Joseph and Aseneth in Greek literary history: the case of the ‘first novel’

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As of today, no real scholarly consensus has emerged as to the date and genre of ‘Joseph and Aseneth’ (JosAs).* Termini post quem /ante quem are the middle of the 2 B.C.E. and 4 - the beginning of 5 C.E.1 Its genre is variously

1 Late dates if preferred force one volens nolens to go back to the hypothesis of Christian Pseudepigrapha (cf. Kraemer 1998 strongly criticized by Esbroeck 2001) since in 4-5 C.E. Jews no longer wrote in Greek, and Greeks no longer translated Jewish books. Christians preserved earlier Jewish works in Greek, the Jews of later centuries could read Greek and used it in their inscriptions, etc., but none of the texts that may have been composed in Greek have survived, because the Jewish communities ceased preserving them, whereas Christians stopped borrowing Jewish writings. If one declares that JosAs is one of the Jewish works written in Greek circa 300 C.E. I would like to ask for one more sample of such a Jewish literary work (not a letter or inscription), based upon the Greek Bible: ‘von ihr (the Greek Bible - NB) zog sich das Judentum aber seit dem II Jh. immer starker zurück, weil die Kirche sie als ihr Eigentum betrachtete und kontrovers-theologisch genutzt’ (Burchard 2003, 45). This forces me to agree that JosAs is in its natural context between the 2d half of the 2 B.C.E. and is absolutely alone after 115 C.E. As for the idea of Christian authorship of JosAs, which is entertained even today (see Szepessy 1974-1975, Collins 2005, Penn 2005) my opinion may sound paradoxical: in some of its parameters JosAs, is too close to Christianity to be penned by a Christian. Joseph, referred to as God’s firstborn son, possesses obvious features of Messiah, he represents God on earth; Aseneth is human, yet she is simultaneously an angelic being and Heavenly City of Refuge. She attains immortality and through her, in her salvation and immortality will be granted to all believers. Christians have only Jesus to perform this role (cf. salvation in or through Christ). In JosAs salvation and immortality of an individual human being through mysterial initiation, and of humanity, which is the content of messianic doctrines, coincide and take place in the present. An ‘eschaton’, that already has come while its accomplishment is still in future, is widely known to be characteristic of Christian apocalypses only. Presumably JosAs could come into existence among Jewish Christian sects of Ebionites, but our knowledge of these sects is pitifully meagre.
described by students as ‘romance’, ‘love story’, ‘roman à clef’, ‘allegory’, or ‘novel’, ‘wisdom tale’ with the background in Egyptian astrology, merkavah mysticism, apologia for the Heliopolis temple, and many others. However, the majority of researchers acknowledge the *JosAs* to be a Jewish Hellenistic work and consequently place it in time after the translation of LXX (because *JosAs* was written in a Greek heavily redolent of LXX Penta-teuch, Psalms and Isaiah) and prior to Alexandria’s pogroms, or at least, prior to the suppression of massive Jewish rebellions at the beginning of the 2 C.E.

The most balanced and prevailing viewpoint regards *JosAs* as a Jewish work (though congenial with some Christian notions) roughly dating in the two centuries surrounding the turn of the eras, best represented by Burchard’s eclectic text and well-characterized as a romance, which emerged under the Greek novel’s influence and had mystical and apocalyptic affinities. From Philonenko and West and until Ahearne-Kroll, the image of *JosAs* as an atypical novel had not been seriously swayed. The exception was Docherty, who concluded that the work should be most appropriately

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2 Delling 1978.  
3 Sänger 1985.  
4 Burchard 2003. Angela Standhartinger (Standhartinger 1995) regards a short version closer to the original one and ties its expansion with a certain tendency caused by a changed perception of the role of woman between 1 B.C.E. and 1 C.E. The short version is more ‘feminist’, less patriarchal, Aseneth in it is a superior being; in the long one, she is rather a wife to Joseph predestined by God; in the long version, Joseph and Jacob are endowed with greater divineness, which overshadows Aseneth relegating her to the rear; the long version strives to a broader usage of the Bible (Standhartinger 1995, passim, esp. 216-219, cf. Kraemer 1998, 5-88, esp., 80). By expanding or shortening the text, the hypothetical redactor was free to introduce the material more appropriate to his views and remove what was alien. The intelligent observations regarding the difference between Philonenko’s and Burchard’s versions (Kraemer considers Burchard’s version a late Christian reworking) do not however make the attribution of ideological orientation of these versions to corresponding periods convincing. The long version is dated circa the year 500 C.E., the oldest manuscript of the short version is dated 500 years later. We are entitled to assume that the short one represents a middle-Byzantine abridgement of a definite orientation discovered by Angela Standhartinger; Burchard’s eclectic version is the closest approximation to the archetype, judging by what reached us. For Burchard’s response to attempts to reconsider the correlation between the short and the long versions, see Burchard 2003, 39-46.  
classified as an example of a rewritten biblical passage. That is, however, a meta-generic definition; like Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, rewritten biblical passage can belong to different genres.

Dissimilarities between *JosAs* and the novels engage researchers no less than similarities between them. Philonenko believed that *JosAs* utilized three sub-genres: missionary, mystical, and roman à clef. It seems, however, unless we follow K. Kerényi’s and R. Merkelbach’s theories, that Greek literature lacks samples of such subgenres. R. Pervo viewed *JosAs* as an adaptation of the wisdom literature and called it ‘sapiential novel’⁸. Chesnutt, Burchard, Gruen⁹ supported, to a certain extent, Philoneko’s view of *JosAs* and considered the reduction of the erotic element and the salience of symbolic and religious aspects so essential as to suggest that the study of *JosAs* as a novel would not advance the study of novelistic genre; neither would such study enable us to illuminate the intent and significance of the Pseuepigrapha. I believe that *JosAs* was neither conceived as a novel nor was subject to the novel’s influence but is of immense importance for the study of the novel’s history.

I agree with those qualifying *JosAs* as created in Greek in the second half of the 2 B.C.E., yet rooted in earlier oral or written Jewish tradition. This coincides with the lower line recognized by Ch. Burchard, editor of the critical edition, who arrived at this dating after forty years of work with the language and literary context of *JosAs*. Unlike most classical philologists, I share G. Bohak’s hypothesis,¹⁰ who already in 1994 suggested an explanation of the most enigmatic scene in *JosAs* and its *Sitz im Leben*. He argued that *JosAs* was written as ‘a fictional history which “foretells”,¹¹ and justifies, the establishment of the Jewish temple in Heliopolis”¹² by a Jew loyal to Onias temple’s community. This hypothesis explains more in *JosAs* than any other does. When Bohak’s dissertation was published the idea of midrashistic apology for the schismatic temple was especially welcomed by

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⁷ Docherty 2004. By ‘rewritten Bible’ one identifies an attempt to rewrite the whole Bible ‘correctly’ (The Book of Jubilees) or to make it accessible to non-Jews (Joseph Flavius, Antiquities); it does not mean an extention of pair of verses up to a novel.
¹⁰ Bohak 1996.
¹¹ Another sample of vaticiantio ex eventu one would find in a book composed at the same period. I mean the famous Book of Daniel which ‘foretells’ the persecutions of Jews and defilement of the Temple by Antioch IV. The Book of Judith which localizes the time of an action ‘in the far past’ also presents a parable of the contemporary events - the Maccabean war.
¹² Bohak 1996, 102
those who studied Jewish literature Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. But at the time, the author of this hypothesis was too young to affect the attitude of established scholars of the ancient novel. The reason for this is evident: the early date which Bohak assigned to JosAs stipulated the reconsideration of the history of the ancient novel. It is intriguing to follow the arguments whose aim was to secure our notions intact, as for instance, the argument that the translation of the LXX had been around for too short a time to make JosAs possible. It suffices to point to the Greek translation of Sirach, dated 132 B.C.E. which is rooted in the LXX, to dispel this argument. Sara Johnson points out that even with the generally accepted dating of JosAs the text appears to be created too early to be affected by ancient novel and therefore one needs either to make the ancient novel more ancient or JosAs younger.

However, historians of literature seem to prefer to place JosAs in a time when Judeo-Hellenistic literature in Greek ceased to exist (3-4 C.E.) rather than recognize the literary independence of the Judeo-Hellenistic love story (Kraemer 1998). Therefore, JosAs is usually viewed as a peripheral Greek novel constructed out of ancient literary material from the standpoint of motifs, plot, devices, images, and characters. Lawrence M. Wills regards some ‘strange books of the Bible’ and the Pseudepigrapha as created between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. and influenced by a Hellenistic ‘matrix’ which emerged (under the impact of common stimulus) among different peoples of the Hellenistic world. This is slightly reminiscent of the idea ante rem and is too general to explain the details. Later Wills seemed to lean toward the opinion that the Jewish novel was ‘a laboratory of the ancient novel’ – a fruitful idea if the former was indeed prior to the latter.

I shall not attempt to confirm Bohak’s position, although I have new arguments to do so. First, these arguments touch upon the questions not re-

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13 Wills 1995, Wills 1997 Pietersma 2000, Attridge 1998. Some of them were quite ready to discuss a necessity of an earlier date for LXX translation of the Prophets and other Scripture. 
17 The term introduced by Elias Bickerman.
18 Wills 1995, 28.
lated directly to the theme of the conference, having to do with Biblical and Qumranic studies, and the history of non-novelistic Judeo-Hellenistic literature. Second, Bohak’s early dating is irrelevant for our argument that *JosAs* was the first or among the first love stories with the happy ending in Greek prose.\(^{20}\)

I believe that *JosAs* is grounded in literature associated with the diaspora’s hero,\(^{21}\) Joseph the Beautiful (‘Prayer of Joseph’, ‘History of Joseph’, ‘Prayer of Jacob’, ‘Testament of Joseph’, ‘Testament of Jacob’, so called ‘Coptic Joseph’, and Philo’s Joseph writings). His marriage to Aseneth is but one of the episodes in his biography and the apology for this marriage, even disregarding a possible apology for Onias’ Temple, was necessitated by the Halachic problem of a patriarch’s marriage to a non-Jew. Thus, like Ruth, Esther, and Judith in the Second Temple literature, Aseneth becomes the protagonist. The plot of *JosAs* coincided with that of a love novel, but *JosAs* happened to arise because of quite different circumstances. In my opinion, closer and more convincing parallels exist between *JosAs* and LXX, Apocrypha and Judeo-Hellenistic literature than between *JosAs* and the ancient novel. My task is not to demonstrate that *JosAs* is a work of Jewish literature, which is evident, but to show that *JosAs* did not need the ancient Greek novel and also - to pose a question whether the ancient novel needed *JosAs* as its precursor?

The most detailed commentary is that of Christoph Burchard that accompanies his English and German translations of *JosAs*\(^{22}\). Burchard offers 67 references to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, 40 to *Callirhoe*, and 25 to *An Ephesian Tale*. Burchard did not explain why he chose to compare *JosAs* with these particular novels or whether possible results were unforeseen. And what do these references mean?

In his work published in 1970, Burchard describes the plot / subject (Vorwurf) of *JosAs* as a variant of the plot / subject of the Classical novels. He does not think like Philonenko (1968: 44) that the difference between *JosAs* and the Greek love stories is as significant as the one between “libertarian and puritan” novels. On the contrary he admits that fidelity and chastity are the main virtues of the Greek love-stories’ central characters as well (63-64). The theme of conversion, not appropriate to the love story and car-

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\(^{20}\) Of course there were folktales’ plots like ‘Perseus and Andromeda’ which were utilized in literary works but did not survive; as for the happy return to Penelope it is part of epic not of love story.

\(^{21}\) Inowlocki 2002.

dinal in *JosAs*, he finds, however, in the XI-th book of *Metamorphoses* (65). He qualified the similarity or coincidence of folk and literary motives, narrative devices, expressions, situations, feelings and beliefs in *JosAs* and the novels (*Metamorphoses*, *Callirhoe* and others) as ‘stylistic’ ones, and many years after the publication of the book and his commentaries to *JosAs* (Burchard 1970, Burchard 1983, Burchard 1985) his views remained unchanged: “As I wrote before, I do not think that the author of *JosAs* used Greek or Latin novels but that there are similarities of style” (private letter, 20 July 2010). Nevertheless, the parallels mentioned in Burchard’s impressive commentaries and included in his above mentioned book (1970: 66-81), seem to be similarities or likenesses of all sorts and types, and most of them could hardly be qualified as purely stylistic and some of them I would not regard as parallels at all.

Not insisting on direct quotations from the novels and on reading of the ancient novels by the author of *JosAs* Burchard nevertheless asserts: ‘JA bei aller biblisierenden Diktion in erstaunlichem Maß die Motivsprache des Romans spricht’ (81); and ‘nur in Frageform’: ‘JA scheint sich nicht nur in der Aussattung eines Romans zu präsentieren, sondern auch gegebenen Romanstoff zu verarbeiten” (82). This assertion still does not mean that the author of the Jewish story borrowed this ‘Stoff’ from the novels. Burchard refuses to follow the way of Quellengeschichte and does not restrict his analysis to topoi. The similarities in *JosAs* and *Cupido and Psyche*, analyzed *in extenso*, are not limited to details and reach the level of sequence of events and the message incorporated into the plot: “Hier hat eine Übernahme stattfinden” (84). So Burchard indicates the acceptance not of the expressions or motifs, but of the ‘theologisierte Mythologie’ or ‘ins Judenum übernommenen Praxis’ of initiation and mystery (82-84). The question of the date, far from being the least important, rises immediately since Burchard admits that *JosAs* is the earliest of the surviving novels. How could then die Übernahme (acceptance) occur? The most likely, as I see it, possible rationalization of the parallels lies in Burchard’s assumption that the Jewish author drew upon Jewish-Hellenistic Weisheitstheologie. I am quite willing to accept the assertion that the common stuff of Mediterranean myth and cult is shared by both the Greek and Roman novels and *JosAs*, yet I do not see how the use of this common stuff can inevitably produce a novel. Burchard does not offer any other conditions that would stipulate the appearance of specifically this genre out of this stuff.

The one suggestion absent among those offered by Burchard is that the haggadic midrash *JosAs* used ‘gegebenen Romanstoff’ and acquired the
form of the future novel independently and probably became a source of inspiration for the Alexandrinean authors of novels. And this is my hypothesis.

There is one other point I would like to make. The parallels mentioned in the commentaries (Burchard 1983, Burchard 1985) being separated from the explanations provided in the book may mislead the reader so that he may think only of JosAs as influenced by novels and not the other way around. Following Burchard’s unexplained preference I consciously selected Apuleius and Chariton to see how they compare with JosAs.

JosAs and ‘Metamorphoses’

The comparison of JosAs to the Metamorphoses is justified by the fact that both are novels of conversion, and no such novels existed prior to Christian Acts and Lives. In JosAs, Aseneth converts to Judaism, in the Metamorphoses, Lucius to the worship of Isis and Osiris. Only in these ancient novels do we find descriptions of initiation. Mysteries are of course mentioned here and there in other novels as objective realia or they provide imagery but not as the most essential plot complex. The Metamorphoses contains mysteries as emplotted metaphor and as a culmination – the fall and humiliation of a human transformed into an ass, trials, epiphany of a god, another transformation back into a human form, and finally after the initiation to mysteries – into a priest.

The story of Psyche’s search for a god accompanied by various trials including the descent into the underworld to attain marriage and immortality, transmits the same scenario as Apuleius’s entire novel. Following her trials Psyche drinks a potion of immortality and turns into a divine, eternally youthful consort of Cupid.

Aseneth also suffers, is regenerated, experiences initiation, transformation, attains immortality, and marries a divine person.

The mystery scenario is similar, but Chestnutt showed that the mystery in JosAs had nothing to do with concrete realia of Isis ritual.

The Bible contains no overt descriptions of mysteries, but Exodus shares this imagery, and centuries later it provoked the creation of the mystery-like drama of the Passover Haggadah. The story contains all of the major ele-

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

One can discern the same scheme in Psyche’s search for her divine husband. But – would the author of JosAs need this fairy-tale if he had Torah with the same imagery and scheme? In Josh 5:14 Joshua had a vision of ‘archistrategos of the army of the Lord’. This is exactly the appellation by which the angel in JosAs named ‘Anthropos’ identifies himself. This moment in the Bible marks the beginning of a new life in one’s own land for the adepts of a new religion.  

To conclude: mystical imagery cannot serve as a reason to assume the influence either of the Metamorphoses, or on the Metamorphoses, it was a common possession as were fairy-tale motifs in JosAs, Cupid and Psyche, and Callirhoe. Such were the motifs of courtship of a divinely beautiful virgin by a host of grooms, their rejection, persecution of the chosen by the rejected, the placing of the virgin in an inaccessible palace or tower where she meets a divinity. The Metamorphoses or Callirhoe are not closer here to JosAs than, for example, the Egyptian Tale of a Doomed Prince or the story of courtship of Nal and Damajanti. Having excluded typological similarities and motifs, we shall dwell on some of the details selected by Burchard.

1. The pose of Aseneth (11,2-3) - with her head in her lap, fingers clasped round her right knee, and her mouth closed – expresses extreme despair and is similar to the pose of Charite (Met 4,24) and Callirhoe (Chariton 1,8,5). On the one hand, this pose is universal in its expression, on the other, with Aseneth it is an element of the ritual of repentance, which comprises many different stages and is so meticulously described that it reads like an instruction. Indeed, it is not simply a pose of despair. The Bible describes it as ‘the pose of Elijah’. That Prophet competed with Canaanite priests who tried to generate rain. Instead of performing ecstatic dances, Elijah cast himself down upon the earth, put his face between his knees, sat on the ground, dropped his head into his lap, and covered it with his hands. Sitting like this he requested seven times to see if a cloud appeared, it does appear the seventh time (1King 18: 42-45). Later Elijah’s pose became part of theurgist

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25 Understanding the extant texts of Passover Haggadah as scenario of the mysterial drama I follow the hypothesis of my Russian colleague Anna Schmaina-Velikanova.
26 Gardner 1932.
practice, and this way medieval mystics used it to initiate rescue epiphanies. Aseneth likewise received help from the heavens. Charite received ‘help’ from robbers, as did Callirhoe, who assumed the same pose when she found herself in a tomb (1,8,5). But although Aseneth’s behavior is reminiscent of that of the Greek heroines, according to the function of her pose in the plot, it is Elijah’s pose she imitates and not that of Charite or Callirhoe.

2. In reference to the golden cover on Aseneth’s bed (2,8), Burchard points out that settees at Birrena’s feast are also covered with golden cloths (Met 2,19). Burchard seems to stress a parallel on the luxury of gold. We would like to emphasize, however, that the cover in Aseneth’s bedchamber was not monochrome. Aseneth’s bed had a cover woven out of gold and purple yarns, interwoven with violet, purple threads, and of fine twisted linen. Identical descriptions, and with the same colours mentioned in them, are found in LXX 2Chron 3:14; Exodus 26:31, 28:5; 28:15. These colours are not incidental, in the Bible they are the colours of the curtain of the Tabernacle, the Temple curtain, and priests’ vestments only. The parallel on the luxury of gold is not as strong and convincing as that on sacred cloths of the Temple and of the priests. It helps us to apprehend the tower in which Aseneth lives as a temple, and her bedchamber in it as the representation of the Holy of the Holies (2,9). These images come from the Bible, there was no need to borrow them from Birrena’s feast’s description.

3. JosAs presents two triads: bread of strangulation, cup of insidiousness, and ointment of destruction, and – bread of life, cup of immortality, and ointment of incorruptibility. Burchard compared these to the triad of staple agricultural products – grain, wine and oil, which are inadvertently mentioned in Met 9,33,2:

‘remunerari benignum hospitem cupiens, promittit ei de praediis suis sese daturum et frumenti et olivi aliquid et amplius duos vini cacos’.
‘He was anxious to repay the generosity of his host. So he promised to give him from his land some grain and olive, and two casks of wine as well’.

Would we, however, say that in JosAs one talks about nutritional food? A similar triad is encountered in the Bible (Ps 104:15): ‘as do wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the hu-

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27 Schneider 1998, 327 ff.
man heart’. Corn, wine, and oil form a stock biblical trope for the fruits of the earth. More specific, however, are expressions: ‘bread of idleness’ (Prov 31:27), ‘bread of adversity and the water of affliction’ (Isaiah 30:20), ‘mourners’ bread’ (Hosea 9:4) etc., as well as expressions analogous to the ‘positive’ triad: ‘bread of life’ (Io 6:35 and 48), ‘cup of blessing’ (1Cor 10:16).

4. Psyche (the Soul) addresses Cupid: ‘tuæ Psychae dulcis anima’ (‘sweet soul of your Psyche’) and earlier: ‘Amo enim et efflictim te, quicumque es, diligo aequæ ut meum spiritum’ (‘For I love and adore you passionately, whoever you are, as much as my own soul’) (5,6,4). And Aseneth says: ‘Lord, I commit him to you. Because I love him beyond my own soul’ (13,15). This more or less natural expression is also biblical, e.g., 1Sam 18:1 ‘When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul’; 1Sam 18:3 ‘Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul’; 1Sam 20:17 ‘Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul’.

5. Burchard compared Portum Quietis (11,15,3) that Lucius finally attained after tribulations, and ‘place of rest in the heavens’ prepared for all who convert by the Virgin named Conversion (15,7). For this image the author of Jos.As does not need Apuleius. Biblical idiom menuha stands for resting-place, state, or condition of rest (‘desired haven’, Ps 107:30). Besides profane meanings this idiom also denotes ‘the place where the Ark is stored’, the Temple (1Chr 28:2) as well as a ‘refuge’ for a soul (Psalm 116:7), it also means a patient being in the open in expectation of the Day of Judgment (Daniel 12:13). In Ps 23.2 there is ‘water of respite’, evidently a spring in a desert, where people get respite; among peoples living at sea and not in the desert ‘still water’ acquired the meaning of still haven or safe harbor. Τόπος ἀναπαύσεως alternates with τόπος ἀναψύξεως, which initially also signified shade and coolness. Those expressions had a long life to live inside Gnostic (see, e.g. Irenaeus Adv. haer. 3,15,2; 3,25,6 , Act. Jo. 99,1-9) and later - Christian tradition in Ephrem Syrus and in liturgical texts. My conclusion is that the relevance of the parallel with Apuleius in this case is minimal.

6. When Lucius came to himself after the epiphany of Isis, fear and joy were interlaced in him, and sweat covered him from head to toe (11,7):.
Nec mora, cum somno protinus absolutus pavore et gaudio ac dein sudore nimio permixtus exsurgo summeque miratus deae potentis tam claram praesentiam, marino rore respersus magnisque imperiis eius intentus monitionis ordinem recolebam’.

‘Without delay I was at once released from sleep. With mingled emotions of fear and joy I arose, bathed in sweat, utterly bemused by so vivid an epiphany of the powerful goddess. I sprinkled myself with sea-water, and as I meditated on her important commands, I received the sequence of her instructions’. 28

After meeting Joseph and receiving his blessing, Aseneth ‘rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and hurried and went into the upper floor by herself, and fell on her bed exhausted, because in her there was joy and distress and much fear and trembling and continuous sweating’ (9,1). However, shifts in emotions are not formulaic, they vary corresponding to authors’ psychological technique,29 but the expression ‘fear and trembling’ which describes Aseneth’s state is a pleonasm of a distinctly biblical origin: Gen 9:2; Exodus 15:16; Deut 2:25; 11:25; Psalm 55:5; Isaiah 19:16; Judges 2:28; 15:2; Daniel 4:37 (LXX); 1 Macc 7:18; 4 Macc 4:10.

7. Lucius undergoes two transformations – he is delivered from the ugly form of an ass (11,13) and appears as an initiate in a form solemn and radiant as the sun; however, his luxurious garments are external to him like the ass’ skin was; naturally, his new vestments are very similar to the vestments of Aseneth as an Egyptian priestess30 but she discarded hers whereas Lucius

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28 Callirhoe also was seized with fear and joy, grief and surprise, hope and despair when she heard voices outside her tomb (1,9,3).

29 Fusillo 1999, 61-82.

30 Cf. descriptions from Met 11,24-5 and from JosAs 3, 6:

‘My linen garment that I wore made me conspicuous, for it was elaborately embroidered; the expensive cloak hung down my back from the shoulders to the heels, and from whatever angle you studied it, I was adorned all round with multicolored animals. On one side were Indian snakes, and on the other Arctic gryphons begotten by a world beyond this in the shape of winged birds. This garment the initiates call ‘Olympian’. In my right hand I wielded a torch well alight; a garland of glinting palm-leaves projecting like the sun’s rays encircled my head. When I was thus adorned to represent the sun and set there like a statue, the curtains were suddenly drawn back, and the people wandered in to gaze on me. Subsequently I celebrated a most happy birthday into the sacral mysteries; there was a pleasant banquet and a gathering of witty guests. There was also a third day of celebra-
displayed much pride in his: the vestments are similar, the attitudes are opposite. In 10,10 Aseneth threw all her external luxury through the window.

In Aseneth’s case, her whole body gets transformed (18,9, cited below), until it becomes cosmic and equal to the city with adamantine walls (15,16 and 19,10), and her face ‘was like a sun and her eyes were like a rising morning star’. Similarly, in Jewish mystical tradition of the Hellenistic period there was a considerable number of transformations described in terms of sudden light flash. An instance closest to JosAs is to be found in 4 Esdras. The seer watches the transformation of a mourning widow (Zion or Jerusalem after 70 C.E.) into an eschatological city and this transformation, so similar to what happens to Aseneth, is accompanied by radiance: ‘While I was talking to her, her face suddenly began to shine exceedingly; her countenance flashed like lightning, so that I was too frightened to approach her, and my heart was terrified. While I was wondering what this meant, she suddenly uttered a loud and fearful cry, so that the earth shook at the sound. When I looked up, the woman was no longer visible to me, but a city was being built, and a place of huge foundations showed itself’ (4 Esdras 10:25-27)\(^1\).

Enoch also undergoes transformation and becomes Metatron – he became fiery and radiant larger than cosmos in size (Hebrew Book of Enoch 15:1). In early Middle Ages mystical works Adam Kadmon is larger and better than the world, and is a composite of pure light;\(^2\) Jesus gets transformed during a prayer: Luke 9:29 ‘And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white’.

\(^1\) 4 Esdras 10:25-27:
‘et factum est cum loquebar ad eam, et ecce facies eius fulgebait valde subito, et species coruscus fiebat visus eius, ut etiam paverem valde ad eam, et cogitarem quid esset hoc. et ecce subito emisit sonum vocis magnum timore plenum, ut commoveretur terra a sono. et vidi, et ecce amplius mulier non comparebat mihi, sed civitas aedificabatur et locus demonstrabatur de fundamentis magnis.’

8. When the angel Anthropos came to her from heaven Aseneth fell on her face on the ashes (14,3). Her foster father when he saw Aseneth already transformed ‘became alarmed and stood speechless for a long time and was filled with great fear and fell at her feet’ (18,11). In these terms the Bible describes the shock of an encounter with an angelic or divine being. Lucius goes numb when he regains his human image, this fact is repeated several times (11,14). Such a reaction is natural and requires no elucidations, cf. Callirhoe 3,9,2; 4,1,9; 5,3,9. But unlike biblical personages and Aseneth Lucius does not remain prostrate after Isis’s disappearance: he leaps to his feet, washes himself, and repeats the lessons received from the goddess.

9. The image of the goddess Isis and her appearance sharply differ from the image of the angel Anthropos. The Metamorphoses has a famous, particularly detailed description of Isis – it is penned by an experienced rhetor, the master of ekphrasis (11,4). The description of the theophany in JosAs is different in technique: ‘His face was like lightning, and his eyes like sunshine, and the hair of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch, and hands and feet like iron shining forth from a fire, and sparks shot forth from his hands and feet’ (14,9). These images are expressive rather than visual as, for example, in the Bible: Daniel 10:5 ‘I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude’; Psalm 96:2 ‘Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him, and consumes his adversaries on every side’; Mat 28:3 ‘His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow’.

10. The goddess Isis arises from the sea; as the moon, she ascends from the below: ‘Then by little and little I seemed to see the whole figure of her body, mounting out of the sea and standing before me (toto corpore per lucidum simulacrum excusso pelago ante me constitisse visum est)’ (11,3). It is, however, impossible to imagine a messenger in the Bible emerging from the sea. To Aseneth the divine messenger appears from the sky and in the dialogue

33 E.g.: Judges 13:20
‘When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground; Daniel 10:9 Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground’.
she answers the way messengers of God are answered in the Bible by other biblical personages, and in great details.

Aseneth fell on her face, the messenger from heaven stood by her head, he called her by name twice but she did not understand, who was calling her, the messenger called her again ‘Aseneth, Aseneth’ and she said as other characters in the Bible: ‘Behold, (here) I (am), Lord’. The Anthropos promises to tell her *rhemata* (14,3). In 1Samuel 3, 2-14 Lord calls Samuel trice and repeats name ‘Samuel’ and Samuel does not recognize who is calling and finally say ‘Behold, (here) I (am), Lord’ and Lord promises to disclose ‘remata’ that is *words* and *deeds* (11); cp. Judges 6,11-24 etc.

However the falling star turning into a person is neither a Classical, nor a biblical image. The Bible has only two instances of this image. And its origin asks for a special discussion to explain the ‘Persian trace’ in *JosAs* mystical imagery.

11. It is instructive to compare representations of eternal marriage. Joseph and Aseneth are united in an eternal union, a sacred marriage, which represents the union between God and the land of Israel (21,2-3): ‘And Joseph rose at daybreak and went away to Pharaoh and said him, ‘Give me Aseneth, daughter of Pentephres, priest of Helopolis, for (my) wife’. And Pharaoh rejoiced with great joy and said to Joseph, ‘Behold, is not this one betrothed to you since eternity? And she shall be your wife from now and for ever’. There were golden crowns, which had been in the Pharaoh’s house ‘from the beginning and of old’ (21,5). Both Penthephres and Pharaoh predict that Aseneth shall be an eternal bride of Joseph and he her eternal bridegroom (4,8 and 21,4)

Jerusalem is forever God’s bride, this union has been set from eternity and it is inviolable. It constitutes the subject of many biblical books but

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34 Isaiah 14:12:
‘How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low’; Num 24:17 ‘I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites. In one case it is fallen angel, in another probably Messiah’.

35 The words of Solomon, Wisdom 8:2:
‘I loved her, and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty; ... 8:13 Because of her I shall have immortality, and leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after me.... 8:21 But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me – and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was...’ On the eternal Union of the God and the country or Jerusalem as bride forever: Hosea 2:19 ‘And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you
even in *Tobit* where the personages are common people, the bride and the groom are also perceived as destined for each other; this marriage is meaningful for the people of Israel since the children from this union will return to Jerusalem.  

Apuleius also seems to develop the theme of eternal marriage between Psyche who receives the cup of immortality, and marriage to a god. This hidden sense is what Medieval interpreters saw in the Tale. But the representation of this theme has a rather playful and comic character: eternal marriage here is presented by Jupiter not as the eternal union between soul and God but as ever-lasting love games (6,23,1-24,4):

> ‘Puellam elegit et virginitate privavit: teneat, possideat, amplexus *Psychen semper suis amoribus perfruatur*’. ... et ilico per Mercurium arripi *Psychen et in caelum perduci iubet. Porrecto ambrosiae poculo: ‘Sume, inquit, Psyche, et immortalis esto, nec umquam digredietur a tuo nexu Cupido sed istae vobis erunt *perpetuae nuptiae*’. ‘He has chosen the girl, and robbed her of her virginity, so he must have and hold her. Let him take Psyche in his embrace and enjoy his dear one ever after’. ... There and then he ordered that Psyche be detained and brought to heaven through Mercury’s agency. He gave her cup of ambrosia, and said: ‘Take this, Psyche, and become immortal. Cupid will never part from your embrace; this marriage of yours will be eternal.’

12. *JosAs* has much in common with the apocalyptic imagery of other Jewish texts, for example, 4 Ezra with the representation of a woman-city.  

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36 Angel says to Tobias about his bride: Tob 6:18: ‘She was set apart for you before the world was made. You will save her, and she will go with you. I presume that you will have children by her, and they will be as brothers to you’, cf. Tob 8:7.

37 Humphry 1995. An image of city personified as woman with turreted crown can be seen in Greek statues, especially in Asia Minor. Image of Aseneth as a city could be influenced by the iconography of e.g. Artemis of Ephesus. Yet in the Near East woman-city is older, than the Greek invasion into Aegean region. It is well attested in Sumerian literature and in the texts of Ugarit. The crowns of this type come into Asia Minor and Aegean islands from Phoenicia.
difference is not only between the epiphanies and revelations of Apuleius but between all Greco-Roman apocalypses: the eschatology of Lucius is personal; that of Aseneth presumes salvation through her of the entire converted humanity,\textsuperscript{38} which is characteristic for Judaic apocalypses and prophesies. Lucius is promised a secure and even a long life, and a decent place in the other world, if he behaves, of course (11,6,20-31):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Vives autem beatus, vives in mea tutela gloriosus, et cum spatiunm saeaculi tui permensus ad inferos demearis, ibi quoque in ipso subterraneo semirutundo me, quam vides, Acherontis tenebris interlucentem Stygiisque penetralibus regnantem, campos Elysios incolens ipse, tibi propitiam frequens adorabis. Quodsi sedulis obsequis et religiosis ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniiis numen nostrum promerueris, scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere.}
\end{quote}
Your future life will be blessed, and under my protection will bring you fame; and when you have lived out your life’s span and you journey to the realm of the dead, even there in the hemisphere beneath the earth you will constantly adore me, for I shall be gracious to you. You will dwell in the Elysian fields, while I, whom you now behold, shine brightly in the darkness of Acheron and reign in the inner Stygian depths. But if you deserve to win my divine approval by diligent service, you will come to know that I alone can prolong your life even here on earth beyond the years appointed by your destiny’.

Aseneth is promised eternal life (see above 16,16). So is Psyche – she is in Olympus, she received the lot of gods but this fact is irrelevant for the fate of humanity. Surely, the Psyche’s fortune could be interpreted and was interpreted as presenting a way out of \textit{conditio humana}, a way for the initiated

\textsuperscript{38} Cf. Isaiah 58:11-14:
‘The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies. ….60:1-4 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. … Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms’. 
and for those with ‘psychai’. The two representations of how the heroines (Aseneth and Psyche) obtain the immortality differ from each other as mythic and fairy, as serious and comical do. I maintain the priority of the first one.

Burchard’s 67 references are not exhausted but the examples provided suffice to show that JosAs does not need Apuleius to explain its literary components and imagery. All the parallels with this Apuleius’s work fade in the face of their support by folklore and biblical tradition.39 We would like to add one more parallel to those singled out by Burchard. Juppiter in the scene on Olympus (VI, 23) addresses gods in such a way: ‘Dei conscripti Musarum albo...’ (‘You gods whose names are inserted on the register of the Muses...’). Album alludes to the register of senators and dei conscripti to patres conscripti. The point of a parody seems to be quite clear. Yet the Heavenly Book is not Roman by origin and Apuleius’s parody seems to by twofold. We know that the name of Aseneth is also inserted into the Book of Life or of Living in heaven as well as the name of Anthropos is inserted into the Book of the Most High (15,4,12). Burchard does not mention Metamorphoses in his commentary on the heavenly book, because it is evident for him that a sort of heavenly citizens register is ‘a common Jewish and Christian idea with roots way back in the ancient Near East, e.g. Ex 32:32 f.; Ps. 87:6, Jub. 30:22 1QM 12.1 f.; Lk 10:20, Rev 20:12,15’.40 If we do not accept an intermediary function of JosAs between Apuleius and the Bible we probably are to admit either the direct borrowing or an intervention of another unknown mediator.

JosAs and Chariton

As the basis for comparing Callirhoe and JosAs I would above all mention that JosAs is the only love-story in the historical fiction of Hellenistic Jews

39 The connection of mysterious imagery in JosAs with zoroastrism deserves a separate investigation. A number of medieval Persian works about Yussuf and Zuleikha testify to a direct familiarity of Islamized Persians with our Pseudepigrapha. Simultaneously rituals of Shiite sects, in particular ‘the ritual of the cup’, stemming from Zoroastrian religious practices and ideas and reinterpreted in Islamic spirit, date as far back as Zoroastrian times, on the one hand, on the other, they display amazing, minute details including, kinship with the description of mystery, which is unique in Greco-Roman and Middle Eastern world. The question about Persian background in JosAs has not until now been posed.

40 Burchard 1985, 226.
while Callirhoe – is the only historical novel among Greek love-stories, but in JosAs all the personages with names are biblical (= historical) with the sole exception of Joachim whereas Chariton’s personages are not historical with the exception of Hermocrates. JosAs is grounded in sacred text, Callirhoe – in legends about the glorious past without strict limitations by primary sources. Ahearne-Kroll compared JosAs and Callirhoe and came to the conclusion, that JosAs ‘utilizes the ancient Greek novel, but its individual expression of this genre is clearly distinct’.41

I doubt that JosAs used any ancient novels. The procedure of comparing JosAs and Callirhoe will differ from the previous one. In addition to demonstrating JosAs’s independence and the rootedness of its imagery in its own culture, I will pose a question, as a kind of mental exercise, whether the influence of another order may be at all possible. For this I need to trace what kind of differences exist between those elements which I compare because of the similarities between passages, images and plot components. It seems to me that the differences between parallel elements have a systemic character and not only demonstrate JosAs’s independence from Greek novels but possibly, horribile dictu, its primary character.

1. Love at first sight is common for both texts. Eros suddenly decided to have Chaereas and Callirhoe meet and arrange their marriage. Aseneth instantly fell in love with Joseph, but they are betrothed to each other from eternity and their crowns had been in Pharaoh’s house ‘from the beginning and of old’ (15,9 and 21,5). Angel Anthropos says: ‘Dress in your wedding robe, the ancient and first robe which is laid up in your chamber since eternity’ (15,10). Their marriage is part of divine design for mankind’s salvation and the restoration of its immortality. In Callirhoe, the marriage is threatened for a while by the parents’ rivalry but this obstacle is easily overcome. In JosAs the initial obstacle is the couple’s difference in origin and religion. Callirhoe, thus, presents us with an insignificant hiatus, in JosAs – there is an inviolable ban to marrying foreign women (Gen 24:3 and 28:1 and 6; Deut 7:3 ff. Nehem 13:13-29 as words of Jacob: Jub 39,6; TestJos 3,3). In Chariton, to show and develop the qualities of the ideal couple Eris and Tyche interfere, trials and adventures follow, the protagonists are pursued by gods’ willfulness and the jealousy of suitors to show and develop their qualities as the ideal couple. In JosAs, to have the ban to the marriage removed the Egyptian Aseneth has to undergo transformation and convert into Joseph’s faith. In the romance’s second part the initial suitors’ jealousy pre-

41 Ahearne-Kroll 2005, 142.
cipitates a series of adventures, but *JosAs’s* main goal is after all not entertainment. Jewish literature of this period always has a pragmatic goal - didactical, apologetic, propagandistic, etc. Being fictional no less than Greek romances, the so called ‘Jewish novels’, and *JosAs* among them, had a different self-consciousness and were never qualified by their contemporary readers as ‘plasmata’, pure invention whose chief goal is entertainment. The motif of persecution by a rejected suitor comes from world folklore. Thus, we are not obliged to imagine that Chaereas’s father’s exclamation: ‘Hermocrates will surely never give you his daughter’ (1,1), in *JosAs* will turn into a ban against marriage with foreign women. Marriages to non-citizens, foreigners, etc. were often forbidden in Greek cities, but the religious issues were not mentioned. In the Bible, on the contrary, such a ban existed. Hence it is more likely that the texts were independent of each other, or that *JosAs* had some impact upon the Greek writers, since for a Hellene religious obstacles to marriage did not make much sense.

2. In Chariton’s work, young people suffer from lovesickness, they fade away (1,1,7-10). This is a novelistic topos. Having experienced a shock upon seeing Joseph and his refusal to kiss her, Aseneth feigned sickness so as not to be disturbed (10,6). She performs a ritual of repentance and keeps a seven-day fast. Callirhoe is on her bed and weeps under her cover, whereas Aseneth dresses in black and for seven days, from the first evening to the morning of the eighth lies prostrate on the floor in ashes mixed with tears.

In one case we deal with the ritual of repentance, in another, with something akin to depression. Could the description of depression prompt the description of the ritual? Or do we deal with the case when the description of the ritual minus a sacral component turned into a depression? The Greek author being alien to the ritual of repentance could perceive the description of Aseneth’s behaviour after her meeting Joseph as a symptom of lovesickness. It is quite unlikely that the opposite situation of transforming such a cliché into ritual could take place.

3. Callirhoe’s beauty is divine; she is compared to goddesses many times: with ‘virgin Aphrodite’ (1,1,2, cf. 4,7,5 and 3,8,9); she is routinely taken for Aphrodite (1,14,1, 2,3,6-10, 3,2,14 and 17, cf. 2,2,6). Seeing her prompts Dionysius to recollect poets’ and artists’ stories about gods forced to converse with people (2,4,8). Because of her superhuman beauty the Persian

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42 On ‘plasmata’ as one of the terms for novels see Rohde 1876, 351, Anm. 1.
43 Cf. the readiness to exchange motherland and religion for Chariclea: Hld. 5,19,13.
king suspects her to be a goddess from a far-away town passing herself for a Greek (6,3,5). These comments about Callirhoe as a goddess are a literary device to emphasize indescribable beauty through the reflections of personages in the narrative.

When Aseneth, still a heathen, an Egyptian, is compared to biblical mothers – Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel – the comparison is not meant to create an image of beauty but to ascribe Aseneth into the line of female progenitors for she is also a progenitor of two tribes of Israel. But this is only the first ‘phase’ of her beauty.

The second phase is her transformation into angelomorphic creature:

Aseneth leaned over to wash her face and saw her face in the water. And it was like a sun and her eyes (were) like a rising morning star, and her cheeks like fields of the Most High, and on her cheeks (there was) red (color) like a son of man’s blood, and her lips (were) like a rose of life coming out of its foliage, and her teeth like fighting men lined up for a fight, and the hair of her head (was) like a vine in the paradise of God prospering in its fruits, and her neck like an all-variegated cypress, and her breasts (were) like the mountains of the Most High (18,9).

Joseph is more beautiful than one born from a woman could be (6,5; 13,14), but this is not a hyperbole. He has his double in heaven: a man ‘in every respect similar to Joseph, by the robe and the crown and the royal staff, except that his face was like lightning … etc’ (14,9). The beauty of biblical personages is not set against some etalon de beaute, it itself is the etalon. What comes first: the etalon or something which evokes its image?

4. When Chariton describes the appearance of Callirhoe ‘as’ epiphany, it is an ‘as if epiphany’. Her appearance in public stuns people, ‘as when Artemis appears to hunters in lonely places’ (1,1,16). ‘In fact not a single one there could withstand her dazzling beauty. Some turned their heads away as though the sun’s rays shone into their eyes, and others actually knelt in homage’ (4,1,8-9). That is how Aseneth’s foster-father feels facing her after her transformation (18,11). It is reminiscent of the angel’s appearance in JosAs. Callirhoe arrives in Babylon in a covered cart, the crowd is anxious to see her; her exit is presented as the last stage of initiation when light comes and initiates see radiant statues of gods: ‘At that moment everyone strained not only their eyes but their very souls, and nearly fell over each other in their eagerness to be first to see and get as near as possible. Callirhoe’s face shone
with a radiance which dazzled the eyes of all, just as when on a dark night a
blinding flash is seen’ (5,3,8-9). The author has at his disposal mystery im-
ages which, as Hägg demonstrated, enhance literary expressiveness.44

Having finished praying and imploring God, Aseneth looks, ‘and behold,
the morning star rose out of heaven in the east’ (14,1). When she raised her
eyes again: ‘and behold, close to the morning star, the heaven was torn apart
and great and unutterable light appeared. And Aseneth saw (it) and fell on
(her) face on the ashes. And a Man came up to her from heaven and stood by
Aseneth’s head’ (14,2-3). This is not metaphorical; it is a genuine epiphany.
The Mystery of the Most High is presented as having been in evidence (14-
18). If I am to compare a description in terms of mystery and a description
of the Mystery I do not think that the former (the description of Callirhoe’s
beauty) could appear under the influence of the latter (the apocalyptic scene
in Jos.As).

5. Callirhoe’s beauty is a given, it gets enhanced due to joy or, for example,
after washing. Then her hidden beauty becomes visible to others: ‘For,
whereas when she was dressed they admired her face as divine, they had no
thoughts for her face when they saw her hidden beauty. Her skin gleamed
white, shining just like a shimmering surface, but her flesh was so delicate as
to make one afraid that even the touch of one’s fingers might cause a serious
wound’ (2,2,2-3).

Aseneth looks do not improve, she undergoes transformation, which
happens as a result of her initiation into mysteries. She becomes immortal,
she receives a new name, she becomes the City, the Fortress for everyone
who turns to God (16,16).

‘Behold, you have eaten bread of life, and drunk a cup of immortality,
and been anointed with ointment of incorruptibility. Behold, from today
your flesh (will) flourish like flowers of life from the ground of the Most
High, and your bones will grow strong like the cedars of the paradise of
delight of God, and untiring powers will embrace you, and your youth
will not see old age, and your beauty will not fail forever. And you shall
be like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of
Lord God, the king of ages’.

What we have here is not simply similarity with beautiful progenitors or
goddesses. Aseneth is a woman, but she is also the City, her walls are ada-

44 Hägg 2004, 141-158.
mantine, Lord God himself rules in this City (19,8). Her old servant looks at her and does not recognize her: ‘What is this, my mistress, and what is this great and wonderful beauty? At last the Lord of heaven has chosen you as a bride for his firstborn son Joseph?’ (18,11). Neither does Joseph recognize her (19,4), her parents are stunned by her beauty radiant as light (20,6-7). Aseneth herself is surprised at her reflection in water: ‘and rejoiced with great joy, and did not wash her face, for she said: Perhaps I (will) wash off this great beauty’ (18,9-10). We see Chaereas returning home from the gymnasium ‘radiant as a star. The flush of exercise bloomed on his beaming face like gold on silver’ (1,1,5-6). In Greek literature eyes are often likened to stars. However, a youth walking like a star is an unusual comparison. Unusual for Greek literature also is the motif of the star descending from heaven. But the former functions as a means of expressiveness, the latter is a mystical event. We deal here with divinity and ‘as if’ divinity, with a literary trope and a mystical event. If we are to draw a conclusion on the priority, I think that mystical event was prior to the literary trope.

6. In comparing the poses of despair in *Metamorphoses* and *JosAs* I have already said that Aseneth’s pose is ‘Elijah’s pose’, the pose of summoning God. Aseneth assumes it after the ritual of symbolic death. Callirhoe suffers a false death, *Scheintod*; Aseneth dies although a mystical but a real death: the ritual of fasting and repentance, and dressing for a funeral lament mean that she weeps for herself as a deceased heathen, and she asks God to create her anew, to re-mould her, to breathe life into her; she does not have parents any longer, her father is God. She died and was raised. Callirhoe recovers after her apparent death, this is called *palingenesia*. The symbolic ‘death’ of repentance in *JosAs* correlates with the false death in *Callirhoe*.

The descriptions of this state are astonishingly detailed, unique in ancient literature. Both of them start with the mentioning of hunger and both end with the ‘Elijah’s pose,’ and weeping for oneself.

‘*Callirhoe* experienced a second return to life. When lack of food had led to some loosening of her blocked respiration, she slowly and gradually regained her breath. Then she began to stir, limb by limb, and opening her eyes she regained consciousness as though waking from sleep, and called Chaereas, thinking he was asleep at her side. But when neither husband nor servants answered, and all was dark and lonely, she began to shiver and tremble, unable by reasoning to guess at the truth. As she slowly came to her senses, she touched the funeral wreaths and ribbons,
and caused the gold and silver to clink. There was a prevalent odor of spices. She next remembered the kick and the ensuing fall and eventually realized that as a result of her unconsciousness she had been buried. Then she screamed at the top of her voice, crying out ‘I am alive!’ and ‘Help!’ When after much shouting nothing happened, she gave up all hope of rescue, and bending her head on her knees she sobbed…’ (1,8,1-5).

Aseneth’s regeneration occurs after her ritual death:

‘And on the eighth day, behold, it was dawn and the birds were already singing and the dogs barking at (people who were) passing through, and Aseneth lifted her head (just) a little from floor and the ashes on which she was lying, because she was exceedingly tired and could not control her limbs because of the want (of food) for the seven days. And she rose on her knees and put her hand on the floor and lifted (herself) up a little from the floor, and (she was) still bowing her head, and the hairs of her head were stretched out (in strands) from the load of ashes. And Aseneth clasped her hands, finger against finger, and shook her head to and fro, and struck her breast continuously with her hands, and laid her head into her lap; and her face was flooded with her tears, and she sighed with great sighing, and pulled her hairs from her head, and sprinkled ashes on her head. And Aseneth was tired and had become discouraged and her strength had gone. And she turned upward to the wall and sat below the window looking east. And she laid her head into her lap, clasping her fingers round her right knee, and her mouth was closed, and she (had) not opened it in seven days and in seven nights of her humiliation’ (11,1-2).

Chariton’s description is livelier and more picturesque but could it engender a detailed ‘theurgist instruction’? Or is it the other way around and the scene in JosAs encouraged the description of palingenesia?

I could continue the list of analogous queries and demonstrate, for example, how the ceremonial kiss in JosAs45 corresponds to the sentimental one in Callirhoe (kisses pack these two narratives), or compare virginity in Callirhoe to virginity as a symbol of proselytism in JosAs. Lack of space and time, however, allows for only one other comparison.

45 Burchard 2005.
In the central episode of JosAs the honeycomb produces swarms of multicolored bees which encircle Aseneth and form another comb upon her face and lips. Could this episode with its string of images be prompted by a comparable scene in Callirhoe?

When Callirhoe is brought out of the shrine, people follow her as if glued to her: ‘Then you could see that royalty comes by birth, as with the king in a swarm of bees, for they all of their own accord followed after her as though she had been elected by her beauty to be their mistress’ (2,3,10). To me it looks totally improbable that Chariton’s comparison could beget this mysterious scene in JosAs, but it looks highly probable that this impressive scene could settle in memory and echo in Chariton’s work. Essentially through the cited examples I have already described the difference between the same motifs in the two narratives. What they represent in one case is primary meaning, original, ‘serious’, real, and ritual. In the other case, we deal with the metaphoric, artificial, literary, artistic, and psychological. These discrepancies are of such a character that they can hardly confirm the influence of the Greek source.

That JosAs is a work of sacral character, and Chariton’s novel is a literary fiction is obvious. Though the problem of priority of the sacral to the fictional is not to be resolved in this paper, common sense would admit that at least for the ancient traditional world reality (even sacral) is prior to fiction (even realistic). The dating of JosAs in the second part of 2 B.C.E. allows us to speak not only of ‘logical’, but also of chronological priority of JosAs to Chariton’s novel. Such textual resemblance as I demonstrated usually imply direct literary influence. From JosAs ancient novels borrowed the plot based on obstacles to marriage, but the sacral character of those obstacles as irrelevant for the polytheistic mentality was discarded. Chariton’s novel is loaded neither with allegories, nor with symbolic dimensions. Chariton omitted the mystery element. As for other novels, a regular tendency is to perceive in them under their realistic surface some symbolic dimension.

The difference between the symbolic dimension in JosAs and the symbolic dimension in other ancient novels is in the former’s ‘non-cryptic’ character. There is no surface which covers the depth, mystery is not hidden under the profane cover, quite the contrary, it is presented to the reader in the apocalyptic scene. The apocalyptic scene in the center of the story is or may be enigmatic for us. Yet nobody has to decipher the very plot of a story as alluding to the hidden symbols.

The comparison of JosAs with Metamorphoses and Callirhoe leads to an unexpected reconciliation between the opposite scholarly tendencies of K.
Kerényi, and Ben. Perry. Indeed, the search for symbolic or mystery dimension appears justified, as does the idea that the Hellenistic novel was invented under the impact of exotic ‘provincial’ work. Soon after, other novelistic works, Christian apocrypha, would appear in the ancient world under the influence of other, likewise provincial and sacral texts – I have the New Testament texts in mind.

If JosAs was older than Greek novels, if ‘Ninus and Semiramida’, and ‘Sesonchosis’ were Greek remakings of Oriental novellas, and Achikar’s story penetrated Vita Aesopi, then, perhaps, it’s time to return to the ‘the first novel’ problem? Was it a Greek who penned it one fine early afternoon? Or if we return to Martin Braun’s idea that Hellenistic peoples created stories about their national heroes, we may regard JosAs a missing link between those stories and the love novel.46

There is little doubt that JosAs was written in the Hellenistic world. As a work of prose, it resembles both the novelistic books of the Bible and the Greek romances. What I maintain on the pages above is that in terms of the palpable influence one can trace the ‘image and likeness’ to the Greek Old Testament and folklore but finds no signs of the presence of the Greek novels in the world of JosAs’ author.

Is it accidental that JosAs uses the expression παράδεισος τῆς τρυφῆς (16.8) from Gen 3:23-24 and the only pagan book to repeat the same quotation is the novel, ‘Daphnis and Chloe’ (4.3.1.4)?

Bibliography


46 Braun 1938.


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