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## "A Man Who Feels God": Constructions of Masculinity in Hellenistic Jewish Interpretations of the Story of Joseph

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

“A MAN WHO FEARS GOD”:  
CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY IN HELLENISTIC JEWISH  
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STORY OF JOSEPH

By

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In memory of my mother,  
with love for my daughters,  
and with thanks to all the men in my life.

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## ABSTRACT

Hellenistic Jewish interpreters of the Bible often restructured and modified biblical texts in an effort to further their own ideological perspectives. Among the many adaptations they made, these exegetes often sought to transform the familiar stories to better fit or express their own constructs of gender identity. This study attempts to uncover the ideologies of masculinity in three first-century Hellenistic Jewish texts: *The Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus, Philo's *De Somniis*, and the anonymous *Joseph and Aseneth*. The texts were studied by means of a close reading for the rhetorical structures of each author, particularly noting the ways terminology and literary structures describing maleness are held in opposition to femaleness, and assuming that gender was a culturally constructed (rather than innate or essential) category. In the course of the study, a variety of constructions are confirmed: masculinity as dominance over the self (Josephus), as sexual propriety and non-violence (*Joseph and Aseneth*), and as avoidance of eunuchism, feminine company, and violating establish hierarchies (Philo). As these three exegetes represent only a small number of those writing at the time, this variety suggests that there may be many more constructions of maleness present in Hellenistic Jewish literature of the era.



## CHAPTER 1 METHODS FOR STUDY

### **Introduction**

The study of Jewish and Christian texts has increasingly become an interdisciplinary endeavor. Many scholars are coming to see the value of crossing the rigid divisions of form, rhetorical, or historical criticism and seeking to blend these disciplines to form new hybrids, with interesting new consequences. Feminist interpretation, in particular, has utilized a variety of other disciplines and methods as vehicles, in conjunction with a feminist-critical "eye," in its interpretation. In this way, these new hybridized forms of criticism have been employed by interpreters to come to new understandings of patriarchy and gender issues in Jewish and Christian texts.

The present study is also a hybrid endeavor. I see the possibility of a different and fruitful discussion of the "lives" of biblical texts (as James Kugel puts it) by utilizing several complementary methods of criticism: what has commonly been called the history of interpretation method and rhetorical scholarship on gender construction. These methods, held in conversation, hold the possibility for giving us new insights into the ways post-biblical authors have utilized biblical texts to produce and validate their own understandings of masculinity and femininity. Specifically for the purposes of this study, I will attempt to describe the constructions of masculinity which are evident in various post-biblical interpretations of Genesis 37 and 39-40 (the early chapters of the Joseph cycle).

In order to better explain the task at hand, let us turn first to the major components of the study (the history of interpretation method and gender criticism in the rhetorical tradition) and follow with a brief discussion of the way these parts come together to form a whole in the current discussion.

## History of Interpretation

Perhaps because of its complexity, or perhaps because of its sheer length (it is the longest continuous narrative in Genesis), the story of Joseph has been subject to a great many interpreters and interpretations. Many are well-known ancient commentators: Philo, Josephus, and John Chrysostom, for example. Many more are anonymous; *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Jubilees*, and *4 Maccabees* lack a discernable author. For the purposes of this discussion, I have chosen to focus on three post-biblical interpretations of the Joseph story: *Joseph and Aseneth*, Josephus' *Antiquities* Book II, and Philo's *De Somniis*. These texts are similar in so far as they all seem to spring from a Jewish perspective<sup>1</sup>, and all three were originally composed in Greek. Still, each exemplifies a different style of interpretation, rhetoric, and purpose<sup>2</sup>, and because of this I contend we will see a diversity of ideologies of masculinity as well. These unique ideas and expressions of the writer, then, will be the focus of this study. That eye toward ideologies and contexts is also the basis for much of what is known in modern scholarship as the history of interpretation method.

James Kugel, who has done much work in history of interpretation, (and a great part of that particularly relating to the Joseph cycle) calls this desire to make a biblical text speak to an interpreter's world "ideologically motivated interpretations."<sup>3</sup> By this, he means the "interpreter clearly wishes to get the text to say something that accords with his own ideology or outlook."<sup>4</sup> Even in cases in which the interpretation arises from a problem or question in the text itself (the Midianite/Ishmaelite confusion in Genesis, for example) the "early exegete is an

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<sup>1</sup> There is currently some discussion among scholars as to whether *JosAs* is, in fact, Jewish (or if, as Kraemer contends, it might well be Christian). See Ross S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). *Joseph and Aseneth* will be discussed in Chapter Four of this study.

<sup>2</sup> A basic listing of the ideological purpose of each work is provided in the section "The Present Study" in the Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Kugel *The Bible As It Was*, 25.

expositor with an axe to grind."<sup>5</sup> That is, s/he is interested in helping the reader not only to understand the text as it stands, but also to see how it supports his or her religious, philosophical, or worldview preoccupations.<sup>6</sup>

The history of interpretations method, then, seeks in part to understand how exegetes of a particular text imposed upon and transformed a passage in an effort to make it both understandable and instructive to the reader of his or her work. Maren Neihoff, another well-known history of interpretation scholar, states her understanding of the method this way in the introduction to her own work on the figure of Joseph:

Every interpretation results from a creative encounter between the ultimately open text of Scripture, on the one hand, and the thought world of the exegete, on the other. I examine the particular way in which each exegete construes the biblical image of Joseph. It is the aim of this study to explore the new features and the diverse hermeneutic functions which are attributed to Joseph in these early interpretations.<sup>7</sup>

The current study will proceed in much the same way. Again, we are in the familiar territory of many other modern scholars. Along with Neihoff, the story of Joseph has been subject to this particular history of interpretation method by many others: Feldman focuses on the works of Josephus<sup>8</sup>; Kraemer and

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<sup>5</sup> James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 248.

<sup>6</sup> Kugel rightly notes that there is a limitation to looking for ideologies in the text, in so far as we cannot always assume that what the author is doing is wholly ideologically motivated. "Even in the case of blatantly ideological interpretations, it is usually quite difficult to decide whether a given interpreter set out to patrol all of Scripture in search of a place to "plant" an expression of his own ideology, or whether, on the contrary, faced with a particular exegetical stimulus in the biblical text ... the interpreter came up with an explanation that, in one way or another, also reflected his own ideology." *The Bible As It Was*, 26. I have to approach this problem with an awareness of the potential for "reading in" ideologies of masculinity. However, I believe it remains possible to make plain at least *some* of the ideological constructs of the interpreter.

<sup>7</sup> Maren Neihoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* is the focus of Chapter Three.

Standhartinger investigate the interpretation present in *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>9</sup>; and Runian, Sly, and Baer discuss the interpretive method of Philo<sup>10</sup>. As we have already noted, Kugel devotes much of *The Bible as It Was* and the whole of *In Potiphar's House* to the tale of Joseph, including both Hellenistic and rabbinic interpreters. We will certainly refer often to the works of these authors in the present study.

However, the current study also seeks to build on the history of interpretation method with what is commonly known as feminist criticism, specifically as it relates to rhetoric of gender construction. That is, we will look at the material not just for the ways in which the exegetes transformed the more ancient text, but the way these transformations comment on gender ideologies generally, and masculinity in particular. So, let us turn now to the second “piece” of this method, feminist rhetorical criticism.

### **Studies of Gender and Rhetorical Criticism**

Let us begin with a basic assumption of many feminists, which has become important to later gender studies. It is the supposition that gender is a cultural construction; that is, while “sex” is defined as the biology which makes us male or female, “gender” is understood as culturally ascribed characteristics which are changeable across cultures.<sup>11</sup> Many feminist scholars of religion have noted that religious texts play an important role in creating and reinforcing these constructions. Indeed, in the past thirty years, feminist scholarship has produced

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter Four of this work will focus on *Joseph and Aseneth*.

<sup>10</sup> A discussion of Philo’s *De Somniis* is available in Chapter Five of this work.

<sup>11</sup> A discussion of these constructions is available in Judith Lorber and Susan Farrell, eds., *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990). Not all feminists agree, however, that gender is wholly constructed. For a counterpoint see many of the so-called difference feminists, including Sara Ruddick “Maternal Thinking” (*Feminist Studies* 6 (1980) 342-364) and Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill.; Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993). On the other hand, some have suggested that even the fundamental distinction between “sex” and “gender” is too limiting. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) clearly articulates this idea. For example, I emphasize construction, with an intentional understanding of the rigidity implied in the term, whereas Butler speaks of performativity in an effort to emphasize the fluidity of categories like sex and gender. I am not entirely convinced that we can divorce understandings of femaleness and maleness from some biological reality, as Butler is.

volumes on the construction of femininity in the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament. Works by such women as Rosemary Radford Reuther, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible and Mary Daly are seen as "classics" in the field. In their many works, these feminist scholars contend that the Bible has been an active cultural participant in creating categories like the "ideal female," or in equating femaleness with certain dualistic notions of evil and weakness which both reflect and influence the larger societal norms of their day.

Not only do these authors share an understanding of the constructed nature of female gender, each further contends that in some way the ideas and constructs of biblical writers continue to permeate modern cultures which value these ancient stories. In the words of Trible, "The Bible is a pilgrim wandering through history to merge past and present."<sup>12</sup> Because this is so, the ancient text can (and does) profoundly impact current constructions of what it means to be female.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the important work of Trible and others, however, there seems to be some important limitations to previous feminist interpretation. First, feminist scholarship on religious texts has most often focused on the Bible itself, and not nearly enough on the subsequent interpreters of the texts. Of course, this tendency seems to be a part of the effort amongst feminists to recognize the cultural import of the Bible for the modern person as a part of the larger liberative orientation of feminism. However, in recent years, scholars such as those involved in the history of interpretation method have come to realize that the text does not jump directly from the ancient world to the modern; instead, it lumbers along, decades and centuries of interpretation strapped to it. The history of a text's interpretations, then, become almost as critical to its understanding for a

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<sup>12</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Slightly more recently, some feminist scholars have also begun to note the role of the Bible and religion for gender construction in the time between Trible's "past" and "present." Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, discusses gender constructions of Medieval Christian women in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

given audience as the text itself<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, feminist scholars of religion have focused mostly in their works on the construction of *femininity* in the texts they study. That is, it seems that few feminist scholars who work with religious texts have explicitly made the connection that, if gender is indeed constructed, it is as thoroughly constructed for males as for females.

More recently, however, the idea that gender is a constructed category has moved beyond the confines of feminism. Whereas feminism has often used gender as a category to recognize and fight against patriarchy, other scholars have chosen to employ the categories (sex vs. gender, masculinity vs. femininity, and so forth) without an overt eye toward “politics” of sex and gender. In the last ten years especially, there has been a massive growth in “gender studies” as opposed to feminist or women’s studies, in which the emphasis has been primarily on how cultures and groups construct masculinity or femininity.

We have seen, then, that while the focus in past scholarship has sought to reclaim and elucidate the impact of gender construction on the lives of women, toward the end of liberation, much more recent work has followed the model of explicating gender constructions of maleness. For example, many sociological discussions of masculinity are currently available<sup>15</sup>; Gay/Queer theory has been

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<sup>14</sup> An excellent example of the “weight of interpretation” on a text is that of Genesis 3 (Eve and the Serpent in the Garden). In a course on the New Testament I taught at Florida State University, I asked students to tell me the story. Without exception, the serpent was called “the Devil” or “Satan” in spite of the fact that at no point in the story are such terms used. From where does such an interpretation come? Sources may include deuterocanonical literature (Wisdom 2:24) or later interpreters (Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*); most likely, however, my students encountered the reinterpretation which had already been made in the first-century apocalyptic writings of the Revelation of John, in which “the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world-- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” (Rev 12:9). What was obvious from my students’ responses was that the subsequent interpretation of a text has become as much a part of their understanding of it as the words of the text itself. Could the same not be true of texts which (implicitly or explicitly) deal with gender?

<sup>15</sup> R.W. Connell’s book *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) is an example of a thorough discussion of understanding masculinity from a sociological and psychological perspective. It does not contend as I do, however, that male gender identity is wholly constructed. Instead, he contends that masculinity is “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture” (71). He seems, by this, to be attempting to provide a middle path between biological determinism and pure social construction. See also,

particularly adept at both analyzing dominant masculinities and recognizing subversions of them<sup>16</sup>. Perhaps closest to our present study, several scholars of Greek and Roman antiquity have analyzed the role of masculinity in ancient Hellenistic communities. For example, in Craig A. Williams' *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, the author describes Roman masculinities by noting those who were perceived as effeminate males and the derogatory language associated with them, thus defining masculinity by its opposite.<sup>17</sup> These sources will be useful in providing models for our current study, in spite of their different foci.

Along with the above studies, which tend to emphasize the sociology of masculinity, several scholars have extended the studies of gender to particularly religious contexts. Clines, Satlow, Boyarin and Abusch all focus on constructions of masculinity as a product of the literature of early Jewish communities. For example, David Clines' *Interested Parties* includes a discussion of how David is portrayed as a model of masculinity for men by emphasizing his victories in battle, particularly as compared to Saul.<sup>18</sup> Ra'anah Abusch has considered the role of castration in creating categories of maleness and femaleness in the first-century Hellenistic literature of Philo. Daniel Boyarin, David Biale and Michael Satlow have each investigated rabbinic views of sex, especially in comparison to more Hellenistic forms of Judaism<sup>19</sup>. Each intends by their work to expand what

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David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> A particularly good discussion of the difference between masculinity and maleness in queer theory is offered in Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. For a focus on both Greek and Roman masculinities, see Lin Foxhall and J. B. Slamon, eds., *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge: 1998). This work particularly recognizes the role of class, location, and time on creating variety in classical understandings of manliness.

14. *JSOT Supplement 205* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212-241. Clines' forthcoming book *Play the Man! The Masculine Imperative in the Bible* appears to follow this same method. A similar method is employed in Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, "Taking It Like A Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees" *JBL* 117:2 (1998): 249-273.

<sup>19</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Michael Satlow, *Tasting the Dish:*

was previously a “feminist agenda,” but which they, as many gender-oriented scholars, have come to understand more broadly. Additionally, these scholars have particularly oriented their work on the ways in which religious traditions (in this case Judaism) have contributed to the discussion of maleness.

Thus, gender studies has become a more inclusive and expansive endeavor, but as Satlow himself notes in the closing chapter of *Tasting the Dish*:

Constructions of gender and gender expectations have wide applications for the future study of rabbinic sexuality. Ultimately, what, for Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis, does it mean to be "male" or "female"? What are the relationships between gender expectations and sexual activity? This study can only raise these questions.<sup>20</sup>

What Satlow notes is that much in the field of gender construction remains to be done, and many constructions have yet to be explored. Utilizing the works of these scholars, I will attempt to add to this growing body of work, particularly the constructions of sexuality and gender which exist in the texts of Hellenistic Jewish authors of the first century. That is, I wish to look at works by ancient Hellenistic exegetes of the Bible for the purpose of discovering what they saw as appropriately "masculine" and "feminine" in their reinterpretation of this religious text.

One particular “mode” of interpretation of texts, the rhetoric of sex and gender, will be of particular importance to this study. This mode of study is dependant on a particular form of literary criticism, known as rhetorical criticism. What is rhetorical criticism? At its most basic, it is simply a method of close reading of a given text with an eye toward the argument of the author. That is, rhetorical criticism is concerned with the world inside the text itself, gaining insight into the ideologies and motivations of the author through the words he or she chooses to put on paper. James Muilenburg, a founding scholar of rhetorical

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*Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); and “‘Try to Be a Man’: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity” *HTR* 89.1 (1996): 19-40.

<sup>20</sup> Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 117.



criticism in religious texts, calls rhetorical criticism “encounter[ing] texts in their concrete particularity.”<sup>21</sup> In this method, we carefully look at the repetitions, structures, and relationships between words, seeking to understand both the patterns and the disjunctions that might suggest meaning. For a rhetorical critic, words, their patterns and structural relations will provide sufficient clues to the worldview of the author that they can serve as a guide to understanding the author’s purpose and ideology.

While many rhetorical critics work at the level of relationship between words within a text, and others notice argumentation structures such as those formalized in Greco-Roman philosophy, still others take the approach which we will use here: identifying the ways in which an author’s choice of language intentionally creates structures of meaning and ideology. Paul Koptak notes that in this mode, rhetorical criticism becomes a dual endeavor: both “the careful and detailed examination of ...[a] text and the broader demonstration of persuasive purpose.”<sup>22</sup> This is perhaps the broadest definition of rhetorical criticism which is available to us, but one which makes the most sense for such a broad task as identifying constructions of gender.

We find that, by focusing on the more broadly persuasive aspect of rhetoric, we are following the example of Patrick and Scult, who see rhetorical criticism of biblical texts as that process by which we identify the “means by which a text establishes and manages its relationship to its audience in order to achieve a particular effect.”<sup>23</sup> Phyllis Trible also notes that this method is commonly employed by biblical rhetorical scholars, which she calls “rhetoric as the art of persuasion” rather than that of the formalized classical traditions<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond”, *JBL* 88 (1969): 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> Paul E. Koptak, “Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible.” *The Covenant Quarterly* 54.3 (1996): 26-37.

<sup>23</sup> Dale Patrick and Allan Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation JSOT Supplement* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1994), 40-48.

Indeed, many rhetorical critics of biblical literature take this path of analysis (rhetoric of effect or meaning) since the authors of biblical texts often have only a tangential relationship to the more formal structures of Greek rhetoric, but are still clearly using methods of persuasion to impact an audience. Our post-biblical exegetes, while perhaps more familiar with Greek rhetorical strategies<sup>25</sup>, are also informed by these non-Hellenistic modes of persuasion. Thus, it seems fitting to follow this track, rather than a more constrained formal analysis.

Phyllis Trible explicates how this particular type of literary criticism is uniquely suited to the task of recognizing gender constructions in religious texts<sup>26</sup>. Her work in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* takes the broader category of rhetorical criticism and makes it directly applicable to the study of gender construction, especially for the construction of God's identification with femininity in Genesis, the Song of Songs, and Ruth. A similar approach is taken by Shelly Matthews in her analysis of female missionary activity in first-century Judaism and Christianity<sup>27</sup>. Matthews discusses Josephus' evaluation of wealthy female converts and the language which supports his descriptions of them. She explores, in particular, the relationship between rhetorical presentations of these women (which are predominantly positive) and the lived realities for women at the time, noting differences between the rhetoric of femininity and its actuality. Both women share the recognition that gender ideologies become evident in a close reading of a given text. Stephen Davis likewise explores the rhetoric of

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<sup>25</sup> This is perhaps most true of Philo, who has formal rhetorical training and who describes his understanding of rhetoric in several of his works. For an overview of scholarly opinion on this matter, see Manuel Alexandre, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics in Philo's Commentary of Scripture." *Revista de Retorica y Teoria de la Comunicacion* 1.1 (2001): 29-41.

<sup>26</sup> Trible, *God*, 31-60. Trible uses similar methodology in *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001). Matthews' discussion of Josephus' *Antiquities* is particularly useful to this work, and will be noted in a subsequent chapter.

gender-bending in Christian legends of holy women in much the same manner, a process he calls "intertexting."<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, given that scholars concerned with the history of interpretation, scholars of gender construction, and rhetorical critics all share a common belief that texts betray a writer's own biases and beliefs about the way the world "should be," it seems an excellent "fit" to approach gender criticism of religious texts in this manner.

### **The Present Study**

Let us revisit the fundamental premises of this study:

1. According to the history of interpretation method, biblical interpreters are ideologically motivated in their reformulations of the text.
2. Many scholars, both feminist and in the larger arena of gender studies, contend that gender is a socially constructed ideology as opposed to a biological fact.
3. Rhetorical criticism suggests that one way of getting at ideology is to delve deep into the text itself, looking for clues in word repetition, omission, structure and argumentation.

The purpose of my study, then, is to look at the ways gender is constructed for masculinity in texts by post-biblical interpreters. As already noted, I have chosen to focus on three ancient exegetes of the biblical story of Joseph found in Genesis 37 and 39-40. Josephus, Philo, and the unknown author of *Joseph and Aseneth* all contribute their own ideology of masculinity to their text and audience.

I have chosen these three texts for both their basic similarities and their unique features. Obviously, one common characteristic is an emphasis on Joseph as a main character in the retelling. Joseph is a common character among first-century interpreters, both Hellenistic and rabbinic. This likely owes to both the length of the original narrative in the Hebrew Bible, which provides ample opportunity for exegesis, and the compelling nature of the character

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men" *JECS* 10.1 (2002): 1-36.

himself, who represents virtue in the midst of difficult circumstances under foreign rule<sup>29</sup>. Certainly, the current study could have proceeded with any of a number of characters whose lives had been reinterpreted by later exegetes; Adam, Moses, and Abraham are all re-imagined for new audiences. However, both the volume of literature and the moralizing orientation of the tale make it a great location for a rhetorical study of masculinity.

A second similarity among these three texts relates to the author, and it becomes another reason for choosing these particular interpreters over others. Each of the three authors I have chosen seems to bear some affinities with what is usually known as Hellenistic Judaism. By Hellenistic, I mean a type of Judaism which is profoundly influenced by the surrounding Greco-Roman culture of the time. One way this influence is made know is linguistic: all three of our authors have written their reinterpretations in the Greek language, and seem to rely on the Septuagint rather than Hebrew texts of the Bible. John Collins<sup>30</sup> further notes a desire among Hellenistic Jews to accommodate to Greco-Roman ideas and philosophical constructs, while at the same time differentiating self from the Greek “other.” According to Collins, this accommodation appeared among Hellenist and Diaspora Jewish literature to a much greater extent than rabbinic or Palestinian forms of Judaism. He states:

Much of the literature of Hellenistic Judaism is inspired by the attempt to achieve ... separation [from Greek culture and religion], by endorsing some elements of Hellenistic culture while repudiating others. ... [We] find the tradition nuanced in various ways that bring it into continuity with the Hellenistic world, even if Judaism still retains some distinctive emphases. There is always some measure of accommodation and

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview of the literature reinterpreting Joseph, See Harm W. Hollander, “The Portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature” in *Biblical Figures Outside of the Bible* Michael E Stone and Theodore A. Bergren, eds. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998): 237-263.

<sup>30</sup> *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

acculturation<sup>31</sup>.

The use of Hellenistic language and philosophical concerns, and the desire to both embrace and repel outside influence, will also mark each of the three Hellenistic Jewish texts discussed here.

In spite of these basic similarities, however, our three interpreters of the Joseph story differ in areas of audience, purpose, and genre. Josephus writes as a historian in an effort to appeal to a Hellenized audience, and to emphasize the ways in which the narratives of the Jewish people align with Greco-Roman ideals. Philo attempts to provide an allegorical interpretation of the Torah based on Hellenistic philosophical categories, which would appeal to those in the Jewish philosophical community of Alexandria. *Joseph and Aseneth* is an attempt in part to fill in the gaps from Genesis as to the hero's marriage to a foreign wife, but also serves as a fanciful example of "re-written Bible," a popular novelistic genre in the Hellenistic Jewish world. Clearly, the hermeneutical principles, audience, and resulting genres behind these commentaries are varied.

Their understandings of gender and masculinity vary as well. We will discover that Josephus constructs masculinity as a function of dominance and self-control (especially over the mind and body), using common Hellenistic language; *JosAsen* constructs masculinity in terms of chastity, fidelity, and non-violence, which intentionally stands against dominant models; and finally, Philo presents an intentionally ambiguous portrait of Joseph in an effort to warn against inappropriate gender-crossing behavior in males. And, while each relies on a view of gender which is binary – which views maleness and femaleness as oppositional – the actual *definitions* which result from each author's exegesis remain diverse.

In spite of these different constructions, however, we find that all our authors hold their own gender ideologies to be "given." That is, at no point do these authors pause in writing to state, "This is how men should be. Go and do

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<sup>31</sup> Collins, *Athens*, 23.

likewise.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, a fundamental premise of much feminist inquiry (and a point that is key to the current study) is that gender, while constructed, creates an inscription of masculinity (and femininity) so pervasive as to appear innate. It will therefore be important to this work to look for embedded, and therefore less obvious, mentions of sex and gender. Such a task is daunting, because it means looking at the texts with suspicion and an eye toward what is not said. The possibility exists for “reading in” one’s own biases, where none actually exists in the text to be studied. However, to the extent that such an enterprise is possible, I will attempt to show how gender ideologies do indeed play a role in the larger hermeneutical task of these ancient exegetes.

The present study will begin with the story of Joseph as found in both the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint. After a discussion of the organization and scholarship on the story as it stands, I will make particular note of the key phrases and ideas which our interpreters will adapt to their own devices. I will also briefly discuss the understanding of masculinity which may be present in the biblical text, based on the work of Lori Lefkowitz.

Following this discussion of the biblical story, the focus will turn to the work of Josephus, particularly in the *Jewish Antiquities*. Emphasizing the story of Joseph’s encounter with Potiphar’s wife, we will encounter an ideal of masculinity in which “real men” are to be dominant in both body and mind, especially in contrast to uncontrolled and passionate women. This construction of masculinity reflects a view widely held in the Hellenistic world.

The study will then turn to the model for masculinity offered by the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Here, we find a much different formulation of manliness, in which to be a fitting Jewish male means not dominance but sexual deference toward women and non-violence toward men. What “befits a man” in this text is made evident through Joseph’s own speeches and the clear contrast the author creates between our hero and the son of Pharaoh.

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<sup>32</sup> *JosAsen* comes the closest here, by having Joseph make statements beginning with “It does not befit a man...” Even here, however, the rationale is not made explicit, and must be inferred.

Finally, in a departure from *The Antiquities* and *Joseph and Aseneth*, Philo offers a not entirely complimentary portrait of Joseph in an effort to more clearly delineate masculine and feminine boundaries, and the dangers of transgressing them. By far the most intentionally constructive of the three, Philo's work on Joseph in *De Somniis* makes the figure appear ambiguous and conflicted to strengthen his rather strict conceptual categories of male and female.

Obviously, this introduction provides only a skeleton outline, onto which we will put the flesh of later chapters. However, this format, organized around three ideologically different interpretations of the Joseph story, will provide a useful demonstration of our basic premise: that hidden in texts is an understanding of gender which is portrayed as given and prescriptive, and that this construction can be better recognized and understood through the unique combination of the critical methods of history of interpretation and feminist-rhetorical analysis.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL STORY OF JOSEPH

#### Introduction

To fully understand the ways in which our various authors have re-constructed the biblical text of Joseph the patriarch, it is necessary to begin with the biblical story itself. Recall that in a rhetorical approach, we are text-oriented; we seek to understand the ideology of the author by means of careful analysis of form, language, repetition and deviations from established patterns within the writing. The assumption is that all of these elements together will yield a sense of the author's own perspective.

In analysis of post-biblical constructions of Joseph, however, a new wrinkle is added to the task. It is not possible to simply look to the text of *Joseph and Aseneth* for patterns of language, for example; since the premise and questions which *JosAsen* poses are so heavily dependent on one particular element in the biblical story, we must first be aware of the "story behind the story" to adequately note what, in fact, is the creation of the author. As already suggested, this is where the history of interpretation methodology of Kugel and others is such an asset. These scholars rightly recognize the importance of the deviations from the biblical text as sources for identifying ideology.

So, in an effort to both satisfy the requirements of rhetorical criticism, which seeks to recognize both continuity and discontinuity in a text, and to get at ideological motivations which are evident through the history of interpretations method, our primary task must be to elucidate key components of the biblical narrative itself. When we have successfully identified key aspects of the Joseph story, as it appears in both the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint, we can better analyze the various stories which rely on it.

Another benefit of a careful reading of the biblical story is that it affords us the opportunity to begin identifying elements of masculine gender construction even before we turn to the later interpreters. In this story, for example, we will see that Joseph serves as a model that equates manliness with political power



and chastity. Further, we will note through the works of Lori Lefkowitz that Joseph fits a larger pattern in the Pentateuch of the favored younger son of the favored wife, a pattern in the literature that tends to “feminize” the child. These gendered constructions will, in turn, re-emerge or be transformed to better fit each exegete’s own sense of what maleness ought to be, and a discussion of them at this point will be as valuable to later chapters as those on structure, genre and plot.

### **Structure and Composition of the Biblical Story**

Joseph’s story is the longest continuous narrative in Genesis, at 13 chapters and a total of 419 verses in the Hebrew version. It is written in the style of the *Novelle*, and has few distinctive breaks from that genre. The story begins with Joseph’s boyhood and the trouble he creates among his brothers, which is in turn “interrupted” by a pericope on Tamar’s trickery with her father-in-law to produce an heir in chapter 38.<sup>33</sup> Following this interlude, the story resumes with Joseph’s (mis?)adventures in Egypt, the reunion with his brothers during a famine, and the settling of his father’s family in that land. Read as it stands in both the MT and LXX, the narrative serves to bridge the time between the patriarchs and the up-coming situation of slavery in the Exodus.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of over-arching structure, Westermann suggests the following divisions in the Joseph narrative as a whole:

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<sup>33</sup> Nahum Sarna calls the Tamar story an “abrupt and puzzling intrusion” (*JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003], 254). Scholars debate the inclusion of this story, which appears to be a self-contained tradition, within the Joseph cycle. At the most basic level, it may be an attempt to “fill in” the gap between Joseph as a seventeen year-old boy and the “man” (אִישׁ) described in 39:2 by using familiar characters (in this case, Judah) who are also a part of the family of Jacob. Susan Niditch contends that chapter 38 is a balancing act: whereas Judah betrays Joseph to the Ishmaelites, he is in turn betrayed by Tamar, in keeping with a larger focus in the book of Genesis on trickery and counter trickery (“The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38.” *HTR* 72 (1979): 143-149). Esther M. Menn discusses the importance of this story at this point in Joseph’s tale in a larger discussion of the history of interpretation of the “intrusion” in *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 73-78. For other suggestions on the role of Tamar’s story in the Joseph cycle, see Gordan Wenham *Genesis 16-50* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1994), 345.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp “Genesis 1-50” in *Pentateuch* (Chicago: ACTA Foundation, 1971), 107. George W. Coates *Genesis: Form Criticism of the Old Testament Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 266.

**Canaan** (Ch. 37) → **Egypt** (39-45) → **Canaan** (46-50, in part).<sup>35</sup>

Westermann further notes that the divisions of location in the larger narrative mirror the “threefold division of scenes in the introduction (Ch. 37)” as well.<sup>36</sup> These divisions are useful in so far as they reinforce the importance of geography to the larger plotline (the movement of the family between the Promised Land and the land of Egypt). Certainly, as it stands, the purpose of the narrative *is* geographical – to get us to Egypt. However, Westermann’s divisions miss the literary purpose *within* the story, which is more complex, and better represented by Wenham.

Wenham’s division of the text is based on repetitions of threes: three episodes noting how YHWH was with Joseph (Chs. 39-41) followed by three stories of Joseph’s family visiting Egypt (42-47) with each grouping having its own climax of action. These groupings are book ended by Chapter 37 in the front, in which Joseph as a young boy is sold by his brothers, and by 48-50 at the conclusion, which Wenham calls “The Last Days of Jacob and Joseph”.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, this division of the story is oriented more on themes and the literary purposes of the document as a whole, especially the role of God’s favor, the importance of familial relations, and Joseph’s internal fortitude in the face of adversity, each of which will influence the work of our interpreters. As such, Wenham’s division points to the sheer literary merit and content of the story *itself* without regard to its location in the larger Pentateuchal framework.

In the end, however, we may prefer to follow von Rad here, who contends that the reader should “read the narrative without hacking too crassly at its construction” since it is, in fact, an “organically constructed narrative.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>35</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (Jon H Scullion, transl. (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press, 1986), 35.

<sup>36</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 344.

<sup>38</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 347. Von Rad concedes, however, that the narrative does have discrete “scenes” which build upon each other without diminishing the effect of the whole. This also seems to be Coates’ contention: the plotline is constructed through a series of events, moving from complication to resolution (*Genesis*, 265).

it will be of use to us to read the narrative as a whole, since that is the way our subsequent interpreters would have encountered the story. However, both Westermann's geographical and Wenham's numerical structural divisions remain helpful for the sake of basic organization.

As to the composition of Genesis 37-50, many scholars point to a redaction of parallel stories from both J and E into a continuous narrative<sup>39</sup>. The dual sources are evident in parallel place, group and personal names (Reuben/Judah; Shechem/Dothan; Midianite/Ishmaelite; Israel/Jacob).<sup>40</sup> Westermann believes that the redactor retains both strands to "preserve the traditional variants" for a community that is already familiar with them; Sarna assumes that the retention (at least in the case of the Midianites and Ishmaelites) is a deliberate choice of the author to convey the close connection between the various groups and heighten the tragedy of the story.<sup>41</sup> Speiser likewise contends a redactor of J and E; for him, the redactor's role is almost more as compiler than creator, "content to take substantial portions from each source and arrange them consecutively" without regard for difference between J and E.<sup>42</sup> In any case, the variants are pronounced and no attempt is made to hide these differences in the biblical text, suggesting two quite strong traditional strands of the Joseph story.<sup>43</sup> In addition to J and E, Westermann notes the influence of P

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<sup>39</sup> Coates works through the various arguments and problems with such a division in *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Story of Joseph* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976). He rightly notes that the Joseph story need not be from both J and E with a subsequent redactor, but indeed that the Yahwist might himself be the master storyteller, utilizing older materials to create a transition to fit "his own literary construct" (79).

<sup>40</sup> What is missing in this chapter, however, are the dual names of God (Elohim and Yahweh) which are usually associated with these sources. Obviously, this would make identifying each section easier, since source theory is often dependent on this particular distinction.

<sup>41</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 35. Sarna, *Genesis*, 260.

<sup>42</sup> Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 293.

<sup>43</sup> Coates disagrees, suggesting that the repetitions are actually a part of the "story's stylistic repertoire and do not serve as source distinctions or value judgments" (Coates, *Genesis*, 254).

on the *toledoth* formula and the detail about Joseph's age in chapter 37, but little else.<sup>44</sup>

This study will focus on the early chapters of the Joseph story. Genesis 37 and 39 are particularly important for our analysis, since they provide much of the background material for our collection of interpreters. The brief discussion below will thus be an attempt to familiarize the reader with both the MT and LXX readings and to draw out distinctive characters and ideas which will be revisited in the later chapters. At the conclusion of this work, I will outline a few ways in which gender functions in the biblical narrative itself, prior to the work of the later interpreters.

### Key Elements in Genesis 37

Genesis 37 opens with the *toledoth* formula<sup>45</sup> (of Jacob, in this case), but does not follow immediately with an actual listing of descendants. Instead, the next sentence begins the story of Joseph, as a boy of 17 tending the sheep of his brothers. His youth is clearly emphasized in these first few verses of the chapter. His age is stated in verse 2b; he is described as a helper-boy to his brothers (נַעַר in the MT);<sup>46</sup> finally, he is described as the child<sup>47</sup> of Israel's old age.

The second very clear point these opening verses makes is that Joseph was favored by his father at the expense of his brothers. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children, because he was the son of his old

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<sup>44</sup> Von Rad calls the priestly material here "unimportant" (*Genesis*, 348); Speiser refers to P as "secondary and marginal" (*Genesis*, 292).

<sup>45</sup> As noted previously, many scholars note these first verses as the contribution of P, both for the *toledoth* formula and the mention of Joseph's age. After this, the P strand falls off considerably, and makes itself seen in only a few other places in the next 13 chapters.

<sup>46</sup> נַעַר means boy or young man in nearly every other instance in the Pentateuch (for example Ge 34:19 and Ex 2:6), but is here taken as servant when combined with the information about the sheep herding. For a description of *na'ar* as attendant, see Westermann, *Genesis*, 36. The LXX simply states "being young" (ὡν νέος) without connection to the shepherding in the same manner.

<sup>47</sup> MT: הוּא בֶן-כִּי לXX: ὅτι υἱός γήρως ἦν αὐτῷ Both words mean "son," of course, but also imply the child-like (or perhaps childish?) nature of Joseph and this time.

age<sup>48</sup>. Further, Israel makes Joseph a tunic<sup>49</sup> that he gives him as a gift to display his affection for the boy. Westermann calls this tunic the result of Israel's "predilection" toward Joseph, which is not in itself the cause of the brother's hatred; however, the predilection becomes openly present to the other brothers through this garment, and because of that open display, Joseph is set apart as a target for mistreatment<sup>50</sup>. It is only after he receives the tunic that Joseph's brothers "hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him."<sup>51</sup>

Dreams, which appear repeatedly in the course of this triptych of his ascent in Egypt, follow the reference to his brothers' hatred.<sup>52</sup> Joseph sees himself first as a sheaf of wheat, to which the others bow down, then as an unidentified thing to which the sun, moon and stars bend. The literary effect is clearly to intensify the distaste of his brothers, and to prefigure his rise to power under the Pharaoh and the eventual obeisance of his brothers. Josephus and

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<sup>48</sup> Genesis 37:3, NRSV. MT: אֶת-יֹסֵף מָכַל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָקָרָהוּ הוּא LXX: Ιακωβ δὲ ἠγάπα τὸν Ἰωσήφ παρὰ πάντας τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτοῦ ὅτι υἱὸς γήρους ἦν αὐτῷ. This is a point of some confusion, since it should actually be *Benjamin* who is the child of Israel's old age. Westermann is inclined to think the designation refers to *any* child born to Jacob later in life, since "[w]hen a man's life span is drawing to a close and a child is born to him, then this is something different from situation of a young man at the height of his strength...the child is something special" (*Genesis* 37). Sarna offers that the author includes this statement because "[h]e was the last of Jacob's children to be born in Paddan-aram" (*Genesis* 255, n.3). While I don't find either argument completely satisfying, at this point we take the text at face value, since our interpreters will encounter it "as it stands."

<sup>49</sup> The MT is unclear as to the meaning of כְּתֹנֶת עֲשִׂימָה, which in II Samuel refers to a garment worn by princesses: "Now she [Tamar] was wearing a long robe with sleeves [כְּתֹנֶת עֲשִׂימָה]; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times." (13:18; see also Song 5:3). It has variously been translated as "robe with sleeves" (Wenham, *Genesis*, 351; Westermann, *Genesis*, 37) or "ornamented tunic" (Speiser, *Genesis*, 287) to convey the special nature of the garment. The LXX has χιτῶνα ποικίλον which gives rise to the English translation "coat of many colors."

<sup>50</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Sarna's translation in *Genesis*, 255-6. The LXX has "were not able to speak peaceably to him" (οὐκ ἐδύναντο λαλεῖν αὐτῷ οὐδὲν εἰρηνικόν).

<sup>52</sup> In this case, they are Joseph's own dreams. Later, they are the dreams of fellow prisoners, and of the Pharaoh himself. In any case, the role of dreams as a prefiguration of what is to come plays a central role in this first section of the story.

Philo both make much of the dreams of Joseph, and we will explore these further in that subsequent chapter.

Finally in chapter 37 we come to the pivotal event: the selling of Joseph to foreign traders. As Joseph approaches his pasturing brothers, they plot to kill him. In a clear sign of source division at this point, two separate “savings” of Joseph occur: the first, by Reuben, who points to the danger of shedding blood and sells him instead to the Midianites, and the second by Judah, who compels the brothers to spare Joseph as a sign of brotherhood and sells him to the Ishmaelites.<sup>53</sup> In either case, the story in chapter 37 ends with the brothers returning the tunic, now stripped from Joseph, to their father who mourns him as dead.

### Key Elements in Genesis 39 and 40

Chapter 39<sup>54</sup> begins with a description of the Egyptian person who buys Joseph from the Midianites (according to 37:36) or Ishmaelites (according to 39:1). The man is called Potiphar in the MT, Pentephres in the LXX. He is described as an Egyptian man (יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְרַיִם, ἀνὴρ Αἰγύπτιος) and variously as a chief steward, court official of Pharaoh, eunuch and captain of the guard. Joseph is placed in charge of the household of his Egyptian master.

Two descriptions of Joseph are given at this point. The first relates to his work ethic: he was a successful man (יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְלָחַיִם, ἀνὴρ ἐπιτυγχάνων) and everything in the Egyptian’s house was “in his hand” so that the master “knew nothing except the bread he ate.” The meaning of this phrase is debatable. It may be that “bread” here is a euphemism for his wife.<sup>55</sup> This certainly would

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<sup>53</sup> This becomes a major issue for rabbinical interpreters of the story. See for example *Bereshit Rabbah* 84 which contends that Joseph was sold twice (!). A nice discussion of how this works for, rather than against, the larger narrative can be found in W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition* (New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2005), 247.

<sup>54</sup> Again, we are reminded of the caesura in Chapter 38, and of the role of Tamar in flipping the standard narrative in *novelle* form with her “intrusion”. See my previous note in this chapter (n. 30) for a discussion of the role of this chapter in the larger Joseph narrative. From an unabashedly personal perspective, I love the intrusion of this woman into the patriarchal narrative – in a way that Sarah and Rebekah just can’t match for sheer drama or verve.

<sup>55</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 374; Sarna, *Genesis*, 272. . Note the connection between this image and Proverbs 30:20, “This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I’ve

make sense, given the importance of his master's wife in the events to follow, and the fact that in Joseph's own speech in verse 8 he says that the only thing the master withholds is "yourself, since you are his wife." Others suggest the bread makes reference to the dietary restrictions that might divide an Israelite and an Egyptian,<sup>56</sup> noting that Potiphar's food must be in his own care for the sake of cleanliness.

Whatever the reason or meaning, it is only this bread which the master withholds from Joseph; everything else is blessed by Joseph's presence in the house. Here we get the formulation of YHWH's blessing<sup>57</sup> in four distinct ways: 1) YHWH was "with him" (vv 2 and 3); 2) YHWH "gave success to all that he did" (v 4); 3) YHWH blessed Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake (v 5b); and 4) the blessing of YHWH was upon everything the master owned. In the case of 3) and 4) the blessing (ברכה) extends not only to persons, but to everything in the household, indicating the overwhelming significance of Joseph's position and success.

The second description of Joseph given at this juncture, prior to the beginning of the incident with Potiphar's wife, is physical. He is "fair of face and handsome".<sup>58</sup> This description in the MT repeats the word יָפֵה twice, which Kugel calls an "emphatic turn of phrase."<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that the same phrase appears in Genesis 29:17, referring to Joseph's mother Rachel. Here, the

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done nothing wrong.' Also note the similarity to Proverbs 20:17, according to Midrash: "Bread of falsehood is sweet to man."

<sup>56</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 303; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 364.

<sup>57</sup> The use of the divine name here indicates a brief J section, and doublets of the kind we experience in 37 are non-existent. However, the E source continues to be important, especially in Joseph's speeches in 39:9 and 40:8.

<sup>58</sup> MT: וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפֵה-תֵאֵר וַיְפֵה מְרֹאֵה Speiser translates this as "handsome of figure and features" (*Genesis* 301); Westermann: "of fine appearance and handsome" (*Genesis* 64); Kugel: "Comely of form and comely of appearance" (*In Potiphar's House*, 253). The LXX does not have repetitive use of one word, but does intensify the description by stating: "Joseph was beautiful of form (καλὸς τῶ εἶδει) and exceedingly well-produced of appearance (καὶ ὠραῖος τῆ ὄψει σφόδρα). . Similar phrases appear in descriptions of Sarah (Gen 12:11) and David (1 Sam 16:18).

<sup>59</sup> Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 253.

text reads, “Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and fair to look on.<sup>60</sup>” The repetition is clearly intended to connect favored mother and favored son, a connection which Lefkovitz notes is commonplace in the patriarchal narratives<sup>61</sup>. This emphatic repetition was not lost on our early interpreters, of course. Josephus, for example, changes the story to make use of the difference between the phrasing of these two **יָפֵה** clauses, suggesting that Joseph’s beauty was in both body and mind. Philo heightens the already apparent connection between mother and son in *De Somniis* <sup>62</sup>.

Joseph’s beauty also serves as a way of introducing the main plot of Chapter 39 -- the confrontation with Potiphar’s wife – by noting that as soon as she had seen him she implored him for sex<sup>63</sup>. Potiphar’s wife is a fascinating character in this chapter: devious, dedicated, convincing, and passionate<sup>64</sup>.. There are no narrative descriptions of her, beyond the basic observation that she is the wife of the master, but her actions betray her character: she is persistent in her desire for an adulterous affair (“she spoke to Joseph day after day”<sup>65</sup>); she has some ability to influence folks in the household and transfer blame (by relating to both the fellow servants and her husband that the “Hebrew” is

<sup>60</sup> **וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַבֹּהַּ וְרַחֵל יְפֵה** Some translators take **רַבֹּהַּ** (the description of Leah’s eyes) to mean “delicate” (as in the NRSV) and some prefer “weak” (as in the NAS).

<sup>61</sup> Lori Lefkovitz, “Passing as a Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance” *Narrative* 10:1 (2002), 5. I will further discuss her understanding of the implications of this connection for masculinity in the patriarchal narratives at the end of this chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 2:9; Philo, *De Somniis* 2:16. See also Philo, *De Iosepho* 40, in which Joseph’s extreme beauty becomes the reason Potiphar’s wife is unable to resist him. For a discussion of the interpretation of this phrase among early exegetes, including Philo and Josephus, see Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 253-245.

<sup>63</sup> Gen 39:7, NRSV: And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." MT: **וַיִּזְכַּר וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ**

<sup>64</sup> A fascinating study of her role and type in folklore is found in Shalom Goldman’s, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (SUNY Press, 2000). Goldman contends that these “scorned woman” tales may well be some of the oldest and most wide-spread in storytelling (xii).

<sup>65</sup> **וַיְהִי כִּדְבָרָהּ אֵל-יֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם**



responsible for the incident);<sup>66</sup> and, finally, she is ultimately responsible for Joseph's placement in prison.<sup>67</sup>

Joseph also gets a deeper characterization in these few verses, and it, too, comes not from a physical description (which was already given) but from his actions in a situation of crisis. As Potiphar's wife first approaches him to instigate the affair, he replies that he could not "sin before God"<sup>68</sup> in this manner; he also refers to the possible affair as a "great wickedness"<sup>69</sup>. Later, as her requests persist day after day, he does not listen (MT: וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: καὶ οὐχ ὑπήκουσεν αὐτῆ) to her and flees from her when she corners him, going so far as to leave his garment behind.<sup>70</sup>

The rest of chapter 39 and the beginning of chapter 40 narrate the time Joseph spent in prison following the allegations of adultery. This section

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<sup>66</sup> Gen 39:14,18. The LXX has an addition in verse 18. In the MT, she says to her husband, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me (בָּא-אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר-הֵבֵאתָ לְנוּ--לְצַחֵק בִּי); but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his coat with me and fled outside." The LXX has: "The Hebrew servant whom you brought in to us came into me to mock me, **and said to me, lie with me.** (πρὸς με λέγων κοιμήθητι μετ' ἐμοῦ) And when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried, he fled and departed, having left his coat with me."

<sup>67</sup> Many scholars have noted the relationship between this story of seduction and that of the Egyptian text "Tale of Two Brothers." (See Susan Tower Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers: The Oldest Fairy Tale in the World* [Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990]). However, in that tale, the wife's plotting is discovered and she is killed, her body thrown to the dogs. Here, Potiphar's wife is able to convince all of her innocence and Joseph bears the full brunt of the accusation. Obviously, her deception and Joseph's innocence heightens the drama and outrage for the reader.

<sup>68</sup> Gen 39:9 וְיִתְּאָתִי לְאֱלֹהִים. The divine name YHWH is never on the lips of Joseph (as here) or any of the other characters in this cycle, but only appears in the editorial comments, as we saw in 39:3-5.

<sup>69</sup> Gen 39:9 הָרַעָה הַגְּדֹלָה Many of our ancient interpreters wondered as to this language: how would Joseph, who had no experience of the Mosaic law, know what was sinful? Josephus will contend that he used rationally apparent standards of household etiquette rather than an orientation toward the divine Law (*Ant.* 2.51-53); *Joseph and Aseneth* contends that the rules were his father's (7:5); rabbinic interpretation goes so far as to have a vision of his father appear to him to tell him right from wrong, without whose intervention he might well have conceded to the mistresses demand (*Genesis Rabbah* 87:8; *Sotah* 36b).

<sup>70</sup> Obviously, this does not refer to the special tunic his father made him (see n. 46), which was left behind with his brothers, and different words are used accordingly. MT: וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְיָדָהּ; and LXX: καὶ καταλιπὼν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῆς.

recapitulates many of the themes we have already encountered: YHWH was with Joseph (39:21 & 23); Joseph achieves a modicum of success and esteem (39:20-23); Joseph interprets dreams (40:5-13). However, chapter 40 ends with the same despair with which it began – Joseph alone in prison, in spite of his gifts and innocence. The final description of him is that he is forgotten (Gen 40:23).

### Additional References

For the most part, our discussion of Joseph as an exemplar of masculinity in first-century texts will draw material from the narrative discussed above. Josephus' *Antiquities*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and Philo's *De Somniis* will make much from the themes of chastity, youth, dream interpretation, and power. However, a few other references will be relevant to our study, and deserve mention.

- 1) After Joseph is called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams in Chapter 41, he (Joseph) offers the following description of an appropriate leader for the time of famine: "let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom [וְעָתָה יִרְאֵה נָרָא פְּרַעֲהַ אִישׁ נְבוֹן וְחָכָם] and set him over the land of Egypt" (41:33)<sup>71</sup>. Obviously, this becomes Joseph's job and is, in essence, the narrator's description of Joseph as an ideal (male) leader<sup>72</sup>. Following this, Pharaoh gives to Joseph the marks of authority: a signet ring, a gold chain, fine robes and the chariot of his second-in-command.
- 2) Shortly after his investiture as second-in-command, Joseph is "given"<sup>73</sup> the daughter of Potiphera (ostensibly a different figure than the

<sup>71</sup> While the MT clearly has "man" (אִישׁ) the LXX has ἄνθρωπον φρόνιμον καὶ συνετὸν, using the more general word for "humanity."

<sup>72</sup> A further emphasis on Joseph as the ideal male leader occurs in vs. 38, in which the courtiers of Pharaoh cry for "a man in whom is the spirit of God," (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ) (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ)

<sup>73</sup> Genesis 41:45 NRSV: And he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. MT: וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ אֶת-אֲסֵנַת בַּת-פּוֹטִי פְּרַעֲהַ. LXX: καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὴν ἀσεννεθ θυγατέρα πετεφρη ἱερέως ἡλίου πόλεως αὐτῷ γυναῖκα.

Potiphar of chapter 37) whose name is Aseneth. Together, they parent two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. This in itself is unremarkable, except insofar as it is a Hebrew patriarch marrying an Egyptian, which would have struck later readers as improper given concerns about exogamy. *Joseph and Aseneth* will depend in part on “rethinking” Aseneth to better comply with the ideal marital partner readers would have expected.

This brings us to the end of those details from the biblical narrative which will be relevant to our discussion. A few final comments are in order. First, it is important to recognize the sparse detail that is present in the biblical text itself. Joseph is described in just a few sentences throughout these chapters. The incident with Potiphar’s wife is a scant 14 verses. While the dreams are described in great detail (a total of 31 verses in Chs. 40 and 41), Joseph’s rise from prison to second-in-command occurs in a mere five. As we can see, much room is left in the biblical narrative for interpretation, development, and re-orientation – a fact which our interpreters will use to their own ideological advantage.

The second observation, which was noted in the introduction, is that even here within the biblical text we can begin to analyze what it might have meant to “be a man” in the community of those who contributed to the biblical story of Joseph. Here, we might begin by simply noting the attributes of Joseph. We see that Joseph is a successful man, and that his success is owed to his allegiance to YHWH, who gives him wisdom. Later, when he rises to prominence in Egypt, Joseph’s discernment is a critical factor in his success against the famine. The emphasis on his intelligence and wisdom, as in Genesis 41:33, becomes a key feature of Joseph for future interpreters. His success in political affairs, especially on account of fidelity to God, is a theme picked up by Josephus and Philo as well, and it will influence their views of proper masculinity because of its inclusion in this narrative. And yet, even here we see that the author wishes to equate manliness with a level head in crisis and discernment in matters of state. These features, unique to Joseph among the men in the story, and often utilizing

the Hebrew word specific to men (אִישׁ), likely set him apart as an masculine ethical model for those who heard or read the text.

When considering masculine ideologies in this biblical text, Lori Lefkowitz has noted that the story of Joseph in the Bible is reminiscent of other patriarchal narratives in which the younger son is victorious over the elder(s)<sup>74</sup>. She attaches this story to those of Isaac/Ishmael and Jacob/Esau, in which the lesser child “inherits the narrative future,”<sup>75</sup> and with it the blessing of the covenant. Additionally, she notes that these favored children tend to have other common features:

In the cases of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, later King David and his brothers, and Solomon and his brothers, it is the younger son, often the child of the more beloved but less fertile wife, the physically smaller, less hirsute, more delicate, more domestic son, closer to the mother, a hero of intellect rather than of brawn<sup>76</sup>.

In all these stories, then, the younger son is triumphant over the elders in spite of (or perhaps because of) his “weaker” status, and comes to dominate the narrative<sup>77</sup>.

This favored son, preferred by the mother, is also given some advantage by her over the elder(s). In the case of Joseph, it is the inherited beauty he shares with his mother that makes Joseph the favored son in Jacob’s eyes, and this plays a role in the elevation of his status both within the family and eventually in Egypt. It is also key to his misfortune, especially in relationship to Potiphar’s

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<sup>74</sup> Lori Lefkowitz, “Coats and Tales: Joseph Stories and Myths of Jewish Masculinity.” in *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity* Harry Brod, ed. (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1998.), 19-29.

<sup>75</sup> Lori Lefkowitz, “Passing As A Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance” *Narrative* 10:1 (2002), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Lefkowitz, “Coats and Tales,” 20.

<sup>77</sup> Lefkowitz suggests that this tendency to prefer the lesser son may be an expression of the political life of the chosen people: “perhaps because they may have been a relatively small, militarily weak, and young people, the early Israelites favored myths that reverse the usual rule of primogeniture.” *Coats and Tales*,” 19.

wife<sup>78</sup>. The boy's beauty, according to Lefkowitz, is one more way in which he is reminiscent of the mother. Lefkowitz thus contends that the female-favored son (whether Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph), in his smallness, youth, and domestic attachments, represents a feminized male. That is, Joseph is more "female" than "male" in this story, in keeping with the overall pattern of the Pentateuch. Thus it happens in some subsequent interpreters of this story, Joseph's feminization is expanded, and his sexuality is questioned<sup>79</sup>. I would suggest, however, that the close relationship to the matriarch, while noted and repeated, is not explicitly attached to the gender identity of Joseph in the biblical tale, as it will be in later interpreters. Still, I would basically agree with Lefkowitz's contention that in the Joseph narrative the (younger) patriarch's masculinity is constructed at least in part from his attachment to the matriarchs, which endows him with a different sense of gender identity than is evident in the elder.

Sexual propriety is also a concern of our hero, and certainly becomes a key feature of the story as we find it in the Bible. Joseph makes direct connections between adulterous sex and sin, noting that violations of established sexual mores would be inappropriate in the eyes of God, and he is thus unwilling to respond to the advances of Potiphar's wife. Here, a clear boundary is delineated between men and women in the story, one which will also reoccur in later interpretations. The male, embodied by Joseph, is sexually hesitant, but the woman is lustful and aggressive. Lefkowitz understands this as another dominant theme in the Pentateuch.

In the Bible, women play many roles....But no matter whether her role is as heroine or villainess, her power to create or destroy is sexual. Each time a woman enacts her role, a man is rendered powerless, and the

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<sup>78</sup> "The fact of Joseph's beauty occurs as a single line in the text that serves only to explain why Potiphar's wife lusts after him." Lefkowitz, "Coats and Tales," 20.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph is described as decorating his eyes, curling his hair, and walking with a dancing step in *Genesis Rabbah* 87:45. Philo describes Joseph in *De Somniis* as inheriting irrationality, a female quality, from his mother (2.16). See Lefkowitz, "Coats and Tales," 23-25.

text's fear of emasculation conveys the secret message that one must contain she who, if unleashed, wields a threatening weapon<sup>80</sup>.

The theme of chastity as a mark of manhood against the dangerous woman will recur – in both Josephus' retelling of the incident with Potiphar's wife, and *JosAsen's* discussion of sex with foreign women-- as a direct result of the actions of Joseph in this episode.

I would suggest, then, that political success, wisdom and discernment, a favored relationship to the mother, and chastity in response to dangerous women all play a role in the subtle definition of masculinity which appears in the biblical text; certainly, the inclusion of them here plays at least some part in their later reappearance and amplification by our post-biblical interpreters. Let us turn now to the first reinterpretation of this story, that offered by Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*.

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<sup>80</sup> Lefkowitz, "Coats and Tales," 26.

CHAPTER 3  
MANLINESS AS SELF-CONTROL IN  
*THE ANTIQUITIES OF JOSEPHUS*

**Introduction**

In the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus, we encounter our first source for embedded ideologies of masculinity. Following a cursory introduction to the text itself, this chapter will be an attempt to describe some basic distinctions between the Biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39) and the expanded narrative present in the *Antiquities* Book II. By investigating these distinctions, I hope to establish that Josephus is not merely expanding the story, but creating a very carefully crafted ideological construction of gender

The discussion which I will put forward here is dependant on the vast amount of scholarly work already done in both Josephan studies and classical works on masculinity. In particular, my work makes use of history of interpretation scholarship from Louis Feldman, Maren Neihoff, Steven Mason, and Harold Attridge, all of whom have studied both the situation in which Josephus wrote and the intent behind much of his writing. Additionally, I will employ well-established categorization of Hellenistic virtues, particularly the ideal of *σώφρων*, in relation to Josephus' own writings on the story of Joseph. However, whereas prior scholarship has emphasized Josephus' general ideological position, or his moralizing elements, or even the extent to which he was engaged in propagandistic work on behalf of Judaism, I will utilize these tools to note the specific ways in which Josephus constructs manliness in his *Jewish Antiquities*. In his construction we find that the interpreter mirrors one "standard" definition of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world, in which true manliness is marked by total self-control, both in the mind and over the body.

**Introduction to the *Jewish Antiquities***

Flavius Josephus was a prolific Jewish author of the first century. His works include the monumental *Jewish Antiquities*, a history which tracks both

biblical and post-biblical figures, likely disseminated in 93/94 CE from Rome.<sup>81</sup> The *Antiquities* was written in Greek, and relies on the Septuagint as its biblical source. In all, the *Antiquities* includes twenty books, recounting Jewish history from the creation of world to the time of Roman rule, ending in 66 C.E at the outbreak of the Jewish War. Books I – IV retell the stories of the Torah, and include the section on Joseph which will be our focus. Books V – IX focus on the taking of the land, the period of the judges, and the kings and prophets. Book X focuses on exile, and emphasizes the importance of the temple and its destruction. Book XI follows the return under Cyrus to the reign of Alexander the Great. At this point, the number of years covered by each subsequent book shortens, and the work as a whole takes on a more formal historical feel. XII and XIII deal with the Hellenistic period, and XIV begins the Roman period with the attack by Pompey. The remaining books follow the lives of the governors and administrators of Judea, and include discussions of religious groups and political unrest in the region. Book XX concludes with the installation of Florus, which Josephus concludes was the impetus for the War. Josephus' *Jewish Wars*, a separate work, takes up the narrative line at this point. The *Antiquities* are usually paired in modern scholarship with the *Life of Flavius Josephus* and *Contra Apionem* as companion works, as Josephus himself often did<sup>82</sup>.

Josephus' express purpose, as he sets forth in the introduction to the work, is "to reveal who the Judeans were from the beginning and what fortunes they experienced, under what sort of lawgiver they were trained as to piety and the exercise of the other virtues,"<sup>83</sup> although he notes just a few lines later that

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<sup>81</sup> Louis Feldman notes that this is the standard dating of the work, and that the discrepancy in years "rests on the possibility that Josephus calculates either by Greek/Jewish years, beginning in the Spring or possibly Autumn or by twelve-month intervals from one *dies imperii* to the next." ("Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*" *Flavius Josephus, Vol. 3* [Leiden: Brill, 2000], xvii.)

<sup>82</sup> Josephus, *Ant* 20.267; *Life* 1, 430; and *Apion* 1.54 (per Feldman).

<sup>83</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all the larger blocks of English translation are from Feldman's *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary Judean Antiquities 1-4 Vol 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 130-186. Problematic or significant words or phrases will be given in Greek from the critical edition by Benedict Niese, *Flavius Josephus: Flavii Iosephi Opera*, 7 vols.. (Berlin: Weidmanns, 1885-95). A new critical edition with translation and commentary in French is also available: Étienne Nodet



this is a monumental and complex task. This description of purpose has led many scholars to conclude that Josephus intended, at least in part, to write an *apologia* for Judaism<sup>84</sup>; that is, that the author was writing to some extent in an effort to respond to those in the Hellenistic culture who had heard all manner of rumors about Judaism, especially about its founders (Moses and the Patriarchs).<sup>85</sup> It makes sense, then, that Josephus would recast these sometimes disparaged figures in an ultra-positive light, disregarding their more negative characteristics and focusing on the affirmative aspects when retelling the stories of the Torah.

However, Josephus neither simply expands on the biblical stories, nor even merely “glosses over” the less complimentary aspects of the Patriarchs and heroes of Judaism. Throughout this work, we see additions and expansions which point us toward the author’s unique perspective on many topics. (This, of course, occurs in spite of his assurance to “set forth the precise details of what is in the Scriptures...neither adding not omitting anything.”<sup>86</sup>) In an effort to find sources for Josephus’ interpretive method, Feldman observes the ways in which rabbinic midrash, the pesharim, and the works of Philo all serve as models for the *Antiquities*<sup>87</sup>. However, he also contends that what Josephus is doing in these volumes is finally different than the interpretation found in other sources;

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et alii, eds. *Flavius Josèphe, Les Antiquités Juives: Introduction et texte, traduction et notes*, Books 1-3. (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1992).

<sup>84</sup> See Harold Attridge, “Josephus and His Works” in M.E. Stone, ed. *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 185-232.

<sup>85</sup> Mason notes many of these rumors: Moses and the Jews were banished from Egypt because they were lepers; the Jews were inhospitable to all outsiders; they had values contrary to all other peoples. He also notes elsewhere, however, that this type of apology cannot explain the entirety of the *Antiquities*, since “the ancient history only comprises about half the book (*Ant.* I-XI), and so leaves one grasping to explain why Josephus bothered with the other half.” Steven Mason, “Should Anyone Wish to Enquire Further” (*Ant.* 1.25) The Aim and Audience of Josephus’ *Judean Antiquities*” in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 64-103.

<sup>86</sup> *Ant.* 1.17

<sup>87</sup> Louis Feldman, *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16.

he is not writing a commentary (as the pesharim), nor is he attempting to create a philosophical treatise (as is Philo), nor is he explicating the individual verses of the Scripture to the same extent as the rabbis. Instead, Feldman contends, Josephus' interpretive method in the *Antiquities* is closest to the targumim, in which "it is impossible, without looking at the biblical text, to discern what is the base text and what has been amplified or omitted, so seamlessly have the additions, for example, been made to the biblical text."<sup>88</sup> By way of example, in the retelling of the seduction by Potiphar's wife, which will be the focus in this chapter, twenty-two lines in Hebrew become 120 in the *Antiquities*.<sup>89</sup> In many places, the author inserts additional information or internal psychological states of the characters, or re-imagines them with an eye toward contemporary language or characteristics, all within the narrative framework of the biblical story as it stands. A close review of these changes, additions, revisions and unique turns of language will be the source material, then, for a discussion of Josephus' own view of masculinity in the retelling of the seduction by Potiphar's wife.

Of course, the endeavor to ferret out Josephus' own ideological constructions by means of his unique insertions and modifications is not new to this project. Indeed, much of the scholarship surrounding the *Antiquities* involves the ways in which Josephus modifies the Biblical text. Attridge's *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquities Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* is a useful example. Attridge identifies the "technique of narrative elaboration"<sup>90</sup> which marks the *Antiquities*. His work recognizes three key areas in which the additions made by Josephus make a difference in the outcome or sense of the story: 1) in cases of the creation of an apologetic aim, 2) in the role or function of the deity, and 3) in cases of moralizing in the work. In each case, by means of

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<sup>88</sup> Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation*, 16.'

<sup>89</sup> Feldman notes that "this pericope is the most highly expanded of all the Josephan episodes pertaining to Joseph and of almost all the biblical episodes paraphrased by Josephus" in his note at the start of the Potiphar section. (Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 144).

<sup>90</sup> Harold Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquities Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 38.

elaboration on basic biblical themes and stories, Josephus is able to form an ideologically unique creation.

One of the most interesting of Attridge's contentions for the current project, which appears in the context of his larger discussion on moralizing (point 3 above), is that sexual passion is a device used to indicate a corrupted person in the *Antiquities*. Here, he refers directly to the narrative with Potiphar's wife as the best example of how the device functions:

[An] important theme is that of the corrupting effects of pleasure and its pursuit... We have seen some of the moralizing elements in the story of Joseph, where the character of the hero and his prudent resistance to various emotions was highlighted, and where the contrasting figure of Potiphar's wife and her complete submission to passion was no less elaborated. The most powerful emotion involved here is, of course, lust for sexual gratification.<sup>91</sup>

He follows with other examples in which he contends Josephus utilizes "the theme of the danger of sex."<sup>92</sup> However, where Attridge will be content to call this one of many examples of moralizing in the text, I will contend that the contrasting of these two figures has implications for gender ideologies as well as moral ones.

Maren Neihoff further explicates the ways in which Josephus amplifies the biblical text<sup>93</sup>. Niehoff focuses first on the ways in which Joseph's story parallels the life of the author. In Neihoff's evaluation, it seems that this patriarchal narrative is not so much a national apology as it is a personal one. This is nowhere more true than in the story of Joseph. Throughout her article, Neihoff points out the many similarities between Josephus' portrayal of Joseph and the

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<sup>91</sup> Attridge, *Interpretation*, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Attridge, *Interpretation*, 127.

<sup>93</sup> Maren Neihoff, "Josephus' Joseph" in *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 92-105.

author's own life by setting the *Antiquities* in parallel with the *Life*.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, Neihoff discusses the role of women in the story of Joseph as another personal apologetic, calling the incident with Potiphar's wife "personal and pietistic," suggesting that the passage has a "conspicuously religious flavor."<sup>95</sup> In both cases, Neihoff seems to suggest that the elements added or subtracted by the author have a larger meaning for his world and for the construction of a personal ideology.

Feldman further suggests that the changes to the biblical text may be an effort to "clean up" Joseph for an audience not familiar with the patriarch. In particular, Feldman sees omissions in the text as signs that Josephus is uneasy with an attribute of Joseph's present in the Bible; by omission of these elements Josephus is freed to present a wholly positive portrayal of the hero, which befits (according to Feldman) an apologetic aim. For example, Josephus removes all reference to Joseph's coat before the brothers' treachery, since if he were wearing the coat when he went to meet them, Joseph would appear taunting<sup>96</sup>. Later, Feldman notes that Josephus removes all mention of God as the source of Joseph's interpreting skills, instead making it appear as if the hero himself was responsible for the explanation of Pharaoh's dreams. In both cases, the result is a total "recasting" of Joseph in the model of Greco-Roman heroes for what Feldman understands to be a thoroughly non-Jewish audience<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Neihoff, "Josephus' Joseph," 92-94. For example, Neihoff contends that the jealousy of the brothers in response to Joseph's dreams is comparable to the language used in the *Life* against John of Gischala, who Josephus contends envied his success.

<sup>95</sup> Neihoff, "Josephus' Joseph," 104.

<sup>96</sup> Louis Feldman, "Rearrangement of Pentateuchal Material in Josephus' *Antiquities*, Books 1-4" [Cited 27 January 2006] Online: <http://josephus.yorku.ca/pdf/Feldman.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Louis Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Joseph," *RB* 99 (1992): 504. There is much discussion in the literature as to exactly who the first audience for this monumental work was. The majority opinion is that the audience was non-Jewish, and thus the function of the document was primarily apologetic. Mason summarizes the majority opinions in "Social Context and Audience: Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*" in *Judean Antiquities* xvii-xx. However, Shaye J.D. Cohen has contended that the *Antiquities* were intended to repair relations with the budding rabbinic community at Yavneh which had been damaged due to Josephus' patronage through Rome. (*Josephus in Galilee and Rome* [Leiden: E.J Brill, 1990], 199-201). Mason does a thorough job

All three scholars, then, recognize some authorial intent and ideological considerations behind the changes and additions of the biblical story, whether for apologetic, moralistic, pietistic, or religious reasons. As Attridge, Neihoff, and Feldman make clear, Josephus' own ideas are made evident most explicitly by what is added, omitted, and reworked into the "base text"; that "layer" which Josephus affixes to the biblical story will be our starting point as well as we seek understanding of the "clues within the text" (to use Tribble's phrase), this time in terms of masculine gender ideology.<sup>98</sup> When we have identified this "layer" a little more completely, we will have a better sense of the ideology of masculinity which Josephus holds.

We can employ rhetorical criticism, then, by making note of these interesting changes, additions, connections and word choices that Josephus employs to underscore his ideological convictions. But where to begin? In spite of the general premise of this paper to investigate the construction of masculinity in first-century interpretations of the Bible, we must begin with a fascinating description of what it means to be female in the *Antiquities*. The incident with Potiphar's wife, retold in such detail and with many additions and modifications, will be the site for our investigation.

### **The *Antiquities* and the Incident with Potiphar's Wife**

As noted above, the pericope involving Potiphar's wife<sup>99</sup> is greatly expanded from the biblical account. The following is a summary of additions to the story made by Josephus which are pertinent to the following discussion.<sup>100</sup>

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of countering arguments in favor of a Jewish audience in "Should Anyone Wish to Inquire Further" .

<sup>98</sup> Tribble, *God*, 1-30. A more complete discussion of rhetorical criticism is available in the introductory chapter of this work.

<sup>99</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 2.39-59.

<sup>100</sup> For a description of the Biblical story of Potiphar's wife, please refer to the preceding chapter. It should be noted that the list here is only partial, as necessary for the discussion below. A thorough listing of all differences is available in the notes to Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 142-149.

Each is followed by the relevant passage in English from Feldman's translation, with the Greek from Niese's edition in a footnote.

1. The master (whom Josephus refers to as Pentephres<sup>101</sup>) who buys Joseph gives him an education in his household: "He held him in all honor and gave him the education that befits a free man."<sup>102</sup>
2. Several statements are added about Joseph's internal state during the course of the attacks and allegations made by Potiphar's wife. In 2.40, the reader is told that Joseph "did not forsake the virtue that encompassed him."<sup>103</sup> At 2.42, Josephus notes that the mistress saw only his slave status, and not his internal state: "She was looking at the outward bearing of his slavery at that time but not on the character that remained firm despite his change of fortune."<sup>104</sup> In 2.50, we read of Joseph's self-control in spite of the mistress's pleas and threats: "Though the woman said these things and wept, neither did compassion persuade him not to be self controlled nor did fear compel him."<sup>105</sup>
3. As noted previously, Joseph's dexterity as a reason for the mistress' attraction is added in 2.41: "For his master's wife was disposed amorously to him because of his handsomeness and his adroitness in his doings."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> I will refer to the man as Pentephres or Potiphar interchangeably, and to the mistress as Potiphar's wife. Josephus himself does not use any name for her at all, but refers to her as the "mistress" (δέσποινα) or "woman" (γυνή).

<sup>102</sup> *Ant.* 2.39. εἶχεν ἐν πάσῃ τιμῇ καὶ παιδείαν τε τὴν ἐλευθέριον ἐπαίδευε.

<sup>103</sup> ὁ δὲ τούτων τε ἀπέλαυε καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἣτις ἦν περὶ αὐτόν.

<sup>104</sup> καὶ πρὸς τὸ σχῆμα τῆς τότε δουλείας ἀλλ' οὐ πρὸς τὸν τρόπον ἀφορώσης τὸν καὶ παρὰ τὴν μεταβολὴν.

<sup>105</sup> Ταῦτα λεγούσης τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ δακρυούσης οὔτε οἶκτος αὐτὸν μὴ σωφρονεῖν ἔπεισεν οὔτ' ἠνάγκασε φόβος.

<sup>106</sup> Τῆς γὰρ τοῦ δεσπότου γυναικὸς διὰ τε τὴν εὐμορφίαν καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰς πράξεις αὐτοῦ δεξιότητα ἐρωτικῶς. This may be less a true addition than a modification, since Josephus is using the double mention of Joseph's handsomeness (Gen 39:6) as a jumping-off point. See the discussion on page 42, below.

4. Following the mistresses request for an affair, “speeches” by Joseph are included, on the topic of governing passion with reason or self-control: "He kept on imploring her to prevail over her passion, setting before her the hopelessness of satisfying her desire, since this would cease when hope was not present, and he said that he himself would rather endure anything than to be obedient to this [request]. For indeed, though it is necessary for one who is a slave to do nothing opposed to his mistress, the contradiction to such orders would have abundant excuse."<sup>107</sup>

"But he resisted her supplications and did not give in to her threats, and chose to suffer unjustly and to endure something more bitter rather than to enjoy the present by giving himself up to his emotions, for which he was conscious that he would perish."<sup>108</sup>

5. The festival day and her feigned illness are added as an explanation for why there were no people around when Potiphar's wife made her advances to Joseph, whereas the biblical text only has that the house was empty: "Therefore, when a public festival was at hand, in which it was customary for women to come together frequently in the festal assembly, she feigned illness to her

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<sup>107</sup> *Ant.* 2.43. ἀλλὰ κρατεῖν τε τοῦ πάθους κάκεινην παρεκάλει τὴν ἀπόγνωσιν τοῦ τεύξεσθαι τῆς ἐπιθυμίας προβαλλόμενος, σταλήσεσθαι γάρ τε αὐτῇ τοῦτο μὴ παρούσης ἐλπίδος, αὐτός τε πάντα μάλλον ὑπομενεῖν ἔλεγεν ἢ πρὸς τοῦτο καταπειθῆς ἔσεσθαι· καὶ γὰρ εἰ τῇ δεσποίνῃ δούλου ὄντα δεῖ ποιεῖν μηδὲν ἐναντίον, ἢ πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν προσταγμάτων ἀντιλογία πολλὴν ἂν ἔχοι παραίτησιν

<sup>108</sup> *Ant.* 2.50. ἀλλὰ ταῖς δεήσεσιν ἀντέσχε καὶ ταῖς ἀπειλαῖς οὐκ ἐνέδωκε καὶ παθεῖν ἀδίκως καὶ ὑπομένειν τι τῶν χαλεπωτέρων εἴλετο μάλλον ἢ τῶν παρόντων ἀπολαβεῖν χαρισάμενος ἐφ' οἷς ἂν αὐτῷ συνειδῆ δικαίως ἀπολουμένῳ.

husband, while hunting for isolation and leisure to seek out Joseph."<sup>109</sup>

6. Perhaps to match Joseph's speeches, a lengthy "speech" by the mistress is also inserted as to the benefits of the affair for Joseph's status in the household, and relating her profound passion toward him: "She addressed even more persistent words than the first, that it would have been well for him to have yielded to her request from the beginning and to have refused nothing, both out of regard for the petitioner and for the extraordinary degree of the passion, owing to which she, though being a mistress, was forced to lower herself beneath her dignity; but even now by giving in better to sagacity he would remedy his senselessness in the past."<sup>110</sup>
7. The phrase is added that she, upon being scorned by Joseph, thought accusing him of rape would be an action befitting a woman: "[She thought that] to anticipate the accusation was both wise and womanish."<sup>111</sup>
8. Two references are added as to the internal state of Pentephres himself. The first relays his distress at seeing his wife as she feigned rape: "And.. her husband came and was dismayed at her appearance."<sup>112</sup>

The second notes his (lack of) reasoning for punishing Joseph with such vigor: "Giving his wife credit for being sensible and having condemned Joseph as wicked, he threw him into the dungeon of

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<sup>109</sup> *Ant. 2.45.* Δημοτελοῦς οὖν ἑορτῆς ἐπιστάσης, καθ' ἣν εἰς τὴν πανήγυριν καὶ γυναῖξί φοιτᾶν νόμιμον ἦν, σκήπτεται νόσον πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα θηρωμένη μόνωσιν καὶ σχολὴν εἰς τὸ δεηθῆναι τοῦ Ἰωσήπου.

<sup>110</sup> *Ant. 2.46.* καὶ γενομένης αὐτῇ ταύτης λιπαρεστέρουσ ἔτι τῶν πρώτων αὐτῶ προσηνέγκατο λόγους, ὡς καλῶς μὲν εἶχεν αὐτὸν μετὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς δέησιν εἶξαι καὶ μηδὲ ἀντειρηκέναι κατὰ τὴν τῆς παρακαλοῦσης ἔντροπὴν καὶ τὴν τοῦ πάθους ὑπερβολὴν, ὑφ' οὗ βιασθεῖη δέσποινα οὐσα τοῦ κατὰ ταύτην ἀξιώματος ταπεινότερα γενέσθαι, φρονήσει δὲ καὶ νῦν ἄμεινον ἐνδοῦς καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ τοῖς παρελθοῦσιν ἀγνωμον διορθώσεται.

<sup>111</sup> *Ant. 2.54.* προλαβεῖν δὲ τὴν διαβολὴν σοφὸν ἅμα καὶ γυναικίον ἡγήσατο

<sup>112</sup> *Ant. 2.55* ἐλθόντι δὲ τᾶνδρι καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν ταραχθέντι



the criminals, but he was even more proud of his wife, bearing witness to her propriety and self-control."<sup>113</sup>

Along with these additions to the Genesis story, Josephus removes any reference to her entreaty to the household servants against Joseph prior to the lie to her husband, or to him as a Hebrew, both of which are a part of the biblical account (2.55).

The story of the encounter with Potiphar's wife was not expanded and modified to such a great degree by accident. As noted earlier, many of the stories of early Israelite heroes in the *Antiquities* are intended as an apologetic to discount the negative perception of the Jewish people by their contemporaries and to attest fully to their piety and morality. Certainly, as a hero of the patriarchal period, Joseph gets the full make-over treatment, especially in terms of his internal fortitude, self-control, and sense of respect in Potiphar's household. All of these additions would have been appealing to a non-Jewish audience.

However, beyond the standard nationalistic apology Josephus obviously intends in the retelling, I would suggest that when we investigate further we find that there is an obvious male/female dynamic at work in this particular pericope. That is, Josephus is not only "apologizing" for Judaism and its heroes, but for appropriate masculinity as well. The male/female dynamic becomes clear when we set the attributes of Joseph that are unique to the *Antiquities* over against those of Potiphar's wife, as Josephus himself does. In so doing, I believe that we will find perhaps the most straightforward and obvious construction of gender in the early books of the *Antiquities*.

### **Characteristics of Potiphar's Wife as Opposed to Joseph**

In portions unique to Josephus, the following statements are made of Potiphar's wife: Her "passion," "lust," and "love" are mentioned on eleven occasions, using a variety of Greek terms suggesting many aspects of her

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<sup>113</sup> *Ant.* 2.59. δούς δὲ σωφρονεῖν τῇ γυναικὶ πονηρὸν δ' εἶναι κατακρίνας τὸν Ἰώσηπον τὸν μὲν εἰς τὴν τῶν κακούργων εἰρκτὴν ἐνέβαλεν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ μᾶλλον ἐφρόνει κοσμιότητα καὶ σωφροσύνην αὐτῇ μαρτυρῶν.

aggressive desire for the patriarch<sup>114</sup>. The woman's wickedness is mentioned on two occasions, employing a word (κακός) which will reappear in a (mistaken) description of Joseph following the woman's accusation of rape in 2.59<sup>115</sup>. Some description of her mendacity is mentioned on two occasions<sup>116</sup>. Further, Josephus states that Joseph found her request for an affair a mark of her hubris<sup>117</sup>. Throughout the tale, much is made of her impetuosity and impulsiveness, both in relation to her passion and the subsequent lie she tells her husband. While some hint of such negative attributes may be inferred in the biblical narrative, these phrases that play up her passion and impulsiveness are unique (and, I would contend, significant) to Josephus' account.

Joseph, too, is described with terminology not present in the biblical text. The most common description for him, however, is rationality, both in academic and practical pursuits. One of the first things we learn of Joseph in the house of Potiphar (according to Josephus) is that he was educated as a free man, in spite of his slave status<sup>118</sup>. Further, when the master's wife first looks upon him, she notices not only his handsomeness, but his ability to run an ordered household<sup>119</sup>. The intensification of the biblical text here may be a way in which Josephus deals with the double mention of Joseph's beauty in Genesis 39:6b. Instead of repeating the same phrase twice, as the Bible does, Josephus

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<sup>114</sup> Josephus *Ant.* 2.41, 42, 43, 44, 51, 53. The words employed for her passion include πάθος in verse 43, with the sense of both pain and desire; ἐπιθυμία in 2.42 and 2.51, with the more basic sense of lust; ὄρμη in 2.53, meaning urge or impulse; ἐροτικός (adverbial) or ἔρος (nominal), meaning love in 2.41 and 2.44; and σπουδή, with the sense of haste or zeal in 2.53.

<sup>115</sup> *Ant.* 2.44: καὶ δεινῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ πολιορκουμένη, and 2.51: λαθεῖν ἀγνοουμένου τοῦ κακοῦ. This phrase, which Feldman translates as "to remain hidden if the wickedness should not be known," is a part of Joseph's speech, in which he attempts to persuade the woman against her evil ways by suggesting that the wickedness will remain even if they are able to conceal the affair.

<sup>116</sup> *Ant.* 2.45: σκήπτεται νόσον πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα; 2.49: καὶ καταψευσαμένης πείραν ἐπὶ τᾶνδρι. .

<sup>117</sup> *Ant.* 2.42: ὕβρις. As a part of the reversal that occurs after 2.55, which I shall discuss below, Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of hubris against the household in her indictment to her husband.

<sup>118</sup> *Ant.* 2.39. The Greek text of this verse is given above, in the listing of Josephus' additions.

<sup>119</sup> Similar qualities will also be attractive to his jailer in 2.61. He appreciates both Joseph's dignified features [ἀξιῶμα τῆς μορφῆς] and his diligence and faithfulness [ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ τὴν πίστιν αὐτοῦ κατανοήσας].

transforms the description so that Joseph appears attractive to Potiphar's wife in both handsomeness (εὐμορφία) and skill (δεχιοτέτα). If this is the case, the description not only strengthens the subsequent emphasis on Joseph's rationality and virtue, but it "solves" a textual problem for Josephus. (Namely: why describe Joseph twice with basically the same phrase?) Certainly, this detail is also added to further the image of the slave as attractive in his self-discipline. Indeed, the entire episode in Potiphar's house is marked by Joseph's self-control, whether in mind (judging, reason, and rhetorical skills especially) or character (virtue, piety, and lack of emotion).

A second notable quality in this account, which is related to the first, is Joseph's extraordinary degree of self-control (σώφρων)<sup>120</sup>. The choice of this word certainly reinforces Joseph's reasonability, since it often means "soundness of mind" and frequently occurs with φρονεῖν in Greek literature. For example, Plato's *Laws* (4.712a) contains this reference to ideal leadership: "whenever the greatest power coincides in man with wisdom [φρονεῖν] and temperance [σωφροσύνη], then the germ of the best polity is planted." Interestingly, Paul's Letter to the Romans in Christian Scripture also notes that one ought to think in terms of self-control [ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν] (12.3). Josephus himself uses this combination in *Ant.* 5.200, in which the Israelites must learn [φρονεῖν] and grow wise from their past (σωφρονῶσιν) before God can send Deborah. In these cases, I must note, the term seems to have the more general sense of rationality and temperance, and not the more explicit sense of sexual self-control as I will argue the term does in our present text. Still, they make an important connection, that Joseph's sexual self-mastery in the passage above is associated with the reasonableness of Joseph in the passage as well.

However, it is not unusual in Greco-Roman literature for σωφροσύνη to also have the more specific connotations of chastity. Aristotle, for example commends σωφροσύνη as the proper mean between licentiousness (ἀκολασία)

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<sup>120</sup> There are only two direct references to Joseph as self-controlled using σώφρων specifically: 2.49 and 2.50. However, the word will reappear after the reversal (2.59) to reinforce Joseph's true chastity with a bit of ironic usage.

and insensitivity (ἀναισθησία), suggesting some association between the term and proper physical interaction, especially in sexual terms<sup>121</sup>. Helen North notes that the Roman world inherited this term along with the other virtues of Greek society as put forward by Aristotle, Plato, and others, but (especially in this case) modified the meaning of the word<sup>122</sup>. In the case of σωφροσύνη, this meant associating the word with the Latin words *temperare* (to moderate, forbear), *modestia* (modesty), and *pudicitia* (chastity, decency), especially<sup>123</sup>. According to North, this association was already well-established by the first century, the time of Josephus' writing. Close to our own subject, North notes the use of this term in the lives of Roman political figures; in the case of Sallust's contrasting portraits of the younger Cato and Caesar, for example, "he concludes the pair of contrasting portraits by applying to Cato the phrase [σώφρων]" based on the younger man's virtues of modesty and chastity.<sup>124</sup> Obviously, as Josephus endeavored to mold Joseph into a statesman worthy of Roman admiration, this type of association would certainly have made sense. Satlow notes that this term even migrated from the larger Greco-Roman culture into both Jewish Hellenistic

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<sup>121</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 3.1231a. "Hence if temperance [σωφροσύνη] is the best state of character in relation to the things with which the profligate is concerned, the middle state in regard to the pleasant objects of sense mentioned will be Temperance [σωφροσύνη], being a middle state between profligacy and insensitiveness [ἀκολασίας καὶ ἀναισθησίας]: the excess will be Profligacy [ἀκολασία], and the deficiency will either be nameless or will be denoted by the terms mentioned. We shall have to define the class of pleasures concerned more exactly in our discussion of Self-control and Lack of Control [ἐγκρατείας καὶ ἀκρασίας] later on." Notice in this passage that Aristotle associates σωφροσύνη with self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια). While it does not appear that these two terms are identical in Aristotle's thought, they are obviously related ideas; chastity is, in part, about self-control.

<sup>122</sup> "Among the four Greek cardinal virtues, which became known to the Romans...only two, courage and justice, were close enough to native Roman values to be readily assimilated. *Sophia*, in so far as it was contemplative rather than practical, was regarded with a degree of suspicion, even by Roman philosophers; and sophrosyne was so intensely Hellenic that in its totality it always remained an exotic in Rome. Yet...it is possible to find in Roman literature...repeated attempts to transplant this exotic" (Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966], 258-259).

<sup>123</sup> North, *Sophrosyne*, 263-264.

<sup>124</sup> North, *Sophrosyne*, 287.

and rabbinic traditions. He contends that while the term, especially with its sense of chastity, may have been equally applied to males and females, the compound sense of both sexual renunciation and over-riding self-control was uniquely male<sup>125</sup>. Indeed, Catharine Edwards calls sexual self-control a specifically male issue by the second century CE, noting that the internalization of virtues like chastity among men defined “masculinity, power, and, on a more general level, patriarchy itself.”<sup>126</sup>

The use of σωφρων in Josephus’ retelling seems follow Satlow and Edwards’ understanding of the term. Throughout the narrative, the term indicates specifically chastity and total control over the body, as it is always used in the context of the affair. For example, in 2.48 the mistress notes that he ought not to put his reputation for self-control (σωφρων) above her, since by giving in he would certainly find enjoyment. He refuses on account of this same quality of chastity, a characteristic that he notes is better than “to enjoy the present by giving himself up to his emotions, for which he was conscious he would justly perish.”<sup>127</sup> Later, in her accusation of rape, she charges that he lacked self-control because he felt he had the right also “to lay hands on your [Pentephres’] wife”<sup>128</sup>. Certainly, these instances suggest that σωφρων has a sense of chastity and self-control, at least in this narrative, and that Joseph’s character is marked by just such rational power over sexual desire.

The dichotomy between the two main characters here is clearly marked. Potiphar’s wife is the epitome of emotion, impetuosity, and passion; Joseph is the bastion of reason and self-control. As an interesting reinforcement of this strident dualism, a reversal occurs near the end of the episode. In verse 59, after

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<sup>125</sup> “Try to Be a Man: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity” *HTR* 89:1 (1996):19-40. He states: “Only males had the capacity to exercise the self-control that, at least in the eyes of the philosophers and doctors, made them men,” 21.

<sup>126</sup> *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 57.

<sup>127</sup> *Ant.* 2.50. While this reference is euphemistic, clearly it refers to sexual enjoyment.

<sup>128</sup> *Ant.* 2.56: καὶ τῆς σῆς ψεύειν γυναικός.

her lie sends Joseph to jail, Potiphar’s wife is commended by her unsuspecting husband as sensible and self-controlled<sup>129</sup>; Joseph, however, is condemned as a criminal in similar language as had earlier applied to the woman<sup>130</sup>. He is also accused, by the woman herself, as lacking for self-control.<sup>131</sup> The reversal of terms is clearly intended to be ironic, and is another indication that we are in the presence of a very intentionally constructed division between two characters.

However there is nothing as yet to convince us that this dichotomy in description is intended to assist in a construction of masculinity in particular. Indeed, prior to *Antiquities* 2.54 we might well say that these qualities are to be understood by the reader as universally valued mores which are simply embodied in the patriarch, rather than part of a more specific ordering of male virtues. However, a very important phrase occurs in verse 54 immediately before the reversal, which gives us the “clue within the text” that we are in fact dealing with a gender-concerned story. Following the lengthy description of her attributes and of his, rife as it is with contrast, Josephus ends the encounter by having Potiphar’s wife consider (in an internal monologue not present in the MT or LXX) that making the false accusation was “a wise thing, and *befitting a woman*” [προλαβεῖν δὲ τὴν διαβολὴν σοφὸν ἅμα καὶ γυναικίον ἡγήσατο.]<sup>132</sup> The straightforward meaning of the word γυναικίος is “womanly” or “of, or befitting a woman.” As noted, it is not a description given of Potiphar’s wife in the LXX story,

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<sup>129</sup> *Ant* 2.59. καὶ μᾶλλον ἐφρόνει κοσμιότητα καὶ σωφροσύνην αὐτῇ μαρτυρῶν. Obviously, the use of the terms φρονεῖν and σωφροσύνη here is particularly ironic.

<sup>130</sup> Κακός, the usual word for bad or wicked (Bauer 398). For Potiphar’s wife: *Ant*. 2.44 & 2.51 (although some regard this phrase as a gloss cf. Feldman *Flavius Josephus*, 147 n. 166). For Joseph, he is sentenced a criminal (κακοῦργος, a derivative meaning “wicked person”). The word πονηρός, meaning denigrate or worthless (Bauer 697) is additionally applied to Joseph here and in *Ant*. 2.55.

<sup>131</sup> *Ant*. 2.56.

<sup>132</sup> A question that remains unanswered for me is why he puts this thought into *her* head, rather than just making a narrative comment that the lie was a womanly thing to do. Feldman has noted that this is Josephus’ own misogyny made apparent (*Judean Antiquities* 148), and it certainly seems so. However, it is odd that he would have her embrace a term that, as we shall see, is not at all complimentary to women.

nor is any such parallel term used in the Masoretic text, and so it does constitute a site for looking at Josephus' own ideological presuppositions about gender. So, we must ask: what does this word mean for our author? To begin, let us consider its usage throughout the *Antiquities*. Following this discussion of the term's broad usage, I will turn to its more specific meaning in this particular passage, and its implications for masculinity in the Joseph narrative.

### Connotations of *Γυναικείος* in the *Antiquities*

*ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΙΟΣ* is first used in the *Antiquities* for the first woman. At the close of the Adam and Eve story, Adam is said to have been punished for the offense of “yielding to womanish counsels.”<sup>133</sup> Its use here seems to mirror the MT and LXX accounts, which state Adam was punished “because you [Adam] have listened to the voice of your wife”<sup>134</sup>. However, there does appear to be intensification in Josephus' description. First, neither the MT nor the LXX refers to her “counsel” (συμβουλία) as Josephus does here, only to her voice (ἡ φωνή), suggesting a strengthening of her role in his downfall. Further, Adam does not just listen (הִשְׁמָעָה; ἤκουσας) as he does in the biblical texts; instead he is weakened (ἥσσω) by her advice. Interestingly, Herod in *Ant.* 18 is described in a similar way: he is punished by the Lord for listening to Herodias' vain womanly discourses.<sup>135</sup> Kraemer has noted that in much of ancient literature, a connection is made between loose morals and female speech<sup>136</sup>. She contends that the silent woman was the ideal, and that a correlation was suggested between the open mouth of a woman and unchastity: “The chaste woman had a

<sup>133</sup> *Ant.* 1.49: ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἤττονα γυναικείας συμβουλίας αὐτὸν γεόμενον ὑπετίθει τιμωρία

<sup>134</sup> Gen 3.17. In the MT: וְלֹא־אָמַרְתָּ לְיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹלֵי אִשְׁתְּךָ in the LXX: τῶδέ Αδὰμ εἶπεν ὅτι ἤκουσας τῆς φωνῆς τῆς γυναικὸς σου

<sup>135</sup> *Ant.* 18.255: Ἡρώδη γυναικείων ἀκροασαμένων κουφολογιῶν δίκην ταύτην ἐπετίμησον ὁ θεός. The choice of language is clearly different, however; Herod hearkens (ἀκροάομαι) to Herodias' words, which are described as “vain talk” (κουφολογία) rather than “counsel.” Still, each is equally indicted as having acted contrary to the will God.

<sup>136</sup> Ross Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207. Additionally, Feldman recollects the Homeric view that by womanly counsel the heroes of the *Odyssey* meet their downfall. (Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 17, n.101).

closed mouth and a closed vagina...the unchaste woman opened her mouth to speech and her vagina to illicit intercourse.”<sup>137</sup> Victor Paul Furnish<sup>138</sup> has discussed the social situation of the early church, especially in relation to the deutero-Pauline command that women are to keep silent in churches,<sup>139</sup> noting the many ancient connections between women’s voices and illicit sexual behavior<sup>140</sup>. Thus, it seems that Josephus is following a common pattern among ancient authors, associating women’s speech with a connotation of inappropriate sexual behavior.

In Book IV, Josephus recounts the speech of Moses concerning making war. In it, a statement is made about the clothing worn in battle: no woman shall be prepared as a man, nor shall a man wear womanly equipment<sup>141</sup>. Here Josephus appropriates Dt. 22.5, which states generally that male and female clothing ought not be confused<sup>142</sup>. Oddly, Josephus adds “especially in your battles” to the biblical pronouncement<sup>143</sup>. It certainly appears by this addition that

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<sup>137</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 207.

<sup>138</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, “Women in the Church” in *The Moral Teachings of Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 83-114.

<sup>139</sup> I Tim 2:9-15. Furnish also discusses I Cor 14:34 (“the women should keep silence in the churches”) in the same chapter.

<sup>140</sup> Furnish “Women,” 87. For example, Furnish cites Plutarch’s “Advice to the Bride and Groom” (142B) in which the ancient author equates unguarded speech with both undressing and immoral character: “She ought to be modest and guarding about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders, since it is an exposure of herself; for in her talk can be seen her feelings, character, and disposition.”

<sup>141</sup> *Ant.* 4.301. “Be especially careful in battles that a woman not wear a man’s clothing nor a man wear a woman’s garment.” Φυλάσσειν δὲ μάλιστα ἐν ταῖς μάχαις, ὡς μήτε γυναῖκα ἀνδρική σκευὴ χρῆσθαι μήτ’ ἄνδρα στολήν γυναικεία.

<sup>142</sup> “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God.” (NRSV)  
 לֹא-יִהְיֶה כְּלִי-גִבּוֹר עַל-אִשָּׁה, וְלֹא-יִלְבַּשׁ גִּבּוֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה: כִּי תוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה אֵלֹהֵיךָ, כָּל-עֹשֶׂה אֵלֶּהָ.

<sup>143</sup> Philo also comments on the command not to cross-dress in *Virt.* 18-21. However, he adds no such reference to battle. Instead, Philo encourages “the true man should *always* maintain his masculinity, particularly in his clothes, which – *as he always wears them by day and night* – ought to have nothing to suggest unmanliness.” Philo seems to stress consistency in masculine dress in all circumstances, as opposed to emphasizing the particularly “manly” instance of battle. (*Philo: Loeb Classical Library Book VII* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939.] Emphasis mine.) Manliness in Philo will be the subject of a later chapter.



Josephus is stressing the masculinity of battle as well as the inappropriateness of womanly dress in male affairs generally. Josephus makes plain here a strict separation between what is proper for men (both in war and in dress) and for women. Later, he reinforces these distinctions, first in the tale of Ammonius who is described as having died shamefully because he was hidden in womanly dress<sup>144</sup>; then again in 19.29, where Josephus notes the story of Caius and Cherea both of whom are portrayed as womanly or effeminate based on choice of dress (Caius) or behavior in battle (Cherea).

By far the most negative connotations for *γυναικεῖος*, however, occur in the stories of several Greco-Roman ruling-class women from the later books of the *Antiquities*. Of these, a woman named Alexandra is most often cited. Alexandra was the daughter of Hyrcanus, and the wife of Alexander, with whom she had two sons<sup>145</sup>. Much of the intrigue in Book 15 comes from her desire to see her sons elevated to positions of authority, and Herod's paranoia at this prospect. Alexandra is even confined to Herod's palace at one point, that she might be better watched. In her attempt at manipulating an escape, Alexandra is described as "being quite full of a womanly mind"<sup>146</sup>. Finally, she is described as womanly in her incessant speeches to her father Hyrcanus about Herod's treachery in the death of her son<sup>147</sup>. While Alexandra receives the designation "womanly" on two separate occasions, other Greco-Roman women are also implicated: Mariamne, Herod's wife, is depicted as having a womanly nature which causes her to mistreat him<sup>148</sup>; Antipater's mother uses vain womanly words.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Ant.* 13.108 στολῆ γυναικείῳ

<sup>145</sup> *Ant.* 15.23

<sup>146</sup> *Ant.* 15.44 φρονήματος γὰρ ἔμπλεως οὖσα γυναικείου

<sup>147</sup> *Ant.* 15.168. δέ τι καὶ γυναικεῖον αὐτῆς πεπονθυίας

<sup>148</sup> *Ant.* 15.219 εἶχεν δέ τι καὶ γυναικεῖον ὁμοῦ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἐκ φύσεως

<sup>149</sup> *Ant.* 17.121. Both Antipater's mother and Herodias above are guilty of vain or light speech – *κουφολογία*. Josephus certainly seems to find relationship between being womanly and

These instances are all the more important because Josephus does, on occasion, use women as positive models in the *Antiquities*. In her book on women and the missionary work in first-century Jewish and Christian communities, Shelly Matthews notes the ways in which Josephus “plays up” important female benefactors<sup>150</sup>. In particular, she analyzes the rhetoric which undergirds Josephus’ discussion of Fulvia, Poppaea Sabina, and Queen Helena of Adiabene<sup>151</sup>, noting that these stories seem to fit a pattern in the contemporary literature of wealthy women interceding on behalf of missionaries<sup>152</sup>. She comes to the conclusion that the prominence of female benefactors in the work serves the rhetorical function of legitimizing missionary Judaism in a time when not all converts to the religion were highly regarded (especially in terms of class and wealth). Josephus, then, employs the device of the female benefactor for an apologetic end, and not to describe the actual situation of benefaction by these or other women. Matthews suggests that “it is implausible to imagine them [wealthy Roman women] on the whole as heroic defenders of Jewish aristocrats and Jewish nationalistic causes”<sup>153</sup>. What is interesting for our discussion is that these women are *not* among those described as “womanly” by Josephus as listed above. If indeed these benefacting women are intended as apologetic models, this suggests that other figures, both in Josephus’ historical books and biblical discussions, are set apart by the use of *γυναικῆϊος* as less-than-ideal.

It is evident, then, that *γυναικῆϊος* has exclusively negative connotations for the women to whom Josephus applies it. To be “womanly” is to be

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inappropriate speaking; along with these two, Alexandra is accused of manipulative speech and Eve is maligned for speaking counsel to Adam. These are again likely related to the association between “bad” women and speech (see discussion of Kraemer above, page 40.).

<sup>150</sup> *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity (Contraversions, Jews and Other Differences)*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>151</sup> “Ladies’ Aid” in Matthews, *First Converts*, 2001.

<sup>152</sup> As also in the Christian Acts of the Apostles, which Matthews discusses in chapter 3 of *First Converts*.

<sup>153</sup> Matthews, *First Converts*, 50.

manipulative and vain of speech, and to be in a condition inappropriate for males, whether in dress or occupation. We can assume, I think, that a similar negative connotation holds true in our text regarding Potiphar's wife. Here, her manipulations against her husband and Joseph are described as slanderous and cunning<sup>154</sup> as well as womanly; she is able to deceive her husband –and condemn Joseph -- by both her looks (2.55) and her words (2.59). Her womanish ways are neither reasonable nor controlled. Josephus effectively constructs an unequivocal view of femininity through Potiphar's wife.

Which brings us back to an important premise of this work: I contend that to the same extent femininity is constructed by a given author, masculinity is as well. The focus may not be as clear – certainly here we have much more overt discussion of femaleness – but nonetheless it is present and identifiable by the author's use of language, additions and omissions. Interestingly, Josephus does not use the complementary male term, ἀνδρικός, here to describe Joseph<sup>155</sup>. In fact, at no point in the story does Josephus stress manliness with explicit terminology, as he does elsewhere in the *Antiquities*. On these other occasions, manliness<sup>156</sup> is closely associated with battle, and is almost synonymous with valor. Only in the case of David, who is described by Samuel as “εὐσεβεία καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία”<sup>157</sup>, does ἀνδρεία seem to be describe an internal state, rather than external activity. We are presented with a unique moment in Josephus' overall discussion of manliness, then. While it certainly appears that in Joseph's story at this point Josephus is creating parallel constructions of

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<sup>154</sup> Σοφός.

<sup>155</sup> In fact, this term (manly) appears only once in the *Antiquities*, in reference to manly dress on a woman in 4.301, which we have already discussed above.

<sup>156</sup> Ἀνδρεία and its derivatives, when used in a descriptive sense and not with the basic sex-identifier “man.” In the sections retelling biblical stories, this word refers to valor in battle in 3.58 (the battle against the Amalakites); 4.117 (Balaam's battle speech); 4.152 (Phineas' strength in killing Zimri); 6.85 (to refer to Saul's courage in the battle with the Ammonites); 7.101 (to describe the power of the foreign king, Hadad); 7.138 (the description of Uriah's battle prowess); 7.217 (the ability in battle of those who fought against David); 7.300 (Abishai's bravery in protecting David).

<sup>157</sup> *Ant.* 6.160.

gender, so that each word or phrase reveals not only what is “womanly,” but what befits a man, he shies away from explicit language of manliness. The associations between maleness and battle elsewhere may be a clue; if Josephus has so associated these terms, perhaps it would seem improper here to designate Joseph’s internal fortitude with words that otherwise signify external, physical prowess. By using σωφρων instead, as he does with profound emphasis in this retelling, Josephus can still relay a masculine virtue (in keeping with the accepted definition of the word in Greco-Roman culture) while avoiding the direct associations with battle that the other term (ἀνδρεία) seemed to have.

Still, it is no great leap to notice the clear structural division Josephus creates here, even without the help of specifically “manly” language. Certainly we can perceive that division between maleness and femaleness here, both in terms of “virtues” and by means of the parallelism of the text’s present structure. That division between the two characters, and the genders they are intended to represent, makes it all the easier for us to lay out in contrasting fashion what is fitting for males according to our author. So what *is* Josephus suggesting about manliness in this text?

### **Masculinity in Josephus’ Retelling of the Incident**

First, Josephus wishes to say that a man ought to be reasonable, as opposed to the passionate or erratic woman. Potiphar’s wife is womanly because she speaks without wisdom and acts according to her passions. Joseph, on the other hand, seeks to reign in her passion with reason. He employs logic, argumentation, and rational persuasion in his attempt to halt the woman’s advances.<sup>158</sup> While she is most often portrayed in terms of passion, he is firmly in the realm of reason. All of his rationality, unfortunately, is fruitless in this episode, of course.. However, as Josephus himself notes at the beginning of the tale, “[Joseph] showed clearly that reason<sup>159</sup> is able to overcome the

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<sup>158</sup> Feldman notes that these characteristics are similar to Thucydides portrayal of an ideal statesman (2.60), something Josephus certainly wants us to see in Joseph as well (*Judean Antiquities*, 147).

<sup>159</sup> *Ant* 2.40. "Reason" is Feldman’s translation of φρόνημα κρατεῖν (“to be strong of mind or spirit”). Thackeray translates the phrase as “a noble spirit” in the Loeb text.

difficulties of life, when it faces them with genuineness” in the longer term. That is, reasonable men will win in the end, as Joseph himself does in Josephus’ retelling: when the hero interprets the dream of Pharaoh and is appointed to the court, the ruler is impressed with Joseph’s reasoning (φρόνησις) and wisdom (σοφίαν), both of which are already well-established in the incident with Potiphar’s wife.<sup>160</sup>

It is interesting to note that the only other man in this tale, Pentephres<sup>161</sup>, is duped by his wife exactly because he forgets to investigate in an orderly manner the claims she has made<sup>162</sup>. By giving himself over to passion<sup>163</sup>, he is in essence stripped of the manliness which is shown through rationality. Josephus thus emasculates him in much the same way as he does to other men, such as Adam and Herod, whom we have already discussed. All become pitiable, fooled by the vain speech of women, and thus less truly male<sup>164</sup>. By these negative portrayals, and Joseph’s contrast as a stronghold of rationality, Josephus is once again reminding his readers that to be a man is to be in control of one’s emotions, and to approach all of life with a controlled mind not unduly influenced by sentiment or vain speech (especially that of “womanly” women).

Second, to be a man is to be in control of sexual desire. We see again a stark contrast between the man and the woman here; her passion spills over into desire, and Joseph’s reasonableness only fans the flames<sup>165</sup>. He, on the other

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<sup>160</sup> *Ant.* 2.87. Θαυμάσαντος δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως τὴν φρόνησιν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ Ἰωσήπου

<sup>161</sup> The fact that Pentephres is the only other male character is intentional. Josephus removes any mention of the other household servants who first hear the mistress’ accusation. Thus, the immediate dichotomy between the reasonable man and the unreasonable is heightened.

<sup>162</sup> *Ant.* 2.58: "He did not apply himself to the investigation of the truth." μὲν τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ἐξέτασιν οὐκ ἐτρέπετο.

<sup>163</sup> He is influenced by ἔπος in *Ant.* 2.58.

<sup>164</sup> Satlow notes that self-control marked the truly manly male from the feminized male. “As early as Aristotle, the lack of self-mastery was a sign of weakness, a characteristic that was soon gendered as feminine” (“Try to Be a Man,” 21).

<sup>165</sup> See *Ant.* 2.44 and 54.

hand, is not moved to act on impulse. He is famous for his self-control, and is indifferent to enjoyment, knowing it leads to disaster<sup>166</sup>. The fact that σωφρων is used in a particularly ironic way to refer to the master's wife at the end of the narrative, only heightens the reader's awareness that this attribute clearly does not "befit a woman," but is the domain of our male hero.

Chastity and self-control will again be marks of manliness in the tale of *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>167</sup>, and to some extent the works of Philo<sup>168</sup> as well. Indeed, we find that sexual self-control as a quality of manliness is common rhetoric in the Hellenistic Jewish world, in spite of the general sense that men were not held to the same standards of virginity as women<sup>169</sup>. As Satlow points out "for nearly all ancient writers, 'virginity' referred to women; there is no Hebrew or Greek for a male who has not had sexual intercourse."<sup>170</sup> Thus, male chastity was not part of a cultural conditioning to some standard of purity or physical ideals of beauty, as was true for Mediterranean women.<sup>171</sup> Instead, male chastity as an ideal often had the sense it seems to have here; chastity was about control or "power over." If one could control his body, one could control much more. Both Perkins and Keuffler have noted this idea of chastity as a growing expression of male dominance in the Roman world, especially in response to limitations on male power in religious, military, and familial spheres<sup>172</sup>. In this respect, it appears that Josephus is only recapitulating an ideal of manliness that is already

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<sup>166</sup> *Ant.* 2.50.

<sup>167</sup> Chapter 4 of this work.

<sup>168</sup> Chapter 5 of this work.

<sup>169</sup> Michael L Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 118-120.

<sup>170</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 120.

<sup>171</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 118.

<sup>172</sup> Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambivalence, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). I will return to these scholars in Chapter 4 on *Joseph and Aseneth*, in which their discussions of sexual abstinence as domination contrasts with the chastity of Joseph as meek and egalitarian in that text.

well-established the minds of his reader, but which he believes can be best exemplified in the person of Joseph.

While Joseph's self-control is valorized here, however, not all early interpreters found the "hero" to be so restrained. In rabbinic interpretation, for example, Joseph's chastity suffers a mental – if not truly physical – lapse. In Talmudic discussion of the incident with Potiphar's wife, R. Johanan suggests that the phrase "he went to do his work" in Genesis 39 may mean "that both [Joseph and Potiphar's wife] had the intention of acting immorally."<sup>173</sup> Indeed, in this retelling, Joseph's father needs to appear to him to remind him not to associate with loose women, and only then does his lust subside, with the desire being forced out from his fingertips.<sup>174</sup> Of course, the rabbis do note that he did not act upon his desire, but they are certainly much more forthright as to the limits of his chastity.

We will see in a later chapter, too, that Philo puts forth a much more complex description of Joseph's relationship to his body. In a not-entirely-complimentary description of the "hero" in *De Somniis*, Philo notes that Joseph gets from his father his reason, but from his mother "the irrational strain of sense-perception," as well as "the breed of bodily pleasure" from the chief baker and cook<sup>175</sup>. We will discuss the meaning of these attributes in greater detail in chapter 4, but it bears noting that this is yet another example where Joseph's chastity, reason, and self-control are not beyond reproach. Thus, while Josephus' definition of manliness as sexual and mental self-discipline may have been a common one, it is by no means the only way of understanding the masculinity of the Joseph.

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<sup>173</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Sotah* 36b. The rabbi is paraphrasing the position of Samuel against another teacher.

<sup>174</sup> The rabbis are attempting to connect this episode with Jacob's final blessing in Genesis 49, where Joseph's "bow remained taught, and the arms of his hands were made agile" in the face of adversity. Thus his "bow" becomes a euphemistic reference to his passion, and his hands accomplish the release of this passion. For a psychoanalytic discussion of this passage, see Richard Rubenstein's *The Religious Imagination: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

<sup>175</sup> *Somn.* 2.16

## Conclusions

Josephus' transformation of the encounter with Potiphar's wife from a few verses of intrigue to a lengthy invective on the evils of passion and the power of self-control creates a clear gender construction within the text. Most women belong to the former category: they are deceitful, manipulative, and overwhelmed by their desires. They act "as befits a woman" in all its negative connotations.

Men, however, ought to look to Joseph as their model for masculinity. Passion and desire have no place in the masculine construct Josephus creates here; men who do act out of emotion are belittled. However, men who employ reason and abstain from bodily pleasure are to be admired, and will ultimately be rewarded for such virtuous behavior.

This brings us to a rather important point which is foundational to the study, but has not yet been made explicit: the characteristics of Joseph, to the extent they are exemplars, are exemplars *for men* specifically. Often in the scholarly literature we have mention about Joseph as a moral model. Indeed, the history of interpretation authors mentioned earlier in this chapter often list the very same characteristics I have described (chastity, self-control, reason), noting that they are thus held up by Josephus as modes of virtuous living. And yet, what seems to be missing here is a recognition that these virtues are held up as intentionally *masculine* virtues. By a careful reading of the text, as we have done here, we come to see that women are not held to this same moral standard; indeed, their deception, vain speech, passion, and unreasonableness are so commonly associated with the female as to be deemed "womanly" by the author. Josephus' clear bipartite division in the narrative further emphasizes and undergirds this same construction. These careful points of organization and word choice make clear to us that the ideas of sexual and mental restraint and order are the domain of manly morality, and thus the mark of a "true man" in Josephus' understanding.



CHAPTER 4  
*JOSEPH AND ASENETH:*  
MANLINESS AS PROPER RELATIONSHIP

**Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the anonymous Hellenistic Jewish tale known as *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>176</sup>. In order to identify the ideology of masculinity present in it, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the issues of text, genre and overall purpose. I will then turn specifically to the statements of Joseph in Part One of the tale, and to the rhetoric which surrounds his identification as male in relation to the sexuality of women. For this portion of the study, I will rely in part upon the important work of Ross Kraemer, making note of her discussion of the ways gender is emphasized in the retelling. However, I will also expand her basic contention, moving from a focus on the gender construction of femininity by way of Aseneth, to include a discussion of the construction of manliness in relationship to women as well. Following this, I will discuss the importance of proper masculinity in the second half of *Joseph and Aseneth*, and the ways in which “meekness” and “mercy” are used to undergird the author’s unique ideals of what a “man who fears God” should be. Finally, we will note the contrasting portraits of Joseph and the Pharaoh’s son which occur in Part Two of the tale, and which serve as a final recapitulation of the ideology of masculinity for the author. By including the encounters among men in the second half of the tale, I am expanding the gender discussion which has already been put forth in

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<sup>176</sup> As we will see, much about this text is debated, beginning with the name. While *Joseph and Aseneth* was the title ascribed by Burchard in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Aseneth’s prominence in the story has prompted others to use her name exclusively as the title. Randall Chesnutt states that the title as it stands “must be judged a misnomer” given the importance of the heroine to the narrative (“Revelatory Experiences Attributed to Biblical Women” in *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991]) Ross S. Kraemer uses the title *Aseneth* exclusively (“The Book of Aseneth” in *Searching The Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994]). For my purposes however, *Joseph and Aseneth* is actually preferable, since it reminds the reader of Joseph’s presence in the tale, which will be the focus here.

previous studies of *JosAsen* to include men's relationships, which the author clearly finds important to a proper definition of manliness.

### **The Tale of *Joseph and Aseneth***

The story of *Joseph and Aseneth* is quite a different "take" on ancient biblical interpretation than we encountered in the works of Josephus. Whereas Josephus was a rigorous interpreter of individual verses of the biblical text, *Jos/As* might better be described as "an extended footnote to the Old Testament," as Burchard puts it<sup>177</sup>. That is, while Josephus concerns himself with expanding and interpreting what is *in* the story the patriarch (for example, how is Joseph able to fend off the advances of Potiphar's wife?), *JosAsen* is concerned with what is *not* told. In this case, it is the story of Aseneth, who is presented to Joseph in Genesis following his interpretation of the Pharaoh's dreams<sup>178</sup>. They are married, and she bears him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. However, that is the extent of her mention within the Genesis narrative. The story of *Joseph and Aseneth*, then, fills in the "blanks" in the biblical text about their meeting, courtship, and adventures in a passionate, emotional tale befitting a modern soap opera.

This kind of retelling, however, presents a dilemma for the method of interpretation I wish to employ. Whereas with Josephus a clear, exacting interpretation of Joseph's story is presented in which it is easy to pick out the author's ideology by noting key words present in *The Antiquities* that are absent in the biblical text, in *JosAsen* one must find other ways of identifying ideology. Thus I will rely on rhetorical devices within the story itself, rather than textual differences between the Bible and the retelling. This remains within the framework I have established in the previous chapters, however, in that it still notes the language in the text itself as the source for identifying ideologies of

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<sup>177</sup>C. Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien Zu Joseph und Aseneth* (New York: Brill, 1996), 302. Susan Docherty (see discussion below) is more specific about this point; she refers to the work as "rewritten Bible," contending that the narrative is more closely connected to the Scriptures than a mere "footnote."

<sup>178</sup> Genesis 41: 45. "Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt." (NRSV)

gender. It will differ only in its reliance on *JosAsen* exclusively, recognizing that what the author has to say ideologically is available *because* there is no biblical tale from which to draw.

### **Text and Manuscripts**

However, before we can look for the rhetorical devices present in *JosAsen*, we must confront the rather sticky problem of text and manuscript tradition. This presents a dilemma to studies of *Aseneth* in general, but is of concern here as well, since I am contending that early Jewish ideologies of gender can be found by careful examination of the text itself. The problem here is, which text?

*JosAsen* is currently available in 16 Greek manuscripts<sup>179</sup>, none of which scholars believe dates earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> century, as well as 8 translations in various languages<sup>180</sup>. The earliest of these dates from about the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Further, the manuscripts and translations often disagree, and none seems to adequately represent the whole of the original (which Burchard calls  $\omega$ ). Instead, they appear to group into four manuscript “families,” in which similarities are present. These families (called **a**, **b**, **c**, and **d**) may in turn reflect earlier families of Greek manuscripts ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  and  $\delta$ ) from which an archetype might be reconstructed<sup>181</sup>. Even if it were possible to recreate an approximation of the “original” via this method, one would still be dependent on the skill of the editor and must be fully aware of the dangers of such hypothetical reconstruction.

A few such reconstructions are considered useful in modern scholarship. Mark Philonenko’s critical edition favors the **d** family (based on two Greek manuscripts and a Slavonic translation), and is often called the “short text” or P.

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<sup>179</sup> Burchard affirms the majority opinion that *JosAsen* was originally composed in Greek. *OTP* 181.

<sup>180</sup> Syriac, Armenian, Latin, Modern Greek, Rumanian, Serbo-Slavonic, and Middle English. Burchard also notes the possibility of a (now lost) Ethiopian version *OTP* 179.

<sup>181</sup> A much more complete discussion of the textual families is available in Burchard’s *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* Chapter 12, “The Present State of Research on Joseph and Aseneth” (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 298-320.

His translation is favored by both A. Standhartinger and R. Kraemer as representative of older, less ornamented traditions<sup>182</sup>. Standhartinger in particular notes the ways in which Aseneth appears more prominent, independent, and is more positively portrayed from the outset of the narrative in P, characteristics which are diminished by “additions” made in the longer text. She wishes to make the argument that these differences are not incidental; instead, they point to a purposeful attempt to downplay Aseneth’s role as an angelic wisdom figure and emphasize her need for redemption and conversion from pagan to proper Jewish wife<sup>183</sup>.

Kraemer, too, believes the longer text to be later than P, making the argument that the longer text includes both clarifying and biblicizing additions to make the Jewish-Christian character of the text more explicit. Her argument is based in part on the idea that Aseneth is a later composition in a syncretistic religious environment<sup>184</sup>. Thus, the earlier text reflects this mix of religious ideologies, and the later is forced to clarify and “correct” the biblical ideas and imagery<sup>185</sup>.

In spite of these recent affirmations of the Philonenko text, most scholars favor Burchard’s “long text” as a better representative of the original. The difference in length between P and Burchard’s (which is also called *Vorläufiger Text –VorIT*—by the author) is several thousand words<sup>186</sup>. Burchard’s

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<sup>182</sup> Angela Standhartinger, *Das Fraubild im Judentum der hellistischen Zeit. Ein Beitrag anhand von “Joseph und Aseneth”* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and his Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). I will discuss Kraemer’s contentions regarding authorship, provenance, and dating beginning on page 62 of this study. Burchard presents a summary of both Kraemer and Standhartinger’s arguments in favor of P and offers a critique of their positions in *JSP* 14.2 (2005) 83-96. Further discussion and critique can be found in Edith M. Humphrey’s *Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 65-79.

<sup>183</sup> Angela Standhartinger, “From Fictional Text to Socio-Historical Context” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1996), 302-318.

<sup>184</sup> Kraemer argues for a date of writing sometime after 300 CE, a date which is much later than most other scholars would support.

<sup>185</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 50.

<sup>186</sup> By Burchard’s own estimate: 13,400 words to Philonenko’s 8270. (“The Present State of Research,” 300). Whereas Philonenko thought that the short text represented an earlier version

formulation is more eclectic, including “all bits of material that are attested by at least one family, conform in style to the undisputed passages, and fit smoothly in the ‘narrative integrity’ of the story”<sup>187</sup>. However, it is clear that Burchard favors **b** throughout. **B** is a widely varied group of Greek manuscripts (all dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century CE or later) as well as two much older translations (Armenian and Syriac, likely composed in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). In his translation for Charlesworth’s *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Burchard contends that by favoring **b** except when a variant reading “definitely proves superior” one is able to reconstruct something close to the original text<sup>188</sup>.

The recent dispute over preference for one or the other text cannot be ignored. However, I find that it is useful for our purposes to follow the Burchard text, even if P may show signs of being earlier. The reasons for this are as follows: (1) in our study, we are looking at the text itself, as it stands. Thus, the idea of a textual history (while interesting) is not crucial to recognizing and analyzing what is going on in the rhetoric of the story as it appears. Of course, the *VorIT* has the advantage of more locations for rhetorical criticism, simply by virtue of its length, and so is to be preferred if the textual history is inconsequential; (2) Burchard makes a strong argument in *JSP* 14 (2005) and elsewhere that there is no need to prefer a shorter text simply on the basis of length. That is, it is quite possible that the **d** family is, in fact, an abridgement of a longer text (**b**), given that such shortening is common among ancient works; (3) we can be relatively well-assured that this version (or something very close) was, indeed, available to persons of the Hellenistic Jewish population, even if another family of the text was earlier<sup>189</sup>; and (4) few substantive differences exist between

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of the story that was later expanded into **b,c**, and **a**, Burchard’s contention is that some predecessor of **b** was early, and that **d** represents a redaction of this longer text. *JSP* 14.2 (2005): 91.

<sup>187</sup> Burchard, *JSP* 14.2 (2005): 88.

<sup>188</sup> *OTP* 181.

<sup>189</sup> Burchard certainly makes this claim about his own text, but even Standhartinger agrees that both versions would have been available by the end of the first century CE. Kraemer, who dates

the two manuscript families in the sections we are going to analyze. The text that we have from Burchard<sup>190</sup>, then, will be our primary source for rhetorical criticism on ideologies of masculinity.

Additionally, there has recently been a renewed debate on the matters of authorship, date, and provenance, based on the work of Ross Kraemer in her monograph *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Wife, Reconsidered*<sup>191</sup>. While most scholars hold that *JosAsen* was a Hellenistic Jewish writing, Kraemer attempts to problematize this assumption by noting that the text, preserved only by Christian communities, also expresses what she understands to be Christian proselytizing concerns<sup>192</sup>, a relationship to Christian literature like the *Odes of Solomon*<sup>193</sup>, and bride/bridegroom imagery<sup>194</sup>. She further offers that given the story's Christian origins, and its lack of attestation prior to the sixth century<sup>195</sup>, *JosAsen* is unlikely to be a first-century document. She instead suggests the third or fourth century CE as a likely date of composition. The third, interrelated, piece of her argument is that there is also no assured way to determine the provenance of *Aseneth*. Scholarly assumptions in favor of Egypt are related to assumptions about

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P much later – after 300 CE – and thinks that *VorIT* may not have existed until the 400s CE, does not share this consensus view.

<sup>190</sup> I will use Burchard's English translation from the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol. 2* (New York: Doubleday, 1985) except when a Greek word or phrase is of significance. On these occasions I will employ Burchard's *VorIT* from *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Significant differences in the shorter text will be noted as necessary, using Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, et Notes* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968) and the subsequent English translation by David Cook, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* edited by H.F.D. Sparks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 473-503.

<sup>191</sup> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Chapter 9 (245-285) discusses authorship; Chapter 10 (286-296) is concerned with provenance.

<sup>192</sup> Kramer, *Aseneth*, 254.

<sup>193</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 255-260.

<sup>194</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 265-267. Kraemer is particularly interested here in the bridal language used by people like Ephrem in the Syrian Christian community.

<sup>195</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 253-254.

authorship and dating<sup>196</sup>, or simply based on the location of the story itself. While she calls herself “steadfastly agnostic”<sup>197</sup> on the matters of both authorship and provenance, she does appear to favor the Christian community in eastern Syria as a possible source for *Aseneth*<sup>198</sup>. Overall, Kraemer seems not as concerned with “solving” issues of authorship, date, and provenance as with helping other scholars recognize the dangers of their own assumptions.

Kraemer’s contentions about authorship, date, and provenance, which I have only briefly discussed, have not been widely accepted by other scholars on *JosAsen*. Collins<sup>199</sup> notes that the concerns about exogamy, the lack of baptism imagery, and the obviously admiring references to Hebrew women and the Jewish family argue strongly against Christian authorship. Burchard continues to assert an early dating of *VorIT*<sup>200</sup>; Chestnutt has discussed how the ritual elements related to oil present in *JosAsen* point to specifically Jewish practices.<sup>201</sup> However, Kraemer’s attention to the uncertainties of *JosAsen* as a text remains a valuable caution to the assumptions of the majority of scholars.

### **Genre, Structure and Plot**

Let us move on, now, to specifics about the genre, structure and plot of *Joseph and Aseneth* as we have it. Several possible genre categories for this story have been suggested. H.C. Kee has plotted out the ways in which this tale matches that of Hellenistic romances, including the “conversion” of a hero or heroine, a sacred marriage, and conflicts and danger that keep the couple apart. Kee further contends that, as in many Hellenistic romances, the work serves a

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<sup>196</sup> For example, she notes Burchard, who assumes Egyptian provenance, is therefore inclined toward an earlier date, prior to the Jewish uprisings in North Africa. See Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 227.

<sup>197</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 301.

<sup>198</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 290-291.

<sup>199</sup> John J. Collins, “*Joseph and Aseneth*: Jewish or Christian?” *JSP* 14.2 (2005): 97-112.

<sup>200</sup> See C. Burchard, “The Text of *Joseph and Aseneth* Reconsidered” *JSP* 14.2 (2005): 83-96 for his most up-to-date responses to Kraemer and Standhartinger.

<sup>201</sup> Randall D. Chesnutt, “Perceptions of Oil in Early Judaism and the Meal Formula in *Joseph and Aseneth*.” *JSP* 14.2 (2005): 113-132.

propagandist role for a religious ideology<sup>202</sup>. However, the idea that *Jos/Asen* is a Hellenistic romance is complicated by the fact that the genre is so ill-defined and broad<sup>203</sup>; even Kee must admit that not all of the features he presents are part of every text he wishes to call “romance”<sup>204</sup>.

A much more specific designation, Ancient Jewish Novel, has been put forward by Lawrence Wills in *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*<sup>205</sup>. He identifies in this genre those works which share explicit reference to Biblical figures, generally date between 200 BCE and 100 CE, and which highlight the emotional and internal states of the hero or heroine<sup>206</sup>. With Kee, Wills affirms the expansion of female roles in these ancient novels. However he notes that ancient Jewish novels, unlike the larger, more ambiguous genre of Hellenistic Novel, tend to focus more on familial loyalty and religious identity, and less on the adventures of the heroic couple<sup>207</sup>. Interestingly, Wills also differentiates between works like *Joseph and Aseneth* and what he calls “Jewish historical novels” such as portions of Second and Third Maccabees and several narrative sections of Josephus’ *Antiquities*. The difference, he contends, is that in the case of the historical novels the author is making a conscious attempt to connect

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<sup>202</sup> H.C. Kee “The Socio-Cultural Setting of Joseph and Aseneth” *NTS* 29 (1983): 394-413. The idea that Aseneth is cult propaganda for proselytes is shared by Nickelsburg, George in “Joseph and Aseneth” in *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and The Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) 258-263. Bohak also contends that the text was religious propaganda, although not for Judaism broadly, but for the specific Oniad community which wished to justify the legitimacy of their Heliopolitan temple. See Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis. Early Judaism and Its Literature 10* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996)

<sup>203</sup> R. I. Pervo calls the genre as it stands “the most formless of all ancient genres” (“Joseph and Aseneth and the Greek Novel” in *SBL Seminar Papers* (Missoula, MT: 1976), 172. He does, however, make connections between *JosAsen*. and several characteristics he considers part of Hellenistic novels, including the love-story plot and transformation of the heroine. See “Aseneth and Her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in the Greek Novels” in *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

<sup>204</sup> Kee, “Socio-Cultural Setting,” 398.

<sup>205</sup> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>206</sup> Into this category he puts the following: Tobit, Judith, the Greek versions of Daniel and Esther and Joseph and Aseneth.

<sup>207</sup> Wills distinguishes between the two genres in his introductory chapter (pgs 1-39).



with and describe historical events while still adding a novelistic feel; stories such as ours, however, were likely perceived as fictitious by their intended audience with no expectation of historicity<sup>208</sup>.

A third possibility for defining the genre of our story is offered in Susan Docherty's article "Joseph and Aseneth: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?"<sup>209</sup> Docherty's argument is that comparing *Joseph and Aseneth* to Hellenistic novels of any sort is of limited value. Instead, one should refer to the text as "rewritten Bible" utilizing the classifications made available by Geza Vermes<sup>210</sup> and Philip Alexander<sup>211</sup>. The main features of rewritten Bible, according to these scholars, are a close relationship to the biblical text (relying on it for background and plotline) and a desire to augment that text with stories which "fill in the gaps" in the narrative<sup>212</sup>. Well-known examples of the genre include *The Book of Jubilees* and the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo.

At first glance, Docherty notes, *Joseph and Aseneth* seems distant from the Bible story and therefore not an example of the genre; indeed, many scholars would not classify this text in this way<sup>213</sup>. However, she makes a strong case for the close connections to the book of Genesis necessary to define this as "rewritten Bible". First, Docherty notes that "the story is firmly set within the time frame of the Genesis narrative" in terms of the famine, the marriage of the

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<sup>208</sup> Wills sidesteps the difficulty of saying for certain how works like *Joseph and Aseneth* were viewed by their original audience through some equivocation: "The novels were probably read by the audience as fictions," 30.

<sup>209</sup> *JSJ* 35.1 (2004): 27-48.

<sup>210</sup> Geza Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 199-231.

<sup>211</sup> P.S. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament" in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99-120 for a complete listing of criteria.

<sup>212</sup> R. D. Chestnutt uses the classification "midrashic" to refer to works, including *Joseph and Aseneth*, with these same characteristics: "They [midrashic works] all adapt and retell biblical narratives in such a way as to address contemporary concerns." In "Revelatory Experiences Attributed to Biblical Women in Early Jewish Literature" in *Women Like This*.

<sup>213</sup> Docherty, in fact, thinks *no one*, with the possible exception of Kugel, places *Joseph and Aseneth* in the category of rewritten Bible ("Joseph and Aseneth," 31).

couple, and the arrival of Joseph's family<sup>214</sup>. Additionally, all the characters from Genesis (Joseph, his brothers, Jacob, Pharaoh, Pentephres, and Aseneth) reappear in this story, even as some are given greater attention and development<sup>215</sup>. Finally, imagery of angelic encounters, marriage traditions, and divine protection make strong allusions to the biblical text<sup>216</sup>. In its many connections to the Hebrew Bible, Docherty finds *Jos/Asen* to be closer to *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Jubilees*, and even *The Antiquities*, than to Hellenistic romances. She thus classifies it as "Rewritten Bible".

The discussion of genre is important, since genre gives the reader some clue as to the purpose behind the content. For example, if we agree with Kee that this text should be included among the ancient romantic novels, then we might also come to the conclusion that it shares their purpose of cult propaganda. On the other hand, if we side with Wills on this issue, we might see behind the text an internal focus – not on converting the outsider but on reminding the insider of one's familial and religious obligations. In the end, however, I prefer the understanding provided by Docherty. In the conclusion to her article, she asserts that the task of rewritten Bible is "to present narratives of the Hebrew Bible which were considered by an author as particularly important in a way that brought out their *fullest meaning and continuing relevance*."<sup>217</sup> Indeed, one of the premises of the current study is that the biblical stories were a tool or medium by which a subsequent interpreter's ideas, worldview, and constructs of ideology were made manifest, and that the ancient characters of the Bible continued to be relevant insofar as they were modified for the interpreter's own needs. Thus, listing this text among others called "rewritten Bible" lends itself well to the overall goals of this paper, while also reminding the reader that the purpose of works like *JosAsen* was to make them broadly

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<sup>214</sup> Docherty, "Joseph and Aseneth," 34.

<sup>215</sup> Docherty, "Joseph and Aseneth," 36-41.

<sup>216</sup> Docherty, "Joseph and Aseneth," 41-43.

<sup>217</sup> Docherty, "Joseph and Aseneth," 46, italics mine.

relevant to those for whom they were written, not just to address a single issue in a narrative manner.

Finally, we ought to briefly mention the structure and plot of the story itself. The narrative falls clearly into two sections, chapters 1-21 and 22-29. The first section concerns the young, chaste woman Aseneth of Egypt, who is aloof to all suitors<sup>218</sup>. Upon seeing the Hebrew man Joseph, she becomes enamored with him<sup>219</sup>. He, however, refuses to reciprocate, claiming that he cannot kiss a woman who “will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table.”<sup>220</sup> In response, Aseneth locks herself in her tower, puts on clothes of mourning, and prays<sup>221</sup>. She is met by a divine messenger who affirms her in her confession and shares a meal of honeycomb with her<sup>222</sup>. Joseph returns to find her transformed, and they are married by Pharaoh<sup>223</sup>.

In Part Two Aseneth is introduced to Joseph’s father, and it becomes clear that many within the family (Joseph’s brothers) and without (Pharaoh’s son) are envious of the new couple<sup>224</sup>. Pharaoh’s son is able to enlist the help of Dan and Gad to kidnap Aseneth and kill Joseph. The heroine escapes, but Pharaoh’s son is wounded in the attack. The wicked brothers then attempt to kill Aseneth with swords, but by her prayers the swords change to ashes<sup>225</sup>. Finally, they abandon their plan and beg for forgiveness; Aseneth brokers the reconciliation between them and Simeon and Levi<sup>226</sup>. In a closing scene, the sons forgive Pharaoh’s son and return him to his father, refusing to kill him. He instead dies from his

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<sup>218</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 1-4

<sup>219</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 5-8

<sup>220</sup> *JosAsen.* 8:6.

<sup>221</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 9-13

<sup>222</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 14-17

<sup>223</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 18-21

<sup>224</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 22-23

<sup>225</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 24-27

<sup>226</sup> *JosAsen.* Ch 28

previous injuries, and the Pharaoh himself from sadness. Joseph is appointed to rule over Egypt until the Pharaoh's younger son comes of age<sup>227</sup>.

It should be noted that there has recently been a great deal of gender scholarship on our story<sup>228</sup>. Ross Kraemer, for example, discusses the "point" of Aseneth in Chapter Seven of *When Aseneth Met Joseph*. She contends that Aseneth functions on many levels in the story: to provide men in the author's audience an opportunity to think and talk about gender<sup>229</sup>; to provide a way of discussing differences between the "self" and the dangerous "other"<sup>230</sup>; to provide appropriate constructs of marriage for women<sup>231</sup>; to be an object of the "male gaze" that pervades much literature, ancient or modern<sup>232</sup>. As is evident from this list, however, much of Kraemer's work has focused on Part One of the tale, especially on the character and gender identity of Aseneth and the images associated with her conversion<sup>233</sup>. The present study will be different in a few ways: first, I will follow the author's gender constructions through *both* sections of the narrative, noting that certain ideologies of masculinity which appear in Part One are recapitulated in Part Two; and second, I will focus on the male characters in the story, especially Joseph (who exemplifies the masculine virtues

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<sup>227</sup> *JosAsen*. Ch 29. This is a significant departure from the biblical text, which suggests only that Joseph rose to prominence under Pharaoh, but did not replace him.

<sup>228</sup> The most complete discussions of gender are available in "Why is Aseneth a Woman? The Use and Significance of Gender in the Aseneth Stories" in R. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 191-221, and A. Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

<sup>229</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 192.

<sup>230</sup> Kramer, *Aseneth*, 194.

<sup>231</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 199-200.

<sup>232</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 202. Kramer asks here whether this might mean that the text is in some ways pornographic, and I must agree that, in some ways, it is.

<sup>233</sup> While some scholars have described parts one and two as only tangentially related, see Eugene Gallagher, "Conversion and Community in Late Antiquity" *JR* 73.1 (1993): 1-15, who argues that Pharaoh's son in part two represents the reverse course taken by Aseneth at her conversion (10). I will argue that the two sections belong together for a similar reason: the Pharaoh's son exhibits qualities opposite of *Joseph*.

encouraged by the author) and Pharaoh's son (who serves as the model of what men ought not to be).

### The Rhetoric of Masculinity

Recall that in rhetorical criticism one looks for the clues within the text to point to larger ideological presumptions of the author. In particular, unique phrasing and the repetition of a given phrase can be a clue to a rhetorical device used for ideological purposes. *Joseph and Aseneth* has just such a clear rhetorical device, which actually appears several times in the course of the narrative. In four key places in the story, the phrase "It does not befit a man..." appears, followed by some moral or religious prohibition which the author clearly wishes the audience to avoid<sup>234</sup>. Interestingly, the author does not use the more general term ἄνθρωπος for these pronouncements. Instead, they are specifically male-oriented, employing the word ἀνὴρ in each case. Clearly, just in this choice alone, the author is letting on that he has something specific to say to men about the way men should be. Let us now turn to each reference as it 'appears, noting the specific ways in which the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* has used this rhetorical phrase to inscribe masculinity for his audience<sup>235</sup>.

#### "To Kiss A Strange Woman": The God-Fearing Man and Illicit Sex

The first use of this rhetorical device appears in verse five of chapter eight.

And Joseph said, "It is not fitting for a man who worships God [οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ] , who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and anoint himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility to kiss a strange woman [γυνᾶϊκα ἄλλοτρίαν] who will bless with her mouth

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<sup>234</sup> *JosAsen.* 8:5, 21:1, 29:3.

<sup>235</sup> I will refer to the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* as male throughout. However, it should be noted that some have posited a female author for the work in one form or another. In particular A. Standhartinger contends that the earlier P version of *Aseneth* might have had a female author (*Das Frauenbild*, 225-237). Kraemer argued for female authorship in *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 221-242, but in her more recent *When Aseneth Met Joseph* has taken a less certain stand (215-216).

dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoint herself with ointment of destruction [καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι ἀπωλείας]. But a man who worships God [ἄνῆρ θεοσεβῆς] will kiss his mother and the sister who is born of his mother and the sister who is born of his clan and family and the wife who shares his bed, all of whom bless with their mouths the living God. Likewise, it is not fitting for a woman who worships God [καὶ γυναικὶ θεοσεβῆι οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον] to kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God.

The Greek phrasing here is almost the same as in the other instances: “οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβῆι.” Note that all three occasions use προσῆκω as a participle, which means “belonging to,” “fitting” or “suiting.” The sense here is of propriety and appropriateness, which certainly seems to be part of Joseph’s point in the above passage.

Of course, we are not just being told what is proper for any man. The author of *Joseph and Aseneth* has a specific kind of man in mind, one for whom Joseph serves as a preeminent model: the man who fears God (ἄνῆρ θεοσεβῆς). Indeed, all of our examples couple these two words (or their plural equivalents), indicating that the construct of masculinity here involves a relationship between maleness and “God-fearing”. The idea of the God-fearer has been explored in a wide variety of works on the ancient world<sup>236</sup> with widely diverging opinions as to the exact religious nature of the person to whom it applied. Cohen has suggested that the term refers to any of a number of Gentiles who “sympathized”

<sup>236</sup> J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Shaye Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew” *HTR* 82 (1989):13-33; John J. Collins, “The ‘God-Fearers’” in *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 264-270; Louis Feldman, “The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers” *BAR* 12 (1986): 59-63; J. Andrew Overman, “The God-Fearers: Some Neglected Features” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 17-26. One should note that the term θεοσεβῆς is not the exclusive term for these persons, and other terms, such as σεβομενοι, are also translated as “God-fearers” or “God-worshippers.” In *Jos.Asen.* 8:8, for example, the author uses φοβούμενος τον θεόν.

with or otherwise participated in Judaism<sup>237</sup>. Collins contends that, with θεοσεβής in particular, “the meaning of each occurrence must be judged from its context” since it has been used in ancient literature and inscriptions to refer to both Jewish and pagan groups<sup>238</sup>. Certainly, the term has a wide range of usage in other religious traditions of the time as well<sup>239</sup>.

Here, the usage of θεοσεβής is complicated by the fact that, while Joseph *seems* to be referring to keeping Jewish dietary custom (eating blessed bread and cup as opposed to that offered to idols, for example), no explicit designation of “Jew” or “non-Jew” is made at any point in the text, and no real emphasis is made on any of the widely-held aspects of participation in Judaism (dietary laws, circumcision, and keeping the Sabbath, particularly.). If the text were really about convincing Gentiles to convert, as Nickelsburg claims, it seems strange that clearer distinctions in practice were not made<sup>240</sup>. Additionally, the qualifications for God-fearer status as listed in Joseph’s speech above seem to be much more focused on whom one kisses and blesses than on what one eats – not exactly about dietary differences, in particular, but about a larger understanding of religious and familial distinctions in a pluralistic environment<sup>241</sup>. In the later occasions of ἀνὴρ θεοσεβής, no mention is made of uniquely Jewish

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<sup>237</sup> Cohen suggests seven categories into which such a sympathizer might fit: 1) admiration of Judaism, 2) acknowledging the Jewish God or incorporating that god into his/her own pantheon, 3) benefiting Jewish communities, 4) practicing some Jewish rituals, 5) venerating the Jewish god and ignoring pagan gods, 6) adding to the community through marriage or some other act of joining, and 7) converting and becoming a proselyte. Any of these might fit the category of “God-fearer.” See “Conclusion: Gentiles, ‘God-Fearers,’ Converts, and Jews” in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 168-174

<sup>238</sup> Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 267.

<sup>239</sup> R. Kraemer summarizes the literature in which θεοσεβής appears to refer to the piety of other religious traditions in her chapter on “The Authorial Identity of Aseneth Reconsidered” in *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 273, and especially footnote 157.

<sup>240</sup> George W. E Nickelsburg, “Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 33-72.

<sup>241</sup> This is similar to Burchard’s understanding of *Aseneth’s* intent: “JosAs was meant to explain to Jews, proselytes and maybe God-fearers, what privileges they possessed as compared with their pagan environment” *Gesammelte Studien*, 315.

religious practice either, but of basic moral principles of chastity<sup>242</sup> and preserving life<sup>243</sup>.

What do we make of the usage of this term in our tale, then? Given the general nature of the prohibitions on a God-fearer in the text (blessing God, proper endogamous relationships, chastity, and non-violence), the designation of God-fearer here seems not to fit the more technical aspects of Cohen's upper-level adherents, who participated in more specific Jewish rituals. Instead, it seems to suggest a general designation for anyone who acknowledges Joseph's God, as in Cohen's level two "sympathizers"<sup>244</sup>. However, having Joseph as the one most often designated as θεοσεβής complicates the matter, since the first audience would have assumed that the patriarch kept all aspects of the law. Indeed, Cohen's categories don't really seem to work at all in the case of Joseph, since he is not a convert in any respect, but a full-fledged member of the Jewish community. Looking at the "context" of the passages in which it appears in *JosAsen*, to use Collins' approach mentioned earlier, we can only say that God-fearing is understood both a designation for Jews (in so far as it was embodied in Joseph and, his brothers) *and* a basic description of anyone who acknowledged Joseph's God through appropriate relationships. We can at least be certain that the designation as it appears in the story intends to separate those who are men in the model of Joseph from those who are not.

We see, then, that one of the first qualities of masculinity in *Joseph and Aseneth* is to be a God-fearer, and that each of the rhetorical speeches follows the ἀνὴρ θεοσεβής pattern. However, each also elucidates additional qualities which befit a man. For example, in the section above (8:5ff) the main quality

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<sup>242</sup> *JosAsen*. 21:1

<sup>243</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:12 and 29:3. Collins notes that in these instances, membership in the Jewish community is *specifically not* an indicator of god-fearing, since both Joseph's brothers and the Egyptian army participate in violating "God-fearing" standards of proper conduct (Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 234).

<sup>244</sup> If this is the case, we must also add Pharaoh to the group of God-fearers: "May the Lord, the God of Joseph bless you...May the Lord God the Most High bless you and multiply you and magnify and glorify you forever." (*JosAsen* 21:5)



seems to be an awareness of what pollutes by way of the mouth, especially in the act of kissing. This text has been discussed as a ritual formula for community meals or as an exemplar of eschatological beliefs<sup>245</sup>. However, what has not been adequately discussed is the relationship between the food imagery and the main command of the passage -- not to kiss foreign women.

Certainly, the taking of food is of deep symbolic importance in Section One of the story. First, meals are symbolic of a religious division between Joseph and his Egyptian counterparts. He refuses to share a table with the people in the court on religious grounds<sup>246</sup>. Aseneth is forced to throw all her food to the dogs in an effort to make herself religiously appealing to Joseph's strict standards<sup>247</sup>. On several occasions after Joseph's speech, a distinction is made between the food offered to idols and that which is fitting for a man or woman who blesses God<sup>248</sup>. Again, the distinction is never made between specific kosher or non-kosher foods, but more generally between proper or improper religious affiliations. When the author surrounds the basic command not to kiss women with such allusions to religious difference, it is clear that he is indicating a specific kind of woman – the woman who does not share the basic religious orientation and identity of the ideal man<sup>249</sup>.

Food also serves as a powerful description of people and relationships in *JosAsen*, often with erotic overtones. Joseph, for example, is described as carrying an olive branch with "plenty of fruit on it, and in the fruits was a great wealth of oil"<sup>250</sup> at his first visit; it is the sight of him thus adorned that causes

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<sup>245</sup>Philonenko *Joseph et Aseneth* 91; Andrea Leiber, "I Set A Table Before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth's Conversion Meal" in *JSP* 14.1 (2005) 63-77.

<sup>246</sup> *JosAsen*. 7:1 "And they washed his feet and set a table before him by itself, because Joseph never ate with the Egyptians, for this was an abomination to him."

<sup>247</sup> *JosAsen*. 10:13, 13:8.

<sup>248</sup> *JosAsen*. 10:13; 11:8; 11:16; 12:5; 13:8.

<sup>249</sup> Kraemer discusses the significance of Aseneth as a foreign woman in "Why is Aseneth A Woman?" *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 193-196.

<sup>250</sup> *JosAsen* 5:6

Aseneth to feel “crushed” and “paralyzed” with love. Aseneth, too, is described as having breasts “standing upright like handsome apples” at the sight of Joseph<sup>251</sup>. When we first meet our heroine, the tower which protects her virginity is described as encircled with fruit, which is ripe and ready for harvest<sup>252</sup>. As she prays, Aseneth is met by a heavenly man (who resembles Joseph); she offers to let him sit on her undefiled bed, her hand on his knees, and then proceeds to ply him with bread and wine<sup>253</sup>. Later, the transformed Aseneth, now acceptable to Joseph as a bride, is described as “like a vine in the paradise of God prospering in its fruits.”<sup>254</sup> Each of these occasions in the narrative equates the sight or taste of food with sex, sexuality or erotic beauty; each uses the fertility imagery of the meal to expand the symbolic meaning of eating to include erotic overtones. Fruit, grain and wine as representations of sexual fertility in the ancient world certainly are well established<sup>255</sup>; however, in its sheer repetition of the symbol, *Joseph and Aseneth* is making a clear connection between the erotic and food.

I would contend that the admonition here is more than just a caution on whom not to kiss. The idea that a proper man must take great care to protect

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<sup>251</sup> *JosAsen.* 8:5. This phrase does not appear in P, which instead has only “Joseph stretched his right hand out, and laid it against her breast, and said, ‘It is not right for a man who worships God...’” Kraemer makes the argument that the phrase “her breasts were standing up like handsome apples” is a later addition which intensifies the erotic nature of the story, as well as diminishing the status of the heroine by “associating her with the dangerous Egyptian women...in a manner totally absent in the shorter text,” 206.

<sup>252</sup> *JosAsen.* 2:11-12

<sup>253</sup> *JosAsen.* 15:14. This very much resembles the story of Ruth and Boaz, in which Ruth uses bread and wine, and close proximity, to attract Boaz (Ruth 2:14-16; 3:7-18). The erotic undertone in this particular incident in *JosAsen* has been generally ignored, with the exception of Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 174-175.

<sup>254</sup> *JosAsen.* 18:9. This appears to be an allusion to the fruit of Eden, which certainly had connotations of sexuality. Kraemer concludes that indirect references to Adam and Eve, as here and in 16:5ff, suggest that the author wishes the narrative to serve as an “inversion of Genesis” in which men and women are restored through eating to the pre-expulsion state of immortality, without undoing the power of sex and sexuality (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 208-209).

<sup>255</sup> See for example D. Sawyer, “Women in Narrative and Religious Practice” in *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 59-72 for Greco-Roman imagery. D. Boyarin discusses the importance of food as a metaphor for sex in rabbinic culture in *Carnal Israel*, 72-76. A Corbeill writes on the tendency to conflate images of sexual deviance with overindulgence at a banquet in “Dining Deviants in Roman Political Invective” in *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

against what enters the mouth certainly shares the erotic connotation which runs throughout the narrative, especially when combined with other warnings to protect against women who do not bless Joseph's God<sup>256</sup>. I would suggest that the passage here is as much about licit and illicit relations as it is about table customs (if not more); the extremely erotic nature of food throughout the story, and then the clear prohibition that it does not befit man to use his mouth in any but appropriate ways, seems to suggest that what is being proscribed in this passage is illicit sexual contact with inappropriate (non-God-fearing) women<sup>257</sup>. The images of idolatrous food and drink thus become more euphemistic than concrete, representing the sexually inappropriate and religiously "other" woman<sup>258</sup>. The suitable man will touch neither her food nor her mouth with his lips.

#### **"With His Wife Before the Wedding": Marital Fidelity**

Such distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate relations are recapitulated in chapter 21, the second of the four instances in which the key phrase "It does not befit a man" appears. After Aseneth has been transformed in her tower, by both throwing out her idolatrous food and blessing God with her cleansed mouth, she meets Joseph a second time. Here, he does not refuse her advances, but embraces and kisses her, indicating that she has become an appropriate wife for him as outlined in our previous example. Joseph wishes Pharaoh himself to give the marriage feast, and plans the next day to approach him for a blessing, but in the interim refuses to have sex with her.

And Joseph stayed that day with Pentephres,

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<sup>256</sup> In the story, Joseph is visited by the memory of his father's words: "Guard strongly against associating with a strange woman, for association with her is destruction (ἀπωλεία)". (*JosAsen.* 7.6) The same word is used in Joseph's own admonition against kissing the strange woman, who anoints herself for destruction.

<sup>257</sup> This claim is supported by the fact that Joseph does indeed find Aseneth kissable after her interlude of prayer in the tower, in spite of the fact that they remain unmarried.

<sup>258</sup> Aseneth makes a similar allusion in her own speech in chapter 11, in which her mouth is defiled, and therefore she will not make an acceptable bride. However, given the constant emphasis on her virginity, this is likely a much more straightforward reference to her not being "God-fearing" as in the above discussion.

and he did not sleep with Aseneth, because Joseph said, “It does not befit a man who worships God [οὐ προσήκει ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖν] to sleep with his wife before the wedding.”<sup>259</sup>

Joseph’s speech in chapter 21 contains no clever euphemism or double-entendre. While in the previous example we have the complex metaphoric relationship between sex and food, leading to an understanding to stay away from relations with women who are not “God-fearing,” here we have a much more straightforward prohibition for men: no sex before the wedding.<sup>260</sup>

As I stated, this text and the speech in Chapter 8 are related; they both delineate clear boundaries for male sexual activity and male/female contact. However, they are not in all ways the same. Whereas the prohibition in chapter eight is against contact with a general population of women, especially foreigners, who do not “bless God,” the above ban is much more intimate, dealing with the marriage bed specifically. Note that Joseph speaks this prohibition in relationship to “his wife,” as opposed to “a strange woman” as in 8:1.<sup>261</sup> What accounts for the specificity of this second admonition?

We have already discussed the priority placed upon self-control and appropriate sexual relations as mark of masculinity in *The Antiquities* of Josephus. In fact, male chastity as a mark of power and self-restraint is often a feature of Hellenistic literature, as Perkins has contended<sup>262</sup>. Here however, the chastity of Joseph seems to indicate something other than just the manly power of self-control, as it did in the *Antiquities*. I would suggest that this second

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<sup>259</sup> *Jos.Asen.* 21:1.

<sup>260</sup> Burchard states that this prohibition seems to suggest that “a man who does *not* worship God might have acted otherwise.” *OTP* 235.

<sup>261</sup> Γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ as opposed to γυναῖκα ἄλλοτρίαν.

<sup>262</sup> Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self* (London: Routledge, 1995). Her argument on chastity is summarized in Kraemer *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, pg 200.

rhetorical statement is intended to focus on the importance of the God-fearing male as a fitting, and therefore equally virginal, husband.

Consider, for example, that much is made of Joseph's virginity as a match for Aseneth's. Pentephres describes Joseph as "self-controlled, and a virgin like you"<sup>263</sup> when he first introduces him to Aseneth. Pentephres later intensifies the connection, stating "[Joseph] is a virgin like you today and hates every strange woman, as you, too, every strange man."<sup>264</sup> Again, we have a sense that the mutual nature of their chastity is of some importance. Burchard suggests that the description at Aseneth's conversion -- "you are a chaste virgin today, your head is like that of a young man"-- denotes not androgyny, but the equality which comes from shared chastity<sup>265</sup>. In fact, the story seems to continually emphasize their equity: both beautiful<sup>266</sup>, both protective against suitors<sup>267</sup>, and -- after Aseneth's transformation -- both described as meek<sup>268</sup> and children of God<sup>269</sup>. The author even goes so far as to create equity between their body parts, in a speech by Aseneth:

And why do you say this that another virgin is to  
wash your feet? For your feet are my feet, and your

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<sup>263</sup> *JosAsen.* 4:7. The word for "virgin" here is παρθένος, which is unusual as a word applied to men. See Burchard's note n, *OTP* 206.

<sup>264</sup> *JosAsen.* 8:1 παρθένος is used once again for both Aseneth and Joseph.

<sup>265</sup> *OTP* pg 226 note b.

<sup>266</sup> *JosAsen.* 1:5, 19:3 (Aseneth) and 4:7 (Joseph).

<sup>267</sup> *JosAsen.* 2:1 (Aseneth) and 7:4 (Joseph).

<sup>268</sup> *JosAsen.* 8:8 (Joseph) and 17:8-10 (Aseneth) In these verses, Aseneth repents of being a "foolish and bold" woman who has "spoken boldly...in ignorance." P has only "[I]t was in ignorance that I spoke evil before you." Standhartinger suggests that this is a mark of the lateness of the *VorIT*, since it emphasizes the negative aspects of her boldness, while later in the story Levi's boldness is valued. However, I agree with Humphrey here, who notes that her repentance says little about her femaleness, but is focused on overcoming ignorance (*Joseph and Aseneth* 72). I would also add that meekness is a prized male attribute in this story, as we shall see below, and thus the purpose of Aseneth's repentance may be to make her more like the ideal male than to "feminize" her.

<sup>269</sup> "Son of God" in 6:5, 13:13, 18:11, 21:4 23:10 (Joseph) and "Daughter of the Most High" in 11:5 (Aseneth).

hands are my hands, and your soul my soul, and  
your feet another woman will never wash<sup>270</sup>.

Clearly, we are meant to observe that these two are an even match. But to what end? In his blessing of their marriage, Pharaoh describes the couple as “betrothed...since eternity”<sup>271</sup>. It is my opinion that the point of Joseph’s insistence on male chastity, and of the parity between the two as a whole, rests on this phrase (which immediately follows Joseph’s “it does not befit a man” speech in chapter 21). The author wishes us to see that appropriate “God-fearing” men are monogamous; they must keep themselves to only one wife, and only after marriage, because they are spiritually intended for only that person from eternity as an idealized match. Indeed, Kraemer notes that one of the ways Joseph becomes a moral model in *JosAsen* is by his insistence on the exclusivity of the husband/wife relationship<sup>272</sup>. In other words, complementary chastity is central to a proper and fitting marriage, and therefore to a proper and fitting man.

The idea that men should be chaste, and limited to sex with one wife, was a developing concept in the Greco-Roman world at this time. Williams<sup>273</sup> makes the argument that, in antiquity, the usual model of sexual relations was the faithful wife and the promiscuous husband. However, the husband was not allowed to be intimate with just anyone, but needed to seek out partners who performed the passive, “feminized,” role. Thus it was not inappropriate for the husband to have sex with prostitutes or slaves (whether male or female) as long as he maintained the masculine role-- the dominator, aggressor, and penetrator. Skinner refers to these boundaries of appropriate sexual contact as “the

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<sup>270</sup> *JosAsen*. 20:4-5. In Biblical texts, feet are often a euphemism for male genitalia, and this text may have some of that erotic overtone as well. See “Ruth: At His Feet Until Morning” in *And Adam Knew Eve: A Dictionary of Sex in the Bible* for a discussion of the euphemism in biblical texts (Palatka, FL: Hodge & Braddock, 1995). P here lacks “Why do you say this that another virgin is to wash your feet?” and “your soul [is] my soul.”

<sup>271</sup> *Jos.Asen*. 21:3

<sup>272</sup> Kraemer, *Aseneth*, 206.

<sup>273</sup> Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

dominance-submission grid of Roman sexuality”<sup>274</sup> noting that it was this dichotomy, rather than strict male/female boundaries, which marked Roman views of sex.

However, as the Greco-Roman world changed, and particularly as Rome moved from Republic to Empire, Perkins<sup>275</sup> and Kuefler<sup>276</sup> have noted a shift in some of the rhetoric of masculinity as it relates to marital sex. More and more, they contend, manliness was marked by self-control and mastery of sexual desire, as opposed to sexual dominance and promiscuous virility. The change, they suggest, was at least partially in response to a sense of loss of dominance in the changing Empire. Kuefler notes that the increasingly autocratic Roman government, as well as military losses and dissolution, likely played a role in men’s sense of emasculation. Thus, feeling displaced from their role as dominators in the larger realm, the appropriate husband learned to dominate himself; no longer was it fitting for a man to have multiple partners of any kind, and chastity was elevated for husbands in both moral and legal realms<sup>277</sup>. Perkins suggests that in this way a previously feminine trait (chastity) was masculinized<sup>278</sup>.

And yet, the sense in our text is not that chastity is a mark of self-domination by Joseph, but one of concord. The marriage is harmonious, egalitarian, and balanced. As Kraemer states, “The concept of marriage in *Aseneth* seems to me very likely the relatively egalitarian union of the

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<sup>274</sup> Marilyn Skinner, “Introduction” in *Roman Sexualities* (Marilyn Skinner and Judith Hallett, eds., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>275</sup> Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 73.

<sup>276</sup> Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambivalence, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Kuefler’s focus on the masculinity of 3-5<sup>th</sup> century CE Christianity is obviously a bit later than the time of *JosAsen*, but his basic concept – that masculinity was changing as Rome changed – is applicable to earlier times. An application of his thoughts to 1<sup>st</sup> century religious communities is available in Colleen Conway’s “Ideology of Masculinity in the Corinthian Correspondence”, an Academic Paper presented to the Biblical Hermeneutics Task Force of the Catholic Biblical Association of America (Cleveland, 2002).

<sup>277</sup> *The Manly Eunuch*, 78-79.

<sup>278</sup> Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 73.

harmonious couple.”<sup>279</sup> So, we may have here a view of masculinity which shares common traits with, but rejects the common assumptions of, men in imperial Roman marriages. That is, our author is not suggesting that Joseph denies Aseneth marital relations to dominate the home, or because he wishes he could dominate in public life, but instead to protect the mutual good of the divinely ordained marriage. The author is constructing marital masculinity as much more egalitarian than the common definitions of the Roman world.

### **“Meek, Merciful and Fearing God”: Meekness and Mercy as Manly**

Before we turn to the final example of the rhetorical phrase which is the subject of this study, it is necessary to offer a description of Joseph which occurs immediately after his speech in chapter 8:

And when Aseneth heard these words of Joseph, she was cut to the heart strongly and was distressed exceedingly and sighed, and she kept gazing at Joseph with her eyes open and her eyes were filled with tears. And Joseph saw her, and had mercy on her exceedingly, and was himself cut to the heart, because Joseph was *meek and merciful and fearing God*<sup>280</sup>.

The interesting thing about this phrase is that it the one description of Joseph’s internal character which is voiced by the narrator. It provides a sharp contrast in tone and characterization to the many descriptions of Joseph which are offered throughout the story by others, all of which promote Joseph’s power and authority. For example, Pentephres calls Joseph “powerful one of God”<sup>281</sup> and Aseneth describes him as the all-seeing “sun from heaven”<sup>282</sup>. She later attributes to him “wisdom and virtue and power.”<sup>283</sup> Others note his position of

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<sup>279</sup> Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 204.

<sup>280</sup> *Jos.Asen.* 8:9. πραῦς καὶ ἐλεήμων φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν.

<sup>281</sup> *JosAsen.* 3:4; 4:7 by Pentephres and 18:1 by his servant and Aseneth herself.

<sup>282</sup> *JosAsen.* 6:2-7

<sup>283</sup> *JosAsen.* 13:14



religious privilege as the “firstborn son” of God <sup>284</sup>. Gruen contends that these attributions on the lips of others are intentionally designed to impress the reader. We are to see Joseph as “[exuding] power and authority” but with a healthy measure of “pomposity and arrogance.”<sup>285</sup> Gruen’s overall sense of the character Joseph in *JosAsen*. is driven by the descriptions of those characters around him, and thus his conclusion is not entirely positive.

While I do hold out the possibility that Joseph might be a morally complex character in this tale, it seems rhetorically important that this is the one occasion on which the narrator interjects a description of the internal character of Joseph. It becomes even more important, however, when we note the very striking difference between this description and the rest; whereas in the eyes of others Joseph is marked by power and authority, in the author’s words he is “merciful, meek, and fearing God.” I suggest that the descriptions afforded Joseph by others are *not* intended to be upheld as reflections of an ideal, as Gruen contends. Instead, I would offer that they are purposely on the lips of others to underscore an understanding of masculinity which was common, but which the author wishes to disregard as false. I will return to this idea in a moment.

This brings us to our final two examples of this key rhetorical phrase. Here, however, they are not spoken by Joseph; instead, each is uttered by a brother. In spite of this, I believe they are intended to suggest a connection back to Joseph’s description as meek and merciful. In these scenes, both in Part Two of the story, the brothers are presented with the opportunity to harm another. In the first instance, Levi speaks against the Pharaoh’s son’s plot to kill Joseph and his own father. In the second, the same brother stops Benjamin from killing Pharaoh’s son in revenge.

[Levi to Simeon] We are men who worship God, and it  
does not befit us to repay evil for evil...[To Pharaoh’s

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<sup>284</sup> “Firstborn son” or “son of God” appears in *JosAsen*. 6:3-5; 18:11; 21:4.

<sup>285</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 97-99.

son] It does not befit a man who worships God to injure any one in any way. And if anyone wants to injure a man who worships God, that [first-mentioned] man who worships God does not succor him, because a sword is not in his hands<sup>286</sup>.

[Levi to Benjamin] By no means brother will you do this deed, because we are men who worship God, and it does not befit a man who worships God to repay evil for evil nor to trample under foot a fallen man nor to oppress his enemy till death<sup>287</sup>.

As was true earlier, this rhetorical phrase employs the *ἀνὴρ θεοσεβῆς* formula<sup>288</sup>. And as before, the phrase does not seem to imply uniquely Jewish religious practices like Sabbath, dietary laws, or circumcision, but instead presents a more universal moralistic orientation. In these ways, it is quite similar to our previous examples. However, whereas the previous two examples of the phrase were directed toward sexual behavior with various women, these instances focus on the appropriate relationship between males.

In the second section of *JosAsen*, men, and men's relationships, play a much larger role in the plot. Pharaoh's son and Joseph's brothers take on much greater prominence in the story, as they seek to complicate the marriage which dominated the earlier portion of the tale. The language of father-son relationships, as well as brotherly relations, becomes more prevalent. Male characters are described in more vivid detail, both in terms of physicality (especially Jacob) and emotional quality (especially Pharaoh's son). The overall sense in this section is clearly a much greater and more blatant masculine rhetoric and a much more obvious male dynamic than in the earlier section. And so, while in the previous part of the story, manliness is contrasted with female

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<sup>286</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:12

<sup>287</sup> *JosAsen*. 29:4

roles and ideologies, here, the kind of man one ought to be is contrasted with other (ostensibly less-manly) men.

This, then, is where the ideology of masculinity takes its clearest form. In each of the passages above, manliness as defined by Levi takes on a very obviously pacifist, non-violent, non-retributive quality. Men who fear God do not repay evil for evil, nor do they oppress an enemy they have conquered, nor do they even take sword in hand. Indeed, they do not “injure any one in any way.”

The striking thing about such a definition of masculinity is that it is clearly disputed within the text amongst the other characters. In the clearest example of an opposing rhetoric, Pharaoh’s son attempts to persuade Joseph’s brothers to kill him in revenge. Simeon and Levi are told “you are powerful men [ἄνδρες δυνατοί] beyond all men on earth, and by these right hands of yours the city of the Shechemites has been overthrown...come assist me, and we will make war on Joseph.”<sup>289</sup> Pharaoh’s son’s speech makes reference to the incident portrayed in Genesis 34, in which Simeon and Levi kill all the Shechemites for the rape of Dinah. It is interesting that the author of *JosAsen* would make note of the obviously vengeful act by the brothers, and then follow it with a speech in which Levi preaches against retribution. Even here, the brothers draw their swords to intimidate Pharaoh’s son, reminding him of what they did to the men of Shechem. However, at the moment they might have killed him, they instead show him mercy<sup>290</sup>. The transformation of the story is clearly intended to favor meekness, even as Pharaoh’s son utilizes the rhetoric of revenge.

This ideology of masculinity, in which maleness is equivalent with power and revenge, is obviously not limited to Pharaoh’s son in this tale. As we have already seen, many wish to describe Joseph in just such terms, emphasizing in particular his power. This is where the narrator’s phrase that Joseph was “meek and merciful and fearing God” becomes so important. The false rhetoric of manliness as vengeful and obsessed with power is overturned by the

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<sup>289</sup> *JosAsen* 23.2.

<sup>290</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:2,4. This seems to be an attempt by the author to “redeem” the brothers’ biblical violence and further his claim that a man who fears God will not harm another.

combination of that description of Joseph and these two speeches by Levi. The author cannot dispute that manliness has often been equated with powerfulness and warring; indeed, one of the most common divisions in the Roman world was between the manly-war-making sphere and the feminine sphere of passivity and gentleness<sup>291</sup>. So, the author attempts a reversal instead: just as the characters in the story, the author's audience may *believe* that manliness is associated with power and violence, but they are mistaken. The idealized man is meek and merciful, and he does not "repay evil for evil."

### **A Concluding Contrast: Joseph and Pharaoh's Son**

Joseph serves as a positive moral model in many ancient texts, as we have seen. In Josephus' *Antiquities* we also noted the presence of a foil to that moral model – Potiphar's wife. Here, too, the author has provided a negative moral example to oppose Joseph. In this case, Pharaoh's son becomes the antithesis of all our author wishes to tell us about the qualities of good men.

By way of review, let us consider the qualities of masculinity which are affirmed in this text. First, we have seen that our author wishes to stress that men who fear God will not enter into sexual relations with foreign women; they will further refuse even their own spouse prior to solemnization of the wedding. In this latter case, the standard is not simply for the sake of self-control, but because it affirms the cosmic and eternal nature of the union. Second, we have noted that in relation to other males, our author promotes mercy and meekness as opposed to the dominant rhetoric of power and retribution. Each of these qualities is exemplified in the person of Joseph.

Pharaoh's son appears in both sections of *JosAsen*. In part one, Aseneth considers a marriage to him prior to her first meeting with Joseph<sup>292</sup>. The author notes that he is one of those who have heard of her beauty, even though he has

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<sup>291</sup> For a discussion of the idea of spheres of influence in terms of sexuality, see: Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995).

<sup>292</sup> *JosAsen*. 4:11

not seen her<sup>293</sup>. However, it is in Part Two that he plays an expanded and much more consequential role. Upon seeing Joseph and Aseneth married, he is “cut to the heart” by her beauty and distraught by their union<sup>294</sup>. Overcome by his feeling, he attempts to enlist the help of Simeon and Levi to kill Joseph and his father so that he might have Aseneth as his wife and reign over Egypt<sup>295</sup>. When these brothers refuse, he turns to Dan and Gad, who agree to fight on his behalf<sup>296</sup>. In the ensuing battle, the Pharaoh’s son is wounded, and the plot is foiled. He later dies of the injuries he has sustained, and the loss of the son kills his father the Pharaoh<sup>297</sup>.

The contrasts between Joseph and Pharaoh’s son are numerous. As we have already seen, Joseph’s understanding of what “befits a man” is marked by chastity and restraint in relationship to women. Pharaoh’s son, however, is presented on two occasions as motivated by inappropriate sexual desire. In the first, he is so moved by a yearning for Aseneth, in spite of the fact that he has not even seen her, that he “kept entreating his father to give her to him for a wife.”<sup>298</sup> His father’s response, that he is already betrothed to Joakim of Midian<sup>299</sup>, indicates the strength of the son’s desire for Aseneth; he has neglected the wife he already had, with whom he is rightfully able to be intimate, choosing instead to be among the many that fight for Aseneth’s affections. Recall, too, that one of the marks of masculinity defended by Joseph is a sense of the eternal nature of the

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<sup>293</sup> *JosAsen.* 2:1

<sup>294</sup> *JosAsen.* 22:1

<sup>295</sup> *JosAsen.* 23:2-17

<sup>296</sup> *JosAsen.* 24:1-20

<sup>297</sup> *JosAsen.* 29:1-9

<sup>298</sup> *JosAsen.* 1:7

<sup>299</sup> *JosAsen.* 1:8

marital union; Pharaoh's son's desire to both usurp another union, and to neglect his own, makes him all the more a contrast to Joseph here<sup>300</sup>.

While the discussion on marriage between the father and son ends, the matter is hardly settled in the son's mind. In a second instance of his passionate reaction to Aseneth, Pharaoh's son sees the newly married couple and is "cut" by the sight<sup>301</sup>. Here, our author repeats a description used earlier to illustrate Aseneth's passionate feelings upon seeing Joseph<sup>302</sup>. The repetition indicates a comparison; as Aseneth was crushed by her passion for Joseph, so too is Pharaoh's son utterly devastated by his desire for her. The comparison is limited to this shared phrase, but it may nonetheless be one way of indicating that Pharaoh is not acting appropriately as a man, but is displaying the characteristics more befitting a love-sick girl. In any case, the depth of his desire even causes him to fall ill<sup>303</sup> and most certainly hatches the plot to kill Joseph and the Pharaoh.

This brings us to the second major way in which Pharaoh's son serves as a negative representation of masculinity in the tale. As we have noted, *JosAsen* is replete with examples by Joseph and his brothers equating masculinity with mercy, forgiveness, and non-violence. Pharaoh's son, on the other hand, represents a false rhetoric of manliness as violent and vengeful. In the speech already discussed above, Pharaoh's son suggests that what makes Simeon and Levi more powerful "beyond all men on earth" is their ability to overthrow and kill the men of Shechem<sup>304</sup>. When they refuse to kill Joseph, Dan and Gad are

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<sup>300</sup> In a striking bit of irony, Pharaoh's son attempts to convince Simeon and Levi to kill Joseph by saying that "he himself took Aseneth my wife who was betrothed to me from the beginning." *JosAsen*. 23:3

<sup>301</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:1 *καὶ εἶδε τὴν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ κατενύγη*. Burchard translates *κατενύγη* as "cut (to the heart)" in accordance with its use in the New Testament (Acts 2:37: *κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν*).

<sup>302</sup> *JosAsen*. 6:1. "And Aseneth saw Joseph on his chariot and was strongly cut [*κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς*], and her soul was crushed, and her knees were paralyzed, and her entire body trembled, and she was filled with great fear."

<sup>303</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:1.

<sup>304</sup> *JosAsen*. 23:2

convinced to join in his plot after he tells them “you are powerful men [ἄνδρες δυνατοὶ], and you will not die like women [καὶ οὐκ ἀποθανεῖσθε ὡς γυναῖκες], but be brave [ἀνδρίξεσθε] and avenge yourself on your enemies.”<sup>305</sup> The Pharaoh’s son’s rhetoric of dominating masculinity is so convincing that Dan and Gad later rebuke Asher and Naphtali’s warning against killing Joseph with the following question: “But shall we die like women? That would be absurd’ And they went out to meet Joseph and Aseneth [to kill them].”<sup>306</sup> The reader is clearly supposed to see the spread of this revenge rhetoric from Pharaoh’s son to the brothers, and the ways it contributes to the attempt on the couple’s lives. It is only by the intervention of Joseph’s family, using Joseph’s own language of what “befits a man,” that the rhetoric of violence as manly is put to a stop. In the closing moments of the story, then, the brother’s can echo the meekness and mercy of Joseph as Levi says “It does not befit a man... to repay evil for evil nor to trample underfoot a fallen man.”<sup>307</sup>

It becomes clear, then, that Pharaoh’s son serves as a counter to the appropriate forms of masculinity which are modeled by Joseph. He is passionate, where Joseph exhibits control. Joseph promotes licit sexuality within context of divinely ordained marriage, which the Pharaoh’s son attempts to usurp. While Joseph models meekness and mercy, the Pharaoh’s son becomes a representation of violence and revenge. In each instance, he reverses those qualities which have been defined as befitting a man.

### Conclusions

The rhetoric of masculinity which is dominant in *Jos.Asen.* is quite different from that which we found in *The Antiquities*. While both appeal to masculine self-control in sexual relations, for example, the reasons behind the rhetoric differ greatly. Josephus suggests that the reason one must repel the advances of strange women is to protect the masculine virtue of reason. *Jos.Asen.*, on the

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<sup>305</sup> *Jos.Asen.* 24:6-7. He has already used the term ἄνδρες δυνατοὶ to refer to the brothers in 23.2 and 24:4.

<sup>306</sup> *Jos.Asen.* 25:8 Words in brackets are mine.

<sup>307</sup> *Jos.Asen.* 29:3.

other hand, appeals to the cosmic nature of marriage, and its unbreakable bond on both parties. Josephus does not question the dominance of men, noting that women must rely on manipulation and intrigue to achieve their means. The author here, however, subverts a dominant view of manliness – power, violence, and revenge -- by promoting an image of Joseph as meek and merciful. The final contrast with Pharaoh's son recapitulates each of these unique views of masculinity, making a marked distinction as to what "befits a man." In the final chapter, we turn to the work of Philo on Joseph, in particular as he is understood in *De Somniis*. We will once again see a clear ideological view of masculinity. However, we will also encounter a significantly more ambiguous evaluation of Joseph than we have found in either *The Antiquities* or *Joseph and Aseneth*.



CHAPTER 5  
PHILO'S CONFLICTED MAN:  
JOSEPH AND GENDER AMBIGUITY IN *DE SOMNIIS*

**Introduction**

This final chapter is an attempt to describe the rather gender-ambiguous portrait of Joseph which is found in Philo of Alexandria's *De Somniis*. The chapter begins with background on both Philo and his works, with an emphasis on the writer's exegetical method and his place within Hellenistic Judaism. In particular, I will note the importance of allegory to Philo's works, and the problems this poses for a study of "real" masculinities as prescribed by a given author. Following this, we will turn to a general description of Joseph as it appears in *De Somniis* and how this characterization differs from that of *De Iosepho*. While noting other possible explanations for these differences, I will finally conclude that we must view Joseph as a Philonic literary "device" which is used by the author for its unique dramatic effect, especially in the case of the latter retelling (*De Somniis*). Having separated the two treatments of Joseph in these two texts, we will look for clues about masculinity in the former, noting in particular the marked ambiguity about Joseph's manliness which colors this allegorical portrait. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of what the ambiguous portrait of Joseph may mean in the larger context of Philo's philosophical and ideological constructs, particularly the ways in which such a negative estimation might have served as a stern warning to Philo's male readers of the dangers of gender boundary defying behaviors among men.

**Philo of Alexandria**

Philo was an Alexandrian Jew of the early first century, and a prolific author<sup>308</sup>. Philo is counted as the creator of biographies, apologetic pieces,

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<sup>308</sup> Exact dates for Philo's birth and death are unavailable, but scholars tend to agree on the last quarter of the first-century BCE for his birth and the late 40's to 50 CE for his death, based on the interpreter's autobiographical statement that he was a "old man" in the early 40's. See Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus Brown Classics in Judaica* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1986), 1-8.

commentaries on the Law, allegorical works and philosophical treatises; in spite of the impressive corpus the modern reader has available (some fifty works) it appears that even more once existed -- as many as seventy total treatises. The writings are in Greek, though in the process of transmission many were translated into (and are now extant only in) Armenian<sup>309</sup>. Others we know of only through references by other authors, especially Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria. Taken as a whole, Philo's corpus is a thorough treatment of both scriptural and philosophical matters related to Judaism. David Runia places these voluminous works into five generally accepted categories: 1) Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus; 2) Allegorical Commentary; 3) Exposition of the Law; 4) historical-apologetic works; and 5) philosophical treatises<sup>310</sup>. The focus of the present study, *De Somniis*, fits in to the second of these general categories. The other work in Philo's corpus which concerns Joseph, *De Iosepho*, belongs to the third<sup>311</sup>.

Philo is generally understood as a Hellenistic Jew, by which I mean that his understanding of Jewish identity was profoundly influenced by the Greco-Roman culture and ideals with which he was surrounded. Certainly, the fact that he lived in the philosophically diverse diaspora city of Alexandria supports the development of his Jewish-Hellenistic perspective. In terms of specific Hellenistic influences, scholars often ascribe to Philo the religious terminology of Greco-Roman mystery religions<sup>312</sup>; others notice his use of Platonic, Pythagorean and

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<sup>309</sup> Those works include: *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, *On Providence*, *On God*, and *On Animals*.

<sup>310</sup> David Runia, "How to Read Philo," in *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies in Philo of Alexandria* (Variorum: Aldershot, 1990), 191-192. Although Runia calls these categories "accepted by scholars for almost a century" (190) there is actually quite a variety of classifications available. Sandmel suggests four ("Philo's Writings" *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Kenneth Schenck offers only three: Commentaries, historical and apologetic treatises, and philosophical treatises (*A Brief Guide to Philo*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>311</sup> The difference is important, and impacts the way in which the text might be analyzed. I will attend to some of these differences in the next section.

<sup>312</sup> Erwin Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystical Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1935).

Stoic philosophical categories<sup>313</sup>. His language, rhetoric and use of allegory clearly reflect a Greek education, and he himself extols the virtues of the *paideia*<sup>314</sup>.

Boyarin<sup>315</sup> has further delineated the Hellenistic influence on Philonic Judaism by contrasting it with rabbinic forms of practice and interpretation. Rabbinic communities, according to Boyarin, tended to interpret religious texts with an eye toward literal rather than allegorical meanings; their focus was less attached to Greek philosophy and more oriented on the problems of the text as it stood. Often, this resulted in readings which valued the material or “everyday” above the philosophical. Boyarin thus uses Philo as the model Hellenistic contrast to Rabbinic Judaism, which he found to be less Platonic in reference to the human body and sexuality.

In spite of the perceived differences between Philo and the Palestinian or rabbinic communities, scholars such as Mendelson, Borgen and Cohen have made a strong case that categorizing Philo as exclusively Hellenistic would be inappropriate, given his close connection to the theology, language and textual traditions of the larger Jewish community<sup>316</sup>. Philo emphasizes central Jewish ideas (especially the one-ness of God) and practices (including Sabbath, dietary

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<sup>313</sup> David T Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

<sup>314</sup> *Spec. Leg* 2.229-230 and *On the Preliminary Studies* 74-76.

<sup>315</sup> *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For a counterpoint, see David Winston, “Philo and the Rabbis on Sex and the Body” *Poetics Today* 19.1 (1998): 41-62.

<sup>316</sup> Alan Mendelson notes the centrality of formalized creed in Philo’s writings in *Philo’s Jewish Identity: Brown Judaic Studies* 161 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 28-49. Peder Borgen focuses on the use of phrases which he finds to be inherited from common tradition shared by Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews and Early Christians. (*Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time* [Leiden: Brill, 1997]). Naomi Cohen looks at Philo’s “Universe of Discourse” in *Spec Leg* 4 to show the close connection between Philo’s choice of terms and various other streams of Judaism. (“Philo Judaeus: His Universe of Discourse” *JSJ* 27.3 (1996): 338-342). In terms of a clear division between Hellenistic and rabbinic forms of Judaism, Peter Borgen, for one, assumes “no sharp distinction should be drawn between Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism.” (“Philo of Alexandria” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 233. David Runia says that the issue requires further study in “How to Read Philo,” 185.

laws, and circumcision)<sup>317</sup>. He appeals to figures from Jewish history as models far more often than he does Greeks. His foundation in Judaism is most obvious, however, in the case of his careful exegesis of the scriptures, especially the contents of the Law. Philo's approach is often allegorical, to be sure, and does promote a highly philosophical view of the truths behind the scriptures; and yet, this should not imply to the reader that he was not interested in the text itself. Indeed, he summarizes his method of interpretation as "both a more accurate investigation of the unseen meanings [allegorical interpretation] and to be beyond reproach in the way you preserve the visible [literal or concrete] aspects of the text"<sup>318</sup>. Later in the same passage, Philo applies this understanding to circumcision, which "does indeed portray the excision of pleasure and all passions...but let us not on account repeal the law laid down for circumcising."<sup>319</sup> Clearly, he is not dismissing the law, but rather seeking to understand its fullest meaning, which is often manifested by the investigative tools in the allegorical method.

Many scholars have offered extensive descriptions of Philo's method of allegorization and interpretation. Thus, I will provide only a summary here for the sake of my own project, and direct the reader to those resources which provide more thorough assessments<sup>320</sup>. At its most basic, allegorical interpretation is simply the process of looking for extended metaphor and symbolism in generally

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<sup>317</sup> However, his adherence to contemporary Jewish thought is not thorough-going. Kenneth Schenck summarizes some of the similarities and differences, especially in terms of eschatological matters, in his chapter "Philo Among Jews and Gentiles" in *A Brief Guide To Philo* (2005). See also Runia, "Philo, Alexandrian and Jew" *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Vaiorum: Aldershot, 1990), 1-18.

<sup>318</sup> *Mig* 89.

<sup>319</sup> *Mig* 92.

<sup>320</sup> David Dawson, "Philo: The Reinscription of Reality" in *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 73-83; Richard Baer, "Philo's Goal and Method" in *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 4-13. Samuel Sandmel, *Philo* (1979). Ronald Williamson, "Philo's Allegorical Exegesis of Scripture" *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144-175.

non-allegorical texts<sup>321</sup>. Philo is in many ways dependent on the categories of interpretation provided by the Stoics, who sought to retell their central myths in less problematic ways. By highlighting the allegorical meaning, the Stoics were able to restructure the behavior of both gods and humans, contending that the “actual” people or divine beings were to be understood as representations of *types*, instead of lived models or exemplars<sup>322</sup>. Philo, too, wished in part to de-problematize the Pentateuch, especially such difficult stories as the dismissal of Hagar by Abraham (which becomes a story of dismissing lower-education for higher in *De Congressu*) and the side-by-side creation accounts (which are transformed into the Platonic world of ideals *Legum Allegoriae*), to name just a few.

However, the allegorical method is not just an effort to de-problematize. It also affords Philo the opportunity to locate and explore the philosophical message which he believed to underlie the rather everyday stories in the Pentateuch as it stood. His philosophical education, which seems to have consisted of Platonic and Pythagorean, as well as Stoic, ideas, did not lend itself immediately to the surface stories of farming, families, rituals, and laws which are common in the Torah. Williamson’s discussion of *De Agricultura* proves the point:

[Philo] cannot accept that the passage [describing Noah as a “husbandman”] merely describes the agricultural pursuits of Noah. What the literalists miss, he believes is ...[it means] for him to be a righteous man exercising ‘soul-husbandry’<sup>323</sup>.

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<sup>321</sup> Ronald Williamson differentiates between allegory proper and allegorical interpretation, noting that the later involves “treating the non-allegorical as if it were an allegory... Philo could surely have extracted a statement of Plato’s Theory of ideas from a railway timetable!” “Philo’s Allegorical Exegesis,” 146.

<sup>322</sup> Sandmel, *Philo*, 19: “By allegory [the Stoics] weeded out of the Homeric legends what they deemed unseemly.”

<sup>323</sup> Williamson, “Philo,” 153.

Cain, a “tiller of the ground,” symbolizes the unrighteous; those called “cattle-rearers” are symbolic of lust and craving. Thus, these biblical characters and the myriad others which flavor Philo’s work become ways of introducing philosophical categories, especially those of Middle Platonism<sup>324</sup>, to the Pentateuch’s “frame story: “the passages about husbandmen, cattle-rearers, tillers of the ground and shepherds are really about the life of the mind and the body,” as Williamson concludes<sup>325</sup>.

Dawson notes how once the allegorical reading of a biblical text is established, Philo takes the final step of insisting that the allegorical meaning he created is actually the original intended meaning. “Philo’s allegorical reading transforms Moses’ writing (i.e. the Pentateuch) into a rewriting of classical meanings and then paradoxically presents that rewriting as an original writing”<sup>326</sup>. Thus, while Philo does maintain some literal component to the interpretation of a scripture (as already noted above), he will still take the text at hand as intending to deliver an “original” metaphorical meaning.

Close to the topic of this project, Baer investigates the ways in which Philo utilizes the terms “male,” “female,” and “virgin” from the biblical text in entirely allegorical ways<sup>327</sup>. In this work, Baer notes that Philo interprets biblical language relating to maleness and femaleness (as in the Genesis creation stories, for example ) to refer to concepts such as “higher nature,” “lower nature,” “mind,” “sense-perception” and so forth as drawn from Platonism. For example, “women” are equivalent to “sense-perception,” or the lower nature of an individual. To overcome “womanliness” (read: sensuality), then, one must

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<sup>324</sup> John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* Revised Edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 139-183. David Runia’s *Timaeus* tracks the influence of Platonism on Philo’s treatment of the creation, but refrains from making Philo *merely* a Middle Platonist, instead suggesting that Philo merges Platonic ideals with Jewish thought in a manner uniquely his own (111).

<sup>325</sup> Williamson, “Philo,” 154.

<sup>326</sup> Dawson, “Philo,” 73.

<sup>327</sup> . R.C. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 14-44.

become a “virgin,” or one who is set free of the sense-perception of the body<sup>328</sup>. If one is able to accomplish this, that person is made a “man;” that is, he becomes a rational soul. In Baer’s analysis, Philo is not generally making a claim on gender categories in lived experience as much as he is on what gender *represents* in an individual’s existence, through an allegorization of the Biblical text. Obviously, ideals and forms in the sense that Baer recognizes them are important for understanding the overall concept of gender which Philo offers, especially given how dependant the exegete is on allegorization. However, Baer’s focus differs from the concrete component which I am trying to ascertain in my work on these texts. Namely, I wish to ask the question: to what extent is the author providing a prescription for the *lived* behavior of males?

For this project, then, Philo’s allegorical method presents a unique problem. I am seeking to show the ways in which ideals of masculinity are made manifest in the texts of a given tradition. However, an assumption exists about this task: even though the texts being analyzed describe non-historical persons, they are making a claim on actual concrete masculinity. That is, figures like Joseph are used by authors as models of how “real men” in the author’s own historical circumstance ought to live. However, with Philo’s approach, the situation is slightly different; the figures – male, female, or otherwise – often represent concepts, forms, and ideals<sup>329</sup>. Potiphar’s wife, for example, is understood in *De Iosepho* as a representation of the undesirable trait of the multitudes, called “passion”<sup>330</sup>. She is not an ethical model in this instance; instead she is a typological form, as fits with the Platonic nature of Philo’s work. The difference between model and form is important: we must ask if we can ever say that what Philo is doing is intended to be prescriptive for “real men” if it functions so often in the realm of allegory?

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<sup>328</sup> Baer, *Male and Female*, 50-51. Baer further correlates the usage of these terms here with categories of male and female as defined in Gnostic and Christian texts, 76-80.

<sup>329</sup> An example of work in this vein is Baer’s (above).

<sup>330</sup> “And like a licentious woman the desire of the multitudes makes love to the statesman.” *Ios.* 64.

I think we can, in fact, still claim that Philo's work does provide a construction of masculinity, and does insist on an ethical component, in spite of the fact that the characters are often used allegorically. This is so in part, because of Philo's own treatment of these allegorical figures. In our previous example, Potiphar's wife does indeed serve as an allegorical representation of the form "passion"; however, Philo also claims that real women, by their passion, are responsible for very real wars<sup>331</sup>. Further, Philo's treatments of biblical figures such as Abraham, Joseph, and Moses clearly wish us to gain some insight for proper behavior from the allegorical treatment (Abraham is learned virtue, Joseph is the ideal statesman, etc.), and hold these men to be modeling just that behavior to which a reader should conform. The idea is that while these figures are representations of ideal forms, they still can and do make a claim on how we ought to act<sup>332</sup>.

### Joseph in Two Portraits

Joseph is an important character in two very different of Philo's works: *De Iosepho* and *De Somniis*. While the former is entirely devoted to the life of the biblical character, in the later Joseph is a smaller part of a larger work on many of the dreams and dreamers of the Pentateuch. As noted earlier, the two texts differ considerably in exegetical method as well as understanding of the biblical figure.

Philo's approach in *De Iosepho* is a combination of chronological re-telling and thematic discussion. Throughout the narrative, Joseph is clearly presented as the "ideal statesman." Philo begins the discussion with this estimation of the main character:

I will carry on the series [of men who exemplify excellence] by describing a fourth life, that of the statesman [πολιτικός]. This name again has its representation in one of the patriarchs who,

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<sup>331</sup> "For the majority of wars, and those the greatest, have arisen through the amours and adulteries and the deceits of women." *Ios.* 11.56

<sup>332</sup> Dorothy Sly puts it this way "[It] is impossible to separate the theoretical statements from the application to the human situation." *Philo's Perception of Women*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 43.



as Moses shows, was trained to his calling  
from his earliest youth<sup>333</sup>.

This “one,” of course, is Joseph. Philo goes on in this introductory section to suggest that, by his training in childhood as a shepherd, Joseph was ideally matched for the life of the politician, for “nothing is so suitable as shepherding, which gives practice in the exercise of authority and generalship<sup>334</sup>”. Later, he notes that Joseph’s very name means “addition of the lord,” an indication that he is the very model of a true politician, whose job is to be an “addition” to nature<sup>335</sup>. Philo further devotes a large portion of the narrative to Joseph’s profound self-control, which he believes has a great deal to do with proper governance. Employing the tale of Potiphar’s wife in much the same way as Josephus, Philo sets Joseph as contrary to all manner of desires and passions, noting:

For wrought up to madness by the beauty of the youth,  
and putting no restraint upon the frenzy of her passion,  
she made proposals of intercourse to him which he  
stoutly resisted and utterly refused to accept, so strong  
was the sense of decency and temperance which  
nature and the exercise of control had implanted in him<sup>336</sup>.

He later adds a layer of allegorical interpretation to this straightforward moralizing, in which the resolute control of Joseph models the unflinching resolve of the statesmen in the presence of passion, the attribute of the multitudes<sup>337</sup>. In

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<sup>333</sup> *los.* 2.

<sup>334</sup> *los.* 3

<sup>335</sup> *los.* 28.

<sup>336</sup> *los.* 40. τῆ γὰρ εὐμορφίᾳ ἐπιμανεῖσα τοῦ νεανίσκου καὶ ἀκαθέκτως περὶ τὸ πάθος λυττώσα τοὺς περὶ μίξεως λόγους προσέφερον ἔρρωμένως ἐναντιουμένω καὶ μηδ’ ὅλως προσίεσθαι ὑπομένοντι διὰ τὴν ἐκ φύσεως καὶ μελέτης ἐνυπάρξασαν κοσμιότητα καὶ σωφροσύνην. This language is highly reminiscent of Josephus’ *Antiquities*, including the use of σωφροσύνη.

<sup>337</sup> *los.* 58-67. In a rather confusing section, Philo contends that the multitudes which the statesman must govern are impotent eunuchs (as represented by the Potiphar) but that their desires in the political realm are like a licentious woman (as represented by Potiphar’s wife). And yet, what is clear (and what will change substantially in *On Dreams*) is that Joseph is neither the impotent, nor the passionate, but the very model of power under control.

his quest to make Joseph every inch the perfect statesman, at one point Philo even makes a rather Platonic allusion to the statesman Joseph as responsible for opening the eyes of the multitudes to truth<sup>338</sup>.

In addition to the very clear allegorical treatment of Joseph as statesman, we see that Philo reveres him also as a model of beauty, wisdom, and rhetoric.

At the conclusion of *De Iosepho*, Philo eulogizes Joseph thus:

He died in a goodly old age, having lived 110 years,  
unsurpassed in comeliness, wisdom, and the power of  
language [εὐμορφίας καὶ φρονήσεως καὶ λόγων δυνάμεως].  
His personal beauty is attested by the furious  
passion which a woman conceived for him; his good sense  
by the equable temper he showed amid the numberless  
inequalities of life...; his power of language by his  
interpretations of the dreams and the fluency of his  
addresses and the persuasiveness which accompanied  
them<sup>339</sup>.

Beauty, wisdom and persuasive speech are, of course, central components of Hellenistic culture<sup>340</sup> which Philo wishes to exhibit here as part of his larger task of locating the epitome of these Greco-roman ideals in Jewish heroes. While he is not held at the level Philo affords either Moses or Abraham, when *De Iosepho* is taken as a whole, the reader is left with the impression that Philo found our hero rightly to be highly-regarded, important and noble.

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<sup>338</sup> *Ios* 125, similar to Plato's philosopher-king in the Cave Allegory from *The Republic*. The portrait of Moses in *Mos.* 1 is very much the same. See Sandmel, *Philo*, 47-49.

<sup>339</sup> *Ios* 269.

<sup>340</sup> Wisdom is one of the four cardinal virtues of the classical world (North, *Sophrosyne*, 258). Beauty is often noted as prized in Hellenistic understanding, especially that the beauty of the body and mind work together (See Kugel, "Joseph's Beauty" *In Potiphar's House*, 66-89). Philo's connection to Aristotelian circles affirms the valuing of rhetoric here as well. See Alexandre "General Introduction" *Rhetorical Argumentation in Philo of Alexandria* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 1-19, for a discussion of the Aristotelian bent of Philo's rhetoric.

Such is not the case with *De Somniis II*. In this treatise, which is less oriented on the order of the biblical text and significantly more allegorical and thematic, Philo presents a dramatically different portrait of Joseph. Instead of a statesman, Philo here portrays Joseph first as an exemplar of the third kind of human dreaming, which is frenzied and agitated<sup>341</sup>. The other portions of *De Somniis*, now lost in part but mentioned here by way of recapitulation, suggest that the first two types of dreams have a divine origin, and are thus easily interpreted and clear. This third type, however, does not originate with God, but is the product of the human soul itself at sleep, and Philo describes them as both obscure and deep<sup>342</sup>. We see even from the introduction, then, that Joseph's role in *De Somniis* is to be substantially different from that of the statesman of *De Iosepho*.

Another, related difference between the two treatments is the etymological meaning given to Joseph's name. Recall that in *De Iosepho*, Joseph's name meant "addition to the lord," meaning that the statesman is not an intrinsic part of the universe, but is a necessary and welcomed addition to the natural order. In this second text, however:

"Joseph" means an "adding," and vainglory is always making additions. To what is genuine it adds what is counterfeit, to what is appropriate what is alien, to what is true what is false, to what is sufficient what is excessive, to vitality debauchery, to life's maintenance vanity.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> "This third kind of dreams arises whenever the soul in sleep, setting itself in motion and agitation of its own accord becomes frenzied." *Somn.* 2.1. The word for frenzied here is κορυβαντιάω, which refers to the religious fervor of the Cybelene ritual in Phrygia.

<sup>342</sup> *Somn.* 2.4 Φαντασια seems to have Platonic allusions here, meaning "image," or "illusion." According to Borgen, these three types mirror the Stoic understanding of dreams. See "Philo of Alexandria," 245.

<sup>343</sup> *Somn.* 2.47. πρόσθεσις γὰρ Ἰωσήφ ἐρμηνεύεται. κενὴ δὲ δόξα προστίθησιν αἰεὶ γνησίῳ μὲν τὸ νόθον, οἰκείῳ δὲ τὸ ἀλλότριον, ἀληθεὶ δὲ τὸ ψεῦδος, αὐτάρκει δὲ τὸ πλεονάζον, ζωῇ δὲ θρύψιν, βίῳ δὲ τῦφον.

Here we see that the “addition” is neither necessary nor helpful. Joseph is not the statesman, but represents “vainglory<sup>344</sup>” which is constantly extending its reach beyond appropriate boundaries. It longs for all manner of passions: indulgent foods, expensive clothes, fancy homes and furniture, power, and bodily comforts<sup>345</sup>. Indeed, the entire interpretation rests on the assumption that the character of Joseph is vain passion, “the soul that has not even noticed that it has lost its way.”<sup>346</sup> Recall that in *De Iosepho*, we have an image of Joseph in which self-control overcomes all manner of passion by reason<sup>347</sup>. Here, however, Joseph *is* passion. This clear change will become the basis of our investigation of masculinity in the writings of Philo.

What accounts for these clear differences? Goodenough suggested that the political audience of each differs, and Joseph is thus employed for the sake of the divergent political ends Philo has in mind<sup>348</sup>. Hilgert point to varieties in methodology (chronological vs. allegorical),<sup>349</sup> and Cazeux argues for differences in the referent of the allegory<sup>350</sup> to account for the divergent portraits<sup>351</sup>. Gruen concludes that we must view Joseph as an “acknowledged literary artifice

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<sup>344</sup> Κενὴ δόξα

<sup>345</sup> *Som.* 2.48-60.

<sup>346</sup> Sofia Torallas Tovar, “El De Somniis de Filón de Alejandría” (Ph.D. Diss. Abstract, Universidad Complutense of Madrid, 1995).

<sup>347</sup> Again, this is an image of male power which is shared by Josephus, and which I have discussed in a previous chapter.

<sup>348</sup> Erwin Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judeas: Practice and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938). Goodenough suggested that *De Somniis* was intended for a Jewish-only audience, and that Joseph is meant to stand metaphorically for the excesses of the Roman government. Because *De Somniis* is not designed for outsiders, the apparent contradiction between the two portraits is lessened.

<sup>349</sup> E. Hilgert, “The Dual Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature.” *Biblical Research* 30 (1985): 7-13.

<sup>350</sup> J. Cazeux “Nul n'est prophète en son pays' - Contribution à l'étude de Joseph d'après Philon” in *The School of Moses. Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion*. (John Peter Kenney, ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 41-81.

<sup>351</sup> Some, however, argue for basic similarity between the portraits. See Jouette M. Bassler, “Philo on Joseph: The Basic Coherence of *De Iosepho* and *De Somniis* ii,” *JSJ* 16.2 (1985): 240-255.

available and versatile,”<sup>352</sup> suggesting that interpreters like Philo felt unconstrained in manipulating the patriarch to whatever purpose was at hand, even if these conflicted with other interpreters or their own previous works. Certainly, we have seen enough diversity in this small study to suggest that this is so.

Turning to ideals of masculinity, we shall see that in *De Somniis* Joseph is neither the ideal Greco-Roman hero (as in Josephus), nor the perfect Jewish husband (as in *Joseph and Aseneth*), nor the ideal statesman (as in Philo’s own *De Iosepho*) but a much more conflicted, struggling, and effeminate kind of male. I would contend that Philo’s departure from standard categories of manliness (controlled, rational, etc.) is intentional, and not merely for the sake of insider/outsider distinctions, as Goodenough proposes. The portrait of (conflicted) manliness in *De Somniis* is intentional in its shock value; Philo is using a well-established literary paragon – Joseph – in an intentionally inappropriate way – as effeminate – to send a stern warning to his readers about the dangers of crossing established gender boundaries. This warning against conflicted manliness is clearly seen in the description of Joseph offered in the introductory sections of *De Somniis II*.

### **Joseph the Dreamer: Conflicted Masculinity in *De Somniis***

The conflicted masculinity of Joseph is evident from the very beginning of Philo’s second treatise on dreams. We have already noted that the very nature of the dreams exemplified by Joseph is chaotic, unruly, frenetic, and obscure. Why is our “hero” so conflicted? Philo, as we shall see, offers a decidedly gender- dependent reason for his turmoil.

The first clue to Joseph’s conflicted nature is offered in *De Somniis* 2.7-10. When Joseph tells his father and his brothers of his two dreams (the sheaves and the heavenly bodies, which portray him as having power over them), they

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<sup>352</sup> Gruen, *Heritage*, 87.

react with shock and distaste, which Philo believes to be well-deserved<sup>353</sup>. The brothers exemplify the principle of “unmixed” good, according to Philo, and mirror the life of the “self-instructed” patriarch Isaac; the unmixed “good” is purely rational, untainted by association with bodily pleasures<sup>354</sup>. It does not have any use for the “soft and milky food suited to infants and little children,”<sup>355</sup> but instead is weaned to food fit for grown-ups – food which gives strength, vigor, and nobility. These characteristics are described as evident only in those “reared by men, themselves too men in spirit, eager for what will do them good rather than for what is pleasant.”<sup>356</sup>

Joseph, by contrast, is described as mixing mind and bodily pleasures. He is,

one who does not indeed take no account of the excellences of the soul, but is thoughtful for the well-being of the body also, and has a keen desire to be well-off in outward things<sup>357</sup>.

Superficially, these may seem like admirably well-rounded traits, but Philo clearly intends them to be an indictment of Joseph and the type he represents. Because of the competing claims in Joseph’s life he represents the soul which “experiences one counter-attraction after another, [and] is shaken this way and

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<sup>353</sup> *Somn* 2.7. "On the former dream an interpretative judgement is pronounced in a tone of vehement menace to this effect: 'Shall thou indeed be king over us?' " διακρίσις δὲ τοῦ μὲν προτέρου μετὰ σφοδρᾶς ἐπανατάσεως τοιαύτη μὴ βασιλεύων ἐφ' ἡμῖν;

<sup>354</sup> *Somn* 2.9. οἱ μὲν οὖν μόνον τό καλὸν ἀγαθὸν εἰπόντες, ἀμιγῆ διαφυλάξαντες αὐτήν, ἀπένειμαν τῷ κρατίστῳ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, λογισμῷ.

<sup>355</sup> *Somn*. 2.10 ἀπαλαῖς καὶ γαλακτώδεσι νηπίαις τε καὶ παιδικαῖς τροφαῖς οὐ δικαιούμενα χρῆσθαι τὸ παράπαν.

<sup>356</sup> *Somn* 2.9. οἱ δ' ἕτεροι σκληροδίαιτοι, πρὸς μὲν ἀνδρῶν κουροτροφηθέντες, ἄνδρες δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὰ φρονήματα, τὸ συμφέρον πρὸ τοῦ ἡδέος ἀσπαζόμενοι καὶ τροφαῖς ἀθλητικαῖς πρὸς ἰσχὺν καὶ ῥώμην, οὐ πρὸς ἡδονήν, χρώμενοι. Philo uses ἀνήρ in both phrases (see note 355), indicating clearly that this is the domain of men.

<sup>357</sup> *Somn*. 2.11. οὗτος γὰρ οὐκ ἀλογεῖ μὲν τῶν κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρετῶν, προμηθεῖται δὲ καὶ τῆς τοῦ σώματος εὐσταθείας, ἐφίεται δὲ καὶ τῆς τῶν ἐκτὸς εὐπορίας.

that and can never attain fixity,<sup>358</sup> the “many-sided soul”<sup>359</sup> that never finds peace.

Philo contends that Joseph’s conflict occurs because he is among those who have nursed (and thus been in the company of women) too long, and have therefore taken on the attributes of women, though they are male. These are “reared up for the greater part of the time from their very cradle in the women’s quarter and in the effeminate habits of the women’s quarter.”<sup>360</sup> They are not weaned early, as was Isaac, and because of this are not strong or vigorous as he. Whereas the Isaac-type of man is truly manly, uncorrupted by feminine interference, the Joseph-type is as soft and effeminate as the ladies in whose company he was raised. Philo contends that this type of man “yields and is ready to give in”<sup>361</sup>.

Philo does not use this pattern of words accidentally. In other places in his works, Philo uses the two terms here – εἶκω (to yield) and εὐένδοτος (easily yielding) -- to describe the actions or thoughts of women, eunuchs, and unmanly men. In *De Iosepho* 65, for example, the licentious woman who represents the multitudes entices the statesman to yield to public opinion. Later, in *Ios.* 153 Philo states that the fault of the eunuch is that he yields to any pleasure. In *De Cherubim* 78-79, a person is deemed “unmanly” (ἀνανδρος) if he submits without resistance to evil. Finally, in *De Sacr* 32, yielding is listed as one of the negative results of following the allegorized woman “Pleasure”. These associations are related to Philo’s larger program of relating masculinity with the Platonic ideal of

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<sup>358</sup> *Somn.* 2.11. καὶ ἀντισπῶμενος ὑφ’ ἐκάστου σείεται καὶ κλονεῖται μὴ δυνάμενος στηριχθῆναι. This sounds similar to the description which Philo offers of Lot in *Abr.* 212.

<sup>359</sup> *Somn.* 2.14.

<sup>360</sup> *Somn.* 2.9. εἰσὶ δὲ οὗτοι μὲν τῆς μαλακωτέρας καὶ τρυφερᾶς διαίτης, τὸν πλείω χρόνον ἐν γυναικωνίτιδι καὶ τοῖς γυναικωνίτιδος ἐκτεθλυμμένοις ἔθεσιν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν σπαργάνων ἀνατραφέντες. The idea that Joseph is too long in the company of women is underscored a few sentences later, when he is described as having inherited sensuality from being in the company of his mother (2.15). Philo here makes use of the biblical idea that the younger son is preferred by the mother, and she has undue influence on him. I discuss this idea in the “Biblical Story of Joseph” chapter.

<sup>361</sup> Τοῦ δὲ εἰκόντος καὶ εὐενδότου

rationality as opposed to sense perception, as discussed by Baer<sup>362</sup>, but the word patterns also have another (I would say, desired) effect. The combined mentions of effeminacy and yielding would have resonated with Philo's listeners, who often understood sex and sexuality in terms of active and passive partners.

In the standard Greco-Roman understanding of sex, whether involving opposite- or same-sex couples, the active participant was seen as the more "manly", the passive more "womanly." Szesnat has shown how Philo's works often reflect these Greco-Roman understandings<sup>363</sup>. Indeed, in *Spec. Leg.* 3 Philo, while expressing disdain for the practice, still describes the male-male relationships of the surrounding culture in terms of active/masculinized and passive/feminized participants<sup>364</sup>. What is emphasized most strongly in Philo's work, however, is the way that these relationships not only "feminize" the passive partner during the act itself, but rob him of his essential (and good) maleness in the longer term. Philo's concern is that the passive participant allows "both body and soul run to waste, and leave no ember of their male nature to smoulder."<sup>365</sup> That is, passivity and association with female roles *make* one girlish, according to Philonic understanding<sup>366</sup>. I would contend that to describe Joseph (and those

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<sup>362</sup> Baer, *Male and Female*, 35-44.

<sup>363</sup> See Holger Szesnat, "'Pretty Boys' in Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*" *Studia Philonica Annual* 10 (1998): 87-107 and "Philo and Female Homoeroticism: Philo's use of *γυνανδρος* and Recent Work on *tribades*" *JSJ* 30.2 (1999): 140-147. See also Sharon Lea Mattila, "Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature, and Philo's Gender Gradient" *HTR* 89.2 (1996): 103-129 which discusses the relativity of femininity in Philo's works.

<sup>364</sup> *Spec. Leg.* .3.40-42. This passage is particularly interesting because of its description of gender-ambiguous persons (*ἀνδρογύνος*) who are proud of their cross-dressing ways, which Philo finds distressing, but which suggests it was not an uncommon practice of his time. See Szesnat. "Philo and Female Homoeroticism," 141.

<sup>365</sup> *Spec. Leg.* 3:41. Translation from Ra'anah Abusch's article "Eunuchs and Gender Transformation: Philo's Exegesis of the Joseph Narrative" in Shaun Tougher, ed. *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2002), 103-121.

<sup>366</sup> By contrast, a woman can become masculinized by leaving behind sexual activity altogether, and adopting the higher life of celibacy and philosophy. See Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 17ff for a description of female members of the Therapeutae community; Ross Kraemer analyzes the description, and its importance for Philo's gender categories, in "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides" *Signs* 14.2 (1989): 342-370.



like him) as both effeminate by association with women and ready to yield would have reinforced his essential femininity; his “male nature” has been lost in a real sense. By his use of these two phrases, Philo is suggesting that Joseph’s very maleness has been compromised.

Interestingly, Philo reinforces this sense of Joseph’s gender confusion by making reference to the others with whom Joseph shares dreams. As we recall, the type of dream which Joseph represents – the third type – is marked by confusion and frenzy. However, Joseph is not alone in having (or, I suppose, *representing*) this type of dream.

Whose then are these dreams? Does not everybody perceive that they are those of Joseph,... and those which the chief baker and chief butler themselves saw?<sup>367</sup>

It is not immediately apparent from this statement that Joseph’s masculinity is being compromised here. However, the company in which he finds himself in this phrase does, indeed, call into question his already tenuous hold on manliness.

According to Philo’s other writings, the chief baker and butler (or wine steward) are eunuchs, a status which they share with Potiphar<sup>368</sup>. Indeed, in a work on castration in Antiquity, Ra’anah Abusch<sup>369</sup> recognizes that one of the key features in Philo’s many versions of this story is the inclusion of eunuchs. These figures, he notes, are rarely seen as a source of moral good in the story, but more often represent “physicality, passion, and pleasure with a lack of reproductive capacity.”<sup>370</sup> The eunuch is neither “real” man nor “real” woman, but

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<sup>367</sup> *Somn.* 2.5. τίνος οὖν εἰσιν οἱ ὄνειροι; ἢ παντί τῷ δηλον, ὅτι οἱ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ, οἱ τοῦ βασιλέως Αἰγύπτου Φαραῶ καὶ οὐς ὁ τε ἀρχισιτοποιὸς καὶ ἀρχιοινοχόος εἶδον αὐτοί;

<sup>368</sup> *Somn.* 2.195; *Ebr.* 211. for Potiphar’s eunuchism see *Somn.* 2.184. Potiphar here is described as associated with food service, much as the other eunuchs are. This connection between food and eunuchism is important, as Philo sees gluttony among the excessive pleasures which people crave, but which – like a castrated man – cannot produce anything of value. See *Mut.* 173.

<sup>369</sup> Abusch, “Eunuchs,” 110.

<sup>370</sup> Abusch “Eunuchs,” 110.

is in a sort of gender-defying half-way state which Philo says is “unable to either to shed or receive seed.”<sup>371</sup> Abusch concludes that, while eunuchism may occasionally serve a positive purpose in the works of Philo, it is most often used with the negative connotation of both impotence and passion.

Of course, merely putting Joseph among this company is not an indictment, *per se*. However, as Abusch makes clear, in this text and elsewhere *Joseph himself* is also described with the language of both impotence and unbridled pleasure-seeking,<sup>372</sup> a change in description from *De Iosepho* I have already noted above. In *De Somniis*, Philo makes clear that Joseph’s very desire for bodily pleasure comes upon him “by association with chief butlers and chief bakers and chief cooks,”<sup>373</sup> a phrase which makes a great deal of sense when understood in terms of the Philonic concept of eunuchism as impotent pleasure-seeking. In this way, Philo makes a clear connection between Joseph, his fellow dreamers, and the shared attribute of sexual ambiguity, furthering the reader’s growing recognition that it is his own gender uncertainty that has our hero so confused.

Finally, and most explicitly, Philo highlights Joseph’s conflict through the gender confusion which begat him.

[T]here is manifest in him, on the one hand, the rational strain of self-control, which is of the masculine family [ὁ τῆς ἀρρενος γενεᾶς], fashioned after his father Jacob; manifest, again, is the irrational strain of sense-perception, assimilated to what he derives from his mother, the part of him that is of the Rachel type [γένει τῷ κατὰ Ραχήλ ἐξεικονισθέν].<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> *Somn.* 2.184. οὐτ’ ἄρρεν οὔτε θῆλυ, οὔτε προέσθαι οὔθ’ ὑποδέξασθαι σποράν δυνάμενος

<sup>372</sup> Abusch, “Eunuchs,” 110.

<sup>373</sup> *Somn.* 2.16. ἐμφαίνεται καὶ τὸ τῆς σωματικῆς ἡδονῆς σπέρμα, ὃ ἀρχαιονοχῶων καὶ ἀπχισιτοποιῶν καὶ ἀρχιμαγείρων συνδιαιτήσεις ἐνεσφράγισαν.

<sup>374</sup> *Somn.* 2.15-16.

Philo's associations linking masculinity with rationality, as well as femininity with sense-perception, are wide-spread in his works. They are related, of course, with the platonic categories of rationality versus sensuality, and are amplified by Philo's own gender ideology which favors the rationality of the male<sup>375</sup>.

As Baer makes clear in his extensive treatment of the subject, however, Philo does not simply divide people into all-male or all-female based on this rational/sensual distinction<sup>376</sup>. Instead, he usually associates a part of any given man (the "higher nature") with the masculine principles of rationality and understanding; within the same man will usually be an "infection" of sense-perception, the woman, as well<sup>377</sup>. The description of Joseph here, then, is in line with Philo's understanding of most of humanity as conflicted and deluded because of a divergence between our higher and lower natures.

In addition, Philo here makes reference to Joseph's parentage as responsible for his confusion. Recall that in the few verses preceding this reference, Philo blamed Joseph for having been in the company of women for longer than was desirable. The proximity was of concern because it meant that, as a boy, Joseph was nursed on "milky food" (γαλακτοειδής) and did not wean to manliness. Here now, we see a more direct indictment: it is not just the company of "women" in general that causes the confusion, it is the undue influence of his mother particularly which leads to his inconsistency. As Lefkovitz has noted, the over-reaching mother, who takes unwarranted interest in the younger (feminized) son, is already a theme in the Torah stories of the patriarchs<sup>378</sup>. Here, Philo develops the idea to mean that in her very being as

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<sup>375</sup> Baer, *Male and Female*, 42.

<sup>376</sup> Baer, *Male and Female*, 38-43.

<sup>377</sup> Baer, *Male and Female*, 40. Baer traces this duality within the man to Philo's interpretation of the creation, in which the first human is androgynous and unconcerned with the material. The "fall" is thus understood as the division of the human against himself because of an attraction to pleasure.

<sup>378</sup> Lori Lefkovitz, "Passing as a Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance" *Narrative* 10.1 (2002): 1-23.

woman (read: sense-perception) she infects part of Joseph; the part of Joseph that is the “Rachel-type” is thus irrational and maternal.

What is interesting (but which by now we might expect) is that Philo makes no effort to resolve Joseph’s dueling (or, perhaps, dual-ing?) natures here. Elsewhere, Philo states that “the passions are by nature feminine [γυναικεῖος], and we must practice the quitting of these for the masculine [ἀνδρικός] traits that mark the noble”<sup>379</sup> and in *De Somniis* he urges “the dreamer” to reject “bodily pleasure, the wife of the Egyptian, as she bids him come in to her”<sup>380</sup>. One might expect that given statements such as the one above, Philo might choose to “clean up” the negative attributes and redeem the hero, as Josephus did, but this is not the case. Instead, Philo uses Joseph’s conflict as the very source for much of the rest of the text; vainglory, lust, gluttony, and more all stem from this uncorrected conflict between the masculine and feminine principles – and all of these are best exemplified in the person of Joseph.

Philo clearly intends for the reader to see in this portrait the dangers of a conflicted soul. Moreover, Philo makes apparent through the figure of Joseph that such inconsistency is dependent on the unnatural mixing of masculinity and femininity. Instead of dominating his sense-perception with rationality, Joseph assimilates too much of his mother. Rather than real manliness, Joseph acquires the gender ambiguity of the eunuchs. And, instead of the weaned strength of Isaac, Joseph represents the yielding and effeminate nature of those who have been in the company of women too long.

### **Philo’s Warning**

Many have analyzed the marked differences between the figure of Joseph in this text and in *De Iosepho*, as I have already noted. Clearly, the fact that two such different portrayals by one author exists does indicate that Joseph functions as a form which can be “clothed” as needed to meet the given authorial intent. If

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<sup>379</sup> *Det.* 28.

<sup>380</sup> *Somn* 2.106.

this is the case, what does it mean to have such a negative portrait of Joseph in this text, replete with gender-oriented condemnations of his character?

I would suggest that a close reading of this introductory section of *De Somniis II* is intended to serve as a warning. Philo wants his male reader<sup>381</sup> to understand, through the available form “Joseph,” the dangers that exist when one violates the clear boundaries of masculinity and femininity which the author establishes. By using an otherwise highly regarded figure in Hellenistic Jewish literature --one which we have already seen is held up as a model of chastity, reverence, and self-control -- Philo would heighten the sense of warning.

Consider the many points at which Philo takes a scene (which other Hellenistic authors understood positively) and gives it negative valence. For example, Joseph’s dreams predicting his rulership in Egypt are construed by Josephus as God-given<sup>382</sup>. They prove his authority, and the brothers’ envy on account of them only heightens their culpability when Joseph is sent away. Indeed, in Philo’s own *De Iosepho*, these dreams indicate Joseph’s predisposition toward statesmanship,<sup>383</sup> and while Philo allows that the statesman is an “addition to nature,” he still recognizes it to be a necessary and important one. And yet, when we come to *De Somniis*, the dreams of Joseph are neither God-given nor predictive; the brothers are in the right for despising the dreamer and his vainglorious dreams.

Again, in other Hellenistic texts, Joseph is seen as the model of chastity and self-control. Recall that much of *Joseph and Aseneth* relies on an understanding of Joseph as so despising passion and sexual immorality that he even refuses to look upon women, for fear that his virtue might be snatched from him. Aseneth’s “conversion” in the text is oriented toward parallelism between the two; he, a virgin, needs a wife who mirrors his chastity. Even the food-talk

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<sup>381</sup> As Sly notes, “It has become increasingly apparent to me that, just as the Biblical figures to be emulated are men, so too the individual for whom he proposes the journey of the soul is exclusively the male adult” (*Philo’s Perception*, 6-7).

<sup>382</sup> *Ant.* 2.3

<sup>383</sup> *Ios.* 3

in *JosAs* bears out the need for proper control of passions, as food becomes a stand-in for sex and our hero appropriately denies himself that which does not “befit a man who fears God.” In Josephus’ portrait, too, Joseph is a paragon of sexual virtue. The author sets up the hero as the diametric opposite to Potiphar’s wife; as she represents all that is passionate, sexual, and bodily, he becomes all that is ordered, rational, and controlled. Philo’s own *De Iosepho* lauds Joseph as wise in the midst of difficult circumstance<sup>384</sup>, and modeling self control in situations of sexual temptation.<sup>385</sup> And yet, in *De Somniis* Joseph becomes passion, covetousness, and desire through his associations and his birth. Why does Philo so transform this character, a man even he has regarded positively in other texts?

The placement of gender language here is important to answering that question. I have shown that, in key places in the introductory section of *De Somniis II*, Philo inserts a gender-dependant explanation for Joseph’s uncertainty. The author suggests that Joseph is conflicted because he was too long in the company of women; he was nursed in excess; he was among gender-ambiguous persons (the eunuchs) and it “rubbed off”; he had too much of his mother (and her lower nature) in him. In each case, gender ambiguity is given as a reason for the actions of the “hero.” These explanations share a dependence on an understanding of sexuality in which gender boundaries are clearly defined; the transgression of these boundaries, then, is responsible for all manner of ills. Indeed, we have seen that Philo shares many of the fixed gender boundaries of Hellenistic culture: the active/passive view of sex, and the higher/lower nature distinction of gender, for example. To use Joseph, an acknowledged literary artifice with predominantly positive associations, as a transgressor of such boundaries certainly would have had the desired effect. Philo could have

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<sup>384</sup> *Ios* 269.

<sup>385</sup> *Ios* 42.

efficiently demonstrated to his audience that no one, not even our “hero”, can violate these fixed restrictions without incurring condemnation<sup>386</sup>.

### Conclusions

In this chapter, I set about the task of determining why such an ambiguous portrait of an otherwise widely acclaimed figure might be offered in Philo’s *De Somniis*. As we have seen, gender ideology plays a role in the answer. Philo uses Joseph, placing negative valence where many others have not, to be a model of what men ought *not to* be. He counsels against the dangers of defying the fixed gender boundaries of the larger Hellenistic culture, and heightens the caution by using a “hero”. Philo essentially warns the reader that, without awareness of his situation, any man might be at peril of gender-conflict, even an otherwise exemplary ethical model. Thus Joseph’s tale becomes a cautionary one, and Philo is able to succinctly inscribe appropriate masculinity – rational, virile, active, and in the company of other men – by emphasizing its inappropriate opposite.

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<sup>386</sup> Philo’s concern over gender role transgression is evident in many places in his works. The writings of Szesnat and Abusch (see above) have proven invaluable in my understanding of these matters.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This project has been an attempt to look at Hellenistic Jewish texts with a critical eye toward the rhetoric of masculinity which might have informed the author of each. In this study, I began with the premise that gender is indeed a social construction, and equally constructed for males as for females in a given culture, a premise which has been adopted by much of feminist scholarship, and is the foundation of more recent gender studies. Given the social construction of gender, it is possible to look at the products of a culture – in this case a text – and see within it an attempt to either change or reproduce a culturally-given construction.

In order to see the constructs of gender in a text, I believe it is useful to look carefully for the language patterns, unique phrases, and particular constructs of the text as it stands. Using these “clues within a text,” it is possible to sort out those ideas which might provide evidence of the author’s own constructions of gender. In the case of our interpreters, this meant noticing differences in word choice or construction from the biblical story of Joseph (as in the *Antiquities*), recognizing the significance of repeated phrases (as in *Joseph and Aseneth*), and observing changes from one story to another by the same author (as was the case for *Philo*). Reading the texts in this manner, what I would call reading for the rhetoric of gender, allows us to see more clearly the author’s own ideology and sense of masculinity.

Before attempting to read our three interpreters this way, I looked at the biblical story of Joseph found at the end of Genesis, elucidating basic features of the structure and plot. The purpose was first and foremost to note those elements of the story which will be expanded, removed, or otherwise modified by our interpreters. Here, I was following the lead of many scholars in “History of Interpretation” who identify authorial ideology by means of recognizing differences between the base text and its subsequent interpretations. Additionally, the discussion of the biblical story of Joseph afforded an opportunity



to note the possible constructions of masculinity evident in that text as well, especially the prominence of political success, close relationship to the mother, and chaste behavior. Each of these constructions, in one way or another, re-emerged in subsequent interpretations.

In the first attempt at reading an interpreter's text with an eye toward the rhetoric of gender, I discussed the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife from Josephus' *Antiquities* Book Two. In this narrative expansion of the biblical story from Genesis 39, Josephus creates a binary structure through his description of the two main characters. Potiphar's wife is in all ways "womanly," by which the interpreter means deceptive, unreasonable, and driven by passion. These attributes mirror those of other women throughout the *Antiquities* who behave in ways Josephus finds improper for or demeaning toward men. Joseph, by contrast, is reserved, in control, reasonable, and chaste. By using the word γυναικῆϊος, Josephus makes the distinction between the two figures more than simply a general moral prohibition; he is clearly speaking to men about the wiles of women, and insisting that these men behave according to the manly model of Joseph, and not the licentious and deceptive ways of women.

Secondarily, I discussed the portrait of masculinity given by the unknown author of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Here, the repeated phrase "it does not befit a man who fears God," followed by a prohibited behavior, was our clue in the text. In the first half of the tale, these prohibitions had to do with sexual relationships to women, whether foreign or betrothed. The second part of the story dwelt on the relationships between men, and particularly emphasized prohibitions against violence. Both categories of prohibitions seemed to reflect a non-standard view of manliness as deferential and non-violent. While this story did share similar features with the *Antiquities*, especially relating to chastity, the underlying motivations differed, and thus the view of masculinity changed as well from one which emphasized male chastity as "dominance over" (Josephus) to "concordance with" (*Aseneth*).

Finally, I presented the complex portrait of Joseph as found in Philo's *De Somniis*. Whereas in *De Iosepho* Philo follows the common format of presenting

Joseph as an unwavering, rational, and chaste moral model, in *De Somniis* Joseph is conflicted, gender-ambiguous and passionate. I contend that this very different “take” on the erstwhile hero is an attempt by Philo to shock the reader into recognizing the dangers of crossing well-established gender boundaries. In particular, a true male must avoid eunuchism, the extended company of women, and the influence of the mother in order to evade dangerous transgressions of established gender categories. The conflicted portrait of Joseph offered in *De Somniis*, by employing the usually heroic model Joseph, creates an effective warning to Philo’s male reader.

Clearly, some of the findings from this study are common across the Greco-Roman world. For example, it seems that the male command to exercise rationality and self-control is widely held in among writers in the first few centuries of the Common Era. We see evidence of this in the works of both Josephus and Philo, who pointedly emphasize the manly nature of self-discipline and reason. However, on other occasions we found that the dominant views of manliness are subverted. This was notably true in the case of *Joseph and Aseneth*, in which the commonly held ideology of chastity was transformed from implying dominance to suggesting concord, as well as in the author’s stance in favor of non-violence.

Additionally, we see standard self- and other-definitions in these texts. In each case, a dualism is presented, with corresponding behaviors or virtues that one must embrace or avoid. Identifying self and other is a common strategy in gender studies, and it has certainly been evident here. However, we also note that this process of definition does not always rely on the same “other” to understand “self.” In the case of Josephus’ *Antiquities*, the licentious woman clearly plays this role. However, it is a *man* (Pharaoh’s son) who occupies the space of the “other” to the greatest degree in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Still more bizarrely, it is Joseph himself who is held as the contrasting identity in Philo’s *De Somniis*. Thus, while similar dualistic notions of manliness and femininity are offered for the sake of self- and other-definition, the occupants of these places was found to be wildly divergent among the texts studied here.

The variation evident in these texts suggests several things. First, it reinforces the basic premise of this study, that gender is not innate, but is instead a cultural product. If gender were truly essential, it seems that no such variation would appear in interpretive texts. More specifically to this project, it also likely means that views of manliness were varied even within Hellenistic Jewish communities. That is, even communities which shared commonalities of religion and location still created distinct versions of masculinity. Furthermore, perceived similarities in construction (for example, chastity), when viewed more closely, betrayed nuances of meaning which imply that more widespread rhetorics of masculinity might be adapted to circumstance or outright subverted by an author. The best example of this was clearly *Joseph and Aseneth*, which transforms dominant cultural ideologies of both male/female and male/male relationships. Finally, variation among the constructions likely says something about the author of each as well. Particularly, I think it indicates that the author played an active role in creating gender constructions, rather than passive. That is, if each interpreter was merely receiving the dominant cultural ideology for manliness, and not constructing anything new, all three would have reproduced that ideology in similar fashion. However, the variability in these texts may well indicate that the author was a lively participant in the conversation, and its subsequent constructions, rather than a mere mimic of prevailing views.

As I have already mentioned, the study of masculinity in religious text is still a new field. Ample texts exist which might benefit from this type of study. While some work has been done on explicitly didactic texts (for example, 4 Maccabees, the Wisdom of Sirach, and halakhic sources), far less analysis has explored narratives, as I do here. Many Jewish authors use *narrative*, rather than explicit instruction, as a tool to inscribe ideologies for their audiences. Thus, one possibility for further study is to continue the work done here with other (similar) texts, whether by biblical or post-biblical narrative authors.

Additionally, it could be fruitful for the historical study of masculinities to take the authors studied here and expand the scope of the analysis beyond isolated narratives. Obviously, in the case of a close reading (as I have done

here) it is sometimes desirable to limit the range of texts discussed. However, given the vast amount of literature created by two of our three authors – Josephus and Philo – it could well be that the ideologies of manliness would vary among the writings, or even within a larger section of the same text. While this type of large-scale study may produce few differences, it would still be very interesting to note where these variations are, and what might have prompted the changes.

Finally, some further comparative study of rabbinic and Hellenistic authors might shed more light on the similarities and differences between these two associated groups. This type of work has been done in part by Boyarin, who sets Philo in opposition to rabbinic texts on gender. However, Philo represents only one possible Hellenistic construction, as we have seen here, and rabbinic literature is by no means a monolith, either. A reading of texts that includes various representatives from both communities may better clarify their relationship in terms of categories of gender.

The study of masculine gender ideologies is just one piece in a larger project of explicating the profound and thorough-going construction of maleness and femaleness across cultures and groups. Hellenistic Jewish communities of the first century are by no means exempt from such study; nor do they exhaust it. That is, while the work done here is primarily intended as a contribution to studies of gender constructions among Hellenistic Jewish authors, it is also valuable as just one of many reminders that some of the concepts we take for granted in a culture, especially gender, are not universal givens. Instead, masculinities and femininities adapt to, and are adapted by, the cultures that hold them, even when these cultures consider their constructions to be “given.” When reminded of the variety of masculinities in the first century, then, it is my hope that we will be made aware of the possibility that divergent masculinities and femininities exist in our own cultures as well.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jessica Lyn Tinklenberg deVega was born September 7, 1973 in Milaca, Minnesota. She received her Ph. D. from Florida State University of Tallahassee, FL in the Spring of 2006. Her dissertation, on constructions of masculinity in first-century Hellenistic Jewish interpreters of the Bible, was written under the direction of her major professor, Dr. David Levenson. Dr. Tinklenberg deVega also received a Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary of Dayton, Ohio and a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Education from Eckerd College of St. Petersburg, Florida. She is an Upper Division Religion teacher at Berkeley Preparatory School in Tampa, Florida.