore and Achille M. Triacca (eds), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la liturgie* ((French adaptation ed. H. Delhougne; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), I, p. 205; Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year,* pp. 34-37.

133. Origen, *Or.* 30 (*PG*, XI, 552).

134. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.6; see also 5.5.1; *Acts Paul and Thecla* 20; Tertullian, *Or.* 23, 29 (*ANF,* III, pp. 689, 691); and many further references in Warren, *Liturgy and Ritualof the Ante-Nicene Church,* pp. 132-33.

135. Riley (*Christian Initiation,* pp. 34, 55, 64) observes that, though for Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose prayer was offered standing, for Chrysostom and Theodore it was offered kneeling.

When praying Aseneth faces east. Christian prayer, too, from earliest times, was directed eastward, toward the rising sun.[136] In contrast to the west, the place of Satan,[137] the east (□□□□□□□) symbolized Jesus, the light that illuminates the darkness, the light that never sets (□□□□□□□□□□□□□).[138] He is the 'sun of righteousness' of Mal. 3.20, and the *tsemah* of Zech. 6.12, the 'branch', translated by the Septuagint in the sense of 'east', or the *tsemah* of David in Jer. 23.5 and 33.15. The belief that Jesus would arrive from the east rested also on Mt. 24.27: 'For as the lightning comes from the east and ashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man'. Tertullian reports that some pagans accuse the Christians of sun-worship, not only because their sacred day is Sunday (*dies solis*) and they say their prayers at sunrise, but also because in prayer they face east.[139]

Prayer facing east was of particular signi cance in the rituals of conversion, for the east symbolized paradise, which opened to converts on their severance from idolatry. In Genesis, the Garden of Eden is in the east (2.8), so facing that way in prayer expressed longing for that paradise. So Basil of Caesarea: 'Thus we all look to the East at our prayers, but few of us know that we are seeking our own old country, Paradise, which God planted in Eden in the East'.[140] Similarly in the *Apostolic Constitutions*:

> After this, let all rise up with one consent, and looking towards the east, after the catechumens and penitents are gone out, pray to God eastward, who ascended up to the heaven of heavens to the east; remembering also the ancient situation of paradise in the east, from whence the rst man, when he had yielded to the persuasion of the serpent, and disobeyed the command of God, was expelled.[141]

In contrast to Adam, who, caught in the net of Satan, was expelled from the Garden of Eden, the candidate for baptism is released from Satan's rule and enters paradise anew. Cyril of Jerusalem says:

136. According to Basil (*Spir.*27.66), facing eastward in prayer is one of the oldest of the customs of the church. The custom of marking the eastern wall of a church or home with a cross derives from this (Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 133).

137. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 1.4 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1069a; *NPNF*, VII, p. 145).

138. Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 168.

139. Tertullian, *Apol*. 16 (*PL*, I, 371-72; *ANF*, III, p. 31); Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.7; Origen, *Or.* 32 (*PG*, XI, 556); Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 9.6 (*PG*, XXXIII, 644; *NPNF*, VII, p. 52); *Constitutiones apostolorum* 2.57; 7.45.2 (ed. Funk, pp. 165, 450); *Didascalia* 12 (ed. Connolly, p. 119). For more on Christ as sun, see section 1 in Chapter 3 below.

140. Basil, *Spir.* 27.66.192a (trans. B. Pruche; SC, 17; Paris: Cerf, 1968), pp. 484-85.

141. *Constitutiones apostolorum* 2.57.15 (ed. Funk, p. 165).

> When therefore you renounce Satan, utterly breaking all your covenant with him, that ancient league with hell, there is opened to you the paradise of God, which He planted towards the East, whence for his transgression our first father was banished; and a symbol of this was thy turning from West to East, the place of light.[142]

Raising eyes upwards with outstretched hands is also associated with Christian prayer. Tertullian states concerning baptism: 'We Christians lift our eyes with hands outstretched, for they are pure.'[143] Stretching arms to the sides in prayer also indicates the sign of the cross, as found in the *Odes of Solomon*: 'I extended my hands and hallowed my Lord, for the expansion of my hands is His sign; and my extension is the upright cross'.[144] Theodore of Mopsuestia summarizes the matter of posture during prayer:

> These engagements and promises you make in the posture which we have described above, while your knee is bowed to the ground both as a sign of adoration from you to God, and as a manifestation of your ancient fall to ground; the rest of the body is erect and looks upward towards heaven, and your hands are outstretched in the guise of one who prays so that you may be seen to worship the God who is in heaven, from whom you expect to rise from your ancient fall. This is the reason why you have, through the promises and engagements which we have already described, directed your course towards Him and have promised to Him, that you will make yourself worthy of the expected gift. After you have looked towards Him with outstretched hands, asked grace from Him, risen from your fall and rejoiced in (future) benefits, you will necessarily receive the first-fruits of the sacrament which we believe to be the earnest of the good and ineffable things found in heaven.[145]

142. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 19.9 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1073b; *NPNF*, VII, p. 146); Gregory of Nyssa, *De Oratione Dominica* 5 (*PG*, XLIV, 1184b-d); Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* pp. 32-33.

143. Tertullian *Apol*. 30.4 (*Apologétique* [trans. Jean Pierre Waltzing; Collection des universités de France; Paris: Société d'édition 'Les Belles Lettres', 2nd edn, 1961], p. 70); Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 1.2 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1068; *NPNF*[2] VII, p. 144); Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 95.

144. *Odes of Solomon* 27; 42; Tertullian, *Apol*. 30.4 (*PL*, I, 445; *ANF*, III, p. 42); *Bapt.* 20 (*PL*, I, 1224; *ANF*, III, p. 679); John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 9.32 (trans. P. Harkins; ACW, 31; New York: Newman Press, 1963), p. 142; *Acts John* 43, 111 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 323, 337); Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 133. Similar practices—sackcloth and ashes, eastward direction of prayer, outstreched hands, confession and penance—precede baptism in the Syriac *Acts of John.* See A.F.J. Klijn, 'An Ancient Syriac Baptismal Liturgy in the Syriac Acts of John', *NovT* 6 (1963), pp. 216-28.

145. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Bapt. Hom.* 2.16 (Alphonse Mingana [ed.], *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist* [Woodbrooke Studies, 6; Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1933], p. 45). Note

Yet another feature characterizing Aseneth's prayer as Christian appears in the long version. Aseneth says her prayer silently (11.3, 15). Unvoiced prayer began to develop in the church in the second century, modeled on the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 1.13; 1 Cor. 13.34), and became common in the third and fourth centuries.[146]

Having separated from the world of idolatry Aseneth is now ready for the other central sacrament in the process of conversion, baptism. This must precede the Eucharist and is a precondition for communion. Many scholars reject the possibility that Aseneth's conversion has a Christian character because of the putative absence of baptism. Indeed, one can hardly imagine a Christian conversion without baptism, alongside the Eucharist one of the two oldest sacraments.[147] However, as I shall show, the 'washing' in *Joseph and Aseneth* actually has the main features of Christian baptism.

After her week of fasting and prayer, Aseneth is instructed by the man of God to remove the black garment she has been wearing, to wash her hands and face in 'living water' (14.12-13)—or 'pure water', [illegible] (14.17), to put on a new garment and to gird her waist with a double girdle of virginity, that is, one girdle on her waist and another on her chest. Aseneth does as she is instructed (14.15-16), and thus 'was made new, and refashioned, and given new life' (15.4).

The details of the new garment that Aseneth is to wear vary in the manuscripts and the translations based on them. In the manuscript of the long version used by Burchard, the garment is described as a new linen garment never before touched, that is, a pure garment, [illegible] (14.12), and again as a new linen garment special in that it was never touched, [illegible] (15.14).[148] On the other hand, in Batiffol's edition, the garment is a *white* garment never before touched ([illegible]);[149] and in Philonenko's edition, based on the short version, the garment is *new and white* ([illegible]).[150]

that certain Jewish prayers were also offered kneeling and with outstretched hands: 1 Kgs 8.54; *b. Ber.* 34b.

146. P. W. van der Horst ('Silent Prayer in Antiquity', *Numen* 41 [1994], pp. 17-21) explains this development of silent prayer as the in uence of Neoplatonist philosophy and as the development of the monastic ideal in the fourth century. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 54-55, 271; Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* p. 23;1 Tim. 2.12; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatecheses* 14 (*PG*, XXXIII, 356 a-b; *NPNF*, VII, p. 4).

147. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* pp. 91, 99; J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian', pp. 106, 112.

148. Burchard, '*Joseph und Aseneth*', *OTP,* II, pp. 182, 184-85.

149. Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', p. 60.

150. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 180; adopted by Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* pp. 126, 192; Chesnutt, 'Dead Sea Scrolls and the Meal Formula', p. 407. Philo-

This description of the 'washing' carries the main characteristics of Christian baptism as presented to candidates for baptism, or catechumens, undergoing the process of acceptance into the church. First the candidate had to disrobe. 'As soon as you enter', writes Cyril of Jerusalem, 'you remove your clothes.'[151] This ritual disrobing, preparatory to baptism, was invested with symbolic meaning, a metaphor, according to Cyril, for removing the old self and its practices. Gregory of Nyssa writes similarly, 'Remove the old self like a soiled garment. Receive the tunic of purity that Christ offers you.'[152] The initiate's removing the black garment and donning the new white garment betokens his or her renouncing the world of sin, the world of darkness and death ruled by Satan, for a new life, a life of purity, light and faith in Christ, eternal life free of sin.

Like Aseneth's 'washing', so Christian baptism requires 'living water' ([illegible])[153] such as a river or sea. Such water was considered 'virgin', signifying Jesus in accordance with Jn 4.13-14. Whoever drank of it would never thirst and would enjoy eternal life. But the most characteristic element of Christian baptism is the white garment worn by catechumens after baptism.[154] Ambrose writes, 'After [baptism] white robes were given

nenko suggests that these verses describe a rite of puri cation (p. 179), but he does not connect it to Christian baptism.

151. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 2.2 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1077; *NPNF*, VII, p. 147). The practice was attributed to the verse 'I had taken off my robe. Was I to don it again?' (Song 5.3). See also Col. 3.9-10: 'You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self'; Gal. 3.27: 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ'; Eph. 4.22-24.

152. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Baptismo* (*PG*, XLVI, 420c); *Epistle* 1 (*PG*, XLVI, 1004a); Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 53-54, 68; *Odes* 11.9-11; 15.8; 21.2; John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2.25 (Harkins, p. 52); Jean Daniélou, 'Terre et paradis chez les péres de l'église', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1954), pp. 433-72 (462-63). On change of clothing as part of religious initiation rituals, see Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *HR* 13 (1974), pp. 165-208 (184-88).

153. Acts 8.36; 16.13; *Did.* 7.1: [illegible] *Odes* 30.1; Pseudo-Clement, *Recogn.* 67 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 132); Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 61; and see Rev. 7.17; 21.6; 21.1.

154. Revelation 7.9-17; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 4.8 (*PG*, XXXIII, 1104; *NPNF*, VII, p. 152); Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* pp. 35, 49; Wainwright, *Christian Initiation,* p. 15. Josephus (*War* 2.8.3 §137) records that among the Essenes prospective initiates wore white clothing during their rst probationary period, and that a white cloak was given to prospective initiates. Notably however the Essenes had the initiate wear this white garment *before*, not *after,* he 'is allowed to share the purer kind of holy water'. The white garment, raised eyes and outstretched arms during prayer, reverence for the number 7—note the seven virgins (17.4-6)—high value placed on virginity and sexual abstinence, common meals for men and women and rituals of

to you as a sign that you were putting off the covering of sins, and putting on the chaste veil of innocence.'[155]

These white clothes symbolize the 'new self' and replace the old, pre-baptism garments, which represented the 'old self'. The terms 'refulgent garment' (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□), and 'new white garments' are technical terms in the context of baptism, and the garments bespeak purity of body and soul.[156] The white garment also symbolizes the resurrection of the body[157] and the believer's sharing in the splendor of Jesus in the scene of the Transguration, when his clothes 'became dazzling white' (Mt. 17.2).

The white garment calls attention once again to the central place of paradise in the complex of symbols and images associated with the Christian initiation ritual, as I have already noted in connection with the orientation of prayer eastward and the change of garments. The white clothing represents the return to the life of purity of Adam before the Fall, as expressed by Gregory of Nyssa, 'You hated, and were reconciled; You cursed, and blessed; You banished us from Paradise, and recalled us; You stripped off the g-tree leaves, an unseemly covering, and put upon us a costly garment.'[158] In Christian thought baptism reopens before the initiate the gates of paradise.[159] As I will show further on, after going through these Christian initiation rites the gates of paradise are opened also for Aseneth, and she becomes a heavenly City of Refuge.

fasting led some to identify Aseneth's conversion with the Therapeutae described by Philo (*Vit. Cont.* 36, 65, 66). See M. Delcor, 'Un roman d'amour d'origine therapeute', *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 63 (1962), pp. 3-27 (22-26); Kuhn, 'Lord's Supper and Communal Meal', p. 76; Pierre Geoltrain, 'Le traite de la Vie Contemplative de Philon d'Alexandrie', *Semitica* 10 (1960), pp. 11-61 (26-27). However, the meal of the Therapeutae does not include key elements of Aseneth's meal—bread, wine (but rather bread with salt and hyssop) and a blessing over oil. See Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 81; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* pp. 92, 104-105; Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, pp. 107-12; Lindars, '"Joseph and Aseneth" and the Eucharist', p. 184.

155. Ambrose, *Myst*. 7, 34 (Botte, pp. 174-75); Riley, *Christian Initiation*, p. 418.

156. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 15 (*PG*, XXXIII, 360a; *NPNF*, VII, p. 5); Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymnes sur le paradis* 6.9 (trans. R. Lavenant; SC, 137; Paris: Cerf, 1968), p. 85; Beck, p. 21; Ambrose, *Myst*. 34 (Botte, p. 118). See also Safrai, 'Early Testimonies', p. 46; Meeks, 'Image of the Androgyne', pp. 187-88; Daniélou, 'Terre et paradis', p. 464.

157. Tertullian, *Res.* 27 (*PL*, II, 834a-b).

158. Gregory of Nyssa, *De baptismo* (*PG*, XLVI, 600a); Ephrem, *Hymnes sur le paradis*, 6.9. A similar tradition, ascribed to Rabbi Meir, reads Gen. 3.21 'garments of skins' (*'or*) as 'garments of light' (*'or*) (*Gen*. *R*. 20.12). See also Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* 49-51; Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety,* p. 167; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 266.

159. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 14 (*PG*, XXXIII, 357a; *NPNF*, VII, p. 4).

The association of the white garment with the Garden of Eden explains not only the white garment donned by Aseneth after her 'washing' but also the virginal girdles she puts on her waist and chest. These represent the 'loincloths' worn by Adam and Eve after their sin (Gen. 3.7, 21). Whereas the garments of skins represent darkness and death, the white garment symbolizes light and resurrection.

Aseneth's 'renewal' after 'washing' and the 'new life' she receives accord with the basic notion of Christian baptism, death with Christ and rebirth, a symbol of new life, re-creation and renewal. This aspect of baptism is based on the words of Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (6.3-4):

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Paul calls the newly baptized 'a new creation' (2 Cor. 5.17), and baptism is described as 'newness of life' (Rom. 6.4) and as 'the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit' (Tit. 3.5).[160] John Chrysostom says of

160. See also Jn 3.5. Hippolytus calls it 'remission of sins by the baptism of regeneration' (*Apostolic Tradition* 21; Botte, pp. 88-89); Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, 62; van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars,* p. 170. See also Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 18; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 111. Jeremias connects Aseneth's renewal and re-creation with *m. Pes.* 8.8: 'A proselyte who converted on the day before Passover, the House of Shammai say, immerses himself and eats his paschal lamb in the evening. The House of Hillel say, one who is separated from his foreskin is as one who separated from the grave.' Jeremias nds there a notion that the immersion of a proselyte is a passage from death to life, as resurrection and rebirth (*Infant Baptism,* p. 33). In fact, the dispute in the Mishnah has nothing to do with such matters but addresses the 'impurity of gentiles'. The House of Hillel apparently represents the halakhic tradition that impurity of Gentiles is a type of corpse de lement. Hence, in their view, a fresh proselyte still has the seven-day impurity of corpse de lement and is required to undergo rituals of its puri cation. The House of Shammai, on the other hand, represent the dominant halakhah in the Second Temple period, that Gentile impurity is equivalent to the less severe impurity imparted by contact with *sherets* (a swarming thing)—hence one immersion is suf cient for purity. See Ben-Shalom, *School of Shammai,* p. 209. For other interpretations, see Shaye J.D. Cohen, 'Is "Proselyte Baptism" Mentioned in the Mishnah? The Interpretation of M. Pesahim 8.8 (= M. Eduyot 5.2)', in John C. Reeves and John Kampen (eds.), *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (JSOTSup, 184; Shef eld: Shef eld Academic Press, 1994), pp. 278-92; Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurity and Jewish Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 116-22.

baptism: 'this cleansing is called the bath of regeneration'.[161] Why, he asks, is the bathing that removes all sins not called the bath of puri cation from sin, or the bath of cleansing, but rather the bath of regeneration? He answers,

> The reason is that it does not simply remit our sins, nor does it simply cleanse our faults, but it does this just as if we were born anew. For it does create us anew and it fashions us again, not molding us from earth, but creating us from a different element, the nature of water.[162]

Nonetheless, the scene of Aseneth's 'washing' raises two problems. First, in contrast to Christian baptism, generally an immersion of the whole body, Aseneth's is no more than washing of hands and face. Neither does the narrative dwell on what would be expected to be a central part of the ritual and seems rather to attach little importance to it. But this problem does not defeat my argument, for in Lk. 11.38 washing of hands is rendered by the Greek verb *baptizein*, and there is much evidence of Christian baptism by simple pouring or sprinkling, particularly on the head.[163] Perhaps in the circles in which *Joseph and Aseneth* was composed such partial baptism was practiced by women for reasons of modesty.[164] It appears from the works of Church Fathers that women who maintained lives of virginity and celibacy were expected to refrain from exhibiting their bodies in public baths, and so bathed modestly, like pigeons in Athanasius's expression, that is, by gentle sprinkling from a washbasin.[165] This accords with Aseneth's virginity and the ascetic tendencies that, I argue, characterize *Joseph and Aseneth.*

Second, there is no mention here of anointing with oil in connection with baptism, neither before immersion, as practiced in the Eastern Church at least since the fourth century, nor after immersion, as practiced in the Western Church even earlier.[166] So if *Joseph and Aseneth* was composed in Syria,

161. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 9.12 (*Stav*. 1.17; 3.23) (Harkins, p. 135).

162. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 9.20.

163. Based on Num. 8.7; 19.18; Ezek. 36.25; *Did.* 7.3. Clement F. Rogers, 'How Did the Jews Baptize?', *JTS* 3 (1911), pp. 437-45; Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* pp. 12, 60.

164. Beckwith ('Solar Calendar', p. 92) raises this possibility and rejects it.

165. J. Lebon, 'Athanasiana Syriaca II: Une letter attribuée à Saint Athanase d'Alexandrie', *Mus* 41 (1928), pp. 189-203 (196).

166. On anointing, see T.W. Manson, 'Entry into the Membership of the Early Church', *JTS* 48 (1947), pp. 25-32 (26); Warren, *Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church,* p. 62; Falsini, 'Con rmation', pp. 205-206; Felmi, 'Customs and Practices', p. 49; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* p. 21; Riley, *Christian Initiation*, pp. 104-38.

as I believe,[167] the absence of anointing at baptism could provide a *terminus ad quem* for the composition.

Two further episodes cohere with my interpretation of Aseneth's conversion. First, immediately after her baptism, Aseneth covers her head with a veil (□□□□□□□□), but the man of God tells her to remove it, 'for today you are a pure virgin, and your head is like a young man's'. Aseneth complies (15.1-2). In the church, after baptism virgins customarily covered their hair. This was rooted in the notion that marriageable young women, and indeed women in general, should conceal the beauty of their faces by wearing veils as expressions of modesty and submission. As Cyril of Jerusalem put it, 'Your face is veiled to leave your mind at rest, to prevent a wandering gaze from making your heart wander too. Though your eyes are veiled, your ears are free to receive salvation.'[168] Aseneth veils her head after baptism according to custom. Why, then, does the man of God instruct her to remove the veil?

In *Acts of Thomas* there is a story of a princess who became a Christian believer in her marital chamber on her wedding day. When her parents, the king and queen, entered the room they saw her sitting opposite her husband with no veil. When asked for the reason, the princess responded,

> Truly, father, I am in great love, and I pray to my Lord that the love which I have experienced this night may remain, and that I obtain that man whom I have experienced today. That I do not veil myself is because the mirror of shame has been taken away from me; I am no longer ashamed or abashed, since the work of shame and bashfulness has been removed far from me . . . And that I have set at naught this husband and these nuptials which have passed away from before my eyes is because I have been joined in a different marriage.[169]

167. The connection of *Joseph and Aseneth* with the Syrian church is manifested in the similarity of ideas, vocabulary and symbols, such as making Aseneth a symbol of the Gentile church, the expression 'city of refuge' referring to the church and mainly the exhortation to chastity and asceticism in the images of Aseneth and of the bees. See further Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 290-91, and Chapter 2 below.

168. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatecheses* 9 (*PG*, XXXIII, 349; *NPNF*, VII, p.3); *Didascalia* 3 (Connolly, pp. 26, 28); 1 Cor. 11.3-8. From Tertullian we learn that there was a controversy in the church over whether virgins were required to be veiled. Tertullian devoted an entire treatise to the issue, taking the position that they should be veiled when they have 'passed the turning-point of their age' (Tertullian, *On Prayer* 21 [*ANF,* III, pp. 687-89]; *On the Veiling of Virgins* 1 [*ANF,* IV, pp. 27-37). Consecration of virgins (□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, *sacramentum* or *sacerdotium virginitatis*) was a sacrament at which they would don the veil in the presence of the bishop (Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', 28; Ambrose, *Virginit.* 3.1 (*PL*, XVI, 219).

169. *Acts of Thomas* 1, 14 (trans. Han J.W. Drijvers, in Hennecke, Schneemelcher, Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha* [rev. edn, 1989, 1992], II, p. 344). Similarly, after

A.J.F. Klijn[170] in turn relates this last passage to the veil that is removed from the face of the believer in 2 Cor. 3.13-18:

> Not like Moses, who put a veil (□□□□□□□) over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing (or: re ecting) the glory of the Lord as though re ected in a mirror (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□), are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

This veil, according to 2 Corinthians, is set aside 'in Christ'. Indeed, just like the princess in the *Acts of Thomas*, Aseneth can set aside her veil because she is now 'in Christ', a partner of Christ, the Spirit. That such a partnership in Christ releases the believer from having to be veiled can be explained by the notion that the believers 're ect the glory of the Lord and are transformed into his image'. According to 1 Cor. 11.7, men should not be veiled because they are the direct image and re ection of God (□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□). All Christians who are 'in Christ' are united in his image and glory and, hence, need not cover their heads.[171]

Paul's instruction that men need not cover their heads because they are 'the image and re ection of God' gives further point to the explanation given by the man of God to Aseneth when he instructs her to remove her veil, namely her head is 'like that of a young man'. The term 'image of God' may refer to the state that obtained at the time of creation, when God created them male and female (Gen. 1.27), that is, that both male and female were in the image of God with no difference between them.[172] In the Christian

Mygdonia is baptized and performs the Eucharist, she stands before Thomas with uncovered head. See *Acts Thom.* 10, 121; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 262.

170. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 1962)*,* pp. 56-58.

171. W.C. van Unnik, '"With Unveiled Face": An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians iii 12-18', *NovT* 6 (1963), pp. 153-69; repr. in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W.C. van Unnik* (NovTSup, 29-31; 3 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), I, pp. 194-210. In his view, based on the *Acts of Paul* (in M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924], p. 273) and the change in the appearance of Stephen in Acts 6.15, when believers are 'in Christ' their appearance changes and they look like angels.

172. 'Adam was both one and two: one in that he was Adam, two in that he was created male and female' (Efrem the Syrian, *In Gen.* 2.12 [CSCO, 152; Scr. Syri, 71, p. 32]). This is rooted in a notion widely found in the Greek world that the rst man was androgynous. The notion was absorbed in Christianity, Judaism and Gnostic teachings:

view, the division of the sexes, arising from the original sin, will be abolished in the coming of the kingdom of heaven, 'when the two are one . . . and the male with the female is neither male nor female',[173] and all will be 'like angels in heaven' (Mt. 22.30). This is the state of those who have been baptized, according to Paul, 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.27-28).[174] Thus,

> somehow the act of Christian initiation reverses the fateful division of Genesis 2.21-22. Where the image of God is restored, there, it seems, man is no longer divided—not even by the most fundamental division of all, male and female. The baptismal reuni cation formula thus belongs to the familiar Urzeit–Endzeit pattern, and it presupposes an interpretation of the creation story in which the divine image after which Adam was modeled was masculofeminine.[175]

Aseneth, then, must remove her veil, for by her baptism she became clothed in Christ, united with his image, and ready to enter the opened gates of paradise. There she is no longer female, and her appearance is transformed to that of a young man, an angel, neither male nor female. Like angels, she is virginal, sexually abstinent, and devoted to the spiritual life. The description of Aseneth after her baptism as 'a pure virgin' and the association the man of God makes between her pure virginity and the appearance of her head as that of 'a young man' bring to the fore the ascetic aspects of the work. In the early church, 'pure virgin' was the term used for virgins who undertook a life of virginity and abstinence, who forwent earthly marriages to marry

see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* p. 302; Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), V, pp. 88, 89; *Gospel of Philip* 71 (trans. R. McL. Wilson; London: Mowbrays, 1962), p. 44. According to Philonenko (*Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 181), Aseneth is indeed declared to be androgynous, which points in his view to initiation rites in mystery and Gnostic cults. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 196-98, 261.

173. Clement, *To the Corinthians* 12.2 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, p. 182). For parallels, see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* pp. 301-304; Dennis R. MacDonald (*There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism* [HDR, 20; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], pp. 97-102) explains this as a return to Eve's prelapsarian state.

174. See also Col. 3.10-11; Eph. 4.24.

175. Meeks, 'Image of the Androgyne', p. 185. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 197. Meeks (p. 181) roots this 'baptismal reuni cation formula' in the early baptismal liturgy. See also V.E.F. Harrison, 'Gender, Generation, and Virginity in Cappadocian Theology', *JTS* 47 (1996), pp. 38-68 (55).

Christ and enter with him into the heavenly bridal chamber.[176] In the early Syrian church in particular, commitment to virginity of men and women was made on the occasion of baptism.[177] Aseneth, like the daughter of the king in the *Acts of Thomas*, represents the virgins who at their baptism undertook to renounce earthly marriage and marry Christ. Following Lk. 20.35-36, these virgins were said to be 'angels on earth'. Their bodies were indeed on earth, but like angels they were removed from sexual activity and were neither male nor female.[178] The male identity of these virgins is because of their likeness to angels, but also because, being 'male', they represent the highest degree of Christian perfection. In the words of Susanna Elm,

176. Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', pp. 26, 27, 29; *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8 in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 226-27, 230, 232; Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', pp. 18-69; Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles on Virginity* 2.8 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 63). On these virgins and the heavenly marriage chamber, see *Joseph and Aseneth* 15.7. Aseneth is called 'pure virgin' also after the meal ritual (19.2).

177. R.H. Connolly, 'St Ephraim and Encratism', *JTS* 8 (1906), pp. 41-48 (47); F.C. Burkitt, 'Aphraates and Monasticism: A Reply', *JTS* 7 (1905), pp. 10-15 (15); M.J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage Persan, Les exposés* (SC, 349; Paris: Cerf, 1988), p. 110; S.H. Grif th, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism', in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 220-45 (226); Robert Murray, 'The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church', *NTS* 21 (1975), pp. 59-80 (65); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 15; Murray, 'The Character of the Earliest Syriac Christianity', in Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews and Robert W. Thomson (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), pp. 3-16 (7). See further below, Chapter 2, section 2.

178. Cf. Mk 12.25; Mt. 22.29-30. See also Basil of Ancyra, *De virg*. 51 (*PG*, XXX, 772b-c); Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles on Virginity* 1.4 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 56); John Chrysostom, *Adversus eos qui apud se habent subintroductas virgines* 13 (*PG*, XLVII, 514); Ambrose, *Instit. virg.* 104 (*PL*, XVI, 345); Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God'. The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. ix; Rosemarie Rader, *Breaking Boundaries, Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 65. Shaw (*Burden of the Flesh,* pp. 235-52) notes the phenomenon common among ascetic women in the fourth and fth centuries, such as Pelagia, Thecla, and Perpetua, of obscuring their female identities and adopting a masculine look. See Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 13; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 58-60; *Acts Paul and Thecla* 25, 40 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 369, 371); *Martyrdom of Perpetua* 10.7 (Herbert Musurillo [ed.], *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs: Introduction, Texts and Translations* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], p. 118). Similarly *Gos. Thom.* 114: 'Every woman who makes herself male shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.' See further J. Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif', *Viator* 5 (1974), pp. 1-32 (6-11).

> If the ascetic life transforms humans into angels, if angels neither marry nor are given in marriage (Mt. 22.30), and if there is neither male nor female in Jesus Christ, then the symbiosis of male and female ascetics represents the highest form of ascetic perfection. If through asceticism a woman achieves 'male' virtue (*arete*), and is thereby transformed into a 'manly woman' then she has not only achieved true equality with her male counterparts, but has been transformed into an ideal, complete human being.[179]

The next event in Aseneth's conversion is the writing of her name in the book of life (□□□□□□ □□□). After her baptism the man of God tells her that her name has been written in the book of life and will never be expunged (15.3). In the long version, this book is 'the book of the living in heaven', and it is emphasized that Aseneth's name is written 'in the beginning of the book, as the very rst of all', and was written by the very nger of the man of God (15.4).[180] The recording of Aseneth's name in the 'book of the life', or in the 'book of the living in heaven', corresponds to the procedures of conversion to Christianity.

The notion of a 'book of life' in which names of persons are inscribed by God in heaven is found in the Hebrew Bible.[181] In Christian sources those who are inscribed in the book of life are numbered among the elect and will have eternal life.[182] In Revelation the book of life and its promise of eternal life are connected to baptism. Those who worship the beast, representing Satan, are not inscribed in the book of life (13.8; 17.8), and in the last judgment will be thrown into the lake of re (20.15). But the baptized 'who have not soiled their clothes, they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life' (3.4-5). Those whose

179. Elm, *'Virgins of God',* p. ix; Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, p. 208; Rader, *Breaking Boundaries*, p. 65. See also Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles on Virginity* 1.4 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 56); John Chrysostom, *Adversus eos qui apud se habent subintroductas virgins* 13 (*PG*, XLVII, 514); Basil of Ancyra, *De virg*. 51 (*PG*, XXX, 772b-c); Evagrius of Pontus, *Kephalaia Gnostica* (Antoine Guillaumont [ed. and trans.], *Les six centuries des Kephalaia gnostica d'Évagre le Pontique* [PO, 28.1; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958]).

180. In the long version (15.12), the name of the Man from Heaven is also 'in the heavens in the book of the Most High, written by the nger of God in the beginning of the book before all the others', since he is 'chief of the house (□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□) of the Most High'. The names in that book may not be pronounced or even heard in this world, 'for these names are exceedingly great and wonderful and laudable'. For the secret nature of the book, see Rev. 5.1-3 and further below Chapter 3, section 3.

181. Exodus 32.32; Ps. 69.29; Isa. 4.3; Dan. 7.9; 12.1.

182. Luke 10.20; Heb. 12.23 ('the assembly of the rstborn who are enrolled in heaven'); Phil. 4.3.

names are inscribed in the book of life of the Lamb will enter paradise and the heavenly Jerusalem (21.27).[183]

Inscription in a book of life appears as part of the preparation of candidates for baptism. After the strength of the candidate's intentions is veri- ed, his or her name is inscribed, interpreted symbolically by the Church Fathers. Gregory of Nyssa writes: 'Give me your names so that I may write them down in visible books (□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□), in ink. But the Lord Himself will engrave them on incorruptible, eternal tablets, writing them with his own nger, as He once wrote the Law of the Hebrews.'[184] The visible recording of names of those baptized in the church registers symbolizes the inscription of the names, by the nger of God, in the heavenly tablets in the heavenly church.[185] A detailed account of this procedure is given by Theodore of Mopsuestia. Jesus founded a kingdom in heaven, and founded it as a city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Firstborn offspring, immortal and eternal, who deserve to be resurrected are inscribed in heaven as citizens of that city. The candidate for baptism enters the church expecting to be counted among them. He is received by the person charged with the registration, who inquires about the candidate's life with a view to determine if he is worthy of being a citizen of this city. 'It is incumbent on all who live under the power of his kingdom to pray and hope that by faith we will receive baptism and be worthy of the registration in heaven.'[186] After Aseneth is baptized, her name too is inscribed in heaven and she is counted among the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

In conclusion, the conversion in *Joseph and Aseneth* occupies a central place in the discussion of the existence of laws of conversion in Second Temple Judaism and adds support to an emerging scholarly consensus that there existed in the Hellenistic Diaspora a Judaism that did not observe the known rules of *giyyur*, or, for that matter, care much for the laws of the Torah, to say nothing of those of the rabbis. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, Aseneth's conversion in fact teaches us nothing at all about

183. Gregory of Nyssa, *De baptismo* (*PG*, XLVI, 417b); *Apoc. Paul* 19 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 627-28); *The Pseudo-Titus Epistle* (Hennecke and Schneemelcher; Eng. ed. R. McL. Wilson *et al.*; *New Testament Apocrypha,* II, p. 70); Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy,* p. 22; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 192-204. See also *Jub.* 30.22; 1QM 12.1.

184. Gregory of Nyssa, *De baptismo* (*PG*, XLVI, 417b); Ephrem the Syrian, *HNat.* 18.2; *History of John the Son of Zebedee*, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,* pp. 41-42.

185. The ' nger of God' alludes to the writing of the tablets given to Moses at Mount Sinai. The book of life has here replaced the tablets of the law.

186. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia, On Baptism*, Part I, in Syriac, p. 154; Part II, trans. pp. 23-28 (26).

Second Temple Judaism, neither in the land of Israel nor in the Diaspora, and certainly nothing about the observance or non-observance of the laws of *giyyur* at that time. Discussion of Aseneth's conversion belongs rather to the study of the history of the early church, of its missionary efforts throughout the Hellenistic world in the early centuries of the Common Era, and of the development of liturgy and rites of initiation for outsiders entering it. By rejecting entirely the idolatrous world, by observing the rituals of fasting and prayer, and by partaking of the two central sacraments of Christian conversion, baptism and the Eucharist, Aseneth established the model for others to follow and, repudiating idolatry, to join the church, thereby meriting salvation and the promise of eternal life in paradise.

2

Aseneth as the 'Type of the Church of the Gentiles'

1. *Aseneth as 'City of Refuge'*

After Aseneth ate the 'bread of life', drank the 'cup of immortality' and anointed herself with the 'unction of incorruption', the man of God, in the longer text, blessed her:

> Behold, from today your esh will ourish like owers of life from the ground of the Most High, and your bones will grow strong like the cedars of the paradise of delight of God, and untiring powers will embrace you, and your youth will not see old age, and your beauty will not fail forever (long text, 16.16).

Aseneth's characteristics as paradise are the same as those of paradise in Christian writings: esh like the owers of life, bones strong as cedars, agelessness and unfading beauty.

Flowers are frequent in descriptions of paradise in Christian sources. Ephrem in his sermons on paradise says:

> Around the trees the air is limpid as the saints recline; below them are blossoms, above them fruit; fruits serve as their sky, owers as their earth. Who has ever heard of or seen a cloud of fruits providing shade for the head, of a garment of owers spread out beneath the feet?[1]

These owers give paradise its perfumed fragrance, which is also the fragrance radiated by Jesus, the embodiment of paradise.[2] The phrase

1. Ephrem, *HParad*. 9.3-5 (trans. S. Brock; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1990), pp. 137-38; see further Ephrem, *HParad.* 10.6-10 (Brock, pp. 149-52); CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri 78, pp. 36, 43-44; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procathechesis* 1 (*PG*, XXXIII, 332). H. Leclercq, 'Paradis', *DACL*, XIII, pp. 1583-84. 'Never-wilting owers' as part of the description of paradise appears also in *2 Baruch*. On the Christian character of this description, see Rivka Nir, 'Christian Sacraments in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch' (in Hebrew), *Teuda* 16-17 (2001), pp. 427-39.

2. Mark 14.3-9; Mt. 26.6; Jn 12.3. Nir, 'Aromatic Fragrances of Paradise', pp. 20-45. See further on the signi cance of the owers of paradise, Chapter 1, section 2 above, and section 2 below.

‘ owers of life’ too may be associated with Christ. The honeycomb, which as we have seen symbolizes the body of Jesus, is made from the ‘dew of the roses of life that are in the paradise of God’ (long text, 16.14). Jesus himself is likened to a ower in a eld and ‘a lily of the valleys’ (Song 2.1).[3] Ephrem ‘invites the martyrs, apostles and prophets to celebrate the resurrection, bringing owers from the garden of delights’.[4]

Cedars too are characteristic of Christian descriptions of paradise. They are part of the image of ‘the Lebanon’, identi ed with the church or with Christ.[5]

In paradise there is no aging. As Ephrem puts it, ‘None grow old there for none die there’.[6] Elsewhere he describes a kingdom of virginity in paradise as a place where nothing wilts; as for those who are worthy to enter, ‘their beauty never fades, their radiance never dims’.[7]

Aseneth’s likening to paradise after her partaking in the Eucharist highlights eschatological aspects of that sacrament. Those who eat of the bread of life enter the kingdom of heaven, paradise opens to them, they merit resurrection and are assured of eternal life. This is the kingdom of heaven of which Jesus speaks at the Last Supper, from which the Eucharist derives: ‘Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God’ (Mk 14.25). This heavenly kingdom of God will be established fully at Jesus’ second coming, as is con rmed in an early formulation of the Eucharist, ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (1 Cor. 11.26). ‘His bread’, says Ephrem, ‘is testimony to our resurrection.’[8] For as the bread, symbolizing the body of Christ, returns to life, so do the believers receive the promise of resurrection by eating of the sacramental

3. Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 3.4.1-4 (trans. L. Brésard and H. Crozel; SC, 376; Paris: Cerf, 1992); Origen, *Hom. Cant.* 2.6 (trans. O. Rousseau; SC, 37; Paris: Cerf, 1966), pp. 122-23; Apponius, *Comm. Cant.* 3.29 (2.2) (SC, 420; Paris: Cerf, 1997). Methodius uses the verse to refer to the virgin brides of Christ in *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* Logos 7.1 (trans. Musurillo, p. 97).

4. Ephrem, *HResur*. 2.10 (CSCO, 248, Scr. Syri, 108, p. 84); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 259. The phrase ‘ owers of life’ as symbolic of Christ is treated in more detail in the discussion on the crowns of the bees in the next chapter.

5. H.F.D. Sparks, ‘The Symbolical Interpretation of Lebanon in the Fathers’, *JTS* NS 10 (1959), pp. 264-79 (272); Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.9.44 (*PL*, XVI, 200; *NPNF*, X, p. 370): ‘His [Christ’s] appearance is that of a cedar of Lebanon, which has its foliage in the clouds its roots in the earth’.

6. Ephrem, *HParad.* 7.22 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 30).

7. Ephrem, *HParad*. 14.11-12 (CSCO, 174, Scr. Syri, 78, p. 60). Although paradise is depicted in early Jewish sources also as having cedars and scents, there is no mention of owers or ‘ owers of life’, nor a promise of eternal life.

8. Ephrem, *CNis.* 46.11 (CSCO, 240; Scr. Syri, 102, p. 56).

body.[9] Similarly in Theodore of Mopsuestia, the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist constitute a prophecy of a future existence in the kingdom of heaven, which God will establish in the world to come: the pleasure we derive from baptism and the Eucharist is symbolic of the true gifts with which we will be endowed in the future, in the heavenly Jerusalem, 'the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother' (Gal. 4.26).[10]

Johannes Betz notes these eschatological features in the description of the Eucharist in the *Didache*:

> The Didache liturgy is all the more clearly directed towards the future Parousia . . . The coming of the Lord is anticipated in the elements of the meal. The Eucharist functions as bridge between the first and the second Parousia. So the eschatological world is projected into and works in this sacrament and qualifies its elements. They are thus acknowledged as 'spiritual food and [spiritual] drink' in an old formula attested also in 1 Cor. 10.3 and so related to that sphere in which the Resurrected One lives.[11]

After the Eucharist Aseneth becomes the personification of paradise, but also a 'city of refuge', a 'metropolis',[12] 'a walled mother city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages' (long text, 16.16). Thus, the man of God's promise to Aseneth is fulfilled: after she eats the bread of life, drinks the cup of immortality and is anointed with

9. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 76-77.

10. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia,* pp. xxiii, 246-47.

11. Johannes Betz, 'The Eucharist in the Didache', in Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Didache in Modern Research* (AGJU, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 271-72; Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, pp. 202, 204; Lindars, '"Joseph and Aseneth" and the Eucharist', p. 193; Andrea Lieber, '"I set a table before you": The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth's Conversion Meal', *JSP* 14 (2004), pp. 63-77 (77). Eschatological significance of the Garden of Eden appears already in the Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel (28.13; 31.9, 16, 18; 36.35), Isaiah (51.3), and Joel (2.3) paint the time to come in the colors of the Garden of Eden. Christianity continued this line, depicting paradise as an eschatological existence, connected to the end of days. In the Hebrew Bible however the eschatological future is never connected to a meal. See Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri: études sur les origins de la typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950), p. 13.

12. Thus the Syriac version, produced sometime in the sixth century, which instead of 'city of refuge' has the expression *emmâ da-mdîntâ*, 'metropolis'. On the other hand, when the angel blesses Aseneth's virgins, he says they will be seven pillars of the city of refuge (*mdînat gawsâ*), and all are the daughters of the city of refuge (*bêta dqeriata dbêt gawsâ*) of the chosen. Clearly these terms are interchangeable. For the Syriac version, see Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica* (ed. E.W. Brooks; CSCO, 83; Scr. Syri, 38.1, p. 38: 16; p. 40: 11-12); and Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 298. In the Latin version in Batiffol, Aseneth is named not City of Refuge, but *multi refugii*, apparently through a misreading of the Greek □□□□□ ('city') as □□□□□ ('much'). See Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 148 n. 139.

the unction of incorruption, her name will no longer be Aseneth but City of Refuge (πόλιςκαταφυγῆς), for in her many nations will take refuge, under her wings many people will be sheltered and within her walls 'those who give their allegiance to God in penitence (μετάνοια) will nd security' (short text, 15.6).[13]

What is this 'metropolis', this city of refuge? Who are the people who will nd refuge there? What is the meaning of the μετάνοια that serves to ensure entry into that city?

The expression 'city of refuge' refers to the institution, as related in Numbers (35.6, 11-34), of cities designated to serve as refuge for 'a manslayer who has killed a person unintentionally', to which such a person could ee and nd safety 'until he stand trial before the assembly'. In the Septuagint these cities are termed πόλειςτῶνφυγαδευτηρίων (LXX Num 35.6),[14] cities of ight. The term emphasizes the function of these cities as places to which those who have killed unintentionally may ee and seek refuge. The Septuagint writes καταφυγή to render מנוס in the sense of shelter, stronghold, and hiding place. It can refer as well to God, as in 'O God, the rock wherein I take shelter: my shield, my mighty champion, my fortress and refuge' (2 Sam. 22.3), and 'O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in a day of trouble' (Jer. 16.19).[15] In all these passages people ee to the city of refuge for shelter, safety and salvation. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, to judge from the description, it is none other than heavenly Jerusalem. It is generally agreed that the promise of the man of God to Aseneth, that many people will nd refuge in her, is based on the Septuagint translation of Zech. 2.15.[16] In the Masoretic Text God says to Zion, 'Shout for joy, Fair Zion! For lo, I come; and I will dwell in your midst—declares the Lord. In that day many nations will attach themselves (ונלוו) to the Lord.' For ונלוו, 'attach themselves', the Septuagint has καταφεύξονται 'will nd refuge'. The parallelism in the passage implies that the city of refuge in which the 'many nations will nd refuge' is Zion. The term used in *Joseph and Aseneth* for the city, 'metropolis', also indicates Jerusalem.[17] But the descriptions of the city in other passages indicate clearly that what is meant is not historic Jerusalem on earth

13. See also long text, 19.5-7.

14. Numbers 35.15 φυγάδιον, φυγαδεῖον; Deut. 19.3 καταφυγή.

15. For the verb καταφεύγειν, 'to ee', see Num 35.25-26; Deut. 4.42; Josh. 20.9; Isa. 10.3; Ps. 59.17-18; 143.2.

16. Philoneneko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 55; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 189; Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, p. 76; O'Neill, *Joseph and Aseneth*, p. 194. See also Jer. 50.4-5; Isa. 54.15.

17. Jerusalem as metropolis: LXX Isa. 26.1 μητρόπολις πιστὴ Σιων. Similarly Philo, *Flacc.* 45-46; *Legatio* 281.3; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.161; *War* 7.375.

but heavenly Jerusalem, described here with unmistakably Christian contours.[18] Joseph says to Aseneth that she is blessed 'because the Lord God founded your walls in the highest, and your walls (are) adamantine walls of life (□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□), because the sons of the living God will dwell in your City of Refuge, and the Lord God will reign as king over them for ever and ever' (long text, 19.8). Elsewhere Aseneth is described as having 'her place of rest (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□) in the highest,[19] and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven (long text, 22.13).[20]

Just like this city of refuge, the heavenly Jerusalem is described in Christian sources as situated in heaven, 'in the highest'; the handiwork of God, not of human beings; a walled city whose heavenly ramparts were laid down by God and are made of live stones bestowing heavenly life on all who dwell within them. 'For he [Abraham] looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. 11.10), and whose citizens are in heaven.[21] The term used in *Joseph and Aseneth* in the description of the walls, □□□□□□□□□□, is also interpreted as meaning 'diamond'. Based on descriptions in the Hebrew Bible of Jerusalem in the time to come,[22] heavenly Jerusalem is described in Revelation, like the city of refuge in *Joseph and Aseneth*, as a heavenly city, next to God in heaven. Its radiance is like a very rare jewel, 'like jasper, clear as crystal'. The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass, and the foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with precious stones (Rev. 21.2, 9-27).

18. Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth*, pp. 118-20; Philoneneko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 183. Many scholars have recognized that the phrase 'city of refuge' indicates Jerusalem or Zion, but they did not connect it to the Christian heavenly Jerusalem. See Humphrey, *Ladies and the Cities,* p. 21.

19. See long text, 17.6; 15.7; both texts 8.11.

20. Both passages in the long text (19.8; 22.13) existed originally only in the Syriac and Armenian versions; see Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung,* p. 118; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, pp. 233, 239. For similar descriptions see *4 Ezra* 10.27; *Sib. Or.* 5.250; *1 En.* 90.29.

21. So Heb. 12.22: 'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering'; see also Phil. 3.20.

22. Isaiah 54.11: 'Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uncomforted! I will lay carbuncles as your building stones and make your foundations of sapphires'; Isa. 60.10; Ezek. 28.13: 'Eden, the garden of God', contains valuable gems. However, neither the Hebrew Bible nor the body of Second Temple literature that is indisputably Jewish makes any mention of a heavenly Jerusalem. See Rivka Nir, 'This is not the city which I have carved on the palms of my hands': The Heavenly Jerusalem in II Baruch' (in Hebrew), *Zion* 65 (2000), pp. 5-44.

Again, like the city of refuge, Christian heavenly Jerusalem is described as a resting place. The notion that heavenly Jerusalem is a resting place derives from the biblical sense that the resting place of the people of Israel is in the land of Canaan and in Jerusalem (Deut. 12.9-11; Ps. 95.11), and that God's resting place is Jerusalem (1 Chron. 28.2; Ps. 132.14; Isa. 66.1). Isaiah 11.10 and 32.18 speak of Israel's resting in an eschatological context; however, in the Hebrew Bible the eschatological resting (□□□□□□□□□) is not connected to a heavenly Jerusalem at the end of days or to the Garden of Eden. The description of the heavenly Jerusalem, identi ed with paradise, appears rst in the pseudepigraphic literature: 'Because it is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed' (*4 Ezra* 8.52); 'And the saints shall rest in Eden, and the righteous shall rejoice in the new Jerusalem, which shall be unto the glory of God for ever and ever' (*T. Dan* 5.12).[23] On the basis of such sources, the new, heavenly Jerusalem seems identical to paradise, the resting place for the souls of saints, the righteous at the end of days, in the time of redemption.[24]

A similar interpretation of the phrase 'resting place' is found in Heb. 3.7–4.13. Psalm 95.11, 'Concerning them I swore in anger, "They shall never come to my resting place"', is there taken to refer to entry into the eschatological temple, or into the heavenly, spiritual world.[25] The 'resting place' is a heavenly existence identical to the eschatological Sabbath, the seventh millennium. This in turn is identi ed in Christian literature with the kingdom of the Messiah, who will bring the six thousand years of this world to an end and establish a new world in which the redemption anticipated for Christian believers will come to pass (Heb. 4.8-11).[26] Like the resting place in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the 'resting place' in the Epistle to the Hebrews is no longer in Canaan and in the terrestrial Jerusalem but in heaven.[27]

23. On the Christian character of these passages, see de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* p. 92.

24. So *2 Baruch* 78–86; *1 En*. 45.3-6; *2 En.* 42.3; 8.1; 9.1; *T. Levi* 18.9; 4Q174 (4QFlor) 1.7-8; Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung*, pp. 120-21.

25. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrew: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 128; Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Sources bibliques; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1953), pp. 87-88; Lindars, '"Joseph and Aseneth" and the Eucharist', p. 190; Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, pp. 149-50.

26. On Jerusalem as a resting place, see Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 52-55.

27. The description of the foundations of the city as being laid on a rock of the seventh heaven (long text, 22.13) connects it also to the heavenly Jerusalem. 'Rock'

Envisaging the foundation of the city as virgins (long text, 17.6) corroborates the identity of the city as the heavenly Jerusalem.[28] In the first Pseudo-Clementine *Epistle on Virginity*, virgins are equated with the 'city of God':

> For in the man who is of God, with him I say there is nothing of the mind of the flesh; and especially in virgins of either sex; but the fruits of all of them are the fruits of the spirit and of life, and they are truly the city of God, and the houses and temples in which God abides and dwells, and among which he walks, as in the holy city of heaven.[29]

The description of Aseneth as a city of refuge, as the heavenly Jerusalem and as paradise establishes her as a symbol of the Christian church. The function of the latter as a refuge is rooted in descriptions in Revelation of the heavenly Jerusalem, which at the end of time will become a city of refuge for Christian converts among the Gentiles.[30] There, after the final judgment and the creation of a new heaven, the speaker sees the new Jerusalem coming down from it and hears a loud voice declare, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them' (Rev. 21.3). The textual variant represented here—the plural 'peoples' rather than 'people'—emphasizes that the church is not limited to one nation but is of many.[31]

is an image for the church in Aphrahat and Ephrem, based on Mt. 16.18. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 225. In the seventh heaven, according to the *Ascension of Isaiah,* the righteous are redeemed and there they dwell with Christ at the end of days (*Ascen. Isa.* 6–18). There garments, thrones and crowns are reserved for them (9.24-26). On the Christian character of the *Ascension of Isaiah,* see Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 9-10, 14; Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem,* pp. 226-27. See also *2 En.* 20–21. A tradition of seven heavens appears in rabbinic literature as well, but not before the Babylonian Talmud. As in *Joseph and Aseneth*, it appears in the context of the heavenly Jerusalem and Temple; see *b. Hag.* 12b; *b. Men.* 39a; *b. Roš Haš.* 32a. Aseneth's being a woman facilitated her use as an image for the heavenly Jerusalem and for the church. Jerusalem is imagined as a woman in the Hebrew Bible ('daughter of Zion': Zech. 2.15; Isa. 62.4-12; Ezek. 16.8ff.; 23.4) and in the Pseudepigrapha (*4 Ezra* 9.45–10.1, 25-50). Jerusalem appears as a woman in Rev. 21.2, 9; Hermas, *Vis.* 18 (III.10).3-5; *2 Clem*. 14.1-2: 'God made man, male and female. The male is Christ and the female is the Church.'

28. Based on Prov. 9.1: 'Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.'

29. Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles on Virginity* 1.9 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 58). Hermas too sees seven virgins supporting the tower, which is the church: Hermas, *Vis.* 16 (III.8).2-3.

30. R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John* (1920; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, repr., 1966), p. 126.

31. Joshua Efron, *Formation of the Primary Christian Church* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv:

The clearest identi cation of the city of refuge with the church, symbolized, as we have seen, by the character of Aseneth, is found in the works of the Syrian fathers. Ephrem calls the church a city of refuge whose tower is Jesus, 'the architect, who became the tower for our house of refuge'.[32] He compares the church to paradise, which he describes as a mountain divided into three parts, each symbolizing a refuge city with a distinct population of Christians. In the lowest part are penitents who have not yet been fully accepted into the church; in the middle part are the righteous; and in the highest, perfect part are the martyrs and the ascetics. These groups constituted the church as Ephrem envisaged it.[33]

Though the term 'city of refuge' is never explicitly used of Aseneth, Syrian Church Fathers did see her as a symbol of the 'church of the Gentiles'. Aphrahat, comparing Jesus to Joseph, writes, 'Joseph married the daughter of an unclean (i.e. Gentile) priest, and Jesus brought to himself the Church from the unclean Gentiles'.[34] Similarly, of Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph and Aseneth, Ephrem writes, 'Thou art the son of Aseneth, daughter of a priest, who was a type of the Church of the Gentiles. She loved Joseph, and the Son of Joseph has holy Church loved in truth.'[35] The church, in Christian thought, is also the embodiment of paradise, as set out in the Syriac work *Cave of the Treasures:* 'Now Eden is the Holy Church, and the Church is the compassion of God, which He was about to extend to the children of men . . . Eden is the Holy Church, and the Paradise which was in it is the land of rest and the inheritance of

Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006), pp. 134, 331. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (2nd edn, 1907; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr., 1968), p. 277.

32. Ephrem, *HNat.* 3.15 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 23.). In the Syriac *Acts of Thomas* the expression *bet gawsa* ('house of refuge') signi es Christ and the church (*Acts Thom.* 10 [Syr. pp. 179-80]. See Klijn, *Acts of Thomas,* pp. 189-91; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 160, 167, 222. In the Peshitta the term *bet gawsa* stands for עיר מקלט, 'city of refuge'.

33. Ephrem, *HEccl.* 34.4 (CSCO, 198; Scr. Syri, 84, p. 85); *HParad.* 2.10-13 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 8); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 259.

34. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 21.9.3-5 (PS, I, p. 957).

35. Ephrem, *HVirg.* 21.9 (CSCO, 223; Scr. Syri, 94, p. 73); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 135-36; Aubrey William Argyle, 'Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching', *ExpTim* 67 (1955–56), pp. 199-201 (200); Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 254. Jesus too is called a 'house of refuge' or 'place of refuge' in Syriac Christian literature, especially in the *Acts of Thomas.* See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 297, 360. The portrayal of Aseneth as a symbol for the Gentile church and the ascription of the expression 'city of refuge' to the Syrian Gentile church are the grounds for Kraemer's considering the possibility that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Christian composition (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 269-70).

life, which God hath prepared for all the holy children of men.'[36] Those who find refuge there will become its citizens (Eph. 2.19), in the words of John Chrysostom, 'For we have been enrolled as citizens of another state, the heavenly Jerusalem.'[37]

The identification of Aseneth as the church rests on her image as a city of refuge and the heavenly Jerusalem and as paradise, but also on her virginity. Aseneth is depicted in the work as a pure virgin,

> about eighteen years of age, tall and beautiful and graceful, more beautiful than any other virgin in the land. And she was quite unlike the daughters of the Egyptians, but in every respect like the daughters of the Hebrews. And she was as tall as Sarah, and as beautiful as Rebekah, and as fair as Rachel . . . And the fame of her beauty spread through all that land . . . and all the sons of the lords and of the satraps and of the kings sought her hand in marriage (short text, 1.6-9).

She, however, 'despised all men and regarded them with contempt; yet no man had ever seen her' (2.1).

Like Aseneth, the church is depicted as a virgin. Paul portrays the church in Corinth as a virgin: 'I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor. 11.2). In Rev. 14.3-4 the virgins, 'who have not defiled themselves with women', are not individuals but the corps of believers 'who follow the Lamb wherever he goes'.[38] Eusebius quotes Hegesippus to the effect that the very early church was not yet corrupted by vain discourses, and hence was called a virgin.[39] Methodius says of the church that 'she is the bride that surpasses all others in the perfection of her beauty and her virginity'.[40]

36. E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927), pp. 62-63; Ephrem, *HParad.* 6.7-12 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 21): 'He planted the garden most fair, he built the Church most pure'; see also Cyprian, *Epist.* 73.10; 75.15; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 261; Daniélou, 'Terre et Paradis', pp. 461, 466.

37. Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 4, 29 (New York: Newman Press, 1963), p. 77.

38. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 71-72; Hermas, *Sim.* 78 (IX.2); 91 (IX.14).2.

39. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22.4; 3.32.7.

40. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, logos 7.7, p. 103; Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.7.31 (*PL*, XVI, 197; *NPNF*, X, p. 368); Ambrose, *Myst.* 3.16-18 (PL, XVI, 393-94; *NPNF*, X, p. 319). In the epitaph of Abericius of Hieropolis in North Phrygia, which was inscribed about 160 CE, the church is called ☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒(a pure, chaste, virgin). See Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*(1891; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2nd edn, repr., 1989), p. 496; Claude Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ: An Enquiry*

The comparison of Aseneth to Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel further establishes the identity of Aseneth as the church. The three biblical women appear in Christian literature as prototypes of the church. And, like Aseneth, all three are gentle and outstanding in their beauty; they serve as paradigms of modesty and purity. As Ambrose puts it, 'Someone may say, "Do you, then, discourage marriage?" Nay, I encourage it, and condemn those who are wont to discourage it, so much so, that indeed I am wont to speak of the marriages of Sara, Rebekah and Rachel, and other woman of old time, as instances of singular virtues.'[41] Ephrem's commentary on the *Diatessaron* cites the oaths of loyalty that Eliezer swore to Rebekah, Jacob to Rachel, and Moses to Zipporah as models for the Lord, who became betrothed to the church as he was being baptized in the Jordan. He explains Rachel weeping for her children (Jer. 31.15) as sorrowing over Christ not having been born as one of her children. Leah is the prototype of the earlier nation; Rachel is the prototype of the church.[42] Similarly, Justin Martyr writes, 'However Leah is your people and the synagogue, but Rachel is our Church'.[43]

The depiction of Aseneth, then, as a city of refuge is distinctly Christian and presents Aseneth in this part of the story as a symbol of the church, which is in turn the heavenly Jerusalem and paradise.

a. *Who Will Find Refuge in This City?*

In the longer text, the city of refuge is to be 'like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages' (16.16). In the short version the man of God says to Aseneth, 'Many nations shall take refuge in you, and under your wings shall many peoples nd shelter, and within your walls those who give their allegiance to God in penitence (□□□□□□□□) will nd security' (15.6). Who are these many nations who will take refuge in the city in their allegiance to God or to his name, and nd shelter under its wings or within its walls? The answer lies in understanding the meaning of □□□□□□□□, the warrant to enter the city. So what is □□□□□□□□?

The verb □□□□□□□□ means to change one's mind or intention, to regret, to change one's religion; the noun □□□□□□□□ means second thoughts, regret, repentance, conversion. The verb appears in this last sense—to change

into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity (London: Faber & Faber, 1946), pp. 117, 130-31,146-47.

41. Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.7.34 (*PL*, XVI, 198; *NPNF*, X, p. 368); cf. Justin, *Dial.* 134.6; François Graf n, 'Recherches sur le thème de l'église: épouse dans les liturgies et la littérature patristique de langue syriaque', *OrSyr* 3 (1958), pp. 317-36 (324-33).

42. Ephrem Syrus, *EC* 3.17 (CSCO, 137; Arm. I, SC, 91); *EC* 3.4 (CSCO, 137, Arm. I, p. 38; SC, 83); cf. *CNis.* 32.16 (CSCO, 218; Scr. Syri 92, p. 78).

43. Justin, *Dial.* 134.6.

one's religion, convert—in both Hellenistic and Christian texts and is particularly frequent in the Pseudepigrapha.[44] This is the commonest use of the term in the New Testament.[45] John's baptism, [illegible], has been interpreted as a baptism of conversion, that is, a once-in-a-lifetime immersion that brings forgiveness of sin (Mk 1.4; Lk. 3.3; Acts 13.24) and entails belief in Jesus.[46] Paul's words to the elders of the church in Ephesus can be understood similarly: 'I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, as I testi ed to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God ([illegible]) and faith toward our Lord Jesus' (Acts 20.20-21). Here too [illegible] entails faith in Jesus. In the words of Behm and Würthwein,

> He [Jesus] modi es and transcends it by making conversion a fundamental requirement which necessarily follows from the present reality of the eschatological [illegible] in His own person. To call to conversion is the purpose of His sending (Lk. 5.32) . . . In view of the coming of the [illegible] the traditional Jewish forms of expressing תשובה, e.g. feelings of remorse, gestures of sorrow, works of penance or self morti cation have no value. God's de nitive revelation demands a nal and unconditional decision on man's part. It demands radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a de nitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience. He who does not convert falls under divine judgment. This conversion is once-for-all. There can be no going back, only advance in responsible movement along the way now taken. It affects the whole man, rst and basically the centre of personal life, then logically his conduct at all times and in all situations, his thoughts, words and acts. The whole proclamation of Jesus, with its categorical demands for the sake of God's kingdom . . . is a proclamation of [illegible] even when the term is not used.[47]

44. Frederick William Danker (ed.), *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd edn, 2000), pp. 640-41, s.v. [illegible]; Helmut Merklein, in Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-93), II, p. 417, s.v. [illegible]; Johannes Behm and Ernst Würthwein, '[illegible]', *TDNT,* IV, pp. 975-1008 (991); Jacques Dupont, 'Repentir et conversion d'après les Actes des Apôtres', *Sciences ecclésiastiques* 12 (1960), pp. 137-73 (142): 'Le terme [illegible] assume ainsi l'ideé de conversion.'

45. Behm and Würthwein, '[illegible]', p. 999; J. Wendling, 'L'appel de Jesus à la conversion', *Hokhma* 27 (1984), pp. 3-38 (10).

46. Danker (ed.), *A Greek–English Lexicon,* pp. 640-41; Behm and Würthwein, '[illegible]', pp.1000-1001.

47. Behm and Würthwein, '[illegible]', pp. 1001-1002. In the Apostolic Fathers, too, the verb [illegible] means to convert to Christianity (Behm and Würthwein, [illegible]', p. 1007; Riley, *Christian Initiation*, pp. 23-24. See *Did.* 10.6; Ignatius, *Eph.* 10.1.

If we take this line of interpretation, we can take [illegible] in *Joseph and Aseneth* to mean conversion. Those entering the city of refuge must be Gentiles, who, following Aseneth, have faith in God in its Christian version.[48] They, the story promises, will nd respite and salvation in the heavenly Jerusalem, in paradise, that is, in the church.[49]

Yet in the context of *Joseph and Aseneth,* the preferable interpretation of [illegible] appears to be the more common one, namely penitence rather than conversion.[50] What repentance means in *Joseph and Aseneth* is clear from its description as given by the man of God:

> For Penitence is the Most High's daughter and she entreats the Most High on your behalf every hour, and on behalf of all who repent; for he is the father of Penitence and she the mother of virgins and every hour she petitions him for those who repent;[51] for she has prepared a heavenly bridal chamber for those who love her and she will look after them for ever. And Penitence is herself a virgin, very beautiful and pure and chaste and gentle;[52] and God Most High loves her, and all his angels do her reverence (short text, 15.7-8).[53]

What characterizes this penitence? The metaphor for it is a virgin, beautiful, pure, chaste and gentle. She looks after virgins and loves them very

48. Portier-Young ('Sweet Mercy Metropolis', p. 136) noted that already in the Hebrew Bible the cities of refuge were not intended for Israelites alone: 'The Law states that not only Israelites, but also aliens may take refuge in the cities (Num 35.15). The LXX translator has rendered the Hebrew גר ('sojourner, resident alien') with [illegible], which has the added connotation of "proselyte" or "convert". For the readers of the LXX, the City of Refuge thus takes on new signi cance as a place of shelter for converts.'

49. Otfried Ho us, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort in Hebräerbrief* (WUNT, 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), p. 67; Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung,* p. 123; Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', pp. 137, 152.

50. Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 26, 61, 130) interprets *metanoia* as 'repentance' but associates it with 'wisdom', particularly as regards its attributes such as beauty, purity and holiness; its functions as an intercessor; and God's love for it. In the same direction, see Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum,* pp. 192-99, 201-204; Standhartinger, 'From Fictional Text to Socio-Historical Context: Some Considerations from a Textcritical Perspective on Joseph and Aseneth', in *SBLSP* (1996), pp. 303-18 (308-10). The interpretation is anchored to Prov. 8.17; Sir. 4.14; Wis. 8.3; 6.12. For criticism of the identi cation of *metanoia* as wisdom, see Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', p. 146. Elsewhere Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 267) associates *metanoia* with the Christian Holy Spirit.

51. Long text: 'and for all who repent she prepared a place of rest in heavens'.

52. Long text: 'a virgin pure and laughing always and she is gentle and meek'.

53. Long text: 'And I too love her exceedingly, because she is also my sister. And because she loves you virgins, I love you, too'.

much; hence God loves them as well and will prepare for all repentant virgins a heavenly bridal chamber (in the short text) or a resting place in heaven (in the longer text). She is the daughter of God, and God loves her; the angels honor her, and she is the sister of the man of God (in the long text). It follows that those who nd refuge in the heavenly city are not those who merely converted to Christianity but the virgins who, like Aseneth, repented.[54]

That entry into the city of refuge is reserved for virgins is indicated also in the blessing that the man of God gives to the seven virgins:

> You shall be seven pillars of the City of Refuge, and all fellow inhabitants ([illegible][feminine], i.e. women immigrants) of the chosen of that city will rest ([illegible]) upon you for ever and ever (longer text, 17.6).

Who are these virgins, and what is meant by their virginity? Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth* is described as 'a virgin who detests men', and who 'detests strange men' (short text, 7.8; 8.1), and Joseph is described as a virgin who 'detests all strange women' (short text, 4.9; 7.6-7; 8.1-3). The love of Aseneth and Joseph is portrayed as the love of brother and sister: Joseph tells Aseneth's parents, 'If she is your daughter, then let her come, for she is my sister, and I will regard her as my sister from to-day' (short text, 7.11; 8.1-3). This combination of terms is familiar from early Christian sources describing 'virgins', male and female, who devote themselves to Christ and publicly declare their determination to take the vow of virginity and sexual abstinence. They forgo earthly marriage to marry Christ and enter with him into the heavenly bridal chamber.[55] Now this was widespread in the Chris-

54. Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 130) sees *metanoia* as the heavenly double of Aseneth, just as the man of God is the heavenly double of Joseph. For Philonenko (*Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 85), too, Aseneth is the personi cation of *metanoia*. Both are called 'daughter of God (*metanoia*: 15.7; Aseneth 21.3). Both ful ll the same functions: on earth Aseneth will provide refuge for those who devote themselves to God through *metanoia*, and in heaven *metanoia* itself seeks from God a heavenly bridal chamber or resting place for those who repent. Mainly, like *metanoia*, Aseneth is a virgin, beautiful and chaste, and God loves her. Like *metanoia*, she is surrounded by virgins and seeks for them blessings from the man of God. Aseneth is the earthly embodiment of heavenly virginity.

55. Male virgins appear as early as Rev. 14.4: 'It is these who have not de led themselves with women, for they are virgins'; and 2 Cor. 11.2: 'I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' On Joseph as a symbol of virginity and sexual abstinence, see Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 2.8 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 63); Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra fornicarios* (*PG*, XLVI, 493-94); Basil, *Sermo* 19 (*De temperantia et incontinentia*; *PG*, XXXII, 1348) and in the *Epistles* 2.3 and 46.4 (*Epistolarum classis* 1, 228, 377); Methodius,

tian church from the fourth century on, as evinced by the numerous works on virginity written about that time.[56] In my view, however, the particular emphasis in *Joseph and Aseneth* on virginity, as detailed above, expresses notions especially characteristic of the early Syrian church. In the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem, and in such early Syriac works as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip*,[57] and especially the *Acts of Thomas*, the fourth-century Syrian church seems to urge its believers to take an oath of virginity, this being understood as renunciation of earthly marriage in favor of spiritual and eternal marriage to Christ. The ideal struck deep roots in the eastern Syrian church, where ascetic abstinence was central in its spiritual essence from the start. According to Murray, 'The consecrated virgin's ideal of "spiritual marriage" with Christ the heavenly bridegroom, in expectation of union with him in the heavenly marriage chamber, dominates all the early literature from the *Odes of Solomon* and the Acts of Judas Thomas to the fth century, including the Gnostic and Manichaean development.'[58]

Those who undertook a life of absolute sexual abstinence and renounced earthly marriage came to be known by certain Syriac terms in the Syrian church of the late third and fourth century. Generally they were called *îhîd yê* (*îhîd yâ*: 'single, celibate').[59] They included two groups: *btûlê* ('virgins'),[60] namely single people who had never married, and *qaddîšê*

Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity, Thecla's Hymn 12, p. 154; Argyle, 'Joseph the Patriarch', p. 200.

56. Willy Rordorf, 'Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969), pp. 212-22 (193-210); Elm, *'Virgins of God',* pp. 25-26. Works on virginity were written by Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and others. The notion lies at the root of both monasticism and the celibate priesthood.

57. The *Gospels of Thomas* and *Philip*, though known to us in Coptic and included in the Gnostic collection of Nag Hammadi, were composed in Antioch in a Greek- and Syriac-linguistic environment and re ect Syrian Christianity. See Jacques E. Ménard, 'Le milieu syriaque de l'Évangile selon Thomas et de l'Évangile selon Philippe', *RSR* 42 (1968), pp. 261-66; Robert Murray, 'The Theology of Symbolism in St Ephrem's Theology', *Parole de l'orient* 6/7 (1975–76), pp. 1-20 (10); Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), p. 139.

58. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* p. 157; see also N. Koltun Fromm, 'Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation', *HTR* 94 (2001), pp. 205-18 (210).

59. In the Peshitta the term translates *monogen s*, 'the only begotten', as an epithet of Christ. In the view of Brock (*Luminous Eye*, p. 136), the Syriac term carries three central meanings: singular, individual, unique; single-minded, unequivocal; and single, unmarried, celibate.

60. Masculine: *btûlâ*; fem.: *btûltâ*; pl.: *btûlê*. For similar terms, see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 152, nn. 3, 13.

('saints, holy ones'),[61] formerly married people who renounced sexual activity at some point after the beginning of their marriage or when widowed. Both groups included men and women and enjoyed special status in the Christian community. They constituted the elite of the believers and were referred to as the *Qyâmâ*, generally understood to mean 'Covenant'.[62] The members of the *Qyâmâ* considered each other 'brother' and 'sister',[63] and, like Aseneth and Joseph, they remained integrally part of their own families, not leaving their communities as was the case later with monastics. It is highly significant, then, that Aseneth is 'adorned like a bride of God' sitting between her two parents when her father announces to her his plan to make her the bride of Joseph (long text, 4.1).[64] Virgins of this sort are intended in the passage where the man of God addresses the virgins in the plural, 'And because she loves you virgins, I love you, too.'[65] The passage extols virgins who have resolved to lead their lives unwed

61. *Qaddîšê*: 'pure, continent'. The term derives from Exod. 19.10, 15, where Moses interprets the divine command וקדשתם as requiring sexual abstinence. Ephrem (*Commentary on Genesis* 6.12) describes a state of *qaddishuta* in Noah's ark. See Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 134.

62. On the virgins of the *Qyâmâ*, see Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (CSCO, 184, 197, 500; Subsidia 14, 17, 81; 3 vols.; Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1058–88), I, pp. 90-108; Griffith, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria', pp. 223, 229; Griffith, 'Monks, "Singles" and the "Sons of the Covenant": Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology', in E. Carr *et al.* (eds.), *Eulogia: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J.* (Studia anselmiana, 110; Analecta liturgica, 17; Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1993), pp. 141-60 (143); Simon Jargy, 'Les "Fils et Filles du pact" dans la littérature monastique syriaque', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 17 (1951), pp. 304-20 (311, 312, 315); Ephrem the Syrian: *Hymns on Paradise* (Brock, p. 26); Harvey, *Asceticism and Society,* pp. 6-7; Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation, Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1999), p. 31.

63. Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 1.1 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 55); *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 222.

64. On virgins who remained in their parents' homes under the authority of their fathers, which was common in the Eastern church in the fourth century, see Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', pp. 42-45; David Amand de Mendieta, 'La virginité chez Eusèbe d'Émèse et l'ascétisme familial dans la première moitié du IVe siècle', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 50 (1955), pp. 777-820 (800-805); Elm, *'Virgins of God'*, pp. 14, 38, 47. Elizabeth A. Clark ('Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement: A Paradox of Late Ancient Christianity', *Anglican Theological Review* 63 [1981], pp. 240-57 [245, 247, 248]) refers to this as 'house monasticism' or 'familial monasticism'.

65. Because Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 62) takes the term *metanoia* to refer to 'Wisdom' she is puzzled by the plural in the sentence and suggests tentatively that the reference is to Aseneth's seven virgin companions. My interpretation avoids the difficulty.

and sexually abstinent, and to consecrate their lives to Christ. They have renounced earthly marriage to marry Christ and to enter with him into the heavenly marriage chamber.

Starting with the parable of the ten virgins in Mt. 25.1-13, the image developed of a heavenly bridal chamber in paradise into which will enter only pure virgins who are spiritually wed to Christ, depicted as a bridegroom, and for whom a special place is reserved in the eschatological kingdom of heaven. This image of a heavenly bridal chamber is distinctly Christian and, to my knowledge, has no parallel in Jewish sources.[66] It is especially common in early Syriac literature.[67] Aphrahat writes,

> Let us keep a watch for the time of the Glorious Bridegroom, that we will enter with him into the bridal chamber (Mt. 25.10). Let us make ready the oil for our lamps so that we can go out to greet him in happiness (Mt. 25.4-7). Let us prepare provisions for our dwelling for the way is narrow (Mt. 7.14). Let us throw out from us all that is unclean, so that we can wear the clothing of the wedding feast (Mt. 22.11-12).[68]

In contrast to ephemeral earthly marriage, the heavenly bridal chamber is eternal and not subject to divorce; it is pure, radiant and free of blemish. Ephrem writes,

> The virgin who rejected the marriage crown that fades now has the radiant marriage chamber that cherishes the children of light, shining out because she rejected the works of darkness. To her who was alone in a lonely house the wedding feast now grants tranquility: here angels rejoice, prophets delight, and apostles add splendor.[69]

Elsewhere he adds,

66. Psalm 19.6 depicts the sun metaphorically: 'As a bridegroom he is going forth from his canopy. He rejoiceth as a hero to run his course.' This verse recalls the freshness, the vigor and the joy with which the rising sun appears in the east to a bridegroom going forth from his canopy; it does not imply a heavenly bridal chamber. See Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (1906–1907; ICC; 2 vols.; London: T. & T. Clark, repr., 1987), I, p. 167.

67. Antoine Guillaumont, 'Monachisme et éthique judéo-chrétienne', *Judéo-Christianisme: Recherches historiques et théologiques offertes au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Recherches de science religieuse, 1972), pp. 199-218 (202); Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, p. 73; Ephrem the Syrian: *Hymns on Paradise* (Brock, pp. 26-33); Harvey, *Asceticism and Society,* p. 5; Elm, '*Virgins of God',* p. 37; A.C. Rush, 'Death as a Spiritual Marriage: Individual and Ecclesial Eschatology', *Vigiliae christianae* 26 (1972), pp. 81-101.

68. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6, 1 (M.J. Pierre [trans.], *Les exposés* [SC, 349; 2 vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1988], I, p. 358); 6-11; 6, 6 (*Les exposés*, I, p. 383).

69. Ephrem, *HParad.* 7.15 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, pp. 28-29).

> The bridal chamber which he prepares is not subject to divorce. There are no days there, for there is no sun. There is no change there, for there are no stars. Eternity is sated with . . . rest; sorrow and joy disappear when he enters the fortress of rest.[70]

John Chrysostom describes the heavenly bridal chamber as 'the heavenly dwellings where there is such brightness, where everything is sparkling, where the light is unapproachable, where virgins shine more brilliantly than any ash of lightning'.[71] In the *Acts of Thomas,* Mygdonia, speaking to her husband Karish, compares their marriage with her marriage to Christ, 'That was a bridal chamber which was taken down. This is a bridal chamber which remaineth for ever.'[72]

In an anonymous work on virginity, the common term for Christ is 'bridegroom'. Jesus is the true bridegroom, who has come to collect only those who have obeyed his call for an oath of celibacy.[73] The true believers who were betrothed to the heavenly bridegroom will inherit the bridal chamber, which is free of corruption and belongs to the virgins alone. Those who are not virgins do not receive the crown of the kingdom of heaven nor enter the bridal chamber. 'They did not come to the bridal chamber and did not make up their bridal bed; therefore they did not receive the crown of the kingdom of heaven and did not join the eternal bridegroom; for they did not come to him.'[74] Parents are instructed to encourage their children to devote their lives to Christ and to forgo earthly marriage:

> If you [the parents] see that the footsteps [of your daughter] are beautiful, her movements graceful, her look esteemed; if you discern her purpose, the nature of her desire—is it human or heavenly, the nature of the pain caused by her fasting and worship of Christ; if you [the father] see that her

70. François Graf n, 'Hymnes inédites de Saint Ephrem sur la virginité', *OrSyr* 6 (1961), Hymne III, 63-103, pp. 222-23.

71. John Chrysostom, *On the Necessity of Guarding Virginity*, in Elisabeth A. Clark (ed.), *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 235-36; Pseudo-Athanasius, *On Virginity*, 51 (trans. D. Brakke; CSCO, 593, Scr. Syri, 233, pp. 19-20).

72. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 261 and p. 200.

73. Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', 12, 18, 57, 108, pp.36-37, 38-39, 48-49, 62-63. The origin of the work is obscure. In its present form it is in Greek, but it seems to have been translated from Syriac; the christological terminology indicates early Syrian Christianity. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, pp. 67-69. Amand de Mendieta ('La virginité chez Eusèbe d'Emèse', p. 818) dates the homily to the early fourth century and favors a Syrian origin.

74. Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', 57, pp. 48-49; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, p. 73.

> budding love is heavenly and genuine, by all means marry her to the son of the Lord God, in the pure and impeccable bridal chamber.[75]

Further, according to *Gos. Thom.* 75, '[m]any are standing at the door, but the solitary (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠) are the ones who will enter the bridal chamber'.

The bridal chamber of which we have been speaking is in fact the church, the holy of holies of the spiritual temple in the heavenly Jerusalem, where the virgins unite with Christ the bridegroom and where they achieve redemption, resurrection and immortality. It is described thus in the *Acts of Thomas*:

> My Church is the daughter of light . . . Her bridal chamber is lighted up, and full of the fragrance of salvation. A censer is prepared in its midst, love and faith and hope gladdening all. Within is steadfastness, all humble; her gates are adorned with truth. Her groomsmen surround her, all whom she has invited, and her pure bridesmaids go before her, uttering praise. The living minister before her and look for their Bridegroom to come, and they shall shine with his glory and shall be with him in the kingdom which never passes away.[76]

On Ps. 137.5, Methodius writes,

> By 'Jerusalem' as I have said, he means those immaculate and untouched souls who have austerely drained the pure draught of chastity with unsullied lips. These are espoused to one husband, to be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ in heaven, winning the reward of unde led con icts . . . He will bring them to dwell in the pure habitation of innermost light, clad in the snow-white garment of virginity.[77]

The longer text of *Joseph and Aseneth* makes no mention of a bridal chamber. Instead Metanoia entreats the Most High for a 'place of rest in the heavens' for penitents. Kraemer suggests that the longer text intends to change the image of Metanoia from that of a mother preparing her daugh-

75. Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', 18, pp. 38-39.

76. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 1, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (Syr. pp. 176.11-177.15, trans. pp. 150-152); Klijn,. *Acts of Thomas*, pp. 67-68; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 133-34. The bridal chamber is a common feature of Gnostic liteature. See *Gos. Phil.* 117.1-30; 118.10-20; 119.4-9; 130.23-24; 134.5 (Wilson, pp. 45, 46, 47, 58, 62); Irenaeus, *Adv.haer*. 1.13.3. The *Gospel of Philip* sets forth ve sacraments, the highest being the mystery of the bridal chamber. See Meeks, 'Image of the Androgyne', pp. 189, 190; R.M. Grant, 'The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip', *Vigiliae christianae* 15 (1961), pp. 129-40 (132); Segelberg, 'Coptic Gnostic Gospel of Philip', pp. 197-200.

77. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 4, 5 (Musurillo, pp. 79-80). In the account of the martyrdom of Martha, the heavenly bridal chamber is said to be built not by hands but in Jerusalem, the free city on high. See Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, p. 71.

ter's bridal chamber to a more inclusive image of an overseer preparing a resting place.[78] I propose instead that the difference between the shorter and longer text on this point may result from the attempt of the longer text to soften the ascetic tones emphasized in the shorter text. The longer text implies that it is not only for those who love her, that is, for virgins, that the Most High prepares a bridal chamber, but that all penitents will find a resting place in heaven. This direction is evident also in the description of Metanoia. In the shorter text her ascetic aspects are emphasized—'a virgin, very beautiful and pure and chaste and gentle'; in the longer text she is a somewhat ordinary virgin—'exceedingly beautiful, a virgin pure and laughing always, and she is gentle and meek'. In any event, the difference between the two texts in the description of the heavenly place is not very significant since, as we have seen, the heavenly resting place is identified with the city of refuge, which in turn is paradise, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the church, and can therefore be identified with the bridal chamber as well.[79]

Other features in the passage under discussion accord with what is known about penitence in Christianity generally and in the Syrian church specifically. According to the passage, 'Penitence is herself a virgin, very beautiful and pure and chaste and gentle and God Most High loves her, and all his angels do her reverence.' Many sources link penitence and virginity to the heavens and angels, and also to God. In Luke there is 'joy in heaven' and 'joy in the presence of the angels of God' over even one sinner who repents (Lk. 5.7, 10). In early Christian literature, virgins are perceived as angels on earth, as in the first Pseudo-Clementine *Epistle on Virginity*:

> For he who covets for himself these things so great and excellent, withdraws and severs himself on this account from all the world, that he may go and live a life divine and heavenly, like the holy angels, in work pure and holy . . . For God will give to virgins the kingdom of heaven, as to the holy angels, by reason of this great and noble profession.[80]

Cyril of Jerusalem writes, 'Let us not be ignorant of the glory of chastity: for its crown is angelic, and its excellence above man . . . Angels walking upon earth are they who practice chastity.'[81] Sebastian Brock sees the association by the Syrian church of virginity with angels as fundamental to this ascetic ideal, and he connects it to the motif of 'wakefulness' in the parable

78. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 61. In the view of Burchard (*OTP,* II, p. 227), the change may be Gnostic.

79. See Aphrahat, *Dem*. 6, 6 (*Les exposés*, I, p. 383); Graffin, *Hymnes inédites de Saint Ephrem sur la virginité* 3.63-103, pp. 222-23; *Odes* 11; 12.

80. Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 1.4 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 56).

81. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 12, 34 (*PG*, XXXIII, 768; *NPNF*, VII, p. 81).

of the wise and foolish bridesmaids (Matthew 25). 'Early Syriac writers generally follow the usage of the author of the Book of Daniel and refer to angelic beings as "wakers" or "watchers" and so to the Syriac reader the wise virgins in the parable are associated with a characteristic of the angelic life, and it is precisely the marriageless nature of the angelic life that provides further motivation for the ideal of virginity.' Luke 20.35-36 regards ascetic life on earth as *angelikos bios*, the life of angels.[82]

On the special relationship of virgins to God, Peter Brown writes that the virginal state was perceived

> as a form of 'mediation' between the divine and the human. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa: For in the Virgin Birth, virginity has led God to partake in the life of human beings, and in the state of virginity the human person has been given the wings with which to rise to a desire for the things of heaven. And so virginity has become the linking-force that assures the intimacy of human beings with God; and by the mediation of the virgin state there comes about the harmonious joining of two beings of such widely distant natures (*On Virginity* 2).[83]

In conclusion, *Metanoia* in *Joseph and Aseneth* is essentially a paean to virginity and its rewards, and brings to the fore the main message of the work. Upon receiving her new name, City of Refuge, Aseneth comes to symbolize the Christian Church, the Church of the gentiles, identi ed with heavenly Jerusalem and paradise, in which all who have converted and assumed belief in Christ will nd shelter, but especially those who are prepared to do 'penitence' (□□□□□□□□, *tyâbûthâ*), that is, to take the vow of virginity and to lead a life of sexual abstinence. Such virgins 'are truly the city of God, and the houses and temples in which God abides and dwells and among which He walks, as in the holy city of heaven'.[84]

82. Sebastian Brock, in Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* (trans. S. Brock; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1990), p. 30. Ephrem the Syrian likens virgins to immortal angels. See Graf n, *Hymnes inédites de Saint Ephrem sur la virginité*, p. 217; Pseudo-Athanasius, *On Virginity* 46 (Brakke, pp. 17-18); Robert E. Winn, 'The Church of Virgins and Martyrs: Ecclesiastical Identity in the Sermons of Eusebius of Emesa', *JECS* 11 (2003), pp. 309-38 (318-23). In *1 En*. 40.9, penitents earn eternal life in paradise, and the particular angel directing *metanoia* has the signi cant name of Penuel. An 'angel of repentance' (□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□) is found in Christian sources: Hermas, *Mand.* 47 (XII, 4), 7; (XII, 6), 1; *Sim.* 78 (IX.1),1; 91 (IX. 14), 3; 100 (IX. 23), 5; On virgins as angels, see also section 2 below.

83. Peter Brown, 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church', in Bernard McGinn John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Encyclopedia of World Spirituality, 16; New York: Crossroad, 1985), pp. 427-43 (432).

84. Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 1.9 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 58).

Aseneth personi es the ultimate virgin, the mirror image of Metanoia, the heavenly virgin who has repented and is the model for other virgins who are called to follow in her footsteps. To these virgins, men and women alike, who wholly renounce earthly marriage and devote their lives to Christ, *Joseph and Aseneth* promises entry into the heavenly and eternal bridal chamber, to the resting place with Christ that God prepares for them in heaven. [85]

Two more passages complete the representation of Aseneth as paradise and a city of refuge and display eschatological expectations for the unity of the church and the unity of the body of Jesus. In the longer text, the man of God extends his hand and touches the honeycomb at the place where he broke it, and the honeycomb is restored to its whole state as before (16.17).[86] I believe this is best understood in light of *Did.* 9.4: 'As this fragment of bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered to become one, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.'[87]

Eschatological anticipation was common among Jews, principally the hope of ingathering of the Jewish Diaspora. It is expressed in the Bible and in regular prayers. It underlay eschatological hopes among Christians for the unity and ingathering of the church, to be united with the body of Jesus through the Eucharist. After Aseneth partakes of the Eucharist and becomes a symbol of the church, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* completes the picture with an expression of hope for the unity of the church and its ingathering at the end of days, namely the restoration of the honeycomb to its original whole state. Similar expectations appear in the *Did.* 10.5: 'Remember your Church, O Lord; save it from all evil, and perfect it in your love. And gather it from the four winds into your kingdom, which you prepared for it.' The bread of the Eucharist, the broken bread, □□□□□□, made from many grains scattered on the mountains and then gathered together, anticipates the unity of all Christians at the end of days.[88] The Eucharist was seen as the

85. Needless to say, repentance here is not the Jewish notion, which is not a religious conversion but a return to an absolute faith in God founded on the commandments of the Torah. Nothing of the sort is found here. See Sanders, 'Covenant as a Soteriological Category', p. 23; Merklein, in Balz and Schneider, '□□□□□□□', p. 416; Behm and Würthwein, '□□□□□□□', pp. 993, 997.

86. Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, pp. 212-14.

87. Similarly in an early text from Egypt, the *Anaphora* of Serapion*;* see John Wordsworth, *Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-Book: An Egyptian Sacramentary Dated Probably about A.D. 350–356* (Translations of Christian Literature: Series 3, Liturgical Texts; London: SPCK, 1923), p. 63; Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, p. 29.

88. H.J. Gibbins, 'The Problem of the Liturgical Section of the Didache', *JTS* 36 (1935), pp. 373-86 (384); J. Betz, 'Eucharist in the Didache', pp. 271-73.

precursor of the ultimate salvation, a sign of its reality. This 'ingathering' (uni cation) of the bread is the start, calling for the ful llment of salvation, a sign of the eschatological uni cation of the church. This ideal of Christian unity in the body of Jesus is often expressed in Paul's letters. So Eph. 4.3-6:

> I . . . beg you to lead a life . . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

And 1 Cor. 1.10:

> Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.[89]

The eschatological aspect of the Eucharist scene in *Joseph and Aseneth* is completed with the marking of the honeycomb with a cross. In both texts the man of God extends his right hand and places his nger at the eastern edge of the honeycomb and draws it to the western edge; the path of his nger becomes like blood. He then extends his hand a second time, this time placing his nger at the northern edge and drawing it to the southern edge; and again the path of the nger becomes like blood (16.10). Perusing Philonenko's diagram—a circle divided into four equal quadrants by two lines intersecting at right angles,[90] Kraemer relates this scene to the globe that Helios holds in the Hamath Tiberias mosaic. She suggests that 'the image on the honeycomb may evoke the cosmic globe carried by Helios, which, in Aseneth, the angel is able to bring into being by the action of his nger'.[91]

But I believe that the Christian character of our scene is so obvious that it needs no demonstration at all; it corresponds perfectly to our general interpretation of the work.[92] In addition to the unity of the church, the story

89. So too 1 Cor. 10.17: 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread'; 12.12-27: 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it'; Gal. 3.27-28: 'for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'.

90. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 188

91. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* pp. 166-67.

92. So Kohler, 'Asenath', p. 174; Hort, 'Aseneth, History of', pp. 176-77: 'the bloody tracks upon the honeycomb evidently make up the cross'; A.F. Segal, 'Conversion and Messianism: Outline for a New Approach', in James H. Charlesworth (ed.),

emphasizes the unity of the body of Jesus and of the sacrament symbolizing him by the cross drawn on the honeycomb. The bread and the wine, which are represented in our story by the honeycomb and the path of blood, are a single unity, as explained by Theodore of Mopsuestia describing the Eucharist:[93]

> The priest recites quietly these prayers, and immediately after, takes the holy bread with his hands and looks towards heaven, and directs his eyes upwards. He offers a prayer of thanksgivings for these great gifts, and breaks the bread . . . And with the bread he makes the sign of the cross over the blood, and with the blood over the bread, and he unites and joins them together, in order to reveal to all that although these elements are two, they are nevertheless one in power, and are the remembrance of the death and the Passion that affected the body of our Lord, when His blood was shed on the Cross for us all. When the priest makes the sign of the Cross over them he unites them and joins them together, because the human body is one with its blood, and where the body is there also is the blood . . . It is with justice, therefore, that according to this teaching, we place both of them on the altar, in order to refer to happenings that took place afore, and to show that both of them are one in power, as they belong to the one person who received the Passion, that is to say to the esh of our Lord, from which blood was also shed. This is the reason why the priest, at the end of the Anaphora,[94] rightly breaks the bread and joins it with the blood while making the sign of the cross, and then likewise brings the blood near the bread in order to show that both of them, which the passion affected, are one, and that we also are ordered to perform the remembrance of this passion in this way.

The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 296-340 (310). Philonenko (*Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 189) believes that it is indeed a cross on the honeycomb, but one related to that marked on the sacred bread in the cult of Mithra. See also E.S. Drower, *Water into Wine* (London; John Murray, 1956), pp. 59-60. The fact that the man of God rst marks the horizontal line of the cross and only then the vertical one cannot negate this possibility because the sequence of the cross's signing was xed only late in the Middle Ages. According to the sources, the sign of the cross was made at rst on the forehead with the thumb (it was called a seal, ⲥⲫⲣⲁⲅⲓⲥ), and its shape was a *tau* (following Ezek. 9.4, 6; cf. *Barn.* 9.8), which in Greek had the form Τ. (Later it was known as the Tau cross, *crux commissa* or *patibulata*). In this form, for example, the horizontal line naturally comes rst. This form appears on inscriptions in the catacombs in Rome, the earliest Christian illustrations of this symbol. See Heather Child and Dorothy Colles, *Christian Symbols* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1971), p. 16; Jean Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), pp. 136-45; H. Leclercq, 'Croix et Cruci x', *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1948), III, pp. 3057, 3061.

93. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 105-106.

94. The main prayer of the eucharist liturgy.

Signing a cross in blood on the bread of the Eucharist by use of a nger appears also in Ephrem:

> See—your image is depicted
> In the blood of grapes
> On the top of the bread,
> And it is depicted on the heart
> By the nger of love
> With all the pigments of faith. Blessed is he who made
> The sculpted images pass away
> In favor of his true image.[95]

The emphasis on the unity of the church and the unity of the body of Jesus is an integral part of the Eucharist and expresses its eschatological elements.

2. *Bees as a Symbol of Virgins in the 'City of Refuge'*

The story goes on to depict a fantastic scene:

> And Aseneth was standing on the left and watching everything the man was doing. And bees came up from the cells of the comb, and they were white as snow, and their wings were iridescent—purple (□□□□□□□) and blue (□□□□□□□□) and gold; and they had golden diadems on their heads and sharp-pointed stingers. And all the bees ew in circles round Aseneth, from her feet right up to her head; and yet more bees, as big as queens, settled on Aseneth's lips. And the man said to the bees, 'Go, please, to your places.' And they all left Aseneth and fell to the ground, every one of them, and died. And the man said, 'Get up (□□□□□□□□) now, and go to your place'; and they got up (□□□□□□□□□) and went, every one of them, to the court round Aseneth's tower. And the man said to Aseneth, 'Have you observed this?', and she said, 'Yes, my lord, I have observed it all.' And the man said, 'So shall be the words I have spoken to you.' And the man touched the comb, and re went up from the table and burnt up the comb; and, as it burned, the comb gave out a refreshing fragrance (□□□□□□) that lled the room (short text, 16.13–17. 3).

95. Ephrem *HNat.* 16.7 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri 82, p. 84); Sidney H. Grif th, '"Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine": The Eucharist as "Living Medicine" in the Thought of Ephrem the Syrian', *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), pp. 225-46 (235). On marking a cross in blood on the bread of the Eucharist, see also the liturgy of St Adaeus and St Maris, *Teachers of the Easterns* (*ANF,* VII, p. 566). Also reminiscent of the honeycomb in *Joseph and Aseneth* is the shape of the bread, the *prosphora*, used in the Orthodox Eucharist, namely a goblet made of two joined parts, sloping upwards, the upper edge of which is imprinted with a square in an inscribed cross that divides the square into four sectors containing the letters IC, XC, NI, KA (Jesus Christ victor). K.C. Felmi, 'Customs and Practices', p. 42.

This scene is the most difficult to interpret in the whole work.[96] Who are the bees that came from the honeycomb and surrounded Aseneth from head to toe? How are we to explain their white color, the crowns on their heads, their sharp stingers, and the colors woven into their wings? Who are the queen bees, and why did they settle on Aseneth's lips? What does all this have to do with Aseneth's conversion?

Kraemer draws attention to the close relation between the image of the bees here and the symbols and images that were prevalent in connection with gods and kings in ancient Egypt and images of bees in the Hellenistic and Roman world.[97] In ancient Egypt, the bee was a symbol of the first royal dynasty in Lower Egypt; and various Egyptian goddesses, among them Neith, had some connection to bees. An ancient myth on the origin of bees has them come into being from tears of the sun god Ra; when they touched the ground they turned into bees, attesting to a connection between bees and sun gods. In ancient Egypt the souls of dead humans were thought to be bees; the Egyptians believed that bees guided the dead to the next world. All these myths may well be in the background of the symbolism of the bees in our story and may indicate some source of the author's imagination.

Much more important, however, in my view, is evidence from the Greco-Roman world, which affords clear parallels to the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth*. In that world bees were deemed divine beings[98] symbolizing eternity and the immortal soul. In the fourth book of Virgil's *Georgics*, devoted to apiculture, we read:

96. See Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 230 n. h2; J.J. Collins ('Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian', pp. 110-11) admits that 'their symbolism in Joseph and Aseneth, however, is obscure, and all interpretations hitherto proposed are controversial'.

97. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 167-71. See also Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 65- 69, who associates the bees with the Egyptian goddess Neith. Similarly J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian', pp. 110-11. On the symbolism of bees in Egypt and in the Greco-Roman world, see A.B. Cook, 'The Bee in Greek Mythology', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 15-16 (1895–96), pp. 1-24; F. Olck, 'Beine', PW, III.1, pp. 431-50; Christoph Höcker, 'Beine', *Der Neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), II, pp. 649-50; Hilda M. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1986), pp. 24-34, 91-139; Maurizio Bettini, 'The Bee, the Moth and the Bat: Natural Symbols and Representations of the Soul', Chapter 3 of Bettini, *Anthropology and Roman Culture: Kinship, Time, Images of the Soul* (trans. John Van Sickle; Ancient Society and History; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 197-226.

98. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 3.10.761a (LCL, p. 347); Petronius, *Satyricon* 56.6.

> Having followed these signs and these habits, some say that bees own a share of the divine soul and drink in the ether of space; for, god invests everything—earth and tracts of the sea and deepest heaven; from him, ocks, herds, men, all species of wild animals—each one gains for itself at birth its little life; doubtless, afterward, all return to him and released, are made new; death has no place but, alive, they y up, each to be counted as a star and ascend into heaven above.[99]

In Virgil's account, bees represent souls, which have a divine kernel; they are a symbol of rebirth and of resurrection of lifeless bodies, and an emblem of the promise of eternal life in heaven.[100] The association of bees with new life emanating from a dead animal, a bull especially, is developed at length in the second half of *Georgics* 4. Virgil here advises the reader of the method to be employed in case one's bees die out, and a new hive must be initiated. The procedure is that of *bugonia*, generating a swarm of bees from the carcass of a dead bull (4.281-314). The poet relates the origin of the procedure in a lengthy tale of Aristaeus, the son of the nymph Cyrene, who offers a sacri ce to Euridice to atone for Aristaeus's indirectly causing her death. Aristaeus discovers a swarm of bees arising out of the decaying esh of the dead ox; the bees, which represent the life-force, have been regenerated from the dead animal.[101]

Maurizio Bettini reports the following:

> A story in the Daniel-Servius commentary on Virgil (*Aen*. 1.430) tells how there lived near the Isthmus of Corinth an old woman named Melissa. Ceres had con ded in her the secrets of her holy mysteries, commanding her to reveal them to no one. Certain women wanted to force Melissa to reveal them: rst they tried with prayers and promises, then, seeing that their efforts were to no avail, they grew angry and cut her to pieces. Ceres punished the women by putting a plague on all their people, and she made bees arise from the dismembered body of Melissa.[102]

Many references to 'bee-souls' in the writings of the later Greek philosophers are connected with the belief in the transmigration of souls; the bees are emblematic of fresh incarnations. Particularly instructive is Porphyry, the third-century Neoplatonist. Souls about to be born, he says, are called bees, for bees symbolize the souls just before reincarnation, by which they will live righteously and, after doing the gods' will, return to the place from which they came:

99. Virgil, *Georg.* 4.219-27.

100. Bettini, 'Bee, the Moth and the Bat', pp. 203, 212.

101. For the history of this and related traditions, see Ransome, *Sacred Bee*, pp. 112-18.

102. Servius on Virgil, *Aen.* 1.430; Bettini, 'Bee, the Moth and the Bat', p. 215; Cook, 'Bee in Greek Mythology', p. 20; Ransome, *Sacred Bee*, pp. 96-97.

> However, they did not indiscriminately call all souls descending to genesis bees, but only those that are to live in justice and who are to return again when they have accomplished what pleases the gods. For this creature is fond of returning to its place of origin and is particularly just and sober . . . so honeycombs and bees would be symbols appropriate in common to water-nymphs and souls becoming brides for genesis.[103]

Considering the remarkable similarity of the above to the descriptions of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth*, Kraemer interprets the scene in the latter in terms of third- or fourth-century Neoplatonism:

> Thus, the scenes in Aseneth with the honeycomb and the bees may be read as indicators of Neoplatonic mystic sensibilities, if not of an actual Neoplatonic context. The scene in the shorter version lends itself easily to an interpretation comparable to that in Porphyry: That the bees symbolize (or may actually be) souls, which die and are reborn and whose ultimate home is that of Paradise.[104]

I accept Kraemer's observations entirely on the relationship between the symbolic aspects of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* and in the Egyptian and Greco-Roman worlds, but I think that the bee motif should be interpreted in a Christian context. The author's way of blending this motif into his story, as he did with the symbol of the honeycomb, illustrates the skill and creativeness with which Christianity integrated images and concepts from its environment into its theology and ritual.

So in light of these Greek and Roman writers, the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* can represent the souls of the righteous believers, who, having accepted the Christian faith, are about to be reborn. Like bees, they have divine wisdom and inspiration, and, once released from the bonds of the physical world, they return immortal and eternal to the heavens. Like bees, they ascend to renewed life from the dead body and will achieve everlasting life in heaven.

Evidence does exist that Christian writers used bees as an image for believers and likened the words of the Lord and the eternal Gospels to honey. Cyril writes:

> *'Go to the bee, and learn how industrious she is*', how, hovering round all kinds of owers, she collects her honey for thy bene t: that thou also, by ranging over the Holy Scriptures, mayest lay hold of salvation for thyself, and being lled with them mayest say, *How sweet are thy words unto my*

103. Porphyry, *The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey* (trans. Seminar Classics 609, State University of New York at Buffalo; Arethusa Monographs; Buffalo: Department of Classics, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1969), 17-19, p. 21; Bettinni, 'Bee, the Moth and the Bat', pp. 197, 199; Ransome, *Sacred Bee,* pp. 31, 108; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 171.

104. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 172.

> *throat, yea sweeter than honey and the honeycomb unto my mouth* (Ps. 119.103).[105]

Ephrem compares the church to a bee sucking from the sacred owers the sweetness and fragrance of the blooms. These must be understood as the words of the Lord and the Gospels, which the bee ies to disseminate.[106]

It seems to me, however, that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* chose the bees mainly for another reason that suited his theological message even more. In the Hellenistic-Roman world, beyond the souls of the righteous about to be born, bees were a symbol of purity, virginity and sexual abstinence. They were compared to the muses, who as virgins lived in purity, and bees likewise became symbols of purity and virginity.[107] As Virgil says, 'You will marvel that this custom has found favor with bees, that they indulge not in conjugal embraces, nor idly unnerve their bodies in love, or bring forth young with travail, but of themselves gather their children in their mouths from leaves and sweet herbs.'[108]

Bees were thought to abstain from sexual impurity and corruption.[109] Bees, it was thought, have no sex; they are neither male nor female.[110]

105. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 9.13 (*PG*, XXXIII, 652; *NPNF*, VII, p. 54) quoting Prov. 6.8.

106. Ephrem, *HNat.* 28.9-10 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 143): 'Now for you, blessed Church, a bee, who has many sweet spring ["Nisan"] blossoms, one spring is Egyptian, the second spring is Hebrew. *From holy owers you cull. From all of them you gather all help.* Blessed Church, from the blossoms of your temple, you gather sweetness. Your type is portrayed by the bee who left the blossoms of her region, and ew rather far, to diffuse the smell of the sweet blossom that sprouted in Judea, and came and gathered in her ears the sweetness of her proverbs and brought [them] forth. But Jerusalem made her pour out the sweetness so that the Gentiles ran and collected it' (emphasis added). The Egyptian Nisan denotes Exodus and the Hebrew Nisan alludes to Jesus' death and resurrection. See François Cassingena-Trévedy, *Hymnes sur la Nativité* (SC, 459; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), p. 322. *Didascalia* 15 (Connolly, p. 145). 'As then the bee is little in strength, and when she has stung a man she loses her sting, and becomes barren and presently dies; so also we the faithful in like manner: whatever evil we do to another, we do it to ourselves.'

107. Ransome, *Sacred bee*, p. 106.

108. Virgil, *Georg.* 4.197-201, trans. Fairclough (LCL). See also Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 3.10.759a8–761b2 (LCL, pp. 337-47); Callimachus, *Hymn* 2: To Apollo 110ff.; Porphyry, *De antro* 17-18 (*Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*, pp. 19-20).

109. Bettini, 'Bee, the Moth and the Bat', pp. 201, 218; Ransome, *Sacred Bee,* p. 106; W. Telfer, '"Bees" in Clement of Alexandria', *JTS* 28 (1927), pp. 167-78 (168). Höcker, 'Beine', p. 649; Eugen Fehrle, *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 6; Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1910), p. 56 n.2.

110. Bettini, 'Bee, the Moth and the Bat', p. 202; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 3.10.759b (LCL, p. 337); Augustine, *Civ.* 15.27.4: There are others, like bees, that have no distinguishing sexual characteristics.

In *Joseph and Aseneth*, then, bees can symbolize the souls of believers who undertake to live lives of chastity and sexual abstinence. Like bees, the virgins do not copulate, have nothing to do with sexual love and do not give birth. This connotation of bees is explicit in Christian sources. Ambrose likens the virgin church to bees. Expounding on Song 4.11, he addresses it in the following words:

> Virginity is t to be compared to bees, so laborious is it, so modest, so continent. The bee feeds on dew, it knows no marriage couch, it makes honey. The virgin's dew is the divine word, for the words of God descend like the dew. The virgin's modesty is unstained nature. The virgin's produce is the fruit of the lips, without bitterness, abounding in sweetness. They work in common, and their fruit is in common. How I wish you, my daughter, to be an imitator of these bees, whose food is owers, whose offspring is collected and brought together by the mouth. Do imitate her, my daughter. Let no veil of deceit be spread over your words; let them have no covering of guile, that they may be pure, and full of gravity. And let an eternal succession of merits be brought forth by your mouth. Gather not for yourself alone . . . And I also point out to you what ower is to be culled, that one it is Who said: 'I am the Flower of the eld, and the Lily of the valleys, as a lily among thorns' (Song 2.1-2).[111]

Like the bee, the virgin church is chaste, modest, and far removed from conjugal relations. Both the bee and the church produce their fruit by their mouths—the bee's is the honey made from dew; the fruit of the virgin church is the divine Word. The Logos, likened to dew, is the 'fruit of the lips' and, like honey, abounds in sweetness and is eternal.[112]

This interpretation of the bees, as a symbol of the virgin souls, is reinforced by the details of the description of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

111. Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.8.40-41(*PL*, XVI, 200; *NPNF*, X, p. 369); Bettini ('Bee, the Moth and the Bat', p. 201) notes that Ru nus of Aquileia cited this aspect of bees to support his argument for the virginity of Mary. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 168. This meaning of the bees was noted already by Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', p. 29. Admittedly, I have not found in Syriac literature an explicit metaphor of virgins as bees. Ambrose is depicted in painting as having a beehive at his side. See Ransome, *Sacred Bee*, p. 105.

112. The identi cation of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* as virgins sheds light on the mention of the bees of paradise in the passage on the honeycomb. The virgins produce the honeycomb, that is, the body of Jesus, in paradise, from the dew of the roses of life, that is, from the Lord's words and his tidings. Methodius of Olympus makes no mention of bees in the *Symposium*, but he does describe virginity, [illegible], as the wings whereby the soul is elevated above the corruption of the body to regions above this world and to elds of purity (Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logoi 8.1-2; 9.1 [Musurillo, pp. 105-107, 132); Pierluigi Piovanelli, 'Une nouvelle citaction de la version Éthiopienne de *Joseph et Aséneth*', *Henoch* 15 (1993), pp. 43-46.

What characterizes these bees? The bees that came up from the honeycomb, we are told, 'were white as snow, and their wings were *iridescent*—purple and blue and gold; and they had golden diadems on their heads and sharp-pointed stingers' (16.13).

White bees represent virgins after baptism. We have already noted that converts to Christianity wore white clothes after baptism. The phrase 'white as snow' refers to the function of baptism as cleansing sins, which, according to the biblical phrase, 'will turn snow-white'.[113] Ambrose addressed people being baptized thus:

> After this white robes were given to you as a sign that you were putting off the covering of sins, and putting on the chaste veil of innocence, of which the prophet said: 'Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed, thou shall wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow (Ps. 51.9). For he who is baptized is seen to be puri ed both according to the Law and according to the Gospel: according to the Law, because Moses sprinkled the blood of the lamb with a bunch of hyssop (Exod. 12.22); according to the Gospel, because Christ's garments were white as snow, when in the Gospel He showed forth the glory of His Resurrection. He, then, whose guilt is remitted, is made whiter than snow. So that God said by Isaiah: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow' (Isa. 1.18).[114]

The white clothes worn after baptism explain the white color of the bees. But what does baptism have to do with virginity symbolized by the bees? Much evidence is found that in the early church, particularly the fourth-century Syrian church, the decision to maintain a life of celibacy for both men and women, the vow to be *îhîd yâ*, was taken on the occasion of baptism.[115] As Ephrem writes, 'See, [people] being baptized and becoming virgins and consecrated ones (*qaddîšê),* for they have gone down [to the font], been baptized and put on that single Only One (*îhîd yâ).*'[116] That the commit-

113. Isaiah 1.18; Ps. 51.9; Dan. 11.35.

114. Ambrose, *Myst.* 7. 34 (*PL*, XVI, 399; *NPNF*, X, 10, p. 321); John Chrysostom, *Huit catéchéses baptismales inédites*, 2.27 (trans. A. Wenger; SC, 50; Paris: Cerf, 1970), p. 149; 8.25, p. 260; Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, pp. 194, 200; Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, p. 58.

115. According to Brock, the vow of celibacy, to become *btûlê* (virgins), and *qaddîšê* (saints, holy ones), is the meaning of the the term *Qy mâ* in the Syrian church (Brock, *Luminous Eye,* pp. 123, 135); Connolly, 'St Ephraim and Encratism', p. 47; Burkitt, 'Aphraates and Monasticism', p. 15: M.-J. Pierre, in Aphraate le sage Persan, *Les exposés* (SC, 349; Paris: Cerf, 1988), p. 110; Grif th, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria', p. 226; Murray, 'Exhortation to Candidates', p. 65; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 15; Murray, 'Character of the Earliest Syriac Christianity', p. 7.

116. Ephrem, *HEpiph*. 8.16 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 173), trans. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 16 n. 79; Tertullian, *Exh. cast*. 1 (*PL*, II, 915): 'That

ment to forgo earthly marriage and instead to marry Christ was made specically on the occasion of baptism is based on Paul's words in Gal. 3.27: 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' That is, on the occasion of baptism the believer is 'clothed in Christ' and united with him. For this reason John Chrysostom treats baptism as the moment when a bride enters a bridal chamber with Christ.[117] The white garment serves as a symbol of a new life of sinless purity, but also as the bridal garment of the baptized who are wed to the resurrected Christ, and as the symbol of union with him.[118]

As Alfred C. Rush defines it: 'Bridal mysticism . . . is of the sacramental order, originating in the initiation of baptism. It is baptism that makes everyone the spouse of Christ, that brings about the sacred marriage between the Christian and Christ.'[119]

Jean Daniélou sums the matter up as follows:

> Baptism is seen in its fullness as a nuptial mystery. The soul until now a simple creature, becomes the Bride of Christ. When she comes out of the baptismal water in which he has purified her in his blood, he welcomes her in her white bridal robe and receives the promise which binds her to him forever.[120]

The association of the white color of the bees with baptism and celibacy is reinforced by the additional imagery of the crowns on the heads of the bees and their sharp stingers. When baptized, one was required to choose between marriage and a vow of celibacy, which in the Syrian church was termed 'taking the crown'.[121] This nexus of baptism, the vow of celibacy and a crown appears in the words of Ephrem to the baptized: 'You to be

good—I mean sanctification—I distribute into several kinds . . . The first kind is virginity from birth; the second, virginity from the second birth, that is, from the font, which either keeps pure in the marriage state by mutual compact, or else perseveres in widowhood from choice; the third grade remains, monogamy.'

117. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 1,1 (Harkins, p. 23).

118. Riley, *Christian Initiation*, pp. 422, 445-49. Brock (*Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 26-33) notes that from early times the Syrian church was described as the bride of Christ, and that in its liturgical texts its marriage to Christ occurred at the moment Christ was baptized. See also Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis,* 5; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 131-42; see, e.g., *Odes* 38.9-12; 42.8-9.

119. Rush, 'Death as a Spiritual Marriage', p. 83.

120. Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, p. 200.

121. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 327; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 141; Eric Segelberg, 'The Baptismal Rite according to some of the Coptic-Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi', *StPatr* 5 (TU 80; Leuven: Peeters, 1962), pp. 117-28. According to Vööbus (*History of Asceticism,* I, p. 91), at baptism people donned white dresses, and crowns were placed on their heads. In liturgical hymns 'crown' stands for baptism.

baptized, who have found the kingdom in the very bosom of Baptism, Step down, put on the *îhîd yâ* who is the Lord of the kingdom. Blessed are you *who have been crowned* (emphasis added).'[122]

In the *Odes of Solomon,* the crown, pictured as a oral wreath, represents the Lord, who is as a crown on the head of the believer. Its branches blossom; they are not parched. Its fruits are salvation (*Odes* 1.1-5). This crown is associated with the owers of life in paradise from which the heavenly crowns are plaited: 'Put on the grace of the Lord generously, and come to His Paradise, and make for yourself a garland from His tree. Then put it on your head and be joyful, and recline upon His rest.'[123] In the sixth *Hymn of Paradise,* Ephrem extols the crowns of the virgins and holy ones, which in their blossoming surpass even the owers of paradise: 'The owers of Paradise took the victory, but then were vanquished at the sight of the blossoms of the celibate and chaste at whose garlands both creation and its creator rejoice.'[124]

The crown made of the owers of life in paradise which adorns the heads of the virgins at baptism symbolizes, like the dew we discussed above, the word of Christ, his presence, which is as a crown on the head of the believer. It opens the door of the bridal chamber for the virgins to enter. This symbolism expresses the eschatological aspect of the crown representing the eternal blessing, the victory wreath of the chosen, the hope of eternal life, the 'crown of life' given to those who are 'faithful until death' (Rev. 2.10).[125] So it is in the *Homily on Virginity*:

> You [the father] make a pure wreath of chastity from the words which you collect similar to those [said above], from the seeds and resources in the divine writings, and from the commandments extolling chastity, in order that she [your daughter] will come willingly, ardent for those things, to *the pure bridal chamber of Christ*, as she meets the wise virgins. Thus you, the father, will achieve for yourself, and she will receive *the crown of immortality* (emphasis added).[126]

122. Ephrem, *HEpiph.* 13.14 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p.191); Grif th, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria, p. 227.

123. *Odes* 20.7-8; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatecheses* 1 (*PG*, XXXIII, 332); Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, 193.

124. Ephrem, *HParad*. 6.12 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, pp. 53-54).

125. See also Jas 1.12; 1 Pet. 5.4.

126. Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homélie grecque', pp. 44-45. See further Rev. 2.10 ('Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life'); 3.11; 4.4; 1 Cor. 9.25; 2 Tim. 4.7; Hermas, *Sim.* 68, 2.1-4; *Ascen. Isa.* 7.22; 9.11-18 (cf. 8.26; 9.25); *T. Levi* 8.5-9; *4 Ezra* 2.43-45; *5 Ezra* 2.11-12; *3 En.* 12; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, p. 73; G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Con rmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1951), p. 112; *Acts of Judas Thomas,* 8 in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 220,

In the *Odes of Solomon* it is the virgins of the 'true *Qy mâ* of the Lord' who win these crowns:

> An everlasting crown is Truth; blessed are they who set it on their head. It is a precious stone, for the wars were on account of the crown. But Righteousness has taken it, and has given it to you. Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, and all those who have conquered will be inscribed in His book (*Odes* 9.8-11).

The celibate and ascetic life was described in terms of holy war and as a struggle in which whoever prevails is crowned. In *Joseph and Aseneth* the stingers of the bees suggest this battle.[127]

The nature of this battle is explained by Aphrahat in his seventh *Demonstration*, 'On Penitents'. This homily, about holy ones and virgins, describes celibacy in terms of holy war and struggle. Those who would join the 'covenant' (*Qy mâ*) and be 'sons of the covenant' are obliged, as a condition for baptism, to maintain an ascetic way of life including sexual abstinence, celibacy and virginity. This way of life is described, in language drawn from Deut. 20.2-8, as a sacred war. Only the *îhîd yê* (single, celibate), virgins and holy ones, who have xed their sights on what is before them and have put the past out of their minds, will be able to prevail in the spiritual battle awaiting them, the struggle of the Christian ascetic monk. The selection of those who can endure this struggle is compared to the selection of the warriors of Gideon as he set out to war on Midian (Judg 7.5), which for Aphrahat is the 'mystery' of this struggle and the model for the *îhîd yê.* 'These things I have written you, my friend', writes Aphrahat, 'because in our generation there are those who devote themselves to be *îhîd yê,* 'sons

290; Sylvain Grébaut, 'Littérature éthiopienne Pseudo-Clémentine', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 5 (1910), pp. 307-23 (317, 319); Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, pp. 19-20; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 328. A coronation rite was part of baptism among Mandaeans; see Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 6.5 (Musurillo, p. 95).

127. The life of Christians in general, not only of virgins, is described in Christian sources as a 'struggle' (□□□□□□□) and a battle to achieve the eternal crown (□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□): see 1 Cor. 9.24-27; Eph. 6.10-17; 2 Tim. 4.7-8; 1 Pet. 5.4; In *Acts Thom*. 5.50 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament,* p. 468) the Christian is an athlete. Perpetual struggle is a de ning characteristic of Christian life. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.11 (Harkins, p. 59): 'Let us, therefore, take courage and strip ourselves for the contests. Christ has put on us armor that is more glittering than any gold, stronger than any steel, hotter and more violent than any re, and lighter than any breath of air. The nature of this armor does not burden and bend our knees, <but it gives wings to our limbs and lifts them up. If you wish to take ight to heaven, this armor is no hindrance. It is a new kind of armor>, since it is a new kind of combat.' See further Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 5.27 (Harkins, p. 91); Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia,* 3, 46, 47.

of the covenant', and holy ones. We wage battle against our enemy, and our enemy contends with us to return us to that nature from which we of our own free will withdrew.'[128]

Similarly, Ephrem writes, 'From the water Gideon chose for himself the men who were victorious in the battle (*qr bâ*). You have gone down to the "victorious" (*zakk yê,* or pure, innocent) waters; come up, and be glorious in the contest (*agônâ*). Receive from the water reconciliation and from the contest, crowning.'[129] A battle for the crown is mentioned also in the passage of the *Odes of Solomon* quoted above, 'the wars were on account of the crown'. Ephrem sums up virginity in this way: 'Its battle is on earth, its crown in paradise.'[130]

These writers portray the effort to maintain celibacy as a war against an 'enemy', namely Satan. This war has an eschatological dimension, for the war against Satan, that is, against sexual temptation, is the great and ultimate war for the salvation of the world.[131] Methodius describes the battle:

> Do not then lose heart at the deceits and the slanders of the beast, but equip yourselves sturdily for battle, arming yourselves with the helmet of salvation, your breastplate and your greaves. For if you attack with great advantage and with stout heart you will cause him untold consternation; and when he sees you arrayed in battle against him by Him who is superior, he will certainly not stand his ground . . . with sober and virile heart, then, take up your arms against the swollen Beast.[132]

Arthur Vööbus sums it up: 'A Christian is an athlete, a ghter, a warrior. The consciousness of being a tireless warrior was the hallmark of the Christian life . . . The terms 'contest' and 'war' which nd expression in both ser-

128. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 7.19-21, 25 (*Les exposés,* I, pp. 430-32, 437).

129. Ephrem, *HEpiph*. 7.8 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 164).

130. Ephrem, *HParad.* 6.24 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 25); John Chrysostom, 'Instruction and Refutation Directed against Those Men Cohabiting with Virgins', in Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends,* pp. 201, 203; Pseudo-Athanasius, *On Virginity* 11 (Brakke, p. 5). Virginity as a struggle is found in Epiphanius, *Panarion* Haer. 61, *Against Apostolics* 4.7.1 (F. Williams [trans.], *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994], p. 120); Epiphanius, GCS, p. 387: 'He hath sin and punishment who casteth away God's virginity and despiseth the contest. For the athlete who violates the rule of the contest is scourged and cast out of the contest; even so he that violates virginity is cast out of that Race and Crown and Prize.'

131. See Shlomo Naeh, '*Heruta*—A Talmudic Re ection of Freedom and Celibacy' (in Hebrew), in *Issues in Talmudic Research: Conference Commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Passing of Ephraim E. Urbach, 2 December* 1996 (Jerusalem: Haakademia Haleumit Hisraelit Lemadaim, 2001), pp. 10-27 (16); Murray, 'Exhortation to Candidates', p. 63.

132. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 8.12-13 (Musurillo, pp. 118-19); John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 1.1 (Harkins, p. 23).

mons and prayers, describe the proper sentiment in the service of Christian perfection.'[133] The white bees, then, with the crowns and stingers, represent the believers who at baptism took the crown of battle in their determination to lead lives of celibacy and virginity.[134]

The coloring of the wings accords well with our interpretation of the bees.

Gideon Bohak sees the colors of the bees as the key to the symbolism of the honeycomb and the bees. The four colors—purple (πορφύρα), blue (□□□□□□□), crimson (κόκκος), and linen (βύσσος)[135]— gure prominently in the furnishings of the Jewish Temple[136] and in the garments of the priest. From this Bohak concludes that the bees with their crowns and 'priestly raiment' symbolize the priests in the Temple.[137] The various colors on the wings of the bees, I would add, match the colors of the priestly garments, as Bohak says, but also the colors of the curtain of the Temple as it is described in early Christian traditions. Unlike the curtain of the Temple according to the Bible, which was not woven with a golden thread at all,[138] gold appears in Christian sources as one of the threads from which the curtain was woven.

133. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, p. 88.

134. For more on this 'battle' in early Syrian literature, see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism,* I, pp. 88-90; Murray, 'Exhortation to Candidates', pp. 59-80. The *Acts of Thomas* is devoted especially to sexual abstinence and the struggle with sexual temptations, seen there as a war against the rule of Satan in the present world.

135. The short text names two colors: πορφύρα and ὑάκινθος with gold threads, νήματα χρυσοῦ. The long text names three colors: πορφύρα, ὑάκινθος, κόκκος, βύσσιναἱμάτιαχρισουφῆ.

136. For the colors of the garments of the high priest, see Exod. 39.22-29; Josephus, *Ant.* 5.231.

137. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, pp. 11-12. Bohak thinks primarily of the temple of Onias, whose history, he believes, is the historical framework of the *Joseph and Aseneth* story—a view I do not share.

138. According the Torah, the Temple curtain was woven from four threads 'of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and ne twined linen'; see Exod. 26.31, 36; 36.35; 2 Chron. 3.14; Josephus, *War* 5.212; *Ant.* 8.72; Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2.87-88. See the description of the tabernacle in Josephus, *Ant.* 3.125-26; of Solomon's temple in *Ant.* 8.72. And cf. *b. Yom.* 71b; Rashi on Exod. 39.3; Maimonides, *Hilkhot Kelei Mikdash* 7.16 (who enumerates the list of materials from which the curtain was made, which does not include gold). Lawrence H. Schiffman, 'The Furnishing of the Temple according to the Temple Scroll', in Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner (eds.), *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March, 1991* (STDJ 11; 2 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), II, p. 626. On the anbivalence of *Baraita de-Melekhet ha-Mishkan* on this point, see Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, p. 113.

The apocryphal Gospel the *Protevangelium of James*,[139] which is dated to the second half of the second century and apparently originated in Syria,[140] tells of the birth of the Virgin Mary, her childhood growing up in the Temple, and the birth of her son, Jesus. The council of priests, we are told, decided to make a curtain for the Temple of the Lord, and for this purpose the priest summoned seven (or eight) 'pure virgins' from the tribe of David, among whom was Mary, she too being 'from the tribe of David and pure before God'. Lots were cast to determine who of these would weave the gold (□□□□□□), the linen (□□□□□□), the silk (□□□□□□), the blue (□□□□□□□), the crimson (□□□□□□), and the purple (□□□□□□□). It fell to Mary to make the purple and the crimson. As she was spinning, an angel appeared and disclosed to her that she would conceive from God and that the son who was to be born would be holy; he will be called Son of the Highest, and his name will be Jesus. The curtain that Mary joined the other virgins to make is the curtain of the new Temple, the heavenly Temple symbolizing the esh and body of Jesus.[141]

Like the Temple curtain in the *Protevangelium of James*, the wings of the bees contain purple, blue, crimson, and gold thread interwoven in linen, and as in the *Protevagelium* they are associated with virgins.[142]

If all this is a single consistent tradition, the bees, on each of whose wings are the colors of the Temple curtain or of the high priest's garments, symbolize the souls of the believers. In the Christian view, each of these believers represents the curtain of the new Temple, which is the body of

139. *Protevangelium Jacobi* 10; Constantin von Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha* (1853; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, repr., 1966), pp. 1-50; Émile de Strycker, *La form la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (Subsidia hagiographica, 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), pp. 108-13; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 48-67.

140. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament,* p. 49. The Syriac version is the earliest we have, and its wide distribution in the Syrian east is proven. Its origin however is disputed. For the main theories, see W. Schneemelcher, in Hennecke and Schneemelcher, ed. R. McL. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, I, pp. 370-88.

141. For the Temple curtain symbolizing the body of Jesus, see Heb. 10.20.

142. Bees' wings, unlike in the *Protevangelium,* do not contain silk (□□□□□□). A similar tradition detailing the threads from which the Temple curtain was woven, and by virgins, appears in *2 Bar. (Syriac Apocalypse)* 10.19, where Baruch instructs 'the virgins weaving [spinning] ne linen and silk with gold of Ophir' to take all those things and to cast them into a re so that it may carry them to their creator for protection from enemies. See further on this tradition in Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, pp. 110-17. The same colors appear in the description of Aseneth's bed (2.15): 'And the bed had a coverlet of purple (□□□□□□□) woven with gold, embroidered with blue, and ne linen (□□□□□□□).' The tower in which Aseneth lives represents the church in paradise; thus, the bed can represent its altar. See more below.

Jesus, and all, as priests, are part of that new Temple. 1 Corinthians 3.16-17 says: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.'[143] Aphrahat develops this notion:

> For Christ is sitting at the right hand of his father; and Christ is dwelling in men. He has authority above and below through the wisdom of his Father and he dwells in many though he is one. Each and all who have faith he overshadows by his power [lit. from himself] and never fails, as it is written: *I will divide him among many* (Isa. 53.12); and though divided among many, he is sitting at the right hand of his Father. He is in us and we are in him.[144]

Brock regards the concept that each individual represents the whole and the whole represents the individual as one of the ideological foundations of asceticism in the early Syrian church. This notion made it possible to see in each believer a church, and to see the church, taken as a whole, as the actualization of the new Temple, which is the body of Jesus.[145] When the virgins and the holy ones make their commitment to celibacy, they, imagined as bees, become a Temple of Christ, and each is a realization of the curtain of his Temple.

All these motifs—crown, struggle, and Temple, all associated with chastity—appear in the following passage in the *Acts of Thomas*: 'Blessed are the spirits of the holy ones (chaste ones), who have taken the crown and gone up from the contest to what is given up to them. Blessed are the bodies of the holy ones which are worthy to become clear temples that the Messiah shall dwell in them.'[146]

This interpretation of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* also accounts for the two classes of bees that appear in the story. In the short text, all the bees surround Aseneth from her feet right up to her head—'and yet more bees, as big as queens, settled on Aseneth's lips' (16.14). In the long text,

143. See also 1 Cor. 6.19; 10.17; *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 221; A. Medebielle, 'Église', *Dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1934), II, pp. 665-68.

144. Aphrahat, *Dem*. 6.10-11 (*Les exposés* I, pp. 391-94; trans. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 71); *Liber graduum* 12.285-304 (ed. M. Kmosko; *Patrologia syriaca*, III [Paris: Firmin Didot, 1926]); Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 9 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 58).

145. Ephrem, *HParad.* 27 (Brock); Brock, *Luminous Eye,* p. 31. The same notion underlies the identi cation of each believer's soul as a bride of Christ and a partner in the marriage festivity of the Eucharist. See Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 125.

146. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 226. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, p. 96; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 74.

'other bees were great and chosen like their queens, and they rose from the damaged part of the comb and encircled Aseneth's mouth, and made upon her mouth and her lips a comb similar to the comb which was lying before the man. And all those bees[147] ate of the comb which was on Aseneth's mouth' (16.19-20). What is the signi cance of the distinction between the two classes of bees? Who are the bees 'as big as queens'?

The distinction, I propose, re ects the distinction in the Syrian church between 'virgins' who never married and 'holy ones' who maintained sexual abstinence within or after marriage. The existence of these two clearly de ned groups within the *Qy mâ* is well documented. Aphrahat, in the sixth *Demonstration*, addresses, in addition to the virgins, another group of ascetics, those who committed themselves to chastity after their marriage, and he instructs them on their proper behavior. Married persons who would live chastely should not live together with their spouses lest they return to their former nature and be considered sinners. Aphrahat refers to the composite group as the '*Qy mâ* of the virgins (*btûlê*) and holy ones (*qaddîšê*)'.[148]

In the rst Pseudo-Clementine *Epistle on Virginity* we read, 'He will give to virgins a notable place in the house of God, which is something "better than sons and daughters" and better than the place of those who have passed a wedded life in sanctity, and whose "bed has not been de led".'[149]

147. It is not clear if 'those bees' refers to all the bees or just to the queen bees. See Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 230.

148. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6. 8 (*Les exposés,* I, p. 386). Fromm ('Yokes of the Holy-Ones', pp. 211-13) argues that Aphrahat freely interchanges the terms *qaddishutha*, 'holiness', and *bethulutha*, 'virginity', and that he does not appear to make sharp distinction between the two: the holy ones and the virgins are constantly lumped together. She states that Aphrahat seems to differentiate between holy and virginal only in reference to Moses, whom he labels 'holy', while the other prophets—Elisha, Elijah, Jeremiah—are virgins. Nor does Fromm nd any evidence in Aphrahat that women can belong to the category of the 'holy ones'. Women's virginity simply elevates them from level of 'daughters of Eve', but it does not bring them to holiness. But she agrees that clearly for some early Syrian Christians this was an important differentiated status. See also in her book *Hermeneutics of Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 131-38.

Against Fromm, scholars have suggested that *qaddishutha* represents nonvirginal celibacy; see Paul Schwen, *Afrahat, seine Person und seine Verständnis des Christentums* (Berlin: Trowitzch & Sohn, 1907), pp. 131-32; Harvey, *Asceticism and Society,* p. 6; Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission to Baptism* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951), p. 22; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism,* I, p. 70. Brock ('Early Syrian Asceticism', *Numen* 20 [1973], pp. 1-19 [10-11]) concludes that while the terms may technically represent different categories of people, they are used interchangeably by Aphrahat. Nevertheless, Brock claims that the category of 'holy ones' includes men and women (both members of a spiritual marriage).

149. Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 4 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 56). In the marty-

Methodius, concerning Rev. 14.1-5, remarks on the 'countless' number of 'holy ones', in contrast to the relatively small number of virgins: 'Here it is also clear that He wishes to teach us that the virgins were restricted to this number, that is, 144,000, from above, whereas the multitude of the rest of the saints is beyond counting.'[150]

These 'queen' virgins, who never married and maintained chastity throughout their lives, constituted the elite of the ascetic Syrian church, as against the other 'holy ones', who maintained chastity but in marriage or in widowhood. If the entire church is the 'covenant' (*Qy mâ*), the queen virgins are the *Qy mâ* within the *Qy mâ*.[151] These virgins can be called 'queens' for they are married to Christ, who is portrayed in Christian sources as a king.[152] Thus Aphrahat: 'O virgins, who have espoused yourselves to Christ, if one of the *bnay Qy mâ* should say to one of you, "May I live with you, and you serve me", you say to him, "I am betrothed to a man, the King, and him I serve".'[153]

rology of Tarbo, the sister of Simon Bar Sabbae, she is referred to as 'virgin', but her sister as 'holy' (*mqaddashta*) (*Acta martyrum* 2.254; see translation and commentary in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient,* p. 73, n. 18). Sozomenos says that the latter was a widow. In the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, the young unmarried women are virgins, but the married women who give up their conjugal life nevertheless achieve 'holiness'. Here *qaddishutha* takes on a separate technical status. See Fromm, 'Yokes of the Holy-Ones', pp. 211-12.

150. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 1.5 (Musurillo, p. 48). Also Eusebius of Emesa, in Winn, 'Church of Virgins and Martyrs', pp. 332, 337. The same distinction is mentioned in *Apoc. Paul* 21: 'These whom you now see are the souls of the married and those who kept the chastity of their nuptials, controlling themselves. But to the virgins and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and those who af icted themselves for the sake of the name of God, God will give seven times greater than these' (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 629).

151. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 11-16, 260; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, p. 72; Burkitt, 'Aphraates and Monasticism', p. 10; G. Nedungatt, 'The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 39 (1973), pp. 191-215, 419-44 (200-205); Jargy, 'Les " ls et lles du pact"', p. 312; Pierre, Aphraate le sage Persan, *Les exposés*, I, p. 103; A.J. van der Aalst, 'À l'origine du monachisme syrien: les "*yihid yë*" chez Aphraat', in A.A.R. Bastiaensen *et al.* (eds.), *Fructus centesimus: mélanges offerts a Gerard J.M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire* (Instrumenta patristica 19; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), p. 323; Grif th, 'Monks, "Singles" and the "Sons of the Covenant"', 159; Grif th, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria', pp. 223, 229, 238.

152. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 270; Aphrahat, *Dem.* 17.2 (*Les exposés*, II, p. 731); John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2.19, 29 (Harkins, pp. 50, 54).

153. Aphrahat, *Dem*. 6.7 (*Les exposés* I, pp. 385-86); Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.7.36, 37 (*PL*, XVI, 199; *NPNF*, X, p. 369).

Why do the bees cling to Aseneth's lips? This is best understood in relation to the Hellenistic-Roman tradition from which the entire imagery of the bees is drawn. Many references are found to bees attaching themselves to the mouths of poets and orators, heralding their poetic or rhetorical skills and purity of expression. In the gymnasium of Zeuxippos at Byzantium were bronze statues of poets with inscriptions. That of Homer reads: 'On Homer's cheeks sat innate modesty, the fellow of the Graces, and a Pierian bee wandered round his divine mouth, producing a dripping honeycomb.'[154] There are stories of Pindar waking to nd a honeycomb on his mouth; likewise of Plato. Sophocles' mouth was said to be anointed with honey, and he was called 'the bee' because he gathered the best from all his predecessors.[155] The Muses, matron goddesses of poetry, art and sciences, were often associated with bees, which could be called 'the winged attendants of the Muses'.[156] The Muses bestowed the gift of sweet speech, poetry and eloquence, and often did so by sending bees to persons' lips. Sophocles, Plato, Virgil and Lucan all were said to have been fed by bees or had their lips touched by honey in their infancy.[157]

This tradition accords well with my interpretation. As in the case of poets and philosophers, pure words emanate from the mouth of Aseneth, who here symbolizes the church. These words are the 'fruit of the lips' which the church creates, as Ambrose puts it, the divine speech, the words of the Lord, the good tidings, the Logos, Christ, which Aseneth, as the church, propagates. In the *Acts of Thomas,* the church is described thus: 'Her mouth is open and it becometh her, wherewith she uttereth all songs of praise. The twelve Apostles of the Son and the seventy two disciples thunder forth His praises in her. Her tongue is the curtain, which the priest raiseth and entereth in.'[158] For John Chrysostom 'the mouth is the opening, the vestibule of the temple which is Christ, and through those portals (i.e. mouths) Christ enters us when we receive communion'.[159] For Methodius, the virgins are 'espoused and wedded to Him that by receiving from Him the pure and fertile seed of doctrine they might collaborate with him in the preaching

154. Ransome, *Sacred Bee*, p. 104.

155. Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Classical Life and Letters; London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 24, 59, 80, 155.

156. Varro, *On Agriculture* 3.16.7 (LCL, p. 503).

157. Ransome, *Sacred Bee*, pp. 103-105; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 168. Bohak (*Joseph and Aseneth,* p. 10) dismisses the Hellenistic-Roman world as an explanation for the honeycomb on Aseneth's lips and asserts that Aseneth's mouth was chosen as the locus of activity of the bees in order to purify it so that Joseph could kiss it.

158. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 1, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 150-51.

159. Chrysostom, *Hom. on 2 Cor*. 30 (*PG*, XLI, 606-607).

of the Gospel for the salvation of all the rest'.[160] So the queen bees that cling to Aseneth's mouth represent the virgins who, by being married to Christ, join in the good tidings and in preaching the gospel. This gospel of Christ is symbolized by the honeycomb that they build with their mouths on the mouth of Aseneth, a representative of the Christian church.

In the short text, the man of God orders the bees to go to their places. 'All the bees left Aseneth and fell to the ground dead. The man then said, "Arise (□□□□□□□□), and go to your places". They all arose (□□□□□□□□□), and proceeded to the courtyard adjacent to Aseneth's tower. And the man said to Aseneth, "Have you observed this?", and she said, "Yes, *my* lord, I have observed it all". And the man said, "So shall be the words I have spoken to you"' (16.15–17.2).

This final episode reflects the eschatological promise implicit in virginity—resurrection and entry into paradise. The bees died but were resurrected (□□□□□□□□□).[161] This interpretation of the Greek verb □□□□□□□ supports the identification of the virgins as members of the *Qyâmâ*. As noted earlier in this chapter, the term *Qyâmâ* is usually explained as a covenant entered into by the virgins and single holy ones of the Syrian church, who undertook sexual abstinence.[162] However, another explanation derives it from the verb , 'to arise,' here in the sense of rising back to life. By this view *Qyâmâ* comprises the 'sons of resurrection', those who have taken on the appearance of angels and whose virginity attaches them to angels in heaven.[163] If so, the bees represent the 'single ones', the virgins and holy ones who, having committed themselves to celibacy and entered the *Qyâmâ*, merit resurrection in paradise.

After coming back to life, the bees fly into Aseneth's courtyard, described in detail earlier in the book:

> And there was a great court all round the house, and a wall round the court, very high and built of great rectangular stones. And there were four gates to the court, overlaid with iron; and eighteen strong young men-at-arms used to guard each one of them. And along the wall inside the court every kind of beautiful tree that produces fruit had been planted; and the fruit on

160. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 3.8 (Musurillo, p. 67).

161. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek–English Lexicon* (rev. H.S. Jones; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9th ed., 1996), s.v. □□□□□□□

162. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 14; Nedungatt, 'Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church', pp. 203, 438.

163. Peter Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 95; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966), pp. 41-44; Griffith, 'Monks, "Singles" and the "Sons of the Covenant"', pp. 150-52; Griffith, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria', 238; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 189.

> every one of them was ripe, for it was harvest time. And on the right of the court there was an ever-bubbling spring of water, and beneath the spring a great cistern that received the water from the spring and out of which a river owed through the middle of the court and watered all the trees in it (2.17-20).

This description—the wall with its guards, the spring at the right of the court, the river owing through the center, the plenitude of fruit trees—corresponds to the descriptions of paradise in Christian sources.[164] These have their origin in several sources: the 'garden locked' in Song 4.12; the description of the eschatological Temple in Ezek. 47.1-12, in which 'water was issuing from below the platform of the Temple eastward . . . but the water was running out at the south [or right] of the altar'; the description of the Garden of Eden in Gen. 2.9-10 as having 'every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad', and a river issuing from Eden to water the garden. In similar terms Christian sources describe paradise, identi ed as the heavenly Jerusalem, as a walled area[165] through which ows 'the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, owing from the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev. 22.1). The river ows in its channel down the main street of the city, and 'on either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month' (Rev. 22.2). As in Aseneth's courtyard, fruit-laden trees grow there. Compare, for instance, the description of paradise in the *Odes of Solomon*:

> And he took me to his Paradise wherein is the wealth of the Lord's pleasure. I contemplate blooming and fruit bearing trees and self grown was their crown. Their branches were ourishing and their fruits were shining, their roots were from an immortal land. And a river of gladness was irrigating them, and the region round about them in the land of eternal life . . .[166] and I said, Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your land, and who have a place in your Paradise. And who grow in the growth of your trees, and have passed from darkness to light . . . Indeed, there is much room in your Paradise. And there is nothing in it which is barren, but everything is lled with fruit (*Odes* 11.16-23).

164. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 116-18; Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', p. 140.

165. See Ephrem, *HParad*. 4.1 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 13); I. Ortiz de Urbina, 'Le paradise eschatologique d'après S. Ephrem', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 21 (1955), pp. 467-72 (468); *Apoc. Abr.* 21; *2 Enoch* 8; 30; *1 Enoch* 24; Greek and Latin *Life of Adam and Eve*'.

166. The opening sentences of this passage are found only in the Greek version. See James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Odes of Solomon: The Syriac Texts* (Texts and Translations, 13; Pseudepigrapha Series, 7; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 50.

Or this, in the *Apocalypse of Paul*: 'And I looked round that land and I saw a river owing with milk and honey and at the edge of the river were planted trees full of fruit. And each tree was bearing twelve times twelve fruits in the year, various and different' (*Apoc. Paul* 22).[167]

The abundance of fruit in Aseneth's courtyard, described as we have seen as paradise, is intended for the virgins and holy ones symbolized by the bees. Similarly Aphrahat writes, 'Paradise has been promised to the blessed, to virgins and to the "holy", and the fruits of the tree of life have been given as food to the faithful and to virgins'.[168]

This scene, then, expresses the ful llment of the pledge inherent in virginity and celibacy. The bees—dying, being restored to life and ying to the courtyard of Aseneth—represent the souls of the virgins, for whom the reward of virginity is entry into paradise, the city of refuge, which is personi ed in the image of Aseneth.[169] The long text relates:

> The man said to the bees, 'Go off to your place', and all the bees rose and ew and went away into heaven (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠). And those who wanted to injure Aseneth fell to the ground and died (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠). And the man stretched out his staff over the dead bees and said to them 'Rise you, too, and go away to your place'. And the bees who had died rose (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠) and went into the court adjoining Aseneth's house and sought shelter on the fruit bearing trees' (16.22-23).

Who are the bees that wanted to injure Aseneth, and how are we to understand the difference between the bees that ew up to heaven and those that found refuge in Aseneth's courtyard?

Burchard suggests the possibility of an allegorical explanation of these bees as the Israelites, with this scene being a parallel to the episode of the onslaught by the wicked sons of Jacob against Aseneth and the forgive-

167. In Hennecke and Schneemelcher, ed. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, II, p. 773. The Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns (Hodayot)* col. XVI (E. L. Sukenik, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1955], col. VIII), lines 4-26, contains the image of 'trees of life in the secret source', of which it is said, 'Their roots extend to the gully, and its trunk opens to the living waters to be an everlasting spring. On the shoots of its leaves all the animals of the wood will feed, its trunk will be pasture for all who cross the path, and its leaves for all winged birds' (trans. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar).

168. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6. 6 (*Les exposés* I, p. 381); Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.8.45 (*PL*, XVI, 201, *NPNF*, X, p. 370); Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Prelude (Musurillo, pp. 40-41).

169. Portier-Young, 'Sweet Mercy Metropolis', p. 140: The bees represent the inhabitants of the city, chosen ones, who have sought God's mercy and gained it through the person of Aseneth.

ness they receive despite their betrayal (28.10-16).[170] But these bees may represent male and female members of the *Qyâmâ* who, despite their vow of celibacy, relapsed and defiled their virginity, thereby degrading the unity and integrity of the virgin church. There is evidence of a decline in the morals of celibates in the fourth century, a phenomenon harshly censured by Syrian Church Fathers.[171] Eusebius of Emessa describes virgins who did not maintain their virginity in terms similar to those in *Joseph and Aseneth*. He pictures virgins who did maintain virginity as flying heavenward, and those who did not as falling from heaven to earth, just like the bees who attacked Aseneth.[172] The ascension to heaven indicates the identity of the virgins with angels; the fall from heaven indicates the rejection of angelic life in favor of the earthly life of mortals.

Alternatively, the bees that attacked Aseneth may represent sects and doctrines opposed to the mainstream of the Syrian church, menacing its integrity. The hallmark of Edessan Christianity was a series of lengthy theological contests waged by different heterodox groups, as Ephrem (c. 306–373) realized when he arrived there after Rome ceded his native Nisibis to the Persians in 363. Much to Ephrem's dismay, he discovered that Christians of his kind 'were lost among a throng of followers of other teachers of a more or less "heretical" bent' with each group taking the name of its founder. Ephrem was particularly vexed by the followers of Bardaisan, Marcion and Mani, but so-called Arians and Jewish Christians were also important factors on the religious landscape.[173] Ephrem admonishes them for failing to prepare for the future kingdom and calls for harmony and unanimity in the earthly church, as in the heavenly church.[174]

A reference to bees that would harm Aseneth, a symbol of those who would impair the integrity of the church, accords with the emphasis in the long text on the desired unity of the church, which I noted in the earlier

170. Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 230 n. h2. And see further below.

171. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 7. 20 (*Les exposés* I, p. 431); Sebastian Brock, 'Ephrem's Letter to Publius', *Mus* 89 (1976), pp. 261-305 (286-87); Griffith, 'Monks, "Singles" and the "Sons of the Covenant"', p. 155.

172. E.M. Boytaert (ed.), Eusèbe d'Émèse, *Discours conservés en Latin* (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense, 1953), Homélie 7.26; Homélie 7.11, pp. 193, 182-83; Amand de Mendieta, 'La virginité chez Eusèbe d'Émèse', p. 806 (ne tombe donc pas du ciel sur la terre), p. 807 (parce qu'elle est tombée); Basil, *Epistles* 46.

173. Nicole Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority in the Pseudo-Clementines* (WUNT, 213; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), pp. 182-84.

174. Ephrem, *HFid*. 6.315-30 (CSCO, 212; Scr. Syri, 88, p. 48); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 244, 90. Among the ministers of Satan, Theodore of Mopsuestia counts Mani, Marcion and Valentinus; Arius, Eunomius and Apollinarius (Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, p. 40).

discussion of the honeycomb and its restoration by the man of God.[175] In either case, resurrection and life in the paradise of Aseneth's courtyard are promised to these as well.

If Aseneth's courtyard represents paradise, the tower standing at its center could be the church in paradise, where the heavenly bridal chamber is located. The tower is described as follows:

> Pentephres had a tower in his house, and it was large and very high. And the top storey had ten rooms in it. The first room was large and pleasant; and it was paved with purple stones, and its walls were faced with precious stones of different kinds. And the ceiling of that room was of gold; and within it were ranged the innumerable gods of the Egyptians, in gold and silver. And Aseneth worshipped all these; and she feared them and offered sacrifices to them. The second room contained all the finery for Aseneth's adornment and treasure chests. And there was much gold in it, and silver, and garments woven with gold, and precious stones of great price, and fine linens. And all her girlish ornaments were there. The third room contained all the good things of the earth; and it was Aseneth's store-house. And seven virgins had the remaining seven rooms, one each . . . And Aseneth's large room, where she spent her time, had three windows. One window looked out over the courtyard to the east: the second looked to the north, onto the street; and the third to the south. And a golden bed stood in the room, facing the east. And the bed had a coverlet of purple woven with gold, embroidered with blue, and fine linen (2.1-15).

Kraemer observed that Aseneth's three rooms constitute a temple.[176] Ancient temples were first and foremost the dwellings of gods, whose presence was manifested by their statues. One of Aseneth's rooms is explicitly said to have served as a temple to the Egyptian gods, in which Aseneth performed sacrifices and libations (2.3-5). In Kraemer's view, Aseneth in the course of her repentance purifies the temple so that the man of God may stay in it.

However, a tripartite structure is also a feature of the church as an embodiment of paradise. Paradise is described by Ephrem as composed of three distinct levels: the peak, on which God descended; the garden, in which the tree of life grows, surrounded by a fence and now guarded by a cherub; and the lowest level where Adam sojourned after the fall. The tripartite division is the model for the three parts of the Temple and a symbol of the three categories of members of the church as Ephrem knew it—the 'victors' (the ascetic *nassihê*) in the upper part, the righteous (*zaddiqê*) in the middle part and the penitents (*tayyabê*) at the bottom. The three parts are equated with the three decks of Noah's ark—for animals, for birds and for

175. See section 1 in this chapter above.

176. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 99, 116, 119-20; Lieber, 'I set a table before you', p. 67.

Noah himself—and with Mount Sinai at the giving of the Torah. When the people stood at the foot of the mountain, Aaron and the priests stood closer in the middle of the mountain, and Moses at the top near God. The key to the divisions, he says, is the church:

> The mystery of the levels of the garden of life He pre gured in the Ark and at Mount Sinai. Symbols of paradise and its disposition he has depicted for us; established, fair and desirable in every way, in its height and its beauty, in its fragrance and variety. It is the heaven of all riches; in it the Church is symbolized.[177]

Christian sources also depict the church as a tower. In the *Shepherd of Hermas* the seer has a vision of 'a great tower built upon the waters, of splendid square stones', and itself built square. The woman interprets the vision for him: 'The tower which you see building is myself, the Church.'[178] As in the *Shepherd of Hermas,* the tower can symbolize heavenly Jerusalem, also built square, with its upper reaches hidden in heaven.[179] The text of *Joseph and Aseneth* emphasizes that, on Joseph's arrival at Aseneth's home, only he entered, whereas his entourage, 'strangers', remained outside, reinforcing the notion that Aseneth's home is a Temple whose purity must be kept intact.

Consistent with this interpretation of Aseneth's tower as representing the church is the description of Aseneth's bed, the cover of which is woven and embroidered in the colors of the Temple curtain. Its sanctity and purity are accentuated by saying that no man or woman ever sat on it (long text, 2.9).[180] Also signi cant are the directions of the windows in Aseneth's room, the place where she safeguards her virginity. These are east, north and south, but not west, which in Christian tradition is the seat of Satan. The number

177. Ephrem, *HParad.* 2.11-13 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 8); trans. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* pp. 258-59; see further, Ephrem, *HEccl.* 34.4 (CSCO, 198; Scr. Syri, 84, p. 85), where the three classes of Christians are symbolized by the three cities of refuge. There they are called 'the lower', 'the middle' and 'the perfect'; see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 259, 309; Murray, 'Theology of Symbolism', p. 9; Daniélou, 'Terre et paradis', pp. 454-55, 466.

178. Hermas, *Vis.* 11 (III.3).3-4; *Sim.* 9.13.1. See also Ephrem, *HNat*. I, 44 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 6); Aphrahat: 'He is the Tower on which many build' (*Dem*. 14.39 (*Les exposés* II, p. 669); Ephrem, *HNat*. 3.15 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, p. 23); Ephrem, *Diatessaron Commentary* (EC 14.2; Syr. p. 114, Arm. pp. 185-86; SC, 121, p. 242); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 219-20.

179. Chavasse, *Bride of Christ,* p. 114.

180. A similar room became a sacred space of the infant Mary, whose mother, Anna, (according to the *Protevangelium of James* 6.1) turned it into an altar and allowed nothing ordinary or impure to pass through it (Eliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 59; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 116).

of guards, eighteen at each of the four gates, totaling seventy-two, is a theologically signi cant number, in Syrian Christianity especially. According to the *Doctrine* of Addai, the apostle of Edessa, there were seventy-two apostles, of which Addai was one, and in Syriac literature this became the accepted number of apostles.[181].

The highly symbolic episode of the bees ends with a promise of the fullment of the hopes implicit in it. The man of God asks Aseneth, 'Have you observed this?', and she says, 'Yes, *my* lord, I have observed it all'. The man said, 'So shall be the words I have spoken to you'. The emphasis placed on the seeing of the symbolic events accords with the Christian perception of spiritual theophanic visions.[182] Oscar Cullmann observed the coupling of sight and belief in the Fourth Gospel, where sight is a condition for belief, and the three verbs 'to see' (□□□□), 'to believe' (□□□□□□□) and 'to know' (□□□□ □□□□) are closely intertwined (14.7, 9, 17).[183]

What did Aseneth see that she should believe? What promise was implicit in the episode of the bees? As I have argued, this episode serves to support and encourage virginity. Its message is that only those who have preserved their virginity, who have maintained perfect sexual abstinence and purity, earn the promise of resurrection and entrance into paradise, into the bridal chamber in the heavenly city of refuge.

The idea that resurrection is assured only for virgins is re ected in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*: 'You have no part in the resurrection unless you remain pure, and do not spoil the esh, but keep it pure'.[184] As H.C. van Eijk puts it, 'The resurrection is presented as the other-worldly remuneration for those who keep their esh pure: continence has become a condition

181. According to Murray (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 133, 173), this number re ects Edessa's claim to apostolic foundation. Manichaean hymns also record seventy-two apostles. See *History of John the Son of Zebedee* 23; *Acts of Judas Thomas* 1, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 150-51. This number, based on the number of nations in Genesis 10 in the Septuagint, is also the number of apostles in some of the manuscript authorities, including Syriac, for Lk. 10.1 and 17. In Luke, the genealogy of Jesus from Adam covers seventy-two generations, expressing the notion that all the nations of the world since Adam are reunited in Christ; see Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri*, p. 29; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 205.

182. Peder Borgen, *Bread From Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup, 10; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), p. 175.

183. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 40-43. See further Jn 1.14; 20.8, 29; *2 Bar.* 29.6-7: 'And those who have hungered shall rejoice: moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day'.

184. *Acts Paul and Thecla* 12 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 366).

of the resurrection . . . resurrection is reserved to those who have practiced continence'.[185]

The final scene in the story of Aseneth's conversion is the burning of the honeycomb and the fragrance ([illegible]) that fills the room. In the discussion of the honeycomb in this chapter, I have shown that the fragrance that emanates from the honeycomb confirms its identification with the body of Jesus. The perfumed aroma is that of the sacrifice of Jesus and is also a remnant of the scent of the heavenly paradise materialized in the body of Jesus on earth. This scent returns heavenward to the heavenly, perfect paradise by means of the burning of the incense.

The burning of the honeycomb also confirms the identification of Aseneth's room with the bridal chamber. In Syriac sources the heavenly bridal chamber is described in terms appropriate to a Holy of Holies, in the center of which is an incense altar: 'Her (the church's) bridal chamber is lit up and full of the fragrance of salvation. A censer is prepared in its midst'.[186] So too in a homily of Balai:

> The place is adorned, crowned with glory, for this is the festal day of the wedding; new is the bride chamber, Christ is the Bridegroom, the 'Watchers' are exulting, men are giving thanks. The altar is established, robed in truth; the priest is standing, he kindles the fire. He takes bread and gives the Body, he receives wine and distributes the Blood. The altar of stones supports our hope and the pure priest calls on the Spirit. The gathered people cries out 'Holy!', the King hears and makes mercy flow.[187]

The burning of the honeycomb may also symbolize an invitation to the Holy Spirit to descend as fire, which effects the consecration of the bread and wine. In one of his hymns, 'On Faith', Ephrem writes about fire:

> The mystery symbol (*raza*) of the spirit is in it [i.e. in fire]
> And the type of the Holy Spirit,

185. H.C. van Eijk, 'Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality', in Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), pp. 209-35 (212). The eschatological aspect of the scene is emphasized in the long text, where the cells ([illegible]) of the honeycomb from which the bees emerged are said to number [illegible] [illegible] 'ten thousand (times) ten thousand and thousands upon thousands'. This expression is commonly used in Christian literature to indicate the millenarian end of days (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.33.3-4). It also indicates paradise, for in millenarian thinking the messainic kingdom is imagined as a return to paradise, where those who are resurrected will have their final dwelling.

186. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 1, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,* Syr., pp. 176.11–177.15; trans. pp. 150-52.

187. Balai, *Hom.* 32.14-16; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 272; Griffith, 'Spirit in the Bread', p. 232.

who is blended with water,
so it yields forgiveness,
and is kneaded into bread,
so it becomes the *Qûrb nâ*.[188]

By means of the holy sacri ce, *Qûrb nâ*, the church summons the re and the spirit to the bread and the wine, and before the eyes of the believer it transforms them into the esh and blood of Christ.[189] In the burning of the honeycomb, symbolizing the body of Jesus, and the fragrance rising to heaven, the story accentuates the unity of the church, earthly and heavenly, around the sacri ce of his body, and thus the scene comes to its end.

In this chapter, I have tried to offer a solution to one of the most elaborate riddles in *Joseph and Aseneth*, namely the scene of the honeycomb and the bees. Contrary to the current view, which cannot provide any detailed explanation whatsoever, I have shown that it accords well with the idea of virginity and sexual abstinence, which in my opinion is the heart of this composition.

The image of the bees extends and develops the identity of the virgins, who will nd salvation in the city of refuge. Although these bees can be interpreted as representing the souls of the righteous believers, who, having assumed the Christian faith, are to be reborn and will be immortal, I prefer to see the bees as a symbol of the virgin church or the virgins' souls in the church, which, like the bees, are chaste and sexually abstinent. These virgins, like all converts to Christianity, don white clothes after being baptized. By taking the vow of virginity in baptism they win the crown of the pure and eternal Lord, which equips them for the challenges to and battles for virginity. When these virgins make their commitment to celibacy, they become a Temple of Christ, and each of them is a realization of its curtain. To these virgins, who are married to Christ and join in the good tidings, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* promises resurrection in paradise, represented by the courtyard of Aseneth's house, and entry into the heavenly bridal chamber, represented by Aseneth's tower. Although Aseneth's conversion is supposed to be a model for all pagans to repudiate idolatry and to join the church, as we saw in the rst chapter, in this chapter it additionally calls on them to take a vow of celibacy and become 'virgins'.

188. Ephrem, *HFide* 40.10 (CSCO, 73; Scr. Syri, 88, p. 132). In the Hebrew Scriptures the descent of re from heaven during a sacri ce is an indication that the sacri ce was accepted by God (1 Kgs 18.38; 2 Chron. 7.1).

189. Grif th, 'Spirit in the Bread', pp. 231-32; Brock, *Luminous Eye,* pp. 104-105.

3

Joseph as the Prototype of Christ

1. Joseph as the Sun God Helios

The gure of Joseph as it is portrayed in *Joseph and Aseneth* conforms well to the Christian interpretation of the work that I propose. Joseph is depicted by with main features and typology of Jesus Christ.[1] Like Jesus, Joseph is called 'son of God' (6.3, 5; 13.13), and 'eldest son of God' (18.11; 21.4, 20);[2] he is likewise the 'bridegroom' and is virginal and chaste.[3]

This depiction is expressed most clearly in Joseph's comparison to the sun god Helios in the passage recounting his rst arrival at Aseneth's house:

1. On Joseph as a prototype of Jesus, see Aphrahat, *Dem*. 21.9 (*Les exposés* II, pp. 819-21); Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 3.18.3 (SC, 399, III, pp. 159-61; *PL*, II, 346); Ambrose, *Jos.* (*PL* XIV, 646); *Spir.* 3.124 (*PL* XVI, 806); Hippolytus, *Ben. Is. Jac*. 12; 26 (ed. Briere-Maries-Mercier; PO, 27, 1-2, pp. 52, 102); Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', p. 24; P. Fabre, Le développement de l'histoire de Joseph dans la littérature et dans l'art au cours des douze premieres siècles', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'école française à Rome* 39 (1921–22), pp. 193-211 (194-95); Argyle, 'Joseph the Patriarch', pp. 199-201; M. Schapiro, 'The Joseph Scenes on the Maximianus Throne in Ravenna', *Gazette des beaux arts*, 40 (1952), pp. 27-38 (27); Jean Daniélou, 'La typologie biblique traditionnelle dans la liturgie du Moyen Age', *Settimane del Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo di Spoleto* (1962–63), pp. 141-61 (150-54); Jean Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux IIe IIIe siècles* (Bibliothèque de théologie: Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée, 2; Paris: Desclée, 1961), pp. 237-48; de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* pp. 98, 99, 123; O'Neill, 'Joseph and Aseneth', p. 195 (Joseph is the type of the Messiah); Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* p. 420; K.S. Heal, 'Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature', *BYU Studies* 41(2002), pp. 29-49 (29).

2. At one point Joseph is even equated with God. In 4.2, when Joseph arrives in Heliopolis, Aseneth dresses for the occasion. Her parents are delighted to see her 'adorned as the bride of God (□□□□□ □□□□)'.

3. See Chapter 2, section 1 above on Jesus as a bridegroom, as a virgin, and on the heavenly bridal chamber; see also Pseudo-Clementine, *Epistles on Virginity* 6; 15 (*ANF,* VIII, pp. 56, 65).

> And the gates of the court that looked east were opened, and Joseph came in, sitting in Pharaoh's viceroy's chariot. And there were four horses yoked together, white as snow, with golden reins; and the chariot was covered over with gold. And Joseph was wearing a marvelous white tunic, and the robe wrapped around him was purple, made of linen woven with gold: there was a golden crown on his head, and all round the crown were twelve precious stones, and above the stones twelve golden rays; and a royal scepter was in his right hand. And he held an olive branch (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠) stretched out, and there was much fruit on it. And Joseph came into the court, and the gates were shut. And strangers, whether men or women, remained outside, because the gate-keepers had shut the doors. And Pentephres came, and his wife, and all his relatives, except their daughter Aseneth; and they made obeisance to Joseph with their faces to the ground. And Joseph got down from his chariot and extended his right hand to them (5.4-11).

As scholars have observed, the description of Joseph's arrival resembles that of the Greek sun god Helios, or his Roman equivalent, Sol Invictus, who daily rides his four-horse chariot (*quadriga*), traversing the sky from his palace in the east to the end of the west. From his head emanate shining rays of light.[4]

The image of Joseph as sun is stated explicitly by Aseneth. Seeing him, she exclaims, 'Behold the sun is come to us from heaven in his chariot and has come into our house to-day. But I was foolish and reckless to despise him, and I spoke evil of him and did not know that Joseph is the son of God.' She does not know where to hide since she had spoken ill of Joseph, whereas nothing is hidden from him 'because of the great light that is in him' (6.3-7).

Kraemer associates the image of Joseph as sun with the image of the sun/Helios and its iconographic representations in the Roman world of the third and fourth centuries, particularly their relation to Neoplatonic cosmology. She notes the similarity between the depiction of Joseph in our work and that of Helios in the zodiac mosaics in Israel from the third to the sixth century, especially those at Beth Alpha and Hamat Tiberias.[5] Joseph rides a

4. F.J. Dölger, 'Die 12 Apostels als Corona duodecim radiorum und die Zwölfstrahlenkrone des Sonnengottes', *Antike und Christentum* 6 (1940), pp. 36-51 (40-41); Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 82-83; Buchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 208 n. k; Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', p. 402. On Helios in Greek and Roman mythology, see Virgil, *Aen.* 12.161-64 (LCL, pp. 311-13); Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Folio Society, repr., 1996), I, p. 151.

5. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 156-66; Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Bollingen Series, 37; 13 vols.; New York: Pantheon, 1953–68), I, pp. 248-57; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 80; Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', p. 402.

chariot drawn by four white horses (*quadriga*) with golden reins; Helios in the Beth Alpha mosaic does likewise. Joseph wears a white tunic covered by a purple robe woven with gold; Helios in the Hamat Tiberias mosaic is similarly garbed; both robes are cinched by a broad decorated belt. Joseph wears a golden crown from which rays emanate; Helios in Hamat Tiberias wears a golden crown, and in both mosaics rays emanate from his head. Kraemer singles out more similarities between Joseph and the Hamat Tiberias Helios: Joseph, wearing a crown, greets Aseneth's family with his right hand, in which he holds a scepter and an olive branch; Helios in Hamat Tiberias, wearing a crown, raises his right hand and holds something in his left hand (a celestial globe and a whip). This is in contrast to the Beth Alpha Helios, who does not wear a crown, does not extend his right hand, and holds nothing.

Kraemer relates the raised right arm of Helios in Hamat Tiberias to a similar gesture of the Roman emperor as seen on third- and fourth-century coins. The emperor is shown riding a chariot, his right hand raised and a globe held in his left. The raised right hand has been interpreted as symbolizing imperial power and identi cation with Helios, Sol Invictus, and the cosmic ruler.

These mosaic oors imply that Greek-speaking Jews, especially those in the synagogues of the land of Israel in the late Greco-Roman period, were under the impress of the image of Helios. Kraemer explains this by referring to two attempts by emperors in Rome to establish a cult of the sun as the dominant state religion. The rst attempt was by the emperor known as Elagabalus (reigned 218–222), who took on that name to aunt his devotion to that god; the second was by Aurelian (reigned 270–275), who established the cult of Sol Invictus. Although neither attempt enjoyed much success, the image of the sun continued to play an important role in imperial Roman religion. Devotion to the sun is expressed in third-century literature, including that of the Neoplatonist writers.

Kraemer links these endeavors to promote this cult to the Roman Empire's political, social, and economic instability in the third century, and to the efforts by the emperors to restore order and unify the empire. She notes the ties between solar theology and imperial ideology in the third and fourth centuries and shows how beliefs about the sun, moon, and stars were part of a cosmology in which the heavenly and earthly worlds were intimately bound together. Solar imperial theology connected the religion of the sun with the belief that the sun created time. The emperor, as the embodiment of the sun, was considered the source of time, hence he and the empire were timeless. Just as the sun is eternal and above time, so the emperor and the empire were permanent and eternal. Joseph's similarity to the Hamat Tiberias Helios, dated to the third or fourth century, and Helios's

relation, in turn, to the iconographic imagery of the emperors and to the solar theology of the same centuries, date Joseph's description in *Joseph and Aseneth* to the third or fourth century. Kraemer summarizes:

> Thus, taken together with the many other elements of imperial solar iconography, I think it highly likely that this gesture of Joseph's, whatever its initial origin may have been, here conveys third- and fourth-century connotations of imperial power associated speci cally with Helios.[6]

Still, Kraemer concedes that differences are to be found between these images and the portrayal of Joseph in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Twelve rays emanate from Joseph's crown—only seven from Helios in both Hamat Tiberias and Beth Alpha;[7] Joseph's crown is set with twelve precious stones—no stone is ever mentioned in connection with Helios's crown; Joseph holds an olive branch—Helios is nowhere described in Roman iconography as doing this; in the synagogue mosaics he holds no branch at all.[8] Joseph does not hold a globe in his left hand, as Helios does in the Hamat Tiberias mosaic.[9] Joseph's raised right hand can be equally interpreted as a gesture of greeting, as Kraemer herself admits—unconnected with the raising of the hand in the imperial solar iconography.

I accept Joseph's identi cation with Helios and the connection to the Roman imperial cult of the sun in the third and fourth century, which Kraemer posits.[10] Nonetheless, as in the case of the images of the bees and the honeycomb, I believe that the image of Joseph is best understood in a Christian context. Here again we see the frequent use by Christians of images and symbols taken from the surrounding non-Christian world and the manner in which they wove these symbols into their own theology. Joseph is pictured as Helios, but he is also the prototype of Jesus Christ, who is regarded

6. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 166.

7. Admittedly, Helios is portrayed elswhere with twelve rays. On seven rays as an expression of folk belief and of the cult of Mithra, see Dölger, 'Die 12 Apostels', pp. 49-50.

8. Though Kramer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 165) found a parallel to the branch in several coins with represention of Helios Oriens, the branches there are palm or laurel.

9. Kraemer would nd an allusion to such a globe in the cross on the honeycomb (16.10-11). For my interpretation of that honeycomb, see Chapter 2, section 1 above. In any case, there is no match to Helios's holding the globe in his left hand.

10. In contrast to J.J. Collins ('Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', p. 111), who says of the description of Joseph as Helios that 'it is more in the character of an embellishment'. The connection with the cult of Helios is further supported by the choice of Heliopolis, 'City of the Sun', as the locale of the story in *Joseph and Aseneth* . See also *T. Jos*. 18.3. Heliopolis was the center of the cult of Ra, the sun god. See Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 202.

by Christians as an embodiment of the sun. This Christian context alone can account for the similarities between Joseph and the Helios iconography along with differences between them.

Abundant sources liken Jesus to the sun, beginning with the New Testament. Jesus is 'the dawn from on high' that will 'give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death' (Lk. 1.78-79). He is 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (Lk. 2.32). The prophecy of Isa. 9.1, 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned', is applied to Jesus (Mt. 4.16). He is 'the true light, which enlightens everyone' (Jn 1.9). Jesus is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel as saying of himself, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life' (Jn 8.12). His face shines 'like the sun shining with full force' (Rev. 1.16), and he is the lamp lighting the heavenly Jerusalem so that 'the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it' (Rev. 21.22-25; see also 2 Cor. 4.4). The roots of the image are in the Hebrew Bible, where the gure of the sun for the God of Israel is frequent (Pss. 19.6-7; 72.17; 84.12; 104.19; Isa. 60.1-31; Mal. 3.20). These images were interpreted by Christians as referring to Jesus, especially the text in Mal. 4.2: 'But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings' (NRSV).[11]

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, writes:

> If the sun as consort of and participant in nature is so pleasing, how much goodness is there to be found in that 'Sun of Justice'? If the sun is so swift that in its rapid course by day and night it is able to traverse all things, how great is He who is always and everywhere and lls all things with His majesty![12]

Christians likened Jesus to the shining sun symbolizing resurrection. Clement of Alexandria writes,

> Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall enlighten thee. The sun of the resurrection begotten before the morning star granting life by the light of his rays.[13]

11. Eusebius, *Dem. ev*. 4.10; 7.3 (*PG*, XXII, 280, 560-61); cf. Pss. 72.5, 17; 19.6-7; 104.19. I provide here the NRSV translation (rather than the NJPS), as it better represents the understanding re ected in the Church Fathers.

12. Ambrose, *Hex.* 4.1.2 (*PL*, XIV, 188); Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 91.

13. Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.*9.84.2 (ed. M. Marcovich; Supplements to *Vigiliae christianae,* 34; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 126; Ambrose, *Exp. Ps. 118*, sermo 8.57 (*PL*, XV, 1318).

The image of Jesus as sun is central also in Syriac Christian literature.[14] In the *Odes of Solomon* Jesus is compared to the sun: 'He is my sun, and his rays have lifted me up and his light has dispelled all darkness from my face' (15.2-3; 11.13). Cyrillona, in his sermon on the cruci xion, writes, 'His person shone like the sun and his limbs became like rays.'[15]

Hugo Rahner observed the profound linkage of the solar folk cults in the Hellenistic-Roman world and the mystery religions with the Christian concept of Jesus as sun. He explains the process by which Christianity, competing with the sun cult, adopted it and applied it to Jesus.[16] Like Kraemer, he locates the process in the period of calm preceding the persecutions of Christians under Decius and Diocletian in the third century. During that century the Helios cult grew steadily, as manifested in Neoplatonism, the cults of Isis and of Mithra and the establishment of an imperial solar cult. The church accordingly felt the need to give cultic expression to its own *mysterium* of the sun. Toward the end of the third century, Christians in Rome apparently began to celebrate the birth of the Lord on December 25, the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar, the day on which the cult of Sol Invictus was celebrated in the Roman Empire, just as Christians in the East celebrated Epiphany on January 6. 'Both are the Church's answer to that spiritual hunger that lies at the bottom of the sun-cults.'[17] Under the in uence of the image of Helios, the east, where the sun rises, was perceived as a symbol of life, in contrast to the west, where the sun sets, perceived as the gates of Hades and hence the kingdom of Satan and the demons. Lactantius writes, 'As light belongs to the East, and as light is the cause of life, so darkness belongs to the West and in darkness is decline and death'.[18]

The advent of Jesus was perceived as the 'rising' of the sun in the heavens, ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠, 'the dawn from on high', symbolizing redemp-

14. Helios represents the deity in the Syrian, and more generally the Roman, world from the third century on. See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, VIII, p. 214.

15. Cyrillona, *Crucif.*, 291-314, in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 169; Ephrem, *HVirg.*, 5.9: Ephrem compares John to a lamp. It is the sun, not a lamp, that is the true 'bridegroom of the eye', and it is Christ, not John—in the lamp the eyes see a *likeness of the sun*, its real bridegroom.

16. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, pp. 89-150, following the classic study of F.J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum* (Liturgiegeschichtliche Forschungen, 4/5; Munster: Aschendorff, 2nd edn, 1925). See also H. Leclercq, 'soleil', *DACL,* XV, pp. 1577-85.

17. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 147.

18. Lactantius, *De Mundi Creatione*, Oratio 5.5 (*PG*, LVI, 477); Athanasius, *Expositio in Psalmum*, 67.34 (*PG*, XXVII, 303).

tion (Lk. 1.78, based on Isa. 9.1).[19] Justin Martyr, adapting Ps. 72.17 for his argument, writes, 'His name shall rise up for ever above the sun (⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠ ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠); and in Him shall all nations be blessed.'[20] Melito of Sardis writes, 'King of Heaven, prince of creation, sun of the eastern sky who appeared both to the dead of Hades and to mortals upon earth, he, the only true Helios, arose for us out of the highest summits of Heaven.'[21] The Greek term for dawn, or east (⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠), is the one used by the Septuagint for צמח, 'plant' or 'branch', as in the expressions 'the man the Branch', 'my servant the Branch', 'the righteous Branch' (Zech. 6.12; 3.8; Jer. 23.5) associated with the offshoot of the Davidic line. This expression, with its double meaning, is transferred to Jesus, as both an offshoot of the house of David and the sun, which rises in the east (Mt. 2.2; 24.27; Lk. 1.78; Rev. 7.2; 16.12).[22]

Like Helios, Jesus is described as riding a chariot. The chariot (*markabta*) in Syriac sources is a common metaphor for the cross, for instance, in Ephrem: 'How fair is the Cross, the vehicle of the Son of its Lord.'[23] Firmicus Maternus describes Jesus as the sun, rising at his resurrection:

> But see, after three days there rises a more glorious dawn, the sun has the beauty of his earlier light restored to him. Christ, the almighty God, stands forth illuminated by yet brighter rays. The redeeming Godhead is full of joy and the multitudes of just and the holy accompany his triumphal chariot.[24]

Zeno of Verona calls Christ 'the driver of the everlasting chariot' and describes him as a victorious Helios swiftly traversing the sky in his shining chariot.[25] In another of his Easter sermons, he portrays Jesus in a chariot

19. For the interpretation of Lk. 1.78 in Christian solar symbolism, see Dölger, *Sol Salutis*, p. 155.

20. Justin, *Dial.* 121.1.2.

21. Melito of Sardis, Fragment 8b, *On Baptism* 4, in *Melito of Sardis, On Pascha* (trans. S.G. Hall; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 73; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 11.114.1-4 (GCS, 1, p. 80).

22. Justin Martyr connects the idiom in Zech. 6.12 (with the Greek verb ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ in the LXX) to Num. 24.17, understanding the coming of Christ as a rising star (*Dial.* 100, 106, 121, 126 [*PG*, VI, 709, 724, 757, 769]); Melito of Sardis, Fragment 8b.4 (SC, 123, p. 232). See also the Greek verb ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠, used to translate the verbs צמח and זרח in connection with Messiah: Heb. 7.14; 2 Pet. 1.19; Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.1 (LCL I, p. 250).

23. Ephrem, *HParad*. 6.5 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 20); *HFid.*, 17.8 (CSCO, 154; Scr. Syri, 73, p. 68); *HCrucif*., 6.12 (CSCO, 248; Scr. Syri, 108, p. 66); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 128 no. 3.

24. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 24.4 in Firmicus Maternus, *L'erreur des religions païennes* (trans. R. Turcan; Paris: Société d'édition, 'Les Belles Lettres', 1982), p. 133.

25. Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* 2.49 (*PL*, XI, 504-505).

drawn by four horses and surrounded by twelve stars.[26] In several sources Jesus appears as riding a chariot of clouds to his marriage feast.[27]

The in uence of Helios and the solar cult entered Christian art and liturgy as well. A mosaic dated to 250–300 CE, found in a mausoleum under St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, pictures Christ driving the chariot of the sun. His head is crowned with a halo of seven rays; he wears a *paludamentum* over a belted tunic, holds a globe in his left hand, and extends his right hand in a gesture apparently similar to that of Helios at Hamat Tiberias.[28] In the view of Jean Daniélou, the presence of a chariot in this mosaic, alongside classic scenes of salvation—baptism, resurrection in the form of a dove, the good shepherd, the sherman—indicates that the chariot too is an expression of Christian eschatological hopes.[29]

Joseph's crown with its twelve precious stones and its twelve rays can be well understood in light of the portrayal of Christ as the sun surrounded by the twelve apostles, as he is described by Zeno of Verona in the passage quoted above: Christ is 'the sun surrounded by a crown of twelve rays, that is, the twelve apostles'. The twelve precious stones on the crown may symbolize the twelve signs of the zodiac, which surround Christ and are also a symbol of the apostles.[30] Clement of Alexandria says, 'For him, the apostles have been substituted for the twelve signs of the Zodiac; for since these govern generation, the apostles are the directors of regeneration.'[31] Other sources describe Jesus as a king wearing a star-studded crown arriving on the day of his marriage. Rahner quotes a poem on the mystery of the sun at Easter, when an anonymous preacher addresses his audience: 'Sol, the focal center of all the stars, lifts up his face and lets it shine, and like a king in his glory, sets on his head the diadem of the stars, for this is his wed-

26. Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* 2.52 (*PL*, XI, 508); Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 121.

27. So in the Martyrium of Martha (Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, p. 70); Ephrem, *HParad.* 6.23 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syri, 78, p. 24).

28. L.E. Hudec, 'Recent Excavations under St Peter's Basilica in Rome', *Journal of Bible and Religion* 20 (1952), pp. 13-18 (13).

29. Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, 86. In frescoes in the catacombs of SS. Peter and Marcellinus, Helios is portrayed in a chariot drawn by two horses (Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, p. 85).

30. The association of the twelve signs of the zodiac with the twelve apostles is not as strange as it might seem. On a tenth-century ivory box in the treasury of the monastery of Quedlinburg, above the representation of each of the twelve apostles is a semicircle with a sign of the zodiac. See Dölger, 'Die 12 Apostels', p. 37.

31. Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. ex Theod.* 25.2; Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, pp. 129, 131-32.

ding day and the day of joy for his heart.'[32] The association of Jesus, surrounded by twelve apostles, with the sun, emerges in a passage of Ephrem, for whom the thirteen days from December 25, the winter solstice, to January 6, Epiphany, symbolize Christ and the twelve disciples:

> The sun conquers and the steps by which it approaches the zenith show forth a mystery. Lo, it is twelve days since he began to mount upward and today is the thirteenth day. It is the perfect symbol of the Son and his twelve apostles. The darkness of winter is conquered, to show that Satan is conquered. The sun conquers, so that all may know that the only-begotten Son of God triumphs over all.[33]

The image of Joseph as the sun with twelve rays, re ecting, so to speak, Christ and the twelve apostles, is related also to Joseph's dream in Genesis. In Christian interpretation this establishes Joseph as a prototype of Christ, as clearly shown in a passage of Hippolytus:

> Speaking about the dream in Gen. 37.9-10 about the sun, the moon and the eleven stars bowing down to Joseph, he tells us that Joseph's dream became reality when the eleven apostles together with Joseph and Mary adored Christ on the Mount of Olives in the time between his resurrection and ascension . . . Joseph was only the type of him who was to come.[34]

So Joseph is portrayed in *Joseph and Aseneth* as Helios, but as the christological Helios. Only the connection between Joseph and Jesus can make sense of both the similarities and the differences between the classical image of Helios and the portrayal of Joseph in this work.

2. Joseph as an Olive Tree

Joseph's identity as a prototype of Christ explains the olive branch, heavy with fruit, which Joseph holds in his right hand. An olive branch, as we

32. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 111; Pseudo-Augustinus, *Sermo* 164.2 (*PL*, XXXIX, 2067).

33. Ephrem, *HEph.* 1.11, 12 (Lamy, I, p. 10); Dölger, 'Die 12 Apostels', pp. 36-37. See a similar description of the church in Rev. 12.1.

34. Hippolyte de Rome, *Sur les benedictions d'Isaac, de Jacob et de Moïse* (PO 27.1-2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1954); M. de Jonge, 'Hippolytus' 'Benedictions of Isaac, Jacob and Moses' and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', in de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (NovTSup, 63; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 204-19 (208); Daniélou, 'La typologie biblique traditionnelle', pp. 141-61;V. Hillel, 'Naphtali, a Proto-Joseph in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *JSP* 16 (2007), pp. 171-201 (192). On Hippolytus's interpretation of the blessings of Isaac and Jacob, see Joseph L. Mariès, SJ, 'Le Messie issu de Lévi chez Hippolyte de Rome', *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1951), pp. 381-96: the blessings fall to the one born of Judah and to his pre guration.

have noted, is nowhere found in connection with the pagan Helios; but it is a symbol of Christ in the writings of the Syrian Church Fathers Aphrahat and Ephrem.[35]

> For oil gives rest to all.
> The olive served Christ, who gives life to all,
> Depicting Him in its abundance, its branches and leaves:
> With its branches it praised Him—through the children
> With its abundance—through Mary
> With its leaf again, through the dove which served Noah His type;
> With its branches it depicted the symbol of His victory,
> With its abundance it depicted the symbol of His dying
> With its leaf it depicted the symbol of His resurrection,
> The Flood disgorging it, as Death disgorging Christ.
> The face which gazes on a vessel lled with oil
> Sees its re ection there, and he who gazes hard
> Sets his spiritual gaze thereon
> And sees in its symbols Christ.
> And as the beauty of Christ is manifold,
> So too the olive's symbols are manifold.
> Christ has many facets, and the oil acts as a mirror to them all:
> From whatever angle I look at the oil,
> Christ looks out at me from within it.[36]

For Ephrem and Aphrahat the image of Christ as a light-giving olive tree combines with his image as the tree of life:

> But with the opening of the door of Salutation, darkness departed from the mind of many; with the rising of the light of the intellect, and the fruiting of the Light-giving Olive, in which is the Signing of the Mystery of Life.[37]

The olive symbolizes Christ, represented by the tree of life in paradise and is a source for the sacrament. Ephrem writes,

35. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* pp. 115, 116, 125; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 268: 'While other explanations for Joseph bearing an olive branch may be plausible, the plethora of images common to Aseneth and fourth-century sources may also suggest that a strong candidate is the olive's association with Christ, here represented as Joseph.'

36. Ephrem, *HVirg.* 7.13-14 (CSCO, 223; Scr. Syri, 94, pp. 27-28); Brock, *Luminous Eye,* p. 59. See also Hagith Sivan, review of *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), by Ross Shepard Kraemer, in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 1998.12.02, online at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/1998/1998-12-02.html, p. 3.

37. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 23.3 (*Les exposés* II, pp. 880-81).

> The Olive represents the mystery of Christ for from it come milk for infants, water for young men, and oil for the sick. In the same way Christ, the 'Olive', gives through his death water, blood and oil.[38]

The fruit-bearing olive branch and the scepter in Joseph's hand as well as details of his clothing link his portrait to that of the coronation of the high priest in the *Testament of Levi* (8.1-10). Levi tells of seven white-garbed men who commanded him: 'Arise, put on the robe of the priesthood and the crown of righteousness and the breastplate of understanding and the garment of truth and the plate of faith and the turban of (giving) a sign and the ephod of prophecy.' He goes on to describe how this was done:

> And each of them carried these things and put them on me and said: From now on become a priest of the Lord, you and your seed for ever. And the rst anointed me with holy oil and gave to me a staff of judgment. The second washed me with pure water and fed me with bread and wine, most holy things, and put round me a holy and glorious robe. The third clothed me with a linen vestment like an ephod. The fourth put round me a girdle like a purple robe. The fth gave to me a branch of rich olive ([illegible]). The sixth put a crown on my head. The seventh put on me a diadem of the priesthood. And they lled my hands with incense that I might serve as priest to the Lord.[39]

Like Joseph, Levi holds a scepter and an olive branch weighty with fruit, wears a purple robe and bears a crown. In each case the context includes a meal of bread and wine, and an unguent. De Jonge interprets the passage in the *Testament of Levi* as describing 'a type of the priesthood of the Christian believers. . . . The author describes the consecration of a high priest, but makes it clear that this is no more than a shadow of the initiation of the Christian believers.'[40]

If the two traditions are related, the portrayal of Joseph may allude to a function of Joseph as priest. It would then be possible to interpret the twelve stones on Joseph's crown as an allusion to the stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel on the breastplate of the high priest.[41] George J. Brooke points out that 'Joseph appears in royal dress with priestly overtone; some elements of his attire re ect the description of the priestly robes of

38. Éphrem de Nisibe, *Commentaire de l'évangile* 21.11 (trans. L. Leloir, *Commentaire de l'évangile concordant ou Diatessaron* [SC, 121; Paris: Cerf, 1966], p. 380).

39. Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* p. 149.

40. De Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, p. 44. Similarly T.W. Manson ('Miscellanea Apocalyptica III Test. XII Patr.: Levi viii', *JTS* 48 [1947], pp. 59-61) maintains that 'detailed study of the passage suggests that it is a Christian interpolation', which originated in the Syrian church.

41. Sivan, review of *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 3.

Exodus (28; 29.1-9; 34.2-31 [LXX 36.9-38]; Sir. 45.6-26)'.[42] He further nds the depiction of Joseph as the sun and as the son of God parallel to texts from Qumran in the priestly context.[43] If the description of Joseph displays elements of the traditions on the priesthood, then Joseph in *Joseph and Aseneth* serves as the prototype of Jesus as king but also as priest.[44]

3. *The Man of God as a Re ection of Joseph*

Joseph's function as a prototype of Christ is re ected in the description of his 'double', the wondrous man of God who appeared from heaven.

> And as Aseneth nished her confession to the Lord, lo, the morning star rose in the eastern sky ([illegible]). And Aseneth saw it and rejoiced and said, 'The Lord God has indeed heard me, for this star is a messenger and herald of the light of the great day. And lo, the heaven was torn open ([illegible]) near the morning star and an indescribable light appeared. And Aseneth fell on her face upon the ashes; and there came to her a man from heaven and stood at her head; and he called to her, 'Aseneth'. And she said, 'Who called me? For the door of my room is shut and the tower is high: how then did anyone get into my room?' And the man called her a second time and said, 'Aseneth, Aseneth'; and she said, 'Here am I, my lord, tell me who you are'. And the man said, 'I am the commander ([illegible]) of the Lord's house and chief captain ([illegible]) of all the host of the Most High. [In the long text: I am the chief of the house of the Lord ([illegible]).][45] Stand up, and I will speak to you.' And she looked up and saw a man like Joseph in every respect, with a robe and a crown and a royal staff. But his face was like lightning, and his eyes were like the light of the sun, and the hairs of his head like ames of re, and his hands and feet like iron from the re. And Aseneth looked at him, and she fell on her face at his feet in great fear and trembling (14.1-10).

In Kraemer's view, the image of the man of God plays a central role. She attempts to demonstrate that the axis of the story is Aseneth's encounter with the man of God, not her conversion:

> The perception of Aseneth as fundamentally a tale of conversion has so dazzled earlier scholars, including myself at one point, that we have largely failed to see the encounter between Aseneth and the angelic g-ure for what it is: a tale of the adjuration of an angel by a woman. This

42. George J. Brooke, 'Men and Women as Angels in Joseph and Aseneth', *JSP* 14 (2005), pp. 159-77 (166-67).

43. 4Q541, 4QApocryphon of Levi, frag. 9.

44. For Christians as holy priests, see 1 Cor. 2.5, 9; for Jesus as a priest, cf. the image of Melchizedek in Hebrews.

45. In the long text, 14.8 and 15.12x.

> is not to say, of course, that the Aseneth stories do not in fact recount a transformative experience that we might well consider 'conversion'. But the assumption that the Greek stories are primarily a narrative of religious conversion (dated, moreover, to the early second century C.E. at the latest) has obscured our ability to recognize paradigms and elements that ancient readers, I suggest, would instantly have perceived.[46]

Kraemer examined magical and mystical writings, such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*PGM*) from Egypt and the Jewish mystical works such as *Sefer harazim* and *Hekhalot* literature, in which instructions are given on how mortal humans may affect the appearance of heavenly beings for the purpose of enlisting them in accomplishing their desires in matters of love, money, and intrigue. Many of the elements in the story she argues, especially the details of Aseneth's 'repentance' and the encounter with the angelic double of Joseph, are explicable in that context.

Kraemer takes particular note of the similarity between the prayer to the sun god Helios in *Sefer harazim*[47] and the practical measures offered there to make Helios appear, and what Aseneth does—precisely 'an adjuration of the Sun, which brings her true knowledge of hidden things, life and death, her own identity and future'. A recurrent pattern runs through all these encounters—separation, liminality, transformation and reintegration—including that of Aseneth, which sheds light on many details of the Aseneth story.

Kraemer then relates the encounter of Aseneth with the man of God, her prayers and the image of the man of God to the *Hekhalot* literature (*2* and *3 Enoch*), by which Kraemer identi es the man of God as the angel Metatron. The image of Metatron is familiar from late Talmudic literature and from *3 Enoch*—a heavenly transformation of Enoch, who functions as an agent of God in creation, as an intermediary between the heavenly and earthly worlds, as the guide of the ascending visionary to heaven, as the revealer of celestial secrets to humankind, as ruler and judge of the world. He is the *logos* and the embodiment of divine glory.[48] In Kraemer's view, like Metatron, the man of God is an intermediary between heaven and earth,

46. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 90-91.

47. *Sefer Harazim* 4.25-43 and *PGM* cited by Kraemer, p. 93.

48. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 125. The gure of Metatron appears twice in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. ag*. 14b-15b, *b. Sanh*. 38b) in polemics against *minim*, namely Christians and Gnostics, and against a dualistic theology, to explain away biblical passages that could be taken to imply a dual godhead. In a third passsage (*b. 'Abod. Zar*. 3b), Metatron appears as an elementary school teacher prior to God's taking up that occupation. Metatron does not appear in earlier land of Israel Talmudic sources—neither in the Jerusalem Talmud nor in the early Palestinian *midrashim*. The apocalyptic image of Metatron was presumably in uenced by Christian literature. See Efron, *Formation of the Primary Christian Church*, pp. 257-61.

and between Aseneth and Joseph. He reveals the mysteries to Aseneth and ascertains that she understands them. His physical appearance is similar to Metatron's, and, like the latter, he is the director of God's household. Finally, by such comparisons Kraemer seeks to con rm the date she assigns to *Joseph and Aseneth*, namely the third or fourth century CE.[49]

The identi cation by Kraemer of Aseneth's encounter with the man of God as the focus of the work, the presentation of the work as 'a tale of adjuration of an angel by a woman' and the use made of Jewish and Greek mystical literature have sparked justi ed criticism.[50] First, it has been argued, the mystical meeting of Aseneth and the angel is only an episode in the story of Aseneth's marriage and conversion, not its central point. Second, contrary to what is usual in adjuration stories, Aseneth does not perform her actions to summon or force the appearance of an angel. On the contrary, the appearance of the angel is a complete surprise for Aseneth, who seemingly has not expected a heavenly visit. Though *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Hekhalot* literature evince some similarities, they also differ: above all, in *Joseph and Aseneth* no one ascends to heaven and no one is witness to a vision of, or takes part in, a tour of the upper heavens. The featuring of a woman, Aseneth, runs counter to the prevalence of male gures in that literature. Moreover, Kraemer's attempt to date *Joseph and Aseneth* to the third or fourth century on the grounds of the similarity to the mystical literature is problematic, as the dating of the latter is itself a matter of dispute.[51]

49. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 89-154; for more in this direction, see Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', pp. 394-413; Kee, 'The Socio-Religious Setting and Aims of Joseph and Aseneth', *SBLSP* 1976 (ed. George MacRae; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 183-92.

50. J.J. Collins, 'Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?', pp. 109-10; Brooke, 'Men and Women as Angels', pp. 174-75; Sivan, review of *When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 3. For criticism of the use of mystical literature, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 207-15.

51. The magical papyri are dated from the rst to the fth century; the *Hekhalot* literature is variously dated from the beginning of the Talmudic period to the Middle Ages. See M. Margalioth, *Sepher Harazim: A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic Period* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Louis M. and Minnie Epstein Fund of the American Academy for Jewish Research; Yediot Aharonot Press, 1967), p. 23; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU, 14; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), p. vii; James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature* (JSJSup, 70; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), pp. 2, 22; P.S. Alexander, 'The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch', *JJS* 28 (1988), pp. 156-80 (165); Alexander, 'Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch', *OTP,* I, pp. 225-29; Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (SUNY Series in Judaica; New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 7-8. To overcome this dif culty Kraemer suggests the hypothetical possibility that *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Hekhalot*

Mainly, however, Kraemer's use of the mystical literature and her placing the encounter with the man of God at the center of the work cannot, I believe, explain its plot as a whole, its theology or its symbolism, in all its details. Kraemer considers *Joseph and Aseneth* a series of 'Greek stories' not necessarily connected to each other. She is thus free to observe similarities of various elements in the work to ideas and philosophical doctrines of one sort or another prevalent around the Greco-Roman world. But she is unable to construct a complete, coherent picture accommodating all the details and currents of the story. Consequently, Kraemer cannot reach an unambiguous conclusion as to the author's religious identity, because, for her, each part of the story points in a different direction.

Who is that mysterious gure whom Aseneth meets? In the Greek manuscripts he is called 'a man',[52] a man of light coming from heaven, or a man of God. He is a man that appears in heaven and is heralded by the morning star in the east. He comes from an indescribable great light, descends to earth in the form of a mortal and appears to Aseneth. A very similar description is given in the *Sibylline Oracles*: 'When a star shall appear coming from heaven in the midst of our days, equal to the sun in splendor, then shall be the hidden coming of the Word of the Most High, having esh like mortals' (12:30-34).[53]

There too a star in heaven, brilliant like the sun, heralds the arrival of another being, in this case the Word of God, which descended to earth in the form of a mortal. If these two descriptions, both appearing in the Hellenistic Pseudepigrapha, are related, the man of God in *Joseph and Aseneth* may be identi ed as the 'Word of the Most High, having esh like mortals'. A similar account, connecting the appearance of an indescribably brilliant star with the appearance of God in mortal form, is given by Ignatius of Antioch:

> A star in the sky shone brighter than all the stars. Its light was *indescribable* and its novelty created astonishment. All the other stars, along with the sun and the moon, formed a chorus to that star, and its light surpassed all the others. And there was a disturbance over whence it had come, this

literature are not contemporary: 'The signi cant similarities between the two need only be evidence of contact, direct or otherwise, between the author or authors of Aseneth and the traditions in the hekhalot materials. It may also well be that both Aseneth and the Hekhalot materials themselves draw on broad religious sensibilities of the late Mediterranean, which they then express in the precise forms appropriate to the concerns of the authors and their communities' (*When Aseneth Met Joseph,* p. 111).

52. For the manuscript variants see Kraemer*, When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 146, n. 102, and in the inroduction above.

53. Trans. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 217; Kraemer also identi ed this divine gure with the Logos of God, but without connecting it to the image of Christ. See further below.

> novel thing, so different from the others. Hence all magic was vanquished and every bondage of evil came to nought. Ignorance was destroyed and the ancient realm was brought to ruin, *when God became manifest in a human way*, for the newness of eternal life.[54]

The man of God can thus be understood as a heavenly re ection of Joseph/Christ, the 'Word of the Most High, having esh like mortals', a simulacrum of Joseph in every way—clothing, crown and scepter.

The images of the morning star appearing in the east and of the indescribable great light like the sun are related to the images of Christ. From the prophecy of Balaam—'A star rises from Jacob, a scepter comes forth from Israel' (Num. 24.17), and from the story of the Magi—led from the east to the infant Jesus by a star (Mt. 2.1-12), Christians developed the image of Christ as a star. Daniélou provides early evidence for the depiction of the Messiah as a star.[55] Like the star in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the star symbolizing the Messiah is said to be exceptional in its brilliant light, to be similar to the sun and to symbolize the messianic light which disperses the darkness. So in the *Testament of Levi* a passage tells of the coming of the new priest:

> His star shall arise in heaven like that of a king, beaming with the light of knowledge, as the sun beams forth the day . . . *He shall shine like the sun on the earth, and shall remove all darkness from under heaven* (18.2-4; cf. *T. Jud.* 24.1).

'Star' and 'Morning Star' became appellations of Christ. In Rev. 22.16 Jesus says of himself, 'I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.' Justin reports that 'Star' is an epithet for Christ: 'He is called Star (□□□□□□) by Moses [Num. 24:17] and Dayspring (□□□□□□□) by Zechariah [6:12].'[56] As Daniélou writes, 'the point to observe here is that the star becomes a symbol of the Messiah himself, as a sign of the light he is to shed upon the world'.[57]

The appearance of the man of God is connected to that of Christ in several other ways. Like Christ, 'whose eyes are like blazing re, whose feet are like

54. Ignatius, *Eph.* 19.2-3 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, pp. 238-39; emphasis added).

55. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 217-21; Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1984), pp. 161-63.

56. Justin, *Dial.* 126.1; 106.4 (*PG*, VI, 769, 724; *ANF*, I, pp. 262, 252); *1 Apol.* 32 (*PG*, VI, 380; *ANF*, I, p. 174); Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. 3.9.2 (*PG,* VII, 870; *ANF,* I, p. 423). The prophecy of Balaam is applied to the Interpreter of the Law in *Damascus Document* 7.19; is used as a promise of victory in the *War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness* (11.6); and is included in the 4QTestimonia (12). This prophecy served as the basis for Rabbi Akiba's homily on the name Bar Kosba, rendering it Bar Kokhba (*y. Ta'an.* 4.8 68d; *Lam. R*. (Vilna) 2.4 (Buber p. 99).

57. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 218.

burnished bronze' (Rev. 2.18), the man of God is described as one whose face 'is like light, his eyes shine like the sun, his hair is like ames, and his limbs are like red steel' (14.1-10).[58] Another similarity is the manner in which the man of God ascends heavenward. The short text reads, 'Aseneth saw what looked like a chariot of re being taken up into heaven towards the east' (17.6), but in the long text he ascends on a four-horse chariot: 'And Aseneth saw (something) like a chariot (□□□□) of four horses traveling into heaven towards (the) east. And the chariot was like a ame of re, and the horses like lightning. And the man was standing on the chariot' (17.7).

This description clearly alludes to Elijah's ascent to heaven in a storm riding 'a ery chariot and ery horses' (2 Kgs 2.11). For Church Fathers this scene symbolized the Ascension of Christ.[59] This in turn connects the ascension of the man of God in a four-horse chariot with Helios and his four-horse chariot, for Christians also associated Elijah's chariot with that of Helios. Henri Leclerq associated Elijah ascending to heaven in a ery chariot in the presence of witnesses (Elisha and the prophets) in wall paintings in cemeteries and on sarcophagi with similar representations of Helios in the classical world and in the cult of Mithra.[60] Such depictions of Elijah as Helios are found in frescoes in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellina and in the Cemetery of Domitilla in Rome. The scene became a symbol of the eternity of the soul and even for resurrection.

As the heavenly re ection of Joseph/Christ, the 'man of God' *may be* identi ed with an angel also. This identi cation is very common among the interpreters of *Joseph and Aseneth* and was so understood by some later versions of the text.[61] Kraemer points out his connection to the star seen by Aseneth as a messenger (□□□□□□□) of God (14.2); the similarity of his appearance to Isa. 58.8, which links dawn rising to God's acceptance; and the af nities of the man of God's appearance to biblical and parabiblical scenes. But she stresses also his association with the primal Adam and

58. Both descriptions are based on the theophany in Ezekiel (1.26-28; 8.2). As in Ezekiel's theophany, in *Joseph and Aseneth* there is a heavenly, godly gure with the form of a man; as in Ezekiel's theophany, there is a description of the upper part of the body followed by a description of the lower part. In both Ezekiel and *Joseph and Aseneth* the light surrounding the gure is emphasized, and in both passages the person who sees the vision falls to the ground in fear and awe. See also Dan. 10.5-12; Standhartinger, 'From Fictional Text', p. 306.

59. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 14. 25 (*PG*, XXXIII, 857b; *NPNF*, VII, p. 101).

60. H. Leclercq, 'Helios', *DACL,* VI, pp. 2147-51.

61. Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth,* p. 177; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 225 n. 14k; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 178; Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', p. 32.

with the speech of God himself. From all this she identifies the angel with the Logos of God.[62] Yet this divine angel can also represent Christ, who appears in Christian sources as an angel and the emblem of God's Logos.[63]

Accordingly, in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* Christ is called to assume the form of the angels of the firmament and of Sheol. On his descent through the heavens he takes on the form of the angels there, and his own becomes like theirs (10.17-31). The same idea appears in *The Epistle of the Apostles* (13):

> While I was coming from the Father of all, passing by the heavens . . . And passing by the angels and archangels in their form and as one of them. . . . And the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel followed me until the fifth firmament of heaven, while I appeared as one of them.[64]

This identification can explain the man of God's refusal to reveal his name, as in the long version:

> Why do you seek this, my name, Aseneth? 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 chief of the house of the Most High. And all names written in the book of the Most High are unspeakable, and man is not allowed to pronounce nor hear them in this world, because those names are exceedingly great and wonderful and laudable (15.11-12).

An angel's refusal to reveal his name has parallels in Jewish tradition, as Kraemer has pointed out (see Judg. 13.18). But the idea that the names of the angels are not known on earth has also parallels in the Christian tradition. In the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (7.4-5) Isaiah asks the angel who took hold of him and led him by hand to the seven heavens, 'Who are you? And what is your name? And where are you taking me up?' The angel replies, 'When I have taken you up through all the stages and have shown you the vision on account of which I was sent, then you will understand who I am; but my name you will not know, for you have to return into this body.' In 9.5, after Isaiah saw Christ he is told: 'You cannot hear his name until you have come up from this body.' People who are still in their earthly body are not allowed to know the names of the heavenly creatures who

62. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 31-35, 120-24; Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth,* pp. 2-3.

63. In the Bible the 'angel of God' is identified with God himself: Gen. 7ff.; 21.17-21; 22.11-18; 31.11-13; Exod. 3.2ff.; Judg. 2.1-5; Gerhard Kittel, '[illegible]', *TDNT*, I, pp. 74-87 (77).

64. *Epistle of the Apostles* 13 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 563-64). Justin *1 Apol.* 6; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 117-19; Bagatti, *Church from the Circumcision*, pp. 179-84.

belong to Christ, whose name itself is newly written and is unknown (Rev. 2.17; 19.13).[65]

This angel can be identi ed with the archangel Michael. He appears in Jewish and Christian sources, like the man of God in *Joseph and Aseneth*, as the 'archistrategos' of all the host of the Most High; in some sources he represents the Word, God's Logos.[66] The assimilation of Michael with the Word can explain why Aseneth thought that the honeycomb came into being as he spoke (□□ □□□□ □□□□□□) and came out of his mouth (16.6). Since the honeycomb represents the Logos, the Word that is identi ed with Christ, the angel proclaims and promulgates it by his own mouth. The identi cation of this angel as Michael can also unravel his role in the story. Michael appears in Christian sources, sometimes alone and sometimes with the archangel Gabriel, as charged to lead the righteous souls to paradise or to heaven. In *4 Baruch* (*Paraleipomena Jeremiou*) Jeremiah prays before his death: 'And may Michael, the archangel of righteousness who opens the gates for the righteous, be (the object) of my attention until he leads the righteous in' (9.5).[67] In the *Apocalypse of Paul* (*Visio Pauli* 14), which narrates the death of the just man and his eternal destiny, God says, 'Since you had mercy, I also have mercy. Be consigned, therefore, to Michael, the angel of the alliance and be led to paradise of joy, that you may become coheir with all the saints.'[68] In the *Shepherd of Hermas* Michael appears as the great and glorious angel 'who has the authority over his people and guides it. For he is the one who gives them the law (□□□□□), in the hearts of those who believe. And so he watches over those to whom he has given the law, to see if they have kept it.'[69]

In the same way, the man of God leads Aseneth the righteous to her paradisiacal life. As he guides her toward the faith, he instills Christian law and faith into her heart. Like Michael in *2 Enoch*, who took Enoch, undressed him of his earthly attire, anointed him with delightful oil, and clothed him in a vesture of glory (22.4-9), so the man of God took Aseneth and disrobed

65. For the book in heaven, see Chapter 2, section 2 above.

66. Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', pp. 32-34; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 178; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 225 n.k. For Michael as 'archistrategos,' see, e.g., *2 En.* 22.6; 33.10; *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 1.3;4.24; *3 Bar.* 11.4; *T. Abr.*1.4; etc. Daniélou shows that in early Christian sources Michael is identi ed with Christ, or the Word (Logos) which represents Christ (*Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 121-27). See also Bagatti, *Church from the Circumcision*, pp. 179-86.

67. On the Christian origin of the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou,* see Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, pp. 203-37.

68. *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* 21-23; *Apoc. Pet.* 13; see Bagatti, *Church from the Circumcision*, pp. 179-84

69. Hermas, *Sim*. 8.3.3 (LCL, pp. 364-65).

her of her earthly clothing and commanded her to don garments of glory and instructed her to anoint herself with the ointment of purity.[70]

The man of God *may* also be identi ed with the gure of the bishop, perceived in the early church as *angelus ecclesiae* (Rev. 1.20). The bishop proclaims Christ's *logos* through the church and is the apostles' successor, the intermediary between the deity and the faithful, and their high priest, leader and king.[71] Functioning as a bishop, the man of God leads Aseneth from darkness to light (15.13) and instructs her in the process of joining the church by baptism and the Eucharist. Batiffol contemplated identifying the heavenly gure with a bishop, but he dismissed the notion because he thought that a bishop is never characterized as 'archistrategos'; he preferred his identi cation with Michael. But the title 'Chief of the House', by which the man of God presents himself to Aseneth, does have a parallel, namely *rab bayta*, or steward. This was a common epithet applied to Jesus and the bishops in the Syrian church, and it appears in this sense in Aphrahat, Ephrem, and the *Didascalia*.[72]

In conclusion, I have tried in this chapter to demonstrate that Joseph is presented in *Joseph and Aseneth* as a prototype of Jesus Christ, especially in his image as sun or in the form of Helios the sun god. Similarly based on the image of Christ is the depiction of the 'man of God', Joseph's heavenly double, who can be identi ed also as an angel, the archangel Michael, or as a bishop, who assumed human form and descended to earth to lead Aseneth to her paradisiacal life in the church.

70. See also the place of Michael in the two stories 'The Miracle of St Michael in Chronos' and the 'Life of Saint Cononus', in Batiffol, 'Le livre de la Prière d'Aseneth', pp. 32-34; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 288-89.

71. Connolly, *Didascalia apostolorum,* p. xxxviii; *Didascalia* 8 (Connolly, pp. 80, 86-88, 92, 93); Ignatius, *Magn.* 6.1 (LCL, *Apostolic Fathers*, I, p. 247); Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety,* pp. 79, 105-109.

72. Aphrahat, *Dem*. 14.9, 16, 38 (*Les exposés,* II, pp. 616-17, 630, 668); *Didascalia* (Connolly, pp. 78, 81, 13-14, 131); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 193, 194. In the visual arts, the identi cation of Joseph/Christ as a bishop appears in the Joseph scenes on the Maximianus Throne in Ravenna. Schapiro ('Joseph Scenes', 27-38) explains these scenes as re ecting not only the notion that Joseph was a prototype of Jesus, as had been suggested earlier, but also that Joseph was a prototypical gure of the bishop. Peter Chrysologus, an early bishop of Ravenna (432–450), in a sermon at the consecration of a bishop, chose as his subject the virgin birth, likening Joseph, Mary's spouse, to the bishop as the spouse of his bride the church (*Sermon* 175, *PL*, LII, 592, 593).

4

Aseneth as Joseph's Bride: The Marriage of Christ and the Church

1. *The Bridal Garment: 'like light in appearance'*

The figures of Joseph and Aseneth are now developed further as symbols of Christ and the church, the latter represented as the bride entering into eternal marriage with Christ the groom.[1] The marriage of Joseph and Aseneth is the climax of the story, from both the literary and theological point of view. It brings the mystical bond between Christ and the church to its purest expression. The story goes like this:

> When Joseph had arrived at her home, Aseneth went into her room and opened her wardrobe, and she took out her first robe,[2] like light in appearance ([illegible]),[3] and she put it on. And she tied a resplendent royal girdle round her waist—and this girdle was of precious stones. And she put golden bracelets round her hands, and golden boots on her feet, and a costly necklace about her neck; and she put a golden crown upon her head, and in the crown, in front, were the costliest of stones [In the long text: a large sapphire surrounded by *six* costly stones]. And she covered her head with a veil. And she said to her maidservant, 'Bring me pure water from the spring.' And Aseneth bent down to the water in the basin; and her face was like the sun, and her eyes like the rising morning star (18.3-7).

The depiction of Aseneth as a bride is based on the representation in Christian sources of the church, or of the Christian community, as the bride of Christ, and it is part of the legacy of the New Testament.[4] This representa-

1. *Joseph and Aseneth* 4.8; 15.9. On the eternal marriage between Christ and the church, see *Acts Thom.* 8, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, p. 261.

2. Referring to 15.10

3. In Christian sources [illegible] means 'any bright light'. See H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek–English Lexicon* (rev. H.S. Jones; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9th ed., 1996), s.v.

4. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* pp. 131-42; E. Stauffer, '[illegible], [illegible],' *TDNT*, I, p. 655. The classic texts for the theology of 'the bride of Christ' are 2 Cor. 11.2; Eph. 5.22-23; Rev. 19.7-9; 21.2, 9, 10; 22.12, 17. Christian sources from the

tion has its roots in the prophetic passages in the Hebrew Bible in which the people of Israel, the land of Israel, or Zion, is depicted as the bride of God.[5] In the Hebrew Bible the image symbolizes the covenant between God and his people, which he promises to keep, like the covenant between bride and groom.[6] Yet despite its biblical roots, most if not all postexilic Jewish writings wholly disregard the metaphor.[7] But in Christian theology the covenant between God and Israel pre gures the more complete covenant between Christ and the church, which will reach perfection at the end of days, at the parousia. The image has a central role in the nal scenes in Revelation describing the bride of the lamb preparing herself for marriage, for the 'wedding feast of the lamb', to be held at the second coming of Christ.[8]

Just as Aseneth, preparing for her wedding, is described as adorned with a belt of precious stones, golden bracelets, golden boots, a costly necklace, and a crown set with a large sapphire surrounded by six precious stones, so is the church described as 'a bride adorned'. The seer in Revelation sees the church, identi ed as 'the holy city, the new Jerusalem . . . coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21.2). The 'bride adorned' is a recurrent motif in Christian sources for the church as bride. Following Isa. 61.10, 'like a bride bedecked with her nery', Ephrem says that the bride adorned with her nery is the church: '"And like a bride adorned": The Bride is the Church which is adorned with the beauty of all nations. Further, the ornaments which beautify the church are these: innocence, purity, chastity.'[9] In his hymns on the resurrection Ephrem describes the marriage of Christ and the church in detail. He tells how in the month of Nisan God took his bride out of Egypt and betrothed her at Sinai. However, because she was unfaithful, God divorced her and chose her daughter instead as his bride. Ephrem depicts the Gentile church as dressed in elaborate royal garments:

> The King's Son, when he saw her wickedness, came and betrothed to himself the Church of the Gentiles, whose love and trueness he had tested. He

rst several centuries on the image of the church as the bride of Christ are collected in Chavasse, *Bride of Christ*. See also Chapter 2, section 1 above.

5. For example, Isa. 49.18; 61.10; 62.4-5; Jer 2.1; Ezek. 16.8-14. Similarly Ps. 45.11-16; Song 3.11; 4.1; 5.1.

6. Stauffer, □□□□□, □□□□□, pp. 653-54.

7. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* p. 43.

8. Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*, p. 191.

9. *Ephrem, Comm in Isa.* 61.10 (*S. Ephraemi Hymni et Sermones,* ed. T.J. Lamy, 4 vols. (Mecheln, 1882-1902), II, p. 183; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 139. In Murray's view (p. 132), the expression 'bride adorned' in Ephrem derives not from Rev. 21.2, which was not part of the early Syrian canon, but almost certainly derives directly from Isa. 61.10, from which the passage in Revelation is derived.

> made her one with himself and himself with her, that there might be no separation. See, she sits in the King's palace, dressed in the ornament of the King. The month of Nisan serves her, arrayed and adorned with ow- ers. Glory to thee, Lord of Nisan.[10]

Like Aseneth, the church is described as wearing golden garments that mark her as the bride of Christ, 'the bride of the Eternal King'.[11] As Aseneth is depicted with a crown, so the church is depicted as 'a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Rev. 12.1).[12] The precious stones on Aseneth's crown may signify the precious stones adorning the walls and foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem, 'the Bride, the wife of the Lamb', who comes 'down out of heaven from God' (Rev. 21.9-21).

Of particular signi cance for the identi cation of Aseneth as the bridal church is the depiction of her wedding gown, 'like light in appearance'. John Chrysostom compares the clothes worn by converts after baptism to 'a shining garment', and speaks of the church as a bride whose immaculate dress is refulgent with indescribable light and radiance: 'Did you see the bride's body bright and shining? Did you see her beauty which ashes forth beyond the rays of the sun?'[13] Methodius, commenting on Rev. 12.1-6, interprets the woman as the church, and says of her garment of light:

> It is the Church whose children by baptism will swiftly come running to her from all sides after the resurrection. She it is who rejoices to receive light which knows no evening, clothed as she is in the brightness of the Word as with a robe. Surely, having light for her garment, what was there more precious or more honorable for her to be clothed in as be tted a queen to be led as a bride to the Lord, and thus to be called on by the spirit . . . This great woman as representing virgins prepared for marriage, as she gleams in pure and wholly unsullied and abiding beauty, emulating the brilliance of the lights. For her robe, she is clothed in pure light; instead of jewels, her head is adorned with shining stars.[14]

10. Ephrem, *HResur*. 3.1-7 (CSCO, 248; Scr. Syri, 108, p. 86); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 139. The 'bride adorned' appears also in *Didascalia* 9: 'But you are the Catholic Church, the holy and perfect . . . the great Church, the bride adorned for the Lord God' (Connolly, p. 86); Aphrahat, *Dem.* 14.38 (PS 680.10-11), כלתא מצבבתא.

11. Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.7.37 (*PL*, XVI, 199; *NPNF*, X, p. 369); John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 11.7 (Harkins, p. 163).

12. See also Ephrem, *HVirg.* 19.2 (CSCO, 223; Scr. Syri, 94, p. 64); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 140.

13. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 4.23; 5.18; 7.24; 11.6 (Harkins, pp. 75, 88, 114, 162).

14. Methodius, *Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, Logos 8.5 (Musurillo, p. 111).

In Syriac literature, the church is frequently termed the 'daughter of light', wearing 'resplendent clothing'. So in the *Acts of Thomas*: 'My Church is the *daughter of light*.[15] The splendor of kings is hers. Charming and winsome is her aspect, fair and *adorned* with every good work.'[16] François Graf n adduces early Syrian and Chaldean liturgical texts in which the church is described as a bride dressed in a coat of light[17]:

> Hail, O Queen Church, the prince you marry. He brings you to the marriage chamber, dowers you with the blood that ows for you from his rib, clothes you in a coat of pure shining light, and places on your head a splendid crown of brightness.[18]

Ephrem says that Adam and Eve before the fall were clothed in garments of light or robes of glory, which were removed from them when they sinned. Ephrem relates these garments of light to baptism and identi es them as the wedding garment, which must remain pure for the eschatological marriage with Christ.[19] Kraemer points to the possible connection of Aseneth's wedding garment, which is like light in appearance and is 'old' and ' rst' (15.10), to the garment of light of Adam and Eve in Ephrem.[20] If Ephrem's relation of the garments of light to Adam and Eve is correct, then by her marriage to Joseph/Christ Aseneth dons, or perhaps re-dons, the pure primordial garment of light that Adam and Eve lost by their sin, and she enters again into a new and pure paradise.

A garment of light is also associated with the virginity of Aseneth as the church. Ephrem contrasts Mary's garment of light to that which Eve lost:

> Eve in her virginity put on leaves of shame,
> But Your mother, Lord, in her virginity

15. 'My church is a daughter of light.' The Greek version has □ □□□□, 'a maiden, maid, a bride'.

16. *Acts of Judas Thomas* 3, in Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, Syr. pp. 176.11-177.15, trans. pp. 150-52; Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, pp. 67-68; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 133.

17. Graf n, 'Recherches sur le thème de l'église', p. 319; Brock, 'Ephrem's Letter to Publius' 12, p. 284.

18. See F.C. Conybeare, 'Die jungfräuliche Kirche', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 8 (1905), pp. 373-89; 9 (1906), pp. 73-86.

19. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, pp. 87-89, 94-95. He notes that in Syrian authors the 'garment of light' is associated with the parable of the wedding, Mt. 22.1-14, in which one guest arrives without a wedding robe and is thrown into outer darkness. In Brock's view the image is originally Jewish. See, e.g., *Gen. R.* 20.12, 'It was found written in the Torah scroll of Rabbi Meir , "garments of light". These are the garments of Adam, similar to a lantern.'

20. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 266.

> Has put on a robe of glory
> That encompasses all people.[21]

The wedding gown, which is 'like light in appearance', associates Aseneth with the image of the church as the moon. This invites an interpretation of her marriage to Joseph as re ecting the motif, common both in the Greco-Roman world and in Christianity, of the marriage of the sun (Helios) and the moon (Selene).[22]

Hugo Rahner notes the in uence of the images of the sun and moon, common in the Greco-Roman world, on Christian thought and imagery.[23] The image of the church as the moon is integrally connected to that of Jesus as the sun; the two form a single symbolic unity representing the marriage of Christ and the church, and from this transcendent harmony comes divine life. In Helios, Christians saw the image of the 'sun of righteousness,' and in the moon the symbol that modestly receives its light from the sun and is embodied in the gures of Mary and the church. Ambrose writes this in praise of the church as the true moon:

> When Luna, in whom, relying on words of the prophets, we see the image of the Church—when this same Luna is reborn to run her monthly course, she is at rst hidden by dark shadows. Slowly, however, her horns are lled with light, and then when she stands opposite Sol, she shines again with the brightness of his beams.[24]

The 'garment of light' of the church is thus the re ection of the rays of the sun of Christ on it, as Anastasius writes:

> Oh, never again vanish into the darkness of the renewing moon, ever-shining Selene. Lighten our way through the divinely hidden meaning of the Scriptures. Oh, cease not, Thou consort and fellow traveler of Christ the Sun Who, as thy bridegroom, clothes thee with light, oh, cease not to send forth thy rays which from him have taken their brightness, So that out of himself but through thee He may give light to the stars and set them on re, through thee for thyself.[25]

21. Ephrem, *HNat*. 17.4 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syri, 82, pp. 87-88); Pseudo-Clementine *Hom* 13.16 (*ANF,* VIII, p. 303).

22. See Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 81-82: The marriage of Joseph and Aseneth replicates the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) of the sun (Helios) and the moon (Selene). Hence the Greek words for sun and moon are masculine and feminine respectively.

23. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, pp. 154-76.

24. Ambrose, *Epistola* 18.24 (*PL*, XVI, 979b).

25. Anastasius, *Hexaemeron* 4 (*PG*, LXXXIX, 911d); Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 175.

The garment of Aseneth is 'like light in appearance' because it is a re ection of the solar dress of the moon, which makes her face shine 'like the sun'.[26]

The re ection of Aseneth's face in the pure springwater in the basin can also be related to this likening of the church to the moon: 'Her face was like the sun, and her eyes like the rising morning star' (18.7). The long text relates thus:

> Aseneth leaned over to wash her face and saw her face in the water. And it was like the sun and her eyes were like a rising morning star, and on her cheeks there was a 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 ghting men lined up for a ght, 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 (18.8-9).

Rahner observes that in Christian theology the moon represents the mystery of Christ and the drama of the cruci xion (*mysterium lunae*) and was the complement to the mystery of the sun.[27] Ambrose says that one must look at the moon with eyes of esh, but also with the force of the spirit, for the Creator endowed the moon, the sister and bride of the sun, with the power to re ect the mystery of Christ.[28] The fate of the church resembles the phases of the moon. The moon diminishes and disappears, only to reappear large and red, a color with deep symbolic meaning. The waning of the moon and its darkening in eclipse were for the Christians an occasion for sadness, symbolizing for them the suffering church sinking into darkness along with the sun of Christ. The red hue of the waxing moon symbolized 'the blood of the son of man', the cruci xion of Jesus and the blood shed during the persecution of the Christians.[29]

26. The solar dress of the church and its association with the moon appears in Rev. 12.1: 'A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet'. See G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 167; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB, 38; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 188: 'Periballomai occurs twelve times in Revelation and examination of these other texts shows that the woman is wearing the sun as her garment.' Aseneth's face is radiant like the faces of the righteous, which at the end of days will shine like the sun (Mt. 13.43). The likeness of Aseneth to the morning star is again associated with the moon. Philonenko notes that the morning star is the planet Venus, and that in monuments of the Roman period it is seen orbiting the sun and the moon. For the morning star as the natural intermediary in the marriage of the sun and moon, see Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, pp. 81-82.

27. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, pp. 155, 160; Ambrose, *Hex.* 4.7.29 (*PL*, XIV, 202).

28. Ambrose, *Hex.* 4.8.32 (*PL*, XIV, 204).

29. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 168.

Aseneth, looking at the re ection of her face in the pure springwater, in fact sees the re ection of the church and its fate, intertwined in the fate of Christ. This is especially developed in the long text. There Aseneth sees her face like the sun and like the shining morning star, images of Christ. Her cheeks have the color of the blood of the son of man, symbolizing the crucixion. The rose of life and vine in paradise are also characteristic Christian images.

Aseneth's af nity to the bridal church is re ected in this passage of the long text replete with images from the Song of Songs, which Christian writers regularly used to describe the church.[30]

As Aseneth represents the church, Joseph, the bridegroom, represents Christ. The gure of Jesus as 'bridegroom' is based on the Hebrew Scriptures, in which God is the bridegroom of Israel and loves Israel as a man loves his wife.[31] However, whereas in Judaism only God is portrayed as bridegroom and no other gure bears this title, in Christianity the title is ascribed to Christ and indicates the intimate communion of Christ and the church, which was achieved by his blood.[32]

The rst biblical depiction of the Messiah as bridegroom is found in Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband' (2 Cor. 11.2). Of particular importance for the image of Jesus as bridegroom are two parables in the Gospel of Matthew: the parable of the marriage feast (22.2-14) and the parable of the ten virgins (25.1-13), in which Jesus is represented as a bridegroom.[33] Both parables counsel sober readiness for the eschaton, not sexual exuberance. The metaphor is further domesticated and adapted to ancient Roman social structures in Ephesians 5 by its inclusion in a household code in which wives' chastity and willing subjection to husbands are based on the model of Christ the bridegroom's marriage to his bride, the church, and the description in Revelation of the marriage of the lamb and the church (19.6-9), symbolized by the new heavenly Jerusalem.[34]

30. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pp. 71-72. Brown (*Body and Society*, p. 274) observes that the language of the Song of Songs, which Origen ascribed to the relationship between Christ and every believer, became in the course of the fourth century almost exclusively a reference to virginity!

31. For example, Hos. 2.16; Isa. 54.6; Jeremiah 3; Ezek. 16.7. More centrally, the images of bridegroom/lover in Song of Songs and in Psalm 45 prove to be rich sources for later Christian interpreters.

32. Grant, 'Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip', p. 129; Charles, *Revelation*, II, p. 126.

33. See further Mk 2.19 and parallels: Jn 2.7-10; 3.29; Eph. 5.22; 2 Cor. 11.3.

34. Revelation 21.2, 9-10; 22.17; see also Clark, 'Celibate Bridegroom', p. 4.

The use of the term 'bridegroom' (*Hatanâ*) as a reference to Jesus was particularly widespread in the Syrian church, and the term is one of those by which early Syrian ascetics expressed their bond with Christ 'the beloved'. They expected to join him in the eschatological celebration of their marriage and afterwards in the heavenly bridal chamber (*gnônâ*).[35] In the anonymous work *On Virginity*, which we have already cited, the most common term for Christ is 'the bridegroom' or 'the true bridegroom',[36] who comes to gather only those who have responded to his call and sworn the oath of virginity. Ephrem also refers to Christ as the 'true bridegroom'.[37]

2. *The Kiss of Joseph and Aseneth*

The kiss between the lovers Joseph and Aseneth, or rather the lack of it, is the focal point of their relationship and is the pivot of the plot. It is what motivates Aseneth's conversion. We recall that when they first meet, Aseneth's mother brings her down from the top storey to face Joseph. Pentephres tells his daughter, 'Greet your brother, for he too is a virgin as you are today, and he detests all strange women just as you *detest* strange men', and then, 'Come near and kiss your brother.' Joseph, however, stretches out his right hand and places it against her breast and says,

> It is not right for a man who worships God, who with his mouth blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed cup of immortality, and is anointed with the blessed unction of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman, who with her mouth blesses dead and dumb idols, and eats of their table the bread of anguish, and drinks of their libations the cup of treachery, and is anointed with the unction of destruction. A man who worships God will kiss his mother and his sister that is of his own tribe and kin, and the wife that shares his couch (□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□), who with their mouths bless the living God. So too it is not right for a woman who worships God to kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination in God's eyes (8.1-7).

But when Joseph returns to Aseneth's house after her conversion he says to her, 'Come to me, pure virgin (□ □□□□□□□□□ □ □□□□), for I have had good

35. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 132, 135; Graf n, 'Recherches sur le thème de l'église', p. 321; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, p. 78. In Syriac liturgical texts Christ is described as the true and everlasting bridegroom. On the symbolism of Joseph as a bridegroom and of the heavenly bridal chamber, see also Chapter 2, section 1 above.

36. Amand and Moons, 'Une curieuse homelie grecque' 12, 18, 57, 108, pp. 36-37, 38-39, 48-49, 62-63.

37. Ephrem, *CNis*. 20.1 (CSCO, 219; Scr. Syri, 93, p.53); Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 152.

news (□□□□□□□□□□□□) about you from heaven, explaining everything about you.' He again stretches out his hands, both of them this time, and embraces (□□□□□□□□□□□) Aseneth. She embraces him in return, and they kiss (or embrace) (□□□□□□□□□) for a long time and 'receive new life [or are rekindled, □□□□□ □□□□□□□□] in their spirit' (19.2-3).

Because of the similarity of this kiss to description of kisses in early Christian sources, Michael Penn recognizes it as the Christian 'sacred kiss' (□□□□□□ □□□□□), the 'kiss of love', 'the kiss of peace' (*osculum pacis*), which plays an important role in the ritual and practice of the Eucharist.[38]

The ritual kiss appears in Christianity from the very beginning, having arisen among the disciples of Jesus.[39] Later Christian sources show that, by the middle of the second century, the kiss had become characteristic of Christian ritual, playing a role in nearly every major Christian rite. Early Christians kissed each other as part of prayer, at the Eucharist, baptism and church appointments; at funerals, monastic oaths, martyrdoms and penitential practices. Peculiar to the Christian use of kisses in ritual, as distinct from similar practices common in the Greco-Roman world, is the key role of the kiss in marking the boundaries of the group. For instance, the third-century *Apostolic Tradition* rules that catechumens who have not yet been baptized cannot after prayer give the kiss of peace to those who have been baptized, because their kisses are not yet pure, 'but the baptized shall embrace one another, men with men and women with women'.[40] According to this work, before the banishment of Satan and the subsequent baptism, the human is subject to evil spirits. So if a baptized person and a catechumen kiss, the former risks the invasion of evil spirits, and through him so does the entire Christian community. Only by segregation of the catechumens and by proscription of their kissing any of the baptized before the evil spirits are ban-

38. Penn, 'Identity Transformation', pp. 178-83; Penn, 'Performing Family', pp. 155-74; Penn, 'Ritual Kissing, Heresy and the Emergence of Early Christian Orthodoxy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (2003), pp. 625-39; Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 96-98; W. Klassen, 'The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament: An Example of Social Boundary Lines', *NTS* 39 (1993), pp. 122-33 (128). See also Stauffer, '□□□□□, □□□□□', p. 657, who discerns here a Christian development: the virgin Aseneth rejects all men until the stranger, the son of God, arrives and converts her to the religion of the true God and gives her God's spirit by the kiss.

39. The kiss appears in salutations ending four Pauline letters: Rom. 16.16; 1 Cor. 16.20; 2 Cor. 13.12; 1 Thess. 5.26: 'Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.' So 1 Pet. 5.14.

40. Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 18.3-4 in G. Dix (ed.), *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome* (London: SPCK, 1968), p. 29; Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 1-17, 99-101.

ished can the integrity of the community be preserved. The kiss separates the baptized from the catechumens.

Joseph and Aseneth uses this very strategy of demarcation when Joseph refuses to kiss Aseneth.[41] When Joseph speaks of a God-fearing man as kissing only his mother and his sister of his own tribe and kin, and his wife, he makes the point that, in contrast to idolaters, these family members 'bless the living God with their mouths'. The underlying assumption is that one may not kiss idolaters even if they are family members. Pagan sources do—infrequently—speak of the impropriety of kissing family members by reason of immoral behavior, but never because of difference of religion. It is rather Christian sources that provide the parallels to the priority of religious identity over family relationship. For instance, Gregory Nazianzus says, in praise of his mother Nonna, that she never grasped the hand or kissed the lips of any heathen, even of a respectable woman, or a friend in her house.[42] Penn adduces an instance from the *Acts of Andrew*.[43] Aegeates, the husband of Maximilla, a Christian convert, returns home from a long journey. He enters his bedroom, where moments earlier the whole Christian community had gathered. The faithful make their departure, leaving Maximilla still in prayer. Aegeates hears Maximilla speak his name, and expects her to receive his kiss willingly, but that does not happen. 'When he approached her mouth intending to kiss it, she pushed him back and said, "'Aegeates, after prayer a woman's mouth should never touch a man's"' (14). Joseph says precisely that to Aseneth. In Penn's view, Aegeates' kiss is considered impure because he is not Christian, that is, because of his religion. Maximilla refuses to kiss her husband because his kiss would pollute her mouth, which has been puri ed by prayer.[44]

41. True, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus states emphatically that men may kiss only men, and women only women; men may not kiss women. But such a strict separation of the sexes was apparently not everywhere observed, and therefore needed to be emphasized. See L.Edward Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996), p. 18. In any event, rst- and second-century sources do not restrict the practice to same-sex kissing, and second-century works explicitly state that men and women kissed each other (Penn, 'Performing Family', p. 156).

42. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 18.10 (*PG*, XXXV, 996).

43. *Acts of Andrew* 13-16 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 248-50); see also Penn, 'Performing Family', p. 168.

44. Penn discusses the kiss in Joseph and Aseneth as an example of the means of exclusion, transformation and inclusion in the Christian church (*Kissing Christians,* pp. 96-98). In contrast to his articles, he argues in *Kissing Christians* that Aseneth's conversion should be understood as her entrance into Judaism, and that the whole book is Jewish. Therefore, he has to maneuver in order to explain how the idea of a Christian sacred kiss penetrated a Jewish work and why he includes an apparently Jewish scene at all in a book that deals with the Christian kiss. At the end of the discussion (p. 98) he

Several features of the kiss in *Joseph and Aseneth* con rm that it is the Christian 'sacred kiss'. First is the indication that Joseph and Aseneth kiss as brother and sister. Early Christian writers employed the rhetoric and the terminology of ctive family relationships (such as 'brother and sister in Christ') to reinforce the cohesion of Christian communities.[45] By using the language of kinship for nonbiological bonds, namely those based on common faith, early Christians sought to rede ne the family. As Mt. 12.46-50 shows, the 'family' of the Christian believer replaces his or her biological relationships. This assimilation of the Christian community to a family enhanced the group's unity and power. Many Christian writers state expressly that the Christian ritual kiss is like that between family members or between siblings. Writing in the second century, Athenagoras warns that, when kissing, 'it is of great importance to us that the bodies of our brothers and sisters, and the others called the names of relatives, remain not insulted and unde led'.[46] In the early fth century Augustine uses the language of family relationship to assert that 'as your lips approach the lips of your brother let not your heart withdraw from his'.[47]

Second is the ritual context. The ritual kiss was a practice directly connected to the Eucharist.[48] John Chrysostom writes that the kiss that the brethren are to exchange before communion is a summons to a life of unity:

> When we are about to participate in the sacred Table [the Eucharist], we are also instructed to offer a holy greeting [kiss]. Why . . . we join souls with one another on that occasion by means of the kiss, so that our gathering becomes like the gathering of the apostles when, because all believed,

raises the possibility that Christian authors changed or edited the text or that it was written originally by a Christian, but he does not at all envisage the possibility that Aseneth's conversion can be seen as Christianization. Also surprising is his conjecture that the kiss in Judaism too served to consolidate the boundary between the group and outsiders, who may not be kissed. Was not the whole point of his book to prove that this is the idea behind the Christian kiss? I wonder!

45. Penn, 'Performing Family', p. 152.

46. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 32.8-27 (ed. M. Marcovich; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 102-103.

47. Augustine, *Sermo* 227 (Sermons pour la pâque, SC, pp. 116, 240-41). More examples are found in Penn, 'Performing Family', p. 162.

48. Penn, 'Identity Transformation', p. 181, with references; Phillips, *Ritual Kiss,* pp. 26-35; Nicolas J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 45-46; E. Kreider, 'Let the Faithful Greet Each Other: The Kiss of Peace', *Conrad Grebel Review* 5 (1987), pp. 29-49 (31-36, 43); Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 86, 97.

> there was one heart and one soul. Bound together in this fashion, we ought to approach the sacred mysteries.[49]

The kiss appears in *Joseph and Aseneth* in connection with the trio of the bread of life, the cup of eternity and the oil of purity when it is first mentioned in the work. If, as I suggest, this trio stands for the Eucharist, the kiss Joseph refuses to give must also be associated with the Eucharist and, like the Christian kiss, should precede it. When they first meet, Joseph refuses to kiss Aseneth because she, like Christian catechumens, has not yet undergone baptism, nor has she received the bread and the wine, and idolatry pollutes her mouth.[50] Joseph, as a good Christian, will not kiss even his close relatives if they do not share his religion, and certainly not a catechumen like Aseneth. However, after Aseneth has shared in the Eucharist and has become a full-fledged Christian, her mouth is pure, and Joseph, by kissing her, confirms her identity as a co-believer.

Third is the association of the kiss with spirit. After Aseneth has undergone the required change and Joseph may kiss her, he stretches out his hands and embraces Aseneth, and she embraces him. They kiss, or embrace (□□□□□□□□□□), at length and receive new life (or are rekindled, □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□) *in their spirit* (19.3). The long text emphasizes the association of kiss and spirit even more: 'And Joseph kissed Aseneth and gave her the spirit of life, and he kissed her a second time and gave her the spirit of wisdom, and he kissed her the third time and gave her the spirit of truth' (19.11). From its beginning the Christian sacred kiss was associated with the Holy Spirit, and symbolized unity, love, peace, reconciliation, and unanimity, which are represented in the spirit of Christ. Hence it is called the 'kiss of peace'. When two persons kiss, they are united by the spirit they have in common; they are, so to speak, kissing the spirit.[51] The expressions 'spirit of truth' and 'spirit of life' appear in the Gospel of John as references to the Holy Spirit: 'This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot

49. Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 11.32-33 (Harkins, pp. 171-72). The connection of the kiss to the Eucharist is found as early as Justin *1 Apol.* 65.2 (*PG*, VI, 428; *ANF*, I, p. 185). Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of the kiss of peace as a sacred mystery preparatory to the Eucharist: (*Hier. eccles.* 3.3.8 in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, II, p. 88). However, by the fourth century the kiss was directly connected to the Eucharist.

50. When setting out Joseph's refusal to kiss Aseneth, the text uses the term □□□□□□□□ ('It is not right for a man who worships God . . . to kiss a strange woman' [8.5]; and again, 'A man who worships God will kiss . . .' [8.6]). Some have found here reason to identify Joseph as a 'God-fearer', or □□□□□□□□□□. This should be rejected, for nowhere in the work is Joseph described as a Gentile God-fearer. See also Sanders, 'Covenant as a Soteriological Category', pp. 22-23.

51. Phillips, *Ritual Kiss,* pp. 7-12, 15; Kreider, 'Let the Faithful Greet Each Other', p. 31; Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, p. 82.

receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you' (Jn 14.17).[52] The kiss that conveys the spirit of life is mentioned also in the *Odes of Solomon*: 'And deathless life embraced me and kissed me. And from that is the Spirit within me; and it cannot die, for it lives' (*Odes* 28.6-7).

The association of the kiss with the spirit is based on 1 Cor. 12.13, 'For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' For Paul, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ present within the members of the Christian community and is that which enters the believers through their mouths. The spirit creates a dynamic bond among the faithful. Partaking of the spirit means taking part in the life of Christ. The ritual kiss arose in the original community of Jesus' disciples as a sign of their union with him and with his spirit—a union that makes people unrelated by blood brothers and sisters.[53]

Fourth is the emphasis that the kiss was on the mouth. 'And Pharaoh turned them towards each other, and they kissed each other' (21.6); the long text states, 'And Pharaoh turned them around towards each other face to face and brought them mouth to mouth and joined them by their lips and they kissed each other' (21.7). The kiss that a baptized person shares with the believers is called 'peace with the mouth'.[54] Chrysostom explains why the kiss must be on the mouth. The mouth 'is the organ which most effectively declares the working of the soul'[55]; elsewhere he writes,

> But there can be another mystical meaning of this kiss. The Holy Spirit has made us temples of Christ. Therefore, when we kiss each other's mouths, we are kissing the entrance of the temple. Let no one, therefore, do this with a wicked conscience, with a mind that festers beneath the surface. For the kiss is a holy thing.[56]

In a passage cited above, Augustine writes,

> The hearts of those who kiss should do what the lips do, that is, join the lips and the heart of those they kiss. After this is said: 'peace be with you'; and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It is the sign of peace; as

52. See also Jn 6.63; 16.13; 2 Cor. 3.6; Hermas, *Mand*. 3.4 (LCL, p. 242); 1QS 3.6; Lindars, '"Joseph and Aseneth" and the Eucharist', p. 190.

53. Klassen, 'Sacred Kiss in the New Testament', p. 128-29; Perella, *Kiss Sacred and Profane*, pp. 18-23.

54. Phillips, *Ritual Kiss,* p. 17.

55. Perella, *Kiss Sacred and Profane*, p. 27.

56. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 11.34 (Harkins, p. 172); Perella, *Kiss Sacred and Profane*, pp. 23-27.

> the lips make it known so let it be in our minds. That is to say, as your lips approach the lips of your brother let not your heart withdraw from his.[57]

3. *The Marriage of Joseph and Aseneth*

The marriage ceremony of Joseph and Aseneth brings the story to a happy end. The text recounts that, after they embrace and kiss, Aseneth takes Joseph's right hand and leads him inside her house, where he sits down on her father's seat, while she brings water to wash his feet. At his suggestion that one of the virgins should perform the task, Aseneth is adamant: 'No, my lord, for my hands are your hands, and your feet my feet and no one else shall wash your feet.' After she has washed his feet, Joseph takes her right hand and kisses it, and she in turn kisses his head. At this point, her parents arrive from their country estate. On seeing their daughter sitting with Joseph in her bridal gown they rejoice and glorify God, and eat and drink. When Pentephres states his desire to invite the lords and satraps of Egypt for a wedding celebration the following day, Joseph counters that he must first tell Pharaoh about Aseneth, as 'he is my father; and he will give me Aseneth as my wife himself'. The next morning he rises early, goes to Pharaoh, and tells him about Aseneth. Pharaoh sends for Pentephres and Aseneth, and, seeing her, he is astonished at her beauty. He blesses her, takes golden crowns, sets them on the heads of Joseph and Aseneth, and blesses them. He then turns them toward each other and they kiss. Pharaoh celebrates their wedding with a seven-day banquet. Once the wedding and banquet are over, Joseph has intercourse with Aseneth; she conceives and gives birth to Manasseh and his brother Ephraim at Joseph's house (chs. 19–21).

Having presented my case for the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth as a symbolic representation of the eternal marriage between Christ and the church, I now address the marriage ceremony itself. I wish to show that the description of the ceremony also is it consistent with the Christian setting of the story as a whole.

Two consecutive ceremonies are related, the first of which may be considered a betrothal, although the text does not call it that. It is held at Aseneth's home, beginning with Aseneth taking Joseph by his right hand and leading him inside. She washes his feet; Joseph takes her right hand and

57. Augustine, *Sermo* 227 in *Sermons pour la pâque,* pp. 240-41; Perella, *Kiss Sacred and Profane*, p. 24. H.M. Schenke, 'Das Evangelium nach Philippus', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 84 (1959), pp. 1-26 (5), observed that in the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* the kiss symbolizes the sacrament of the bridal chamber, common among Gnostics and the most important of the five sacraments (baptism, chrism, Eucharist, redemption, and bridal chamber).

they kiss; the bride wears a wedding gown; there is a festive meal at which God is blessed. The wedding ceremony proper takes place the next day at Pharaoh's residence (yet considering what Pentephres says, it might be at the bride's parental home). Pharaoh, here the groom's father, acts as of - ciator. He places two golden crowns on the heads of Joseph and Aseneth, blesses them, and they exchange kisses. Only when the seven-day banquet ends is the marriage consummated at the groom's house.

Comparison with Jewish marriage ceremonies of the rst centuries CE reveals a number of similar features. Here, as in the Jewish context, the marriage has two stages, betrothal and wedding, with the former preceding and leading up to the latter. It is similarly based on the mutual consent of both partners to the marital union, as well as on securing consent of the bride's father, to whom this particular story assigns a key role. Pentephres is a driving force from the very start; he initiates the marriage and brings about its actualization. Here, as in Jewish betrothals, there is a festive betrothal meal at the future bride's home.[58] As in Judaism, the betrothal of cially inaugurates the couple's joint life. They are henceforth called husband and wife, which explains why Joseph, immediately after this ceremony, refers to Aseneth as his wife (8.20).[59]

Parallels to the marriage ceremony described in Joseph and Aseneth can also be drawn from the Roman environment, notably the betrothal (*sponsalia*) preceding the wedding and preliminary consent of both partners and each paterfamilias (Pharaoh in Joseph's case) as essential conditions for betrothal and matrimony. As in imperial Rome, apparently the bride's father assumed responsibility for the wedding feast, the groom being present as guest of honor.[60]

Yet our ceremony exhibits its own special features, which set it apart from both its Jewish and Roman counterparts. Unlike betrothals in antiquity, regardless of time and place, Joseph sends no gifts nor gives any money to Aseneth or her family.[61] Yet more than anything else, the marriage of

58. On the betrothal meal in Judaism, see *m. Pes.* 3.7; *t. Pes*. 3.12.

59. Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 235 n.b; Boaz Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law: A Comparative Study* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), I, p. 234. On the customs of the Jewish betrothal ceremony, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* pp. 75, 163-66.

60. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 125-60; Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law*, I, p. 293; Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 120; J.E. Grubbs, '"Pagan" and "Christian" Marriage: The State of the Question', *JECS* 2 (1994), pp. 361-412 (363-65, 388).

61. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, pp. 164-66.

Joseph and Aseneth is distinguished by its main procedures, especially the following three: the bride washes the groom's feet; she takes his right hand and he takes hers; they exchange kisses. To my mind these readily approximate Christian betrothals in the first centuries CE, which centered on two acts: the kiss and the giving of the right hand.

Most instructive on the matter is Tertullian. A passage in his treatise on the veiling of virgins is my chief evidence of this:

> If it is sexual intercourse with a man which makes them women, they would not be veiled, except after they have undergone marriage. But even among the pagans, women are led to their husbands veiled [i.e. at the wedding]. But if they are veiled for their betrothal, because they are mingled with the male body and spirit through a kiss and their right hands (*per osculum et dexteras*) through which for the first time they give up the modesty of their spirit, through the shared pledge of their awareness, by which they contracted their complete fusion, how much more will time veil them, without which they cannot be engaged and under pressure of which they cease to be virgins even without betrothal.[62]

He makes the same point in his treatise on prayer:

> I can firmly pronounce and argue in accordance with my prescription about those who are dedicated to *sponsi*: they ought to be veiled from the day on which they first trembled at the body of a man in the kiss and right hand. For in these things everything made an advance marriage . . . both their spirit through their awareness and their modesty through the trial of a kiss . . . and their mind through their will.[63]

Accordingly, at the *desponsatio*, which according to Tertullian rendered the girl *sponsa*, she and her *sponsus* join hands and exchange a kiss. Interpreting this as the couple's intent to consummate a physical union in marriage, he adds that consciousness of this intent and promise mean that the girl has resigned her maidenly modesty. Significantly, physical contact with a male body and mental awareness make her a married woman already. In the *Joseph and Aseneth* account, her washing his feet stands for the physical contact and promise of perfect union, expressed in her response to his suggestion that one of the virgins take over the task: 'No, my lord, for my hands are your hands, and your feet my feet and no one else shall wash your feet.'[64]

62. Tertullian, *Virg.* 11.4-5 (trans. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, pp. 149-50).

63. Tertullian, *Or.* 22.10 (trans. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, pp. 149-50); Lucien Anné, *Les rites des fiançailles et la donation pour cause de marriage sous le bas-empire* (Louvain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1941), pp. 64-69; Grubbs, '"Pagan" and "Christian" Marriage', p. 388.

64. For more on the betrothal kiss, see Ambrose, *Epistola* 41.18 (*PL*, XVI, 3).

To prove his hypothesis that the *osculum* in betrothals is a progeny of imperial Rome rather than of Christian liturgy, Lucien Anné has argued that Tertullian's kiss, in the relevant texts, does not necessarily indicate a betrothal ceremony and may be read as an affectionate gesture under the intimacy allowed between a couple. Grounding his assumption in *osculum* and *dextera*, by which Greco-Roman literature rendered greeting by means of a kiss, he asserts that it may well apply to the Tertullian context.[65] Against this interpretation, Susan Treggiari says, are not only the precise timing of the exchange and the insistence on its signi cance in both passages but also the usage of the kiss and the taking of the hands in non-erotic contexts.[66]

The Christian features of Joseph and Aseneth's betrothal equally accord with the view advocating prohibition of premarital sex to a betrothed couple. This is evident in Joseph's refusal to sleep with Aseneth at her father's house, because 'it is not right for a man who worships God to have intercourse with his wife before their marriage' (20.8).[67] Only after the wedding ceremony and seven-day banquet do the couple engage in intercourse (21.8). How do we account for this? Should Joseph's objection to premarital sex be ascribed to prevailing customs in Judaism?

Betrothal, in the Hebrew Bible, had legal consequences. Once formalized, probably upon payment of the *mohar,* or bride-price, the betrothed female was considered in some respects a married woman, and her status was de ned with the term 'inchoate marriage'.[68] The wedding itself, and transfer of the bride from her father to her husband's house, legally 'completed' the marriage, putting into effect a wider range of marital regulations.

Whether 'inchoate marriage' actually existed in the Second Temple period is questionable. Contrary to common opinion, Michael Satlow has argued that throughout that period Jews did not customarily become 'betrothed', or even have a rm understanding of what 'betrothal' meant.[69] The only evidence of Jews practicing a form of inchoate marriage comes from Mt. 1.18-19. Jews outside Palestine, and perhaps in Palestine's more cosmopolitan

65. Anné, *Les rites des ançailles,* pp. 65-68.

66. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, pp. 150-51. But the kiss may also have been part of a formal betrothal ceremony in some parts of imperial Rome of the early fourth century (Anné, *Les rites des ançailles*, 68-73).

67. Aseneth as a betrothed woman is perceived by the author as Joseph's wife, and not, as Hezser translates: Joseph refrained from sexual intercourse '*with his future wife* before marriage' ('*Joseph and Aseneth* in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels', p. 34).

68. Cf. Exod. 22.15; Deut. 20.7; 22.23; 28.30. This discussion is much indebted to Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, pp. 68-89.

69. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, pp. 69-73.

areas, did not appear to engage in inchoate marriages (although first-century CE Jews in rural Galilee may have practiced this biblical form of betrothal).

Far less ambiguous is rabbinic evidence for betrothal as a legal act. Betrothal, as forming inchoate marriage, became an established principle in rabbinic law. The earliest rabbinic attestation to acceptance of betrothal as the legal criterion for marriage is found in the schools of Hillel and Shammai, in the first century CE. By the end of the Yavneh period betrothal was firmly established in rabbinic law. Accordingly, the betrothed female was bound to inchoate marriage, and, for sexual and certain economic purposes was considered a married woman. If she had sex with another man she would be guilty of adultery, and to remarry would require a divorce.[70] Framing this perception is a Mishnaic passage on the ways in which a woman is 'acquired'.

The first Mishnah in *Qiddushin* states: 'A woman is acquired in three ways and acquires herself in two ways. She is acquired by money, by contract, and by intercourse' (*m. Qid*. 1.1). As Satlow has noted, the Mishnah says nothing about betrothal per se, only about 'acquisition', that is, marriage. This is certainly at odds with what is portrayed in *Joseph and Aseneth.* Joseph refuses to engage in premarital sex with Aseneth, and the story is most emphatic about intercourse taking place after the formal wedding ceremony and seven-day feast; the Mishnah would have endorsed it as legitimate toward instituting the marriage.

At the same time, Talmudic sources reveal divergent attitudes to premarital sex in the interim between betrothal and wedding. There seems to be a regional division, with Judea allowing the engaged couple such practice, and Galilee forbidding any sexual contact until after the wedding. The Babylonian Amora Abaye instructs that Palestinians recited the groom's blessing at the betrothal celebration because 'in Judea . . . he would be together with her' (*b. Ket*. 7b). Even in Palestinian sources, Jewish couples betrothed in Judea had a 'reputation' for having sexual relations before the marriage itself. The Mishnah alludes to this: 'One who eats at his father-in-law's in Judea without witnesses is not able [later] to make a claim [for his wife's] virginity, because he was together with her.'[71] The Tosefta distinguishes promiscuous Judean from chaste Galilean couples:

70. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 75. Satlow (*Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 79) points out that betrothal by intercourse gave rise to legal and social problems. The legal problem with 'intercourse for the sake of betrothal' (*t. Qid*. 1.3 [ed. Lieberman 3.2.276]) was that it removed the possibility of a man making any claim regarding a woman's virginity on their wedding night; socially, the problem was that Babylonians emphasized the sexual component of marriage, especially the woman's first sexual encounter.

71. *Mishnah Ket.* 1.5; *m. Yeb*. 4.10.

> R. Yehudah said: At first in Judea, they would examine the *huppah* [wedding canopy], and the groom, and the bride, three days before the *huppah*. But in the Galilee they did not do so. At first in Judea, they would leave the bride and the groom alone for one hour before the *huppah*, so that his heart may become crude with her. But in the Galilee they did not do so. At first in Judea, they would appoint two *shushbinin* [attendants], one from the groom's family and the other from the bride's family, but despite this, they would only testify concerning the marriage. But in the Galilee they did not do so. At first in Judea, the *shushbinin* would sleep where the groom and bride slept. But in the Galilee they did not do so. Anyone who did not act according to this custom was unable to claim against [his wife's] virginity.[72]

Satlow sees no compelling reason for not very largely accepting the testimony of these sources that betrothed couples, in parts of Palestine, engaged in physical contact before the wedding.[73] Here Judea was no exception. Premarital sex with a *sponsus* was common practice in imperial Rome of the first centuries CE. 'The virgin certainly needed to be protected from seducers', Treggiari writes, 'but the phobia of pre-marital sex with a sponsus does not seem to occur until the empire becomes Christian.'[74]

From the diverse sources it becomes clear that Joseph's reluctance to engage in premarital sex with Aseneth goes against biblical tradition and prevailing customs in parts of Palestine (Judea) as well as imperial Rome in the first centuries CE. Yet it may conform to contemporary practices in other parts of Palestine and the Babylonian dispersion, where the Galilean practice became the norm throughout the Amoraic period.[75] Boaz Cohen, a proponent of *Joseph and Aseneth's* Jewish authorship, cites Joseph's words as further proof of Judaism's intolerance of sexual contact during betrothal and its prevalence, Judea being the exception.[76]

I believe that Joseph's refusal of premarital sex with Aseneth is unrelated to practices prevailing in contemporary Judaism, whatever their direction. This tale bears not the slightest commitment, even at the most superficial level, to Torah and commandments, so it would be far-fetched for it to preach strict observance of sexual purity in married life. All the more so, considering that the couple display no reticence about intimate physical contact, evident in their lingering embrace and mouth-to-mouth kiss immediately after their betrothal and even before. In fact, the kiss that Aseneth desires from Joseph causes her conversion, and this happens long before their wedding.

72. *Tosefta Ket.* 1.4; *b. Ket.* 12a.

73. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, pp. 166-167.

74. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, p. 159.

75. L.M. Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1948), p. 126; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 167.

76. Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law*, I, p. 322. He bases his arguments on Talmudic sources as well: *m. 'Ed*. 4.7; *y. Pes*. 10.1, 37b (*m. Gi* . 8.9).

Joseph's refusal to engage in sexual contact with Aseneth is owed to early Christianity's stand against extramarital sexual relations, as is the story's emphasis on intercourse after the wedding ceremony and ensuing banquet. This stance is already articulated by Paul: 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn' (1 Cor. 7.9).[77]

Equating extramarital sex with prostitution (□□□□□□), Paul regarded marriage as a defense against illicit desire.[78] Later, in the first quarter of the fourth century, the negative attitude to premarital sexual relations was inscribed into the canons of the church councils. As analyzed by J.E. Grubbs,[79] these assume that premarital sex is generally bad, but it is less harshly penalized as long as marriage follows. The canons adopted at the Council of Elvira in Spain (c. 306) decreed that unmarried women 'who have not guarded their own virginity' but marry the man who 'violated' them would be subjected to a one-year abstention from communion without penance, 'in that they have violated only the marriage rites'.[80] Canon 54 of Elvira states: 'If parents break the faith of a betrothal agreement, they shall abstain [from communion] for three years. However, if either the *sponsus* or the *sponsa* has been caught in a serious offense (*crimen*), the parents will be excused. If it was a sin (*vitium*) between the couple and they have polluted themselves, the former decision shall stand.' Both *crimen* and *vitium* presume sexual relations. Accordingly, if either one of the betrothed pair was unfaithful, the parents were justified in breaking off the engagement. But if the *sponsus* and *sponsa* had sexual relations with each other, they were committed to the match, making it wrong for the parents of either party to try to end it. Clearly evident in these rulings is that premarital sex, unlike extramarital sex, is pardoned if the lovers marry.[81]

Joseph's words reflect precisely this attitude to sexual relations before marriage: although it is not a grave sin, for a Christian to have intercourse

77. See further 1 Thess. 4.3-7; 1 Cor. 6.9-10.

78. James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 58, 61, 66; Malina, 'Does Porneia Mean Fornication?', pp. 161-84; Eric Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage* (trans. Marsha Daigle; New York: Seabury Press, 1983), pp. 73-74; David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 89; Brown, *Body and Society,* p. 55; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 167 (who suggests that Joseph's declaration 'It is not right for a man who worships God to have intercourse with his wife before their marriage' might be a later Christian emendation!).

79. Grubbs, '"Pagan" and "Christian" Marriage', pp. 399-406.

80. Elvira, Canon 14; Grubbs, '"Pagan" and "Christian" Marriage', p. 401.

81. Grubbs, '"Pagan" and "Christian" Marriage', p. 402.

with his wife before marriage is not right. Premarital sex with one's future wife, though not recommended, is forgivable once matrimony takes place.

The wedding ceremony, like the betrothal, is embedded in the Christian world of the first centuries CE. The text describes the following progression: Pharaoh blesses Aseneth, takes two crowns of gold, sets them on the couple's heads, recites a blessing, turns the partners to face each other; they exchange kisses, and thereupon begins the banquet, which lasts seven days. At its core are the features that distinguish wedding ceremonies in the Christian church of the early centuries: placing crowns on the bride's and groom's heads, blessings or prayers extended to the couple by the officiator, the kiss, and the banquet.

Admittedly, some rabbinic sources testify to both bride and groom wearing garlands (*atarot*) on their heads at the Jewish wedding procession (*m. So* 9.14); the bride's is of gold, much like the crowns at Joseph and Aseneth's wedding.[82] But the significance attached to such garlands does not correspond to the crowning in *Joseph and Aseneth*. As noted by Satlow, the adornments, garlands and procession in a litter, mentioned in *m. So* . 9.14, imply a link between marriage and royal coronation. Rabbinic literature continued the usage of 'garlands' or crowns in their biblical sense of royal crowns.[83] Having garlands on their heads, the couple became 'royalty for a day'. The processional customs furthered this notion, and, because no one attains greater honor than the king or queen, the procession not surprisingly applied the trappings of royalty.[84] Yet the infrequency of this tradition in rabbinic sources tells us that crowning the couple with garlands was a very marginal feature of Jewish wedding celebrations, and was far from any liturgical context. By contrast, the crowning of Joseph and Aseneth evidently carries a liturgical significance, recalling the crowning at the center of Christian nuptials.[85] As of the fourth century, the ceremony's focal point in the Eastern church was, as in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the 'crowning', when crowns were set on the couple's heads and the priest recited a blessing. At the time of John Chrysostom, the crowning ceremony was perceived as a symbol for the couple's purity. In his sermon on the First Epistle of Timothy he says: 'Garlands are wont to be worn on the heads of bridegrooms, as a symbol of victory, betokening that they approach the marriage bed uncon-

82. *Tosefta So* . 15.8: 'And what are the sorts of crowns for brides against which they made their decree? Gold embroidered silks' (trans. J. Neusner); *y. So* . 9.16, 24b-c: 'The following are brides' crowns, that is a city of gold. Rabbi Aqiba made for his wife a city of gold' (trans. H.W. Guggenheimer); *b. So* . 86a.

83. See, e.g., 1 Chron. 20.1; Song 3.11.

84. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 172.

85. According to Satlow (*Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 337 n. 75), 'It is possible that the entire section, whether in whole or in part, is an interpolation'!

quered by pleasure. But if captivated by pleasure he has given himself up to harlots, why does he wear the garland, since he has been subdued?'[86] Thus, the crowns stood as 'symbols of victory' over lust, and the couple, triumphant, proceeded to their marriage bed. According to Kenneth Stevenson, Chrysostom seems to imply that crowns used at weddings were not ordinary crowns, but special ones reserved for liturgical use.[87] Similarly, the crowns Pharaoh set on Joseph's and Aseneth's heads were special, being those 'which had been in his house from the beginning and of old' (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□, 21.5 in the long version).

Christian nuptials, alongside the crowning, featured blessings recited by the of ciant.[88] The crowning ceremony prayer, similar to Pharaoh's prayer for Joseph and Aseneth, concerned the couple's future life and appealed to divine grace and aid. On blessings and prayers at wedding ceremonies, Dio Chrysostom, in his sermons on Genesis, comments that the priests 'through prayers and blessings bind (them) together in the same will and the same home' in order that the groom's love may increase and the woman's 'shame' (□□□□□□□□□) may be extended. He further alludes to the 'work of virtue' in the home, banishing the schemes of the devil, and a pleasurable life together under the protection of God.[89] Likewise, blessing Aseneth, Pharaoh says, 'The Lord will bless you, even the God of Joseph, who has chosen you to be his bride, for he is the rstborn son of God, and you will be called the daughter of the Most High, and Joseph shall be your bridegroom forever' (21.3). Blessing both bride and groom, he adds, 'God Most High will bless you and prosper your family forever' (21.5).

86. John Chrysostom, *Homily 9 on 1 Timothy 2* (*PG*, LXII, 546). Crowning at weddings is equally mentioned by Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 231, *Ad Eusebium* (*PG*, XXXVII, 374). Writing to Eusebius, he mentions that the wedding liturgy involves the crowning of the couple by the father (of the bride?) and a special liturgical prayer recited by the priest. See Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* p. 22. Opinions differ on the origins of this custom in Christianity. R. Béraudy ('Le marriage des chrétiens: étude historique', *Nouvelle revue théologique* 114 [1982], pp. 50-69 [54-56]) thinks that it rst appeared in Armenia in the fourth century and from there moved to Cappadocia, where it existed already before the end of that century. Between the fourth and the sixth centuries the 'crowning' became the central rite in establishing the sacrament of matrimony. Against him, Stevenson (*Nuptial Blessing,* p. 104) dismisses the possibility that this custom originated in Armenia. In tracing its development, he ascribes it to ancient pagan traditions and, being later picked up and strengthened by Jewish biblical and apocryphal traditions, it then reached Christianity. Nothing points to Armenia. It is rather Syria that can be seen as its land of origin.

87. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* pp. 2-3; L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution* (trans. M.L. McClure; London: SPCK, 5th edn, 1956), p. 432.

88. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* p. 25

89. Dio Chrysostom, *In Gen. Hom*. 48.6.

Summarizing the information available on fourth- to sixth-century Christian nuptials in the East, Stevenson writes, 'The crowning is suf - ciently important for the entire rite to be referred to as "crowning" which distinguishes it from how Western writers understand it.' Despite differences between the various churches (Byzantine, Armenian, Copt, Ethiopian and Syrian), all used the crowning ceremony as the climax of the wedding service.[90] Other details of this account—notably the couple's kiss, Pharaoh's priest-like position as of ciator, the seven-day banquet (these possibly based on biblical antecedents) [91] and the fact that Aseneth conceived in Joseph's house, which might allude to the *domum ductio*, or leading the bride to her husband house (also common in imperial Rome) all match what we know of the Christian nuptial liturgy.[92]

The story of Aseneth's conversion ends in her marriage to Joseph and the birth of their two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. As I have attempted to prove, their marriage account ts neatly into the core ideas of the Christian setting of the work. Aseneth's depiction as adorned bride, 'in a garment like light in appearance', makes her an image of the church as bride, and a re ection of Christ the sun. Now, in the culminating phase of her conversion, as she becomes a complete Christian believer, a 'pure virgin', Aseneth and Joseph can exchange the Christian 'sacred kiss' and be united by the Holy Spirit. The 'sacred kiss', forbidden prior to Aseneth's conversion to signify the religious disparity between her and Joseph, now becomes the expression of their belonging to a common religious fraternity. In the light of Christian nuptials of the rst centuries, the ensuing marriage ceremony may be read as similarly unfolding in two stages: the betrothal, featuring at its center the kiss and joining of the right hands, and the wedding, with the 'crowning' and attending prayers conducted by the of ciator.

This chapter has further elaborated the role of Joseph and Aseneth as symbols for Christ and the church—the groom and 'bride adorned for her husband', and their eternal marriage. Yet in his usual manner the author interweaves his account with what he knows of the customs and rituals commonly practiced in his contemporary Christian church. They are here observable in the depicted 'sacred kiss' and marriage conventions. So the story goes beyond the mere presentation of Joseph and Aseneth as gures symbolic of heavenly spiritual entities, such as Christ and the church, to render them equally as earthly models for the daily Christian lifestyle.

90. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* pp. 25, 120.

91. The Bible provides descriptions of seven-day wedding banquets: Jacob embarks on a seven-day celebration of his marriage to Leah (Gen. 29.27), and similarly Samson after his rst marriage (Judg 14.12, 17). Likewise, Second Temple Jewish sources occasionally testify to seven-day wedding banquets.

92. Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love,* p. 93.

5

Christian Ethics in *Joseph and Aseneth* 22–29

The story of Aseneth's conversion (chs. 1–21) reaches its happy end with her marriage to Joseph and the birth of their two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. A shorter story follows (chs. 22–29) about an abortive attempt by Pharaoh's son to abduct Aseneth and make her his own wife; he procures the help of some of Joseph's brothers. The beginning of the plot coincides with the end of the seven years of plenty and onset of the seven years of famine, when Jacob, together with his entire family, goes down to Egypt and settles in the land of Goshen. Aseneth determines to accompany Joseph in order to meet Jacob. On their way home from the encounter they are seen by Pharaoh's eldest son. Captivated by Aseneth's beauty, he summons Simeon and Levi to secure their assistance in killing Joseph so he can marry her. He offers them gold and silver, manservants and maidservants, houses and estates; he threatens to kill them if they decline, which they do, warning him not to repeat what he has said against Joseph. Advised that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the maidservants of Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel, dislike and envy Joseph and Aseneth and will do what he wants, he sends for them. They come by night, led by Gad and Dan, and promise to collaborate in the plan to waylay Aseneth and her escorts, carry her off, and then kill Joseph and his children, whereupon Pharaoh's son will marry Aseneth. Their plot almost succeeds. Aseneth's escorts are killed; she escapes in her chariot but is about to fall into the hands of Pharaoh's son when Levi with his brothers come to her rescue. Benjamin takes a stone and hurls it at Pharaoh's son, wounding him severely. Joseph's brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, go on, determined to kill Aseneth, but their swords turn to ashes. It then dawns on them that God has stood by Aseneth. They consequently plead for her mercy and deliverance from their brothers' vengeance. She reassures them, promising that they will be saved, which they are. As a result of Levi's intervention, even Pharaoh's son is treated with compassion. He is brought to his father's house, where he dies. On Pharaoh's death, Joseph becomes king of Egypt and then bequeaths the crown to Pharaoh's grandson.

Scholars have noted considerable dissimilarities between the preceding story of Aseneth's conversion and marriage and this one. On rst encoun-

tering it, the reader immediately senses something new in style, mood and rhythm. The former is a tale of romance, marked by lengthy sentimental prayers and symbolic gestures; the latter revolves around war, dark schemes and warlike victories. Their obvious link is the character of Aseneth, who stands at the center of both. However, whereas the former story revolves around her relationship with Joseph and her conversion, the latter focuses on Joseph's brothers and the attempt of Pharaoh's son to abduct and marry Aseneth. Joseph, previously at center-stage, is pushed aside, replaced by Levi, the chief protagonist alongside Aseneth. Instead of the earlier rhetoric, abounding in symbols and images of city of refuge, 'honeycomb' and bees, here is a seemingly simple and prosaic narrative. Such differences suggest two different authors. The first plot stands on its own, culminating in the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth and birth of their sons, which further sustains the assumption that it is a story apart. Accordingly, I tend to accept the scholarly argument for different authors.[1] Nevertheless, scholars are correct in their assessment that the two stories are complementary, together forming a cohesive theological and conceptual whole. Whoever united the stories, as well as their intended readership or audience, was most likely aware of their affinity, which accounts for their joint transmission.[2]

1. *'It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil'*

How the God-fearing believer should deal with his malefactor is the key question in chs. 22–29. Whether he should reciprocate, avenge the intent to harm, repay evil for evil, apply antiquity's principle of 'an eye for an eye' (*ius talionis*, the law of equal retribution)[3] is at issue. The stand taken by the story is clear-cut: 'It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil' ([illegible]);[4] better he proffer his enemies and ill-intentioned schemers love and forgiveness. Evil should be countered with good rather than with vengeance, and passing judgment on person's evil doings

1. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 27; see also Pervo, 'Joseph and Aseneth and the Greek Novel', pp. 177-78; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 40; S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism,* p. 92; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 45.

2. Burchard, '*Joseph and Aseneth*', *OTP,* II, p. 182.

3. For more on this law, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20-49* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 275–76.

4. The term [illegible] here means 'any other person'; see J.H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 518. See also Rom. 13.8-10 [illegible] in alternation with [illegible].

lies strictly with God. A clear indication of the centrality of this notion is its recurrence on four occasions in this fairly short story:

1. 'Why so angry with him? For 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) is Levi's response to Simeon, who, on hearing the proposal of Pharaoh's son, reacts in anger and intends to kill him.
2. 'Take heart and do not be afraid, for your brothers are men who worship God (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□), and do not repay evil for evil to any man' (28.4) is how Aseneth reassures the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, after they recognize that God is on her side in the embattled confrontation, and consequently plead for her mercy and deliverance.
3. At Aseneth's plea that Joseph's brothers, coming to her rescue, should not harm their brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, Simeon asks: 'Why should our mistress plead for her enemies? No! We will cut them down with our swords, because they have plotted evil against our father Israel and against our brother Joseph now on two occasions and they have plotted against you today. And Aseneth said to him, No, brother, you must not repay evil for evil to your neighbor, for the Lord will avenge this outrage' (28.14).
4. Benjamin is about to strike Pharaoh's wounded son as he lifts himself from the ground and sits up, when Levi rushes to him, and seizing him by the hand says, 'No, brother, you must not do this for we are men who worship God (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□), and it is not right for a man who worships God (□□□□□□□□□□□□□) to repay evil for evil, or to trample upon a man who has already fallen, or to harry his enemy to death. But come: let us bind up his wound; and if he lives, he will be our friend, and his father Pharaoh will be our father' (29.3-4).

Representative of the enemy and evildoer are Pharaoh's son and the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, headed by Gad and Dan. In all their actions they are driven by hostility and vengeance. In avenging the enemy they pursue what they conceive to be the masculine ideal governing proper conduct, as evinced by what Pharaoh's son says to Gad and Dan: 'I know that you are good soldiers, and that you will not die as women die; but act like men and take vengeance on your enemies' (24.7). Their treatment of Joseph owes its impetus to enmity and envy (22.12), while in return for their outrageous conduct they expect their brothers to reciprocate vengeance (28.4). Moreover, they do not heed Naphtali and Asher, their close brothers, who try

to dissuade them from their ill intentions toward their father and brothers (25.5-7).[5] Joseph's brothers, the sons of Leah and Rachel, demonstrate the two common attitudes to enemies and malefactors. Simeon and Benjamin are out to kill the enemies in revenge for their similar intent; namely they are determined to repay evil for evil, or an eye for an eye (28.14). Aseneth and Levi, in contrast, represent the conduct preached by the story: one should not reciprocate evil with evil and consign judgment and vengeance to God. What are the theological sources for this idea? Both Jewish sources and Greco-Roman philosophy attest to antiquity's extensive preoccupation with retribution and the appropriate response to the enemy and evildoer. Turning to the Hebrew Bible, scholars have pointed to the following parallels: 'Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house' (Prov. 17.13); 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of re upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee' (Prov. 25.21-22); 'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth' (Prov. 24.17). David's decision to spare Saul (1 Sam. 24.17-19) is another example.[6] This idea nds a somewhat similar expression in postbiblical Jewish sources. For example, the *Letter of Aristeas* reads: 'To whom must a man be generous? All people believe that it is one's duty (to be generous) toward those who are friendly to us. But I hold that we must (also) show gracious generosity to our opponents so that in this manner we may convert them to what is proper and tting to them. But you must pray to God that these things be brought to pass, for he rules the minds of all' (v. 227). In this passage the author argues that friend and foe alike are to be treated with 'gracious generosity'.[7]

In Greco-Roman literature, the most famous and in uential was Socrates' standpoint that 'it is never right to do wrong or to requite wrong with wrong, or when we suffer evil to defend ourselves by doing evil in return'

5. The gures of Dan and Gad are based on Jacob's blessing in Gen. 49.17, 19, and also on *T. Dan* 1.4-8; *T. Gad* 1.4–2.4.

6. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth,* p. 203; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 310; Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount* (trans. O.C. Dean; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 88-89; Luise Schottroff, 'Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies', in Luise Schottroff *et al.*, *Essays on the Love Commandment* (trans. Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 15; Gordon M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts* (JSPSup, 13; Shef eld: Shef eld Academic Press, 1993), pp. 72-93; Gerber, 'Blickwechsel', p. 205.

7. But if Zerbe (*Non-Retaliation,* pp. 52-53) is correct in identifying the foes here ( ) not as opponents but as those who are of an opposite opinion, this example would not t with the idea in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

(Plato, *Crito* 49d).[8] This idea appears most paticularly in the philosophical texts of the Stoics and Cynics. Thus, Epictetus (55–135 CE) writes: 'For this too is a very pleasant strand woven into the Cynic's pattern of life: he must needs be ogged like an ass, and while he is being ogged he must love (φιλεῖν) the men who og him, as though he were the father or brother of them all' (*Discourses* 3.22.54).[9] But nothing comes close to the conceptual and verbal parallels in Christian sources, which devote extensive space to the ethics of retribution and proper conduct of Christians to fellow humans generally and to evildoers in particular. Paul provides two verbal parallels for *Joseph and Aseneth*, when he spells out the recommended rules of conduct for Christians in the Roman and Thessalonian churches.

In his Letter to the Romans he writes:

> Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another . . . Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep . . . *Recompense to no man evil for evil* (μηδενὶκακὸνἀντὶκακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες). Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of re on his head. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good* (Rom. 12.9-21).

In 1 Thessalonians he writes: '*See that none render evil for evil unto any man* (ὁρᾶτεμήτιςκακὸνἀντὶκακοῦτινιἀποδῷ) but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men' (5.15).

1 Peter provides another parallel: '*Not rendering evil for evil* (μὴ ἀποδιδόντεςκακὸν ἀντὶκακοῦ), or railing for railing: but contrariwise

8. See also Plato, *Resp.* 331E-336A; *Apol.* 30D.

9. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 306-308; J. Piper, *'Love Your Enemies': Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis: A History of the Tradition and Interpretation of its Uses* (SNTSMS 38; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 20-27; William Klassen, *Love of Enemies: The Way to Peace* (Overtures to Biblical Theology, 15; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 12-26; Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 32A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 321-22; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus,* IV, *Law and Love* (Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 544-48; Schottroff, 'Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies', pp. 15-22.

blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing' (3.9).[10]

Yet another instance is suggested in the sixth antithesis of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor (□□□□□□□), and hate thine enemy.[11] But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.[12]

Though these verses from the Sermon on the Mount do not provide verbal parallels for the *Joseph and Aseneth* assertions, as do the epistles, the idea is essentially there.[13] Scholars emphasize the importance of Jesus' statement and its centrality to Christian theology. Jesus' appeal to love one's enemies is the most quoted and in uential saying in early Christian literature and resounds through many of its initial writings.[14] The evangelist chose to cite

10. To highlight the verbal similarities between *Joseph and Aseneth* and the passages from the New Testament letters, Robert Jewett (*Romans: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007], p. 771) juxtaposes these verses, showing that they are exactly parallel in the use of the verb 'pay back' in the phrase 'evil for evil' and in the pronouns that are translated 'anyone' or 'no one'.

11. Its foundation is Lev. 19.18, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself', though nowhere does the Hebrew Bible say 'hate thine enemy'.

12. Matthew 5.43-48; cf. Luke's Sermon in the Plain (6.27-36); Rom. 13.10; Gal. 6.10; 1 Thess. 3.12; Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 15.5-9. The apologists similarly instruct love of enemy; see Theophilus, *Autol*. 3.14; Athenagoras, *Suppl.* 11.1 (under the exact same phrase: 'love your enemies'); Justin, *1 Apol*. 15.9 ('love those who hate you'); and likewise in *Did.* 1.3: 'This is the teaching relating to these matters: Bless those who curse you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For why is it so great to love those who love you? Do the Gentiles not do this as well? But you should love those who hate you—then you will have no enemy.' On conceptual af nity between this notion and Christian ethics in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5.44), see Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 311; and see further Marinus de Jonge*, Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (SVTP, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), p. 62; Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth,* p. 247c. See also *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 7.7; *T. Jos*. 18.2; *T. Benj*. 4.2- 3; *T. Zeb*. 8.4-6; *T. Sim*. 4.4-7. A similar idea appears in the Qumran Scrolls; see *1QS* 10.17-18.

13. Note that this is the only parallel using the word □□□□□□□ ('neighbor') as in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

14. W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–97), I, pp. 551-53.

it at the end of the Sermon on the Mount's antitheses because it stands at its climax as the most important and severe command.

On the primacy of this notion, Herman Hendrickx says, 'The demand to love one's enemy constitutes the most radical demand of Jesus' ethics, and all his other demands should be explained on the basis of this one.'[15] In its distilled form, Jesus' saying provides the most radical and clear-cut expression of this idea in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world.[16] It postulates unconditional love. Jesus is not content to call for abstention from vengeance against the evildoer but goes further, demanding positive action: do good to your enemy. He expands and deepens the signi cance of 'love thy neighbor' (Lev. 19.18), drawing into its orbit the enemy and the persecutor. Jesus rejects any distinctions between neighbors and enemies, Jews and Gentiles. Love is all-embracing, without ethical and racial discrimination. His imperative is absolute and uncompromising, whatever the circumstances. Any antagonist must encounter love because all, friends and enemies alike, anticipate the imminent coming of the kingdom of heaven and divine judgment under God as supreme judge.[17]

To comprehend *Joseph and Aseneth*'s teachings with regard to the enemy (chs. 22–29) and their theological and ethical tendencies, they should be seen, I believe, in light of the parallels drawn from Christian literature.[18] Aseneth and Levi exemplify the commendable conduct of God-worshiping

15. Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Studies in the Synoptic Gospels; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), p. 91; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew,* I, p. 54. That it is the rst teaching in the *Didache* attests to its importance.

16. Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 88.

17. Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 88-89; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, I, p. 54. See Dieter Lührmann, 'Liebet eure Feinde', *ZTK* 69 (1972), pp. 412-38 (427), who adduces this sentence in *Joseph and Aseneth* as proof that Christianity's rejection of *lex talionis*, in the fth antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5.38, was already adopted by Jewish tradition.

18. This possibility was raised already by Marinus de Jonge and Johannes Tromp ('Jacob's Son Levi in the Old Testament Pseudephgrapha and Related Literature', in Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren [eds.], *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* Harrisburge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1998], pp. 203-36 [227]), who argue that 'the possibility of Christian additions and embellishments here cannot be excluded . . . Certainly passages like these provided an additional reason for reading and copying *Joseph and Aseneth* in Christian circles'. Other scholars, while noting these similarities, deny the possibility of Christian in uence on *Joseph and Aseneth* because they date it earlier than the Christian tradition. See Piper, *'Love Your Enemies',* pp. 38-39; Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth', *OTP,* II, p. 240 n.s. Meier (*Law and Love*, pp. 541-42) indeed dates *Joseph and Aseneth* to the rst or early second century CE but does not raise the possibility of Christian in uence. He argues that there was a widespread and long-lived tradition that in uenced both.

Christians toward enemies and evildoers. Rather than repay evil for evil, they preach that evil should be overcome by doing good. They themselves do not allow evil to overwhelm them, but overcome evil with good. They bless their persecutors; they do not curse them. They manifest warmth and love for all their enemies and persecutors, whether Joseph's brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, or the Gentile son of Pharaoh. They renounce vengeance and wrath because judgment lies strictly with God and he alone can avenge (28.14). Aseneth, in defending the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah against their brothers who seek vengeance, demonstrates this code of behavior. So does Levi, in his treatment of Pharaoh's son. Whereas the latter threatens to kill Simeon and Levi if they do not cooperate, Levi calls him 'neighbor'; when Pharaoh's son is wounded, Levi says to Benjamin, 'respectfully and in good humor' (23.10), that they are not in the habit of trampling a neighbor already fallen or of killing the enemy.[19] He therefore helps him up, washes the blood off his face, dresses his wound, mounts him on a horse and brings him to his father's house. Thus, Levi and Aseneth personify Christians who do not yield to evil but subdue it through good.

Why did the author of chs. 22–29 choose Aseneth and Levi as representatives of a proper Christian ethic? Such a choice, to my mind, sheds further light on the signi cance attached to this theme in the present story and on its Christian setting.

2. *Aseneth as Symbol of the Christian Church*

Aseneth's role as city of refuge provides one of the few overt links between the story in chs. 22–29 and the conversion account in chs. 1–21. According to the short text, Levi 'saw the place of her rest in the highest heaven' (22.10), and in the long text he sees 'her place of rest in the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven' (22.13). Levi's visualization of Aseneth is an almost verbatim reiteration of her depictions in the rst story. In the long text Joseph tells Aseneth that she is blessed, 'because the Lord God founded your walls in the highest, and your walls (are) adamantine walls of life (□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□), because the sons of the living God will dwell in your City of Refuge, and the Lord God will reign as king over them for ever and ever' (19.8). In the short text Joseph prays that Aseneth may 'enter into thy rest, which thou hast prepared for thine elect' (8.10).[20] Such descriptions draw on her image as city of refuge, which is paramount in the

19. Levi's command to Benjamin in 29.4, 'Put your sword back into its place', has a parallel in Mt. 26.52; Jn 18.11.

20. See 17.6; 15.7 (long text); 8.11 (both texts).

account of her conversion. Though Levi does not actually use the speci c term, his proximate expressions—'place of rest in the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven'—portray her precisely in the image of a city of refuge. The importance of the notion in the preceding story can explain why the author chose to repeat it here and may shed light on the prominence and signi cance of the instruction 'It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil.'

In Chapter 2 above ('Aseneth as the "Type of the Church of the Gentiles"') I discussed at length the symbolic meaning of Aseneth's image as city of refuge. The city is described as the 'walled metropolis of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages' (long text, 16.16), in which many nations (□□□□ □□□□□) will take refuge and shelter, and within whose walls 'those who give their allegiance to God in penitence (□□□□□□□□) will nd security' (short text, 15.6). This is identical to the heavenly Jerusalem and to paradise, and it establishes Aseneth as a symbol of the Christian church.

The story in chs. 22–29 is intended to exemplify Aseneth's role as city of refuge, namely the church, the moral values that were to be its principles, and one of the most potent ethical rules imposed on its Christian citizens: the injunction against rendering evil for evil but instead loving and forgiving the enemy. Evil must be confronted with good rather than with vengeance, because God alone is entitled to judge humans for their evil deeds.[21] The primacy of this notion in Christian theology and in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount explains the authorial choice of setting it at the heart of the story woven in the chapters under consideration. Scholars have dwelt on the connection between Jesus' announcement of the coming kingdom of heaven (Mt. 4.17; Mk 1.15) and his commandment to love the enemy (in Matthew and Luke), seeking to prove that its observance is a condition for entry into God's kingdom and for those entering to attain the status of God's children (Mt. 5.45 and Lk. 6.35: 'That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven'). As emerges from Jesus' rhetorical questions (Mt. 5.46-47), entry into God's kingdom is its reward.[22] Allegiance to Jesus' command to love requires transformation, repentance (□□□□□□□□). Taking the city of refuge embodied by Aseneth as identical to the kingdom of heaven announced by Jesus, it follows that entry into it is contingent on one's attitude to one's

21. See also Richard I. Pervo, 'Aseneth and her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in Greek Novels', in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women like This: New Perspective on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (SBLEJL 1;Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 145-60 (154).

22. Piper, *'Love Your Enemies',* pp. 69-88.

enemies. Aseneth, personifying the church, implements Christian theology's most important ethical instruction: love your enemies.

The story in chs. 22–29, much like its predecessor, is geared to exemplify Aseneth in her role as city of refuge, serving for 'shelter', a stronghold, rescue and redemption for all 'who give their allegiance to God in penitence' (short text, 15.6). Portraying the attempts by the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, headed by Dan and Gad and their men, to harm Joseph and Aseneth and their children and expounding their envy and enmity for Joseph by detailing their odious schemes to abduct Aseneth, the tale actually leads to their ultimate recognition of God's power. Realizing that God has taken Aseneth's side against them, they fall to the ground, pleading for her mercy and deliverance from their brothers. As 'City of Refuge', she assuages their fears, speaks out for her enemies and prevents their brothers' vengeance. She thus personi es the church, opening its gates to penitents and extending forgiveness to sinners. That the protagonists are the twelve sons of Jacob, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, which constitute the Christian church, is most signi cant for her presentation in this particular role. As the church, Aseneth provides refuge for all. She does not shut her gates to idol worshipers such as Pharaoh, who acknowledges Levi's eminence and bows down before him. Perhaps she does not shut her gates even to Pharaoh's son, who is instructed in Christian ethics by Levi (23.10-16): if treated appropriately, as Levi tells Benjamin, 'he will be our friend and his father Pharaoh will be our father' (29.4). They thus exemplify 'the many nations (□□□□ □□□□□) that will take refuge in her and will nd shelter under her wings because they gave their allegiance to God in penitence (□□□□□□□□)'.

This story's notion of love for the enemy has an additional link to its predecessor. At its conceptual core, the account of Aseneth's conversion posits the love of God. Joseph is 'a man that worships God (□□□□ □□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□), who with his mouth blesses the living God'[23]; Aseneth is the exemplary model for love of God, which propels her to discard her idols and confess God. God-fearingness is the characteristic that the second story attributes to Joseph's family: Jacob is a man who worships God (23.9), the servant of God (23.10); Levi is a man who fears God (22.8) and likewise his brothers (28.4; 29.3). Both stories in fact exemplify Christianity's two most important commandments: love of neighbor and love of God.[24] Jointly they contribute one of the messages uniting the two

23. See 4.9; 8.5, 6, 7; 20.8; 8.9.

24. Mark 12.28-30; Mt. 22.34-40; Lk. 10.25-28. The two commandments—love of God and love of neighbor and enemy—recur frequently in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and are among its principal ideas. See Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, p. 418; M. de Jonge, 'The Two Great Commandments in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', in de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*

stories into a conceptual and theological whole. The second highlights love of neighbor and enemy, the first (chs. 1–21) love of God.

3. 'It is not right for a man who worships God . . .' as Expressing the Proper Christian Ethic

The recurrent phrase 'It is not right for a man who worships God . . .' further expresses the importance in the theological structure of *Joseph and Aseneth* and its Christian background of the command to love the enemy and not return evil for evil. This pattern joins the two stories into a single literary and ideological unit and underlines the foremost principles of Christian ethics.

This formula, which, as noted, occurs on four occasions in the second story, appears twice in the first. First Joseph utters it, with regard to the kiss he withholds from Aseneth:

> It is not right for a man who worships God (οὐκἔστιπροσῆκονἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ, who with his mouth blessed the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed cup of immortality and is anointed with the blessed unction of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman, who with her mouth blesses dead and dumb idols and eats of their table the bread of anguish, and drinks of the libations the cup of treachery and is anointed with the unction of destruction. A man who worships God will kiss his mother and his sister that is of his own tribe and kin and the wife that shares his couch, who with their mouths bless the living God . . . So too it is not right for a woman who worships God (γυναικὶθεοσεβεῖοὐκ ἔστιπροσῆκον) to kiss a strange man because this is an abomination in God's eyes (8.5-7).

Next Joseph voices it in his refusal to sleep with Aseneth after the betrothal ceremony (20.8): 'It is not right for a man who worships God (οὐπροσήκει ἀνδρὶθεοσεβεῖ to have intercourse with his wife before their marriage.'

Chesnutt, a proponent of the widely accepted Jewish identity of the work, applies it to the social context of Jews in a pagan environment.[25] He asserts that the sentences spoken by Joseph, like their parallels in chs. 22–29, serve to prescribe proper Jewish behavior toward Gentiles: '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

as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (SVTP, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 141-59; see also *T. Jos*. 18.2; *T. Benj*. 4.2-3; 5.1-5; also *Jub.* 7.20; 36.4, 8.

25. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 106; Chesnutt, 'From Text to Context', pp. 293, 300.

concern in the shaping of the narrative and the existence of uneasy relations with Gentiles in the real social world of Joseph and Aseneth.'[26]

Yet precisely this 'stereotyped expression' highlights the work's Christian identity and is intended to set out the proper behavior of Christians rather than of Jews.

Resorting to Michael Penn's research, I tried to show that the kiss Joseph refuses to give Aseneth before her conversion, and the kiss they exchange afterwards, is the Christian 'sacred kiss' (φίλημαἅγιον), the 'kiss of love', 'the kiss of peace' (*osculum pacis*), which served a key role in marking the boundaries of the group.[27] I also showed that the identi cation of the kiss in *Joseph and Aseneth* as the Christian 'sacred kiss' is con rmed by a series of similarities between the two: the references to Joseph and Aseneth kissing as 'brother' and 'sister', the association of the kiss with the spirit and the emphasis that the kiss was on the mouth. As we have seen, Joseph's refusal to have sexual relations with Aseneth after the betrothal but before the formal marriage similarly obeys a Christian instruction.[28] This Christian stand against premarital sexual relations is expressed already by Paul in his letters; later it is written into the canons of the church councils.

So the moral injunction indicated in chs. 22–29 to love the enemy and not repay evil with evil clearly conforms to the comprehensive Christian ethical teaching of *Joseph and Aseneth* as a whole. It transpires through the image of Aseneth as city of refuge and the recurrent literary pattern 'It is not right for a man who worships God to . . .'

4. *Levi and the 'Unspeakable Mysteries'*

Of all Joseph's brothers, Levi is singled out in this story as the model for the proper conduct of an ideal Christian believer. He is 'a worshiper of God and a man who feared the Lord' (θεοσεβῆ καὶφοβούμενονΤὸνκύριον), the exact terms in which the preceding story describes Joseph[29]. The adjective φοβούμενος may well apply to the 'God-fearing' Gentile, who observes certain Jewish precepts without becoming a proselyte, namely undergoing Judaism's full conversion process (*giyyur*).[30] However, it may equally apply to a Christian who fears the Lord, namely confesses him, in its ubiquitous New Testament sense. [31]

26. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 106.
27. See Chapter 4, section 2 above.
28. See Chapter 4, section 3 above.
29. See 4.9; 8.5, 6, 7; 20.8; 8.9.
30. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 143.
31. See Lk. 1.50; Acts 10.2; 9.31; 2 Cor. 7.1; Eph. 5.21 (ἐνφόβῳ Χριστοῦ); 1 Pet. 1.17; Rev. 11.18.

Levi in the second story is largely Joseph's counterpart. They alone see Aseneth's 'place of rest' in heaven and comprehend her role as city of refuge, which they describe in identical terms. Both state the rule on how a God-fearing man should behave, adhering to the same literary pattern ('It is not right for a man who worships God . . .', [illegible]). Like Joseph, Levi occupies a special place in Aseneth's heart: when he and Simeon escort Joseph and Aseneth after their encounter with Jacob, 'Aseneth took Levi's hand because she loved him' (22.8).[32] Like Joseph, Levi is honored by Pharaoh: on his appearance with Pharaoh's wounded son, 'Pharaoh got up from his throne and made obeisance to Levi upon the ground' (29.7).

Nevertheless, the story ascribes to Levi some distinctive features: he is a prophet ([illegible]), having insight into people's hearts,[33] and 'he used to see letters' in the heavens, written 'by the nger of God', which he would read and interpret to Aseneth secretly. The heaven-written letters relate to the theme of 'tablets of heaven'—a familiar motif in apocalyptic literature, inscribed with the entire history of the past and its foreseen course in the future.[34] These heavenly tablets, containing a cryptic and hidden law, replace the biblical tablets of law that also were written with the nger of God (Exod. 31.18; Deut. 9.10). Levi, in the long version, knows the ineffable mysteries ([illegible]) of the Most High God, revealing them to Aseneth in secret because he has seen her place of rest in the highest and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven (22.13). There is thus a clear indication that the 'unspeakable mysteries of the Most High God' that Levi saw in heaven are somehow connected to Aseneth's role as city of refuge. The expression [illegible] indeed appears in the long version of the rst story, in the scene of eating the honeycomb and Aseneth turning into the city of refuge. After she has found the comb in the storeroom, the man of God says to her: 'Happy are you, Aseneth, because the ineffable mysteries of the Most High have been revealed to you ([illegible]) and happy are all who attach themselves to the

32. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 79. Kraemer dwells on the point that in the long version Levi is described as an angelic gure corresponding to Joseph, whose attributes and actions are drawn from the short version in order to highlight their resemblance.

33. Levi's prophetic insight nds expression in *Joseph and Aseneth* twice: he prevents Simeon from harming Pharaoh's son (23.10); he knows about the danger awaiting Aseneth and sets out with his brothers to rescue her (26.7).

34. See *T. Levi* 5.4; *T. Asher* 2.10; 7.5; *1 En*. 106.19; *Jub*. 5.13; 32.21; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, p. 201.

Lord God (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□) in repentance, because they will eat from this comb' (16.14).[35]

In Greek religious texts the term □□□□□□□ occurs in reference to mystery religions, fostering cults in which such 'unutterable words' would comprise secret doctrines, formulas and descriptions of visions that were not to be communicated to the uninitiated.[36] Aseneth similarly understood the significance of the honeycomb, which disclosed to her the doctrines and laws of her role as city of refuge and were to be revealed to all who attached themselves (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□) to the Lord God in repentance, because they would eat of this comb (16.14). Conceivably, the inference is that Levi saw the mysteries (sacraments?) of the church as they would be implemented in Aseneth's 'place of rest', in the city of refuge, in the Christian church.

Levi's ability to see 'the place of rest in the highest heaven' and the ineffable mysteries of the city of refuge, along with his prophetic virtues, situate his image in *Joseph and Aseneth* within the tradition of the Christian *Testament of Levi*.[37] The first section of the *Testament of Levi* describes a vision in which Levi is called by an angel of God to go up and enter the heavens until he reaches the seventh heaven. There 'in the highest of all dwells the Great Glory in the holy of holies far beyond all holiness' (3.4; 5.1), and there 'he will stand near the Lord and will be his minister and will declare his mysteries to men and will proclaim concerning him who will redeem Israel' (2.10). This vision provides a conceivable basis for Levi's vision in *Joseph and Aseneth*, particularly in explaining how he could see Aseneth's 'place of rest' and the city of refuge, which were located next to God.[38] It

35. See also 15.12: 'All names written in the book of the Most High are unspeakable □□□□□□ □□□□, and man is not allowed to pronounce nor hear them in the world, because those names are exceedingly great and wonderful and laudable.' The term □□□□□□□ occurs also in 2 Cor. 12.1-4 in the context of visions and secret revelations: Paul, recounting a vision in which he was taken to the third heaven, into paradise, 'heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter'.

36. Margaret Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 2000), II, pp. 795-97; Furnish, *II Corinthians,* p. 527.

37. On the affinity with the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* see Delcor, 'Un roman d'amour', pp. 18-21. On Levi as a prophet in the *Testament of Levi,* see *T. Levi* 2.10; 8.2, 15, and my comments above. On the Christianity of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in general and *Testament of Levi* in particular, see studies of Marinus de Jonge on the *Testaments* and recently V. Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD, Hebrew University, 2008).

38. A similar tradition in which Levi is taken up to heaven and stands before God occurs in the *Aramaic Levi Document* (4QTestLevi[a] 2.15-16; 4.1-8, in Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone and Ester Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Trans-*

equally contributes an understanding of the 'mysteries' Levi saw in heaven and communicated in secret to Aseneth: the *Testament of Levi* connects the 'mysteries' to 'him who will redeem Israel'. This verse, according to Marinus de Jonge, refers to Christ.[39] In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the 'mysteries' are connected to the city of refuge, which, in my reading, is identi ed with the church. Is it possible that the 'mysteries' Levi saw in heaven and told Aseneth in secret also involve 'him who will redeem Israel'?

Admittedly, there are also dissimilarities between the two compositions: Levi in *Joseph and Aseneth*, unlike Levi in the *Testament*, is not depicted as a prototype of Christ.[40] Nor does he appear in his traditional priestly role, as he usually does, in the *Testament of Levi* and throughout the Pseudepigrapha, as well as in Jewish tradition.[41] These differences notwithstanding, there is suf cient solid ground for the assumption that the Levi tradition in the present work bears af nity with the Christian circles of the pseudepigraphic tradition of the *Testament of Levi*. Levi's prominence and key role

lation, Commentary [SVTP, 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004], p. 67), probably one of the sources for the *Testament of Levi*. See Marinus de Jonge, 'Levi in the Aramaic Levi Document and in the Testament of Levi', in de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (SVTP, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 124-40 (129, 139); Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition*, p. 113. The exceedingly fragmentary condition of the source makes it impossible to say if the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* made any use of it. In any event, af nities with the *Testament of Levi* are much broader than with the *Aramaic Levi Document*. Another tradition describing Levi's ascension to heaven is found in Midrash *Pirkê deRabbi Eliezer* (*PRE*) 37 (ed. Friedlander, p. 284). This tradition is based, to all appearances, on the *Testament of Levi*. *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* is a late Midrash, written no earlier than the eighth century CE, whose author is known to have made use of Christian sources and of works from the Pseudepigrapha, such as *Jubilees*, *Adam and Eve* and similar books 'from the circle of Enoch'. On the dating and characteristics of the Midrash, see Y. L. (Leopold) Zunz (ed.), *Ha-derashot be-yisra'el* (rst published, 1832; supplemented by H. Albeck [Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, 1974]), p. 139; I. Lévi, '*Éléments chrétiens dans le Pirké Rabbi Eliézer*', *REJ* 18 (1889), pp. 83-89.

39. De Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* pp. 50, 52.

40. On Levi as the prototype of Christ in the *Testaments,* see Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, pp. 78-79; Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition*, p. 171.

41. On this oddity, see de Jonge and Tromp, 'Jacob's Son Levi', p. 226. The reason might be that both of these roles are applied to Joseph in *Joseph and Aseneth*, as I showed in Chapter 3 above. In view of Levi's centrality in the second story, Bohak concludes that the author was himself a descendant of Levi, a Jewish priest, who was deeply interested in Levi, the primogenitor of the entire Jewish priesthood, and this fact supports Bohak's hypothesis on the Oniad origin of the book (Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, pp. 51- 52). See also Kee, 'Socio-Cultural Setting', p. 405.

in this tradition may account for his choice as the model for the proper behavior of a Christian in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth*.

In sum, although very different in style, content and atmosphere, the story in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth* is well accommodated to the story in chs. 1–21. At its core is a call to Christians to behave in accordance with Christianity's ethical instruction on the attitude to the enemy. Rather than repaying evil with evil, it preaches overcoming evil with love and forgiveness and consigning judgment and vengeance to God. Exemplifying this Christian ethic are Aseneth and Levi. This notion also connects the two parts of *Joseph and Aseneth* in three respects:

1. It ts with Aseneth's role as city of refuge and 'place of rest' in heaven. This imagery, which is the focus of the account of her conversion, is picked up by the present story in alluding to her as a church. When Aseneth says, 'It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil' she underlines the moral values that were to be embedded in the church and the ethical code imposed on its Christian citizens. In her image as church, Aseneth equally extends shelter and deliverance to repentant evildoers.
2. It is coupled with the commandment to love God, at the center of the rst story; it drives home Christianity's two most important precepts: love of God and love of neighbor.
3. It is consistent with the recurrent formula in the two stories: 'It is not right for a man who worships God . . .', designating the proper moral conduct of Christians with regard to their co-religionists and fellow humans at large.

The similarities between Levi's character and role in this story and those in the *Testament of Levi* are indicative of the story's af nity with circles of the Christian pseudepigraphic tradition. 'The author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* was not primarily interested in the narrative passages of his work, but used them to illustrate his ethical teaching', de Jonge writes. He wanted 'to write a book which taught the Christian way of life, illustrated with the lives of the sons of Jacob. Certainly, the author did not intend to write a scholarly treatise on Christian ethics, but merely wished to reach the ordinary Christian believer and, therefore, used examples and illustrations which everybody could understand.'[42] De Jonge's words might well serve to summarize the essence of the story in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth*.

42. De Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* p. 119.

Conclusion

In this book I have offered an alternative understanding of *Joseph and Aseneth*. I have tried to show that its vocabulary, ideas and concepts, its symbols and images and its entire structure are fully comprehensible when seen against the background of third- and fourth-century Christianity. Aseneth's conversion, which is the focus of the work, is not the Jewish *giyyur*. It does not correspond to the halakhot and customary practices of the *giyyur* of women as they are known from Talmudic, historiographic or epigraphic sources, of either the Second Temple or the Talmudic period, in the land of Israel or in the Diaspora. Aseneth's deed can be understood only as conversion to Christianity. As in the usual practice, the focal point of Aseneth's conversion is the sacrament of the Eucharist, the foremost ritual of initiation into the church, based on eating 'the bread of life' and drinking 'the cup of immortality'. A blessing over the 'unction of incorruption' alongside those over bread and wine also has its place in the early Eucharist.

In *Joseph and Aseneth,* the honeycomb stands for the Eucharist, which, like the body of Christ, confers immortality. Identi cation of the honeycomb with the Eucharist is suggested by several associations: its identi cation with the biblical manna, which in the Christian tradition symbolizes the body of Jesus; the connection of its fragrance to the 'scent of life' that emanates from the body of Christ as the true sacri ce and as the embodiment of paradise; and its being made from the dew of the roses of life in paradise, symbolizing the 'the dew of the Lord' that resurrects and promises eternal life, as does the bread of the Eucharist. But above all, this identi cation is con rmed by the correspondence of the liturgical aspects of the scenes of the honeycomb, and of Aseneth's penitence preceding it, with the liturgies known from early Christian sources. The honeycomb event contains the same four elements that characterize the early Eucharist: setting a table on which bread and wine were placed, the eucharistic sacri ce, the 'breaking of bread' and the 'communion'. Aseneth's actions and gestures *before* this ritual meal—fasting, prayer in a kneeling position with the body facing east, hands outstretched, eyes turned upward and a prayer of exorcism—match the liturgy and practices of penitence required of converts to Christianity and those of the catechumens, candidates for baptism; these were the practices required for communion.

Against the prevailing opinion, I have shown that Aseneth not only takes part in the Eucharist, but she is also baptized: according to the man of God's instructions, she removes her black garment, washes her hands and face in 'living water' and puts on a new white garment. After this 'washing' she is 'made new, and refashioned and given new life'. All these acts and expressions are features of Christian baptism, and after it she becomes a 'pure virgin', 'clothed with Christ', an angel, and her name is inscribed in heaven along those of all other Christians who have been baptized.

When Aseneth eats of the honeycomb, a transformation takes place in her image and she is newly named City of Refuge. On receiving this new name she becomes a symbol of the Christian church, the church of the Gentiles, as the Syrian Church Fathers saw her, identi ed with the heavenly Jerusalem and with paradise, in which all who have converted and undertaken faith in Christ will nd shelter, but especially those who are prepared to do 'penitence' (□□□□□□□), that is, to take the vow of virginity and lead a life of sexual abstinence. Aseneth personi es the ultimate virgin who has repented and serves as the paradigm for other virgins who are encouraged to do the same. To these virgins, men and women alike, who renounce earthly marriage entirely and devote their lives to Christ, *Joseph and Aseneth* promises entry into the heavenly and eternal bridal chamber, into the resting place with Christ which God prepares for them in heaven.

Exhortation to virginity and celibacy is also the key to the scene of the bees. The image of the white bees with golden crowns, sharp stingers, and multicolored wings is a symbol of the souls of the 'virgins', who at their baptism took the vow of virginity and made the decision to marry Christ. These virgins, robed after their baptism in white, are rewarded with the crown of the Lord and made ready to go forth to the battle necessitated by their strict way of life. Through their determination to be virgins they become a part of the Temple curtain, or of the high priest's garment, materialized in the body of Christ. This interpretation of the bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* also accounts for the two classes of bees, which re ect the distinction in the Syrian church between 'virgins' and 'holy ones'. The 'queen' virgins never married and remained virgins for their entire lifetimes; the other 'holy ones' undertook chastity, but within marriage or in widowhood. The two groups constitute the elite of the ascetic Syrian church. They may well be called 'queens', for they were married to Christ, portrayed in Christian sources as a king. The bees cling to Aseneth's lips because, as in the case of poets and philosophers, pure words emanate from her mouth. This is the divine speech, the words of the Lord, the good tidings, the Logos, propagated by Aseneth as the church and by the virgins as brides of Christ. These virgins receive their reward by being resurrected in paradise. This paradise is concretized in the garden of Aseneth's house. The garden symbolizes the city of refuge; the tower symbolizes the church, the heavenly bridal chamber.

For his part, Joseph symbolizes Christ. His depiction as a Helios g-ure, arriving from the east in his four-horse chariot, wearing a crown with twelve precious stones and emitting twelve golden rays, corresponds to the image of Jesus as a sun surrounded by the twelve apostles. The olive branch held in his hand, heavy with fruit, con rms the identity of Joseph and Jesus, corresponding as it does to the symbolism of Christ in the writings of the Syrian Church Fathers. The similarity of the depiction of Joseph in our work to the description of the coronation of the high priest in the *Testament of Levi* perhaps indicates the function of the image of Joseph as a prototype of the kingly appearance of Christ, but also as a priestly gure. The man of God is the heavenly re ection of Joseph/Christ. He can also be identi ed as an angel, the archangel Michael, or as a bishop, who takes on human form and descends to earth to lead Aseneth and show her the way to the church.

The story of Aseneth's conversion comes to its happy end with the marriage of Aseneth and Joseph. The character of Aseneth as a bride adorned for her husband, that of Joseph as a groom and their eternal marriage symbolize the marriage of Christ and the church. Aseneth's wedding garment, a garment of light, is a frequent metaphor in the description of the church in Syriac literature and associates the gure of Aseneth with that of Selene, the moon, which in turn symbolizes the church. Just as the moon receives its light from the sun, so the church receives its light from Christ and disseminates it on earth. At the center of the relationship of Aseneth and Joseph is the Christian sacred kiss; before Aseneth's conversion this was the expression of the religious disparity between the two, and after it expressed their belonging to a common religious fraternity.

The marriage ceremony of Joseph and Aseneth is compatible with the usual Christian nuptial customs and rites in the rst centuries CE. Their two stages were the betrothal and the wedding itself. The rst centered on the exchange of a kiss and the joining of the right hands, which expressed the physical and the spiritual unity of the couple and the pledge of their complete fusion. The washing of Joseph's feet by Aseneth exempli es this physical fusion. At the center of the second stage is the placing of golden crowns on the bride's and the groom's head, accompanied by blessings for future prosperity and divine grace. These are characteristics of Christian wedding ceremonies especially in the Eastern church from the fourth century on.

Aseneth's adventures in chs. 22–29 begin with a plot devised by Pharaoh's son to abduct her, and her rescue. Although this tale was apparently composed by a different author, it complements the ideas and tendencies of Aseneth's religious transformation in chs. 1–21. This story raises the question of how to deal with the evildoer or the enemy. The author of this story asserts that 'it is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil'. Evil should be defeated by love, mercy and forgiveness, not through vengeance. Only God has the right to judge the evildoer. This idea

is rooted in the famous Christian idea phrased identically in Paul's letters: 'Recompense to no man evil for evil' (Rom. 12.17). This notion also underlies Jesus' sixth antithesis in the Sermon of the Mount. Aseneth exemplifies in this story her task as city of refuge, whose Christian citizens are called on to treat their neighbors according to Christian moral values. She herself, as the embodiment of the church accepts within her walls all evildoers who have repented.

The story of Aseneth's conversion was composed to persuade polytheists to join the church and to accept the Christian religion. By rejecting the idolatrous world entirely, by observing the rituals of fasting and prayer and by partaking of the two central sacraments of Christian conversion, baptism and Eucharist, Aseneth established the model for others to follow: repudiate idolatry and join the church and merit thereby salvation and the promise of eternal life in paradise. The story however goes further. It calls on those who do join to take at their baptism a vow of virginity and to resolve to lead a life of sexual abstinence. This call, I believe, is the central message of the conversion story and runs through its entirety. The same idea underlies the symbolic imagery of the city of refuge and of the bees. Only in such a Christian setting is it possible to furnish a reasonable explanation for all the symbols and metaphors embedded in the work.

The emphasis placed on virginity in *Joseph and Aseneth*, as well as the array of symbols and concepts, may also indicate its provenance. Virginity did become a venerated way of life at the end of the fourth century throughout the church, as is reflected in the profusion of works on virginity and its merits written at that time by writers such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Ephrem, Ambrose and Jerome. However, no church came close to being as adamant about promoting and facilitating the practice as the Syrian church in the third and fourth centuries.

The association of the story with the Syrian church is reflected also in the use of other concepts prevalent in that church: the images of Joseph and Aseneth as Christ and the church, the symbolism of Aseneth as the Gentile church, the portrayal of Aseneth and Joseph as bride and groom, the depiction of Joseph holding an olive branch as a symbol of Christ—and especially the similarity of the symbols, ideas and style of *Joseph and Aseneth* to other early Syrian works such as the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Odes of Solomon*, the anonymous composition *On Virginity* and the works of the two illustrious Syrian Church Fathers, Aphrahat and Ephrem.

Scholars have noted the author's use of images and symbols common in the Hellenistic-Roman world together with traditions drawn from the Bible. The use of symbols and allegories was deeply rooted in Christian theology in general, but it was especially prevalent among the Syrian Church Fathers. Sebastian Brock has remarked on the 'symbolic theology' that

characterized Syrian Christianity, in contrast to the 'philosophical theology' that characterized the Greek world.[1] His point is particularly apt with reference to Ephrem. Central to Ephrem's poetry is the image, the symbol, which he could set out as a simple metaphor or display cinematically as a quasi-allegory. Ephrem drew his imagery from the Scriptures as well as from nature. As he puts it in the *Hymns on Virginity*, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the natural world are the three harp-strings on which God himself sings of the secrets (*razê*) of the divine image and of the human image of Christ.[2] For Ephrem, the *razê* represent a manifest concrete entity or an event related in Scripture or occurring in nature that is seen by the interpreter as a sign, as an image of something hidden, a revelation of some aspect of the divine hiddenness. Similarly, the *Gospel of Philip* says of symbols that 'truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in the types and the images'.[3]

Assuming that *Joseph and Aseneth* is indeed a product of the Syrian church, the use of symbols and metaphors from the Hellenistic world and the fact that the work was written in Greek are not surprising. At the time of Aphrahat and Ephrem, in the fourth century, there was a ourishing bilingual culture in Edessa and Antioch, the two poles of Syrian Christianity, which developed as an integral part of Greco-Roman civilization. Greek was widely spoken and understood, especially in the urban centers, along with Aramaic. Edessa was called the Athens of the east because it had a famous school where philosophy and rhetoric were taught to the young. Greek works were most likely read in Greek. Syriac does not represent a culture different from Greek; both languages are expressions and vehicles of the same Hellenistic civilization in Syria.

According to Han Drijvers, all the available evidence indicates that Syriac-speaking Christianity in northern Mesopotamia and eastern Syria was mainly of Gentile origin. As in Antioch, Christianity in Edessa was mainly of Gentile origin and does not reveal any substantial in uence of Judaism, which was a traditional, well-established belief system, whereas the Christians were revolutionary newcomers who recruited their followers mainly

1. S. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in N.G.Garsoïan, T.F. Mathews, R.W. Thomson (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), p. 20; idem, *The Luminous Eye,* p. 41; Murray, *Symbols of Church,* pp. 1-2; Murray, 'The Theology of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology', *Parole de l'Orient* 6/7 (1975/76), pp. 2-12

2. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers,* pp. 105-106; Sidney H. Grif th, 'The Image of the Image Maker in the Poetry of St Ephrem the Syrian', in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica XXV* (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), pp. 258-69 (259).

3. Wilson, *Gospel of Philip,* pp. 128-29.

among the Gentiles.[4] This observation can explain how *Joseph and Aseneth* is so unaware of and remote from Jewish tradition and the world of biblical and halakhic commandments. *Joseph and Aseneth* was not addressed to Jews in Syria; needless to say it was not composed by a Jewish author. It was addressed to the pagans, who as idol worshipers could see in Aseneth a model of conversion to Christianity and could follow in her footsteps. Aseneth's image was perfectly suitable as a model for Gentiles also because she was known in the Syrian church as a type of the Gentile church, as is evident from Aphrahat's and Ephrem's imagery.

Joseph and Aseneth is a good illustration of the many possibilities and the strict limits of the use of the pseudepigraphic guise. On the one hand, it endowed the work with the unquestioned authority and legitimacy of the ancient Hebrew biblical tradition, into which the author could infuse covert Christology and thus propagate his theological ideas. On the other hand, the biblical tradition, familiar as it was to all, dictated the narrative framework within which the author would have to implant those ideas. This limitation is especially evident in the role of the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth and the birth of their two sons. As I have tried to demonstrate, the central message of the work is the call to polytheists to join the Christian church and take the vow of virginity and sexual abstinence. That Joseph and Aseneth ultimately marry and produce two sons does not refute my thesis. It is the inevitable end of a story that uses the biblical and pseudepigraphic cover. It re ects the literary constraints on the author, which he had to consider in determining the limits of his ction. This apparent contradiction can be seen in the very fact that the Syrian Church Fathers chose Aseneth as the type of the 'church of the Gentiles'. They chose the image of Aseneth to be the type of the church even though for them the church was the purest symbol of virginity.

This Christian author's use of symbols and metaphors common in the Hellenistic-Roman world, such as the honeycomb, bees, and the image of Helios and the way he fused them into his composition illustrate the talent and creativity that characterized the religious and theological literary activity of Christian writers in the rst centuries CE in their efforts to Christianize the pagan environment in which they lived. The blending of such traditions, rich in symbol and metaphor, can explain the enormous attraction of Christianity for the pagan world, and speci cally the popularity of *Joseph and Aseneth* in it.

4. Han Drijvers, 'Syrian Christianity and Judaism', in Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak (eds.), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians: In the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 134-46 (125-26, 141, 143); Brock, *Luminous Eye*, p. 21; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, p. 264; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, 'The Didascalia Apostolorum: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus', *JECS* 9 (2001), pp. 483-509 (487-88).

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