Redefining Diaspora as Home through Conceptual and Realised Metaphor: The Polisification of Aseneth

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Abstract

The renaming of Aseneth as Polis Kataphugês (City of Refuge) is a climactic moment in the ancient Jewish novel Aseneth*. In this article, I argue that this narrative ultimately accomplishes a redefinition of 'diaspora' as 'home' by activating the metaphor* POLIS IS WOMAN*. To accomplish this analysis, I introduce a neologism, 'polisification,' which means: the process by which a person becomes a polis. In* Aseneth*, this metaphor and process redefine the boundaries between Heaven and Earth, Zion and diaspora. Aseneth is transformed into an ambulatory polis, Polis Kataphugês, which not only brings the heavenly into the earthly sphere, but crucially makes it possible to encounter the divine wherever Polis Kataphugês travels. This shifting of the locus of divine encounter decentralises the importance of geographic location in identity (re)formation while simultaneously relying on the authority of biblical imagery to legitimise this rhetorical strategy. Through conceptual and realised metaphor,* Aseneth *transforms the immobile into the mobile, using Aseneth's body to establish a home for the displaced household of Jacob, and inviting a reconsideration about this early Jewish story's provenance.*

Keywords: *Biblical Reception, Conceptual Metaphor, Realised Metaphor, Home/Diaspora, Urban Metaphor*

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Introduction

Judaism has been and is often understood as a diasporic ethno-religion in which a central theological, emotional, and cultural component is a longing for the end of exile and the return to home. While there are certainly texts and stories in which this is the case, there has never been a monolithic experience of Judaism. There has, thus, never been only one idea of where and how a Jewish home is made. In this article, I explore an alternative experience of ancient Jewish diasporic life in the parabiblical novel *Aseneth*,[2] the plot of which complicates the binary of homeland-diaspora.[3] I argue that this narrative ultimately accomplishes a redefinition of 'diaspora' as 'home' by activating the metaphor WOMAN IS POLIS. Even though this metaphor intersects with a complex, overlapping network of biblical metaphors and allusions, the importance of the WOMAN IS POLIS metaphor for understanding *Aseneth* in its entirety can be seen in the placement of the heroine's polisification—the process by which she

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[2] The typical title for this text is *Joseph and Aseneth*. Following Kraemer and Ahearne-Kroll, I refer to it as *Aseneth*. Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2005); Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt: The Composition of a Jewish Narrative* (SBL Press, 2020). Taking Tom de Bruin's lead, I use the terms biblical and parabiblical: *Fan Fiction and Early Christian Writings: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Canon*, Library of New Testament Studies (Bloomsbury, 2024), 22–23. De Bruin builds on the work of Kelsie Rodenbiker, who uses these terms neutrally and in full awareness that there was no closed canon of biblical sources during the Second Temple Period. De Bruin analyses the parabiblical texts and additions contained within the now canonical biblical sources in *Fan Fiction and Early Christian Writings*. For an overview of *Aseneth* studies, see Angela Standhartinger, "Recent Scholarship on Joseph and Aseneth (1988-2013)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 12, no. 3 (2014): 353–406; R. Gillian Glass, "Joseph and Aseneth," in *T&T Clark Handbook to Hellenistic Jewish Literature in Greek*, ed. Marieke Dhont (T&T Clark, 2025): 281-92.

[3] On the multifaceted nature of the relationship between 'home' and 'diaspora', see, e.g., Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity: What Christianity Cost the Jews* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Joshua Levinson, "Chapter 1: Departures," in *Jews and Journeys: Travel and the Performance of Jewish Identity*, ed. Joshua Levinson and Orit Bashkin (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 3–9; Malka Z. Simkovich, *Letters from Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024).

becomes a *polis*—at the narrative climax in the first part of the story, as well as the metaphor's narrative realisation in the story's plot.[4]

In *Aseneth*, the eponymous heroine is transformed from an earthly woman into a heavenly city. Aseneth becomes πόλις καταφυγῆς (*Polis Kataphugês*; City of Refuge). As Polis Kataphugês, Aseneth's transformation goes beyond mere renaming, providing her with a status and purpose in Israel's household, and bringing the heavenly into the earthly sphere (*As.* 15.7). Previous scholarship has discussed many aspects of Aseneth's transformation, although these studies typically operate within a comparative framework that emphasises only parts of the metaphor, while also prioritizing the metaphor's structure in the comparative sources (*POLIS*/CITY IS WOMAN). While this metaphor is certainly part of the constellation of allusions in *Aseneth*, there is more to this text's use of the conceptual categories of CITY/*POLIS* and WOMAN. The heroine's transformation from Aseneth to Polis Kataphugês inverts the typical metaphor. This is no superficial switch, as I shall argue, because the inversion of source and target domains reverses the transformative effect of the metaphor: where feminised cities enable an emotionally driven exploration of relationship,[5] the polisified woman becomes a means of shifting spatial and communal boundaries. In *Aseneth*, this metaphor redefines the boundaries between Heaven and Earth, and between Jerusalem/Zion and diaspora. In conjunction with geographic markers, the female body becomes a place for men's reflections on their own positionality. Aseneth is transformed into an ambulatory *polis*, Polis Kataphugês—a transformation that brings the heavenly into the earthly sphere, thereby, crucially, making it possible to encounter the divine wherever Polis Kataphugês travels. This shifting of the locus of divine

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[4] On narrative structure, see 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* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 40–46.

[5] Affective use of the metaphor POLIS IS WOMAN can be seen in, for example, the Attic orators' writings. In *Against Demosthenes*, Dinarchus conjures the image of the *polis*' body (τὸ τῆς πόλεως σῶμα) in order to juxtapose the *polis* with Demosthenes. Based on this personification with whom the citizens can empathise, Dinarchus then asks his audience which is more worthy of their pity, the *polis* or Demosthenes (1.110).

encounter decentralises the importance of geographic location in identity (re)formation while simultaneously relying on the authority of biblical imagery to legitimise this rhetorical strategy. By transforming the immobile into the mobile, *Aseneth* uses Aseneth's body to establish a home for the displaced household of Jacob.

Aseneth and Polisification (i.e., Source and Method)

Aseneth is a twenty-nine-chapter work that tells the otherwise unattested story of how Aseneth, the Egyptian daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis, came to be married to Joseph, the Hebrew son of Jacob and honoured advisor to Pharaoh.[6] The novel's first part is the romance of Aseneth and Joseph (1-21): she, an arrogant, idolatrous Egyptian noble woman, becomes enamoured of Joseph, rejects idolatry, and embraces the God of Joseph. After a week of fasting and praying, Aseneth encounters a heavenly being called the Anthropos (ἄνθρωπος; man, human), who confirms her acceptance by God, announces her marriage to Joseph, and renames her Polis Kataphugês. Following this epiphany, Aseneth and Joseph wed, and she bears two sons, Menasseh and Ephraim. The second part of the story is one of familial and political conflict (22-29). The son of Pharaoh, jealous of the bond between Pharaoh and Joseph, and covetous of the beautiful Aseneth, plays on old fraternal insecurities among Jacob's sons. He convinces the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah to help him abduct Aseneth, and murder Joseph and Pharaoh. Thanks to God's direct intervention and Leah and Rachel's sons, this plot is foiled, Joseph becomes interim ruler of Egypt, and Aseneth and Joseph live happily ever after.

Even this short summary reveals the importance of earlier Jewish literature for *Aseneth*'s composition. In content and style, *Aseneth* looks

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[6] Rabbinic sources explain Aseneth and Joseph's marriage differently. See Victor Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924): 239–306.

like part of LXX Genesis, using elements such as syntax, characters, plot structures, and locations to set itself in that story-world.[7] In terms of themes and function, however, *Aseneth* integrates a complex, inter-generic matrix of imagery and vocabulary from earlier biblical texts.[8] Allusions to and adaptations of earlier sources are important for analysing the conceptual metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* and its realisation in *Aseneth* because of its independent and interdependent significance. By this, I mean that this metaphor exists independently in the text, meaning that WOMAN IS *POLIS* exists as a conceptual and realised metaphor in *Aseneth*, regardless of whether one reads this story alongside any other literature; however, the use to which I argue the metaphor is put—a rhetorical use to redefine 'foreign land' as 'home'—is contingent upon understanding *Aseneth* as interdependent with other early Jewish literature. *Aseneth* is the product of an interpretive act in which imagery and language from earlier Jewish sources are creatively combined to achieve new effects. I therefore presume knowledge of and direct engagement with the entire Septuagint corpus, from which particularly important texts are LXX Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Songs.[9] These works inform the heroine's characterisation and the importance of themes like refuge, protection, and mercy throughout the novel.[10] Previous scholarship has teased out dependence on earlier texts and metaphors, but often in isolation. I will show that the metaphor

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[7] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22. Examples of references to the Joseph story in *Aseneth* are Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:7-20; As. 4:10), Joseph's interpretation of dreams (Gen 40:8-22; 41:16-32; As. 4:10), and Joseph's regency over Egypt (Gen 41:40-57; As. 22:9). For further discussion of how *Aseneth* incorporates Joseph's story, see Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (The Jewish Publication Society, 2013): 2525–89.

[8] Important studies on Septuagint in *Aseneth*, include Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Asenath: Überlieferung—Ortsbestimmung* (Mohr Siebeck, 1965); Gerhard Delling, "Einwirkungen der Sprache der Septuaginta in 'Joseph und Asenath,'" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9, no. 2 (1978): 29–56; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22-29; Eberhard Bons, "Psalter Terminology in Joseph and Aseneth," in *Die Septuaginta - Text, Wirkung, Rezeption. Herausgegeben von Wolfgang Kraus Und Siegfried Kreuzer,* ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund (Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 430–43; and, in the same volume, Daniela Scialabba, "The Vocabulary of Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth and in the Acts of the Apostles," 504–14.

[9] Septuagint translations are from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds. A *New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

[10] Anathea E. Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth's Honeycomb," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14, no. 2 (2005): 133–57.

WOMAN IS *POLIS* harmonises allusions and themes, uniting them towards one rhetorical aim—creating home in diaspora.

I take an eclectic approach to *Aseneth*'s multi-lingual textual tradition. My methodological considerations are informed by a desire to consider this metaphor's rhetorical utility within the Hellenistic Jewish diaspora,[11] while also working with Greek texts from the actual manuscript traditions.[12] I refer to Patricia Ahearne-Kroll's *Aseneth fabula*,[13] because her identification of the "core storyline" highlights the degree of narrative fixity within the *Aseneth* tradition. By making recourse to the *Aseneth fabula*, I argue that the conceptual metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* exists across the entire manuscript tradition, as does a version of its realisation. The metaphor was thus very probably present in the story's earliest versions. To explore concrete textual evidence of the conceptual and realised metaphor, I use the Greek texts of families *d* and *a*, as recorded in Jonathon Stuart Wright's recent monograph *Joseph and Aseneth After Antiquity*.[14] As textual witnesses to shorter and longer versions of the story, respectively,

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[11] Current academic consensus holds that *Aseneth* is a first century BCE, Jewish, diasporan narrative, written in Greek, in Egypt. Recent proponents include Jill Hicks-Keeton, "Aseneth between Judaism and Christianity: Reframing the Debate," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49, no. 2 (2018): 189–222; and Jill Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth: Gentile Access to Israel's Living God in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 16-40; Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 187-210. *Aseneth* has been dated as early as the second century BCE (Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1996), 84–87), and as late as the sixth century CE (Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 290-1). Previously, its Greek origins would have sufficed to define *Aseneth* as a diasporan text. Such categorisation, however, exists within a dichotomous understanding of ancient Jewish literature and language— namely, that Greek-language sources originated outside of Judaea, and Hebrew and Aramaic language sources originated inside Judaea. Marieke Dhont articulates the problems inherent to this long-standing correlation between languages and geographical provenance in "Intertext and Allusion in Jewish-Greek Literature: An Introduction," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 32, no. 2 (2022): 101–9.

[12] The earliest Greek manuscript dates to the 10th century, and the narrative's exact origins and transmission history remain uncertain. The story exists in seven languages and more than ninety individual manuscripts. These textual witnesses have been divided into roughly four groupings called families. Manuscripts are referred to using a single upper-case letter (e.g., F, W, G), whereas manuscripts families are indicated with a lower-case italic letter (e.g., family *a*). For a table of manuscripts and their groupings, see Christoph Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth: Kritisch Herausgegeben (mit Unterstützung von Carsten Burfeind und Uta Barbara Fink)* (Brill, 2003), 16–26. For recent discussions, see Jonathon Stuart Wright, *Joseph and Aseneth After Antiquity: A Study in Manuscript Transmission* (De Gruyter, 2025).

[13] Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 142-58.

[14] Wright, *Joseph and Aseneth After Antiquity*. I use Burchard's versification, *Joseph und Aseneth*.

families *d* and *a* provide us with a glimpse into the degree of expansion the polisification metaphor could receive across the textual tradition.[15]

Limiting this study to these two Greek manuscript families serves another purpose—namely it facilitates a fulsome interrogation of a particular word's cultural significance. This article's central research questions could be phrased thusly: Why is Aseneth renamed **Polis** Kataphugês? Why not the (equally) important spatial concepts of Land or Temple of Refuge?[16] There is little disagreement that *Aseneth* was composed in Greek, and that the Septuagint's influences run deep.[17] Consequently, the earliest version of Aseneth's new name is most likely πόλις κατάφυγῆς (*Polis Kataphugês*, City of Refuge).[18] That certain words are particularly difficult to translate is well known. Πόλις (*polis*) is one such term for ancient Greek.[19] Frequently translated as 'city-state' in English, there was no more powerful an organisational symbol in the Hellenic imagination than the *polis*—it defined Hellenic identity, and its social, political, economic, and

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[15] A detailed analysis of all textual variations is beyond the scope of this one article, but I am writing a study of the complex gendering that emerges from a comparison of the metaphor's diverse expressions in the Greek textual tradition.

[16] "Space is often defined by an abstract scientific, mathematical, or measurable conception while place refers to the elaborated cultural meanings people invest in or attach to a specific site or locale." Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, "Space and Place," in *OBO* in Anthropology, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0170.xml (accessed 30 Apr 2025). Both space and place are social constructs. Roland Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," in *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred*, ed. Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen J. Wenell (Bloomsbury, 2016), 23–36; here 31. A person's access to spaces and places is part of a complex negotiation of identities and power. On the spatial turn and early Jewish literature, see Kelley Coblentz Bautch, "Spatiality and Apocalyptic Literature," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5, no. 3 (2016): 273–88; Wen-Pin Leow, *Like Mount Zion: Conceptual Metaphor and Critical Spatiality in the Songs of Ascents* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2024); Joseph Scales, *Galilean Spaces of Identity: Judaism and Spatiality in Hasmonean and Herodian Galilee* (Brill, 2024).

[17] Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 160-85. Nick Elder has argued that *Aseneth* circulated as a bilingual, Hebrew-Greek oral narrative prior to its redaction in Greek: "On Transcription and Oral Transmission in Aseneth: A Study of the Narrative's Conception," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 47 (2016): 119–42. Interestingly, Elder explores the consequences of this shift in paradigm for the story's genre classification, but only alludes to a potential shift in geographic provenance if *Aseneth* did circulate in Hebrew as well as Greek.

[18] The name is well attested in the manuscript tradition: Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 182.

[19] Though my intuition tells me that there is an entangled realisation of the conceptual metaphors WOMAN IS LAND, WOMAN IS CITY, and WOMAN IS NATION/PEOPLE in the other language versions of *Aseneth*, the significances of the city's other names, like the Latin *civitas refugii* (mss 436) and *civitas confugii* (mss 435), merit their own studies.

geographic components, for over a millennium.[20] It therefore seems unlikely that renaming Aseneth *Polis Kataphugês* was random. In this article, I ask what we learn if we take the *polis* seriously.

In addition to the longevity of the *polis* as a culturally meaningful category, I focus my analysis on the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* because I argue that it unites imagery and plot throughout *Aseneth.* At first glance, renaming the metaphor thusly may seem to be a superficial departure from two larger subjects: first, the metaphors that connect female bodies and/or feminine qualities to inanimate objects and places, like WOMAN IS LAND, WOMAN IS FOOD, CITY IS WOMAN, NATION IS WOMAN in general; and second, the discrete use of CITY IS WOMAN in earlier Jewish sources. Regarding the first point: Names hold conceptual power, and to use any *one* of the metaphors just listed would be to miss the interconnectedness of *all* these concepts in ancient Hellenic and Hellenistic thinking. Even as it adapted to changing circumstances, the *polis* characterised Hellenic urban life for centuries.[21] A *polis* cannot be reduced to built spaces and architectural features, however, and each one also had a territory (χώρα, *chōra*), and social groupings and structures (which were hierarchically organised along several axes), as well as economic and political institutions. Through these institutions, the *polis* structured internal life for all its inhabitants (free and enslaved), in addition to their relationships with inhabitants of other *poleis* through peer-polity relations.[22] In analysing *Aseneth*, I integrate numerous sub-metaphors to demonstrate that Polis Kataphugês exhibits all the qualities of a Hellenic *polis.*

Emphasising that the conceptual metaphor in *Aseneth* is WOMAN IS *POLIS*, and not *POLIS* IS WOMAN may also appear as an attempt to distance *Aseneth* from earlier Jewish texts (and this study from previous ones). Far be it

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[20] See John Ma, *Polis: A New History of the Ancient Greek City-State from the Early Iron Age to the End of Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2024).

[21] For a diachronic study, see Ma, *Polis.*

[22] Ma, *Polis*, 10-11.

from my intention, for the transformative power in *Aseneth* is part of the mutually reinforcing authority between this story and earlier sources. In using the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS*, *Aseneth* participates in the tradition of personified Zion/Jersualem as attested to in, for example, Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Revelation, and 4 Ezra.[23] However, in these examples, the metaphor is always CITY IS WOMAN, and it is my contention that this switch between target and source is an important part of the rhetoric around 'homeland'/'foreign land' in *Aseneth*.[24] In using the *polis* (source) to talk about a woman (target), *Aseneth* is unlike texts like Ezekiel or 4 Ezra in which women (source) are a vehicle for discussing Jerusalem (target). *Aseneth* is, however, like the Song of Songs. This erotic poem represents the only other example of the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* of which I am aware.[25] I return to this discussion of literary reception in "Part 3: Polis Kataphugês in Context."

I call the transformative process whereby Aseneth becomes Polis Kataphugês "polisification,"[26] and it is interconnected with another of this

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[23] Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen has done an extensive study of *Aseneth* using cognitive metaphor theory and conceptual blend theory: *Aseneth's Transformation* (De Gruyter, 2018). Hartvigsen's monograph, without which the present study would be impossible, documents numerous conceptual metaphors in *Aseneth*, such as CITY IS WOMAN, COVENANT IS MARRIAGE, IDOLATRY IS ADULTERY, and how their new contexts create new meanings by blending multiple sources.

[24] 4 Ezra appears to be another example of WOMAN IS *POLIS*, because a woman lamenting the death of her child is revealed to be Zion in Ezra's fourth vision (4 Ezra 9:26-10). I would argue that this is still the metaphor CITY IS WOMAN, but presented in reverse order, for the 'woman' of the vision is revealed to never have been a 'real' woman, but always to have been Zion. The vision was a test of Ezra's commitment. See Humphrey, *The Ladies and the City*. On the personification of Jerusalem/Zion, see, e.g., Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Fortress Press, 1995); Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Fortress Press, 2008).

[25] Danilo Verde writes, "When we consider the rest of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature, the description of the Song's representation of the woman's neck as a tower emerges as unique. The only text of the Hebrew Bible in which the image of an armed tower and the underlying metaphor WOMAN IS FORTIFIED CITY is used to describe a woman is in Song 4:4." *Conquered Conquerors: Love and War in the Song of Songs* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2021), 62.

[26] I coin this neologism because no other term is accurate enough. By their very definitions, anthropomorphism and personification cannot apply: "The attribution of human qualities to non-human entities or concepts," J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5. Ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 40, 112. To say that the name Polis Kataphugês depersonalises Aseneth is accurate but does not push us far enough in our reflections on how the female body is deployed conceptually. Angela Standhartinger comments that Aseneth's renaming depersonalises (*entpersonalisiert*) the heroine: she goes from woman (Aseneth) to place (Polis Kataphugês): "Weisheit in Joseph und Aseneth und den paulinischen Briefen," *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 4 (2001): 482-501, here 488; Hartvigsen picks up on this depersonalisation, proposing that it stems from the allusions to Jerusalem/Zion in *Aseneth* functioning

story's transformations: the deification of Aseneth.[27] Humanity and divinity exist on a spectrum in *Aseneth*, as in other ancient literatures.[28] Though differently present across the manuscript traditions, Aseneth becomes otherworldly through her consumption of the heavenly honeycomb, a process called hierophagy, which is directly associated with her renaming as Polis Kataphugês.[29] These two internal transformations (i.e. narrated in the text), polisification and deification, are central to the conceptual transformation of 'homeland' and 'foreign land' as categories. Aseneth's transformation into the God-founded Polis Kataphugês is the mechanism by which Egypt will become a homeland for the house of Jacob, for they are the citizens of this divinely founded *polis*. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate this third transformative process through analysis of Aseneth's deified polisification.

Part 1: Polisification, or the Conceptual Metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS*

Aseneth's polisification is part of an extended encounter with an unnamed angelic figure known as the Anthropos (*fabula* 20a-j; 14:1-17:10), which forms the climax of the romantic plot in chapters 1-21 (*fabula* 1-27). In approaching Aseneth's polisification, my analysis focuses on four moments: the Anthropos' renaming of Aseneth (15:7; *fabula* 20d), the Anthropos' explanation of the honeycomb's effect once eaten (16:16), the

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"in [an] opposite manner to the personified cities that are mentioned in the LXX and the Hebrew Bible," *Aseneth's Transformation*, 68. Objectification is better, yet still inaccurate: though some parts of a *polis* are inanimate, and therefore object-like, a city or *polis* is not a mere object. I also wish to avoid confusion through the decontextualised use of 'urbanisation' or the French '*urbanification*.' On the connection between personification and objectification, see Nils-Hennes Stear, "Personification and Objectification," *Hypatia* 39, no. 1 (2024): 145–58.

[27] I argue elsewhere that Aseneth becomes a divine figure: R. Gillian Glass, "Aseneth's Epiphanies," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 53, no. 1 (2022): 32–68. An expanded version can be found in chapter 2 of "A Daughter of Hebrews and Hellenes: Epiphany in *Aseneth* and Contemporary Greek Literature" (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2022), 64-118.

[28] Colleen Conway, "Gender and Divine Relativity in Philo of Alexandria," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 34, no. 4 (2003): 471–91.

[29] "Hierophagy is a mechanism by which characters in narrative cross boundaries from one realm to another. In all cases [...] this is accomplished by the character consuming some other-worldly item." Meredith J. C. Warren, *Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 2.

Anthropos' blessing of Aseneth's *parthenoi* (17:6; *fabula* 20i), and Aseneth and Joseph's dialogue upon their second encounter (19:5, 8; *fabula* 22). The first moment transpires pre-hierophagy, whilst the remaining three occur post-hierophagy, and my analysis follows this bipartite division. For each scene, I consider what references to urban architecture, agricultural environs, and socio-political institutions exist in the *fabula*, and families *d* and *a*. The portrait of Polis Kataphugês that emerges is of a God-chosen, entirely secure, self-sufficient *polis*.

Pre-Hierophagy: Aseneth *15:7*

Let us begin the analysis of Aseneth's polisification by considering its most consistent aspects: her new name and function. According to *fabula* 20b, the entire *Aseneth* tradition includes "[the Anthropos'] announcement of Aseneth's name change, 'City of Refuge' because people will seek refuge in her."[30] Polisification's core features, therefore, comprise the *polis*' name and refuge-seeking nations, announced by a God-sent messenger. To consider details, we look to the texts of verse 15:7 in families *d* and *a*, which record the Anthropos' initial words about Polis Kataphugês thusly:[31]

Family *d*	Family *a*
(15:7) Καὶ οὐκέτι κληθήσει Ἀσενέθ, ἀλλ᾽ ἔσται τὸ ὄνομά σου πόλις καταφυγῆς, διότι ἐν σοὶ καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ ὑπὸ	(15:7) καὶ οὐκέτι ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν κληθήσῃ Ἀσενὲθ ἀλλ᾽ ἔσται τὸ ὄνομά σου πόλις καταφυγῆς διότι ἐν σοὶ καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ ὑπὸ

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[30] Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 148.

[31] For minor textual variations, see Wright, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 372-3. English texts are my adaptations of Ahearne-Kroll's translation in "Joseph and Aseneth."

τὰς πτέρυγάς σου σκεπασθήσονται λαοὶ πολλοί, καὶ ἐν τῷ τείχει σου φυλαχθήσονται οἱ προσκείμενοι τῷ θεῷ διὰ μετανοίας.	τὰς πτέρυγάς σου κατασκηνώσουσι καὶ σκεπασθήσονται διὰ σοῦ ἔθνη πολλά καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τείχη σου διαφυλαχθήσονται οἱ προσκείμενοι τῷ θεῷ τῷ ὑψίστῳ διὰ μετανοίας.[32]
And no longer will your name be called 'Aseneth,' but your name will be 'Polis Kataphugês,' because in you many nations will flee for refuge, under your wings many peoples will be sheltered, and within your wall those who cling to the Most High by aid of repentance will be protected.	And now of you, no longer will your name be called 'Aseneth,' but your name will be 'Polis Kataphugês,' because in you many nations will flee for refuge, under your wings many nations will rest and be sheltered through you, and within your walls those who cling to God the Most High by aid of repentance will be protected.

These two texts are very similar. Consistently, the Anthropos announces that she is henceforth Polis Kataphugês (no longer Aseneth), and that many nations will take refuge in her, always including a reference to the divine. Consequently, the *polis*' initial portrait is one of a sanctuary of enormous proportions, able to welcome a large, heterogeneous population, and, because God has sent the Anthropos to transform Aseneth, Polis Kataphugês is *theophiles* (beloved of the gods).[33]

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[32] As. 15:7 family *a* is taken from the Greek text printed in Wright's dissertation: Jonathon Stuart Wright, "After Antiquity: Joseph and Aseneth in the Manuscript Transmission; A Case Study for Engaging with What Came After the Original Version of Jewish Pseudepigrapha," Volume 2: Appendices (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2018).

[33] The designation θεοφιλής (*theophilês*, dear to or beloved of the gods) is rare in its written attestations, but the idea that gods cared for certain individuals and built or natural environments over others was common; see Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 40. As a city's epithet: the Roman-named Herakleopolis Magna in Upper Egypt was called θεοφίλετος (*theophilêtos*, BGU924.1, 3rd c CE). There is an extensive body of scholarship on cities and their protector deities. See, e.g., Susan Guettel Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space: The Ancient Greek Experience* (University of California Press, 2004); Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother*

Even this short renaming statement by the Anthropos is enough to demonstrate Aseneth's polisification and its significance as a system of social and spatial organisation. Aseneth is not held at a distance from the concepts of *polis* or refuge by a simile—she is not 'like' a *polis kataphugês*, she *is* Polis Kataphugês. The Anthropos need not list all the common features of *poleis* for them to be included in the term. His words, therefore, focus our attention on this *polis*' most important features: social bodies and their functions. In Polis Kataphugês, the social actors listed are the many nations and God. The *polis*' purpose is protection, as indicated by the protective imagery and purpose of wings and walls. Polis Kataphugês has a privileged relationship with her tutelary deity, which enables her to function as a secure mediating place between said deity and those seeking his protection. By the Anthropos' words, Aseneth and her body become a place in which human-divine interactions may occur: Polis Kataphugês.

Post-Hierophagy

Aseneth's ingestion of divine honeycomb and her interaction with the heavenly bees who made it are part of the novel's core story-line (*fabula* 20g-h). Descriptions of her post-hierophagic, polisified body, however, are not. The pertinent pericopes are not found in family *d* and therefore only family *a* interests us in this sub-section. Family *a*'s post-hierophagic descriptions of Polis Kataphugês expand the metaphor or make explicit certain, otherwise implicit aspects of the metaphor. Of particular interest here to us is how these passages emphasise the *polis* as food-source (16:16), its military and defensive abilities (16:16), and its socio-political structures (17:6; 19:5, 8).

The pertinent verses are:

Zion; Thomas Galoppin, Elodie Guillon, Max Luaces, Asuman Lätzer-Lasar, Sylvain Lebreton, Fabio Porzia , Jörg Rüpke, Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli, and Corinne Bonnet eds., *Naming and Mapping the Gods in the Ancient Mediterranean: Spaces, Mobilities, Imaginaries* (De Gruyter, 2022).

16:16	And the angel said to her, "See then, you ate the bread of life (ἄρτον ζωῆς), you drank a cup of immortality, and you have been anointed with oil of incorruption. See then, beginning today, your flesh (αἱ σάρκες σου) bursts forth like blossoms of life (ἄνθη ζωῆς) from the ground of the Most High, your bones (τὰ ὀστᾶ) shall be enriched like the cedars (αἱ κέδροι) of God's garden of delight, indefatigable forces will possess you (δυνάμεις ἀκάματοι κατασχήσουσί σε), and your youth will not see old age and your beauty will not die out forever. And you will be like a fortified metropolis (μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη) for all."
17:6	Then Aseneth summoned the seven *parthenoi*, and she had them stand before the angel. And the angel said to them, "The Lord God, the Most High will bless you. You will be seven pillars of the City of Refuge (κίονες καταφυγῆς ἑπτὰ πόλεων), and all the female inhabitants of that city's elect (πᾶσαι αἱ σύνοικοι τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν τῆς πόλεως ἐκείνης) will rest upon you forever."
19:5	And [Aseneth] said to [Joseph], "Lord, I am your servant, Aseneth. [...] and [the Anthropos] said to me, 'I have given you to Joseph as a bride, and he himself will be your bridegroom forever. And your name shall no longer be called Aseneth, but your name shall be called, 'Polis Kataphugês'. And the Lord God will reign over many nations (βασιλεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν), on account of you many nations will take refuge with God the Most High."
19:8	And Joseph said to Aseneth, "Woman, blessed are you by God the Most High, and blessed is your name (εὐλογημένον τὸ ὄνομά σου) forever because the Lord God established (ἐθεμελίωσεν) your walls and the sons of the living God (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ ζῶντος θεοῦ) will dwell (ἐνοικήσουσιν) in your City of Refuge (ἐν τῇ πόλει τῆς καταφυγῆς σου), and the Lord God will reign over them (βασιλεύσει αὐτῶν) forever and ever."

Polis Kataphugês' agricultural features, her food-source, are all described post-hierophagy. The Anthropos' explanation of the honeycomb's effects

reveals that Aseneth has been transformed inside and out, and his description conceptually blends agriculture with fecundity and its implied sexuality to present her body as something to be eaten.[34] Through the Anthropos' speech (16:16), Aseneth's skin (αἱ σάρκες) becomes Polis Kataphugês' blossoms of life (ἄνθη ζωῆς), and her bones (τὰ ὀστᾶ) are fortified like cedars (αἱ κέδροι). These two similes imitate biblical parallelisms, and thus match the concept of skin with bones, blossoms with cedar. Evocative of urban gardens and water features, Polis Kataphugês is not only aesthetically pleasing with her blossoms and cedars—she is also consumable. In calling Aseneth's skin ἄνθη ζωῆς (blossoms of life), the Anthropos alliteratively recalls his earlier ἄρτον ζωῆς (bread of life). Aseneth becomes a most remarkable example of "you are what you eat."[35] Polis Kataphugês, Aseneth's polisified body, therefore, becomes not only the land whence agricultural products will emerge, but the very sustenance its inhabitants will consume.[36]

Polis Kataphugês' walls—her primary defensive feature in As. 15:7—re-appear in her post-hierophagy descriptions. After eating the heavenly honeycomb, the Anthropos implicitly emphasises her wall when he tells her that she will not age *sic* as mortal women do, but will be a "fortified metropolis," literally a walled mother-city (μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη; 16:16). Joseph also mentions Polis Kataphugês' walls, adding that they were divinely established (19:8). Polis Kataphugês was already a *polis* with a wall (15:7), so these additional details amplify her status in three salient ways. First, the Anthropos' use of *metropolis* shifts the dynamics between Polis Kataphugês and other *poleis*, as a mother-city was a central polis whence others were founded and by which those satellite *poleis* defined themselves.[37] To be *metropolis* is therefore to say that Polis Kataphugês and

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[34] On gendered food metaphors in biblical literature, see Esther Brownsmith, *Gendered Violence in Biblical Narrative: The Devouring Metaphor* (Routledge, 2024).

[35] Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 91-2.

[36] Aseneth's auto-epiphany (see Glass, "Aseneth's Epiphanies," 55-7) in family *a* furthers the image of polisified woman for (sexual) consumption by likening Aseneth's hair to a grapevine (18:9).

[37] Hicks-Keeton argues that Aseneth becomes a mythic mother-figure, an analysis which emphasises Aseneth's human motherhood, over her polisified role. *Arguing with Aseneth*, 58-59.

her identity are the centre around which other communities and their self-definitions orbit. Joseph's recognition of Polis Kataphugês' divinely laid foundations reiterates her status as *theophiles.* Because Polis Kataphugês will shelter and protect many peoples (15:7; 19:5), this metropolitan, mural emphasis with its divine origins reinforces this *polis'* inter-*polis* status and security, which surpass any other mortally founded *polis.*

A defensive group inhabiting Polis Kataphugês unites the *polis'* defensive structures with its socio-political institutions. When describing the polisified, deified Aseneth, the Anthropos says: καὶ δυνάμεις ἀκάματοι κατασχήσουσί σε (16:16). Christoph Burchard translates this as, "untiring powers will embrace you," and Patricia Ahearne-Kroll renders it as, "untiring powers will surround you."[38] I offer an alternative translation: "indefatigable forces will possess you." While neither Burchard's, nor Ahearne-Kroll's translation is at all incorrect, I wish to be clear about this pericope's meaning for Polis Kataphugês when positioned between human need and divine imposition. The combination of the noun δύναμις and the verb κατέχω imparts a military meaning that is not always overt in translation.[39] Δύναμις can mean power or authority, but in the plural, it can also mean forces—as in military forces. When used of rulers and tutelary gods, κατέχω means to occupy, to possess, or to dwell in. We already know that Polis Kataphugês will defend its inhabitants (15:7), some of whom are the sons of God (19:5). Furthering this militaristic image, the Anthropos who visits Aseneth is the epitome of the angelic warrior figure, for he is the commander-in-chief and general of God's armies (14:8).[40] It is therefore not far fetched to imagine that the

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[38] Christoph Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 2. Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works,* ed. James H. Charlesworth (Doubleday, 1985), 177–247, here 229; Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," 2560.

[39] Ahearne-Kroll does comment on this martial language: "Primarily a military image (of flanking forces), this phrase conveys God's military protection by means of angelic forces (cf. Exod 14:19; Isa 37:36 = 2 Kings 19:35)." "Joseph and Aseneth," 2560.

[40] Alecksander R. Michalak, *Angels as Warriors in Late Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 112-113; Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 265.

Anthropos is promising Aseneth that "indefatigable forces will possess" Polis Kataphugês as a divine, defensive guarantee.[41]

In addition to these defensive inhabitants, this *polis* is populated by diverse inhabitants and has a clear system of governance. The most repeated group is the "many nations" (ἔθνη πολλά) who will seek refuge in and be protected by Polis Kataphugês (mentioned twice in 15:7; 19:5). These many nations must "cling to God the Most High" (15:7), but Polis Kataphugês will shelter all who seek her. In addition to this unnumbered, featureless many, family *a* also includes references to three sub-groups inhabiting Polis Kataphugês. The first two emerge when Aseneth asks that the Anthropos bless the seven *parthenoi* who live with and serve her.[42] He makes them the pillars (κίονες) upon which the elite women of the *polis* will rest (αἱ σύνοικοι τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν τῆς πόλεως ἐκείνης) (17:6). We therefore know that there are free women among Polis Kataphugês' inhabitants. Returning to the pillars, such features were associated with large, important buildings, like temples and palaces.[43] These pillars therefore increase Polis Kataphugês' architectural beauty, while offering another example of a metaphor for social organisation in which female bodies and built environments overlap. This example comes with an added layer of blatant social stratification: the (most likely enslaved) *parthenoi*'s service to Aseneth is extended and expanded in their role in the Polis Kataphugês, where they will support all elite women. The founding of Polis Kataphugês does little, then, to challenged presumptions

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[41] Security is a basic human need, and stories of tutelary gods' defensive actions on their cities' behalf were memorialised in art, cult, and legend (Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 330). One should, however, bear in mind that this is not an offer in which Aseneth can acquiesce or decline as she should want. This is a forceful imposition of divine will, and so Polis Kataphugês' security is inextricable from her possession.

[42] His blessing of these girls is included throughout the tradition (*fabula* 20i), but this architectural transformation is only in family *a*. The seven girls are called *parthenoi* and *paidiskai*. The typical translations of *parthenos* and *paidiskê* into English are problematic: *parthenos* is usually translated as 'virgin' or 'maiden', and *paidiskai* as 'maidservant' or 'young girl.' In the case of *parthenos*, 'virgin' has connotations that differ significantly from the ancient meaning, on which see Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," 2530. In the case of *paidiskê*, there is often ambiguity about whether the girl mentioned is enslaved or free.

[43] Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," 2562.

of enslavement and social hierarchies,[44] as indicated by these *parthenoi*-pillars. The third and final sub-group appear in Joseph's words, when he meets the transformed Aseneth. He says that "the sons of the living God will dwell in your city of refuge" (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ ζῶντος θεοῦ ἐνοικήσουσιν ἐν τῇ πόλει τῆς καταφυγῆς σου; 19:8).[45] Bound by divine familial ties, these inhabitants are explicitly male (sons).[46] Whether these two elite groups and the enslaved *parthenoi*-pillars ought to be considered synonymous with, or subcomponents of the "many nations" is hard to say definitively.

There is absolutely no ambiguity around governance in Polis Kataphugês. Aseneth (19:5) and Joseph (19:8) both name God as king.[47] They each associate God's kingship with different social bodies inhabiting Polis Kataphugês, however, and this seeming disagreement reinforces the lack of clarity around this *polis*' social hierarchies. On the one hand, Aseneth states that "the Lord God will reign over many nations," (βασιλεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν) explaining that the Anthropos said that it is "on account of" or "through" her (διὰ σοῦ), Polis Kataphugês, that "they will take refuge with God the Most High" (19:5). Joseph, on the other hand, says that "the Lord God will reign over [the sons of the living God] forever and ever" (19:8). What is crystal clear is that this *polis* is eternally ruled by a king-god.

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44 Angela Standhartinger, "Intersections of Gender, Status, Ethnos and Religion in Joseph and Aseneth," in *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theresa Wacker (SBL Press, 2017), 69–87; Ronald Charles, "A Postcolonial Reading of Joseph and Aseneth," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18, no. 4 (2009): 265–83.

45 This recognition scene begins a narrative transition out of the sublime, epiphanic moments in *Aseneth*, back into the narrative's mundane, 'real' world. (B. Diane Lipsett points out this transition in her discussion of Aseneth's psalm (21:10-21): *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth* [Oxford University Press, 2011], 116). Joseph's words commence this slow descent from sublime to mundane by disassociating Polis Kataphugês and Aseneth. Aseneth tells him that her name is henceforth to be Polis Kataphugês (19:5), to which he responds by saying, "blessed is your name forever because the Lord God established your walls" (19:8)—words which continue the indistinguishability of Aseneth and her polisified form. In his next phrase, however, Joseph verbally severs woman and *polis*, saying that "the sons of the living God will dwell in *your* city of refuge" (19:8). Aseneth is no longer Polis Kataphugês, but rather one in possession of a *polis kataphugês*.

46 On earthly and heavenly family in *Aseneth*, see Nathan Hays, "Orphanhood and Parenthood in Joseph and Aseneth," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 27, no. 1 (2017): 25–46.

47 God's absolute governance is equally indicated by heaven's military hierarchies. See Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*; Michalak, *Angels as Warriors*.

The post-hierophagic image of the polisified woman in family *a* is emphatically divine, and richly detailed in its depictions of built and agricultural spaces, and socio-political organisation. Its extended polisification results from this hierophagic act and affirms the heroine's deification.

Portraits of a Woman as Polis

We have now seen four key pericopes in Aseneth's polisification: 15:7 in families *d* and *a*, and 16:16, 17:6, and 19:5, 8 in family *a*. The name, nations, and the numinous in 15:7 are the bones around which the polisified flesh is wrapped. In both families *d* and *a*, muscles and sinews are put on the *polis*' bones by adding explicitly defensive functions—the sheltering wings and protective wall (15:7)—highlighting and extending the *kataphugês* part of the name. In family *a*, the greatest anatomical extensions include the urban, agricultural, and socio-political aspects of the *polis*, and the audience thus learns how this newly founded *polis* will be able to support its inhabitants. Polis Kataphugês' original skeletal frame is perfectly preserved, even when it is fleshed out in greater detail.

Part 2: Making a Spouse a Home: Realisation of the Metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS*

In Part 1, I detailed the depth of meaning in Aseneth's renaming. Henceforth known as Polis Kataphugês, her polisification is, in those passages, a conceptual metaphor (WOMAN IS *POLIS*). In this second part, I argue that WOMAN IS *POLIS* is also a realised metaphor in *Aseneth*. A metaphor becomes realised when its conceptual components have a literal meaning for the plot, in addition to literary or sensory meanings.[48] Much could be said about the realisation of WOMAN IS *POLIS* in *Aseneth*, but,

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[48] Esther Brownsmith, "Metaphors Realized in Narrative: A New Direction for Biblical Metaphor," *Religion Compass* 18, no. 10 (2024): 8 pages. https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.70005.

for the sake of my argument, I limit myself to select, salient observations about three narrative moments: Aseneth's characterisation before she officially encounters Joseph (*As.* 1-5; *fabula* 1-9), Aseneth and Joseph's marriage and blending of families (*As.* 20-22; *fabula* 23-29), and the creation and resolution of familial and political tensions, (*As.* 22-29; *fabula* 30-54). The activation of metaphors related to the domains of AGRICULTURE, WAR, and SEX in these narrative moments demonstrate the unifying ability of the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS*, its narrative effect, and its rhetorical significance for redefining 'home'.

Aseneth 1-5

From the story's very outset, the audience is primed to see Aseneth's polisification and its affiliation with Joseph as natural through a complex association between Aseneth, the land of Egypt, the harvest, and built urban spaces. The first physical description of Aseneth establishes the extreme malleability of her identity by associating her with the "daughters of the Hebrews" over and against the "daughters of the land" (1:5; *fabula* 1).[49] Even though this language isolates Aseneth from her country-women (a social group), the narrative maintains her association with the physical land through the repetition of the adjective ὡραία (*horaia*, in-season or ripe): Aseneth (1:5), the fruit-trees of her garden (2:11) and the fruits from her family's fields (4:2) are all ὡραία (families *a*, and *d*). One immediately understands that Joseph, whose task is harvest-gathering, will 'reap' Aseneth.[50]

Aseneth is explicitly polisified by the Anthropos' renaming, but her polisification is possible because of the narrative's early establishment of a connection between Aseneth and built environments. Aseneth is

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[49] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 100; Standhartinger, "Intersections;" Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen, "The Complexity of Aseneth's Transformation," in *The Complexity of Conversion: Intersectional Perspectives on Religious Change in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Valérie Nicolet and Marianne Kartzow (Equinox, 2021), 185–211.

[50] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 96. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 56.

connected to her tower, its rooms, and their furnishings by a "palette of purple, violet, white, gold, and silver that recurs throughout the tale."[51] Aseneth's rooms have purple walls and a gold ceiling, and innumerable gold and silver idols (2:3-4; *fabula* 3). Daily sacrifices to these idols turn Aseneth's living quarters into her private temple.[52] Polychromatic parallels in Aseneth's attire and setting conflate Aseneth's person and her temple-tower, for she wears clothing and precious jewels of the same shades, and her jewellery is inscribed with the names of the Egyptian gods whose innumerable idols adorn her rooms (3:6; *fabula* 5).[53] Even when she leaves her rooms, Aseneth remains connected to her idolatrous devotion, but, more importantly, her body can already been interpreted as a mobile cultic space: she takes her temple with her by adorning her body in identical colours and fabrics, as well as equivalent ritual objects. Without ever labeling her as such, the story primes its readers to recognise that Aseneth *is* her setting, and both its and her adornments, and their associated actions. Surrounded by the concentric literary environments of her tower rooms, her garden, and its high walls, Aseneth is presented as a fortified city to be breached.[54]

The same colour palette that connects Aseneth to her idolatry and its location also indicates her future association with Joseph. The visual splendour of Joseph's arrival at Aseneth's home continues the purple, white, and gold (5:4-5; *fabula* 9), using these visual parallels in their attire to show that they are, despite current differences, each other's intended.[55] Further conceptual alignment is created through their respective cultic associations: Aseneth is (in) a temple, albeit an idolatrous one, and both

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[51] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 96.

[52] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 183.

[53] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 97.

[54] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 101.

[55] Meredith J. C. Warren, "A Robe like Lightning: Clothing Changes and Identification in Joseph and Aseneth," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. K. Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten (Ashgate, 2014), 137–53.

she and Joseph are characterised as god-fearing.[56] Aseneth therefore exhibits the correct virtue, but must learn to redirect her god-fearing actions towards Joseph's God.

Aseneth's opening chapters activate many conceptual metaphors, of which some of the most important are WOMAN IS FOOD (HARVEST) and WOMAN IS TEMPLE, and their counterparts, MAN IS EATER (HARVESTER) and MAN IS WORSHIPPER. One therefore understands (at least) two things: that Joseph was always intended to have access to Aseneth and her living-space; and that Aseneth was never entirely 'Egyptian' and Joseph was never fully 'foreign'.[57] Semantic echoes of these earlier scenes resound throughout Polis Kataphugês' description, transformed into explicit features of the polisified woman.[58] Rather than living in a temple-like space, set within a walled garden, Aseneth becomes the walled garden, the divine *polis*, in/through which other worshippers can interact with their deity.

Aseneth 20-22

Cognitive metaphors are not mere literary adornment—they "shape and reinforce our sociopolitical realities."[59] In *Aseneth*'s story-world, the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* merges literary idea(l)s and politics.[60] This merging occurs when Pharaoh marries Aseneth to Joseph (21:2-8; *fabula* 21). The figure of Pharaoh is simultaneously that of Egypt's ruler and Egypt itself. He therefore unifies culture, land, politics, and people.[61] Pharaoh is uniquely positioned to give Aseneth (Polis Kataphugês at this

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[56] Aseneth worships and fears (ἐσέβετο Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐφοβεῖτω) her Egyptian gods (2:3) and Joseph is θεοσεβὴς 4:7 in families *d* and *a*.

[57] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 97, 100.

[58] For example, the same word designates the walls encircling Aseneth's garden (τεῖχος, 2:10) and those of Polis Kataphugesês' (τὰ τείχη, 15:7).

[59] Brownsmith, "Metaphors Realized in Narrative," 4 of 8.

[60] Nicolas Wiater, "The Empire Becomes a Body: Power, Space and Movement in Polybius' *Histories*," in *Late Hellenistic Greek Literature in Dialogue*, ed. Jason König and Nicolas Wiater (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 36–68, here 46; Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 117-9.

[61] Safwat Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel* (Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 1-2, n. 2.

point in the story) to Joseph. Joseph was already a powerful man in Pharaoh's court, but his harvesting duties only gave him access to the land's agriculture production; by marrying Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês to Joseph, Pharaoh gives him lordship over (some of) the land, its produce, its buildings, people, and institutions.[62]

Aseneth is equally instrumental in bringing Joseph's family into Egypt once they are married. In this version of events, it is she who first expresses a desire to visit Jacob and his sons in Goshen (21:3; *fabula* 29). Aseneth embraces Jacob (22:9; *fabula* 29) and befriends Levi and Simeon (22:11-13; *fabula* 30). When read with the WOMAN IS POLIS metaphor in mind, the implication is that Joseph is only able to give his family access to this space because Aseneth has welcomed them, and he controls Aseneth's place as her *kurios.*

Aseneth 22-29

The final narrative moment to consider is the familial and political conflicts of the narrative's second half. The Son of Pharaoh's attempted kidnapping of Aseneth and its implied rape activate the metaphors WAR IS RAPE and SEX/ROMANCE/RAPE ARE WAR,[63] and his exploitation of familial tensions in service of regicidal political goals also evokes FAMILY SYSTEM IS POLITICAL SYSTEM. On a metaphoric level, these chapters' conflicts and resolutions reveal the ultimate significance of the WOMAN IS *POLIS* metaphor: it clearly delineates between who is protected by the Polis Kataphugês and so lives, and who is not and so dies.

The metaphor ROMANCE IS WAR is introduced early in *Aseneth.* Rumours of Aseneth's beauty spark such ardour that men are ready to make war to win her hand (1:6; *fabula* 1). The Son of Pharaoh's initial suit for Aseneth is rejected by Pharaoh (1:7-9; *fabula* 2), but his desire is stoked again when

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[62] A woman was always the property of a lord or master (κύριος, *kurios*). Aseneth recognises Pentephres (e.g., 4:6), Joseph (e.g., 20:4), and God (e.g., 12:12-15) as (her) *kurios* at various points in the story.

[63] See Alice A. Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 79–98.

he sees Aseneth and Joseph together (23:1; *fabula* 31). The Son of Pharaoh's rivalry with Joseph is double: romantic because he covets Aseneth, and political because he envies Joseph's standing with Pharaoh. In this twofold rivalry we recognise the inseparable nature of so-called 'public' and 'private' concerns, as the martial violence the Son of Pharaoh's jealousy will instigate combines the metaphors ROMANCE (SEX) IS WAR and POLITICS IS WAR.

One's status as a metaphoric inhabitant of Polis Kataphugês, as well as one's position within the *polis*' social hierarchies are crucial in this conflict. The sons of Leah and Rachel have embraced Aseneth and Joseph (22:11; *fabula* 30), so we can understand them as inhabitants, even citizens, of Polis Kataphugês; the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, however, have enmity towards Aseneth and Joseph (22:11; *fabula* 30), which positions them as either inhabitants of a lower status or even as outsiders. Both sides of this politicised family drama fight for possession of Aseneth and Egypt, so the question becomes: are they attacking a foreign territory or defending their home? For both parties, the answer is both, and we see the coercive and voluntary taking up of arms to this end. The Son of Pharaoh manipulates the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, deceiving them with threats of fraternal violence, successfully scaring them into fighting for him and his political agenda (24:3-20; *fabula* 37). The Son of Pharaoh fights to conquer Aseneth and retain Egypt, his home. Dan and Gad are so very foreign—foreigners to Egypt and Polis Kataphugês—and attack as swords-for-hire for a land not their own. The sons of Leah defend Polis Kataphugês, their (metaphoric) home, and their victory, which causes the Son of Pharaoh's death (29:7; *fabula* 54), enables Joseph's temporary ascent to the throne of Egypt (29:9; *fabula* 54). Joseph attains power because he retains Aseneth.

But what of Dan and Gad? Despite plotting violence against her, Aseneth protects her brothers-in-law from fratricidal vengeance (28:7-17; *fabula* 49-51). Scholars routinely recognise Aseneth's protection of Dan and Gad

as the fulfilment of her role as a city of refuge, which it certainly is.[64] This protective act is thus the part of the narrative realisation of the WOMAN IS POLIS metaphor that indicates its socio-political power. Dan and Gad do not flee back to Canaan, petitioning Aseneth for refuge instead; standing literally between the different groups of men, Aseneth is the mediator/mediating space between them, their brothers, and God. Simeon and Benjamin obey the protective ruling of their home *polis*, which Levi enforces and Joseph governs.

Part 3: Polis Kataphugês in Context

Thus far, my analysis of WOMAN IS POLIS has focused on understanding this metaphor within the context of the *Aseneth* story. I have argued that this conceptual metaphor encompasses all other gynocentric metaphors associated with Aseneth's transformation into Polis Kataphugês. I then argued that WOMAN IS POLIS is also a realised metaphor which serves as a literary strategy for making Egypt a home for an otherwise foreign people.

In this final section, I look at Aseneth's polisification in relation to other early Jewish literature. I frame Polis Kataphugês as the blended reception of, notably, three earlier Jewish ideas: personifications of Jerusalem/Zion, cities of criminal asylum, and Egypt as a place of danger and/or refuge. This section asks three questions: How does metaphor decouple the ideas of refuge and divine encounter from a geographically fixed location (Jerusalem/Zion)? Why model the Polis Kataphugês on the cities of criminal asylum? And what can it mean that Polis Kataphugês is in Egypt? I argue that, in *Aseneth*, the WOMAN IS POLIS metaphor adopts the divine status and protectorship of Jerusalem/Zion, adapts spatial and social aspects of the cities of criminal asylum, and blends them both in service of (re)claiming Egypt as a divinely appointed place of refuge. In other words, the descriptions of Polis Kataphugês create a discourse of 'Egypt as

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[64] E.g., Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 119; Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis;" Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 212-20.

homeland' by creatively mixing different locational and relational aspects of Jerusalem/Zion with language of divine protection. Aseneth's polisified body is crucial to mobilising this conceptual metaphor because, as a human woman, she can travel.

To support my argument, I discuss the following themes in early Jewish literature and how they appear in *Aseneth*: (1) Zion as refuge and Jerusalem as metropolis, (2) the cities of criminal asylum, and (3) Egypt in the Jewish literary imagination. Building on the work of Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen, Ross Shepard Kraemer, and Daniela Scialabba, who have shown a wide range of *Aseneth*'s possible intertexts,[65] I focus my comparisons on language and imagery found in LXX Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms, and Genesis. In addition to showing the creativity of Second Temple Jewish literature more broadly,[66] this particular cocktail of allusions, I argue, has two important rhetorical effects. It recasts Polis Kataphugês as a significant locus of divine encounter, and shows that not all Jewish communities equated 'diaspora' with 'exile.'[67] Far from it, some clearly understood these 'foreign lands' to be, in fact, home.

Of Foundations and Family: Zion and Jerusalem

Zion and Jerusalem feature prominently in early Jewish literature.[68] Through the consolidation of cultic and political powers in this location

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[65] See Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*; Scialabba, "The Vocabulary of Conversion;" Daniela Scialabba, *La conversione dei pagani in Giuseppe e Asenet e negli Atti degli Apostoli: modelli a confronto* (Facoltà teologica di Sicilia, 2012); Daniela Scialabba, *Creation and Salvation: Models of Relationship Between the God of Israel and the Nations in the Book of Jonah, in Psalm 33 (MT and LXX) and in the Novel "Joseph and Aseneth"* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019); Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation*.
[66] Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Ashley L. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity in Book III of the Sibylline Oracles: Gender, Intertextuality, and Politics* (Brill, 2020).
[67] My argument in some ways resembles that of Gideon Bohak in his monograph *Joseph and Aseneth and the Temple in Heliopolis.* Though we both see the *Aseneth* story as one in which Jewish life beyond Jerusalem and Judaea (including, or perhaps specifically, its cultic aspects) are being legitimised, Bohak considers Polis Kataphugês to be a justification for the Oniad temple at Heliopolis. This level of geographic and historical specificity is absent from my analysis. See the conclusion for more on this.
[68] Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion* remains a foundational study. See also Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); and the chapters

that produced written records of Jewish stories, they became a, if not the, significant locus of divine encounter with the God of Jacob.[69] For my purposes, the most important aspects of Jerusalem and Zion's variegated depictions are the interrelated ideas of God's founding of and relationship to this city/mountain as depicted in the prophetic books.[70]

Allusions to Jerusalem/Zion and its cult feature in *Aseneth*'s setting and plot.[71] From the very beginning of the story, allusions prime the audience to imagine Aseneth as Jerusalem/Zion-like and temple-esque: Aseneth's tower-top apartment replicates Zion's mountaintop height (As. 2:1);[72] and her initial status as a foreigner (As. 1:4) and opening behaviours as an arrogant, wayward daughter and idolator (As. 2:1, 3; 3:6; 4:9-12) evoke traditions of Jerusalem as initially foreign (e.g., Ezek. 16), and prophetic imagery of idolatry as feminine and feminising arrogance (e.g., the haughty daughters of Zion in Isa. 3:18-22).[73] In sum, Aseneth's living quarters and clothing evoke a mountain-top temple and its ritual objects, and her behaviours reproduce prophetic discourses, even before her transformation. As a means of characterising Polis Kataphugês, Jerusalem/Zion are particularly important for articulating the intimate

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in Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Flesher, eds. *Daughter Zion Her Portrait, Her Response* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

[69] The events and themes of 2 Maccabees, for example, are spatially and temporally structured around Jerusalem. See, e.g., Robert Doran, *Temple Propaganda: The Purpose and Character of 2 Maccabees* (Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981); Sylvia Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochos IV* (University of California Press, 2014); R. Gillian Glass, "Analepsis, Prolepsis, and Eschatology in 2 Maccabees: That Was Now, This Is Then," in *Prolepsis in Ancient Greek Narrative*, eds. Saskia Schomber and Aldo Tagliabue (Brill, 2024), 115–41.

[70] In discussing Zion and Jerusalem, I distinguish between the two in the earlier sources, but, following Hartvigsen, I use Jerusalem/Zion in discussing their reception in *Aseneth*. Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation*, 35.

[71] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 65, 172-240.

[72] R. Gillian Glass, "Inverted Pathways to Power: Heavenly Knowledge and Authority in the *Book of the Watchers* and *Aseneth*," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook on Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in the Ancient Near East*, eds. Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman (Bloomsbury, forthcoming), 291-304, here 224, 301.

[73] Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 27.

relationship between God and his *polis*, as well as for establishing the relationship of this *polis* to a people-group and their neighbours.[74]

The divine founding and protective function of Polis Kataphugês replicate those of Jerusalem/Zion: God founds and protects them both.[75] Aseneth's encounter with the Anthropos offers a narrativized foundation—an implicit foundation by God that exists across the entire textual tradition (*fabula* 20d). In family *a*, Joseph makes the implicit explicit: Upon seeing Aseneth transformed, Joseph says that God has founded (ἐθεμελίωσεν) her walls (As. 19:8). His words recall LXX Isaiah or Psalm 86, where the Lord founds Zion (LXX Isa 14:32 ὅτι κύριος ἐθεμελίωσεν Σιων; LXX Ps 86:5c καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτὴν ὁ ὕψιστος).[76] Nor is the Isaian echo in *Aseneth* limited to this one verb.[77] The prophetic verse explicitly connects God's foundation of Zion with God's protection, for it is through Zion (δι᾽ αὐτοῦ) that he preserves the lowly or humbled of the people (σωθήσονται οἱ ταπεινοὶ τοῦ λαοῦ). The Anthropos' announcement that Polis Kataphugês will shelter many nations (As. 15:7) recalls Zion's protective purpose in LXX Isaiah 14:32.[78]

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[74] My analysis here draws significantly on Portier-Young's 2005 article "Sweet Mercy Metropolis" and Hicks-Keeton's chapter "Genesis Remix," in *Arguing with Aseneth*, 41-60. Portier-Young convincingly argues that the blended imagery of honeycomb, Jerusalem/Zion, and the cities of criminal asylum (e.g., Num 35.11-14) alters the idea of 'mercy' from one based on homicide/manslaughter to divine mercy for any/all who seek it. Portier-Young's analysis starts from the cities of criminal asylum, then moves to Jerusalem/Zion; it is, in part, the argument's sequencing which results in the conclusion that it is the concept of and access to divine protection that is changed in *Aseneth*. In inverting the order of allusions, analysing Jerusalem/Zion first, then the cities of criminal asylum, I draw on Portier-Young's conclusions to argue that this same blended imagery alters location. Likewise, after analysing references to Isaiah in *Aseneth*, Hicks-Keeton concludes that "Aseneth is the mother-city who, patterned after Jerusalem's comfort to repentant and restored Israel, also provides refuge for repentant and re-created gentiles, for the "many nations" who turn to Israel's God and, like Aseneth, are renewed." *Arguing with Aseneth*, 58. In discussing "gentile access," Hicks-Keeton is interested in inclusion/exclusion in *Aseneth*, but does not focus on where this may be happening.

[75] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 124; Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation*, 110; Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 153.

[76] Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation,* 110.

[77] See Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth*, 58-59.

[78] What is a suggestion in family *a* may be a direct allusion in family *d*, in which a variation in vocabulary calls the inhabitants of Polis Kataphugês ἔθνη πολλὰ and λαοὶ πολλοί. Family *d* thus more obviously echoes the people (λαός) of LXX Isaiah 14:32, unlike family *a* where ἔθνη πολλὰ is repeated twice.

According to LXX Ps 86:5, Zion is explicitly a mother (Μήτηρ Σιων), thus joining maternal personification to the language of foundation by God.[79] Jerusalem/Zion is frequently personified as a mother in early Jewish literature (e.g., Isa 66:10-14). The conceptual metaphor CITY IS MOTHER takes on historically contingent, socio-economic significance in Greek-language texts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, for Jewish and non-Jewish authors in diverse genres identified Jerusalem as the μητρόπολις (*metropolis*, mother-city) of the Jewish people.[80] Ancient understandings of collective identity were based in the inextricably linked concepts of ἔθνος (*ethnos*; people group, nation) and (*metro*)*polis*.[81] The *polis* defined not only its *ethnos*, as the "settlement where the people's laws, customs, calendar, and cult were distinctively realised;"[82] but also its relationship to other *poleis*, through peer-polity interactions.[83] Going a step further, the *metropolis* could found colonies, resulting in complex networks of solidarity and rivalry. As *metropolis* of the Jewish people then, Jerusalem defines an entire people-group through a geographically bounded, socio-political and economic concept, in addition to defining relationships between insider and outsider people-groups.

Urbanity, motherhood, and personified Jerusalem have different meanings for *Aseneth*'s diverse texts. Key narrative elements, like

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[79] MT Ps 87:5 reads, "Indeed, it shall be said of Zion,/ "Every man was born there."/ He, the Most High, will preserve it." (JPS). The LXX Ps 86:5 interprets: "Mother Zion, a man will say,/ a man is born in her?/ he, the Highest, has founded her (Μήτηρ Σιων, ἐρεῖ ἄνθρωπος,/ καὶ ἄνθρωπος ἐγενήθη ἐν αὐτῇ,/ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτὴν ὁ ὕψιστος [my translation]). Later Second Temple Jewish literatures pick up on this theme in, e.g., Gal 4:26; Matt 23:37.

[80] E.g., Philo, *Flacc.* 46; *Conf.* 77-78; Strabo calls Jerusalem τὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων μητρόπολιν (*Geographies*, XVI 2.28). Philo's reference to Jerusalem as *metropolis* is particularly significant in light of the present discussion. Without stating it outright, Philo implies that it is the presence of the holy temple that makes Jerusalem the Jews' *metropolis* (*Flacc.* 46), but he elsewhere states that a newly founded city becomes its inhabitants' *metropolis*, regardless of where they were born and raised (*Conf.* 77-78). See Torrey Seland, "'Colony' and 'Metropolis' in Philo: Examples of Mimicry and Hybridity in Philo's Writing Back from the Empire?," *Études Platoniciennes*, no. 7 (2010): 11–33. In Philo, then, we find a (possibly) contemporary Jewish understanding of how one might relate to both Jerusalem and another *metropolis*, the echoes of which I think resound throughout *Aseneth*. Interestingly, Philo refers to the pillars of the Tabernacle space as both κίων and στῦλος (*Moses* 2.77–101); the Septuagint calls these same columns στῦλος (Exod. 26), but the term for column in *Aseneth* is κίων. See, Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," 2587, n. 146.

[81] Steve Mason, "*Eretz-Israel* and Diaspora: Variations on the Category Blues," in *Tra Politica e Religione: I Giudei Nel Mondo Greco-Romano. Studi in Onore Di Lucio Troiani*, ed. Livia Capponi (Jouvence, 2019), 225-46, here 225.

[82] Mason, "*Eretz-Israel* and Diaspora," 226.

[83] Ma, *Polis*, 10-11; 97-99.

Aseneth's early characterisation, her tower, and God's founding of Polis Kataphugês, are stable across the traditions. Polis Kataphugês is always, therefore, like Jerusalem/Zion, and as an ambulatory *polis*, she is always an identity-defining place in which one can meet their deity. What is an allusive background in some texts comes to the fore in those texts which call Polis Kataphugês "a fortified mother-city" (μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη, *As.* 16:16).[84] Eleven versions of *Aseneth*[85] more explicitly link the newly founded city with Jerusalem/Zion: in those manuscripts, Polis Kataphugês is a divinely founded *metropolis* of equal status to Jerusalem/Zion. In the words of Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen, "[t]he features of Aseneth/the City of Refuge and Jerusalem/Zion [...] merge in the blended space [and, m]etaphorically speaking, the statement Aseneth[/Polis Kataphugês] is Jerusalem/Zion is therefore adequate."[86] Across a majority of the Greek texts, Polis Kataphugês is not just a divinely founded *polis*, but equal to Jerusalem/Zion as an identity- and community-defining space.

Of Sexualisation and the City: An Excursus

Aseneth's polisification also replicates imagery and/or language from the Song of Songs. Of the surviving ancient Israelite corpus and cognate literatures, this poem is a unique example of a metaphor in which the source (WOMAN) is described by an urban, architectural target (CITY).[87] The Song's uniqueness and its reception in *Aseneth* are important for understanding the sexual and sexualising nature of polisification as a rhetorical strategy.

Regarding Song, Danilo Verde has shown that the poem's military metaphors are inextricably part of the Song's matrix of sexual and romantic metaphors. The metaphors LOVE IS WAR, WOMAN IS (FORTIFIED) CITY,

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[84] Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth*, 58.

[85] Manuscript G and the ten manuscripts comprising families *a* and *c*.

[86] Hartivgsen, *Aseneth's Transformation*, 108.

[87] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 62.

and MAN IS CONQUEROR characterise the woman as elusive (Song 4:4), sublime (Song 6:4), and both socially and sexually mature (i.e., able to chose her own sexual partner; Song 8:10).[88] This characterisation, in turn, participates in a dangerous discourse about women that is well known in ancient and modern cultures alike: women "play hard to get," which justifies men's unwanted and persistent attentions, in addition to using their beauty to dominate men.[89]

Returning to *Aseneth*, we can see the inherently sexual and sexualising nature of the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS*. Aseneth in her walled garden and tower is the city to be conquered, the harvest to be collected;[90] Joseph fears her lust (that is, her sexual maturity; As. 7:2-6), but yields to her tears (As. 8:8-9);[91] and it is through marriage (and its legitimate sex) that the two are united.

It is necessary to address a particular discomfort that pervades *Aseneth* scholarship. There exists an interpretive resistance to the interrelated ideas that Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês should be understood as Jerusalem/Zion (not just *like*, but the *same as* or *equivalent to*), and that this

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[88] Song 4:4 "Your neck is like Dauid's tower,/ built into *thalpioth*;/ on it hang a thousand shields,/ all the mighty men's javelins." (ὡς πύργος Δαυιδ τράχηλός σου/ ὁ ᾠκοδομημένος εἰς θαλπιωθ/ χίλιοι θυρεοὶ κρέμανται ἐπ' αὐτόν, πᾶσαι βολίδες τῶν δυνατῶν); 6:4 "You are beautiful as Goodwill, my mate,/comely as Ierousalem—/as awesome a sight as women arrayed!" (Καλὴ εἶ, ἡ πλησίον μου, ὡς εὐδοκία,/ ὡραία ὡς Ιερουσαλημ,/ θάμβος ὡς τεταγμέναι.); 8:9-10 "If she is a wall,/ let us build upon her battlements of silver,/ but if she is a door,/ let us carve for her a board of cedar./ I am a wall,/ and my breasts are like towers; I was in his eyes as one who finds peace" (εἰ τεῖχός ἐστιν, οἰκοδομήσωμεν ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἐπάλξεις ἀργυρᾶς·/ καὶ εἰ θύρα ἐστίν, διαγράψωμεν ἐπ' αὐτὴν σανίδα κεδρίνην./ Ἐγὼ τεῖχος, καὶ μαστοί μου ὡς πύργοι·/ ἐγὼ ἤμην ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ ὡς εὑρίσκουσα εἰρήνην). Verde focuses on the MT, but the LXX is more pertinent to my discussion.

[89] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 101. Unfortunately, Verde is just one example of scholars treating the Song as if it preserves a genuine example of a woman's perspective. Such poetic discourse—especially the idea that a woman desires to be sought after, saying 'no' when she actually means 'yes'—is absolutely the product of rape culture, serving to justify men's unwanted advances. Scholarship that does not explicitly label such rhetorical strategies as dangerous (inadvertently) reinforces this perspective. For an important discussion on this topic, see Barbara Thiede, "Taking Biblical Authors at Their Word: On Scholarly Ethics, Sexual Violence, and Rape Culture in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143, no. 2 (2024): 185–205.

[90] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 97-102.

[91] Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 104; Tim Whitmarsh, "Joseph et Aséneth: érotisme et religion," in *Les hommes et les dieux dans l'ancien roman: Actes du colloque des tours, 22-24 octobre 2009*, ed. B. Pouderon and C. Bost-Pouderon (Maison de l'orient et de la Méditerranée — Jean Pouilloux, 2012), 237–52.

metaphor brings with it an inherently sexual/sexualising component.[92] As previously mentioned, Hartvigsen's conclusion to a detailed study is that, "metaphorically speaking, the statement Aseneth is Jerusalem/Zion is [...] adequate," meaning accurate.[93] To the second qualm, Kraemer reminds us that, in various biblical texts, "adultery is a favorite metaphor for Israelite idolatry, and Aseneth is clearly an idolater."[94] Foreign women are, moreover, equated with sexual predation and deviance, and Aseneth is presented in accordance with these Othering tropes—despite being in the land of her birth.[95] It is therefore never necessary to explicitly describe Aseneth performing illicit sexual acts—assumptions about her willingness to participate in them is part of the chain whose metaphoric links include idolatry-adultery-foreign woman-personified Jerusalem. The language surrounding Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês participates in the same "world of romance and rape" as its sources, its rhetorical power presumes the audience's recognition of and identification with these prophetic metaphors of female sexuality, rape, marriage, power, and control.[96] One thus understands the necessity of emphasising Aseneth's chastity and its many layers of protection.[97] To achieve its rhetorical aims, this story must balance two needs: metaphors of CITY IS WOMAN and an idealised (i.e., virtuous) heroine. Therefore, the narrative must provide elements (seven chaste companions, a high tower, strong walls, guards, etc. *As.* 2:1-10) that

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[92] Of *Aseneth*'s parallels with the penitent Jerusalem in Isaiah 58, Kraemer writes, "it would be astonishing if the reference to Jerusalem were explicit" (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 29). Similarly, Portier-Young argues that ideas of Jerusalem/Zion as mother-city of refuge contribute "to the portrayal of Aseneth as City of Refuge," but that "she is not to be identified with Jerusalem, but she will play a comparable role for inhabitants of the Diaspora." ("Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 137-138.). More ambiguously, Hicks-Keeton states that Polis Kataphugês is "modelled on" Jerusalem (*Arguing with Aseneth*, 54). Regarding the sexual undertones inherent in using imagery of personified Jerusalem/Zion, Kraemer notes that the comparison between Ezekiel 16 and *Aseneth* is "hardly perfect" (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 29), and Hartvigsen pointedly refutes any possibility of what she calls "the whore metaphor" because "because the infidelity of the woman/Jerusalem is incompatible with Aseneth's marriage to Joseph." (*Aseneth's Transformation*, 136; also 99-104).

[93] Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation,* 108.

[94] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 29.

[95] Hartvigsen, *Aseneth's Transformation*, 128-130. On the Othering of Aseneth, see Charles, "A Postcolonial Reading." On women as temptress and foreigner in biblical narratives, see Athalya Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative,* 2nd ed. (Bloomsbury, 2020), 106-122.

[96] Weems, *Battered Love*, 44-45.

[97] See Glass, "Inverted Pathways to Power," 301-2.

work against the less desirable aspects of sexualisation in the chosen imagery.

Although the blending of Jerusalem/Zion references in *Aseneth* is enough to convey the sexualising nature of Aseneth's polisification, the text's reception of Song of Songs further illustrates the point.[98] Polis Kataphugês is the result of blended allusions, incorporating the imagery and meaning of JERUSALEM/ZION IS WOMAN, WIFE, ADULTERESS/WHORE, IDOLATOR from prophetic works on the one hand, and WOMAN IS (FORTIFIED) CITY which is elusive and sexually mature from the Song of Songs on the other. Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês thus fits the "bifurcated image" of "woman as either 'whore' or 'virgin'" of earlier biblical texts.[99]

Unpacking the inherently sexual and sexualising nature of these metaphors reminds us that this identity-forming rhetoric is done in the context of early Jewish culture and its highly gendered and gendering language. Discussing allusions to Zion's foundation by God and the metaphoric and socio-historical significance of Jerusalem as mother-city help us understand the Polis Kataphugês' ability to define a people-group. But how does one travel from here—a Polis Kataphugês deeply rooted in Jerusalem/Zion—to Heliopolis? Next, I argue that the cities of biblical asylum function as a conceptual bridge for shifting Jerusalem's foundation from Canaan to Egypt.

Of Asylum and Mobility

In a now foundational study of *Aseneth*, Anathea Portier-Young argued that Aseneth's new name, Polis Kataphugês (πόλις καταφυγῆς), connects her to the "cities of refuge" (φυγαδευτήρια) that the Israelites are

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[98] For discussions of allusions to Song in *Aseneth*, see Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 19-49, 50-88; Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 86-122.

[99] Weems, *Battered Love*, 45.

commanded to build (Num 35, Deut 19, Josh 2, 1 Chron 6).[100] Portier-Young discusses the effects of layered allusions on ideas of refuge, mercy, and inclusion in *Aseneth*. She makes three particularly important observations:

(1) The emphasis on large-scale inclusion: the cities of criminal asylum were for the stranger and the sojourner (καὶ τῷ προσηλύτῳ καὶ τῷ παροίκῳ τῷ ἐν ὑμῖν, Num 35:15), as well as for Israelites, which is expanded by the repetition of "many peoples" (ἔθνη πολλά) in *Aseneth* 15:7;

(2) There will be asylum for Jews everywhere due to the injunction to found new cities of refuge as God grants them new territory (Deut 19:8-9);

(3) Transformed Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês becomes an agent of divine mercy through the layers of allusion to Jerusalem, the cities of refuge, and honey and honeycomb imagery.[101]

To Portier-Young's analysis, I add two points of further discussion. First: the obligation to found new cities "if the Lord your God enlarges your borders, as he swore to your fathers, and he gives you all the land that he said he would give to your fathers" (LXX Deut 19:8) tacitly means that the Polis Kataphugês is part of the land promised to the ancestors. Her inhabitants are thus living in the land promised by God—a homeland.

Second, attending to the LXX-specific use of words in the semantic field of 'refuge' supports my argument that the semantic characterisation of Polis Kataphugês is constructed in support of a 'pro-diaspora' discourse. Portier-Young uses "cities of refuge" for φυγαδευτήρια (*phugadeutêria*) throughout her article.[102] Though a perfectly good translation, re-evaluating the meaning of πόλις καταφυγῆς in light of Garrett Galvin's discussion of "refuge" and related, yet distinct, concepts like "permanent

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[100] Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis."
[101] Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis."
[102] Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis."

exile," "diaspora," and "criminal asylum" provides further insight in (a) how these concepts appear and merge in *Aseneth* and (b) just how the blended imagery in *Aseneth* alters the meaning of φυγαδευτήρια.[103] Galvin limits his analysis to MT, and space precludes a detailed study of how LXX handles each Hebrew term Galvin discusses. Two pertinent examples are the translations of מקלט and מחסה. Galvin makes a sharp distinction between what he calls "spiritualised" and "physical" word usage[104]— undefined terms that I presume are equivalent to "metaphorical" and "literal." The first term is decidedly real, physical, or literal for Galvin: מקלט appears exclusively in passages about the six cities established to protect those accused of manslaughter (e.g., Num 35; Josh 20; 1 Ch 6:52). Galvin thus concludes that the term "is associated with asylum in every OT usage."[105] Of the nineteen uses of מקלט in MT, LXX translates fourteen of them with the neologism φυγαδευτήριον.[106] Φυγαδευτήριον merges the noun φυγαδεία (*phugadeïa*, banishment, exile) with the compound suffix –τηριον (–τηρ and -ιον), a suffix which marks an appurtenance of place, instrument/means, or vessels/utensils.[107] This compound suffix is frequently used in making the names of cultic locations associated with distinct gods and heroes.[108] Logically, φυγαδευτήριον should mean 'a (cultic) place of banishment'—but the word's context shifts the meaning to 'a place of refuge', as a person accused of manslaughter can safely await legal proceedings in the φυγαδευτήριον without fear of retaliation (e.g., Deut 19:4-6).[109] The LXX neologism seems to recognise the physical (i.e. spatial) reality of these cities as "places of refuge."

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[103] Garrett Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 39-48.

[104] Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge*, 44-6.

[105] Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge*, 46.

[106] Num 35:15 uses φυγαδεῖον, for example. John William Weevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers* (Scholars' Press, 1998), 587.

[107] J. H. Moulton and W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Volume II: Accidence and Word-Formation (T&T Clark, 1928), 342 §137.

[108] Moulton and Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 342 §137.

[109] Weevers states the change in meaning, but does not explain why this should be the case: *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers*, 587. Alternatively, one could argue that φυγαδευτήριον should be thought of as a place of cultic or ritual banishment, as it is a location of liminality in which a person could temporarily self-isolate, self-exile, or self-banish

The metaphorical/literal distinction begins to break down in Psalms. Seemingly because "[m]any of these nouns [relating to refuge] are more prominent in the psalms than in the narrative-driven material describing refuge-taking in Egypt," Galvin considers the twelve uses of מחסה in MT Psalms as evidence that this noun is purely metaphorical, having lost its "physical and psychological elements of 'flight,' gaining in return an exclusive reference to Yahweh."[110] The psalms' translator(s) clearly understood the term's semantic plasticity, however, rending it as ἐλπίς (*elpis,* hope or expectation; LXX Ps 13:6; 60:4; 61:8; 73:28; Ps 90:9; 93:22; 141:6), βοηθός (*boêthos*, a substantivised adjective meaning assisting, auxiliary; LXX Ps 61:9; 70:7), or καταφυγή (*kataphugê*, place of refuge; LXX Ps. 45:2; 90:2; 103:18), depending on poetic context. Adding further semantic complexity, these same words are also used in the LXX Psalms to translate multiple Hebrew terms, as seen in LXX Ps 93:22 (MT 94:22), for example, where καταφυγή corresponds to משגב (refuge, stronghold, high tower), and "the rock of my refuge" (מַחְסִי לְצוּר) becomes "my assisting hope" (εἰς βοηθὸν ἐλπίδος μου). On this limited evidence, LXX Psalms appear to use καταφυγή to designate physical, protective spaces—a stronghold (Ps 93:22), a safe place of some kind in an otherwise very martial poetic context (90:2), and a rock for hares (πέτρα καταφυγὴ τοῖς χοιρογρυλλίοις). Though the figurative language may express some sort of metaphoric idea of God as refuge, within the poetic realities, a καταφυγή is a real/physical place.

This cursory consideration of LXX terminology suggests that Portier-Young's argument still stands, but can be further nuanced. As πόλις **καταφυγῆς**, and in line with psalmist language, Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês is a real, physical protection against vengeance and harm. The narrative bears this out in her intervention on behalf of her would-be attackers (*As.* 27-9). Additionally, the πόλις καταφυγῆς in *Aseneth* uses

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while awaiting the juridical process which would decide on their future reintegration into or permanent exclusion from the community.

[110] Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge*, 46.

psalmist imagery to alter the meaning of φυγαδευτήριον, but I suspect that this alteration is less about manslaughter and vengeance than it is about the connotation of banishment and exile inherent to the word's origin in φυγαδεία.[111] The obligation to found new φυγαδευτήρια as territory expands creates a justification for the new *polis* in *Aseneth*, but it also runs the risk of conflating this God-given land with exile. Renaming Aseneth πόλις καταφυγῆς, rather than φυγαδευτήριον or φυγαδεῖον, associates the φυγαδευτήρια with divine safety. When combined with allusions to Jerusalem and Zion as the psalmist(s) imagine them, this potentially exilic foreign territory is transformed into the homeland promised by God.

Of Danger and Destiny: City of Refuge in/and Egypt

At this point, Polis Kataphugês, founded by God in Heliopolis, Egypt, is recognizably a divinely ordained home. This relocation of God's *polis*—the place which defines God's people—is particularly potent in a story set in Egypt, because, of all places, Egypt is a symbolic space whose presence saturates the biblical texts.[112]

Egypt bears a twofold significance in early Jewish literature: it is a space of hope and a space of fear.[113] The prior is equated with openness, abundance, and fertility; this Egypt appears as a refuge from famine and political strife (e.g., Abraham, David, Jeroboam), and even as a place of economic benefit and social advancement despite extreme hardships (e.g., Sarah's abduction, and Joseph's enslavement and assault). The latter stems from closure, restriction, and enslavement (e.g., the Egyptians

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[111] Cf. Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis."

[112] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 23. Also, Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster*; Safwat Marzouk, "The Representation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, ed. Edward Silver and Louis Stulman (Oxford University Press, 2021), 57–77.

[113] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 23.

themselves in Genesis 47:13-26; the Hebrews in Exodus).[114] Diverging and contradicting, these socio-literary constructs of Egypt's spatial symbolism play jump-rope with the line between the political and economic realities of Egypt and its role in ancient historical events, and the artistic licence of literary and cultural imaginations.[115] After all, the frontier is porous between real places and their peoples and cultures on the one hand, and, on the other, the ideas thereof in an *imaginaire*. These realities and ideas are, moreover, mutually affecting.[116]

Within the multilingual corpus of ancient Israelite and early Jewish texts, transmitted and (re)created over many generations, Egypt is particularly condemned as both an actual place and a concept in prophetic and poetic works. Within these texts, Egypt is associated with not only idolatry, but outright rebellion against God (e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah).[117] As discussed above, these works were particularly influential on the themes and vocabulary used to write *Aseneth.* Rather than reproduce the earlier works' condemnations, however, *Aseneth* not only balances ideas of Egypt as good and bad, but uses the language of prophecy and poetry to reject negative discourse about Egypt in favour of a positive image more in line with the experiences of Egypt as place of (eventual) safety for Joseph, Jacob, and their family. *Aseneth* may well be a continuation of the debate about Egypt between Jeremiah and Genesis. Safwat Marzouk proposes that Joseph's words to his brothers offer a counterargument to Jeremiah's condemnation of those Jews who sought refuge in Egypt. Whereas Jeremiah's negative portrait of Egypt alienates Jews living there, "[t]he

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[114] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 29; Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge*, 48-64.

[115] I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the effects of constructs and concepts on living people are very real, and frequently violent.

[116] Marzouk demonstrates the historical backdrop of military and political conflicts between Babylon and Egypt in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and how it informs these texts' interlocking discussions of events and concepts in *Egypt as a Monster*; and "The Representation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah." Taking Aseneth's home in Heliopolis as an example, it is most likely because this city was economically, politically, and cultically important that it became associated with themes of knowledge, ritual, priests, and philosophers in Jewish, Hellenic, and Roman literatures— mentions of Heliopolis in conjunction with temples, priests, rituals, philosophy, and astronomy appear in, for example, LXX Jer 50:12-13; Herodotus, *Histories* II 3:1-9:2; and Strabo, *Geography*, XVII, 1:28-30.

[117] Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster*; "The Representation of Egypt."

Joseph narrative [...] suggests that despite its hardships, migration to Egypt is part of a divine plan that will lead to survival."[118] The verbal parallels Marzouk observes between MT Genesis 45:7; 47:4 and MT Jeremiah 42:16–17; 44:12 are unfortunately absent in the LXX texts. The general themes, however, are present in Joseph's and Jeremiah's LXX words. That Jeremiah predicts the destruction of Heliopolis' obelisks, temples, and deities in particular (43:12–13) would not, I think, go unnoticed by someone writing Aseneth's story. As daughter of the priest of On in Heliopolis, she is potentially dangerous and in danger simultaneously. Polis Kataphugês offers divinely sanctioned safety, reversing the prophetic condemnation of Egypt as a place of metaphorical and physical refuge.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the ancient Jewish novel *Aseneth* uses the metaphor WOMAN IS *POLIS* to redefine a foreign place as home for Jacob and his sons. The polisification of Aseneth incorporates allusions to Jerusalem/Zion which make her *theophiles* and God-founded, as well as allusions to the cities of criminal asylum; cumulatively, these combined allusions conceptually relocate the urban location of divine encounter from Canaan to Egypt. The transformative ability of WOMAN IS *POLIS* resides in its remarkable ability to integrate and balance the categories of foreign and familiar as they apply to multiple characters. In alluding to traditions of Jerusalem as a previously foreign woman, we are invited to see Aseneth as an outsider to Joseph and his family, even as she is an insider in Egypt, living in accordance with ancestral Egyptian customs. Jacob and his sons, called Hebrews and Canaanites, are equally foreign, a vulnerable status which reappears throughout the story.[119] It is through their relationships

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[118] Marzouk, "The Representation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah," 76-77.

[119] The construction of the 'Other' in *Aseneth* is a complex literary process that plays on intersecting stereotypes of gender, ethnicity, and class (see Standhartinger, "Intersections"), and shifting focalisation. Readers' perceptions

with Aseneth/Polis Kataphugês that the house of Israel acquires all the advantages of *polis* life. And, even though Joseph holds high office in Pharaoh's court, it is by marrying Aseneth that his citizen status extends to both an earthly and heavenly *polis*, and, as her *kurios*, he is heir to her earthly and heavenly inheritances.[120] Finally, because attacks on lands, urban spaces, or women were akin to an assault on a group, its tutelary god, or both, in *Aseneth*, the attempted kidnap and rape of Aseneth by the Son of Pharaoh is akin to a military assault on the entire *ethnos* inhabiting Polis Kataphugês.

The possibility of security and citizenship in a God-founded, divinely protected *polis* far beyond Canaan is a powerful statement—one which invites reflection upon *Aseneth*'s origins. Current consensus is that this

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shift with the characters, inviting here the 'Othering' of Aseneth, now there the 'Othering' of Joseph. On focalisation and its uses for characterisation, see Whitmarsh, "Joseph et Aséneth: érotisme et religion."

[120] I agree with Ronald Charles' postcolonial reading of *Aseneth* in many ways ("A Postcolonial Reading"): the story's author(s) certain seem to have understood the world in terms of imperial or monarchal (that is, based in rule by a king) rule. Charles is, furthermore, correct that Aseneth is Othered in various ways, and that Joseph comes to dominate her (that is, after all, the nature of a kyriarchal system). However, I disagree with the conclusion that *Aseneth* is "a clear colonizing text" ("A Postcolonial Reading," 271). Joseph undoubtedly wields considerable power, which enables him to give land to his kin. Yet, Joseph's power and authority are extensions of Pharaoh's governance, as symbolised by his riding on Pharaoh's second-best chariot (As. 5:4), and Joseph's recognition of Pharaoh as a father-figure (As. 20:9; 24:14)—i.e., as one with authority over him, Joseph. Joseph operates within the existing socio-political structure, and—as a formerly enslaved Canaanite who was trafficked into Egypt—his position is contingent upon his ability to integrate into and reproduce Pharaoh's system of governance. In *Aseneth*, there is no mention of the indenturing of Egyptians during the famine recounted in Genesis 47:13-26, and Joseph returns power to the younger of Pharaoh's sons—apparently without a power struggle (As. 29:9). *Aseneth* is certainly a story that presumes kingly power, but it hardly presents a colonial invasion or usurpation. Further difficulties in Charles' analysis arise from his use of the consensus that *Aseneth* is a 1st c. BCE text. Saying that this text exhibits "disdain for Egyptians" in its imperialism and colonialism (Charles, "A Postcolonial Reading," 271; Charles is quoting Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Temple in Heliopolis*, 42) not only flattens the complexity of characterisation and power dynamics in *Aseneth*, in which there are 'good' and 'bad' characters of both Egyptian and Hebrew origins; but also equates the Egyptians of the texts with the real-world people group of the same name at a time when Egypt was, in fact, a Hellenistic kingdom. If *Aseneth* is an imaginative act of imperialistic mimicry, and I agree that it is, *and* it is also, originally a 1st c. BCE text, then the 'Egyptians' in this narrative are more likely to be the Ptolemaic monarchs, and *Aseneth* is writing itself into Hellenic imperialism. The challenges of drawing historic conclusions from *Aseneth* have been discussed by Edith M. Humphrey, "On Bees and Best Guesses: The Problem of *Sitz im Leben* from Internal Evidence as Illustrated by Joseph and Aseneth," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 7 (1999): 223–36. The complexity of power dynamics and morality have been demonstrated by Sabrina Inowlocki and Angela Standhartinger, whose publications show the nuanced and diverging depictions of Egyptian and Hebrew characters and their masculinities in this story: Sabrina Inowlocki, "Le roman d'Aseneth: un roman feministe?" in *La femme dans les civilisations orientales et Miscellanea Aegyptologica: Christiane Desroches Noblecourt in honorem*, ed. Christian Cannuyer, (Centre d'Histoire des Religion, 2001), 111–118; Standhartinger, "Intersections."

story originated in Egypt, and it is entirely plausible that such a message emerged in a Jewish community there. Any literary Egypt is, after all, connected to a literal geography and "real political and economic policies."[121] And yet Egypt also exists as a "metaphoric geography" and "a spatially differentiated otherness" in the literary imaginations of Jewish, Hellenic, and Roman writers.[122] The *Aseneth* novel is set in Egypt because it has to be: this is where Joseph met Aseneth (Gen 41:45). Almost all arguments which endeavour to demonstrate that the story did indeed originate in Egypt are tautological, as Kraemer points out.[123] In addition to the simple fact that there is an abundance of evidence from Egypt and a paucity of evidence from anywhere else, arguments for this story's Egyptian provenance typically fail to show that literary or documentary evidence from Ptolemaic Egypt is exclusive in its ability to explain aspects of plot or imagery in *Aseneth.* Such arguments also typically understate or entirely omit that the so-called "Egyptian" qualities of the story can be readily explained by an intimate knowledge of biblical texts.[124] And, because *Aseneth* displays other, fairy-tale like qualities,[125] this Genesis-mandated setting could be read as roughly equivalent to 'an ancient city in a land far, far away.' Any Jewish community living beyond Canaan (as it is called in *Aseneth*) could have felt it necessary to express the validity of their 'diasporan' life, and done so with a story set in Egypt. Due to its importance in the Jewish literary imagination as a liminal space onto which to project hopes and fears, and its frequent role as Israel's own

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[121] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 31. Also Marzouk, "The Representation of Egypt."

[122] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 31. Also see, e.g., Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster*; "The Representation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah;" Phebe Lowell Bowditch, *Roman Love Elegy and the Eros of Empire* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2023); Robert Cioffi, *Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Greek Novel: Between Representation and Resistance* (Oxford University Press, 2024); and their extensive bibliographies.

[123] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 290–91.

[124] E.g., János Bolyki, "Egypt as the Setting for Joseph and Aseneth: Accidental or Deliberate?" in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuizen*, ed. A. Hilhorst and G. H. van Kooten (Brill, 2005), 81–96; Jürgen K. Zangenberg, "*Joseph und Aseneths* Ägypten Oder: Von der Domesikation einer 'geführlichen' Kultur," in *Joseph und Aseneth*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 159–86. For further discussion, see Glass, "A Daughter of Hebrews and Hellenes," 5-9.

[125] The anonymity of Pharaoh and the Son of Pharaoh, for example, recalls the stock figures of fairytales, like 'the King' and 'the Prince.'

foil,[126] Egypt could here be an ideal catch-all term for 'foreign land'. The radicality of claiming 'Egypt' as home is not diminished, because it is the foreign land *par excellence* of the ancient Jewish literary *imaginaire*, but we cannot necessarily presume that this message is the assertion of a Jewish community in Egypt.

The focus on Polis Kataphugês as a *polis* throughout this article is equally ambiguous in its utility for rethinking *Aseneth*'s dating. Despite its continued significance in the Hellenic cultural imagination, the roles or status of *polei*s were considerably different under Hellenistic monarchies, and then shifted again under Roman imperialism.[127] As a *polis* with a king-god, Polis Kataphugês is reminiscent of Hellenistic *poleis*, but this literary use of a socio-political structure could indicate any of (at least) three options: (1) a Hellenistic origin, (2) a later idealisation of the Hellenistic *polis* (as seen in the Greek novels, for example), or (3) the natural result of blending the theocratic ideals of certain Jewish texts with a Hellenic system for socio-economic organisation. This reading of *Aseneth*, does, however, offer insight into a different experience of Judaism in antiquity, one in which 'home' is defined by divine encounter in a secured inhabitation of an ambulatory *polis.*

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[126] Boer, "Egypt as a Space of Fear and a Space of Hope," 25.

[127] Ma, *Polis*, 203-228 (Hellenistic *poleis*); 259-402 (the *polis* under Rome).