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Psalter Terminology in *Joseph and Aseneth*¹

Introduction

One of the most important topics of the patriarchal narratives of the Book of Genesis is marriage and family. Choice of partner, childlessness, birth of children and conflicts between husband, wife, and other members of the family play a prominent role in these stories, whoever has written and arranged them. However, one of the most striking features of these narratives is that they give us extensive details of the marriages of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, on the one hand. On the other hand, Joseph's marriage was only worth a few lines.² In fact, according to Gen 41:45, Pharaoh gave Joseph Aseneth, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Aseneth bore two sons who were called Manasseh and Ephraim (vv. 50–52), the ancestors of the future tribes of Israel. These details are remembered in Gen 46:20, in the context of the genealogy of Jacob's family (Gen 46:8–27). Here again, the text is quite laconic and does not offer any more information, apart from the aforementioned facts. In other words, the Genesis narrative does not say a word about the exact circumstances in which Joseph's marriage was concluded and in which the two children grew up. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that Joseph is not at all blamed for having married an Egyptian woman. In particular, the Genesis narrative does not mention the danger that the union with Aseneth could have enticed Joseph to worship Egyptian gods.³ His "orthodoxy" is obviously not

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² It is remarkable that even in recent studies focussing on the role women have played in the Pentateuch Aseneth only has a shadowy existence, e.g. *Die Bibel und die Frauen. Vol. 1.1: Tora*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer/Mercedes Navarro Puerto/Andrea Taschlerber, Stuttgart 2010.

³ Several commentators highlight this aspect, e.g. CLAUS WESTERMANN, *Genesis*, 3. Teilband (BK.AT I/3), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982, 100: "Für den Erzähler der Josephsgeschichte war es nicht anstößig, daß Joseph der Schwiegersohn eines Priesters des Gottes

at stake. In contrast to Solomon, whose foreign women are said to have “turned his heart away after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4), Joseph’s marriage with Aseneth seems free from this risk. The possibility of rendering a cult to the Egyptian deities is not even mentioned, despite the fact that Aseneth’s father is an important priest.

Whereas the Genesis text passes over all of these questions, a non-biblical text, the so-called novel⁴ *Joseph and Aseneth*, fills many gaps of information. This text belongs to the so-called hellenistic Jewish literature⁵ and was probably written in Egypt in the course of the 1st century BCE, perhaps at the beginning of the 1st century CE⁶ or even later in the course of the same century.⁷ Its original language was certainly Greek.⁸ In its first chapters, the novel vividly describes Aseneth’s way of life and her education, the circumstances of the first meeting of the future spouses as well as the obstacles to be removed before the marriage can be concluded. Indeed, the major problem that seems to make marriage impossible is obviously Aseneth’s religion. This problem emerges, at least for Joseph, when he happens to meet her for the first time in her parent’s house. As soon as her father wants to present his daughter to Joseph, Joseph refuses to kiss Aseneth and to be kissed by her because “with her mouth she blesses dead and dumb idols” (VIII:5).⁹ In short, Aseneth’s idolatry is the crucial motive

Re wird ...” JÜRGEN EBACH, *Genesis 37–50. Übersetzt und ausgelegt*, Freiburg 2007, 254: “Im Text der Josefsgeschichte selbst wird die Verbindung mit einer Ausländerin nicht getadelt ...”

⁴ Modern scholars seem to agree upon the literary genre of *Joseph and Aseneth* insofar as they perceive relationships between this text and ancient (erotic) novels. Nonetheless, they underline the differences which distinguish *Joseph and Aseneth* from other Jewish or non Jewish literature. For more details see e.g. HOWARD CLARK KEE, “The Socio-Cultural Setting of Joseph and Aseneth”, *NTS* 29 (1983) 394–413, on pp. 395–400; CHRISTOPH BURCHARD, “Joseph and Aseneth”, in: *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. II, edited by James H. Charlesworth, New York 1985, 177–247, on p. 186; ALBERT-MARIE DENIS, *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique*, vol. I, Turnhout 2000, 292f.

⁵ The commonly held view among scholars is that *Joseph and Aseneth* lacks elements of a substantial Christian redaction. A Christian authorship of the text is far more unlikely; see e.g. JOHN J. COLLINS, “*Joseph and Aseneth*: Jewish or Christian?”, *JSP* 14 (2005) 97–112.

⁶ See e.g. RANDALL D. CHESNUTT, *From Death to Life. Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (JSP.SS 16), Sheffield 1995, 80–85.

⁷ For this hypothesis see e.g. MANUEL VOGEL, “Einführung”, in: *Joseph und Aseneth* (SAPERE XV), edited by Eckart Reinmuth, Tübingen 2009, 3–31, on p. 15.

⁸ For this scholarly consensus, see CHESNUTT, *From Death to Life* (note 6), 71; DENIS, *Introduction* (note 4), 328.

⁹ The critical edition of *Joseph and Aseneth* used in this article is to be found in: *Joseph und Aseneth*. Kritisch herausgegeben von CHRISTOPH BURCHARD mit Unterstützung von Carsten Burfeind und Uta Barbara Fink, Leiden/Boston 2003.

that prevents Joseph from approaching the young woman, let alone marrying her. In the following chapters, the novel describes the process of Aseneth's conversion to God which involves the abandoning of idolatry. As a result, Joseph can accept Aseneth as a partner and marry her.

In previous studies of the novel, Aseneth's conversion has been carefully examined.¹⁰ However, detailed studies of her soliloquy and her prayer are still needed. In this article, I would like to complete existing research by emphasizing a subject which is still neglected. Focusing on vocabulary, I will argue in particular that the author of the novel portrays Aseneth as a young woman who despite her pagan origin employs the specific prayer vocabulary of the Septuagint Psalter. This phenomenon has a double effect: Firstly, Aseneth, who only knows the "God of the Hebrews" (JosAs 11:10) from hearsay, turns out to be familiar with the titles, expressions and phrases with which this god is to be addressed. Secondly, Aseneth is presented to the Jewish readers of the novel¹¹ as a person to whom Jewish belief is not completely alien. She even appears to be able to express a prayer in a manner that is not totally different from, or incompatible with, the language of the numerous anonymous persons who implore God in the Psalter. In other words, Joseph's future wife Aseneth is clearly a pagan, but from the very beginning of her decision to adhere to Joseph's god, she speaks and prays as if she were already acquainted with Israelite religion.

In the following two sections, I would like to address two issues: 1. From the example of three selected expressions it will first be illustrated to what extent the author of the novel has recourse to typical linguistic features of the Septuagint in general. 2. In a second step it will be shown that Aseneth is using a specific vocabulary of the Septuagint Psalter, not without adapting it so as to meet the specific needs of the context of her conversion.

1. "Septuagintisms" in *Joseph and Aseneth*

In a 1978 article, the German biblical scholar GERHARD DELLING quoted an overwhelming number of examples in order to show that the anonymous

¹⁰ E.g. by CHESNUTT, *From Death to Life* (note 6), chapter 4; JÜRGEN K. ZANGENBERG, "Josef und Asenet. Zur Pragmatik und Modellhaftigkeit der Konversion Asenets", in: *Der eine Gott und die fremden Kulte* (BThSt 102), edited by Eberhard Bons, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2009, 95–120.

¹¹ Recent scholars dismiss the hypothesis that the novel was composed for pagan readers. The novel was rather intended for Jewish readers, perhaps for sympathizers as well (BURCHARD, "Joseph and Aseneth" [note 4], 195) and was concerned with advocating the admission of pagans in the Jewish community, see ZANGENBERG, "Josef und Asenet" (note 10), 119–120.

author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is deeply influenced by the language of the Septuagint.¹² Examples include prepositional phrases formed with ἀπό προσώπου (JosAs 5:2; 27:7; 28:14) as well as a specific theological vocabulary, e.g. the pejorative designation of other gods as εἰδῶλα (JosAs 8:5; 11:8; 12:5; 13:11). According to DELLING, this evidence can only be explained on the assumption that the Septuagint as sacred book played a central role in the author's community, whether in liturgy or for the sake of religious education. Be this as it may, the writer appears to have a good knowledge of the Septuagint and its language.

In contrast to Delling whose results are chiefly based on concordance study, it is possible to go further by providing additional data in support of his conclusions. Closer examination shows that not only specific words but also some unusual or rare phrases and expressions of *Joseph and Aseneth* are nowhere else attested than in the Septuagint and in later Jewish and Christian literature. This means that the author of the work goes far beyond switching here and there into a kind of theological sociolect of the Egyptian Jewish community. Interestingly, he proves to be familiar even with a couple of linguistic subtleties we only find in the Septuagint, in Hellenistic Jewish and in later Christian writings. Whether he employs this material consciously or not, it stands to reason that such uncommon expressions can be better understood against the background of the Septuagint. It will suffice to quote three examples:

a) In the soliloquy preceding her prayer to God, Aseneth decides to confess all of her sins to him (JosAs 11:11): ἐξομολογήσομαι αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου. That this decision is much more than a lip service, can be deduced from the beginning of her prayer where Aseneth announces (JosAs 12:3): σοὶ ἐξομολογήσομαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου, "to you I will confess my sins". Readers acquainted with the language of the New Testament probably do not stumble over such a choice of words. On the contrary, from a New Testament point of view, the phrase ἐξομολογήσομαι [...] τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου sounds quite familiar. A similar formulation occurs in Mark 1:5 and in its parallel in Matth 3:6 (ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν). Furthermore, the verb ἐξομολογέομαι governs the object ἁμαρτία in Jam 5:16 and in early Christian literature, e.g. in Shepherd of Hermas, Vis. 1 1:3. In texts of Jewish origin one of the closest parallels of ἐξομολογέομαι with the object ἁμαρτία can be found in Josephus, *Ant.*, VIII, 129: καὶ παρὰ

¹² GERHARD DELLING, "Einwirkungen der Sprache der Septuaginta in 'Joseph und Aseneth'", *JSJ* 9 (1978) 29–56, quoted here according to GERHARD DELLING, *Studien zum Frühjudentum. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1971–1987*, edited by Cilliers Breytenbach/Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, Göttingen 2000, 232–256, on p. 233–254. Far less complete is the list of allusions provided by ARMIN LANGE/MATTHIAS WEIGOLD, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, Göttingen 2011, 233.

τῶν ὑπολειπομένων [...] ἔξομολογουμένων τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς τῶν πατρῶν νομίμων παραβάσεις, “[...] and by the remainder of the people who confess their sins and their transgression of the ancestral laws”. Leaving aside JosAs 11:11; 12:3 and the occurrence in Josephus, other parallels of ἔξομολογέομαι governing ἀμαρτία are missing in the remaining writings of the Jewish Hellenistic literature, including the works of Philo. Thus, as an intermediate conclusion one can notice that the expression ἔξομολογέομαι with the object ἀμαρτία or a synonym is probably limited to Jewish Hellenistic and early Christian texts. Nonetheless, the question arises of where it comes from, particularly since we do not have exact parallels in the non Jewish Greek literature. To my mind, it is possible to form the following hypothesis: In the Septuagint, the standard equivalent of the verb *יד* hi. and hitp. is ἔξομολογέομαι. It is well known that in most of the Septuagint quotations the verb ἔξομολογέομαι is subject to a semantic change insofar as it does not mean – as in classical Greek – “to admit, to acknowledge”, but “to give thanks”.¹³ However, in some rare cases, the Hebrew verb *יד* governs objects of the semantic field of sin, e.g. in Ps 32:5 *הִתְוַדַּתִּי לַיהוָה עֲלֵי פְשָׁעֵי לִי הַדָּבָר*, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord” and in Dan 9:20 *וְהִתְוַדַּתִּי אֶת חַטֹּאתַי* “and confessing my sin”.¹⁴ The Septuagint translation of these two texts is remarkable. In the case of Ps 32:5, the translator does not follow the general rule by inserting the verb ἔξομολογέομαι. Instead, he uses another verb, ἔξαγορεύω “to tell out, to make known”: ἔξαγορεύσω κατ’ ἐμοῦ τὴν ἀνομίαν μου.¹⁵ The same verb as equivalent of *יד* hitp. already appears in Lev 26:40; Num 5:7. In the case of Dan 9:20, it is striking that the LXX version renders as follows: ἐγὼ [...] ἔξομολογούμενος τὰς ἀμαρτίας μου whereas Theodotion reads: ἐξ-αγορεύοντος τὰς ἀμαρτίας μου. This evidence leads to the following conclusion: In the LXX, one can observe the tendency to avoid ἔξομολογέομαι when dealing with the confession of sins.¹⁶ The verb chosen in this passages is ἔξαγορεύω, as in non Jewish texts like Plutarch, *De superstitione*

¹³ For a more thorough investigation of this question see EMANUEL TOV, “Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings”, in: *Melbourne Symposium of Septuagint Lexicography* (SCSt 28), edited by Takamitsu Muraoka, Atlanta, Ga. 1990, 83–125, on p. 101.

¹⁴ One might quote a third occurrence, Prov 28:13, where the Hebrew verb *דָּוַת* governs an object of the semantic field of transgression. However, the LXX translation diverges considerably from the MT.

¹⁵ For this text see EBERHARD BONNS, *Der Septuaginta-Psalter. Übersetzung, Interpretation, Korrektur*, in: *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten* (WUNT 219), edited by Martin Karrer/Wolfgang Kraus/Martin Meiser, Tübingen 2008, 450–470, on p. 455.

¹⁶ In this regard TOV, “Greek Words” (note 13), 104, is not totally exact when he claims that “the translators [...] did not distinguish between these two basically different senses”, i.e. of the underlying Hebrew verb: “to confess” and “to thank”.

168 D 6–7¹⁷. In spite of this tendency, the translator of Daniel prefers a quite standard rendering by employing ἐξομολογέομαι. This translation is in a certain sense corrected by Theodotion. Nevertheless, in non translated texts – JosAs¹⁸ as well as in the New Testament and in early Christian literature – this specific use of ἐξομολογέομαι survived or turned up again like a linguistic reminiscence of the style of the Septuagint, perhaps because it comes close to the classical Greek use of the verb.¹⁹

b) Another linguistic reminiscence of the style of the Septuagint is a formulation which is also connected with sin (JosAs 12:4): ἡμαρτον ἐνώπιόν σου πολλά, “I have sinned much before you” (see already 7:4). Usually, the verb ἀμαρτάνω governs the dative (e.g. Ps 40:5) or a prepositional phrase (e.g. εἰς + acc., see Gen 20:6).²⁰ In the Septuagint however, the verb is quite often constructed with prepositions like ἐνώπιον (1 Kgdms 7:6; 20:1) or ἐναντίον (e.g. Gen 39:9; Deut 9:16). This specific linguistic feature of Septuagint texts, which is obviously foreign to non Jewish Greek literature, is probably a trace of linguistic conventions in use at the Persian court.²¹ Whether this hypothesis is correct or not, one cannot but conclude that the author of a non translated text like JosAs consciously or unconsciously makes use of this construction which is typical of Septuagint language.

c) The third “septuagintism” to be considered appears also in Aseneth’s soliloquy. Reflecting on her previous sins and on her decision to turn to the merciful and forgiving “God of the Hebrews”, she says (JosAs 11:13): “Who knows if [τίς οἶδεν εἰ] he will see my humiliation and have mercy on me?” In classical Greek the expression τίς οἶδεν εἰ seems to be quite unusual.²² Once more the clause in question can best be explained against a Septuagint background. In fact, τίς οἶδεν εἰ occurs four times

¹⁷ πολλάκις δὲ γυμνὸς ἐν πηλῷ κυλινδούμενος ἐξαγορεύει τινὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτοῦ καὶ πλῆμμελείας, “often rolling naked in the mud he confesses certain sins and transgressions”.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the JosAs citations are not mentioned by WALTER BAUER, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 6., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage von Kurt und Barbara Aland, Berlin/New York 1988, 560–561.

¹⁹ OTFRIED HOFIUS, art. ἐξομολογέω, in: *EWNT*, II, 20–23, on col. 21.

²⁰ For further details, see ROBERT HELBING, *Die Kasussyntax der Verba bei den Septuaginta. Ein Beitrag zur Hebraismenfrage und zur Syntax der Koivῆ*, Göttingen 1928, 215–217.

²¹ See JAN JOOSTEN, “L’agir humain devant Dieu: remarques sur une tournure remarquable de la Septante”, in: *RB* 113 (2006) 5–17.

²² CHRISTOPH BURCHARD, *Joseph und Aseneth* (JSHRZ II, 4), Gütersloh 1983, 661, note 12, quotes some examples of this expression that occur in non Jewish literature, e.g. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe et Kteitophon*, VII, 6, 2. On closer examination, these turn out to be quite different from the Biblical evidence.

where it renders the Hebrew term *מִי יָדוּעַ* “who knows”.²³ In this context, one can neglect Esth 4:14, where Esther is the subject of the following subordinate clause. The closest biblical parallels of JosAs 11:13 are 2 Kgdms 12:22; Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:14. In each of the three quotations *τίς οἶδεν εἰ* introduces a reflection on how God is expected to react. God being the subject of the subordinate clause depending on *εἰ*, the speaker hopes that he will not punish but prove himself merciful. Thus, David hopes that the child born to Bathsheba will not die because the Lord will be gracious to him. Likewise, the king of Niniveh expresses the hope that God will change his mind and refrain from punishing the city. *Mutatis mutandis*, the addressees of the prophet’s speech in Joel 2:14 are invited to return to the Lord in the hope that he will accept his people’s acts of repentance. By and large, the context of Aseneth’s *τίς οἶδεν εἰ* is analogous: The fear that the “God of the Hebrews” will punish her for having worshipped the idols prompts Aseneth to pronounce this *τίς οἶδεν εἰ*: perhaps God will see her humiliation and have mercy on her.

2. Allusions to and quotations of the Septuagint Psalter in JosAs

Living in the tower of a luxurious palace, Aseneth seems to have no important contacts with the outside world (JosAs 2:1). However, this does not prevent her from declaring that she has heard many speaking (cf. Ps 3:3; 4:7) of the God of the Hebrews (JosAs 11:10). As we have already seen, Aseneth is aware of the fact that worship of this god is totally incompatible with idolatry. However, as soon as Aseneth has abandoned idolatry, this topic no longer plays a prominent role.

Let us now focus on her soliloquy and her prayer. These two texts display some features, in particular on the level of vocabulary and style, that betray a deep knowledge of the Septuagint Psalter. In this article, which does not claim completeness, I will highlight the following six points.

a) *God and the foreign gods*

Before addressing her prayer to God, Aseneth had got rid of the idols by throwing them through the window (JosAs 10:12). As for the relationship between the idols and God, she has come to the conclusion that the former are deaf and dead (JosAs 13:11), whereas the Lord is first of all a true and living God (Jos 11:10). As such, he hates all the worshippers of idols (JosAs 11:7: *μισεῖ πάντας τοὺς σεβουμένους τὰ εἰδωλα*). This assertion is

²³ A stylistic variant appears in Tob 13:8 BA: *τίς γινώσκει εἰ θελήσει ὑμᾶς καὶ ποιήσει ἐλεημοσύνην ὑμῖν*.

based on another one which reflects the language of the Septuagint Psalter: διότι θεός ζηλώτης ἐστὶ καὶ φοβερός ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς σεβουμένους τοὺς θεοὺς ἄλλοτρίους, “for God is a jealous and a terrible god towards all the worshippers of idols”. On the one hand, the first part of the quotation, especially the adjective ζηλώτης, reflects the language of the first commandment of the Decalogue according to Ex 20:5; Deut 5:9, particularly its interdiction to worship idols. On the other hand, this interdiction is expressed by using the vocabulary of Ps 95:4: ὅτι μέγας κύριος [...] φοβερός ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς θεοὺς, “for the Lord is great [...] and terrible over²⁴ all the gods”. However, God’s jealousy does not preclude him from accepting Aseneth’s repentance.

b) God as a merciful god

Aseneth has already been told that the God of the Hebrews is not primarily a punishing God but that he is understanding and patient (JosAs 11:10): ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων καὶ μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἐπιεικής, “merciful, compassionate, long-suffering, pitiful and gentle”. To be sure, this chain of Greek adjectives evokes the stereotyped formula of confession which recurs with slight variations in various texts, especially in Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 85:15; 102:8; 144:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2. However, it deserves attention that one element is missing in all of these texts: the adjective ἐπιεικής, “fair, good, gentle”. In the Jewish literature in Greek, this characterisation of God is very rare. However, it occurs once in Ps 85:5²⁵: σύ κύριε χρηστός καὶ ἐπιεικής καὶ πολυέλεος πᾶσι τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις σε, “you, Lord, are kind and gentle, and abounding in mercy to all who call on you” (NETS). Furthermore, ἐπιεικής as a quality of God can be found twice in other texts of Jewish hellenistic literature²⁶: in PsSol 5:12, where God is referred to as χρηστός καὶ ἐπιεικής, and in the Letter of Aristeas § 211, where he is called ἀπροσδεής [...] καὶ ἐπιεικής “without want and gentle”. It is interesting that the two adjectives ἐπιεικής and πολυέλεος appear in both JosAs 11:10 and Ps 85:5, albeit in inverse order at the end of the enumeration. In contrast to Ps 85:5, where sin and forgiveness are not mentioned, Aseneth associates God’s mercy with his willingness to forgive.

²⁴ On the translation of ἐπὶ, see RALPH BRUCKER, “Psalm 95[96]”, in: *Septuaginta deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament*. Vol. II: Psalmen bis Daniel”, edited by Martin Karrer/Wolfgang Kraus, Stuttgart 2011, 1771–1775, on p. 1772.

²⁵ See also DELLING, “Einwirkungen” (note 12), 247.

²⁶ For detailed information on the use of this adjective in Jewish hellenistic literature, see CESLAS SPICQ, *Lexique théologique du Nouveau Testament*, Fribourg (Suisse)/Paris 1991, 544–548.

c) *The influence of the vocabulary of Ps 31*

A certain influence of the vocabulary of Ps 31 is recognisable in two quotations dealing with sin.

α) Aware of her guilt, Aseneth is willing to reveal her lawless actions to God (JosAs 12:4): *πρὸς σὲ ἀποκαλύψω τὰς ἀνομίας μου*. In so doing, Aseneth follows in the footsteps of the speaker of Ps 31:5 who declares: *καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν μου οὐκ ἐκάλυψα*, “and I did not cover my lawlessness”. In the same vein, the macarism which introduces this Psalm blesses the persons whose sins are “covered over” (Ps 31:1): *μακάριοι [...] ὧν ἐπεκαλύφθησαν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι*. Hence forgiveness of sins requires that sins are firstly “revealed”, and in a second step they become “covered over”.

β) Accordingly, Aseneth hopes that God does not take account of her sin (JosAs 11:10): *μὴ λογιζόμενος ἁμαρτίαν*. These words call to mind the second half of the aforementioned macarism²⁷ (Ps 31:2): *μακάριος ἀνὴρ οὗ οὐ μὴ λογίσῃται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν*, “blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”. Once again, it should be highlighted that this Psalter quotation is the only Septuagint text to employ *λογίζομαι* in combination with *ἁμαρτία*. Especially in negative formulation, this expression does not occur elsewhere in the extant Jewish literature in Greek that could have been known to the author of JosAs.²⁸ It does not reappear before the New Testament where it is used as a scriptural proof in the context of Paul’s argumentation about justification in Rom 4:8.²⁹

d) *The keywords καταφεύγω and καταφυγή*

One of the salient features of the chapters dealing with Aseneth’s conversion is the use of the verb *καταφεύγω*, “flee for refuge”, which emerges for the first time in her soliloquy. After having abandoned the idols she feels hated by her family and lonely (JosAs11:3): *παρθένος καὶ ὄρφανὴ καὶ ἔρημος καὶ ἐγκαταλελειμμένη καὶ μεμισημένη* “virgin, orphan, desolate, abandoned and hated”. This insight provokes the desperate question (JosAs11:3): *τί ποιήσω [...] ἢ ποῦ ἀπέλθω, πρὸς τίνα καταφύγω*, “what shall I do or where shall I go, and with whom shall I take refuge?” The verb *καταφεύγω*, a *hapaxlegomenon* of the Septuagint Psalter, occurs in Ps 142:9: *ἐξελοῦ με ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου κύριε ὅτι πρὸς σὲ κατέφυγον* “deliver me from my enemies, O Lord, for I have fled to you for refuge”. Admitted-

²⁷ See also DELLING, “Einwirkungen” (note 12), 245.

²⁸ The Apocalypse of Sedrach, which employs the expression in 16:3 (*οὐ μὴ λογισθῇ ἁμαρτία αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος*), is probably of later date than JosAs, see DENIS, Introduction (note 4), 884.

²⁹ See PASQUALE BASTA, *Abramo in Romani 4. L’analogia dell’agire divino nella ricerca esegetica di Paolo* (AnBib 168), Roma 2007.

ly, the situation of the psalmist is not comparable with Aseneth's situation, insofar as the psalmist is not complaining about loneliness but about his enemies. However, in each case, God seems to be the only refuge.

The verb *καταφεύγω* appears several more times in JosAs: once again in her soliloquy in JosAs 11:11 (*καταφεύξομαι ἐπ' αὐτόν*, "to him I will flee for refuge") and three times in her prayer: at the beginning, middle, and end. Aseneth introduces her prayer by an *invocatio* where she develops the divine title *κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων*, "Lord, God of the ages", by a series of participles, praising him for who he is and what he does (JosAs12:1–2).³⁰ In the first clause by which Aseneth establishes a relationship between herself and God, she uses the word *καταφεύγω* (JosAs 12:3): *πρὸς σέ καταφεύγω*, "to you I flee". In other words, Aseneth's prayer is grounded in this "movement" towards God whom she asks for forgiveness and mercy. In JosAs 12:3, this movement is not at all silent but leads to prayer: *πρὸς σέ κεκράξομαι, κύριε, σοὶ προσχεῶ τὴν δέησίν μου*, "to you I will cry, to you I will pour out my supplication". Needless to say these two clauses reflect the language of the Septuagint Psalter. This holds true for the use of the verb *κράζω* (e.g. Ps 29:9 *πρὸς σέ κύριε κεκράξομαι*) as well as for the idea of "pouring out one's supplication" (see already JosAs 11:11) that derives also from Psalter language, see Ps 101:1 *καὶ ἐναντίον κυρίου ἐκχέη τὴν δέησιν αὐτοῦ* and Ps 141:3: *ἐκχεῶ ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ τὴν δέησίν μου*.

That the movement expressed by *καταφεύγω* is more than a metaphor, is illustrated by the next two occurrences of *καταφεύγω*. In fact, Aseneth's turning to God corresponds to another movement, i.e. the rejection of the past. In order to establish a link between these two movements, Aseneth uses a pun (JosAs 13:1): *ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀπέφυγον ἐκ πάντων καὶ πρὸς σέ κατέφυγον, κύριε*, "for behold, I fled from everything and I flee to you, Lord". In the following paragraph (Jos 13:1–11), Aseneth explains in detail what *ἐκ πάντων* means: expensive clothes, luxurious rooms, sumptuous dishes, and, finally, her gods. At the end of this long enumeration, Aseneth seems to have lost everything she was proud of in the past. However, this loss is compensated by her new refuge. Thus, she introduces the last part of her prayer by the following words (JosAs 13:12): *πρὸς σέ κατέφυγον, κύριε, ὁ θεὸς μου*, "I fled to you, Lord, my God".

³⁰ In this respect, Aseneth follows the model of many Greek prayers which display a three-part structure, the first element being the *invocatio*. For further information, see RALPH BRUCKER, 'Christushymnen' oder 'epideiktische Passagen'. *Studien zum Stilwechsel im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (FRLANT 176), Göttingen 1997, 36–46; WILLIAM D. FURLEY/JAN MAARTEN BREMER, *Greek Hymns. Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. Part One: The texts in translation*, Tübingen 2001, 52–56. In French speaking studies the *invocatio* is sometimes called "titulature"; for examples, see FRÉDÉRIC CHAPOT/BERNARD LAUROT, *Corpus des prières grecques et romaines* (Recherches sur les rhétoriques religieuses 2), Turnhout 2001, *passim*.

The analysis of the occurrences of *καταφεύγω* in Aseneth's soliloquy and prayer would not be complete if one did not take into account the corresponding noun *καταφυγή*, "refuge". This noun is here referred to God and his mercy. In fact, in her prayer, Aseneth underlines that she has no other refuge (12:13): οὐδὲ ἑτέρα καταφυγή πλὴν τοῦ ἐλέους σου, κύριε, "and no other refuge except your mercy, Lord". On the one hand, the noun *καταφυγή* echoes the Septuagint Psalter vocabulary where *καταφυγή* is used 13 times as a divine title (Ps 9:10; 17:3, etc.).³¹ On the other hand, nowhere in the Psalter is this title combined with *πλὴν*. Therefore, Aseneth's confession οὐδὲ ἑτέρα καταφυγή πλὴν τοῦ ἐλέους σου, κύριε is somewhat reminiscent of other Septuagint quotations which emphasize the incomparability, not the unicity of the God of the Bible (e.g. Ps 82,2^{LXX}).³²

In conclusion, it can be stated that the use of *καταφεύγω* and *καταφυγή* we find in JosAs reflects the language of the Septuagint Psalter. It could even be said that JosAs develops this terminology in comparison with Greek Psalm texts, insofar as *καταφεύγω*, *καταφυγή* and the related word *ἀποφεύγω* serve as keywords. Their main function is to express Aseneth's two crucial and complementary "movements" in which consists her conversion. It implies "fleeing from" the idols and her past as well as "fleeing to" the Lord.

e) God as father

In Aseneth's soliloquy as well as in her prayer, one central idea is that God is compared with a father. As we will see, this idea allows the development of the topic of protection that God grants to Aseneth and, correspondingly, the hope she puts in him. To begin with, Aseneth does not refrain from a strong anthropomorphism when justifying her prayer to God by the words (JosAs 11:13): διότι αὐτός ἐστιν πατήρ τῶν ὀρφάνων, "for he is a father of orphans". Once more, such an expression is not completely understandable without having a look at the biblical background. That God is a father of orphans and a judge for widows can be seen from Ps 67:5 (τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν

³¹ Obviously this divine title has an Egyptian background as has been shown by ORSOLINA MONTEVECCHI, "Quaedam de graecitate Psalmorum cum papyris comparata", in: *Proceedings of the IX International Congress of Papyrology*, Oslo 1951, 293–310, reprint: EAD., *Bibbia e papyri. Luce dai papiri sulla Bibbia greca*, Barcelona 1999, 97–120, on p. 108f; see also ANNA PASSONI DELL'ACQUA, "La metafora biblica di Dio come roccia e la sua soppressione nelle antiche versioni", *EL* 91 (1977) 417–453.

³² For this idea see EBERHARD BONNS, "Le Dieu et les dieux dans le Psautier de la Septante", in: *Le monothéisme biblique. Évolution, contextes et perspectives* (LeDiv 244), edited by Eberhard Bons/Thierry Legrand, Paris 2011, 129–143, on p. 140. See also DARINA STAUDT, *Der eine und einzige Gott. Monotheistische Formeln im Urchristentum und ihre Vorgeschichte bei Griechen und Juden* (NTOA 80), Göttingen 2012, 171f, on JosAs 12:14.

ὀρφανῶν καὶ κριτοῦ τῶν χηρῶν).³³ Of course, only the first title, “father of orphans”, is fitting in this case, Aseneth being a young woman and not a widow. Nevertheless, Aseneth claims for herself the status of orphan assuming that her parents and her relations hate her for having destroyed the idols (JosAs 12:4–5).³⁴ Consequently, she emphasizes the idea that God is like a father for her. In a long comparison (JosAs 12:8), she portrays a father who takes a frightened small child in his arms and calms it, and then she ends with the plea: ἔκτεινον τὰς χεῖράς ἐπ’ ἐμέ ὡς πατὴρ φιλότεκνος σου καὶ ἄρπασόν με ἐκ τῆς γῆς, “stretch out your hands upon me like a child-loving father, and snatch me off the earth”. In her prayer, in particular in the confession that immediately follows the citation already mentioned (JosAs 12:13: οὐδὲ ἕτέρα καταφυγὴ πλὴν τοῦ ἐλέους σου, κύριε), Aseneth continues as follows: διότι σὺ εἶ ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν καὶ τῶν διωγμένων ὑπερασπιστὴς καὶ τῶν τεθλιμμένων βοηθός, “for you are the father of orphans, a protector of the persecuted and a helper of the afflicted”. This latter quotation, which corresponds largely to JosAs 11:13, shares some specific words with the Septuagint Psalter, especially the divine attributes.³⁵ The noun ὑπερασπιστὴς, “protector”, only occurs in the Psalter (e.g. Ps 17:3.31; 26:1) and in related texts (2 Kgdms 22:3.31). As for the noun βοηθός, “helper”, it is frequently attested in the Psalter (Ps 9:10; 17:3, etc.), but not exclusively so. Except for a few passages (e.g. Gen 2:18.20 [Eve]; Ps 71:12; Job 29:12), in most of the occurrences the noun βοηθός refers to God. However, more important is the observation that ὑπερασπιστὴς and βοηθός form a word pair only in the Septuagint Psalter (see Ps 27:7; 32:20; 39:18). Therefore, it is probable that the author of JosAs has found this expression in the Psalter as well.

f) God as the only hope

One of the most important divine titles used by the speakers of the Septuagint Psalter is the noun ἐλπίς.³⁶ Ever since his early childhood, God is the “hope” of the speaker of Ps 21:10: ἡ ἐλπίς μου ἀπὸ μαστῶν τῆς μητρός μου,

³³ See also DELLING, “Einwirkungen” (note 12), 247.

³⁴ ANGELIKA STROTMANN, “Mein Vater bist du! (Sir 51,10)”. *Zur Bedeutung der Vaterschaft Gottes in kanonischen und nichtkanonischen frühjüdischen Schriften* (FTS 39), Frankfurt 1991, 254–276, on p. 260. Strotmann remarks that Aseneth never uses the vocative “father” when speaking to God (p. 275).

³⁵ For these attributes, see also PASSONI DELL’ACQUA, “La metafora” (note 31), 432.434.

³⁶ See FRANÇOIS VAN MEXEL, *Ἐλπίς. Espoir. Espérance. Études sémantiques et théologiques du vocabulaire de l’espérance dans l’Hellénisme et le Judaïsme avant le Nouveau Testament* (EHS XXIII/213), Frankfurt 1983, 224–241; EBERHARD BONS, “Die Rede von Gott in den Psalmen^{LXX}”, in: *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta, vol. 3* (BWANT 174), edited by Dieter Böhler/Heinz-Josef Fabry, Stuttgart 2007, 182–202, on p. 195f.

“my hope from my mother’s breasts”. Ps 70:5 goes in the same direction: ἡ ἐλπίς μου ἐκ νεότητός μου, “my hope from my youth”. Aseneth formulates this in a less concrete manner, although she leaves no doubt that the Lord is her only hope (JosAs 12:13): ἄλλη ἐλπίς οὐκ ἔστι μοι εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ σοί, κύριε. It should be highlighted that this use of ἐλπίς is typical of the Septuagint Psalter insofar as it reveals a certain shift of meaning: The prepositional phrase governed by the word does not express something that is desired or expected, but the source “from whom good things are expected and hoped to come”³⁷. Once again, one cannot but conclude that Aseneth’s prayer is inspired by the Septuagint Psalter and its specific vocabulary. However, she does not follow this model slavishly, but makes explicit what is implicit in most of the Psalter occurrences of ἐλπίς: God is her *only* hope.

Conclusion

Recent researchers agree on one fundamental point: JosAs is composed by a Jewish author and for Jewish readers, perhaps for “sympathizers” as well. As for the purpose of the novel, it has been claimed that the author wanted to win the acceptance of Hellenized Jews for persons interested in getting in closer contact with their community.³⁸ Taking for granted that in the Hellenistic period the synagogue attracted some individuals among the non Jewish population, especially the so called “God-fearers”³⁹, one can explain the above mentioned linguistic features of Aseneth’s soliloquy and prayer as follows: Aseneth is depicted as a non Jewish woman who abandons her idols in order to believe in the “God of the Hebrews”. The seriousness of her conversion is emphasized by the words and declarations the author puts in the mouth of his protagonist. Speaking about the Lord and praying to him, Aseneth uses the specific formulas and expressions of the Septuagint Psalter. Sometimes she seems to quote the Greek Psalms, sometimes she quotes their vocabulary in order to express ideas of her own. Nevertheless, one point should be stressed in conclusion: Even before her conversion becomes “authenticated” by the angel (JosAs 14:2–17:8), Aseneth is portrayed as a person whose prayer language is very similar, even identical to that of a Hellenistic Jew. Of course, one has to bear in mind

³⁷ ANNELI AEJMELEAUS, “Faith, Hope and Interpretation: A Lexical and Syntactical Study of the Semantic Field of Hope in the Greek Psalter”, in: *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint presented to Eugene Ulrich* (VT.S 101), edited by Peter W. Flint/James C. VanderKam/Emanuel Tov, Leiden/Boston 2006, 360–376, on p. 366.

³⁸ See note 11.

³⁹ See e.g. JOHANN MAIER, *Zwischen den Testamenten. Geschichte und Religion in der Zeit des zweiten Tempels*, Würzburg 1990, 299.

that Aseneth's decision to believe in the "God of the Hebrews" has the characteristics of an ideal conversion because she, daughter of an important Egyptian priest, will be married with the patriarch Joseph. Even so, it should be noted that the "God of the Hebrews" is not totally unknown to her. Thus, one fundamental aim of the novel is probably to narrow the gulf between born Jews and pagans, i.e. between Jews and other persons who neither share their ethnic origin nor their religious history.